



All about Estepona



Vol. 13 Issue 316

www.theolivepress.es

April 2019

A KIND OF MAGIC



Photo by Jon Clarke

Estepona has managed to avoid the mass market tourism of the rest of the Costa del Sol, writes Charlie Smith

A WOMAN holding the world in her hands above the blue Mediterranean sea. This is a fitting image for Estepona and is the subject of the town's latest mural. Called *Atlantis*, it is the 49th work in the town's series of street art, located up the steep hill of Avenida de los Reales, which offers unparalleled views down to the sea (see page 20). But this new painting by Jose Fernandez Rios, unveiled on International Women's Day, reveals more than just a celebration of female contributions to society. It captures the constantly evolving nature of Estepona and its impressive global credentials, despite being a medium-sized town. Within Estepona's mural series alone, you have the largest vertical mural in Europe, and even the first braille mural in Spain, using ceramic pieces, to assist the learning of the visually impaired. Perhaps one of the most unusual examples of Estepona's worldwide appeal is Disney's discovery of the area in the ear-

Continues on Page 18

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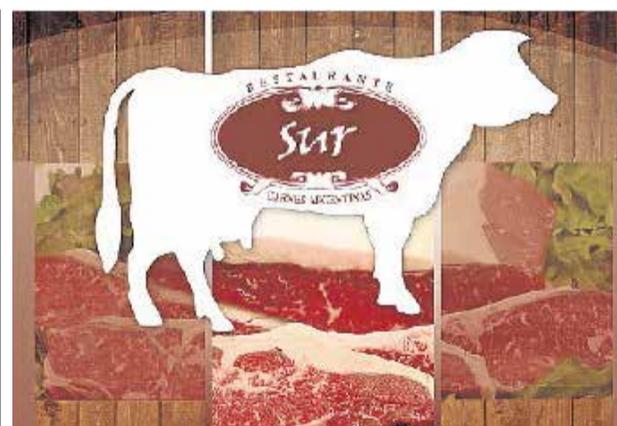


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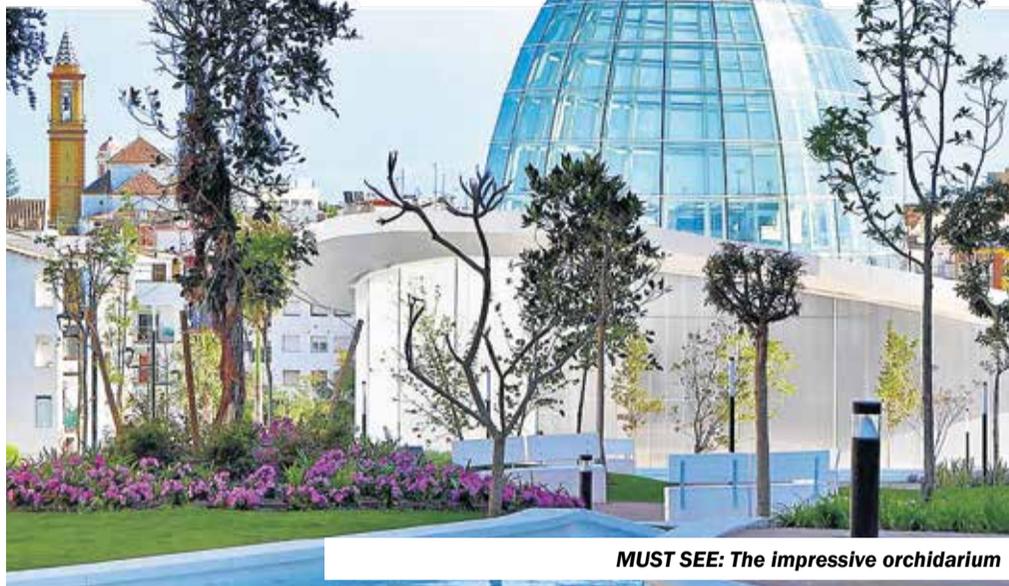
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OLD TOWN: Paved streets with colourful flowerpots in Estepona



MUST SEE: The impressive orchidarium

From Page 18

FLOWER POWER

ly 1990s – although the town was the original choice for Eurodisney but it was pipped to the post by Paris. But away from the would-be theme park dreams of decades gone by is the real beating heart of this charming town.

A short walk along the marble pavements of Estepona's Calle Terraza brings you to the charming and aptly named *Plaza de las Flores* (square of the flowers). In this hidden hive of activity you will find the tourism office, with maps for all kinds of excursions, including the murals tour and a host of reasonably-priced restaurants and cafeterias.

Also nestled among the flowers, and spilling out onto Calle Terraza, are a handful of stylish clothes shops, mixing independent and quirky stores with more famous brands such as Mango.

Further into the historic centre and you will notice that the town has ramped up its appeal with a 'hanging garden' of geraniums sprouting from multi-coloured pots on every wall of every street.

And it went one better than the plant pots a few years ago with its exotic glass-domed orchidarium at the other end of Calle Terraza.

The futuristic greenhouse (above) with more than 8,000 species of orchids and three waterfalls welcomes more than 250,000 people each year and they continue to arrive by the coach load.

Lorena Cano Bedoya, 38, who moved to Estepona in 2008 from Colombia, lives just around the corner from the magnificent orchid house with her seven-year-old son Diego, and treasures the greenery on her doorstep.

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PORT PERFECT: Estepona's working port is a hive of bars and restaurants

"Estepona is a town with a very special magic," she tells me, "starting with its climate, its sea, its nearby mountains." Sandwiched between the ocean and the high sierras of Bermeja, Estepona does surf and turf in style. "It is a town that gives you the most beautiful and quiet places to discover," she adds, from her house that is just a few minutes walk from La Plaza de las Flores. Most of all Lorena treasures the life here for her active young son. "Diego is a child who likes sports and reading classical music," she says. "We dedicate days for those activities and I try to educate him without screens, we prefer to spend time enjoying doing things together outside." And its idyllic outdoor spaces and winding streets are perhaps why Estepona is often described as one of the last 'authentically' Spanish resorts on the Costa del Sol.

It has somehow managed to stave off the whitewash of celebrity yachts and designer brands of Marbella, while also avoiding the takeover of 'Little Britain' in the likes of Benalmadena. Maybe that is in part thanks to its Mayor, José María García Urbano of the PP, who has spent €100 million on public works since he took over in 2011. During his eight-year tenure, he has transformed Estepona into a green paradise for those who live here, while still attracting a steady stream of foreign tourists.

Estepona was founded during the golden age of the Caliphate of Cordoba

The latest edition to the 700,000 square metres of new green space, is a public park complete with slides and wildlife up near the hospital. This is part of the 'Estepona, Garden of the Costa del Sol' project, which is progressing in time for the flood of summer tourists. And the high visitor numbers are unsurprising, and not only because of Estepona's 325 yearly days of sunshine, 21km of coastline, 17 beaches, dozens of *chiringuitos*, eight golf courses and more spa hotels than you can shake a fluffy white towel at. Fresh air fiends can sail in the port, go horse-riding, do high ropes at Selwo Adventure park, play padel in the poligono or kick back with a cocktail and their toes in the sand at one of its glorified beach shacks. One *chiringuito* owner, Erwin Vanderdonck, 52, who owns Palm Beach on Playa de la Rada, is already gearing up for the summer. This beach bar, where chart-topping girl group Las Ketchup recorded their video for *Asereje*, has just undergone a huge redevelopment.

"We should be open by the end of May," Erwin tells me, "It's going to be beautiful." Originally from Amsterdam, he made the jump 17 years ago, swapping the 'mayhem of finance' in London for the 'authentic feel' of this Costa gem. "The main centre for nightlife used to be the port," he says, "but now there is a shift towards the centre, with new bars opening." Playa del Cristo, the next beach along, is set on a sheltered bay with two pleasant watering holes. In fact, the fishy fare served by these *chiringuitos* is surprisingly good. After supper, pick up an ice cream on Calle Real or hit the bars: Louie Louie's is always guaranteed for a good boogie or if you prefer to watch, El Patio puts on a colourful feast of flamenco on Friday nights for €20. And although the centre of town has seen a recent nightlife boom, Estepona's bright young things still flock to the bars and clubs in the port on weekends. Bartenders freehand-pour drinks according to ye old Spanish 'say when' system (*hic*) and will only turf revellers out towards 4am. After that you can freshen up with a quick swim before breakfast, then face up to a long hot day of paying for the night before - face down on a beach towel. Alternatively, if you went to bed on time, there are four excellent markets to get up for. Three are held on Sunday mornings: one at the port (9am-2pm) and a *rastro* in the bullring (10am-2pm). On Wednesday mornings (9am-2pm) Avenida Puerta del Mar market is the place to be. Or, why not head into the old town's twisting uphill streets, which offer a glimpse of life as it used to be in Estepona. While the paseo brings you right back to the present with its lycra-clad joggers, giant chess sets and intricate sand sculptures, beneath the cosmopolitan surface you'll find a lady with a past who has been flirting with civilisation and repelling invaders since neolithic times. Her story is told through a scattering of watchtowers built to ward off the Moorish invaders, the Arab-built clock tower and 16th century castle ruins. Estepona was founded during the golden age of the Caliphate of Cordoba in the 10th century. Destroyed by the conquering Christians in the 15th century and rebuilt by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand almost a century later, King Philip V granted the town a charter for 600 families in 1728. Compare that to the 65,000-plus residents today - a figure that more than triples in summer months. And rentals, by the way, do fill up quickly at this time of year, so book early if you want to discover why Estepona should be number one on your Costa del Sol bucket list.



HERITAGE: Festivals (left) and architecture reflects its history



A Spanish restaurant with a twist, located on the edge of historic old Estepona Town in a converted farm house dating back to the 1890 with many features retained.



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Mural magic

IT'S quite literally the most off-the-wall collection of urban art on the Costa del Sol. Everyone from top international artists to creative prison inmates have contributed to Estepona's amazing al fresco art gallery of 49 murals glamping up bleak concrete buildings around town.

Every other high rise is bursting with colour and imaginative designs – from dancers and divers to optical illusions which deceive the eye from a distance.

One of the latest additions to the 'Artistic Murals Route' is Atlantis by Jose Fernandez Rios, located on Avenida de los Reales, which was unveiled on International Women's Day.

Another example of Rios' work is the gardener cutting bougainvillea on the side of Victor de la Serna school.

Likewise, the impressive Fishing Day mural occupies 1,000m² across six separate buildings – and holds the record for the largest vertical mural in Spain.

Artistic inmates of Alhaurin prison meanwhile created six-metre-long metal sculptures for one mural which recreates the sea floor as part of the Moraga Collective initiative. Erin Aman whose work is featured in San Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, is another of the famous contributors to the offbeat outdoor expo.



RECORD: Fishing Day (above) holds the record in Spain, while (left) Jose Rios is inspired and Estepona's newest mural Atlantis (right)



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Floral tribute



THE first seeds were sown back in 2012, when Estepona Mayor Jose Maria Garcia Urbano and his fellow councillors drew up the design for a green walking city dedicated to culture and art.

The mural trail was born that year, an ongoing project that is transforming dowdy tower blocks with eye-catching frescos depicting local scenes.

The intention was to shine light on the town's forgotten neighbourhoods and attract more foreign tourists.

Ambling through the sinewy flower-laden streets of the old town, it's clear to see how these efforts have borne fruit, and how well-deserved is Estepona's nickname.

Marielle Maulenberg, an MA student and English teacher, has watched the whole town blossom. "I'm really impressed with how they've done it up." "Before, it was much quieter but the mural trail and street renovations have really transformed it," she tells me appreciatively.

Estepona's flower pot-strewn pedestrianised streets and squares are some of the prettiest on the Costa del Sol.

Its scented town centre is one of the reasons Michael Ventress, a retired bank worker from Basingstoke, chose it as his holiday destination.

Michael, along with countless other tourists, come to admire the photogenic centre and wander around in search of the murals.

Because not only do they beautify the town, they provide handy landmarks to help navigate the streets.

Head in any direction and your walk will take you on a floral trail graced with sculptures by local artists and poetic verses penned by Spanish bards showcased on ceramic plaques.

Potted plants hang off whitewashed walls, scattering a confetti of crimson, lilac and magenta petals.

You can see rarer plants at the Orchidarium, an indoor perfumed garden where 1,300 varieties are joined by the notorious Amorphophallus Titanum or 'corpse flower', named for its foul odour. Visitors have not yet had the dubious pleasure of taking a sniff as it hasn't yet breached the soil's surface. When it does, it could potentially grow up to three metres high.

Then there are the floral plazas, typified by Plaza de las Flores which lives up to its name, where you can get trail guides from the tourist office and study them at one of the pavement cafes.

Others you'll happen upon while meandering through the streets, like Plaza de Begines which has a stage set up. Local resident Manuela Reinoso, 50, tells me it's for the May Day celebrations.

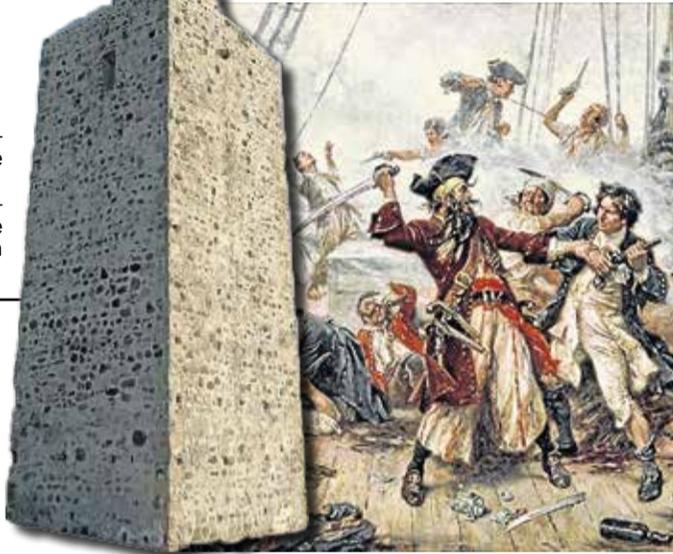
Let curiosity be your guide to discover these hidden treasures for yourself and you'll understand without doubt why no other town can hold a petal to Estepona's Garden of the Costa del Sol.

PIRATES AND PLANTS

Find out how this booming seaside town is so much more than sun, sea and sand, writes Pablo Balbontin

DID you know pirates regularly attacked the coast of Estepona in the 1700s? Or that its bullring is the only asymmetrical structure of its kind in the world? This gem of the Costa del Sol is

packed full of history and amazing facts and those two are just for starters. Here are 11 stupendous Estepona assets that easily make it one of the coolest resorts on the coast.



A pirate legacy

Back in the 18th century pirates were no strangers to Estepona's shores and King Felipe II had seven watch towers built along the coast to protect it from attack by sea, known as almenaras, which still stand today.



It's own werewolf

Among the many sculptures gracing Estepona's streets, one soars above the rest: a creature that's half wolf, half man. It's a homage to the Spanish actor Paul Naschy for his contribution to Spanish horror films of the 70s, when he was cast in his most famous role as a werewolf.

A Disney connection

If things had been different, Eurodisney Estepona would have been coining it in from millions of visitors around the world. The resort was the original choice for Eurodisney back in the early Nineties before the project was finally awarded to Paris for political reasons. But frankly we prefer it that way.



Tombs intact

The first traces of human existence in Estepona can be found in the mountains in the shape of the Corominas Necropolis, whose dolmen cave tombs and graves remain almost exactly the same as they were 5,000 years ago.



Europe's Biggest Orchidarium

Not only does it hold the size record at 15,000 cubic metres, this monster glass house houses an incredible 8,000 different species of exotic orchids.

A TREND-BUCKING BULLRING

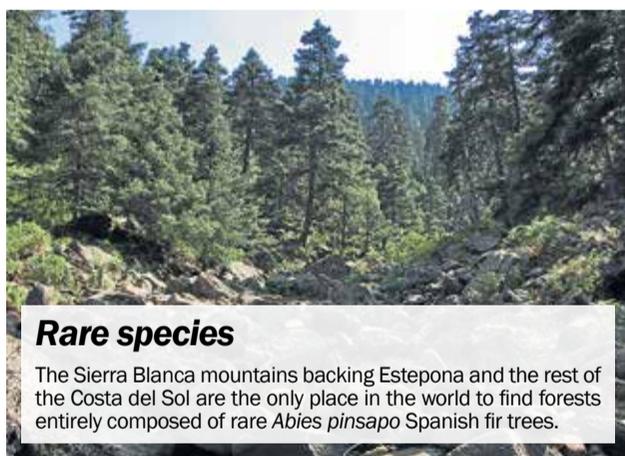


Estepona's plaza de toros isn't the oldest, biggest or best in Spain but it's one of a kind - the only asymmetrical bullring in the world. Its clever shape was designed by Juan Mora Urbano to offer spectators more seating in the shade than under the hot Spanish sun, and it has hosted numerous sport and cultural events since it opened in 1972.

A GHOSTLY PAST

Estepona was once a ghost town like many of the depopulated pueblos in inland Andalusia today. After years of war, it was conquered and then abandoned by King Enrique IV of Castile

in 1461, when it became a wild and dangerous place to be. It was rescued from near extinction in 1502 when 30 families were encouraged back to reboot the town we know today.



Rare species

The Sierra Blanca mountains backing Estepona and the rest of the Costa del Sol are the only place in the world to find forests entirely composed of rare *Abies pinsapo* Spanish fir trees.

Independence

One of the most valuable documents kept in the Historical Archive of Estepona is the Villazgo letter. Written and signed by Felipe V in 1729, it grants the title of independence to Estepona, which had been under the control of Marbella since 1552.



A remarkable tower

The Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 was the most devastating earthquake known in the history of southwest Europe, triggering a tsunami that spread to the Med. Estepona's church didn't make it, but the tower did and it's still standing today, although it had to wait until the 20th century to get its famous clock.

A split personality

Estepona has been inhabited by many civilisations down the centuries - Phoenicians, Romans Muslims - who all called it something different: *Alextebbuna*, *Asttebbuna*, *Estebbuna* and its present name, christened by Enrique IV.

La Jaula

concept store

Hurrah for Jaula

It is the hippest new clothes shop in Estepona old town. And womenswear store, La Jaula, has its roots firmly based in Estepona.

The trendy shop is the latest launch from the Reinaldo stable of businesses, which includes restaurant Casa del Rey and up-market Reinaldos in Estepona port. Run by hard-working half Dutch/half Spanish owner Liliانا (pictured left with staff), it sits conveniently behind the Casa del Rey. Located just off the idyllic Plaza de las Flores, the fashion specialist also stocks a range of interior design pieces and homeware. But it is doing best for its collection of reasonably-priced dresses, business wear and jewelry, providing the backbone to their new range.



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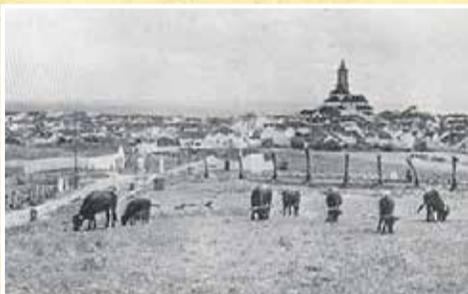
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VINTAGE: Estepona was once a quaint fishing village



OLD SCHOOL: Locals march in a procession at Easter (Semana Santa time)



WHITE-WASHED: The area surrounding the beautiful centre was once grazing ground for cattle

Life on the seas

Estepona's seafaring tradition is the salt adding seasoning to its tourist offer

STILL a working fishing town, much of Estepona's cash flow surges from the port. The importance of the maritime trade is obvious at the Ethnographic Museum, which showcases the ancient craft of boat making and the cornucopia of marine life living off this golden coast. Museum guide Mariano Jobreas, who moved to the town from Madrid, shows off a wall displaying dozens of complicated knots.

"To become a fisherman you have to learn to tie every single one of these. "You have to be prepared for all eventualities out at sea," he says gravely.

The models of fishing boats still in use look so real, he jestingly assures me that the working vessels are much bigger.

On a trip to the port Miguel Ferrer Gonzalez explains his boat trips.



HUB: The port is still a hive for fishermen, but also offers a melting-pot of bars and restaurants these days

"I came here because Estepona is more of a family town," he beams, explaining that he spends his days sailing around in search of dolphins. It sounds like money for old rope as dolphins aren't hard to find - beach goers often spot shoals of them frolicking offshore.

"It's not an office job, and if you like the sea, this is the job for you," agrees Miguel.

If you'd like a turn at the helm yourself, the Real Club Nautico houses a sailing and kayak school with a dry dock for sailboats and a nautically-themed restaurant for hungry sailors returning home from the sea.

Estepona is still home to hundreds of working fishing families whose ancestors have been casting their nets here for centuries. Now this great maritime tradition is continued by their offspring who brave the elements to this day to put fresh fish on local dining tables.



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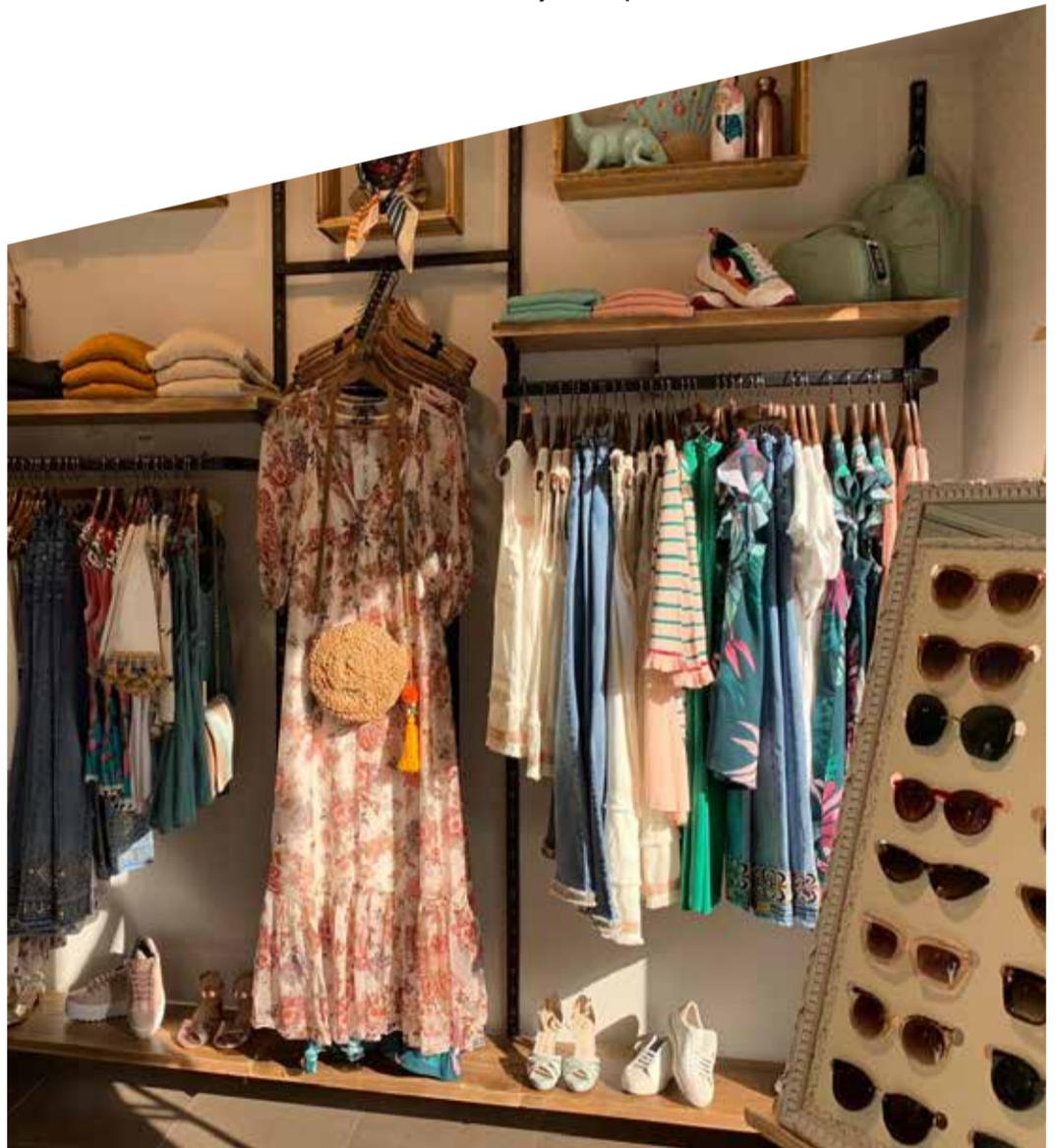
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CELEBRITY LINKS: (Top to bottom) Bruce Forsyth, Jimmy Tarbuck, Lionel Blair and Ronnie Corbett



How the Holy Trinity of Brucie, Tarby and Lionel Blair helped Estepona's longest-running expat company, the Experience Group, make it to 50 years, writes Jon Clarke

STANDING on the runway of Malaga airport, Alan James needed to do a double take. Parked up around him was a phalanx of planes - 20 in total - and most of them looked familiar. "It turned out they were all our planes, all of them chartered to bring tourists from all around Europe," recalls the boss of Estepona's Experience Group, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. That was 1988 and a time when the company had over 300 staff (three permanently at the airport) and thousands of tourists and property buyers coming to the Costa del Sol every month.

Very much the heyday of the coast, Alan would rub shoulders with global captains of industry on the local golf courses and socialise at night with the likes of Jimmy Tarbuck, Bruce Forsyth and Lionel Blair. "It was an amazing time and I was literally flying all the time and everywhere," explains the personable businessman, who at 81-years-old still works most days at the company HQ, in Benavista. "We had offices all over the UK and one in Brussels and brought in 20 charter flights a week from every UK airport," he continues.

Something of a military operation, the Experience Group set up 17 different companies to take care of every aspect of its clients' visits to Spain. Each had its own distinct purpose, one dealing with travel, another with property sales, while others dealt with furniture and entertainment and the setting up of golf clubs and restaurants. One of Alan's favourites handled



POWER COUPLE: Alan James with wife Carol

ships and helped to launch one of the first cruises in the Med; a four-country trip, which went from Malaga to Gibraltar, then on to the Algarve and finally Morocco.

"It had 85 suites and made its way right up the Guadalquivir river to Sevilla, before returning to Malaga via Tangier," recalls Alan. "Tourists loved it and we would normally tag on a week on the Costa del Sol before or after the cruise."

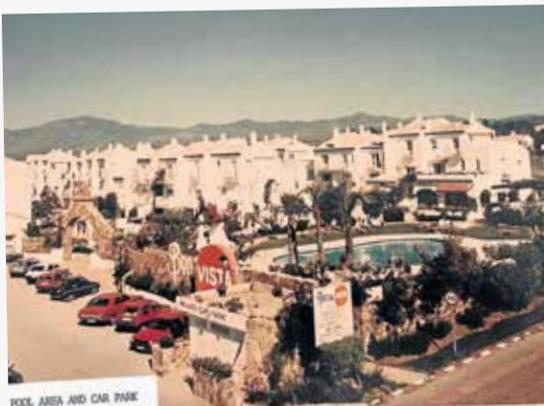
But tourism, of course, was only a half of the company's business, which grew to become one of the key construction companies along the coast. "We built 5,000 homes from Torrox

'You can't build homes like sheds, you need proper design and construction'

Top 10 Experience Group projects

1. Centro Comercial Bena Vista - 50 Shops and offices and the footbridge over the main road. Developed, designed and constructed 1985
2. Urbanisation Bena Vista, 100 Apartments and Townhouses. Developed, designed and constructed - opened 1983
3. Las Palmeras de Bena Vista, 400 Apartments and Townhouses. Developed, designed and constructed - opened 1985
4. Benamara Pueblo, 100 Apartments and Townhouses. Marketed and designed -opened in 1974
5. Jasmin Villas, 15 Villas. Marketed and designed - opened in 1981
6. Benamara Gardens, 80 Apartments. Marketed and designed - opened in 1979
7. Dos Hermanas, 300 Apartments Townhouses and villas and Commercial Zone Marketed and designed - opened in 1983
8. Rincon Del Paraiso, Exclusive villas. Developed, constructed and designed - opened 1985
9. El Paraiso Golf Club. Purchased 1983 - now owned by the members.
10. Bena Vista Lawn Bowls Club. One of the best facilities on the coast. Developed, constructed and opened in 1984

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LEGACY: Benamara was built by the Experience Group back in the 1970s

to Sotogrande between 1970 and 1990," he tells me proudly, as we walk around the leafy, low-density urbanisation of Benamara, one of his earliest and favourite developments. The Experience Group built everything from great value two-bedroom apartments to stunning

front-line golf course villas. These include many around El Paraiso golf, as well as others built for his many golfing friends, including Gary Player and Nick Faldo, as well as Fred Trueman and showbiz pals including Lionel Blair and Jimmy Tarbuck. At Benavista alone he built the sho-

GRAFTER: Alan left school at 15 before later setting up the Experience Group and building Bena Vista (here) while on a plane in the 1970s (below)



Experience counts



FIELDS OF GREEN: Experience organised many tournaments at El Paraiso

Golfing paradise

The Experience Group helped to turn the Costa del Sol into a 12-month resort. "I didn't want empty planes and decided the best way forward was to attack the golf market. "Heading up the team was Nick Faldo and with some clever marketing we were soon bringing in tens of thousands of tourists every winter. "Prices were cheaper in the winter which was a big draw. And punters could have an all-inclu-

sive holiday with flights, golf and buggies for about £100 all in. "We also started the *Tar-buck Classic* golf tournament to boost the image of the Costa del Sol and brought in 25 teams each year, captained by various England stars and managers such as

Matt Busby and actors such as Robert Powell. "We took over four courses, including the famous Valderrama and did around four tournaments a year. It was a must-attend for so many celebrities and really helped to raise the profile of the coast."



MEMORIES: Les Dawson played in a 1982 tournament, while (left) Matt Busby and Nick Faldo

pping centre, the bowls club, the footbridge and most of the houses nearby. "By 1973 we had built 400 homes and in the 1980s built and sold over 4,000 homes," he explains. "So much of it was knowing what the clients wanted. And we used a good team of architects and worked

on the basis of letting in sunshine and light and offering big terraces and pools. "You can't build homes like sheds, you need proper design and proper construction. "We didn't cut corners and built to a high spec with cavity walls, copper pipes and proper electrics and the clients appreciated it. "We also liked to use old fashioned Andalusian pantile roofs and classic local style, not modern box-like stuff," he adds. Alan's links to the Costa del Sol began in 1969 when already wealthy from a UK quarrying business he made his first foray down to Malaga.

While here, he met a Swiss builder in La Cala de Mijas who asked him to help him with a project there, before being introduced to a wealthy landowner, who was also conveniently a minister in dictator Franco's then government. The following year he started working with both - plus two local architects - to develop his first project in Benamara, Estepona, and moved to Spain permanently with his wife Carol, now 72. The main architect was his friend John Littlejohn, while they also used local planning svengali Jose Maria Santos Rein, an architect, who 'made things work with the town halls'.

Building roots

Born in 1938, at the age of 15 Alan left school to work in the timber industry in London's East End. Working for the UK's biggest importer of timber into Portsmouth and Canning Town he got to spend a lot of time thinking and talking about construction. This naturally led to working in quarries and he eventually headed up one of the biggest concrete companies in the Midlands. "I ended up with six quarries, most of them limestone," he says. At the same time he trained as an accountant and even built his own accounting systems, which he still uses today. "You always need to know what's happening in your company and we have over 2000 movements a month so it's important that the system works," he explains.

A TRIBUTE TO MY DAD!

Dad became an entrepreneur while still at school, so he always expected us to work too. Both myself and my sister Allyson started at 10/11 years old in his office, filling mailshot envelopes after school, then answering phones and booking holidays for clients of Bena Travel and using one of the many terminals linked to the huge mainframe computer - in the mid 70's it was one of the first of its kind. Holidays were spent helping couriers shepherd clients in and out of their accommodation along the coast and handling the manual check-in at Malaga airport, a much less security-cons-

cious affair in those days. The Celebrity-Am golf weeks and other tournaments we organised, including the *Jimmy Tarbuck Classic* and the *Les Dawson Trophy*, made for a colourful childhood. My Dad and Carol became firm friends with many celebrities such as Frank Carson and Fred Trueman. Having the opportunity to work backstage on charity galas over the years, it was a logical step for me to go on to work backstage at concerts, Stage Managing in theatre and then in Production and Art Directing in TV and film. Our father taught us to be fearless and resilient. His drive and optimism in business gave us courage and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances.



DAUGHTER: Claire James

Charity work

A strong believer in charity, Alan has raised thousands of euros for various organisations including the Aspadem handicapped children's charity in Marbella. As well as running golf tournaments to raise money, he brought in famous singer Petula Clark (left) for a big concert at the Don Carlos Hotel, as well as comedian Ronnie Corbett the following year.



LIFE is a confluence of time and place, and right now Estepona is the place to be on the Costa del Sol. For years it stood in the shadow of its larger, glamorous neighbour Marbella and was known for its rustic charm and good value for money, but increasingly Estepona is becoming a star in its own right.

This process is the product of a variety of factors coming together at a particular point in time, and it started with the election of Mayor José María García Urbano, a local notary who took office a few years ago at a time when Estepona's fortunes were at their lowest.

The financial crisis had exposed years of waste and mismanagement, and the town's finances were in a mess. The mayor rejected his salary, taking an official token sum of €1 per year, and set about reorganising the town's finances, slashing costs amid a war on waste and ensuring that all municipal staff and resources were productive.

TOWN ON THE UP

Estepona has bounced back from financial ruin and neglect to become a flourishing cultural and business hub, with the community spirit to match

A lot has changed in ten years

What followed was an intensive beautification of the town centre that had become a little rundown. You might think this an odd thing to do for a cash-strapped town, but the mayor and his team knew that this was an investment in future development, and set about getting as much done with as much creativity and as little financial investment as possible. Instead of big glory projects, streets were fixed and cleaned, homes and façades painted, and the now famous flowerpots arranged in all the pedes-

trian streets of the historic centre. The fact that each street has its own colour and pattern makes them all the more distinct, and the floral beautification is a fine example of a simple, cost-effective measure that has had a great impact.

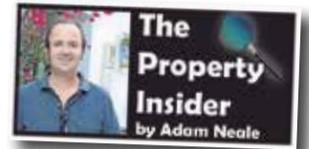
The impact has been visual as well as on morale, as the town hall also involved the local community in the beautification of parks and squares, the addition of artwork by local artists – who also contributed to attractive murals that now form the basis of a growing art route within the town – and even the placing of cryptic poems in spots throughout Estepona. It has all enlivened this charming Andalusian resort, which is more

popular than ever. A new hospital, as well as a community, conference and theatre centre and one of Europe's finest orchidariums, are reflections of the town's upbeat feel, Estepona is clearly a town on the up.

A new real estate destination

Though it has always enjoyed a certain popularity among property buyers from abroad, Estepona is now becoming a new mid to higher end destination for second and permanent home seekers from across Europe and beyond. This is partly aided, of course, by the fact that unlike Marbella the town does not suffer from any planning issues, so the processing of building licences is an efficient process.

This has led to a lot of investment in increasingly exclusive property deve-



lopment in and around the town, which ranges from beachside, city and hillside apartments to luxurious townhouses and villas.

Estepona's coastal extension, now named the New Golden Mile, is fast catching up with Marbella and together with areas such as El Paraiso, Costalita, Atalaya, Cancelada and Estepona Golf creating a true alternative to buying in Marbella.

All this is reflected in property sales within the Estepona municipal boundaries, which in 2017 and 2018 surpassed 2,500 transactions per year – almost double the level of 2012. With a good and growing choice of modern properties, plenty of opportunities to upgrade existing homes and an expanding range of quality services available, it is fair to say that the feel-good factor that Estepona currently enjoys provides an excellent platform for strong, sensible development now and in the future.

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Estepona boasts two of the Costa del Golf's founding courses, and a whole lot more

TWO of the genuine *grandes dames* of the Costa del Golf are found in Estepona.

Both El Paraiso and Atalaya rank with the oldest courses on the coast and were established in the days when you could build a golf course just about anywhere you liked.

As a result, the quality of the courses is fantastic, built on wonderfully flat land with the mountainous backdrop of the Sierra de las Nieves.

It means you don't lose so many balls and the courses are easy to walk around.

El Paraiso caters for every kind of golfer, boasting seven different types of membership and up to eight competitions a week for varying abilities.

It also has an active ladies section, with more than 200 members.

Atalaya Golf Club proudly dates back to 1968, when the design of the course was more important than fitting it between apartment blocks.

Eucalyptus trees, cacti and palms line the club's two 18-hole courses - Atalaya Old and Atalaya New - whose wide, easy-walking fairways pass fountains



PITCH PERFECT: Estepona courses

GREENS ARE GO!

and flower beds.

As a members' club that is open to guests, the course has a lively community feel and there is always a buzz around the clubhouse.

Although a younger course, dating from 1989, Estepona Golf is famous for superb putting surfaces and sea views.

Featuring strong par 3s, it provides an excellent round for players of all standards.

"Estepona has the best golfing temperatures in Europe, with over 320 days of sunshine a year and an average of 22 degrees," explains Jason Callow, of Estepona Golf.

Contact El Paraiso on 952 883 835 or email info@elparaisogolfclub.com

For Estepona Golf, call 952 937 605, or email information@esteponagolf.com



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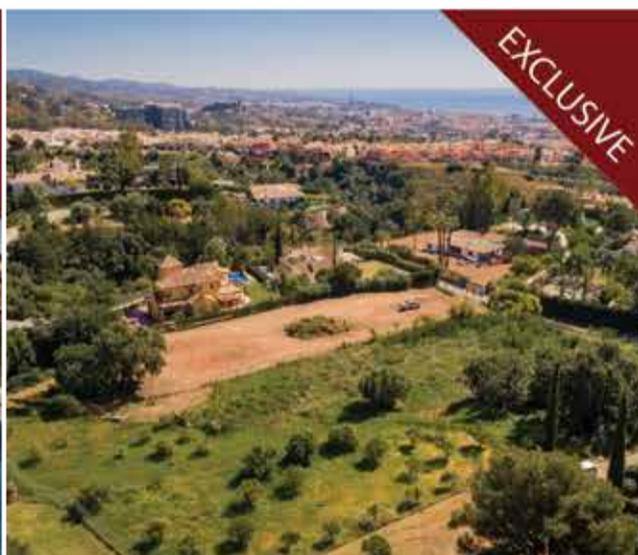
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Classic act

There's no place else on the Costa for vintage cars and repairs

CLASSIC cars have been a long-time passion of Andreas Ullstein, owner of Coast Classics in Estepona. His love affair started several years ago when he bought his first - a quintessential Ford Mustang.

Fast forward a few years, his friends questioned why Andreas hadn't used his knowledge and expertise further. So, 10 years ago, the award-winning Coast Classics workshop was born.

Walking into the showroom in the Estepona Poligono, customers are greeted with a salon in the style of a 1950s american diner before being shown the array of collectible motors. None of the cars on show are younger than 30 years.

Andreas and his team are so good that a 1969 Ford Mustang Mach 1 won the Gold Award from the Mustang Club of America in 2013.

"It's the stories behind the cars that drive the projects," says German Andreas, who has been living on the coast for over 26 years.

"Whether that be that the classic car, one of only five made in the world, or a grandparent that needs restoring to its original glory."

The team can fix up any classic car and provide any service imaginable, including maintenance, repair, restoring, consignments and sales.

Using the latest technology, the workshop has made a name for itself in being among the best mechanics in the country. "Most importantly we are extremely passionate in what we do," adds Andreas, "We love the work and take pride in every job, and that shines through."

Contact Coast Classics on 619 270 000 or email classics@coast-classics.com



Repair your career prospects

Looking for a new career in technology or enjoy computing as a hobby?

LEARN to fix everything from cracked screens and water damage to faulty batteries at Total Repairs, the Costa's one-stop shop for electronic repairs across all devices.

Become a professional technician with courses for all levels, from beginner through to genius, covering everything from basic soldering to repairing motherboards. The courses start from €299 for a 20 hour course, these courses are being offered twice monthly.

Total Repairs is now bigger and better, join an expanding team with a new site recently opened in San Pedro, Calle Cordoba, joining our two existing shops in Diana Park and Cancelada.



So don't despair visit Total Repair!

Contact the Total Repairs team at diana@totalrepairs.es or +34 648 400 666

WHERE TO EAT

Location, location

Estepona has a great collection of top places to eat if you can only locate them, writes Dining Secrets of Andalucia editor Jon Clarke

POQUITO a poco Estepona is developing a food culture to go with its rapid growth as an upmarket resort.

While still lagging behind Marbella there are now plenty of reasons to head into town to check out its fast burgeoning restaurant scene.

Little by little, more exciting places are opening up than the usual fried fish and tapas joints.

Indeed, you can find most types of cuisine now, from Japanese to Venezuelan and Goan to Peruvian.

Driven by an influx of wealthy and more demanding expats, particularly Scandinavians over the last few years, the town's chefs have had to up their game.

Between the two squares of Plaza Ortiz and Plaza de las Flores and the two streets of Calle Real and Calle Caridad you will now find, perhaps, a dozen good places to eat.

One of the nicest is the excellent Argentinian **Sur**, in Plaza Ortiz, where well tra-



velled owner Juan is never standing still, always trying new things in terms of decor, wines and dishes.

A classic family affair, you often find father, wife, son and daughter, not to mention son-in-law serving up juicy empanadas, lamb tagines and, of course, the best steaks imaginable.

Up on Calle Caridad don't miss the just-opened **Galpon**, an atmospheric place run by a group of Argentinian friends who have been storming it on the Costa del Sol for years.

Cooks Natalia and Nadia do a splendid job from their open-plan kitchen, particularly with an excellent sea bass ceviche, a fabulous mushroom risotto and extremely tender noisette of lamb, which cooks for 24 hours.

Maitre Martin is friendly and has a good knowledge of wines, particularly the bespoke section from Argentina, ranging in price from 15

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SPLENDID: Casa del Rey revolutionised Estepona town centre





CREATIVE EYE: Juan is constantly evolving his restaurant Sur (left)



NEW BROOMS: Nadia and Natalia at Galpon with dish (left) and sala (below)



“We love wine, we love meat...
What if you combine the two?”



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to 50 euros. Heading up from here, you might want to grab a tapa in **La Para**, while a superb place for a cocktail is the recently opened **Vibes**, run by Syrian, Sam. It is a great place to chill and you can even order a hookah pipe. One place you certainly must not miss is fabulous **Casa del Rey (below)**, which opened half a decade ago at one corner of Plaza de las Flores. Completely changing the fabric of Estepona old town when it opened, it is a stylish spot with a fantastic collection of nearly 100 wines by the glass. It has brought a new style of diner to the centre and gourmets keen to experiment with wines and tapas will love the ambien-

Continues on Page 30



La Alcaria de Ramos is an Andalusian countryside stately mansion located high above the Mediterranean, with wonderful views

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Brilliant Benavista

Home to a thriving bowling club, Benavista is so much more than just fantastic views

BENAVISTA is one of the most popular places for British expats to put down roots on the Costa del Sol.

Less developed and lower rise than many of its neighbours, Estepona's 'east end' is aptly named - you get a better vista in Benavista!

The beautiful area between Estepona and San Pedro is home to a thriving community of foreign residents that has shaped it into what it is today, and there is always something going on.

"We are so spoilt for choice," says Hughie Holgate, 71, who runs the popular Benavista Bowls Club and its Green Bar.

"We have many members who play in leagues up and down the Costa del Sol."

With the club membership going from 50 members to over 150, the Green Bar is a thriving bar which serves tapas, daily specials and an extensive lunch menu.

The club also has free WiFi connection.

Large sunny terraces at the club are ideal for enjoying the Green Bar's renowned Full English at €3.95.

Happy hour is from 4-6pm.

Benavista Bowls Club is the only bowls club on the coast to offer live streaming of matches.

It is fully open to public and instructors are on hand to provide tuition for beginners.

For those after even more fun there are quiz nights, and plenty of more laid back events throughout the year, where people don't have to wear bowling whites.

Please call the club to enquire about the different events, on +34 952 88 51 48 or visit www.benavista-bowlsclublive.com



From Page 29

Gourmet Tour



PARADISE: Sea bass in salt and monster dessert from Alfonso (right) at El Pescador



ce and attractive tables outside, always square is

Dona Jeronima, which is beautiful on warm evenings.

The waiters know a lot about wine and the Reinaldo group (which also runs Reinaldo in the port as well as Bar Don Ronaldo nearby) also runs the Wine Room next door.

Friendly owner Liliانا (who is half-Dutch and half-Spanish) is often around and happy to chat, when not busy keeping the group of six businesses ticking along.

If full, another place to check out in the

square is **Dona Jeronima**, which is beautifully designed with a living plant wall and stunning natural lighting inside and a great terrace.

An international restaurant, it has a charming courtyard with a fountain

Another interesting place to look for in the old town is well established **La Pampa**, in Calle Sevilla, which sits in a building dating back to the 19th century.

A very international restaurant, it has a charming courtyard with a fountain and a

roof terrace which is a great place to eat.

When it comes to seafood, there can only

really be one place worth visiting.

Run by Alfonso for years - and very often found in its kitchen - **El Pescador** is Estepona's seafood stalwart. Sitting slap bang on the main beach, few places have developed as quickly and as stylishly in the town over the last decade (and he has just opened another one in Marbella).

Through sheer hard work and a clever eye for quality and panache, he has turned this place into the must visit fish restaurant.

You sit by the promenade overlooking the sea and eat only the best fresh fish from the nearby port. My tip

is the sea bass in salt, an absolute joy. Another excellent chiringuito right on Estepona's main beach is **Africa Beach**, run for four years by the talented team from well established inland restaurant La Alcaria de Ramos.

An excellent place to spend the day, you can lay back and enjoy a superb fish lunch enjoying prawns and sardines cooked on espeto skewers, then hang out on a sunbed for the rest of the day, enjoying cocktails at night.

Just up the road you will find the chiringuito **Palm Beach**, one of the best on the coast for quality, and due to reopen again shortly.

Set up by talented former Dutch broker Erwin Vanderdonck, it has a range of tasty dishes including prawn pil pil samosas and crab spring rolls, which are melt-in-



PORT OF CALL

For holiday rentals near the bustling Puerto Deportivo, look no further than Marina Harbour Holiday Apartments



ESTEPONA now has a whole range of holiday rentals available for the summer season, right by the port.

Estepona Apartments, the successful rental firm behind some of the town's most sought after dwellings, has now expanded to include 'Marina Harbour Holiday Apartments'.

A stone's throw from the beach, the company's new portside properties are located among the hustle and bustle of Estepona's nightlife scene, whilst offering unparalleled ocean views.

And with the Mediterranean on your doorstep you would be forgiven for thinking these holiday homes come with a hefty price tag, but not at Estepona Apartments.

Prices start from as little as €33 a night for a one-bedroom apartment, while a two-bedroom stay can be found for €35, and three bedrooms for €45.

These homes make the perfect getaway for families, golfers, or those who just want to enjoy one of the Costa del Sol's most beautiful beaches.

All apartments have an outdoor terrace area, heating, air-conditioning, fresh towels, WiFi and a fully-equipped modern kitchen for self-catering.



And with the port's amazing crop of restaurants serving some of the coast's best seafood, as well as international cuisine and British dishes, you really will be spoilt for choice.

For those dining at home, there are several late-night shops and supermarkets nearby too.

The La-Fragata urbanization hosts the one-bedroom apartment, which comes with a pool, one bathroom, and can sleep up three people.

For two-bedroom and two-bathroom apartments, there are a whole host to choose from. Guests at the Puerto-Blanco rentals have access to the famous Cristo beach, with a market every Sunday in the port.

Meanwhile the Puerto-Aito and El-Faro residences, which both have pools, can sleep up to four guests, and are very close to an abundance of bars and restaurants.

Three-bedroom and two-bathroom options are also available at Edificio-Montemayor and El-Faro.

Both these homes, which comfortably sleep six, offer sea views, and are just a short walk in to the cultural heart of Estepona's Old Town.

With a range of quality holiday rentals to choose from, if you are planning a trip to Estepona, you had better choose Estepona Apartments.

Get in touch with them at www.estepona-apartments.com or ring 34 628 133 548



GROO-V TIMES

POPULAR Costa del Sol club, Groo-V is going through some exciting times, after launching its first ever live jam session.

Run every Wednesday from 10:30pm-late, the nights encourage local musicians to come together through the power of music.

"It was a great night," says Vincent Neale, owner of the live entertainment venue in El Paraiso.

"We play everything from Clapton to Spanish stuff and from opera to reggae." Groo-V are also launching an X-Factor competition for the Costa del Sol, with auditions beginning mid-May.

"First prize gets €2,000, second €1,000 and third €500, with all of the top three getting a gig contract with us," Vincent explains. Despite opening less than eight months ago, Groo-V has even made it onto TV, appearing on Channel 5's Bargain-Loving Brits in the Sun.

Vincent is excited for the future and encourages the public to visit Groo-V for karaoke nights on Friday and Sunday, and live gigs every Saturday.

Visit Groo-V's Facebook page at @groovbenavista



HISTORIC: La Pampa dates back to 1890



TALENTED: Jose Antonio Ramos (left) runs Africa Beach and La Alcaria de Ramos

the-mouth amazing. Another superb chiringuito, just outside the port, up on the 'secret' Playa del Cristo you will find chiringuito **Lolailo**, where a friendly team serves up the freshest fish that one would expect from a good beach restaurant. A bit further afield a must visit for anyone wanting to find one of those true dining secrets of

the Costa del Sol is **La Alcaria de Ramos**. Run by Jose Antonio Ramos for over three decades, it sits beside an inland crossroads, between the two famous golf courses of El Paraiso and Atalaya. An ancient coaching inn, it is charm personified and has wonderful views of the coasts sitting up in an enviable posi-

tion. For many years in the Spanish *Michelin* guide, it mixes up traditional Mediterranean cuisine with international fare and has a superb wine list. Last, but not least if you find yourself up in Benavista, check out the excellent **Green Bar**, which is always busy and has a great menu del dia as well as some superb tapas.

BBQ, Fish, Cocktails, Sunbeds, Beach...good times...

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