

All about the Sierra Nevada

December 2010

A 20-page Olive Press insiders guide

On top of the world

Just an hour from the beaches of the Costa del Sol, the Sierra Nevada is Europe's most southerly ski resort, often open until mid May, writes Jon Clarke



IT is not known whether 15th century Arabic king Muley Hacen (Abdul Hassan Ali) was a skier or a snowboarder. But his name has left an indelible imprint on Spain's most famous ski resort, the Sierra Nevada, as he insisted he was buried at the top of its highest peak. Appropriately named after him, Mulhacen stands at

3,482m high making it one of the better places to be interred in Spain. It is Spain's highest peak offering some of the most spectacular views in Europe. Indeed, on clear days you can see right across the shimmering Med to Africa, where Muley Hacen's forefathers heralded. It is this altitude that makes the Sierra Nevada unique. At the same latitude as Cyprus and just 30 miles from

the beaches of the Costa del Sol, it is nothing short of amazing that you can ski here from November through to May.

The most southerly ski resort on the continent – not to mention one of the highest – its incredible location is often said to allow a morning's snowplowing followed by an afternoon on the beach.

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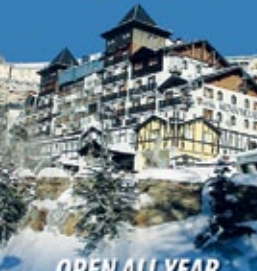


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Continues from page 1

But it is a rarely tested adage. This is why Granada newspaper *Ideal*, in conjunction with the resort of Pradollano, decided to try out the theory two years ago. Picking a sunny day in May, a couple of Granada-based foreign students were ushered up to the slopes where they skied from 9am to 1pm, before taking the 75 minute drive to the Costa Tropical resort of Salobrena.

In 1973 there were only about 20 buildings here, today it is a big resort

"It worked perfectly and by 3pm they were settled in, eating a paella on the beach," explains Santiago Sevilla, from Cetursa, the company that runs the resort, also known as Solynieve (or 'sun and snow').

"By 9pm they were having a tapas crawl around the Albaicín of Granada just to add the icing on the cake," he adds.

It is not necessarily everyone's idea of a relaxing day's skiing, but it is entirely possible. As is staying, for example, in Granada city, or nearby Monachil, and heading up to the slopes on the early bus, or in your car.

For centuries though, the only people to labour up the Sierra Nevada's peaks were the *neveros*, or icemen, who carried blocks of ice down from the high mountains to sell in the city.

Today, the mountains draw ever increasing numbers of

A resort for fun



Picture courtesy of IDEAL, Alfredo Aguilar

SUN AND SNOW: Pradollano resort gets going usually at the beginning of December

visitors for a huge range of outdoor activities, principally skiing and snowboarding at this time of year.

It is little surprise, with the resort now counting 115 pistes, covering 102 kilometres, with a good range of levels and 22 ski lifts.

"It has grown a lot over recent years and is now as modern as any other in Europe," explains Jose Maria 'Chechu' Calvo, 55, who has been running his ski school and rental business Snowpeople in the

resort for over 30 years.

"In 1973 there were only about 20 buildings here, today it is a big resort that can accommodate around 20,000 people a night."

It certainly needs to at cer-

tain times of the year when the resort gets rammed. Big queues can build up for the ski lifts and even on the roads up to the resort.

The busiest times are at Christmas and *Semana San-*

ta as well as half term, or *Semana Blanca* ('white week') at the end of February, appropriately so as school children can learn how to ski.

It has also, rightfully, got a good reputation for being a



The James Bond tunnel

It looks like a giant caterpillar... or something out of children's TV show Teletubbies. But this new lift - known as the Alfombra of 'magic carpet' tunnel - has been cleverly designed to take beginners up the nursery slopes even after a heavy snowfall.

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THE BIG QUESTION:
Why do you love the Sierra Nevada?

It's always sunny



Luisa Fonseca, 32, Lisbon
My brother's a keen skier and he recommended Sierra Nevada so my husband and I decided to take a family trip during our bank holiday in Portugal. Granada city is only a short drive away so we're not confined to the resort.



Alex Ramirez, 21 and Christina Castillo, 19, Granada city
We study in Granada so Sierra Nevada is on our door-step. It's quite expensive but it's the cheapest way we get to go skiing without having to travel far.



Maria Jesus Deaz Garcia, 41, Sierra Nevada
I've lived and worked here eight years and ski every week. This place is unique because it's always sunny and the quality of the snow never changes.



John James, 28, Alicante
I have been coming here every year since I was 17. I've also skied in France but Sierra Nevada is my favourite, especially for snowboarding as it has the Tubo de Borreguiles for boarders.



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I HAVE to confess from the outset that I cannot ski. The only time I have tried it was on a dry slope in Birmingham and I came home with friction burns on most of the protruding parts of my body. I also remember the agony of having cramp in my foot - which was heavily encased in a moulded plastic ski boot and thus impossible to flex or rub. So why on earth am I sending my nearly four-year-old daughter to ski school?

The selfish reason is that I want an excuse to go to the ski resorts at weekends

The unselfish reason is I want her to develop a skill that will keep her fit and that she can enjoy for years to come. The selfish reason is that I want an excuse to go to the ski resorts at weekends. Yes, the sad truth is, I am a snowboarder. Now, some of you may think skiing and snowboarding are much the same thing. True, both activities are practised on snow and they both involve shelling out large sums of money that can never be justified. Both can be as fast or slow as you like and can involve jumping in the air and uttering silly jargon. But for me, I relish snowboarding for its grace of movement. The late philosopher and Zen practitioner Alan Watts



KIDS STUFF: Smiles all round for these happy skiers during a lesson on the slopes

Going downhill fast

Jason Heppenstall probes his 'Inner Skier' while his four-year-old daughter has her first skiing lesson

entered. A random look at one (www.handbag.com) says: "Pure zingy mountain air contains

lower levels of oxygen than we are generally used to... the body becomes more efficient in its circulation and oxygen delivery... which is great for sluggish desk-bound types!" Quite.

So snowy in fact is his CV he even test rode the very first prototype snowboard

It goes on to talk about stress busting and facing fears and overcoming frustrations. One person who knows a thing or two about this is Lanjarón resident Jon Phoenix. Since he quit drumming with some of the major rock acts of the 1970s he has taught about a quarter of a million people to ski "Without a single injury," he says. In his time he has been a British freestyle ski champion and has coached the national team. So snowy, in fact, is his CV he even test rode the very first prototype snowboard

fice and explain the concept of "Inner Skiing" to me. "It is a way of overcoming your fears through techniques developed on the ski slope," he explains from the Olive Press sofa. He goes on at length to enlighten me, citing examples of people who have overcome difficult mental obstacles and negative self-impressions, through the act of skiing. As I jot all this down he is keen to point out he teaches "normal" skiing as well. Before he leaves I ask him for any tips regarding teaching my daughter to ski.

"Just let her play," he insists. "Kids pick it up much easier than adults and they do not relate well to verbal instructions about poise or balance." With Jon's advice in mind I find myself in a cable car a few days later, accompanied by my nervous daughter who is sporting a pair of red boots and skis. My fear is that she will reject it completely after only a minute - which will be the most expensive minute's entertainment in our family history. We meet up with Jo, the instructor at the bottom of the nursery slope and Jasmine is duly handed over to Karina, the second Norwegian to appear in this article. I am instructed to come back in an hour and we swap phone numbers. I plod off for a coffee and nervously await the expected phone call ("She is bawling her eyes out - come and get her"), but it never arrives. I wander up to the slopes again and am astonished to see Jasmine skiing confidently down the slope holding onto Karina's ski poles. At the end of the lesson Jasmine is elated. "Can I have my own skis Dad? Blue ones? And boots? And a pink suit?" I should have seen that one coming...



GO: Learning to snowplough from the age of five



⁶ *Sierra Nevada special*

Chugging into the present day



Long gone are the days when a rickety old bus took a couple of hours to reach the snowline from Granada

THE Sierra Nevada's history as a ski resort dates back to 1912 when Spain's oldest ski club, the Sierra Nevada Society, was founded. However, it was not until the 1920s – with the modernisation of Granada's roads – that the Sierra Nevada started to increase in popularity.

By the late 1950s a bus used to chug its way up to the slopes, while cars would turn up in their dozens at weekends.

Visitor numbers slowly grew from then, and in 1964, Cetursa, a business dedicated to reserving ski tickets, was founded.

This proved to be the catalyst behind the transformation of the resort to its present-day splendour.

But it was the hosting of the 1996 World Ski Championships that properly signalled the slopes' arrival on the world scene as a skiing hotspot.

It is yet to look back!



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Sierra Nevada special

A real mountain adventure



PACKHORSE: Mule ride back after day skiing off-piste



There are some great off piste adventures to be had around the Sierra Nevada resort

FANCY a real mountain adventure?

Then why not head off for a day or two's journey from Pradollano to the Alpujarras, off piste and in total wilderness.

A couple of the best companies in the Sierra Nevada offer a range of fantastic routes for all the family.

Telemark, in particular, has a range of trips from hardcore climbing for mountaineers to half-day soft-snow walking trips with snow rackets.

But its best trip must be the whole day cross-country adventure that takes partici-

pants back in time through the stunning Genil Valley.

"It is a real, fun adventure," explains Luis Casanova, who helped to set up the ski school over two decades ago. "You get to see how the mountains were a few centuries ago."

"We try to put an emphasis on ecology and nature and it is impressive to see the typically old farmhouses in the area."

Costing just 100 euros per person, the day out includes transport and lunch, and takes participants from deep off-piste snow down to a green valley.

"Best of all, a team of mules ends up helping to bring your stuff back to Pradollano," adds Luis, who speaks impeccable English and is a keen traveller to Africa.

Another company, Snowpeople, also organises off piste mountain adventures.

One of the best sees participants heading off up the Barranco de San Juan and ending up in Lanjaron, in the Alpujarras, on the other side, from where you will be brought back by car.

"You are likely to see mountain goats, foxes and plenty of rare birds on the journey," explains Jose Maria 'Chechu' Rada Calvo.

"It is a real adventure and something you will not forget for a long time."

It is one of a number of routes and excursions offered by the company, which runs a skiing school, as well as a couple of shops, a burger bar and a supermarket, which even sells Krug champagne at 170 euros a throw.

Set up in 1973 by La Riojan Chechu, it now prides itself on its attention to detail and its slant towards families.

"We take particular care of children and families and that is where we concentrate our abilities."

For more information visit www.telemark.es or www.snowpeople.es.



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10 *Sierra Nevada* special

Super stylee

The Sierra Nevada is slowly becoming the hot spot for snowboarders in Spain



COOL: Snowboarders in action at Sulayr Superpark, a map of the new park (above) and (left) a class from the Surfin snowboard centre



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It is the most exciting new development in the Sierra Nevada for years. Now Europe's most southerly resort has a superb snow park perfect for snowboarders and freestyle skiers. The Sulayr Superpark is bigger than the previous Borreguiles park and is definitely a lot more adventurous. "It is revolutionising the way the resort treats snowboarders," says Melanie Benarfa, who runs the Surfin snowboard centre, with her husband Gaston Marinoni. "It is an incredible construction and a great idea and at last we are starting to see some of the world's most famous riders visiting us down here." The mother-of-three - whose husband set up the first snowboard school in Spain with friends

21 years ago - estimates that the resort now has more snowboarders than skiers. "I think the change happened as long as five years ago and I wouldn't be surprised if today there were almost double the number of snowboarders." Her shop has done well to cash in on the massive growth in the discipline, which is naturally nearer to surfing and skateboarding than skiing. Certainly in its style and attitude. The Surfin centre is also one of only two places in Spain (after Xanadu in Madrid) to be chosen as an official Burton Learn to Ride Centre. Incorporating all of the US labels' four flags, it is able to offer classes for women, children, as well as special 'freestyle' classes. "It is a great place for kids to learn how to snowboard," explains Melanie.

"And for adults, well, the Sierra Nevada is easily one of the best places for nightlife in Europe." The new superpark meanwhile is designed to allow snowboarders and skiers to practise jumps and acrobatics on three different natural and artificial modules without running into each other. The revamped area in Loma de Dilar, previously used by cross-country skiers, is geared towards a younger clientele. It boasts new features including wifi for internet users, a massive sound system and a completely fresh look which stands out from the rest of the resort. Perhaps, most importantly, there will be a safety team on hand to help anyone who gets injured.

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Sierra Nevada special

Morgan restaurant boss Salah Eddine Bentaleb on his route from running hotels in Morocco to dishing up the best food on the slopes

The marvellous Morgan

FROM the age of 15 Salah Eddine Bentaleb was washing glasses in his uncle's hotel the Berbere Palace-Etoile du Sud on the edge of the Sahara desert.

A hard worker he quickly moved up to being a bartender, then restaurant manager and finally hotel manager, so he knows a fair bit about running restaurants.

This is all immediately apparent on dining at his brand new restaurant Morgan in the Sierra Nevada.

Now 37, the genial Moroccan has created an attractive space with a distinct mountain style with the help of business partner Paco Francisco Rodriguez. You either dine in the warm pastel red dining room, or outside on the huge sun-deck terrace with superb views over both skiing slopes and down to the city of Granada below. But, most importantly of all, the new eatery has an exciting menu, offering high quality, fresh dishes, and all at exceptionally good prices. Before you have even looked



FUN IN THE SUN: On Morgan's terrace

at the menu you are thrust an ice cold glass of pink cava in your hand, the bottles be-

ing kept at the ideal temperature in a mound of snow by the front door.

"I have worked with the likes of Nicole Kidman, Brad Pitt and Russell Crowe at my uncle's hotel, so I know how important it is to keep standards high," he explains.

To ensure this, he has hired an Argentinian chef Esteban, who trained with the Hilton group at various locations around the world. Together they have planned an ambitious selection of dishes, including frogs' legs and a delicious carpaccion of beef, served with parmesan and rocket, as starters. The main courses - all of them under 20 euros - were enticing and varied and included a number of vegetarian options and fish dishes, such as the neck of cod, served in white wine and garlic. The *cochinillo* (roast suckling pig) also stands out, in particular, for the fact that the

IN CHARGE:
Experienced
restaurateur
Salah

menu often a choice of leg, shoulder or ribs, or a mixture of each. It is delightful, just the right crispness and perfect after a hard day's skiing.

The steaks are also inviting with the stone-cooked *solomillo* particularly inviting, it being served on a piping hot stone on the table to allow the diner to cook it to his own perfection.

Desserts were anything but an afterthought with the apple tart with vanilla ice cream and caramel a joy, and the *piononos de Santa Fe* (a typical almond and honey Arabic dish from Granada) well worth the wait.

But the restaurant would not be the same without its excellent wine list; one of the best on the slopes.

A bottle of Moët and Chandon at just over 50 euros was good value, while there are some of the best Spanish wines around including the 200 Mongas, from Rioja, at just 45 euros, and Finca Monasterio, for just 29 euros. "We have really put emphasis on keeping the costs down," explains Salah. "We want to be a mid-priced restaurant, but known for its quality."

He has certainly got that right!



RESTAURANTE **Morgan** SIERRA NEVADA

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Sierra Nevada special

15



I long for the peaks even on the beach in summer

I FELL in love with the Sierra Nevada when I first arrived here 20 years ago as a ski rep. I'd been working in hotter climes before but got a promotion to come here and, quite simply, never looked back. There is always amazing weather and great snow which makes the Sierra Nevada a top class resort... and the only one in south-

Giles Birch (above) on why he has spent two decades working as a skiing instructor in the Sierra Nevada

ern Spain. It is just sad then that so few people have heard of the Sierra Nevada

outside of the country. While a lot of UK skiers go to France, Austria and An-

dorra, few make it down here unless they have holiday homes in Andalucía. But its range of slopes is as good as any international ski resort. I became an instructor through the Spanish Ski Federation, but I could see there was a gap in the market for native English-speaking teachers. We launched the British Ski Center in 2002 and slowly built up the business year by year, but things slowed down for everyone in 2009 during the recession. That's why we and a lot of other businesses haven't increased staff numbers for the last few years and tried to introduce more flexible classes to suit everyone's



ON A DRUMROLL: Charismatic skiers have fun

needs. But there's still so many great things about this resort that no economic downturn will change.

I can honestly say I wouldn't want to live anywhere else in the world

One being the length of our ski season, which is far longer than any other. We start in late November and stay open until early May while other resorts don't open until mid December and end their season in March. This is partly because of how high up we are but also because of the quality of the snow which is constantly worked on during the night. That's why you'll never see

slush even in the latter part of the season. This is also a really great place for intermediate skiers to come and improve their skiing, with an abundance of green and red slopes, plus it has one of the best nursery areas I've ever seen. I met my wife here during my instructor course and we now live in the valley at the foot of the mountains with our two-year-old daughter. I can honestly say I wouldn't want to live anywhere else in the world. We're so lucky just being a short drive away from the coast and can get to the beach so easily in summer. But even then, I long for the winter and seeing the snowy peaks every morning from my window.

Visit www.britishskicenter.co.uk for more info



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Sierra Nevada

WHERE TO STAY

From traditional to chic and stylish



It's hard to describe Pradollano as an authentic mountain village.

But, with a metre of snow on the ground and the sun blazing down, it certainly has its charms.

In terms of places to stay there are plenty of modern hotels, although nothing beats the stylish Sol Meliá in the heart of the town.

Well, there are actually two Meliás in the town, to be exact, with the recently opened modern Sol y Nieve and the more traditional Sierra Nevada nearby.

The former has all the style and frills you would expect from a top-of-the-range four star hotel, while the latter is cosier and more chalet-like in style.

Nearby look out for Hotel Kenia, which is open all year and has a distinct style about it. It is comfortable and warm and the staff are courteous and polite.

The best location by far is the Hotel Telecabina, which is literally next to the main ski lift up to the slopes, while



SLEEK: Sol y Nieve hotel, while (top) El Purche

in the resort you might also take a look at the new Hotel Vincci, or the exclusive Lodge hotel, which starts at around 200 euros a night, but counts on footballers, soap stars and politicians as guests.

Another altogether different option is to stay in beautiful countryside just outside the town, on the celebrated 'picturesque route' down to Granada, via the charming town of Monachil.

It is here, just ten minutes

from the slopes, that you will find Restaurant Camping El Purche.

A privileged spot in its own valley it has a *Little House on the Prairie* feel about it. With excellent roaring fires, its restaurant is charming and serves up a superb selection of local dishes.

Go for either a room in the hostel or one of the roomy wooden chalets that sit on the other side of the road.

Nearby, just behind the brand new tourist visitor centre half way up the hill you will find Casa Rural Macareno. It is a great value place to stay, with single rooms from just 25 euros a night during the week, it has lovely views and is just a ten minute drive to the slopes.

Equally good value is the friendly Hostel Los Puentes just ten minutes out of the resort on the main road back to Granada. Finally, if you are looking for something really stylish, then head a little further down to the ancient town of Monachil itself, where you will find the chic retreat La Almunia del Valle.

Owned by a pair of urbane Madrilenos, the hotel is a mix of modern and ancient, with slate roofs and thick walls alongside, hip paintings and décor.

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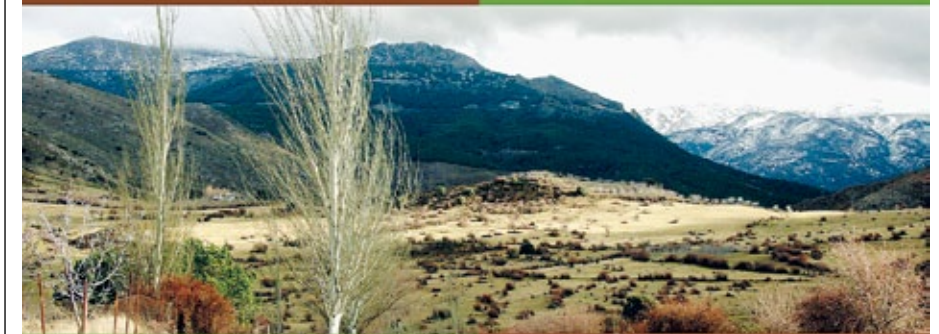
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Sierra Nevada

WHERE TO EAT

Flying high on the food front

UNSURPRISINGLY for a ski resort the emphasis in the Sierra Nevada is not fine dining. In fact, there is a large amount of very average run-of-the-mill cafeterias. But that said, once you start exploring there is actually a great range of excellent places to eat. One of the picks of the resort has got to be La Lonja, a fabulous fish seafood restaurant. Set up by livewire Antonio Lopez Huevos 39 years ago, when the resort was in its infancy, the 'marisqueria' has simply gone from strength to strength. There is a tremendous spread of seafood from around the country; from Galicia, Cadiz and the Med. The walls are surrounded in



CHEESY: Good spread at Bodegas Mazon

photos of the famous footballers and bullfighters who have eaten here, and surprise, surprise, there was a celebrated matador having lunch with his family upstairs. If meat is more what you are after then look no further

than La Carreta, an exceedingly warm, cheery place, its owner Paco being a charming and attentive host, serving up an excellent mix of meat-laden dishes. Everything is cooked on the grill and there is a nice range of cheeses and hams.



VARIETY: Warm welcome at stalwart Alpine (left), girls night out at cosy Suiza Swiss and (inset, right) wok-style at Buda wok




Practically next door, you would certainly want to give Suiza Swiss a try. An incredibly warm and friendly place, with dark red walls, candles and comfortable *banquette*-style tables. Popular with celebrities and politicians, there is a great range of inviting dishes, with an emphasis on hearty mountain fare, like duck breast, pasta and raclette. There is also an excellent wine list, including Cristal champagne at 399 euros a pop, ideal for a grand celebration. Nearly next door look out for the new Italian Portofino – A taste of Italy, which is a simple, homely affair, with great quality pasta dishes. One of the most exciting new additions is Morgan, an amazing place set up by Moroccan

Salah Eddine Bentaleb, who has a creative eye and an excellent grasp of price versus quality. Eat outside on the sunny terrace or inside in the toasty warm and comfortable diner, which has an excellent wine list and one of the most creative, exciting menus on the slopes. Another brilliant new addition to the restaurant scene is Ci Vediamo, an Italian restaurant that has just opened with a young and talented team at the helm. With an Austrian *Maitre de Tomas* and a chef Sergio Munoz - who has worked at a string of Michelin-starred restaurants, including Cafe de Paris in Malaga and San Celoni in Madrid - it certainly has pedigree. Its owner Stevie Silva, a professional snowboarder has insisted on a free reign, hence you might expect to eat a deliciously fresh salmon with avocado, rocket and capers, or duck ham on a risotto of mushrooms with grilled parsley, which is a superb winter dish. Also worth checking out is the bright and adventurous spot Restaurante El Nevado, which has an interesting Granada-style menu. For tradition though, Alpino takes some beating. This well-established stalwart of the slopes is a joy to discover, it sitting in a basement below a couple of buzzing tapas bars. Wonderfully decorated and seductively lit, it has classic Italian written all over it from the signed photo of Sophia Loren, to the huge range of cheeses and cold meats. It really does feel special dining here and the fact that it had a good range of Italian wines, including Barolos and Brunello de Montalcinos was a huge boon. Bodegas Mazon is another great place for warm, traditional fare. With a roaring fire at the door and a series of dining areas, it has a distinct style to it. Best of all are its lovely old fashioned photos of the resort. Also look out for Restaurante la Bodega, a classical restaurant below the Hotel Telecabina. Always popular, it is a great place for a big



YOUNG AND TALENTED: The team at Ci Vediamo

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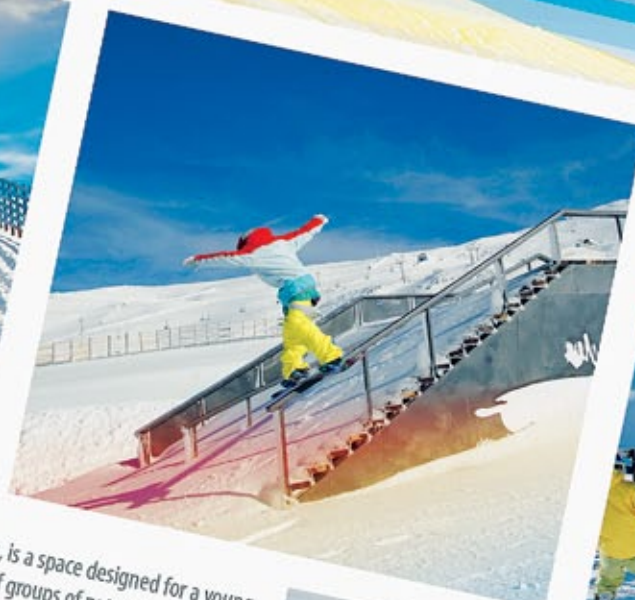
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WHERE ICARUS'S DREAM CAN BE FOUND

The great new feature at Sierra Nevada for 2010/11 is the inauguration of the Sulayr Superpark, the outstanding snowboard and freestyle stage that a prestige resort requires.



Sulayr, between the Peñon del Dilar and Loma de Dilar pistes, is a space designed for a young public and for lovers of freestyle skiing, with the installation of groups of natural and artificial modules for jumps and acrobatics, for both beginners and experts, for national and international ski-cross and snowboard-cross competitions.

The new terrain park is larger than the old Borreguiles, with greater distance between the fixtures allowing more jumps to be taken in with a single descent... and so is much more exciting. The Monachil and Loma de Dilar chairlifts are the most important lifts to access this area, which now has its own image and many new attractive features making it a cool spot in the world of snow.



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