

All about Gaucín

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Olive Press 8-page pull out special

Queen of white villages



By Paul Whitelock

IT'S called the balcony of the Serranía de Ronda and it's not hard to see why. Perched high on a rocky outcrop, surrounded by breathtaking mountain scenery, the views from Gaucín stretch across not one, but two continents.

In fact, on a clear morning, Gibraltar lies brooding off the coast in the distance while across the short straits you can practically see the Moroccans getting ready for the day.

It's hard to believe that Africa is so close. Gaucín has long been one of the hippest places to live in Andalucía.

A select holiday spot for the likes of the Sainsbury family, Fatboy Slim and allegedly Princess Diana, it has also become a popular village for many cultured expatriates – up to 500 – who have chosen to settle here.

It is this interesting and varied group of northern Europeans – many of them artists, photographers and writers – that give the town a distinctly creative and prosperous air.

So organised are the two dozen artists who live in the town for much of the year, that they organise annual open days of their studios every spring to show off their work.

While just 30 minutes from the Costa del Sol, Gaucín feels a million miles apart in spirit.

It may not have the attractions of the coast below, or the key tourist sites you find in nearby Ronda, but what it does have is a raw beauty and unspoilt countryside that sucks you in. Small enough to remain

STRIKING: One of American artist Bayard Osborn's original sculptures in front of the charming white village

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Gaucín special

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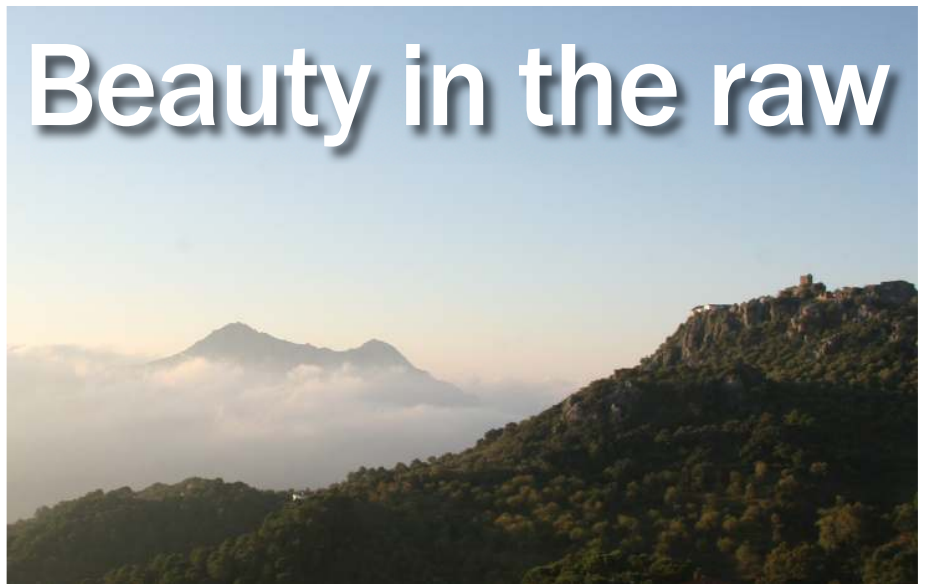
untroubled by supermarket chains (one of its best food shops, Pura Vida, is strictly organic, local produce) you hardly get a Spanish, let alone an English newspaper. Oh! apart from one of the Sunday papers at the petrol station every once in a while.

There are however, plenty of fantastic bars and restaurants and the narrow streets and shady squares are a great place to hang out in summer.

Foreigners have integrated well over the years and are well liked by the locals

Wander around and enjoy the jumble of whitewashed houses – many of them surprisingly grand – lorded over by the historic Arabic castle the Castillo del Aguila.

Then take a ride out into the nearby countryside, where there are a host of excellent hotels or restaurants for a meal or somewhere to lay down your head.



FORMIDABLE: Gaucín castle was often attacked by invaders en route to Ronda

Even better, get up early and take one of the superb walks that head in circular routes around the town. The countryside here is some of the best in the region and views are not in short supply.

The history of Gaucín is fascinating and turbulent by anyone's standards.

Archeological remains indicate settlement right back to pre-historic times. Subsequent 'visits' by, among others, Iberians, Phoenicians, Romans, Visigoths, Moors and the French have all contributed to a troubled history for the village.

The town's position at the head of the stunning Genal valley made it subject to frequent attack.

Yet these invaders, together with the "invasion" of northern Europeans in the last few decades, have all helped to weave the rich tapestry that is modern-day Gaucín.

According to mayor Francisco Ruiz, the foreigners have integrated well over the years and are well liked and accepted by the locals.

"We have few problems between local people and the foreigners who either live here permanently or who visit as tourists," Sr Ruiz told *the Olive Press*.

He went on: "The Spanish understand and appreciate the wealth the in-comers have brought to what was a fairly run-down hill village in the decades following the Spanish Civil War."

But one thing is for sure, these newcomers are no trailblazers. Gaucín has been watching foreign tourists – and particularly the British – come and go for centuries.

Gibraltar was the key to Gaucín's early popularity with the British. From the late 18th century, many of those whom the British Empire had dispatched to the Rock chose to spend

GAUCIN is awash with geckos. Dotted across the town's whitewashed walls, 400 decorated creatures filled Gaucín for its 2008 Gecko Project.

The project was launched by a local tourist association, which distributed models to children, artists and other local residents.

It took its inspiration from Swiss artist Walter Knapp's 1998 Cow Parade project. In an attempt to encourage tourism, Knapp oversaw the installation of life-sized painted cows around the streets of Zurich.

Since 1998, over 65 towns and cities have followed Zurich's lead with a wide range of a n i -

Village awash with geckos

imals being decorated, including bears in Berlin and camels in Dubai.

As a common sight in Gaucín, the gecko was selected as the creature of choice for the town's project.

It was hoped that the project would encourage visitors to fully explore the town's back streets, hunting out the village's hidden architectural gems.



their summer breaks in the cool of the mountains and away from the claustrophobia of Gibraltar.

Ronda was a favourite destination, which led to British engineers being commissioned to build a railway from Algeciras all the way to Ronda in the late 19th century, stopping conveniently near Gaucín.

But, even before then a famous hotel, the Hotel Nacional, was putting up tourists inside its historical four walls.

Run by a popular local figure, Don a Clemen, it became an institution and only finally shut half a decade ago. Previously known as the Hotel Ingles it is appropriate that the visitors book was dominated by British comments, such as one by a Royal Artillery captain, who wrote that he was "satisfied" with his stay in 1882.

A tour these days should begin opposite the petrol sta-

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Among the famous

AMONG the famous faces to be seen in Gaucín from time to time are an English Lord, an English stately home owner, a famous American singer, the daughter of a British entertainer, a Cuban author and a famous American sculptor.

Former government minister Lord Sainsbury, chairman of supermarket chain J Sainsbury plc, spends his summers in Gaucín, while Lady Ashcombe, mistress of Sudeley Hall in Gloucestershire, and Stephen Windsor-Clive, the very in-demand mosaicist, and relative of distant Clive of India have houses here. Then there is "Rat-



FAMILIAR: Lord Sainsbury and Karen O'Connor

lesnake" Annie, who sings with country and western star Willie Nelson, Karen O'Connor, daughter of housewives favourite Des O'Connor, as well as ex-Cuban diplomat-turned-author, Jorge Freyre.



tion on the main road from Ronda or Algeciras.

Look out for a giant, brightly-coloured gecko perched on a white gable end. It is the fitting – artistic – start to a tour of one of Spain's prettiest white villages. This is the first of 250 of these typical local creatures located on walls around the village, each one designed by people in the village as part of last year's Salamanca-est competition (see panel opposite).

Brainchild of local Spaniard Jesus Balsa, the idea was to involve the residents, locals and foreigners alike in promoting the village.

"All the 175 children in the school made one, plus many others," explains Balsa. "There were originally 400 made and the idea is to put them up on the wall for people – and particularly children – to look out for. It was a beautiful way to encourage tourism and complements the town's artistic links."

By following the geckos around you get a wonderful flavour of the village. Keep your eyes peeled on every street and corner. It was Balsa who helped to set up Gaucín Tourism, an independent organisation dedicated to developing and promoting tourism in the village.

Along with a number of other key figures, including French businessman Nico Morbois and former mayor Teodoro de Molina, they are now organising a number of events, such as a monthly farmers market (the first

Saturday of the month), tapas competitions, and arranging walking routes around the village, mostly in the spring and autumn.

Meanwhile Teodoro has developed his own website which has lots of information and news about local events much of it in English. He says: "It seems that a lot of foreigners came here looking for tranquility and their investment into the local economy has really helped Gaucín grow."

Teodoro has organised many cultural events including the annual Art Trail, the Flamenco Festival, the bull-running and the festival of Moros y Cristianos, when the battle between Moors and Christians is re-enacted.

With all this on offer in Gaucín it is not surprising that the main industry here is tourism.

Not only do people come for their annual holiday, but there is a regular stream of day-trippers who come up from the coast to escape the congestion and the sweltering heat of summer.

And whether you want to stay in a yurt, villa, B&B, hostel or hotel, Gaucín has got the lot.

"It is a great place to come and stay," says David Rodriguez at *La Herriza*.

It is also a good place to buy with estate agent Mary Beker explaining that it has a great range of properties. She said: "It's conveniently near to the coast, but it's maintained its rural charms."

Many of the local shops, hotels and bars are owned

by foreigners, who invested money in old properties and renovated them.

Take Ginny Bolton, from Notting Hill, London, who first came here in 1971. "It was amazing back then. I bought a place for £500, which was ridiculously cheap." She did that up and sold it on, then later bought the old house which she renovated into the present-day Restaurante Don Martin.

Luis Ruibérriz de Torres, from Madrid, also refurbished an old building and turned it into the Hotel Restaurante La Fructuosa, which he currently leases. He also metamorphosed an old village house on the same street, Calle Convento, into a quaint little antique and bric-a-brac shop, called El Convento.

"I like working in the tourist industry here. "It's so much better and healthier than in Madrid," he explained.

Elisa Mirángels came from Barcelona and opened the Bonísim Delicatessen last year. "I like it very much here. The coast is awful – it's been destroyed."

Meanwhile, Alison Joelson from Herefordshire bought an old warehouse 15 years ago and turned it into the Bar/Bistro La Fuente, which overlooks the main square.

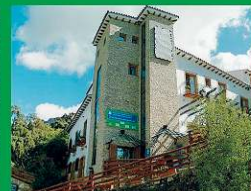
"It was a lot of hard work, but fun, much better than running a pub in central London!"

Now retired, Alison leases the place to a young couple who run it as the rated Restaurante La Fuente.

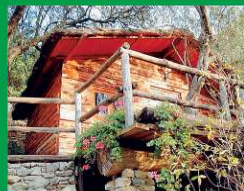
All this foreign investment and development has helped to turn what was once a rundown, impoverished rural backwater into the vibrant, classy and thriving village that is the modern-day Gaucín.



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16 **Gaucín special**



INSPIRATION: A child marvels an artwork at the annual spring show

THERE are few places in Andalusia with such a high concentration of artists.

Gaucín is positively teeming with painters, sculptors and photographers, many of them foreigners, who have been here for decades. In total there are nearly 30 artists living in the town, many of whom have taught art in schools and exhibited around the world.

Residents include sculptors, potters, painters, photographers and poets

Everything comes together in the spring with the annual Art Trail, when for two weekends you can wander round the village from studio to studio and meet the artists and look at their work.

The most famous, and the oldest at 87, is the American sculptor Bayard Osborn, who has lived in Gaucín for over 30 years.

But other key figures include Michael Roschlau, a German sculptor, who runs the El Convento art gallery on Calle Convento. He

True and



shares a studio with Nozomi Hatano, who is a superb watercolourist.

Potter Juan Antonio Sangil, who teaches pottery in Jerez, has a beautiful studio at the top of the hill, and his wife, Ana Pellon, is a painter, who has exhibited in London.

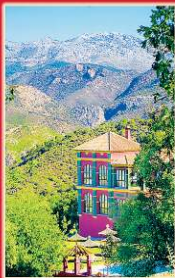
English artist Jenny Waterhouse, who designed this year's poster for the Flamenco Festival, has lived in the village for 25 years.

Painter and photographer Paco Benitez – who doubles up as a local forester – has recently exhibited in

Gaucín. Painter ing, wh Finca La the Gau outside exhibitin Gallery member, Brenda dio near at the Liverpool Ceramic from Ire at her de Manilva Photogra Schoch, and Mic



Restaurante Grill El Hacho

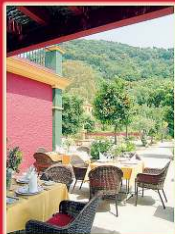


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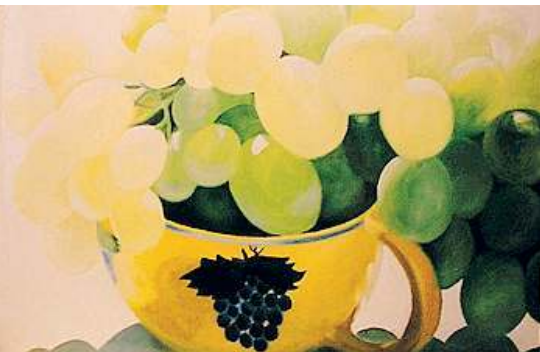


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Artist colony



Victoria Orr-Ew... has a studio at... Tobiscas just off... Gaucin road... the village, will be... at the Lennox... in London in No... and printmaker... Hartill, with a stu... the church, will be... Editions Gallery in... ol in September.
...ist Anna McGrane... land, has a studio... lightful finca on the... -Gaucin road.
...aphers Mandy... Vivienne Whiffen... Michael Lock cover a

wide variety of subject matter, including views of Andalusia. Painters Vanessa Wilson, Lesley Riddihough, Stephanie Thompson and Paddy Robinson all have their studios in the village, as do Jim Rattenbury and Sebastian Fisher, who use a variety of artistic techniques. Stephen Windsor-Clive is a talented mosaicist, who is well known abroad. There are also a number of celebrated writers and poets in the town, in particular, Spanish poet Francis Prieto, who is the local librarian, and Cuban novelist George Freyre.

ARTISTIC:
(Clockwise from left) works by Jennifer Waterhouse, Lesley Riddihough, Stephanie Thompson and Michael Roschlau



My Gaucin

Elisa Miràngels, 53



Elisa, who opened her delicatessen Bonissim partly to stock British products to save people driving to the coast, says: "The coast is awful - it's been destroyed but I like it very much here. It is a very peaceful place."

Sam Ehrlich, 39, artist
Sam, who makes furniture and builds kitchens from recycled materials, says: "I have done a lot of work and commissions in and around Gaucin for about 18 months."

"I have received a lot of good feedback on my work, which is really helpful as what I do is very different from painting."

"Only problem though is that my house looks a lot like something from Stig of the Dump at the moment!"

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Rosalina Cristobal Picazo, owner, Pura Vida.

Rosalina, who runs one of Andalusia's finest health food shops Pura Vida, says: "The cornerstone of my shop is fair trade. It is time we changed our attitudes about how we treat the environment - we need to completely re-evaluate our philosophies."

"Much of our success is a credit to the foreigners who have moved into this village - they really have helped to change everyone's attitudes towards eco-friendly produce."

The gentleman sculptor

Paul Whitelock talks to the togonarian artist Bayard Osborn

BORN in Manhattan in 1922, Bayard Osborn is the best known of the Gaucin artists and has lived in the village for over 30 years.

As a young man he didn't train in anything, but was always interested in art and joined the Art Students League, but got angry and frustrated with them and

also quit Harvard University for undisclosed reasons, before ultimately moving towards sculpture.

After living and working in Manhattan for a while, he moved to Gaucin in 1983, where his relatively large house hosts a spacious top-floor studio, where many of his works are on display. Osborn has exhibited in Europe



STUDIO: Osborn at work

and the USA and has sold paintings to, among others, the King of Spain, Juan Carlos.

Unfortunately, Bayard is inactive at the moment following a recent stroke, but his legacy is assured and there for all to see. He lives with Pilar, his charming Cuban wife, who he married 40 years ago.

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WHERE TO STAY



IN the heart of the village, your best bet would be Molino del Carmen, which is a beautifully converted olive mill, with comfortable rooms, while the well connected Hotel Caballo Andaluz sits overlooking the town with breathtaking views. Nearby, the well established Hotel La Almuna, is in a charming location with amazing views towards Gi-



braltar and Morocco. Run by a charming Englishwoman, Diana Paget, this lovely rustic retreat has a nice mixture of rooms and a superb well-established garden.

More modern, but equally rural, is the comfortable Hotel La Herriza that sits in a sleepy valley looking out towards the Alcornocales natural park. Run by the engaging David Rodriguez, this is one of the classiest places to stay in inland Andalucía.

Other interesting places to stay are the stunning Hoopoe Yurt hotel, in nearby Cortes, while Casas Mosaicas is an opulent villa, available to rent. En route to Cortes you will also find the Hotel-Restau-



WOW: Salitre, Almuna, Molino del Carmen and Banu Rabbah (clockwise from far left)

Hotel Banu Rabbah, and its charming restaurant Kalbas. Finally in El Colmenar, for those on a budget, you might try Casas Rurales Ahora.

WHERE TO EAT

FOODIES are spoilt for choice. But be prepared to get in your car, for two of the best restaurants are on the road down to Gaucin Estacion.

The first is the brilliant, Restaurante El Hacho, where English chef Neil has a great repertoire of dishes learnt from a long career in the restaurant trade, while further down the road in the village itself is the lovely Caserio Ananda, where you can eat fabulous free range meats cooked over a wood grill. In Gaucin itself you will find the English-owned La Fuente. Run by Lisa and "Huggie", its



rooftop terrace is a wonderful place to spend a summer evening, with an international *a la carte* menu.

Also why not try the fabulous restaurant with its wonderful views at Hotel Caballo Andaluz. Another excellent restaurant is the long-established Don Martin, run by Ginny. It has the best roof terrace in the village and serves up international



DINE IN STYLE: At La Fuente and, (right), Caballo Andaluz

cuisine. For tapas, why not try Bar Paco Pepe, a convivial and friendly spot, which usually has a *menú del día* at lunchtimes. Other bars worthy of a mention are Bodeguita Chaparro at the entrance to the village and Bar Portuesuelo at the exit.

WHERE TO SHOP

GAUCIN has a great range of shops, but thankfully none of the big chains. One of the main hubs of the town is Pura Vida, the health food shop, which serves a wonderful range of organic produce, while nearby the recently-opened Bonissim Delicatessen complements it perfectly.

On the same street is a quaint little shop selling antiques, bric-a-brac, art and other bits and pieces. Owned and run by Luis RUIBERREZ de Torres, from Madrid, El Convento is worth half an hour of anybody's time, and you're sure to find something to tempt you to open your wallet. If you're looking for a house to buy, why not try the Experience Group in Estacion de Gaucin, or Mary Beker and her son Tom (See adverts).

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ONE of the best ways to get to Gaucín is by train on one of the most picturesque railway journeys in Andalucía - from either Málaga or Algeciras. The train journey skirts the beautiful Alcornocales natural park and through the Guadiaro valley where the river flows even in summer.

Eventually you arrive at the charming village of Estación de Gaucín, which grew from scratch when the railway was built in the 19th century.

A destination in itself it is a sleepy place surrounded by incredible natural beauty, and amazingly some superb restaurants and bars.

From here you are very close to one of the must-see natural sites of Andalucía. Recently designated a National Monument, the Cañon de las Buitreras ('Vulture Canyon') is a must-visit for anyone who has an interest in nature.

To get there take the road to Gaucín from the village and a few hundred metres along take the turn-off to the left that leads to the Central Electrico.

Continue walking another 500 metres and then pass through the metal gates that take you into the Sevillana electricity sub-station and then follow the marked path on the left that goes uphill to the canyon.

The path takes you into the park following the river valley for about three kilometres to the head of the canyon, where you will find a mini-lake surrounded by the high limestone cliffs, over 100 metres high, that form the canyon.

The water is ice-cold, as it comes from underground, and the canyon itself is named after the vultures that live in the surrounding area, as they can often be seen circling high above, using the strong thermals to gain height. Several species of eagles,

A lunch in the Vultures' Canyon

Take the train to have a fabulous walk in the Vultures canyon followed by lunch in the hamlet of Estación de Gaucín, writes local resident Sara Oker



JUMP AND WAVE: Watching the train at Caserío Ananda and jumping into the canyon

kingfishers, fresh water shrimps, mongoose and even otters can be seen along the riverbanks and in the surrounding countryside.

After your trip to the canyon, which can be pretty exhausting in the summer heat, the village has some really excellent places to while away a few hours before the train back.

The best of these is the superb Caserío Ananda, where you can eat one of the finest lunches on offer in Málaga province.

Run by a local woman, Angeles, and her Navarran

husband, Pedro, they have turned a railway shed into a charming northern Spanish-inspired eatery.

It has well sourced free range meats - roast suckling pig, lamb chops and sirloin steak are the specialities - and a brilliant wine list put together by a friend, who holds the much coveted 'nariz de oro' (golden nose) award for wine.

There are always specials of the day, such as Navarran artichokes with foie, which is delicious, their own tomatoes, in season, and the sweet red peppers cooked in the oven with garlic were

amazing. A pudding of fresh figs with mascarpone was just as good.

But the key to this true dining secret is the grilling done on a wood oven, only using firewood from orange trees, which is "crucial to the flavour" explains Pedro.

If you are looking for something a bit less informal, the Bar Rincon del Cani, run by a young couple, Antonio and Virginia, has a range of very good tapas and a *menu del día*, all home cooked. In the winter you can get seasonal mushrooms and also a good selection of lo-

cal game.

They also have a fantastic wine list, specially selected for the restaurant, and there is a lovely area to sit outside and enjoy the views over the village and surrounding mountains.

There are several places to stay in the village. To find out more, visit *Eve* at www.experiencegroupspain.com. The *Casa Rural Ahora*, located on the riverside, not only offers rural accommodation but also a range of natural therapies, spa, jacuzzi and even a Turkish bath, a great way to recover after a day out walking or just enjoying the views and sights of this special village.

Sara Oker has lived on a finca outside Estación de Gaucín for 15 years. She has three children and runs her own business in Ronda, the Andalucía Soap Company.

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Brian Horton - An obituary

From Reuters and Times to Gaucín and wine

BRIAN Horton, former Reuters boss and Times foreign editor, and later a wine expert, has passed away in Gaucín. He had been ill for some time.

Brian Horton, former Editor-in-Chief of the Reuters news agency, died suddenly at his home in Gaucín, Spain on Saturday 25 July. He was 76. Born in the UK to New Zealand parents, Brian came from a family with a journalistic background. The family moved back to New Zealand following the outbreak of World War II.

He joined Reuters as a Cambridge graduate in December 1957 and after holding several key positions, was made Editor-in-Chief in 1968.

He resigned after a few years and went into the wine business, moving to Gaucín with his second wife Jane and children in 1976. In 1981 he was head-hunted and went back to London to become Foreign Editor of The Times. He later became Managing Editor before moving to News International as Director of Development.



WEDDING: Horton

Brian left them to return to Gaucín in 1986 where he spent his retirement. He was in poor health in recent years and his last great wish was to see his son Robert married. This he did at La Linea the week before his death.

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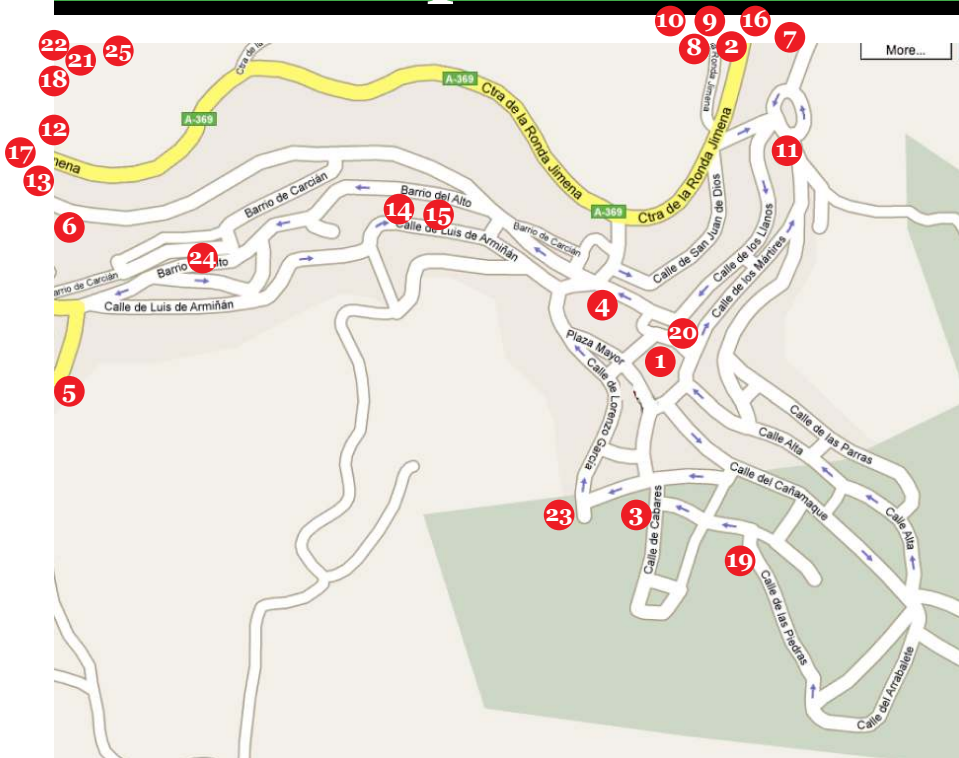
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My Gaucín

Ellie Able-Wright, 20, waitress.
 "There used to be more night life for kids. The swimming pool is also closed down for renovations at the moment, so it's tough."

Teodoro de Molino, former mayor
 "The influx of northern Europeans has really helped the town grow by bringing investment and everyone has integrated really well."


Graham Morris, Carpenter, 23 years as a resident
 "The town's changed entirely for the better since I have lived here. It has a great social mix and I could not imagine living anywhere else."

Seraphina Clarke, retired literary agent
 "Living in Spain gets us away from the health and safety culture of the UK and we enjoy being able to smoke in public places. Spain is only one of few EU countries that permit the practice."

Interviews carried out by Kevin Guyan and Andrew Pearce.



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