ll about | lvera

April 08, 2010

Formerly a feared bandit hideout, Andrew Pearce discovers that the picture-perfect town of Olvera is still a great escape – but for very different reasons

OWERING over the rolling hill-sides and jagged rocky peaks of the Sierra Gaditana, it is difficult

the Sierra Gaditana, it is difficult to imagine the lawless past that idyllic Olvera once possessed. For this picture-perfect white town reminiscent of an extravagant wedding cake from a distance - was a notorious outpost for some of Andalucia's most-feared outlaws just 200 years ago.

ago.

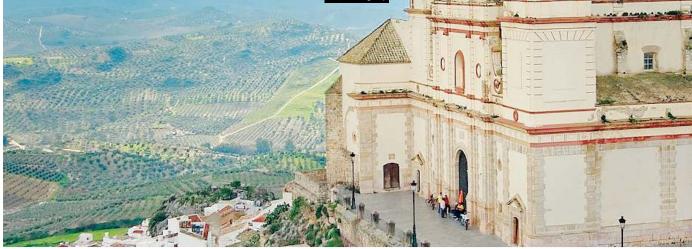
Incredibly, the-once isolated settlement granted asylum to criminals if they pledged to take up arms in its defence.

And the arrival of bandits to this remote frontier post soon gave rise to the adage 'Kill a man and go to Olvera'. Nowadays, fortunately, time has moved quickly and the 9000-strong town is now making a name for itself for all the right reasons. Officially part of Cadiz, it is perfectly positioned on the cusp of Malaga and Sevilla provinces, within easy reach of some of the region's main cities. Yet, standing at 643 metres above sea level, Olvera is still far enough away from these lively hubs to ensure its parochial feel has remained intact.

Turn to Page 14









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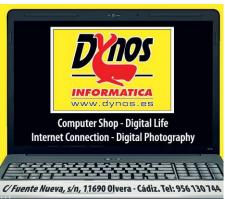
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¹⁴Olvera special

From Page 13

"If you take away the cars parked in the narrow streets you could be living hundreds of years ago," explains resident of three years Anne-Marie Kingsnorth.
"It is so easy to live here, everything I could ever want is just a short walk away, I enjoy such a great quality of life."

life."
Surrounded by sunflower-lined hills, lush olive groves and arguably Andalucia's most inspiring scenery it is easy to why Olvera is now a magnet for expatriates looking for their own slice of authoritic Spanish heaves.

thentic Spanish heaven.
"As you drive towards Olvera, it is impossible to ignore the amazing scenery and incredible views," explains Zoe Males, from Olvera Zoe Males Properties.

"It is just so pretty and of-ten convinces any prospec-tive buyers looking to invest before they've even stepped foot incide" foot inside.

foot inside."

But Olvera is not just any
Spanish white town, it is in
fact the landmark start of
the 'Pueblos Blancos' route
that snakes its way south
through the ensuing Malaga province. Yet it stands head and shoul-

ders above its white coun-terparts for one obvious



Wedding cake cascad

reason, its majestic twelfth-century Moorish citadel that keeps a watchful eye on its

territory.

It served as a seemingly impenetrable defensive garrison but was eventually breached by Christian reconquistadores fighting for

King Alfonso XI in 1327. The Castillians then proceeded to strengthen the fort as it assumed its present day allow. ent-day glory. But now the most action the

impressive castle witnesses the endurance-boosting

And the short climb is well worth the effort as its conquerors are rewarded with inspiring panoramic views across Andalucia's virgin

countryside.

A mere 700 years later, despite another invasion—this time of the expatriate nature—life in Olvera is defined by a more heart-

warming theme.
A stroll up the high street,
Calle Llana, leads to the Pla-

za del Ayuntamiento, home of the popular Pepe Rayas

of the popular Pepe Rayas tapas bar.
There, both expatriates and Spaniards while away their lazy afternoons in perfect unison – a common sight in the estimated 99 bars and cafes that line the town's streets.

One day a year Olvera resembles a ghost town as the masses celebrate on the open hill

Once the ratios are calculated, there is apparently one bar for every 91 lucky residents.

"There are so many great bars and restaurants that you are always greeted by new faces" continues Zoe,

who moved to Olvera five

years ago.
"This town is a real place

of integration for everyone, it has such a great atmosphere."
"Yet, most importantly for me, is the fact that you still feel like you are living in Spain

feel like you are living in Spain.

And these positive sentiments are shared by Cristobal Gomez, still only 22, but already running the popular PC Planet, computer shop in town.

"There is so much going on here, we are lucky to have cheap food, good bars and lots of local business," says Gomez, who grew up in Olvera.

"Above all, on Friday and Saturday nights there is a brilliant atmosphere."

"Everyone knows each other and there are never any

problems."
And this great vibe is set







Mark & Maria welcome you to their friendly Moroccan-themed boutique bed & breakfast located in the centre of Olvera.

"Beautiful house, wonderful company, brilliant views and location. A perfect recipe for an enjoyable stay. Many thanks to Mark and Maria." lan & Carol, Loughborough, UK



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Why would you recommend tourists to come visit Olvera?
Olvera is one of the most trea-

sured places that can be found on the 'White Town Route'. Townsfolk are characterised by their peacefulness and appre ciation of culture and tradition. Not only that, but Olvera boasts a great history, beautiful streets, great food and, above all, special

If you had to choose just one aspect, what do you believe makes Olvera so

special?
The beautiful church and The beautiful church and Moorish citadel are perhaps the two most emblematic landmarks in Olvera. But, for me personally, I would say that it is the mix of both tradition and modernity that really gives this town its unique feel. What in particular would you

recommend visitors to do when they visit Olvera? I would advise them to embrace the place's great history. First, they should start by taking a stroll through the Barrio de la Villa and, of course, take a look at the Sancto course, take a rook at the salte-tuary de Nuestra Senora de los Remedios church, or go for a walk along the Via Verde. But, above all, they should sit back, relax and enjoy the great food the town has to offer!

How would you describe

Olvera's atmosphere? Most importantly, it has a family atmosphere of peacefulness and rest. It is ideal for families with small children and for people who want to escape the hustle and bustle of the nearby big cities.

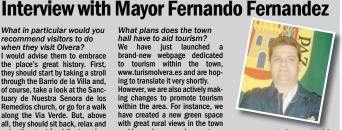
What plans does the town hall have to aid tourism?

We have just launched a brand-new webpage dedicated to tourism within the town, www.turismolvera.es and are hoping to translate it very shortly. However, we are also actively mak

ing changes to promote tourism within the area. For instance, we have created a new green space with great rural views in the town and have also opened a new town museum in the Ermita area.

And finally, why does such and finally, why does such a special relationship exist between Spaniards and expatriates? Olvera is now very cosmopolitan because the locals are naturally

warm and welcoming to visitors Thanks to their innate friendliness



our new guests have settled in very easily.
The English community has grown

quickly over the years and has blessed the town with its great love for life and knowledge. For example, the winner of this

year's carnival poster design was expatriate Alan Pearson - demonstrating the participa-

Olvera special

to reach fever pitch on the second Monday after Easter (April 12) when the whole town decamps to the fields on the outskirts to celebrate

on the outskirts to celebrate Romeria Day. It is in the open land around the charming Sanctuary de Nuestra Senora de los Remedios church where townsfolk congregate to give thanks for the rain.

thanks for the rain.
Ironically, this year — after enduring Andalucia's wettest ever winter — people would surely be forgiven for celebrating an end to the Biblical-like torrents.
Nevertheless, excitement is already growing for this tradition which impressively dates back to 1715.
For one day a year Olvera resembles a ghost town as the masses enjoy music, drinks and barbeques up on the open hills.
"Don't come and visit the town as there won't be a

Don't come and visit the town as there won't be a soul about!" says interpreter Anne-Marie.
"It's a great day out, you will find most people relaxing under the shade of olive trees eating come delivious. trees eating some delicious paella."

People headed for the coast in search of opportunities and prosperity

But if the town party is missed then it is well worth ascending the town's streets, aiming directly for the Moorish fortress where just a stone's throw away
lies the hugely impressive,
Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de la Encarnacion.
The neoclassical church

The neoclassical church
– completed in 1843 under
the orders of the Duke of
Osuna – dominates the sky-

Osuna – dominates the sky-line almost as much as the Arab garrison adjacent. Indeed, its sheer size and architectural quality is often likened to that of a cathedral. Inside, it boasts an interior clad in Italian marble and it is regarded as one of the finest churches in Malaga

province.
Sadly, in 1936, Republican revolutionaries burnt a number of church icons, images as well as the part



ORIGINAL: Unusual metal sculptures are dotted around the town

of the interior during the

of the interior during the Spanish Civil War. And the 'years of hunger' that ensued after the three years of national infight-ing affected Olvera as much as its neighbouring white

towns.
Its peoples headed for the coast in search of opportunities and prosperity, temporarily stunting the town's growth.
Yet agriculture remained

growth. Yet agriculture remained a crucial job creator and Olvera's olive co-operatives are well known across the

the Furthermore, also lays claim to the fact that more Iberican pigs are raised in Olvera than in any

they are reportedly nurtured for their first three months before being sold to other breeders across the

country. Coincidentally, the importance of open spaces in sup-porting Olvera's primary job sector is now paying dividends for its tourist in-

dustry. One of the town's key mod-One of the town's key mod-ern-day tourist attractions is the 38km via verde – one of Andalucia's most popular walking and cycling routes. Along its beautiful trail, it boasts half a dozen viaducts, more than 20 tunnels and most importantly for food

rants en route.

It runs alongside an abandoned railway line which was built between 1927 and

1930. The brief dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera declared that Olvera would be a crucial station on the line between Almargen and Jerez de la Frontera.

and Jerez de la Frontera. Although the railroad company went bust in the 1930s at least this failed political plan has led to some modern-day good, (see Hunger Bike, page 18). Just next door to the Via Verde lies the Centro Ecuestre Platero, a horse riding and tourist centre, that provides lessons as well as an inviting bar

as an inviting bar. However, the less adventur-ous are still well catered for ous are still well catered for in Olvera. For those with a flair for design can chance their arm at Artesania del Prado's pottery classes. And window shoppers are also be in safe hands at Amazoe's Moroccan Home Décor boutique located in the heart of town.

No doubt about it green

heart of town.

No doubt about it, green walkways, lashings of both ancient and modern culture, as well as a great social vibe to boot, Olvera delivers on a large number of fronts.

In fact, it is no surprise that once discovered by expatriates, they soon realise how lucky they were to have settled in the picturesque enclave.

settled in the picturesque enclave. "I have lived in many places across the globe, but this is definitely the best place I have ever settled in," adds Anne-Marie. "I could end up staying here forever." Just two centuries ago, Olvera was home to Andalucia's most feared bandits and outlaws.

and outlaws. It certainly has come a long



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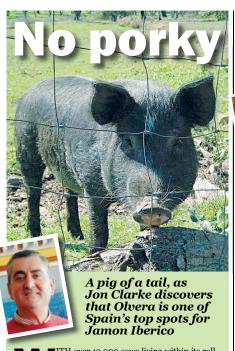
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OPEN AIR: Residents enjoy windy conditions with Moorish castle overlooking



ITH over 12,000 sows living within its rolling country limits, Olvera has become one of Spain's main breeding grounds for the famous Jamon Iberico.

Indeed, this is where the story of ham practically originates from, with around 260,000 piglets born here every year.

erv vear.

nates from, with around 260,000 piglets born here every year.
Known as Pata Negra pork, the piglets (or 'lechon') spend the first three months of their lives being reared in the area, before being shipped off to either Huelva or Salamanca to be fattened up on acorns.
"Unfortunately there are not many oak trees in the area so the final stages of their breeding have to be done elsewhere," explains local restaurateur Juan Antonio Pernia Verdugo (pictured above left), of El Puerto de los Arbolitos restaurant.
"So every day lorry-loads of pigs are taken up north to continue their breeding".
There are a total of 150 businesses dedicated to pig rearing in Olvera.
Most of them are small family businesses, but a few of them are big companies, such as Los Remedios, which is one of the town's main employers.
On average, each sow is capable of having three litters a year, with an average of eight piglets.
"That means around 264,000 piglets, with each selling for around 55 euros at present," says Antonio Villalba, boss of Los Remedios.
His 45-year-old company also specialises in olive oil, for which the area is also unsurprisingly well known, it being surrounded by acres and acres of rolling olive groves.
There are three producers in Olvera, which has around 1000 hectares officially registered as organic.





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left) Semana Santa celebrations in 1935



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Olvera





Oh to be n Olvera

Mick Walker extols the virtues of his isolated hill town hideout that is actually perfectly sited for most of Andalucia

IKE a wedding cake cascading down a high hill, Olvera is the most archetypal of Andalucian vistas. A classic 'pueblo blanco', the white village, is seen from miles around and evocative of the slow rural life of southern Spain in days gone by. As with most people, my first view of Olvera was from the A382. Several years ago I was trav-

nrst view of Olivera was from the A382. Several years ago I was travelling between Jerez and Granada, and as I passed through the tunnel near Algodonales, there it was. Framed by the tunnel was this magnificent town perched high on a hill, gleaming white in the sunlight, and magnetically drawing me in.

Surrounded by spectacular rutted hills and with a backdrop of far away distant mountains, it was clearly a paradise for nature lovers. Some years later, as my Spanish town on the coast got filled up with concrete and lost its authentic charms, Olvera was one of charms, Olvera was one of the first places I thought about coming to.

about coming to.

I soon discovered that it
was not only beautiful, but
a friendly place full of atmosphere. A town with very little crime, where leaving your door open is still the norm. A pair of incidents with my

Spanish neighbours, who at this time did not even know my name, have served to highlight the town's friendly



WEDDING CAKE: Olvera is the archetypal white town perched on a lush hillside

atmosphere. The first was when a neighbour knocked at my door asking if I had an empty five-litre water container

The climb to the top is rewarded with stunning views over three provinces

I had, and gave it to him, not having a clue what he want-ed it for. Two or three hours ed it for. Two or three hours later came another knock. It was the same neighbour with my now full container. He explained that he and his wife had been up into the mountains to a remote spring to fill their many containers with this perfect, pure spring water, and they thought that I would like some. The second incident came

some years later when another neighbour came knocking to ask if I'd heard that Mercadona was about

that Mercadona was about to open a new supermarket in the town.

Carrying a pile of paperwork under his arm, I assumed he had a petition for us to sign against it. But no, his daughter had just secured a job there and been given a limited number of invitations for guests at the official opening, Did I in fact want free food and drink? Back in the town, the old heart of Olvera is clustered on a hill topped by a magnificent church and twelfth century Moorish castle,

on a hill topped by a magnificent church and twelfth century Moorish castle, which once held the line for the Nasrid kingdom of Granada against the advancing Christians from the north.

The climb to the top is rewarded with stunning views over three provinces: Cádiz, Sevilla and Málaga. It is for this lofty location that so many house buyers fall in love with the historic town. There is practically nowhere without a view. Another obvious advantage can be seen simply by looking at its location on a map. Take a look at the circle of cities that surround Olvera. Sevilla, Córdoba, Granada, Malaga and Jerez. They are all within an easy hour or so drive. Not to mention the fact that

an within an easy nour or so drive.

Not to mention the fact that the beautiful old town of Ronda is also only 35 minutes away and Antequera is not much further.

Farm aid in Olvera

EARTS were warmed in Olvera when townsfolk organised a secret music concert to raise money for a flood victim.

Guitar player Peter Elliot was shocked when he was handed an Agon are chosen of first playing at

snocked when he was nanded an 800-euro cheque after playing at his own gig. Peter - who plays in the duo Man-tis - had been told the concert was to celebrate a friend's engagement

at bar Pepe Rayas.
But residents had secretly arranged the event to help Peter and his wife Diane after their finca was flooded.
"I was dumbfounded and very



FUNDRAISER: After floods

touched that everyone had rallied round," explained Peter. Fundaiser organiser Zoe Males said: "It was our own small ver-sion of Farm aid."



Olvera special

MORNING'S cycle along the Via Verde is not only one of Andalucia's most enjoyable excursions, but – somewhat incredibly - one of the region's best food jaunts. The

jaunts.
The 38-kilometre hiking and cycling route through soaring mountain scenery between Olvera and Puerto Serrano is one of the true secrets of inland Andalucia.

A clayer ruse of the Andalucia.

A clever ruse of the Andalu-cian authorities, the track heads along an unused rail-way track that was never inaugurated after the railroad company went out of business in the 1930s.

business in the 1930s. While a lesson in economic meltdown, some clever wonk saw the potential to open it up to the public. Today, it offers a wonderful opportunity to have a relatively flat cycle ride through

some of Andalucia's most primitive, unspoilt countryside.

Bring your own bikes or rent them at the Estacion de Via Verde hotel in Olve-

de Via Verde hotel in Olvera or further along the track in Coripe, from Andres at Coripe Rural. It is just ten euros for a morning's cycle and is certainly good value. There are children's bikes, trailers for



VALUE: Good cycle and great food

babies and even a tandem for rent from Coripe, at least.

least.
We started in Coripe, heading uphill towards Olvera, onwards through a series of long tunnels, until we reached the amazing Penon de Zaframagon, said to be the largest Griffon vulture colony in Spain colony in Spain. While a 24-hour live close-

Hunger bike

Take a trip along Andalucia's best inland secret the Via Verde, writes Jon Clarke

up feed is normally beamed back to a visitor centre be-low, sadly it is often shut. After about an hour, we arrived in Olvera, in time for a morning coffee. With the heat of the day

with the fleat of the day building up, we soon turned around and hot-footed it back to Coripe, where Juan Ramon at the excellent restaurant in Estacion de Coripe was ready to serve us lunch at the very reasonable hour of 1pm.

By rights it should be a hot dog and fried-egg sarnie sort of place.

But owner Juan Ramon has

A keen local nature lovel, this softly-spoken chap has a passion for food quite un-likely for such an isolated

strips of smoked salmon and a delicious seafood sauce.

Full after our lavish lunch, we almost took him up on the offer of a siesta upstairs

His fresh tomatoes alinados with shavings of gar lic and rosemary compete with the best, while the hot tuna croquettes melt in the

other ideas. A keen local nature lover,

area.

area.

Working closely with his mother and friends in the kitchen, he knocks out a series of really, rather accomplished dishes.

The avocado salad turns up with some unbelievably fresh prawns, cod roe and caviar, not to mention its strips of smoked salmon and

and Saturday nights, Ra-

SECRET: The Via Verde boasts some areat views and (left) Andres from Coripe Rural alongside culinary maestro Juan Ramon

Even better for a starter though is the carpaccio of beef, with the thinnest slices of Manchego cheese, courgettes and mushrooms on top. It was a lesson in finesse.

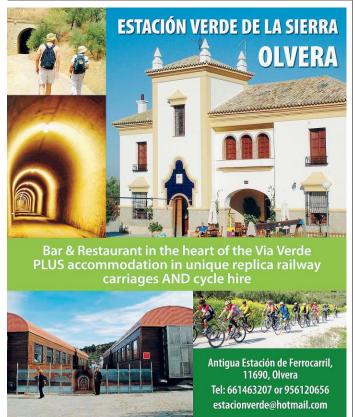
After our starters, we dived into a fantastic main course of carillada (bull's cheek) in a plum sauce, as well as some tremendous skewers of monkfish and prawns.

of monkinsh and prawns.
The puddings are nothing to
write home about, but there
was a nice moist almond
tart and more Magnum ice
cream flavours than my
daughter could count.
You can eat either inside

the station or on the terrace outside, where on Friday

mon does a barbecue.
"I felt it was about time to bring some life to this village," says Ramon, who bring some the to this vil-lage," says Ramon, who comes from Moron. "I've always liked food and love the combination of nature and good food. It works well as I am full nearly ev-ery weekend of the year." More than full after our lay-More than full after our lavish lunch, we almost took him up on a siesta in one of his cool bedrooms upstairs. It is advisable to book.

Call Estacion de Coripe on 620013708 and hire bikes with Andres at 655 526 716 or 955 858 675 or at Es-tacion de Via Verde hotel







Olvera special

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

WHITE-washed Olvera will whet your appetite with a host of eateries and fine dining scattered across this hillside

town.

Despite being positioned so close to the Jerez road Venta El Castillejo is surprisingly one of Olvera's most peaceful escapes.

one of Olvera's most peacetul escapes.
But the food's lively flavours certainly contrast with the tranquil setting. In particular, the fresh tomatoes alinados in olive oil garlic and oregano are delicious.
Inside Olvera, scores of youths

come from nearby towns to visit trendy bar El Frenazo and the joint certainly caters

for those wanting to have a

for those wanting to have a good time.

Meanwhile, restaurant Puerto de los Arbolitos serves up traditional Spanish tapas. Specialities are the barbequed meats such as chicken and jamon, all lovingly served up by charismatic restaurateur Juan Antonio Pernia Verdugo.

Finally, if you went to clip out

Finally, if you want to slip out of Olvera then Restaurante Estacion de Coripe is the place

Estacion de Coripe is the place to visit. Nestled some ten kilometres north-west of the town, owner Juan knocks out a series of ac-complished dishes. The avoca-do salad and strips of smoked salmon strips are excellent.

WHERE TO STAY

WITH jagged hilltops and lush countryside as far as the eye can see, the rugged landscape of Olvera contrasts greatly with its warm and comfortable accommodation.

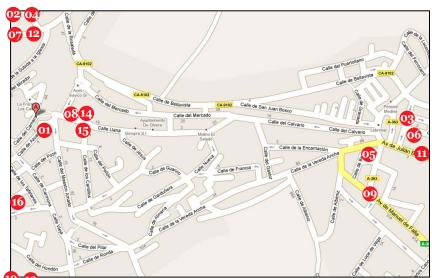
And Casa Marroc is the perfect example of Olvera's homely appeal. This beautiful little inn is hidden deep within the long, narrow streets of the historic town.

Another traditional place to stay is the Estacion Verde de

la Sierra, where the rooms are, la Sierra, where the rooms are, uniquely, replica railway carriages. Set in the heart of the glorious Via Verde cycle route guests can hire bicycles directly from the hotel.

If you're searching for that ultimate country experience we also recommend the Casa Pural Corino Located auticide.

Rural Coripe. Located outside Olvera, these cottages provide a great escape from the hustle and bustle of our daily lives.



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- 02. Časa Rural Coripe
- o3. Centro Optico o4. Centro Ecuestre Platero
- o5. Dynos Informatica o6. Disco El Frenazo
- 07. Hotel Estacion Verde de la Sierra
- o8. Olvera Properties

- 09. PC Planet 10. Artesania del Prado
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