

All about Coín

June 2009

We found Eldorado in Coín

Best known for the defunct BBC soap the truth is most foreigners who live in Coín have really coined it in, says Jon Clarke

IT has been well over a decade since *Eldorado* slunk from the TV screens with a whimper and an *hasta luego*. The biggest soap opera flop in British TV history, the BBC drama had hoped to replicate some of the sunshine and glamour of imported Australian soaps like *Neighbours*, and keep *EastEnders* on its toes. How wrong could they have been? Hamstrung with problems from the start, the show suffered from poor casting, bad storylines and cringing performances by actors, many of whom didn't even know what a read-through was. Indeed, the only thing producers had no shortage of was sunshine, with the set appropriately built in the hills in Coín above the Costa del Sol. Amazingly, it is still there today – and despite the show having re-couped its investment many times over due to re-runs, it stands as a stark reminder of the BBC's failure to replicate on screen the life on the Spanish costas.

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We are opposite the bus station in Coin

From Page 1

But, that is not to say that the purpose-built set, high in the hills above the Guadalhorce Valley town has gone to waste.

A string of films and TV dramas have been produced there since – and Antonio Banderas is even scheduled to be part-making a movie there this Autumn.

According to sources, Spain's hottest star is making a film about Andalucía's last Moorish ruler King Boabdil – he of the last sigh – who handed over Granada to the Christians in 1492.

"He is due here in September or October," confirms Marco Berrocal, who manages the studio Ciudad del Cine, which these days also comprises a hotel and restaurant.

"We have had plenty of productions here since *Eldorado* ended and we hope to have many more."

It is certainly the most unusual place hidden amid a pine forest high above Coin. You take a windy lane known as Camino de los Llanos which goes higher and higher into the hills until you suddenly come across... well, a self-contained village. Except that it isn't.

A petrol station, town hall, village square, post boxes and phone boxes, all suddenly emerge in a clearing within the forest. More *The Shining*, than a soap opera, even the receptionist insists that it is "a cold and very spooky" place to stay the night in winter.

Certainly most people in Coin try their best not to be associated with the defunct soap opera *Eldorado*.

"It is a complete coincidence that the programme was set here," says estate agent Richard Nicholson, who has lived in Coin for seven years. "It was based on an urbanisation in Nerja that had become quite well known in the UK at the time."

"It was about an English ghetto and nothing like Coin, which is a real Spanish town, where most foreign-



MAYOR: Clavijo



SCHEDULE: Antonio Banderas is scheduled to film in Coin this Autumn

Banderas in town

ers try to integrate and learn the language and those who don't mostly don't get on and end up leaving for the coast."

Ask Robert Zdrill. He actually settled in the inland Malaga town having worked as a video editor on *Eldorado* for a year.

"I fell in love with the place and didn't want to move anywhere else," explains the Canadian, who gave up making pop videos for the likes of Simple Minds and Geri Halliwell to start his own satellite television company RSS.

"The landscape is like British Columbia or California and there is so much history going back to Roman times."

"On top of that they are incredibly laid back and tolerant up here and they have definitely maintained their artistic tradition, with ceramics and other arts."

Marble from the quarries was used in the construction of the Roman town of Italica

You definitely get a sense of this, wandering around the historic core of the town, which has some surprisingly attractive old buildings and a good variety of shops.

Even better, there is finally a stylish place to stay in the

heart of the town.

Converted by a pair of local brothers, Hotel Albaicin has cleverly maintained the original features of an old sock factory and an attached 18th century townhouse, alongside modern architectural intervention. There are even some of its original Moorish features, such as a water fountain, alongside stylish modern staircases and contemporary rooms.

"We just wanted to preserve some of Coin's best heritage," explains Sebastian Guerrero Loriguillo, whose girlfriend Maria Jose Garcia was the architect.

Coming from a long line of artists and musicians – his grandfather painted the Tajo of Ronda, while his great grandfather toured with famous flamenco star Juan Breva – his family was schooled to appreciate the building's history.

"We have worked more than ten years through a charity to protect and preserve the old town of Coin, so when we found this old building for sale in 2004 we jumped at the opportunity to buy it," continues Guerrero, 35.

"We knew one thing that Coin badly needed was a stylish, central hotel to create a focal point. We believe we have done that."

There is no doubt that the hotel and the Albaicin area, which was named after the tightly packed sloping streets of Granada's famous Arabic *barrio*, is a nice place for a stroll.

There are still plenty of

Coín special

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Such has been the movement of foreigners to the town over the last few years, smart Costa del Sol law firm De Cotta, McKenna and Santafe Boss Jon Sutton said. "I think a lot of the expats who have moved to Coin want to speak to someone who can speak their language when it comes to legal matters. As the firm has an integrated mix of Spanish and English lawyers we offer an excellent service to everyone."

remnants of the old Arabic town, which has long been a thriving agricultural centre and the main market town for the Guadalhorce valley. Located in a fertile valley of the Rio Grande river, it became known for its fruits, such as oranges, avocados and more recently pomegranates.

It was under the Romans – who named it *Lacibis* – that Coin became an important market town and transition point for the minerals being quarried in the nearby Sierra Blanca. Marble from these quarries was used in the construction of the Roman town of *Italica*, or Roman Sevilla, and the mining of iron ore and marble continued into the 19th Century.

During the time of the Visigoths, like many places in Andalucía, the town lost its lustre and largely fell into ruin until the Moors conquered the region and rebuilt it around 929AD.

It went through something of a renaissance, thanks to the Arabs' clever use of water and love of gardens and planting. But their days were numbered and in 1485, after a long siege, the town finally fell to the Christian Crusaders from the north, who were said to have included Christopher Columbus among their troop.

A wonderful spot which on a clear day has views of the Sierra Nevada 180kms away

But the Moors' legacy of planting and gardens was thankfully respected, a factor that was clearly noted by celebrated British explorer Captain Cook when he visited the town, along with Cártama and Alhaurin in 1829. Travelling with the Royal Navy, he was mightily impressed.

"These villages," he wrote, "are on rising ground above the river and in beauty of situation and cultivation cannot be excelled. They afford a specimen of the whole country when possessed by the Moors, being surrounded by gardens with orange, lemon and palm trees and abounding in all the fine as well as the more common fruits."

To this day an orange tree features on Coin's coat of arms and there is no doubt that the town still has a curious feel of being both bustling and rural in equal measures.

While on one hand slick businessmen walk into the town hall armed with briefcases and clutching plan-



COLUMBUS: Explorer Christopher Columbus arrived from the mountains to the north to take Coin for the Christians



RESTING: The hotel pool where actors working in the *Eldorado* TV series stayed

ning applications, it is not unusual to see a tractor or quad bike driving around its narrow lanes, and there are numerous farming implement businesses scattered around.

"That is certainly the difference between Coin and Alhaurin," says Dutchman Carlo von den Nieuwenhuijzen, 47, who is a regular visitor to both towns through his job as a chef at a guesthouse. "While Alhaurin is more urban and built up, Coin has more of a country feel. You can really sense it in the shops."

While Alhaurin is the place to find top quality salmon or Asturias blue cheese, Coin is good for locally-grown fruit and veg and has an excellent Saturday market on the feria ground.

He and his partner Ronald Henselmans, 43, had been quite specific when choosing the main parameters for locating the perfect spot to open their B&B Casa Don Carlos.

"It is pretty quiet and traditional here," says Jaap, Just 25 minutes to the air-

port and 25 to the coast, it also needed good views and to be in a decent size plot with at least five bedrooms. "We looked at 50 houses in just one week with five different estate agents," says Ronald, a former Ikea manager from Brabant. "We were specific about what we wanted, but were still shown a lot of rubbish and one house, for example, didn't even exist."

"Eventually we found this wonderful spot, that on a clear day has views of 180kms all the way to the Sierra Nevada."

They are not the only Dutch running a guesthouse in the town. On the other side of Coin, on the road to Monda, is Restaurante Hostal SantaFe. Run by a young couple, Marije Veugen and her husband chef Jaap Schaafsma, they are listed in the Michelin guide and have been voted to have one of the Top Five best dining terraces in Andalucía.

"It is pretty quiet and traditional here," says Jaap,

27, who trained at some of the best restaurants in Holland including Augusta and Terracotta. "But you don't live here for the nightlife... you live here because it is a quiet rural area. If you want nightlife you can go to Marbella."

That is exactly what Ashley and Ben Fitches did not want when they settled in Coin four years ago. They couldn't wait to get away from the Costa del Sol when looking for the dream location to set up their health and fitness business in Andalucía.

Indeed, just two weeks on the Golden Mile in Marbella was enough to send them packing into the hills for a taste of the real Spain.

Finding the infamous coastal resort "false and pretentious," they hankered for something a bit more down to earth and, well, genuinely Spanish.

"We drove all over the place looking at lots of towns," recalls Ashley, 37, a beautician and Reiki master. "Ronda was out of the way, and while the villages around the mountains are charming they are a bit quiet."

"It was on our way back from one journey that we popped into Coin to buy some cakes for tea. We had not really given the town any thought, and were surprised to find it so laid back and friendly. There were kids and pregnant women everywhere and lots of happy-looking old men playing chess in the square. We thought, this is the sort of place we could live in."

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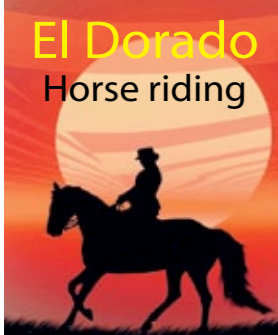


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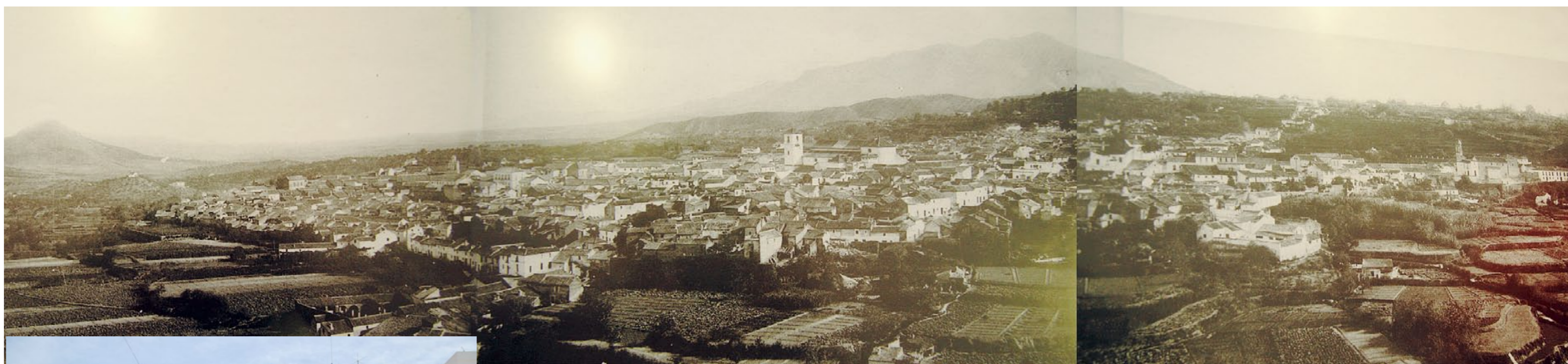
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HISTORIC: In 1910, as this charming panoramic collage shows, Coín was already well established



ANCIENT AND MODERN: From sprinkling fountains and grand town houses to quad bikes up back streets, Coín has many interesting sites

Barranco Blanco and much more

By Andrew Pearce

COIN could not be further from the Costa del Sol clichés that spring to mind when the notorious package holiday resorts are mentioned. Situated in the Valle de Guadalhorce, at the foot of the Sierra de Mijas, and overlooked by the Sierra de Alpujata, it is close to many areas of immense natural beauty. If you are willing to get out and explore you will certainly not be disappointed. Just five kms south of Coin, is the adventurer's paradise of Barranco Blanco, home to sparkling waterfalls, crystal clear plunge

pools and challenging mountain trails. Mountain bikers can test themselves on tough dirt tracks, while those looking to relax and simply savour the landscape can take leisurely strolls or horse rides around the valley, or just find a comfortable spot to enjoy a family picnic. Slightly further afield, in the Sierra Blanca, is a little-known trek that should challenge all would-be hikers.

The trail begins in the Refugio de Juanar area in Ojen, from where a five-hour round trip, encompassing 11kms of mountain terrain, heads up to the striking La Concha peak that rises up behind Marbella. The whole journey is accompanied by impressive views out to Marbella, the Mediterranean Coast and even the northern tip of Africa if the day is clear. Once the 1215 metre summit of La Concha has been reached, it is even possible to immortalise the achievement. A tin container marked Correos

awaits people who want to scribble their names down and post them as evidence of their accomplishment! In the other direction towards the Sierra de las Nieves national park is the Rio Grande river, where there are numerous places to take a dip and lay out your picnic mat. And then in the far distance are the soaring snow-capped sierras, only a half an hour drive away. If these suggestions still do not whet the appetite then just hit the road and explore – there really is more to Coín than meets the eye. Costa del Sol it is not.

A century of tradition

From Page 3

But the couple, who give classes around Coín, were certainly not the first to come looking for their *Eldorado* in Coín. Officially, some 20,000 expatriates are said to live in the Guadalhorce Valley, which is located between the Sierra Blanca, and imposing Sierra de las Nieves natural park, which looms in the distance to the west. "But it is a lot more than that when you take into account the number who are not officially registered," says Maria Jose Hevilla, who runs an accountancy firm *Cohesa*.

"This place is buzzing with expatriates, even though a lot have gone back in the last few months." The bilingual accountant, whose husband is an English avocado farmer, has now settled in Coín after living for many years in Barcelona. "I think a lot has to do with its connections, just 20 minutes from the Costa del Sol, 20 minutes to the airport and 20 minutes into the moun-

ains," she explains. It is also one of the main things local PSOE mayor Gabriel Clavijo lists when singing the praises of his domain. "Coín is a big town, but with the quality of life of a village," he explains. "It still has a laid back feel. We have a lovely average annual temperature of 15 degrees and you don't have to go to Malaga to do your shopping." He is also particularly proud of his town's envi-

ronmental record, which certainly, in comparison with his neighbours, is impeccable. As well as helping to spearhead (so far) successful campaign to fight a plan to dam the Rio Grande to provide more water for Malaga city, he has continually blocked neighbouring Alhaurin el Grande's plans to concrete over popular local nature spot, known as Barranco Blanco. And that is not all. As the *Olive Press* has reported in recent editions, he has even been sued unsuccessfully by a developer for overturning a plan to build 600 houses and a golf course at another nature spot Los Llanos de Matagallar near the town. "We particularly want to maintain the traditions of the countryside and the old ways of life. Coín is an agricultural town and it is essential to maintain the integrity of the river, the town's water and its environment." But, the mayor, as well as its local residents, will have to keep their guard, especially when there are still so many green areas around the town ripe for development. To use the last line of *Eldorado* before it was axed in 1993, "You can't trust anyone these days."



SKY HIGH BEAUTY: The amazing Barranco Blanco from hills above

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WHERE TO STAY

SLOWLY but surely Coín is establishing itself as a good place to stay in the Guadalhorce Valley. Without a doubt the most convenient place to stay is the **Hotel Albaicín** (www.hotelalbaicin.es) in the heart of the old town.

Comfortable rooms, it has excellent communal spaces and is a great place to hang around. Set up by two local brothers a year ago, it is the epitome of style, yet conserves plenty of its original features.

Nearby in the hills above Coín is one of the most alluring places. The name **Santa Fe** (www.santafe-hotel.com 952452916) conjures up an idea of the Wild West and there is nothing up here that disappoints from the stunning Jacaranda trees you meet on arrival to the beautifully-conserved old farmhouse, which counts four comfortable bedrooms and one of the best restaurants in Andalucía.

Another good place to lay down your hat is **Casa Don Carlos** high in the hills between Coín and Alhaurín (669945046 www.casadoncarlos.com).

While comfort is very much at the top of the list, this guest house run by Ron and Carlo also has some of the best views imaginable.



STUNNING: Hotel Albaicín



RURAL RETREATS: Left Santa Fe, while (above) Carlo and Ron from Casa Don Carlos

WHERE TO EAT



TOPS: Santa Fe's Jaap

THERE are a number of outstanding places to eat in Coín. Listed as having on the Top Five best terraces in Andalucía, naturally **Santa Fe** (www.santafe-hotel.com 952452916) is an essential place to check out. A two-minute drive out of town, it sits in a stunning leafy garden. Run by a Michelin-trained Dutch chef Jaap (left), it is really something out of the ordinary. In the heart of Coín itself, you should definitely take a visit to the recently-opened **Punto y Coma**, installed in Hotel Albaicín, where La Consula-trained chef Diego Manceras, knocks out a fabulous mix of modern and traditional, using mostly local ingredients. His *Ajo Blanco* and *Gazpachuelo Malagueño*, a hot broth

of mayonnaise with prawns, rice and potato were both particularly good. Another place essential to try is **Casa Paco** (www.casapaco.es), the most well known of the town's restaurants – and quite rightly so. Here, ambitious chef Paco Ruiz Cerrillo (right) can try out a range of the recipes he has picked up at a variety of cooking courses and seminars, including *Madrid Fusion*. Great attention to detail, subtle pastel-blue walls and a superb wine list, covering most of the country's regions. It makes for a fantastic place for a special occasion. Yet there is more. In particular, you must try **Bohemia** (www.restaurante-bohemia.com 952450545) which is romantic and highly adventurous. The owner Pedro Trillo has incredible talent both for his interior design, food and original tapestries, which line the walls and his interesting menu is always a joy.



CREATIVE: Paco at Casa Paco

ous. The owner Pedro Trillo has incredible talent both for his interior design, food and original tapestries, which line the walls and his interesting menu is always a joy.

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7 Coín special EL DORADO

Drama waiting to happen



TOWN WITH NO NAME: Eldorado set - complete with petrol station, town hall and post boxes - is still around today. Left, Zdrill, whose career was 'effectively ruined' by the drama



IT was destined to go wrong right from the start.

The first time the BBC had ever contracted an independent company to produce a series outside of the UK, it is incredible that they chose the Costa del Crime as the testing ground.

Based out of Coín, the company JD y T owned by producers John Dark and James Todesco was given the job of pulling together the biggest soap opera launch for a decade.

A former producer of James Bond films Dark hoped that *Eldorado* would soon take on *Eastenders*. Yet, after a few episodes it was hamstrung with an enormous amount of problems and ratings were sinking fast.

"The BBC was caught with its pants down," contends Robert Zdrill, who worked as

a video editor on the series. "There was lots of mischief going on and it turned out to be a huge disaster."

The problems were enormous. Poorly-built sets, actors who couldn't act and poor production left the drama with three million less than its target 10m viewers. It was eventually axed after one year in March 1993.

"To be fair it was rushed through onto the schedules too early," says Zdrill, who has since produced music videos for the likes of Simple Minds. "The top brass wanted it ready for Expo 92 and there was no way it was going to be ready in time."

In particular, he cites the poor lighting, the set made of breezeblocks which ruined the sound and the "abysmal acting". "On the first night at the launch party, you could practically hear a pin drop it had gone so badly," he recalls. "It spelt the end of my career and a lot of others too."

It proved to be a huge hit for the BBC licence payers, with £5m going towards the set and equipment, and the production budget of at least £1m. The BBC ending up writing off the £1.5m set as well as £1m of camera equipment.

That said, today it is still an interesting place to visit and around the year a number of productions are still produced at the studios, including one directed by Antonio Banderas.

You can still take a wander around the set, visiting the original pool, see the town hall and village square, as well as the series of houses made of breeze blocks. It is not far from Coín and well worth the trip.

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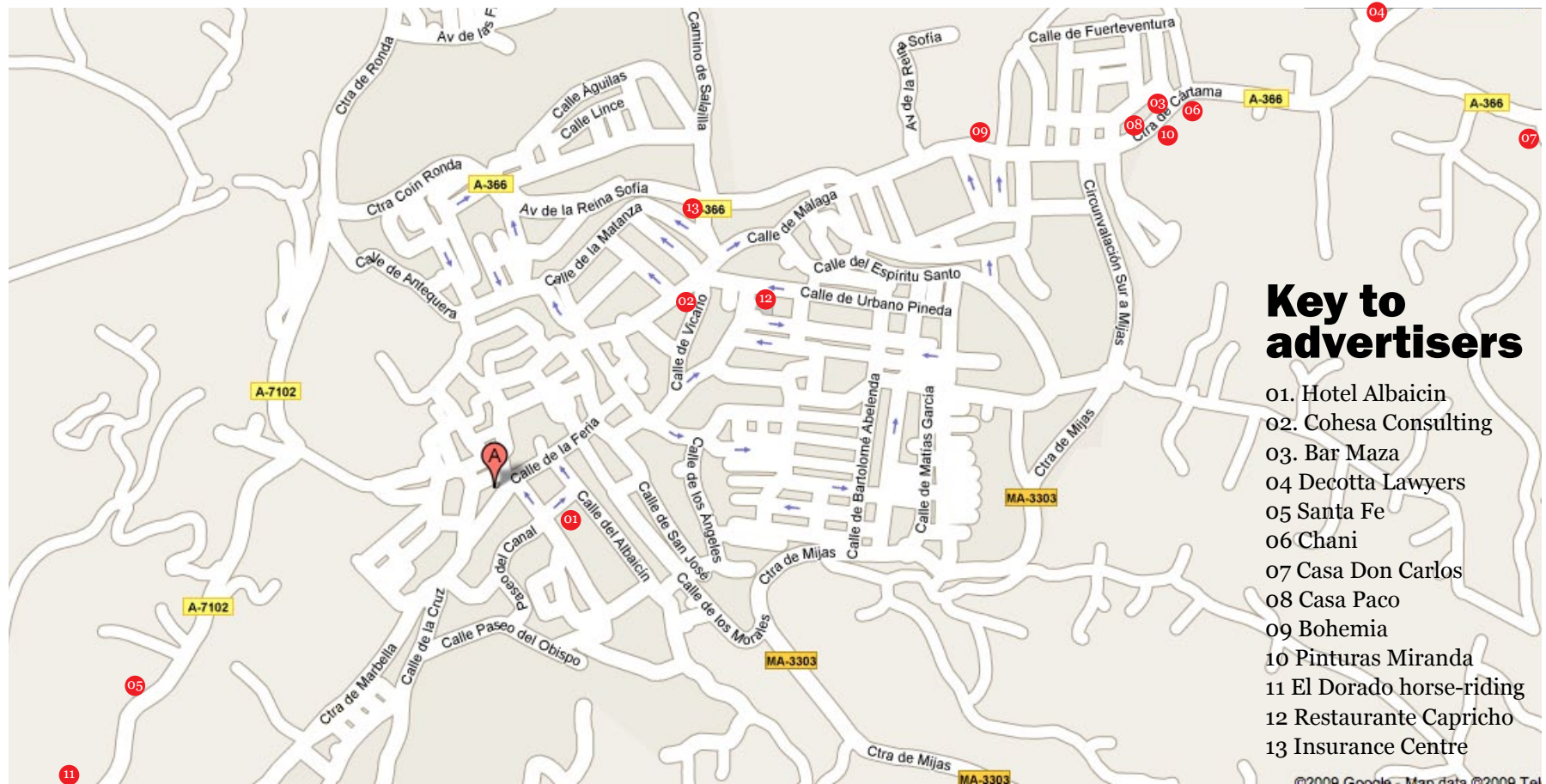
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