

All about Estepona

12-page special pull-out



How times change

Paul O'Connell re-visits a town of growth and prosperity

IN days of yore, well 1977 to be exact, when I first set foot in Estepona as a fashion photographer, there was only green space between the town and the newly constructed marina. Now, as a regular visitor, I'm horrified to see how the Costa del Sol's 'concrete necklace' has sprawled almost the whole way from Torremolinos to Sotogrande.

I am sure many of you will remember those golden days of uninterrupted beaches, a few chiringuito bars dotted here and there, and some really cheap bar grub along the A340.

Back then, Estepona was a sleepy town comprising about 5,000 residents. Few tourists wandered its narrow cobbled pathways and no one had a yacht to berth yet.

One long-term local expatriate resident Sonia Longman, 67, recalled how in the 1950s there was practically nothing there apart from a smelly fish factory, where Carrefour is today.

She explained: "When we used to get a taxi from Torremolinos, where we lived, to Gibraltar, I remember my mum giving us hankies with cologne as we passed Estepona to mask the smell of the glue made from fish oil."

Longman and her sister, who have run the local English bookshop Longmans for decades, started life in the town working on Spanish newspaper, *Sol de Espana*.

Working under the tutelage of Lord Cowley, who was a direct descendant of the Duke of Wellington, they were given the job of producing an Eng-

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12

Estepona special



BOOKKEEPER:
Sonia Longman
liked to "push
boundaries"

From Page 11

lish page within the paper every day. "We always liked to push the boundaries and even once got reported to the Bishop of Malaga for using a photograph of a sexy girl in a bikini climbing a tree.

"It was in the days of Franco and the editor was summoned to Malaga to receive a dressing down from the Bishop. He got such a ticking off that we were forced to fill in the midrifts of all bikini photos with black felt pen so it looked like they had bathing suits on!" She also recalled how - after she moved to the town in the 1960s - her sister's donkey was 'towed away' by the local police for eating flowers in the main square. "It was taken to the slaughterhouse and my sister had to literally beg the fat local policeman to give her a lift there to rescue it just in time."

How things have changed. In line with the growth of most of the Costa del Sol, the town and its surrounding area have become a magnet for property developers, estate agents, golfers, professional footballers and

My donkey was towed away



GREAT CHANGES: The prosperous marina brings in new money

television celebrities.

The marina now holds berths for more than 250 yachts and the town has become a busy place with

around 25,000 people residing there all year round. A distant cousin of its more affluent neighbour, Marbella, and situated 40 kms

from Gibraltar, the town is a good mix of upmarket and package holiday resort. But, what one really notices about Estepona is the fact



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HISTORY: Church in Pl

that it remains resolutely a Spanish town, conserving much of its old quarter, that is in every way as attractive as that of nearby Marbella, its richer, more affluent cousin.

Historically, Estepona was always seen as the halfway house between Malaga and Gibraltar.

Originally given the title of *Estebbuna* by the Romans, the town is littered with historic monuments, from old Phoenician and Roman burial grounds to splendid castles.

Built on the old Roman road, which is now known as the paseo, the town was destroyed in the 15th century and rebuilt by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand a century later.

In 1729 Philip V granted the town a charter for 600 families and the town has continued to grow to this day.

The old monuments are still very much in evidence from the scattering of watchtowers warding off the Moorish invaders, to the Arab-built clock tower and the 16th century castle ruins, which are worth a visit.

The best is the old Franciscan monastery which is now the Church of our Lady of Redemption.



If you ask nicely you may still be allowed to walk to the top of the tower and enjoy the vista of the whole town and mountains inland.

Modern Estepona still maintains its ancient ambience and does not seem overwhelmingly saturated with foreign investment.

Unlike Fuengirola and its fish alley, there are only a handful of English bars in the old town and along the paseo. Local Spanish bars take precedence and there is plenty of good tapas to be had at very cheap prices.

In fact, one of the only things the town lacks are good places to stay, with the selection in the old town, at least, extremely poor. The town does however boast one of the best beaches on the coast, the Playa de la Rada, which won a prestigious blue flag in 2009. Lining this golden stretch of coastline are a number of well known chiringuitos that have been established since the mid sixties.

In the summer, as holiday-makers fight to grab limited towel space in Puerto Banus, Estepona's sun worshippers often have enough space to draw up their own volleyball courts in the sand. Others like Pauline Olivera prefer Playa del Cristo, just up the coast. "It is one of the only unspoilt little bays left on the coast," she says. "It is so nice I chose to get married there."

However, not only is the town great for sunseekers but it also serves up a storm

de San Francisco

for fans of quality seafood. Even now, more than 50 small fishing boats leave the calm waters in the early hours, coming back laden with their catches.

There are certainly a few gems to be had along the paseo where a delicious three-course lunch will set you back just 15 Euros with a carafe of wine to boot.

I remember frequently visiting one of the most famous restaurants that was situated outside Estepona called the Yellow Book.

This alternative hangout was based around the notorious drawings of one local artist which had to be censored for their explicit content.

While they didn't leave anything to the imagination famous guests included Michael Parkinson, Jimmy Tarbuck and Ronnie Corbett.

If you are celebrity-spotting today, comedian Frank Carson has a house near the marina while the much-loved Cilla Black often pops over.

My old favourite, wrinkly rocker himself Rod Stewart used to live just a few minutes drive away towards the Casares road.

These days, however, you are more likely to bump into footballers trying to improve their handicap on a golfing break at El Paraíso golf course.

Nevertheless, fond memories often come from our younger, more heady days and we must sometimes embrace progress, even if it is at the expense of cultural heritage.

Yet many of Estepona's old remnants remain intact – a stroll through the old town, past the orange tree-lined plazas will still invoke images of how life was some 35 years ago.

Just don't go wandering too far as it may just bring you back into modern times.

Sunseekers often have space to draw up volleyball courts in the sand

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HAVE never been someone to hang out in the obvious teenage haunts. So I skipped Estepona port in favour of a few choice spots, a little more authentic and a bit less loud and over-indulgent.

A great place to start is in Calle Real with all its small and music-orientated bars. There's something here for everyone; whether it is heavy rock, grunge or house and hip hop you are after.

Q Box at the beginning of the street serves the cocktail drinkers and lounge fans while Louie Louie is for old school rockers looking for a night of headbanging and organised Jaegermeister events.

Tolone is small and cosy, filled with warm colours and equally warm people

For some pre-party nourishment De Marco's serves some of the finest Pizza in town; and then there is Tolone.

Tolone has been like a sec-

Bohemian flavours

Roxanne Sancto, 22, finds her ideal spots to hang out right in the heart of the old town

ond home to me for the past three years and I can guarantee that a lot of kids and adults alike will agree.

Small and cosy, filled with warm colours and equally warm people, Tolone Bar invites you to sit back on one of their comfortable

couches, kick back and relax, slurping on one of the many delicious and original smoothies, or filling up on one of their 'Californication' wraps or homemade brownies.

Owners Kristi and Mario regularly invite local talents



NONCONFORMIST: Roxanne Sancto

to exhibit their work in the small space they have to offer. And this is how the idea for the annual ExplorArte Festival each July was born. Once a year the pair go out of their way to organise this festival, which offers an intriguing mix of music and art of all styles.

As well as great metal and rock bands and hip hop and pop artists motivating the crowds, there are poetry readings, and lots of impressive art and photography. Being able to enjoy the sand between your toes, and the sea right at your feet as you listen and learn about what's new and rising in the world of music and art lends a strong bohemian flair.

So if you are in the Estepona area, make sure to drop by for some bohemian flavours and styles, and don't - under any circumstances - miss the annual ExplorArte Festival!

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Regular overseas payments - Out of control and out of pocket

This is a difficult time for people receiving an income from the UK when living in Spain. It is especially tough for those receiving pensions or making mortgage payments.

This article examines some of the issues regarding the transfer of funds abroad from the UK and what, if anything, can be done to safeguard the amount you receive each month - or better still, increase it.

When your UK pension is paid directly to Spain, the chances are that your pension provider will transfer your sterling via a third party. It is the third party that makes the conversion from sterling into euros and, more often than not, this will be a bank.

As banks do not specialise in foreign exchange, their transfer fees are usually high and their exchange rates relatively poor. In many cases, the rate they offer is 2-3% less than could be achieved elsewhere. Rates are only available at the time of transfer, with no option to lock into better rates when sterling is strong against other currencies. In addition, processing charges (the deductions banks make for handling the transaction) can be as much as £18 per payment. The only saving grace is that some pension providers negotiate a lower fee for transferring the funds abroad.

The situation is often worse if your pension is paid in sterling to an account in the UK and you arrange your transfers directly with the bank. In addition to poor exchange rates and receipt charges, the average cost for transferring your currency is £25 per payment and, again, there is no option to lock into favourable rates. Crucially, the majority of banks do not have an automated process for regular payments, therefore you are expected to arrange your transfers every month via telephone or internet banking, even if the bank does offer some form of regular payment service, it tends to lack the sophistication of other services on the market.

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Moneycorp recently invested over £1.3m into making their payment processing system the best in the industry. It is geared towards processing regular payments as efficiently as possible - using the very latest technology. Features include automated Direct Debit, so if your pension is paid into your UK sterling account, Moneycorp can automatically debit funds on the day you choose and make your transfer. If your pension is paid directly by a pension provider, Moneycorp can receive the money from them and make the transfer. The Regular Payment Plan is flexible enough to accommodate your chosen payment schedule, with frequencies ranging from weekly to annual.

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Abra Alcazaba

Estepona is full of property bargains and, unlike many parts of the coast, is maintaining its value

THE range of properties in Estepona is next to none. You can bag anything from a rambling traditional town house to a sprawling luxury villa.

Local agent Adam Neale, 40, of Terra Meridiana, explains that Estepona has been popular with Spaniards and expatriates alike for a number of years now.

"The area's popular with Spaniards as well as expats and there are lots of people from Sevilla and Malaga with holiday homes here.

"The main change is that we've seen a rise in the number of people buying villas in the area as opposed to apartments and people seem to be moving to Este-

By Asha Stuttard

pona to live rather than just buying holiday properties," said Neale.

Prices range from 50,000 euro apartments up to luxury beachfront penthouses selling for one or two million.

The Spanish influence on the area is what makes Estepona a more appealing place to buy a property.

It is one of only a few coastal towns that has not lost its Spanish feel and character in both the lifestyle and the property style.

Another boost to property in the area has just arrived



IT'S MAGIC: Agent Terra Meridiana is offering this 2-bed villa for just 295,000 euros (down from 450,000) and this beautiful beachside villa for under one million euros

in the shape of the iconic luxury residential development Alcazaba Hills Resort in the hills above the town. The Alcazaba brand has become known in Andalucia for its award-winning resorts, since it began its first constructions in 1984.

The new development, located at the top of the Arroyo Vaquero valley three kilometres from Estepona, is a gated community of 100 luxury apartments, built in a typical Mediterranean style. Each of the two and three bedroom apartments have great views over exquisite tropical gardens of exotic plants towards the sea.

popular Sunday market.

In due course, Alcazaba Hills Resort will also benefit from a 155 room hotel, spa and wellness centre. It will boast 15 swimming pools, with cascades and rainforest showers, various restaurants, and a children's playground.

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Buyers are more sophisticated than ever before and seek real value deals

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"Despite the challenges presented by the global downturn, we hope that our brand and track record as developers will give confidence to prospective purchasers," said resort director Juan Pablo Leria Valero.

"Buyers today are more sophisticated than ever before; their prospective purchase must offer value for money, capital appreciation and rental yield."

Any golf enthusiast owning property at Alcazaba Hills Resort can also enjoy preferential rates at nearby Estepona Golf Club.

Buyers will also have use of the nearby Alcazaba Beach Club and there will be a shuttle service to both facilities, as well as to Estepona and its marina with its shops, restaurants, bars and



LUXURY: One of the stunning pools at the upmarket Alcazaba Hills development

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A cosmopolitan town

Hugh and Sue Thompson, owners of Retro shop, have lived in Estepona for eight years, and renovated three properties in the town. "We like the Spanish feel of the place. It is not all high rise and fish and chips. There are some English bars and areas, but they have not destroyed the fabric of the town."

Eva Mateos, from Leon, in the north of Spain opened the New You Clinic with her Canadian husband Joe Alonso a month ago. The clinic sells a range of exclusive beauty treatments and skin conditioners, as well as being the exclusive supplier of the Power Plate exercise machine, which gives the body a high speed workout using vibrations to stimulate them and relax. "We fell in love with the place seven months ago when we first moved

Why a range of key movers...



LOCALS: Hugh and Sue Thompson, Eva Mateos

here. We love the Anglo/Spanish vibe and as we have a three year old, it was important to find a safe place to live."

Adam estate agent via Mo...

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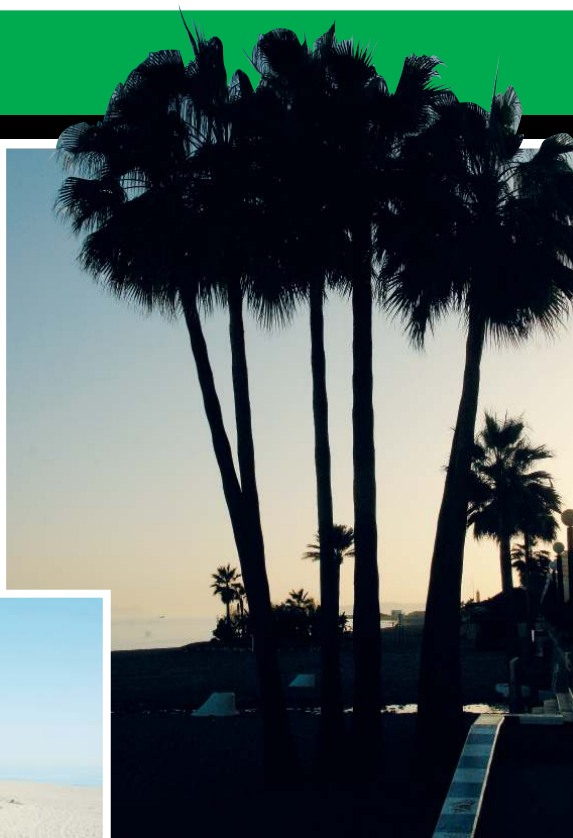
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CHARMING: Estepona offers a wonderful range of architectural styles, from this 16th century doorway, far left, to the typical street scene (left). Below, a bull and chiringuito on the beach, and two Arabic ladies look for a friend in the old town, while right, the lovely towering palms on the beach



Living with a true Spanish feel

...s and shakers moved to vibrant Estepona



...s, Adam and Theodora Neale, Walter and Wendy and Gemma Drake Ford

Neale, 40, owner of Terra Meridiana agent, moved to Spain, from England, Moscow, with his Belgian wife Theodo-

ra, seven years ago. "I love the facilities here for children. The beach has one of the best children's playgrounds in Spain and there is

lots to do here. On top of that it is extremely friendly and predominantly Spanish, which is important for us."

Walter and Wendy Von Moolenbroek from Holland moved to Estepona over two years ago and fell in love with the trendy cafe Lola right in the heart of the town by the beach. "We love the fact that Estepona exists in spite of tourists. It has another life and is anything but dead in winter."

Gemma Drake Ford, 32, from Billericay, Essex has lived just outside Estepona for 11 years. "It is a lovely town, a real mix of nationalities. Cosmopolitan, but still very Spanish. The centre is beautiful with all its old cobbled streets and I love the gardens on the outskirts."

mokey Joe's

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WHERE TO EAT

A meal for all tastes

FROM the fabulously healthy, but original, dishes at Terra Sana to the adventurous cuisine at El Casino in the old town Estepona has a lot to offer. Terra Sana, in Laguna Village, certainly takes some beating with its mix of organic dishes, cooked from as much local produce as possible.

There is a lovely palm tree-lined shady terrace and the restaurant is running a clever Christmas appeal for unwanted toys to be donated to local children's charities.

In the other direction, the marina is a good spot to look for somewhere to eat, with the Taberna Marinera being the pick of the bunch.

An atmospheric place harping back to the golden days of the 1980s, with music and décor to match, the food – and particular wines – are pretty good too.

Nearby, the Irish Fiddler is a good spot for some typical Irish fare and don't forget La Luna, a charming spot at the end of the marina, where you can always watch live football.

Back in the old town, Calle Caridad is a good place to start any gourmet tour, perhaps at the excellent Taberna de Lucia, where you will find Spain's best ham on offer.

Now pedestrianised this charming old street has four or five excellent restaurants, including the recently opened El Casino, which is an incredibly stylish place for dinner.

Owned by a local media mogul, its Italian chef knocks out such delights as artichokes with foie and hollandaise sauce and, best of all, a light and airy terrine of leeks and prawns.

Looking for somewhere for an after hours tipple, just a few doors up is the friendly Irish-run Bar Rouge run by

Thom Maher.

Nearby, on the beach you will find Costa Oeste, with a great a la carte menu and panoramic views across the ocean towards Gibraltar.

Across the square is another charming spot, Lola's, run by Dutch couple Walter and Wendy Von Moelenbroek with a clear passion for life. A milliner by trade Wendy has a great eye for detail and she and her husband know how to make this one of Estepona's most successful places to eat.

Around the corner is Dune Bar, which has been run by David and Irene, from London, since 2005. Says David: "We are known for our Mediterranean-style cuisine and people particularly comment about our mozzarella and roasted vegetable baps. They are the best on the coast". The couple are generously offering a free bottle of wine to any readers bringing along a copy of their advert.



CHARMING: Terra Sana, while (right) Serrabugo deli

WHERE TO SHOP

Mumm champagne and retro cool

WHILE some of the bigger chain stores, such as Mango, have closed over the difficult last few months, the pedestrianised back streets are full of off beat and independent shops, each with their own twist. Retro is the perfect example of this. A former stained glass window school it has been brilliantly restored by Hugh and Sue Thompson, keeping its overwhelming charm.

At least a century old, the shop which sells retro and antique furniture, as well as soft furnishings, is getting extremely popular with the local Spaniards as well as expats. "And the Madrilenos and Basques buy up loads of stuff when they come down here in the summer, because it is so much cheaper than back home," says Sue, who taught fashion in the UK before moving to Spain.

Nearby, artist Gemma Drake Ford, 32, from Essex, has set up another cool shop La Fuente del Arte. A self-taught artist she is selling a great mix of hand-painted decorative furniture, mirrors and paintings from her studio in Calle del Mar. Ideal Christmas presents, she buys a mixture of old and new furniture and enhances it with decorative painting. "I can also take commissions, so people can match their own interiors to my work," she explains.

Further into the centre of town are a

range of superb gift and fashion shops, while on Calle Terraza, at the junction of Veracruz is one of the best delis on the Costa del Sol. Run by a charming couple, Serrabugo is full of delights from around Andalucia, including the finest jamon iberico, goats cheeses and goodies from the Serrania de Ronda.

On top of that, you can get all kinds of meats by the slice and the selection of wines – well over 100 – are mixed and varied in price and even include a bottle of Mumm champagne for just 30 euros. Out of town, in the industrial estate, head for the shop Thom Moebel, which not only has great wooden indoor and outdoor furniture, but some interesting windmills, which would make great Christmas presents.

Nearby, if you are looking for electrical items is Electro Oferta, which has some terrific deals in the run up to Christmas. And don't forget for computer equipment there is also Surweb Informatica, one of the longest-running and most efficient computer shops on the whole coast.







Dreaming of a Green Christmas!

- ① Book your group & corporate Christmas lunch in November and get a 10 % discount!
- ② Bring toys to our restaurants & we will donate them to local charities. (new or used, no need to wrap them up)
- ③ Spread the word!

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Terra Sana Laguna Village is open 7 days a week from 10 am to 10 pm

Green Menu

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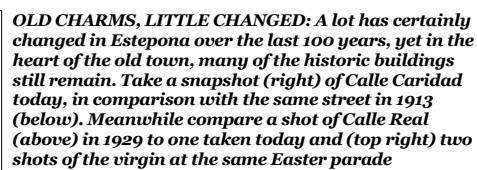
Spiced pumpkin soup with Gruyere cheese toasty
or
Prawns and crispy chorizo with a green bean salad and lemon roast garlic and parsley dressing

Grilled marinated turkey escalope with seasonal vegetables, red cabbage, thyme potatoes and cranberry sauce
or
Seared creole salmon with Christmas jewelled rice and lime saffron butter
or
Vegetable & pecan thyme loaf with smoked tomato sauce

19,50€

Seasonal cheese cake
or
Christmas pudding sundae

Keep your Christmas-heart open all year round!

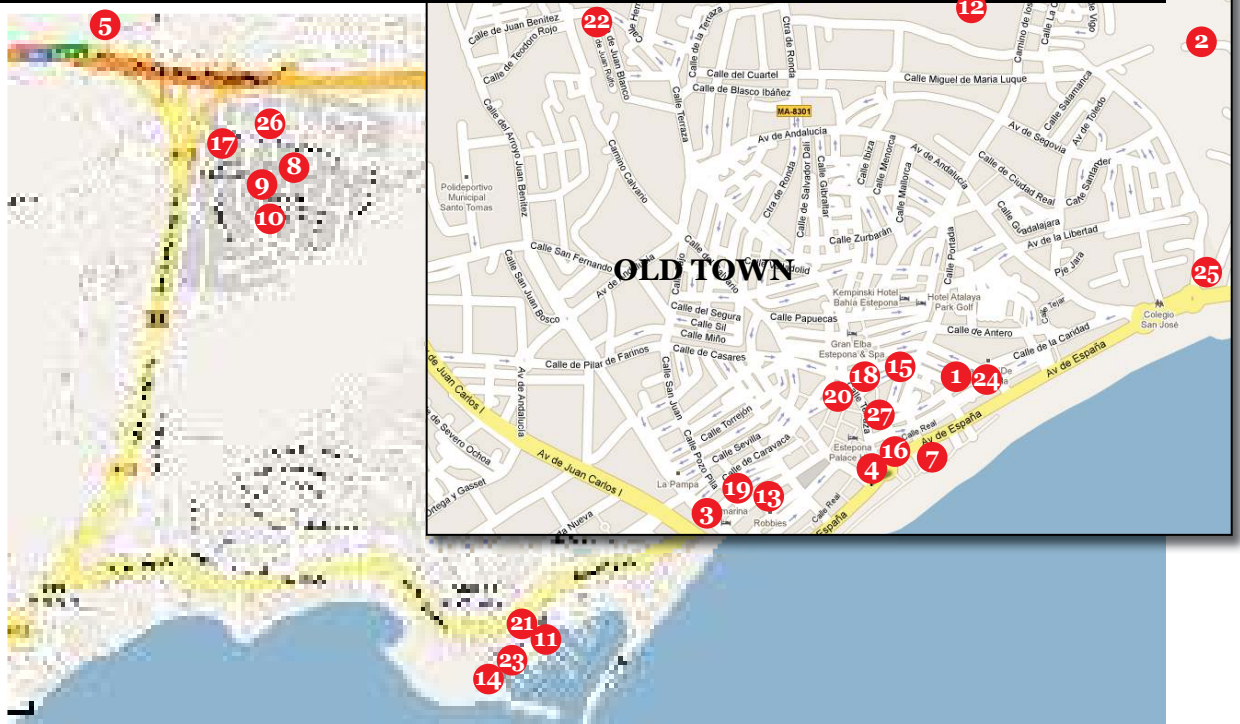


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- 10 HM Cater Equipment
- 11 Irish Fiddler
- 12 LA Alcazaba Hills
- 13 La Fuente de Arte
- 14 La Luna
- 15 Longmans Bookshop
- 16 Lolas
- 17 Murray Harper
- 18 New You Center
- 19 Retro
- 20 Serrabugo
- 21 Sizazz Hairdresser
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FOR SALE: Front line beach 2 bedroom house with private garden. Was 1.2m. Now 750,000 open to offers. Ref: TMRT1002



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