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## The island of fun

A TINY island in the heart of the Serrania de Ronda, the fiercely independent town of Arriate is today one of the fastest growing towns in Malaga province. A combination of its excellent local shops, a nature-loving local population - and of course, its proximity to Ronda - has seen the town grow by around 20 per cent over recent years. Known for its celebrated ham and its midnight bell ringers, there is no doubt that Arriate-heralding from the Arabic word *Arriadh* - is a little different.



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**Communist for most of the last 30 years Arriate has a very different feel from its close neighbour Ronda. JON CLARKE, who lives nearby, finds out why**

**T**HE People's Republic of Arriate is an island in the Ronda Mountains. Not an island in the classic sense of the word, but an island nonetheless, of just eight-and-a-half kilometres squared and entirely surrounded by the district of Ronda, from which it wrested control some 400 years ago. Fiercely independent of its *pico*, or snobbish, neighbours (who many locals say, lord it over the whole Serrania) the district - which is the smallest in Malaga province - has been staunchly Communist since the death of dictator Franco in 1975. Ruled by the IU (formerly Communist PCE) Party pretty much ever since, fortunately perhaps this is what one might call Communist Light, and has more to do with a shared sense of fun and endeavour than of the teachings of Chairman Mao. This might perhaps explain, why - despite its apparent hard left leanings - the town has some of the best known Easter parades in the whole of the province.

# The People's Republic of Arriate



**CONTRADICTION:** While staunchly communist since the 1970s Arriate is celebrated for its Easter parades

**The processions are taken very seriously and they are very moving**

Highly competitive and reaching fever pitch around Good Friday, practically every family has a member in one parade or another. Indeed, such is the clamour to be involved, the brotherhoods even hold lotteries for the right to carry the floats (or *tronos*) of Jesus and Mary. "It has always seemed a real contradiction to me," says Jose Antonio Coca, a local fitness instructor and mas-

seur, who grew up in the town. "The processions are taken very seriously and they are very moving, but it is a simple fact that most of those involved hardly ever go to church and so it is really just down to the tradition." Either way, Arriate has a very warm and friendly feel

to it and, on the whole, its people look after each other in a sort of anarchic, commune-type way. It is no surprise to learn then, that in the run up to the civil war in 1936, the town's defence committee was run by anarchists, who with the CNT had the strongest trade union in the area. Arriate also has the curious distinction of being, aside from Ronda, the only town of the Serrania de Ronda to have grown substantially over the last decade. While most of the dozens of towns and villages have generally shrunk in size, hemorrhaging people to the larger cities, Arriate has actually increased to its current figure of over 4000. Much to do with its near proximity to Ronda - coupled with more reasonable prices - the town has been booming. Still considerably cheaper than Ronda you can pick up an average house of three bedrooms and one

bathroom from 160,000 to 170,000 euros, which is the price of a flat in Ronda. Robert Barclay, of sustainable property company Andaluca Exclusive, is selling a stunning three bed, two bathroom stone house with lovely shady garden, huge roof terrace and fully-functioning well. "We look for interesting old houses to convert, keeping their integrity intact. "Arriate, like Ronda, has a great range of nice old buildings crying out to be restored and kept out of the clutches of developers, who would simply knock them down for flats or ugly new builds. "The town is easily one of the most friendly and desirable in Malaga province. It is really buzzing here and has a soul quite distinct from its larger neighbour. A lot of people are now moving in, and most of them are still Spanish." This is obvious as the place expands ever nearer to its

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**LOCATION, LOCATION:** Enveloped by rolling mountain scenery, Arriate has grown by 20 per cent over the last few years. Top left, the girls from the new nursery El Enano Saltarin and (right) the Jesuits in an Easter march

boundaries of Ronda; and will seemingly soon expand all the way up the main MA-428 towards its larger cousin. In a bid to get better links between the two towns that are just 6 kms apart, a plan has been proposed to put a tram line between them. "It would be an excellent way for people to get around," explains local architect Lola Ayala, who was born and schooled here. "The town hasn't got great public transport and as so many people work in Ronda it needs it." While also concerned about the state of urban planning, which has seen a controversial development, known as Los Picachos, recently started above the town, she is proud of its cultural pursuits. The 24-year-old - who studied architecture in Sevilla, after attending the local Arriate school explained: "For such a small town there is a

lot to do. There are two town bands, a drumming group and everyone has hobbies, either playing instruments or sports. We know how to have fun." It is a tradition that can be traced back even before the origins of the town, when a mythical group of country musicians roamed the area playing music in the dead of night. Known as La Aurora de Arriate, the group of musicians still keep up the tradition playing in the dead of night on Sunday morning between the hours of 4am and 6am. With origins from Arabic times in the 13th century, the coplas, or local songs, have been passed down from generation to generation and became famous when in 1973 the British National Geographic Society recorded them for an album on Spanish cultural music. A capacity for music is all too obvious with a visit to

the incredible Los Caireles bar on the high street. There are few surprises in the Serrania de Ronda as pleasant as walking through the anonymous colourful frosted glass doors on a concert night in winter, when it will be full of hundreds of music fans of all ages, colours and styles.

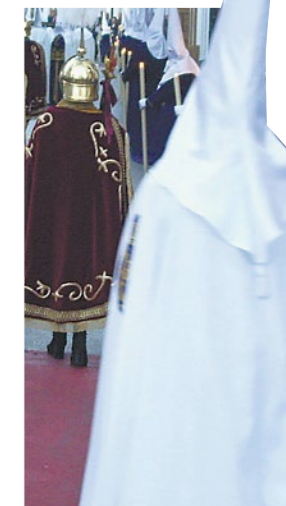
**The bar is a small corner of what was once Arriate's Cine Ideal. And what a gem it is**

"This was one of the most popular cinemas in the Serrania. Much to do with the brothers Roberto and Monolo Rivera, who have a popular drumming troop Arriadh Cumcum da, the surprise is more the better, if you can persuade them to take you out back.

If so, you will soon realise that the bar you are standing in is just one small corner of what was once - since the 1940s - Arriate's Cine Ideal. And what a gem it is. Still standing today, with its main screen and stage - not to mention 350 original wood and leather seats bought from Cine Paris in Malaga in the 1950s - best of all are the stunning brightly-coloured hydraulic tiles that line the entrance. "Our father was a real film fanatic," says Monolo. "This was one of the most popular cinemas in the Serrania. People came for miles around despite the movies being heavily censored by the local priest and mayor, who would watch the film first demanding cuts all over the place." Running until 1988, when due to dwindling audiences part of it had to be converted into a flamenco venue, the brothers have kept it

intact despite numerous offers from developers to turn it into flats. "This is our legacy and part of our town's key history," says Roberto. "I grew up watching Cinema Paradiso

*Continued page 4*



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**INSIDE OUT:** Festival of Light sees locals move their homes outdoors at night

**"I love the fact that there is so much stunning countryside nearby"**

*From page 32*

and always dreamt of one day opening the cinema up again. One day we hope to be able to find the funding to do that."

Just like the bar, rarely is the town quiet, with its main drag full of shoppers morning and evening, buying their vegetables and meats for the day's lunch or supper. Almost every house on the main street has a shop on its ground floor. Many of them have no signs, but just a main door. Some are like caves, stretching back almost 50 metres, and shopping around, you can find some of the best quality meat and vegetables in Malaga. Pedro Montesinos, of the same name fruit shop, explains: "Because people here like using the local shops there is a demand for good quality produce."

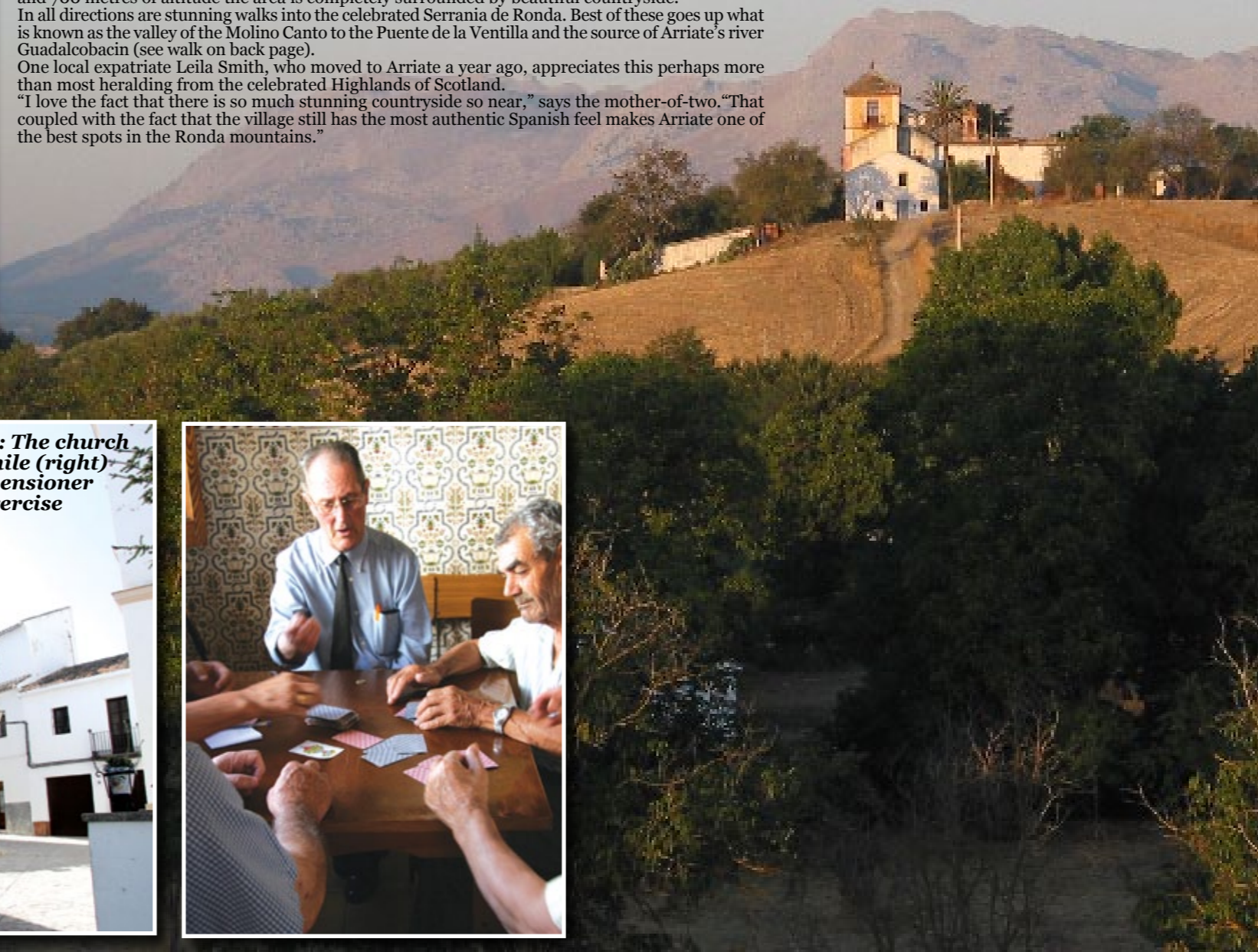
One thing you can't help but notice in the town is the number of people always hanging around watching the day go by. Many of these are pensioners, who have finally returned to the town from Switzerland and France, after emigrating for work in the tough impoverished years in the 1960s and 1970s. So memorable is one place Bar La Albarra right on the corner by the town's main junction, that one Dutch photographer put together an exhibition built entirely around its clientele. Standing outside watching the action (which is rarely more than the local policemen direction traffic through the narrow, mazy streets) or sitting down to play cards over an 80-centime brandy, the old boys look entirely contented with the world.

Another tremendous haunt is the tapas bar El Almacen, right in the heart of the town, by the main church. Built in an old double-height storeroom, as its name suggests, it has been sensitively converted, keeping its delightful huge imposing doors. The food is rarely less than superb and something of a big surprise for such a small town. But tucked away in the town's fabric are quite a number of other interesting sites. Best are some of the "secret" meat factories that are dotted around the town. One of these in the charming pedestrianised Calle Callejuela has been open as a shop since 1900, a fact proven by the number carved into its pretty wrought iron doorway. The factory is at the back for anyone interested in visiting. But Arriate is perhaps more than anything about its amazing surroundings. Found at between 500 and 700 metres of altitude the area is completely surrounded by beautiful countryside. In all directions are stunning walks into the celebrated Serrania de Ronda. Best of these goes up what is known as the valley of the Molino Canto to the Puente de la Ventilla and the source of Arriate's river Guadalcobacin (see walk on back page).

One local expatriate Leila Smith, who moved to Arriate a year ago, appreciates this perhaps more than most heralding from the celebrated Highlands of Scotland. "I love the fact that there is so much stunning countryside so near," says the mother-of-two. "That coupled with the fact that the village still has the most authentic Spanish feel makes Arriate one of the best spots in the Ronda mountains."



**LIVELY & SERENE:** Idyllic Santo Domingo estate has not changed for centuries, while (above) people still queue patiently to buy their fruit & veg. (Bottom) Arriate's drumming band, Arriadh Cumcum Da at work



**HISTORIC:** The church square, while (right) one local pensioner does his exercise



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**FIND:** The sowing of the Morosanto vineyard (above) led to a dig, which has so far yielded Roman statues and columns and proof that wine was made in Roman times

## Vino vidi vici

WHILE Ronda may be reaping all the kudos for the area's sudden emergence in the wine market, Arriate more than holds its own.

In fact, it was at Cortijo las Monjas, just outside the village, where the resurgence for Ronda's wines started to gather speed, when aristocrat Prince Alfonso Hohenlohe planted a vineyard there. The man credited with setting up Marbella, Hohenlohe had bought the estate in the 1980s and was soon producing a promising wine called Andalus. Along with German Federico Schatz and other Arriate winemaker Juan Manuel Vetas, they lobbied the authorities until the area was finally rewarded its own appellation in the 1990s.

It was not as if Arriate didn't already have pedigree. Back in Roman days the town was an important area for wine production. At the the 12-hectare Morosanto estate on a hillside overlooking the village staff recently stumbled across the foundations of what was once a Roman bodega.

Immense in size and with most of its foundations still intact, archaeologists have so far found parts of columns and statues, a 21-metre Roman swimming pool, a sauna, and even a burial chamber with three female skeletons.

But that wasn't what so excited local historians. Amid the ruins that sit on the south-facing slope of the charming Llano de la Cruz valley was a 'laqar' or grape treading floor and pipes through which the wine was transported to vats. This confirmed that wine-making in the area went back to 3AD.

# The Arabic garden

By Irene Ortiz

Arriate got its name from the Arabic word *Arriadh*, which means gardens or orchards. It was during the Moorish control of Andalusia from the 7th to 15th century that the area became a key supply zone for the Arabic town of Ronda, then known as Arunda. Celebrated for its fruits, in particular apples and pears, in the area, known as the *Huerta abajo*, 50 neighbours still use the same ancient Arabic water course, or *alcantarilla*, to take water to their crops.

The settlement of Arriadh was first mentioned in documents from 1407 during the Arabic Kingdom of Granada, when a key skirmish took place in the valley below between Arabic and Christian forces, who were coming in on a recy visit from nearby Canate la Real.

After the expulsion of the Arabs from Spain, it came under the administration of Ronda, until in 1661 on February 14 the town achieved its total independence, hence the patron saint of the village San Valentin.

It was around this time that most of the land in the valley and the town was owned by the Moctezuma family, one of Ronda's key aristocratic families. Awarded land by

the Reyes Catolicos for their bravery in fighting the Aztecs in Mexico, they lived in Ronda, but had a big hunting estate around Arriate. Hunting everything from boar to lynxes - that are said to have last been seen in the Sierra de Los Merinos, above the town as recently as two decades ago - they needed a big staff to run the estate.

**It is this that makes for a better healthier mix than those pure breed stiffs up in Ronda**

It is for this reason that a lot of families are said to have been brought in from the north of Spain to work hence the foundations of the town being laid.

"How else can you explain how so many of the names are alien to this region and so many people here have blue eyes and blonde hair," asks former school master Salvador Conde Melgar. "Bercerra, Conde, Marin, these are names from Galicia and the Basque country. And it is this that to this day makes for a better healthier mix that those pure breed



ORIGINAL: A typical Arriate building

stiffs up in Ronda."

A wealth of narrow roads lead off the main street where you can find a variety of interesting shops and small businesses such as Muebles Serrano, a traditional carpentry workshop that makes and sells hand-made furniture. It's owner Francisco Serrano (Paco), an octogenarian, has been making furniture since the age of eight and learned his trade from his father. Paco explained that his father helped to craft the old water-mill wheel that was once situated by the bridge, in the street called Calle Molino (Mill Street), the mill is now a private residence, one of the largest and most beautiful houses in the village, unfortunately the mill wheel was not preserved. Paco is a

member of one of the oldest families in the town and his grandfather, Don Jeronimo Serrano Gomez, was once Mayor of Arriate. His memories of the old days include those of the "Herrerros" or Blacksmiths, who were always assisted by women from the village whose job was to operate the bellows that kept the fire burning. A hard job! How times have changed!

The cuisine in Arriate is typical of a Serranian town, with Gazpacho an appetizing cold vegetable soup eaten in summer-time and a range of pork products for which Arriate is well-known. Their speciality "cocido Arriateño" is a type of delicious stew, perfect for a winters lunch. Sweets on the menu in-



## Arriate is not a sewer

A NUMBER of key issues are affecting Arriate today. Aside from the town's water supply being threatened by the huge, macroproject of Los Merinos golf, the town continues to tip raw sewage into its river, the Guadalquivir. This is despite its mayor Bernadino Gaona being from the so-called IU-Green party alliance, and a river, which once had crabs and crayfish is now filthy and frothing. Despite a new law in 2004 insisting by the end of 2007 that every river in Europe should be sewage-free, the town hall in Arriate has still not even begun to build a sewage works. Continuous promises for a decade to fund and install such works, have fallen on deaf ears after election victories. Now residents have had enough. One, Cesar Aguilo, a music teacher, who works for the Platform in defence of water in the Serrania, said: "It is a disgrace for a party that claims to be environmental. The mayor has promised to install a sewage works for the last 12 years at election times, and every time it is ignored. Now in the latest election promise he claims that they have found 3.6 hectares for the works. But they are not even in Arriate. The land is in Ronda and it is illegal to take land from another municipality for such works."

clude homemade "flan" a delightful wobbly caramel pudding, rice pudding and "tocino del cielo" literally translated as "bacon from heaven", however, this is a sweet creamy caramel pudding usually served with whipped cream.

**Señor Garrido said that the original churros were made on the street using a log fire**

Arriate has an excellent selection of local restaurants, pubs and tapas bars where you can enjoy a drink and something to eat for a very reasonable price. Places to visit include Bar el Apero, where you can eat typical Arriate dishes, like pigs trotters and snails when in season, Bar Paquito for his excellent breakfasts and Toberna Manolo, which has a unique atmosphere, particularly out the back at *Jeria* time. Up the hill is Bar Escobar, real local's boozier and there are always two take away chicken shops, El Comi and Pizzeria Laura. There is even some decent nightlife in Arriate, with Bar Esquina always a nice place to hang out, while Los Caireles across the road

always has something interesting happening. El Almacen, a converted wheat store is a modern tapas bar, opened three years ago by cousins Erica and Ruben. The walls are decorated using paintings by a Sevillian artist in the style of Botero (Colombian Artist famous for painting over-weight people and animals!) Their specialities are various pork tapas, the wines are excellent and the sweets homemade and very good. A good choice for a tapas evening!

Arriate still has many fine examples of houses in the typical Andalusian style,

with thick stone walls, beamed ceilings and terracotta tiles. Their mass keeps the houses fresh in the summer and warm and cozy during the winter months. Good examples of these houses can be found in the old part of town and in the Casas Nuevas zone. In particular look out for Casa de piedra, which is for sale in the old part of town for just 169,000 euros ([www.andalucia-exclusive.eu](http://www.andalucia-exclusive.eu)), with its own functioning well and leafy garden and "casa la fuente" a charming old town house, being sold through Serrania Services ([www.laserraniaservices.com](http://www.laserraniaservices.com))

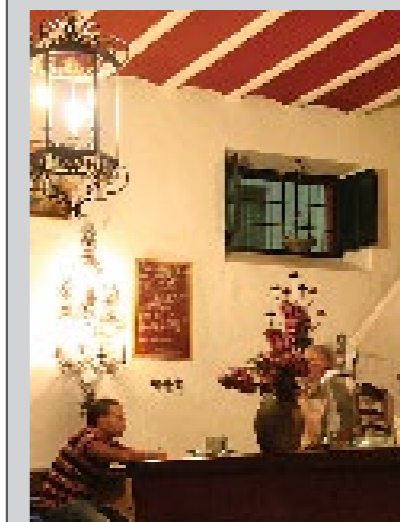
### WHERE TO STAY

## Something for the weekend



THERE are few surprises as great as Hotel El Huertecillo tucked away next to the river in the heart of Arriate. A beautifully converted farmhouse, part dug out of caves, the five cottage hotel is the life's work of two local brothers, and easily rivals anywhere else to stay in the Serrania de Ronda. Visit [www.elhuertecillo.es](http://www.elhuertecillo.es) or call 637533753 for more details.

### WHERE TO EAT



**El Almacen, Calle Horno, Arriate Tel: 617257890**

In the heart of Arriate, this charming restaurant might be worth the journey alone. Right next to the old church and convent this converted storeroom still has its original beams, and, best of all, lovely old wooden doors.

But it is cousins Ruben and Erika's fabulous food that really shines out. Not content to simply knock out the usual *venta* fare, the range of tapas are always varied and fresh as could be.

There is normally a tasty cabbage salad, with raisons and some superb fried prawns with Iberican ham wrapped around them. The food gets better by the year as their enthusiasm increases. The wine list isn't bad either.

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# 8 Arriate special

## Go take a hike!

### The militiaman's escape - Arriate, Malaga

DISTANCE: 2 to 10 kms  
TIME REQUIRED: 1 to 3 hours  
RATING: Easy



**SHADY:** The route follows the river and is largely in dense woods

## Go with the flow

Arriate is surrounded by delightful mountain terrain perfect for walking

It was during the civil war when Republican troops had to escape quickly from the rapidly advancing armies of General Franco that the Ventilla gorge no doubt became invaluable.

Heading straight out of the still staunchly 'rojo' village of Arriate, near Ronda, the Guadalquivir river cuts a deep gully from its source on the edge of the Sierra de las Nieves national park. And through it the brave militiamen could escape towards El Burgo and laterly Malaga, where the Republicans held out for a few extra months.

It has also created one of the most wonderful, little-known escapes from the

summer heat in Malaga province. A deep, shady paradise full of wildlife and nature, crickets hum, while bee-eaters swoop around and the river rushes down from the mountains creating a number of plunge pools to swim in.

There are plenty of excellent spots to lay down a towel and read a book and the steep

sides of the weather-beaten gorge are impressive.

Walking gently uphill, crossing the river on a couple of occasions, the walk eventually arrives at the source of the river beside the Puente del Ventilla, a popular picnic spot for people from Ronda and Arriate.

The banks are lined with ash, eucalyptus, olive and oak trees and there is no

sign of human life, apart from a couple of ancient ruined mills.

Bring a picnic, but best of all, if you fancy something to do to while away the midday hours, 'borrow' the pack of cards, which someone has kindly left beside a natural wooden table and chairs knocked together by local goatherd earlier this summer.

## Don't get lost



**LEFT HERE:** Don't miss this key turn off 200 metres out of Arriate

It is a little tricky to find the beginning of the walk. Head into Arriate from Ronda and take the first right off the small square up Calle Marbella. At the top take a left up a narrow street and then a right and you are in Calle Malaga. When the road opens out into the feria ground, park your car and start on walking uphill along Calle Malaga. After about 400 metres, after going past a smelly chicken factory, you will find a sign that reads "Coto deportivo de Caza" and a yellow sign

painted on a wall (see above). Go left and follow the path up to the edge of the gorge where it then drops dramatically down towards the river. You are soon in the trees and the temperature drops dramatically. You will past a little spring on your right and eventually come down to a picnic spot with a wooden table and chairs. From here you can head up the river keeping an eye out for the white and yellow signs as far as you fancy, and then walk back when you are ready.

## Key to advertisers

- |                          |                              |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 01 Autopintados Guerrero | 19 Persinas Barriga          |
| 02 Neumaticos Mario      | 20 Hotel Huertecillo         |
| 03 Big Orange            | 21 Panaderia Vinas           |
| 04 Los Caireles          | 22 Ferreteria Arriate        |
| 05 Antonio Perez Holgado | 23 Floristeria el Arriate    |
| 06 Bar Paquito           | 24 Perez Cabrera             |
| 07 Ferreteria Delgado    | 25 Construcciones Vazquez    |
| 08 Viveros Gomez         | 26 El Almacen                |
| 09 Embutidos Melgar      | 27 Andalucia Exclusive       |
| 10 EA Martin Ayala SLL   | 28 La Alcantarilla           |
| 11 Serrania Services     | 29 El Comi                   |
| 12 Decoracion Reme       | 30 New Nursery               |
| 13 Automocion Arriate SL | 31 Venta Polverilla          |
| 14 Arriagost             | 32 Bar El Apero              |
| 15 Bar Esquina           | 33 Gasoleos Arriate          |
| 16 Bar Escobar           | 34 Reparaciones Caballero    |
| 17 Cintaflo              | 35 Taberna Manolo            |
| 18 Pizzeria Laura        | 36 Fruteria Pedro Montesinos |
|                          | 37 Taxi Driver               |

**Fruteria Pedro Montesinos**  
Arriate's best fresh fruit shop

Calle Jose Monte, 18, Arriate. Tel 656 903 865

