

All about Aracena

March 2012 A 12-page Olive Press supplement

It's ham-azing!

There are no cinemas, beaches and Chinese takeaways, but it's ham heaven in the rolling mountain region of Aracena that few have heard of and even less visit, discovers Jon Clarke

FROM my perch high above Almonaster la Real, I sit contemplating the spectacular vista from what must once have been the Moors' most scenic mosque.

Swallows swoop around the historic monument as I gaze into the far distance across a rolling sea of oaks, chesnuts and pines.

Almost on cue, a lone piper starts belting out a medieval standard from somewhere below.

It is almost enough to consider converting... but then that would mean missing out on easily the best delicacy Spain has to offer.

For in the cork woodlands in front of me graze what must be the happiest pigs on earth.

Going on to produce the best ham in the world, the famous black Iberian pigs live free-range for up to four years, grazing on a diet of almost entirely acorns.

First noted by Laurie Lee in his classic tome *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning*, you can clearly taste the sweetness of the *jamon Iberico* the minute you enter these verdant hills.

A breathtakingly beautiful area of woodland, scenic walks and authentic, unspoilt whitewashed villages, yet almost nobody has heard of the Sierra de Aracena.

"And that is even on the coast in our own province of Huelva," explains local hotelier Lucy Arkwright, from Posada San Marcos.

Close to the Portuguese border, an hour north of Sevilla, the Sierra de Aracena - Andalusia's second-largest natural park - is sandwiched between the wild plains of Extremadura and the heat of the Andalusian heartland.

It is about as different to the Costa del Sol as Fortnam & Mason is to Iceland.

But that's not to say that the English haven't discovered it yet. On the contrary, it is close to here - at Minas de Riotinto - that in the 19th century, British miners and engineers laid out Spain's first golf course and football pitch.

The nearby hills - a romantic, almost melancholy sweep of wilderness - was their playground.

Turn to Page 2

HAPPY: Free range pigs and the view from Almonaster la Real mosque



Pictures by: Jon Clarke



RESTAURANTE
Maricastaña

Plaza del Álamo, 7 | Castaño del Robledo
Sierra de Aracena
RESERVAS: 654 24 85 83
restaurantemaricastana@hotmail.com
www.restaurantemaricastana.com



A dream place to stay



Casa Oropéndola
C/Arias Montano, 2
21369 Castaño de Robledo
Huelva
T: +34 959 465 538
M: +34 606 413 332
E: oropendola@avired.com





ARRIEROS



Restaurante Arrieros
C/ Arrieros 2, Linares de la Sierra, Huelva
Tel 959 463 717 | 667 599 673 | info@arrieros.net
www.arrieros.net



Finca Buenvino

<http://www.fincabuenvino.com>

Walking, cooking courses,
birding, wildflower walks, Food
Photography courses

2 Aracena special

From Page 1



"But it has also long been an exclusive escape for rich Sevilanans," explains Aracena mayor Manuel Guerra. "The grandparents of the king used to holiday here and the aristocracy built grand houses. "They came to enjoy the wonderful countryside and nature," he adds. It is certainly the perfect antidote to the hideous development that has scarred much of the Costa del Sol. And while Aracena has never courted the hordes of Brits who flock to Spain, to be fair, it's probably not their cup of tea either. Indeed, as the expatriate locals are quick to point out, the rainfall figures are the second highest in Spain and apart from walks and nature, there is not a lot else to do.

It is the timeless, picturesque villages that make the region so special

They have got a point. There are no beaches, casinos or Chinese takeaways in Aracena and the locals mostly don't speak English. That said, according to one local estate agent Alfonso Pardo increasing numbers of

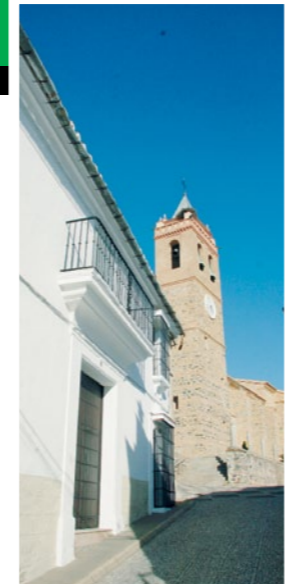


BEAUTY: Fountain in Linares, Aracena mayor (left) and a church in Almonaster la Real (right)

Cut above the Costas

Britons are flocking there to find a home with Julie Christie, Bryan Ferry and Roland Olazabel from Tears for Fears all casting an eye over its housing stock in recent years. "The word is out that this is one of Andalucía's last unspoilt zones," says Pardo, a former actor, who moved here over a decade ago. "But it is already expensive due to the exclusivity of being in a natural park, which puts tough restrictions on building. "As well as that there is a lot

of competition from wealthy Spaniards, who have the romantic notion of owning a retreat here. All this gives the area a certain cachet, which no-one wants to spoil, and ultimately nobody shouts about it from the rooftops." The reasons for its popularity among those-in-the-know becomes quickly obvious as you drive up from the dusty dry plain of Sevilla, its sun-baked expanses slowly giving way to a rich, muddy green spread of oak and chestnut woodland.



But while its crystal-clean air and natural setting has so much allure, it is the timeless, picturesque villages and their sylvan hinterlands that make the region so special. Alive with the chatter of children and served by a surprisingly good network of shops and restaurants, somehow the two dozen or so settlements manage to maintain their pastoral identities and continue thriving without modern development. It is this anomaly unlike so many other parts of Spain that so appealed to Nick Winer, when he and his wife settled in the area five years ago. Having travelled the world, and in particular Africa, where he worked in famine relief with Oxfam, he needed somewhere quiet to lay down his hat. "It has always been a friendly place, where the locals are happier than most and not every young person flees the minute the chance comes up," says Winer, who had first fallen in love with Spain, while living temporarily in a cave house in Almeria in the 1970s. The reason behind this, he explains, is that Aracena is one of the few areas of Spain where the *latifundio*, or big landowner system, never took root.

A LANDSCAPE YOU'LL NEVER FORGET

The Sierra de Aracena forms the western-most tip of the Sierra Morena, the mountainous belt which forms a natural divide between Spain's central *meseta* and the Guadalquivir valley. The area gets surprisingly heavy rainfall (more than 1000mm) considering its southerly position: the Atlantic weather systems forced upwards by this last spur of the Iberian massif which rises to a height of nearly 1000 metres. This, along with a relative absence of pesticides, ensures the wildflowers here are spectacular in all but the summer months. The



SCENIC: Alajar nestles into classic oak woodland

area's most singular feature is the extensive *dehesa* system of woodland management whose persistence has ensured a staggering 90 per cent of the area of the Park

remains forested. The trees most characteristic of the *dehesa* are holm and cork oaks. These provide rich and sustainable grazing for the prized Iberian pigs which are

By Guy Hunter-Watts



FUN: Smurf at Aracena Carnival

Apparently too difficult to support large estates, instead the locals shared out the smallholdings that surrounded their villages. Similar to that in the Alpujarras, near Granada, most would have a small olive grove, a few chestnut trees and an orchard for fruit. And as there was never a water shortage (there is over 1000mm of rainfall a year) they always had food and used to make money sending their produce by bullock cart to Sevilla every week.

terton. Without a doubt, the British pioneers to Aracena, they bought an estate in the area in 1982. Having moved to Spain so Sam could concentrate on his writing they soon decided to open a B&B to make ends meet. The decision had been made soon after meeting his wife Jeannie at a party in London. "I put two propositions to her in one breath. I asked her to marry me and move over to Spain at the same time," recalls charmer Sam. "Luckily she also loved the mountains

and was up for the idea of catering." While they pined for a classic cortijo to renovate, it was a far from easy task as most of the places they visited came with 500 hectares and cost too much. Then one day they stumbled across finca Buen Vino. The huge estate was covered in primroses and heather and had wonderful views. "By the next morning we were hooked," recalls Sam. Taking a look around from their terrace it is not hard to see why.

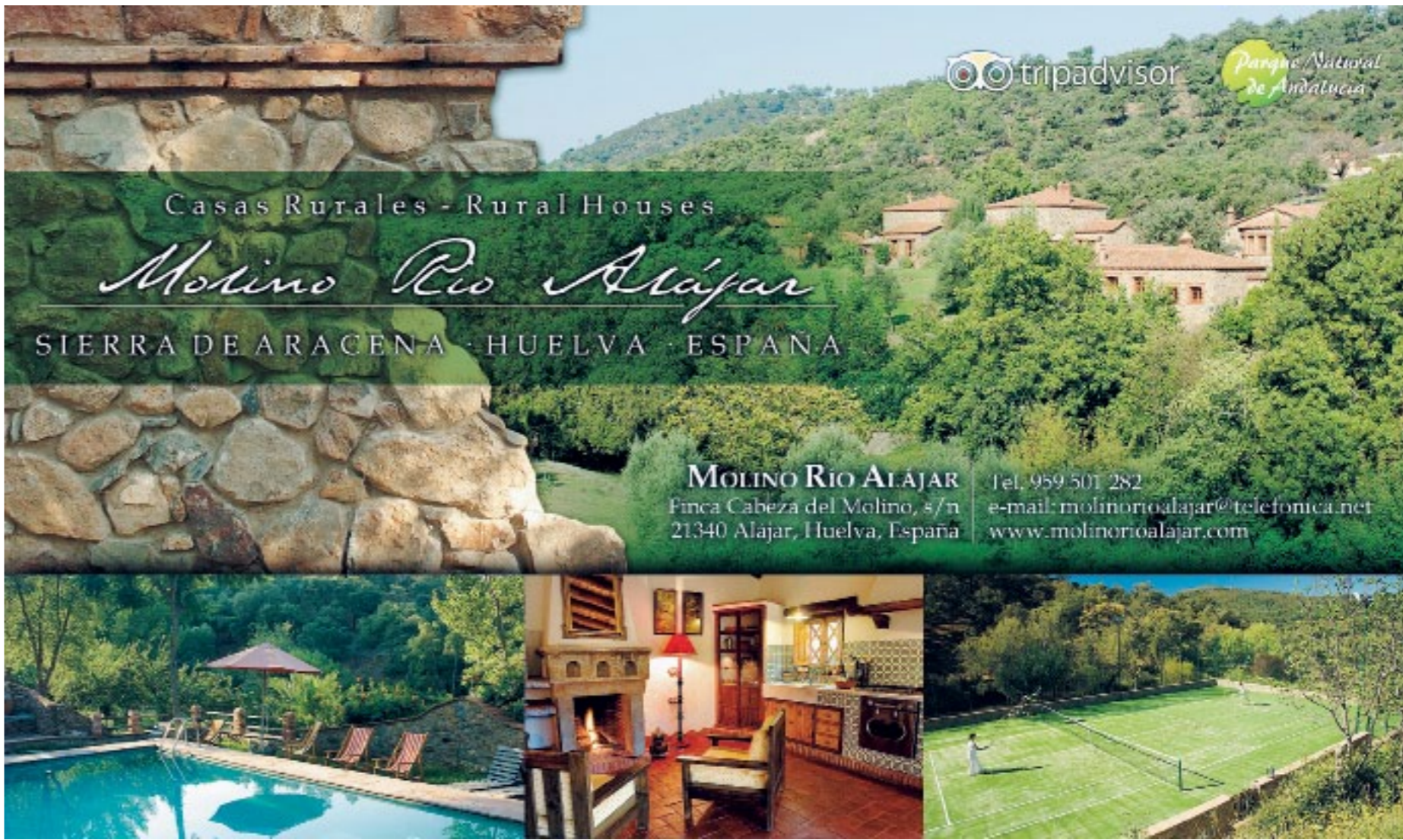


ANCIENT: Typical architecture in sleepy village of Castano de Robledo

ONE EYE ON MECCA

IT is one of the few surviving Spanish mosques to have stood the test of time. Dating from the 10th century, the *mezquita* in Almonaster la Real sits among the ruins of a castle overlooking the whole area. The oddly-shaped building was built using the materials from a Visigoth church on the same site that dates from the 5th century. And the Mihrab - the prayer niche facing Mecca - is the oldest example of its kind in Spain. After the Christian reconquest the

mosque was turned back into a church with the addition of a central axis, a function it has maintained to the present day. And although it has since been altered and added to the original building is still clearly seen. Inside, the well-restored interior boasts five naves and numerous classic Moorish arches supporting the ceiling. Interestingly, its five naves are perpendicular to the *qibla* wall, a trait that can be found in other contemporary Spanish mosques such as the Great Mosque of Cordoba.

Casas Rurales - Rural Houses

Molino Rio Alajar

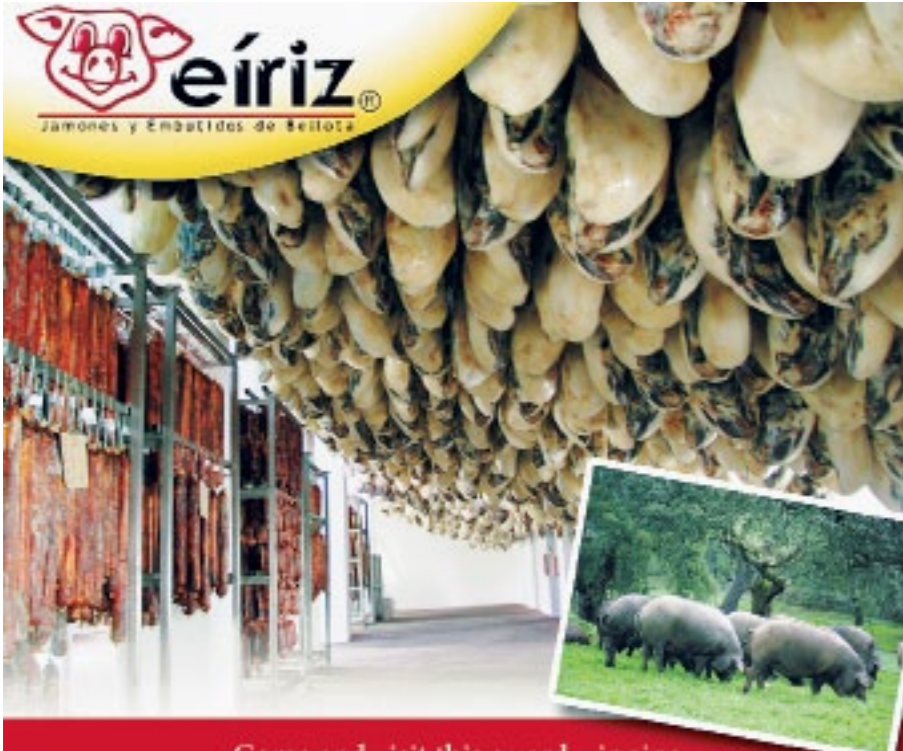
SIERRA DE ARACENA · HUELVA · ESPAÑA

MOLINO RIO ALAJAR
Finca Cabeza del Molino, s/n
21340 Alajar, Huelva, España

Tel. 959 501 282
e-mail: molinorioalajar@telefonica.net
www.molinorioalajar.com

Pictures by: Jon Clarke

eíriz
jamones y embutidos de bellota



Come and visit this award winning ham factory in the heart of the Sierra de Aracena
Winner of the 3 gold stars Great Taste award in London
15€ per person for guided tour with ham, beer and snacks

C/ Pablo Bejarano 43 | C.P. 21209 Corteconcepción | Huelva
Tel: +34 959 120 019 | +34-678-733-443
E: domingo@jamoneseiriz.com

facebook

www.jamoneseiriz.com

great taste gold 2011

e | l | i | t | e Glass Curtains SL

SPECIALIST MANUFACTURERS AND INSTALLERS OF GLASS CURTAINS



- Protect and reduce the effect of dust, wind, noise and rain
- Frameless glazing system
- Specialist in manufacturing glass curtains
- Create an all year round usable terrace
- Undisturbed views
- Trade and commercial welcome

5 YEAR GUARANTEE

References available upon request
From quotation to installation you can be sure of a first class product and services from Elite Glass Curtains

For your FREE no obligation quotation call now on: **630 625 085** or **952 830 503**
E-MAIL: info@eliteglasscurtains.com
WEB: www.eliteglasscurains.com
ELITE GLASS CURTAINS S.L., POLIGONO ELVIRIA 26, MARBELLA

4 Aracena special

The home

It is one of Spain's most prized delicacies and a source of national pride for Spanish foodies looking to show off their country's cuisine. And nowhere is the pride for *jamón ibérico* more evident than in its spiritual home, Aracena, and nearby neighbour Jabugo.

Aracena is the true spiritual home of the world's best ham, discovers James Bryce

Production of the cured ham - also known as *pata negra* - plays a major role in the region's economy and there are several reminders of its influence throughout the area. Not just satisfied with naming

a square after the sought-after delicacy, Aracena also has a ham museum and an annual fair in its honour. And with good reason. The gourmet product is becoming increasingly popular



LITTLE CHANGE: At Eiriz today and half a century ago. (Bottom) Domingo checks his products



Hamtastic!

Jon Clarke visits award-winning ham producer Eiriz

It was the best news I had heard for ages. Told that I had to avoid eating *chacinas* or cold meats for health reasons, the discovery that *jamón ibérico de bellota* was cholesterol free was music to my ears. "The fat is natural and has no polyunsaturates as long as it comes from acorn-fed pigs," explained Domingo Eiriz Martin, from ham factory Eiriz, one of Spain's highest-rated ham producers.

I was taking a tour of his factory/home, in the tiny village of Corteconcepción. Away from 'Ham Central' or Jabugo, this was not the most obvious place to find one of the region's best producers. But it soon became obvious that the village was surrounded by cork oaks, the vital vegetation from which the black Iberian pigs receive their main source of food: acorns. Slaughtering approximately 120 pigs a week, the family firm, which has 10 staff, only uses pigs that have lived entirely on acorns.

"This is vital if you are going to use the label '*jamón ibérico de bellota de Huelva*'," explains Eiriz, who joined his family firm full time four years ago after a career as a lawyer.

"I might be earning less and working harder, but I am working towards my future and putting this factory on the map," he adds. His hard work certainly seems to be paying dividends with the award-winning ham now being sold in 10 countries around the world. Best of all he recently received a three-star gold award from London's prestigious Great Taste fair.

"There are a total of 7,500 gourmet products from around the world, including teas, biscuits, sauces and marmalades," he explains. "And they blind taste each product in groups with mine coming top for three years in a row." Hamtastic news, indeed.



Have a full tour of the Eiriz factory and taste the products over a glass of beer for just 15 euros per person... contact Domingo on 678733443 or domingo@jamoneseiriz.com

5 Aracena special

of jamon

around the world, in countries including America and China, where demand has rocketed over recent years. It comes after two companies were finally allowed to market the produce in America, both passing stringent slaughterhouse regulations which have to be met.

Produced from black Iberian pigs and cross-bred pigs, surprisingly *jamón ibérico* only accounts for eight per cent of Spain's cured-ham production. The emphasis is firmly on quality over quantity and this is reflected in the prices, which range from 30 euros

per kilogram for the lowest quality, to 70 euros per kilogram for the very, very best. Although the prices may seem excessive, a look at the high level of time and care that goes into the production process soon makes it seem justified. After being weaned, the pig-

Picture by: Angel Millan from Posada San Marcos



HAPPY AS PIGS IN MUD: The best jamon comes from pigs fed only on acorns



lets spend several weeks being fattened on barley and maize before being released to roam in pasture and oak groves.

Here they feed naturally on grass, herbs, acorns and roots until slaughter, where the ham is salted and left to dry for two weeks.

They are then rinsed and left to dry for another four to six weeks, followed by a curing process that can take anything from 12 to 48 months.

The best quality Iberian ham *jamón ibérico de bellota* is raised on a diet entirely composed of acorns - approximately one pig per hectare - which has been found to make the meat cholesterol free.

The discovery means that *jamón ibérico* is part of that other rare breed - something that not only tastes good but is healthy too.

Top Ham Tips

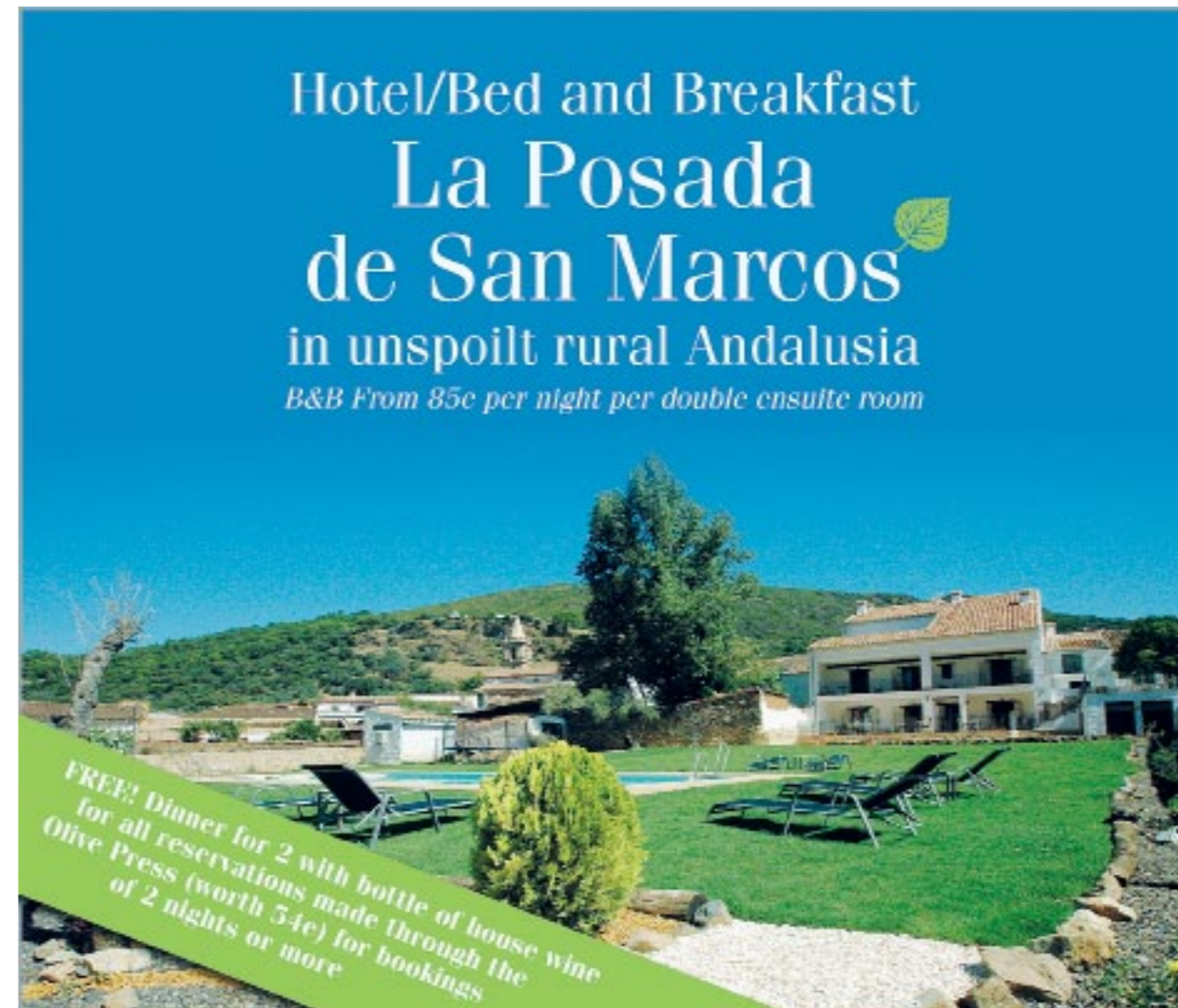
1. Make sure you only eat *jamón* at the temperature of 25 degrees, as it is only at its best when it starts to sweat at 23 degrees when the fat begins to melt.

2. Ham can be kept in packets in the fridge for months and quickly brought to room temperature by running each side under a hot tap for 15 seconds on each side.

3. Spain's best quality ham is *jamón ibérico de bellota*, which is at its best from the Denominación de Origenes (DOs) of Huelva, Guijuelo, in Salamanca and the Valle de Pedroches, in Cordoba



Hotel/Bed and Breakfast
La Posada de San Marcos
in unspoilt rural Andalusia
B&B From 85€ per night per double ensuite room



FREE! Dinner for 2 with bottle of house wine for all reservations made through the Olive Press (worth 54€) for bookings of 2 nights or more

Stay at La Posada de San Marcos, environmentally friendly accommodation where Lucy and Ángel, your English speaking hosts, will ensure a great break!

Just over an hour's drive from Seville you can find yourself in an idyllic rural setting. Alájar, almost the epicentre of a diverse natural park, Sierra de Aracena, Huelva. Here you can completely

unwind by lazing on your balcony, on the sun terrace or by the 12x6m pool, be as active as you like from easy hikes to rock climbing or canyoning - most activities suitable for children, feast on gourmet acorn fed Iberian ham (*jamón ibérico de bellota*) and even tour an organic Iberian pig farm with tasting menu. The choice is yours! Ideal for weekends and short breaks.

www.posadasalajar.com
info@posadasalajar.com
+34 959125712 / +34 667906132

Aracena special

EXPATS who hanker after the ancient woodlands, cobbled footpaths and stone walls so typical of walks in the UK will love Aracena.

The landscapes here are more reminiscent of Hardy's Wessex than of Cervantes' Spain with luscious green hillsides, thanks to some of Spain's highest rainfall figures.

This is classic walking terrain, and best of all, the Natural Park of the Sierra de Aracena y Los Picos de Aroche encompasses an impressive 184,000 hectares. So there is no shortage of places to get away from it all.

I have long been a lover of this area and came close to buying a farm here a few years ago. The six walks described in my book *Walking in Andalucía* take in a string of pretty villages which, until just 50 years ago, were connected to one another by an elaborate network of drovers' paths.

There are few areas which offer more attractive walking than the Aracena Park

Most walks follow these century-old thoroughfares, which fan out from the villages by way of cultivated *huertas* where small groves of citrus alternate with carefully tended vegetable plots. In many places the original cobbling remains intact and there are long sections of path which run between old stone walls, covered in mosses and lichens. Although the scenery here is less wild or rugged than in other Andalusian moun-

A walk through Hardy's Wessex

SNEAK PEAK:
Looking over a wall at Galaroza

tain ranges – you're always aware that the hand of man has been instrumental in fashioning the landscape – there are few areas which offer more attractive walking than the Aracena Park. Both long and short-distance paths have recently been way-marked and the region is bound to attract a growing number of visitors.

For the time being though, there are few walkers, gradients are for the most part gentle and the itineraries I've chosen are generally easy to follow. Here is one of my favourites:

Galaroza Circuit The Walk of the Sylvan Valley

THE NITTY-GRITTY

Distance: 12.5 kms
Time required: 3.5/4 hours
Rating: Easy/Medium
Map: IGN 1:50000 Aracena (917/10-37)
Water: Bars and restaurants in Castaño de Robledo @ 1 hr 15 mins

THIS exceptionally pretty circuit leads through oak and chestnut forests from Galaroza to the tiny village of Castaño del Robledo. The Jabugo river valley teems with birdlife and the walk is an aural as

well as visual feast. It would be tempting to linger along the way and perhaps to picnic in the shade of an oak somewhere beyond the Capilla de Cristo. From the high path you follow back towards Galaroza you're treated to wonderful views west towards Portugal. Put time aside to explore both villages which have excellent bars, restaurants and some good lodgings, too (see Where to Eat and Stay on pages 28-29).

The route

The walk begins in the main square of Galaroza, La Plaza de la Constitución, next to the fountain. With your back to the town hall turn left, then bearing left again head away from the square past the Toribio restaurant. Soon you pass a small supermarket, descend past Bar La Fuente then pass a pretty palm-fringed square before coming to the main road leading from Aracena to Portugal, the N-433. Cross the road, turn left in

One of his favourite areas for walking, author Guy Hunter-Watts praises Aracena and, continuing his series of walks for The Olive Press, describes a delightfully leafy circuit easy for all the family starting at Galaroza

front of Cafe bar Venezia and head along the main road towards Aracena. After 80m you reach a sign marking the beginning of the path La Ribera de Jabugo – the Jabugo river valley walk.

Turn right here and drop down a narrow path. It soon becomes cobbled, bears left and just 80m from the road reaches a junction. Here cut right. The narrow path runs between two walls, crosses a water channel then reaches another junction by an open tract of ground. **(10 mins)**

Bear sharply left and descend. You shortly cross the Murtigas stream via a small stone bridge then pass a sign explaining the eco-system of the valley. The path widens to become a broad, sandy track which cuts through stands of oak, pine and chestnut while beneath you in the river valley are thick stands of poplar, ash and willow.

The track narrows again to become a path as it passes behind a stone hut, running parallel to the River Jabugo's left bank.

Passing a wooden bench the path soon runs past a group of white buildings, Las Casas del Tortero, where it merges with a broader track. **(30 mins)**

The track runs past a number of farm buildings then merges with a broader, better-surfaced track. Soon it descends, passes a pylon then crosses a small concrete bridge to the Jabugo's right bank.



LANDMARK: The entrance to El Tortero farm, along the route

Beyond the bridge the track bears left. At the next junction, just past an ivy-covered building, bear left and after passing an information board (it lists the edible mushrooms that are to be found in the valley – setas comestibles) you cross the river once again.

You soon pass the entrance gates to the farm of El Tortero, continuing along the left bank of the river. After angling left away from the river on a pretty, narrow path which is cobbled in sections you reach a farm with a water butt on a metal platform. Here bear hard left, picking up a broader track which runs past a number of smallholdings. There are cobbled and concreted sections. Passing by a cross you reach the outskirts of the village by a marker post and a newly built picnic area where there is tap water. **(1 hr 10 mins)**

Here, bearing slightly left then hard right, you follow Calle Soledad round the edge of the village. It soon runs up to meet with the main road next to a bar and a ham shop. If visiting the village centre, head straight across. There are a couple of small bars where you could break for refreshments. Turning left along the main road you pass a bus stop then a ham ware-

house and the Senorio de Encinas restaurant. Climbing for another 125m be ready to cut left away from the road along a track which leads in to a picnic area next to a small shrine, La Capilla del Cristo.

Pass the chapel to its right and head up a broad track that climbs up through the forest. Views soon open out towards Jabugo and, beyond, to the mountains of Portugal.

The track heads on up through groves of chestnut to reach a junction. Ignore the track which cuts left towards two sets of farm gates: you should bear right, sticking to the main track. You'll occasionally see faint yellow and white P.R. waymarking. The track soon descends, narrows down, then reaches a junction with a broad track. **(1 hr 45 mins)**

Here head straight across: you'll see P.R. markings and a sign for Galaroza. After 50m you reach a fork: here bear right.

The path widens and continues its descent. Shortly you reach a point where the track divides: take the left

path and, continuing to descend, reach another junction where it splits three ways.

Take the middle path. Pines give way to oaks and, after passing two new houses and an older one to your right, you pass the farm Finca La Farruca whose shed walls have been adorned with a number of wierd sculptures.

The cobbled track passes a number of small farms, running on between stone walls. Soon you cross the Murtigas stream for the second time in the walk via a concrete bridge.

You climb a final steep section of cobbled track which bears right, then left, before running up to meet with the N433. Bear left and follow the road to the outskirts of the village.

Just past a small shop which sells touristy paraphernalia turn right off the N433 at a sign for Consultorio. Follow this street past Bar Avenida then at its far end turn left at a sign for Centro Po-

blacion and head up Calle Fernando Marquez Tirado which soon becomes Calle Vitoria

Following Calle Vitoria to its far end, keeping right at a No Entry sign, you should then cut left down Calle San Sebastian. You pass a public phone booth then, sticking to your same course, come to a church and a large square. From here keep on in the same direction passing the Cajasol bank. After angling left past a large brick building continue along Calle Don Gumsindo Marquez to arrive back to your point of departure, la Plaza de la Constitución. **(2 hrs 25 mins)**

Add 30-45 minutes to all timings if you plan to visit Castano de Robledo.

LA CASA NOBLE

• HOTEL CON ENCANTO •
• BOUTIQUE BED AND BREAKFAST •

Indulge

in the Luxury

and the Tranquility

of this Andalusian home

• Calle Campito 35, Aracena, (Huelva), Andalusia, Spain •
Telephone 959 127778 • Facsimile 959 870 046 •
• www.lacasanoble.net • info@lacasanoble.net •

GRANDEUR: The surprisingly large and ornate church in Castano de Robledo



POSADA
FINCA LA FRONDA



www.fincalafronda.com

Finca La Fronda • Carretera de Correpana a Aracena HU 8105 km. 22,400
21340 Aljair • Huelva • España
Tel. (34) 959 501 247 or (34) 639 632 908 • email info@finclafonda.com



LANE: *In Jabugo*

8 *Aracena*

MAD FOR MOSAICS

A mosaic of a tree with a crown on top, set against a green background. The mosaic is made of small, light-colored tiles, and the tree is depicted in a stylized, symmetrical manner. The crown is a simple, three-pointed shape. The tree has a central trunk and several branches, each ending in a small, leaf-like shape. The entire mosaic is framed by a thin black border.

The 'empedrados' are a defining feature of the Aracena region



T is a trait that marks out the Aracena region.

Meticulously crafted with rocks and pebbles from the nearby hills, the quaint *empedrados*, or 'mosaic floors' are a delight for artists and photographers alike.

Dating back to the 17th century they are most in evidence in the villages of Galarza, Valdelarco, Linares de la Sierra and Alaiar.

The work combines the efforts of miners, labourers and pavers who quarried white limestone from the nearby hills, then chipped it, filed it and surrounded it with mortar to form paving. Often built in front of homes, as a kind of threshold, the mosaics marked the transition from public to private space.

They also served as a kind of flat, hard walkway to lead cattle through the house.

Historians believe that in the small village of Jabugo, the paved sections were especially useful for bringing horses and donkeys inside, when they were regularly stolen and smuggled into nearby Portugal.



They also served as a kind of flat, hard walkway to lead cattle through the house



To form the more ornate designs, artists combined light-coloured limestone with darker shades to craft attractive mosaics – sometimes purely decorative, sometimes displaying the year or a shop name.

The best examples of these can be seen in the tiny village of Linares de la Sierra where there are over 300 designs, some dating back to the late 1800s.

Traditionally these *llanos* – or ‘flats’ – would form a level square of land which was used to place a chair on which villagers would while away the afternoon chatting to neighbours in the Andalusian sun.

Home entertainment is about to change forever.
Are **you** ready to form part of the revolution?

<http://dtmedia.tv>



★★★★★ MJB (Jensen)

"Another great idea from a forward looking company. The picture quality is very clear. Keep up the excellent service which you seem to excel in!"

★★★★★ H.G. Özgür ve İsmail

"Well done on the new dT Media. Excellent picture quality! Keep up the good work. We have recommended you to many people!"

No need to install software, just select channel & enjoy.
FREE Trial available for non DT customers.



Includings:

- ✔ **FREE** access to **dT Media TV**
- ✔ **DT OneBill Line Rental** (no more Monday)
- ✔ Up to **8MB Broadband Internet**
- ✔ **WiFi Router** (simply plug n play)
- ✔ **UNLIMITED** National calls
- ✔ **300 FREE** minutes to EU land lines
- ✔ Ability to make up to **3 simultaneous calls**
- ✔ **Low Cost Call service** (no prefix required)
- ✔ **FREE** multilingual Technical Support
- ✔ **FREE** multilingual Customer Service

Only
49,95€/month

direct
TELECOM
Communications for life

see-f, talk, see
900 - DIREC
 34733

[illegible]

bar obra



• VINOS • TAPAS • POSTRES • COPAS • COCTELES • CAVAS •

Sótano la Casa Noble, Calle Campillo 35, Aracena
Tel: +34 628 601 551 | www.bar-obra.net
http://www.facebook.com/BarObra

BAR RESTAURANTE EL RINCON DE CURRO



Carretera Almonaster-Cortegana, km 1
21350 Almonaster la Real (Huelva)



Tel: 959 14 31 49
Mobile: 676 780 606

Open 7 days a week, 362 days a year

RESTAURANTE

MONTECRUZ

Serving ONLY local and ecologically produced products

Plaza de San Pedro s/n, Aracena (Huelva)
Tel: 959126013 - e-mail: montecruz@telefonica.net
www.restaurantemontecruz.com

CAAE
GDS

10 Aracena special

Where to stay

WHEN an LA fashion designer re-locates to Andalusia you expect something special. And Casa Noble does not disappoint.

The appropriately named townhouse in the heart of Aracena is a romantic retreat with style very much to the fore. Painstakingly renovated by Melanie Denny, originally from Australia, it has a wonderful balance of colours and fabrics, while also enhancing the very best of the historic building.

The floors, doors and rejas are original and the designer has worked hard to use natural light to create a true sense of space.

The bedrooms are vast, with incredibly good quality mattresses and furniture almost all imported from America, while the bathrooms are impeccable.

A massive foodie, Melanie takes great care in ensuring that not only breakfast, but lunch and dinner, in basement bar Obra, are as good as you would expect to find elsewhere in the region.

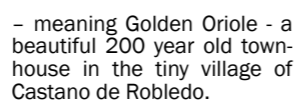
Another charming townhouse option is Casa Oropendola

Dreamtime

Aracena counts some of the best quality and most peaceful hotels in southern Spain, reckons Jon Clarke



SUSTAINABLE: Posada San Marcos is carbon neutral and Molino Rio Alajar (left) stunning



– meaning Golden Oriole – a beautiful 200 year old townhouse in the tiny village of Castano de Robledo. Converted by Dutchwoman Susana, this charming home maintains all its original features, including hydraulic tile

floors, a wonderful two hectare huerta/garden with its own well and best of all an unusual veranda, one of the nicest architectural features in the whole region. Good value and great for families, this is a superb base for

walking and the town is slowly getting a name for being something of a foodie retreat, with a good range of restaurants.

Another stunning place to stay is Finca La Fronda, which sits in an impossibly good location at the top of the scenic back road between Linares and Alajar.

Run by former oil executive Charles Wordsworth and his son Alex, a dynamo of energy, this is a privileged retreat with perhaps one of the best sited pools in Andalusia.

The views stretch for miles and the rooms are well appointed and nudge towards luxury.

The backdrop is entirely green and the silence here is golden, with little to disrupt the peace.

Down the hill you must look out for the highly original Posada San Marcos.

One of Andalusia's only completely carbon neutral places to stay, this is the second hotel of Angel Milan and Lucy Arkwright, who have been hosting travellers and walkers in Alajar for over a decade. Carefully renovated using the best quality wool and cork insulation, it also counts underground geother-

11 Aracena special



mal heating, which is one of the first in Andalusia.

"It has certainly cost a fortune, but we hope it will eventually pay back," explains Arkwright, a friendly Bolton lass, who has been described as the 'Gerald Brenan of the 21st century'.

With intelligent mattresses that mould to your back and a wonderful garden with a huge pool and trampoline for the children, this is a top option.

Another excellent choice for the active traveller is Molino Rio Alajar which not only counts a fabulous pool, but one of the only tennis courts in the area, and perhaps one of the most scenic in Europe. Sitting in the heart of a sleepy valley, near Alajar, you arrive at the molino down an extremely narrow cobbled track, even driving over a ford.

Few arrivals could be so perfect



RANGE: From Finca la Fronda to Casa Noble and (inset) the Chestertons at Buen Vino. (Bottom) Casa Oropendola

and once in, you will not be disappointed, with its sensitively converted cottages nestling seductively into the landscape and its owner Peter Jan sensitive to guests' whims and issues.

Keen walker Peter and his wife have spent the last year waymarking up to 10 local walks that go from the door and their knowledge of the area is second to none.

Last but not least, a trip to Aracena would not be the

same without a night at the grand family retreat Finca Buen Vino. Set in 100 hectares of breathtaking mountain scenery, this beautiful renaissance-style villa counts – without a doubt – one of the finest swimming pools in southern Spain.

Wonderful walks go right from the door to all of the surrounding villages

The family home of the charming Chestertons for three decades, this is a working farm, which has its own livestock and vegetables.

You are here though for the fabulous welcome you get from Sam, Jeannie and their children, when in residence, and the rooms are comfortable and full of books.

Wonderful walks go right from the door to the nearby villages of Los Marines, Fuentes de los Marines, Linares de la Sierra and there is normally someone able to pick you up if you need a lift home.

Best of all you can stay in and have a wonderful three-course candlelit dinner – served in a wood-panelled dining room – created by either Jeannie or son Charlie, who trained at Ireland's top cookery school, Ballymore.



Journey to the Centre of the Earth



flooded 'Chickpea Chamber', and the intricate formations in the Chamber of God's Crystal, a vault that was formed some 50,000 years ago. Locals referred to the cav-

erns as a 'water well covered in snow' due to the white formations – from which the street at the cave entrance takes its name, Calle Pozo de la Nieve.

Where to eat

DINING CENTRAL

By Jon Clarke

IN an area best known for its fantastic ham you would expect to find the odd good place to eat.

Well, the truth is, in Aracena natural park it is hard to find a bad place to fill up.

Some of the best spots are in Aracena town, where, according to *the Guardian*, you will find one of the Top 50 best restaurants in the world.

The fabulous spot Restaurante Casas has been catering for tourists since 1947 and is said to be one of the oldest restaurants in Huelva province.

Incredibly, its owner Manuel Romero has been working here since 1964 and he and his family have served the great and good from bullfighters to golfers and actors to royalty.

The Guardian in particular singles out its jamon, but there is a good range of Iberian cuts of pork and an atmosphere conducive to a long lazy lunch.

Over the road is an even more exciting place, Montecruz, which is one of the very few restaurants in all of

You are spoilt for choice with good places to eat in Aracena



CREATIVE: Maricastana

Andalusia certified as being organic by Spain's equivalent of the soil association CAAE. This wonderful spot is run by the talented livewire Monolo, who is constantly working to find the most exciting ingredients and new dishes to impress his customers. He changes the menu constantly and prides himself in the quality of his produce, which includes easily the best

wild 'Boletus' mushrooms I have ever tried.

He has an impressive *caza* hunting menu, when in season, which includes a carpaccio of mountain goat with foie gras, olive oil and lime and an amazing *arroz* with game birds.

A short drive out of Aracena leads to the sort of restaurant that any tourist to Andalusia dreams of. Arrieros, in Linares de la Sierra, is an authentic eatery, where sourcing of ingredients trumps fancy sauces every day of the week.

Set in a charming village house, with classic mosaic floor, ancient fireplace and cork stools, this is one of Andalusia's true dining secrets.

Run by Luismi and, at weekends, his primary school teacher wife Adela, this is a place for romance, but equally to experience the best pork you will eat anywhere in the world.

There is pork in all its glorious forms; *presa*, *secretos*, *pluma*, even *castanetas*, or throat glands, which actually tasted great if a little crunchy.

Mains included an amazing *pluma Iberica* hamburger, which was tender and served with a slightly spicy tomato marmalade and some sliced and baked potatoes.

Nearby, Alajar has the equally atmospheric El Padrino, little-changed since the 18th century, with some wonderfully earthy and off-beat dishes, such as stuffed chard



BUSTLING: Montecruz and (below) Monolo and wife at Casas

stalks, while its big bodega of wines is exciting to visit.

Around the corner is the equally charming Botica de Amparo, literally the sitting room of the ancient townhouse of Amparo, who lives upstairs. This friendly place is great for tapas and the food is all prepared in her kitchen by Amparo or her sister.

In Castano de Robledo, you must look out for Maricastana, where a charming local couple have turned this ancient townhouse into one of the most stylish dining retreats around.

Declaration

It oozes charm, and even sets out a 'declaration of intentions' promising to 'conquer the stomach', not through over-eating, but through opening the senses and taste buds.

It didn't do badly, with an interesting mix of dishes, well sourced and carefully cooked, in particular with a heavy emphasis on vegetables. Finally over in Almonaster la Real




RESTAURANTE

CASAS

"The best jamon in the world"

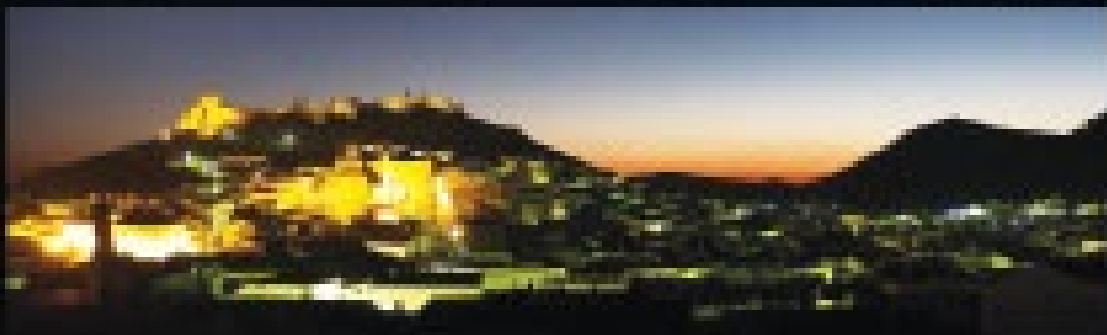
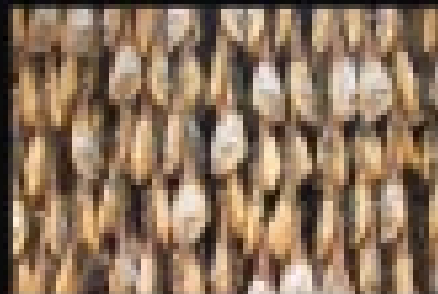
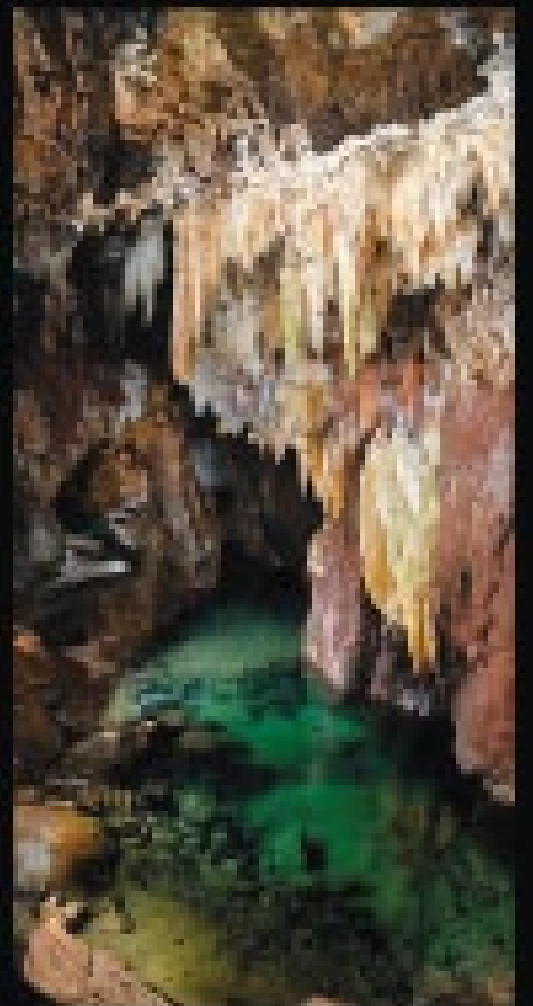
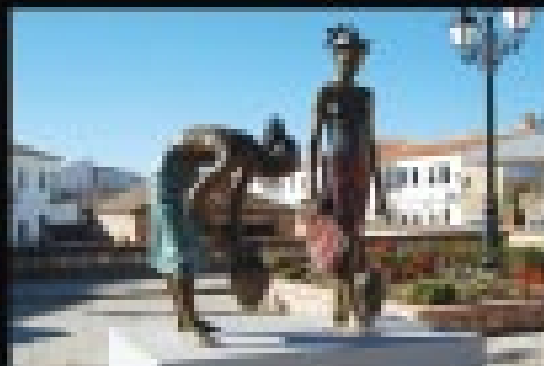
THE GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER

Open since 1947 serving local authentic dishes
One of the first restaurants in Huelva Province



Calle Pozo la Nieve, 39-41
21200 Aracena Huelva
Tel: 959 128 044
699 465 075

Aracena - inner beauty



Ayuntamiento de Aracena - Tel. 959 126 276 - www.aracena.es