

All about San Pedro

Benahavis, Benavista and Guadalmina

December 2010

A 12-page Olive Press insiders guide



Where wealth and the working class rub shoulders

It's where working class communities buffer exclusive gated enclaves. Anatoly Kurmanaev discovers how the diverse gems around San Pedro offer a perfect getaway for discerning visitors

WHEN the late Lady Di needed a break from the paparazzi and royal intrigue she frequently headed to the Costa del Sol. But not any old part of the celebrated costa, don't you know. She headed for a tiny village tucked away up a narrow gorge five minutes from San Pedro de Alcántara. It was multi-million private estate of industrialist James Goldsmith that the world's most famous princess used as a hideaway. He and his famous children Jemima, Zac and Ben are among the many jet-

setters who bought property around the hills of Benahavis. The influx of high-profile investors such as Saudi financier Adnan Khashoggi and British tycoon Sir Alan Sugar has completely transformed this remote but dignified corner of the Costa del Sol. Indeed, today Benahavis touted as the richest municipality in Spain. And, incredibly, despite rapid gentrification over the last 30 years, the village has lost none of its character and charm. The reason? Both native and foreign

Turn to Page 2

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2 San Pedro special

From Page 1

Residents put great value on the area's long-standing traditions of autonomy and seclusion. Separated from the sprawling gated communities of the coast by a narrow winding gorge, Benahavis sits at the top of the Guadalmina river valley, hedged in by steep hills. Benahavis had started to grow in the late 11th century principally to service the imposing fortress of Montemayor, which sits just above the village.

Defeated but never conquered - the bastion's remnants stand to this day

It was built by an Arab chieftain who later bequeathed the village its name - *Ben al-Havis*, 'the son of Havis'. It was always a key strategic spot, as control of Montemayor castle meant control of western Costa del Sol, and Moorish caliphs feuded incessantly for the dominance of the bastion. It was also, coincidentally, one

High contrast

ESCAPE: Views down to San Pedro coast and (inset) the main square

of the last Muslim castles to capitulate as the marauding Christian armies advanced south in 1485. Defeated but never conquered - the remnants of the ancient bastion still look over Benahavis to this day. The atmospheric remains, which offer fabulous views, well sum up the village's spirit of independence, which did not die away under the new Christian rulers. Less than a century after the Moors' defeat, Benahavis was granted autonomy from

Marbella and in the 19th century it served as a major stronghold for Spanish guerrillas during the Napoleonic wars. Like the Catholic missionaries and French officers, the recent millionaire arrivals have not changed the character of Benahavis, merely opening a new chapter in the village's history. And best of all, the town has not allowed the new arrivals to ruin its character. Indeed, the town hall took the revolutionary step to put



feel. According to official statistics, 29 per cent of the 4,400 people living in the municipality are foreigners, while

preservation orders on the vast majority of land around the town, to keep it from development. For a municipality with the highest rate of expat residents in Spain, Benahavis retains a decisively Spanish

the rate in the village itself is almost certainly considerably higher. Walking along the main street Avenida Andalucía at siesta time one sees local

Spaniards chatting with British residents outside cafes. "Benahavis is a relaxed friendly society in which to live, where villagers are welcoming and always supportive of newcomers trying to settle into Andalusian life," explains Stephanie Thomas, who retired to the village with her husband several years ago. "They smile when you attempt to speak Spanish and are very forgiving when you get the pronunciation wrong!"

The streets are quiet and clean, but this village is never sedate - turn the right corner and you stumble upon a busy tapas bar filled with friendly faces.

Yet to visitors the main attraction of Benahavis is food.

The village feels like it has nearly as many restaurants as front doors, with an eatery occupying practically every building on the lively Calle Malaga.

Although the restaurant boom coincided with golf developments nearby, Benahavis has always punched above its culinary weight.

The village already boasted around a dozen restaurants 30 years ago, when its population was just around 1,000. Today, it's said to have the highest concentration of restaurants in Andalucía.



WAR AND PEACE: Fishing boats and (inset) historic Montemayor castle

"This is the gastronomical capital of Costa del Sol," said Argentine restaurateur Omar de La Capelina.

"Every restaurant has its own idea, its unique *librito*," he added. "If you don't have your own flavour, you won't survive. It is as simple as that"

The competition is certainly tough, but as the constant flow of new restaurants demonstrates, there's no shortage of entrepreneurs eager to try a hand at conquering the so-called 'food capital of Andalucía'.

While Benahavis stands out for its wealth and gentrification its nearby neighbour of San Pedro de Alcántara largely remains true to its working class origins.

Perched between the posh 'Costa del Golf' resorts and the tourist mecca of Marbella, San Pedro's down-to-earth atmosphere stands out sharply from its surroundings.

Its industrial heritage has always been in contrast to the fishing communities either side, or the agricultural villages inland.

The town was founded at the height of the industrial revolution in the mid-19th century as the processing centre for the sugar cane and cotton industries.

The gradual loss of Spanish sugar-producing colonies in the Caribbean only increased San Pedro's prominence and the town quickly established itself as a centre of agricultural innovation.

San Pedrenos are proud of their industrial past and a number of the old sugar mills dotting the area are gradually being restored.

One of the first industrial buildings in the town, the Trapiche de Guadaiza sugar factory owned by San Pedro's founder Marquis del Duero, is currently being turned into a museum.

A visitor will struggle to find an unfriendly San Pedreno

Another fine example of industrial heritage is the finely-preserved El Ingenio mill at Calle Concha, which gave the name to the surrounding barrio.

The factories and mills have become upmarket coastal hotels and cafes but the working class ethos of the town itself is still alive and well, with the

residents shifting from the manufacturing to the service sectors, largely to support the famous tourist Meccas of nearby Marbella and Puerto Banus.

San Pedro remains very much a magnet for labourers from the Andalusian interior and the salt of the earth values they bring with them allows the town to retain its character.

A visitor will struggle to find an unfriendly San Pedreno. The townspeople seem always open for a chat and a helping hand.

Resentment of expats that may be noted in some secluded villages is nowhere to be seen.

"Every year there are more and more tourists and that's great, it adds to the diversity of the town," said shop assistant Milagros Perez, who moved to San Pedro from Ronda 10 years ago. "Tourists are our support."

Such views were repeated again and again by the young and the old, the natives and recent arrivals.

San Pedro may not be the most flashy resort town but for those looking for a break from Costa del Sol's ostentatious bling, the town is a perfect getaway.



IDYLLIC: Azure lake in the hills above San Pedro



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My inspiration from gypsies

Celebrated Benahavis sculptor David Marshall tells Anatoly Kurmanaev about what inspired his love of welding and creating metal sculptures

YOU would be hard-pressed to spend any time in Benahavis without hearing the name David Marshall. Having spent over 40 years in the village, the Scottish-born designer is one of its most prominent figures – both literally and figuratively. His works of metal and glass can be seen in a number of places, while his growing family runs various local businesses.



DRIVEN: David Marshall with some of his more unusual pieces

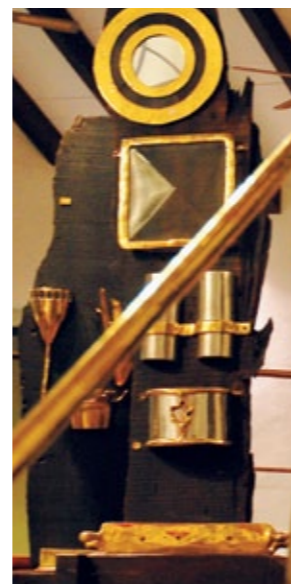
More than anything, however, David's adventurous spirit and self-reliance mirror Benahavis' curious mixture of worldliness and parochialism. David came to the Costa del Sol in 1965 while recovering from malaria he had contracted living in Colombia. "The doctors in England told me: 'if you go back to Latin America you will last six months,'" he said. "Meanwhile back in Scotland I could be a sheep farmer or a salmon fisherman."

he looked elsewhere... and Spain seemed like a good compromise between Colombia's tropics and the grayness of Britain.

Colombia was also the cradle of his love for metals. Being an English speaker he had soon landed a job as a weld-

ing assistant with an American constructor. "I started playing with bits of metal lying around building sites and it all went on from there," says David, who also has homes near Ronda and in Colorado. "I never had any art experience, I just started

didn't prevent David from achieving major commercial success. He now boasts several galleries and his work is regularly exhibited around the world. David's work ranges from small accessories to grand architectural designs. His choice of bronze and aluminum as main materials is driven by the long history of brass casting dating back to the Romans.



I'm looking for things that people could do 500 years ago

And in southern Spain he found a rich culture of metal work to build upon. He says his method of welding goes back to the Andalusian gypsies, who melted together the metals they stole from public buildings and churches. David now regularly travels to places like India, Indonesia, Thailand and Ghana, looking for artisans who help materialize his ideas.

HEAVY METAL: Benahavis studio "There are certain areas that have certain skills," he says. "I'm looking for things that people could do 500 years ago and have since lost. "You have to go to these places to find them."

Follow the Benavista road

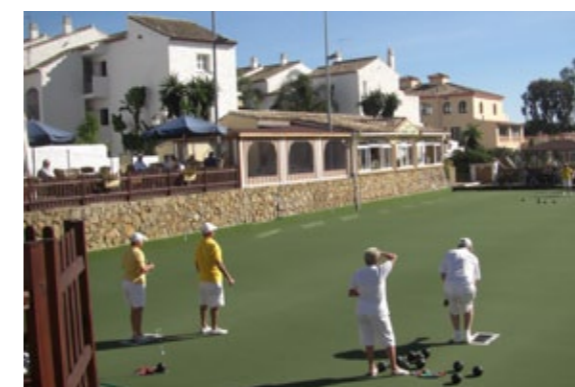
A string of small developments between San Pedro and Estepona are some of the most popular places for expats to settle in Andalucia



ATTRACTIVE: Most developments are an easy walk to the beach

STRETCHING along the coast towards Estepona is one of the most popular places for British expatriates to live on the whole Costa del Sol. But, while it is heavily populated by foreigners, the coastal zone from San Pedro to Benavista is completely different to the sprawling metropolis to the east of Marbella. Far less developed, considerably more family orientated and - best of all - with easily as many good beaches and chiringuitos. And then there are the golf courses, which line the nearby hills. "We are so spoilt for choice," says Hughie Holgate, 63, who runs the Benavista bowls club and next door restaurant Los Arcos. "There are at least half a dozen golf courses within a mile of here and the facilities for fam-

ilies are great. "On top of that you are only a short drive into the hills via the Ubrique or San Pedro roads." The entrepreneur, a father-of-four, added that the bowls club was a real magnet for the area. "We have 70 members, who play in leagues up and down the Costa del Sol," he explains. "And non-members have their own green which costs just 10 euros for a three hour game." Another hive is the El Paraiso Country Club, which sits inland near its namesake golf club. Well established on the coast, it is here that Roy and Marion offer an amazing range of entertainments and a popular restaurant to the expatriate community. "We are pretty full for much of the year," explains Marion, who has been busy organising a hectic Christmas schedule.



BUZZING: Benavista bowls club

Excellent

Down from here you find a string of urbanisations - Diana Park, Benavista and El Pilar - which are full of shops and services. They include a range of excellent butchers and cake shops, as well as English supermarkets, curry houses and British bars. "There is pretty much everything you could need around here," says Pauline Kavenagh, who runs Grumbles restaurant, which has been open since the late 1980s.

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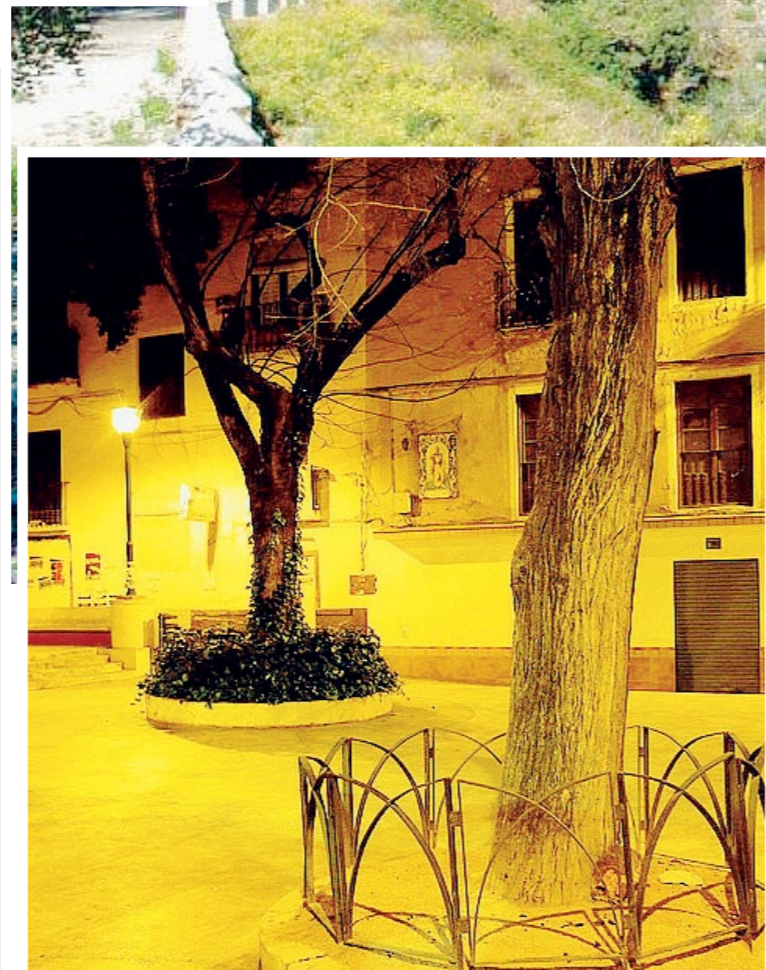
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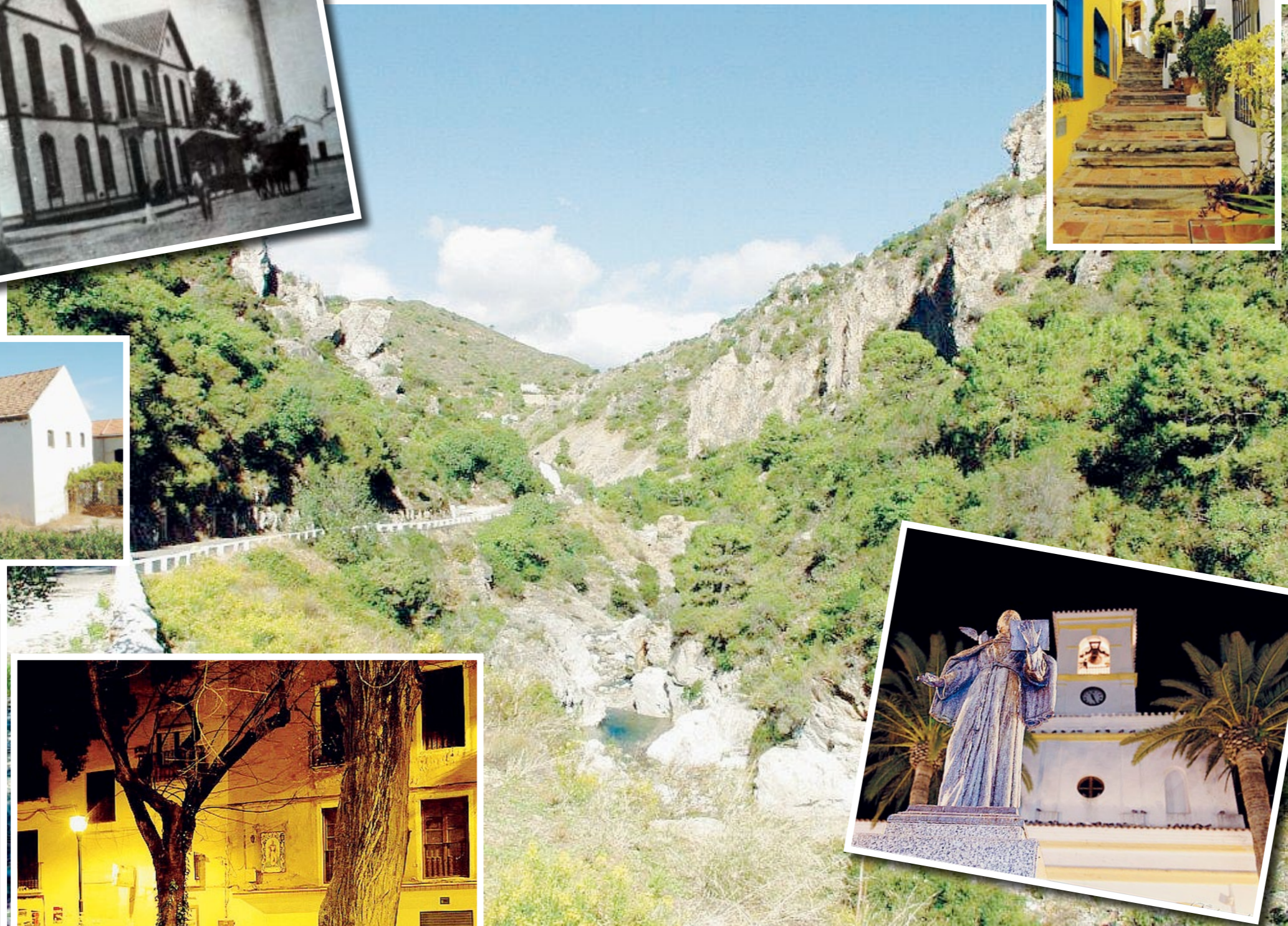


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THE San Pedro area is full of great escapes and interesting nooks and crannies... if you know where to look. From (above) clockwise, a San Pedro square at night, the Trapiche de Guadaiza sugar mill (before and after), main picture Benahavis Angosturas trail, typical street scene in Benahavis, a mock up of the Normandy landings on San Pedro beach, a San Pedro statue at night and a view of distant La Concha mountain from Guadalmina beach

6 San Pedro special



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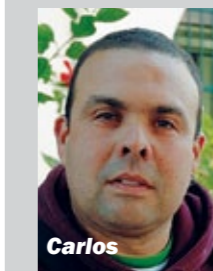
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7 What you think of San Pedro

The Olive Press spoke to five long-time Spanish residents



Carlos

Carlos, painter, 11 years in San Pedro

"I came here from Argentina and I wouldn't want to be living anywhere else. It's a really nice place to raise kids, it has a good state school and they can play where they want without danger."



Francisco

Francisco, retired construction worker, 30 years in San Pedro

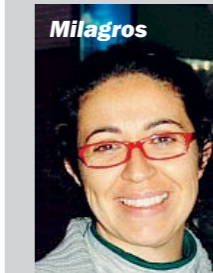
"I first arrived here for work and ended up staying. The climate is much better than in my hometown of Ronda and it is so close I can always go home to visit family on the weekends."



Manuel

Angela, housewife, 32 years in San Pedro

"I have been coming here from Cadiz with my family since I was a little girl and decided to stay. I'm now quite attached to it. It was just a small village before - now there are a lot of people!"



Milagros

Manuel, machinery operator, San Pedro native

"I was born here and for me it's still the best! It has the best seaside walk on the coast and the women here are true guapas. I can't think of living anywhere else."

Milagros, shop assistant and hotel worker, 10 years in San Pedro

"I came here from inland Andalusia to work. I started a family, bought a house - took roots here. There's a little more life here, more tourists and the climate is better."

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8 San Pedro special

My beautiful

WHEN Michelle Obama famously stayed with her daughter at the 5-star Padierna spa last summer, there was confusion about where exactly the Obamas holiday residence was. Naturally Marbella town hall was overjoyed when the world's press tagged her holiday destination as Marbella, when in fact it was the municipality of Benahavis. Benahavis, as it happens, already counted on some of the most exclusive properties - and most famous residents - in the world, so it was all taken in its stride. With its celebrated developments, including Zagaleta, El Madronal and La Quinta, it counts some of the world's key power-brokers. The likes of Mark Thatcher, Hugh Grant and Lord Alan Sugar are some of the figures who own homes there. Benahavis village itself, while not quite as pricey, is one of the true jewels in the crown of the Costa del Sol.



Why Benahavis could be the most exclusive place to live in southern Spain, writes agent Scott Marshall

It has everything there: from the truly spectacular to the classic traditional Spanish family home. What I think appeals to many people is the fact that it remains unspoiled by passing traffic, thus maintaining the



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9 San Pedro special

Benahavis



IDYLLIC: Well prepared town centre and (left) typical village detail

security and exclusivity of this mountain paradise. Its population enjoys the highest average annual income in Malaga making it the only municipality in the province above the national average of 23,800 euros. Benahavis is a location where you can enjoy nature at its best. Popular riverside walks run through valleys hedged by wild thyme, juniper and rosemary. As a resident of Benahavis your beautiful surroundings are accompanied by small luxuries, for example: private insurance for children up to

two years old is paid by the town hall. On top of that for just 20 euros a year, all residents have access to the village golf practice range, gymnasium with professional monitor. They can even get free tennis lessons, martial arts classes and art workshops. Growing up in Benahavis is a wonderful experience; children are safe to run around the streets and parents have no need to worry about them. Everybody knows each other and although times changed, we'd like to think that Benahavis hasn't.

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Although times have changed, we like to think that Benahavis has not

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Pies, pet shop and top jamon

THERE really is only one place to buy ham in the San Pedro area. At Miguel Coca Quintanilla's shop De Pata Negra, you will find some of the best acorn-fed *jamon iberico* in the province.

All entirely raised at his father's farm in the Valle de Pedroches, in Cordoba, it is no surprise to learn that in 2004, he won the national ham-cutting championship in Madrid. "I have been cutting ham since I was 13 years old," he explains. "And there is a serious art in doing it properly."

In the same street, Calle Lagasca, you cannot fail to notice

WHERE TO SHOP

the striking window display of Pepito Cardena, a charming dress shop specializing in flamenco fashions.

Owner Manuel Cardena also runs another shop, just up the street, which purveys party costumes and accessories for just about every conceivable occasion - from Halloween masks to Santa suits.

In San Pedro you will also find a ganga grow shop for all you kids out there who like to experiment.

Meanwhile if it is second-hand furniture you are after make sure to head up to the Blue Vista group in El Pilar, where Gary Matcham and able helper June have a huge range of items. In the same urbanisation El Pilar, which is fast becoming one of the best on the coast for shopping, you will also find a great butchers as well as a pie shop.

Here you will find not only the English Pie Shop and Simpsons, the butcher, but just up the road, in Benavista, a great bookshop Glitterati, which is having a special Xmas shopping evening on December 9.

Finally in Guadalmina look for the Lassie Dog pet shop.

Meanwhile as the you climb the celebrated road towards Ronda you will finally come across the La Heredia urbanisation. An award-winning urbanisation that has a real sense of community and style, here you will find a couple of excellent restaurants, one run by a former protege of Gordon Ramsey.

But, best of all, is the superb Dutch-owned shop the Best of Holland, and a great bread shop Cafeteria & Panaderia Heredia and Guillermo's butchers next door.

WHERE TO STAY

THERE are, of course, some extremely famous hotels to be found in the San Pedro area. The best known is, of course, the Padierna spa, where Michelle Obama stayed last summer. But while a terrific spot to stay, the luxury five-star hotel is way out of most people's price bracket.

If you are looking for luxury you would be better off staying at the Crowne Plaza in a great location between Guadalmina and Benavista. One of the most attractive buildings on the coast, the five-year old hotel is extremely comfortable. Its stylish touches are straight away obvious from its hip lobby that leads down to an open-plan restaurant/breakfast room, all giving onto a pool area and gardens. Just a five minute

stroll to the beach, it is also in easy reach of two or three great restaurants.

Another splendid choice - and particularly inviting for those looking to get away from it all - is Hotel Amanhavis in the historic heart of Benahavis village. Authentically Andalucian, it is a charming hotel with numerous individual touches. Run by a hard-working German and his American wife (coincidentally something of a spit of Michelle Obama), it has very much maintained its sense of history. The rooms are all individual and have interesting features such as the Philosophers Study which has a secret escape hatch. Best of all, you don't really have to go out to eat as the restaurant has got an extremely good local reputation.

STYLISH: From Tanino (top) to Cocomo (below), the restaurant scene is really buzzing in the area



WHERE TO EAT

Cocktails, Argentinian fare and 'the best village to eat in Andalucia'

WITH a cook who has trained under Marco Pierre White and a cocktail shaker who has won the world championships, Cocomo certainly ticks all the right boxes.

Sitting just off the N-340, this beautiful new restaurant has brought a touch of true Marbella glamour to the little known stretch of coastline between San Pedro and Estepona.

With an alluring entrance, huge outdoor terrace and numerous stylish touches, it has been developed with no expense spared by British hotelier Mark Ansell.

Expect a mixture of fabulous cocktails by Simon Joseph, who won the world cocktail championship in 2007 and an enticing, if compact, menu devised by Simon Taylor Lane.

Most of the dishes are original and the wine list offered up a range of French gems, such as the Sancerre Rose and a Crozes Hermitage for just 35 euros.

Nearby, and equally stylish, you will find the fabulous space Tanino. Also run by a pair of tried and tested restarateurs (Trudi, from Holland, and Jose, from Argentina, already have a pair of restaurants in Madrid), it is a beautifully decorated eatery.

Broken up into various sections, you can lounge on sofas, sit on the sundeck

or eat in the colourful restaurant. There is even a shop selling clothes and bespoke jewelry.

The food has an emphasis on quality meats, as you would expect from an Argentine, but there is an interesting fusion of spicy dishes, including curries, as well as various Thai dishes.

The wild salmon with pepper sauce and a dash of wasabi and chilli sauce was a great starter, while the risotto with asparagus and fresh prawns and parmesan was a great main course.

Sophistication

For food of a similar quality you would have to head into the heart of Benahavis, which is often described as Andalucia's 'food capital'.

There is no doubt that the range of restaurants and the general level of quality is, indeed, a good deal higher than much of its rivals.

While many places fight to offer a menu *del dia* at the cheapest possible rate, here in Benahavis, they fight for quality. I was astonished at the quality of food at Los Abanicos, which exudes a quiet sophistication, making it the perfect rendezvous spot for couples and consirators alike.

Then there is La Escalera, which has a



cosy conviviality and is extremely popular for its grilled pork and lamb and regularly changing specials. Finally at La Copelina, Argentinian Omar serves up a great grill, or parilla.

Up in Benavista you would do well to drop into Grumbles, one of the longest-standing restaurants around. Open since the late 1980s, it has changed its name a few times, but is now firmly under the steady guardianship of Pauline Kavenagh.

Serving up a good range of English-style dishes, expect good quality home made food such as chilli con carne, steak and guinness pie and a superb fresh spinach and red pepper lasagne.

Then there is also Los Arcos bar, next to the bowling club, where you will find a range of tasty snacks... and in summer, if that is your bag, a hot dog stand.



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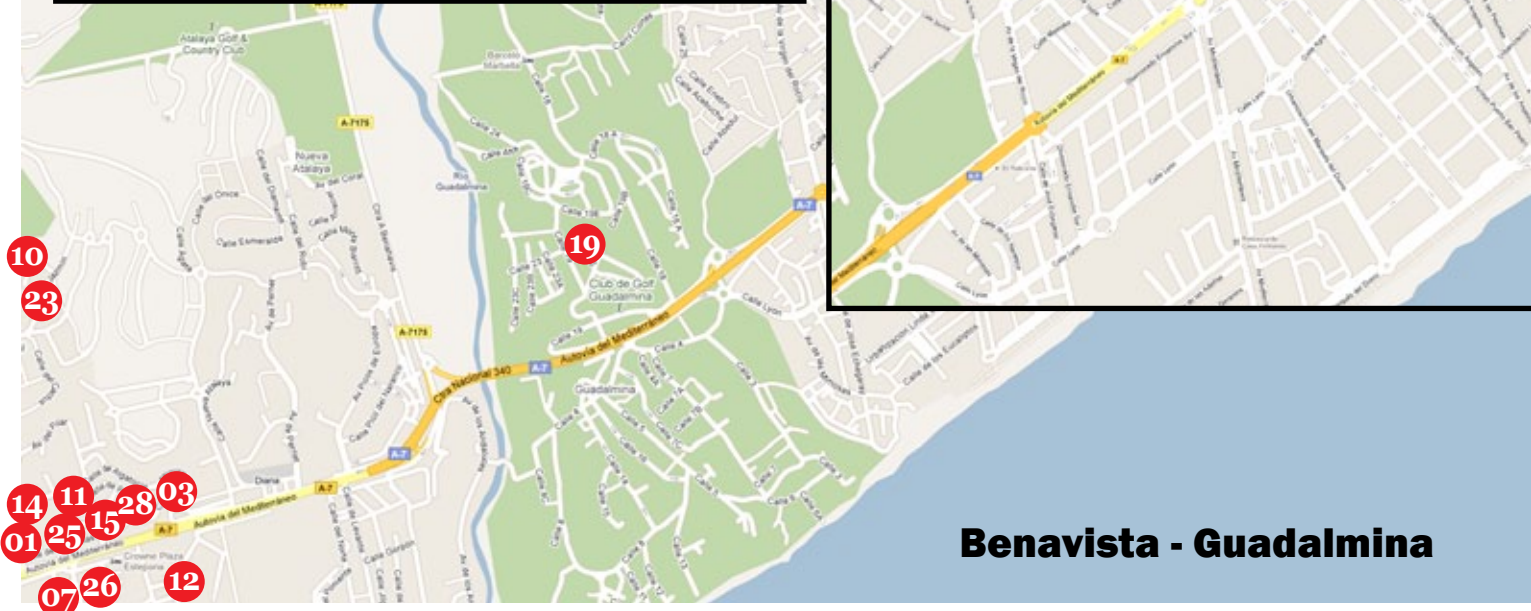
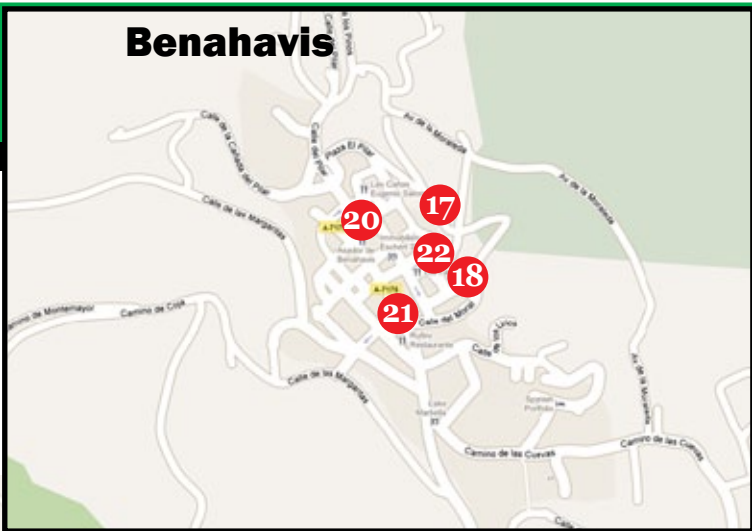
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