

All about Marbella

Bad boys, IT Girls and Wags... but for those in the know, like Kate Moss, Simon Cowell and Prince Harry, there is a lot more to discover in the heart of Andalucia's most maligned resort, writes Jon Clarke

THERE was never any question which of the two Marbellas Michelle Obama was going to visit. The underrated, undervisited old town, or the emblem of overstuffed opulence that is the nearby port of Puerto Banus. Thankfully, as the US president's wife wandered around the atmospheric casco historico, she had a chance to appreciate the very best of the Costa del Sol.

For the shady cobbled streets, with their charming old buildings bedecked in bougainvillea and hibiscus, are the epitome of Andalucian charm. Beautifully preserved, the narrow lanes are full of character and brimming with some of the region's most stylish boutiques, hotels and restaurants.

Turn to Page 2

A tale of two cities



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Journey through time

From page 1

There is a distinct emphasis on quality and the hard-working local restaurateurs clearly go out of their way to make their terraces attractive. This couldn't, of course, be further from the tarnished image of the town, which was rocked by possibly the world's biggest property scandal in 2006.

Turning Marbella into a global watchword for corruption and greed, disgracefully Operation Malaya saw the rounding up of more than 100 politicians, businessmen and lawyers in the town. Estimated to have involved around two billion euros of illicit money - mostly for illegal property licences - the end result was a town short of politicians (no bad thing, of course) and with around 40 per cent of its houses said to be illegal.

To say that Marbella was suffering from something of an image problem would be an understatement. But, thankfully, the town is getting back on message.



FUN AND GAMES: Puerto Banus is always lively

Property is slowly starting to sell again; new businesses are opening by the week and tourists are starting to trickle back to an old faithful after a few years dipping their toes in alternative waters.

"I think Marbella feels a bit like Centre Parcs to a lot of British holidaymakers," reckons businesswoman Debbie Pea, who has lived in Marbella for three decades.

"After spending a couple of summers in Florida or Turkey - perhaps to get away from the tarnished image of Marbella - they are now coming back.

"They have a love/hate rela-

tionship with the place, but once they finally come back they feel safe and at home." Like numerous other business people in the town, the boss of Originals interior design company feels like she has been through hell over the last four years.

"It was like having the rug pulled out from under our feet," she explains. "What with the recession and the kicking Marbella has been through, it has been incredibly tough.

"We have all had to reinvent ourselves and there has been zero glamour and lots of hard work."

The end result is a more streamlined, better quality range of services in the town. And by the town, she means very much Marbella, not its curious sister Puerto Banus. "People who live here never really go to Puerto Banus. It is all about money and really just for the tourists," says Pea.

Glossy glass shop fronts are a shrine to flamboyance and flashiness

That, however, should not put tourists off visiting the port, which the locals sometimes call 'Port of Abuse' thanks to its reputation as a place to get up to no good.

Built in the 1970s by legendary property mogul Jose Banús, it certainly does its best to lure people from the straight and narrow, with row after row of restaurants, bars and clubs, many of the strip-

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EVOCATIVE: Iglesia de la Encarnacion (left) and an ornate tower (right)

and head left up the hill. Within minutes you will find yourself in another world. The historic part of Marbella is a warren of charming alleys, partly surrounded by the ruins of an old Arab wall, and with remnants of its old alcazar fortress.

At the heart of this pleasant web is the pretty Plaza de los Naranjos (Orange Square), the focal point of the town, dating back to 1485. Here you will find the 16th century town hall, scene of all the political shenanigans, a 17th century lawyer's home, and a charming fountain which was installed by Marbella's first Christian mayor in 1504.

Marbella still manages to pull in the stars and the bad boys

Around the corner, look out, in particular, for the church Iglesia de la Encarnacion, a stunning 16th century affair, which was later remodelled in a Baroque style.

There are even museums here, with the Museo del Grabado Espanol Contemporaneo, which has works by some of Spain's best artists, including Picasso, Dali and Miro.

Head uphill from Orange Square and you will find the amazing new Hotel Claude, a stylish place, where fashion designer Adolfo Dominguez and flamenco star Joaquin Cortes have recently stayed. Cortes, who recently appeared at a couple of municipal functions, managed to slip away late at night to the fabulous old flamenco haunt of Ana Maria, sitting on one of the town's most evocative squares.

It is here, well after the sun has gone down that practically every Spanish flamenco star - including Cameron de la Isla (who is photographed on the wall with owner Ana Maria) - has done a turn. But Marbella has always been the haunt for celebrities, with the Swinging Sixties seeing the likes of jet-set figures such as Jackie Onassis, Frank Sinatra, Cary Grant,

Ava Gardner, Audrey Hepburn and Brigitte Bardot. Later, Rolling Stones stars Brian Jones and Mick Jagger sunned themselves on its beach, while James Hunt wooed the ladies. Meanwhile, Sean Connery played golf and eventually bought a villa here. Its purchase is now, perhaps predictably, under investigation for fraud.

Marbella still manages to pull in the stars, with Cheryl Cole, Simon Cowell and Jemima Goldsmith all recently relaxing here while Kate Moss and Prince Harry love the party scene.

The bad boys are also very much in tow, with Mark Thatcher, Adnan Khasshoggi and James Hewitt all regulars on the party scene. Former cavalry officer Hewitt - who famously had an affair with Lady Diana - now has his own restaurant and bar here, the Polo Lounge.

There are plenty of other rumours flying around about Hugh Grant and Bjorn from Abba looking to buy in the area...and after Michelle Obama suddenly landed in the town for her summer holidays, anything could happen. But hey, that's Marbella.



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cians, many centuries before the Romans. The tragedy is that the vast majority of tourists who visit Marbella every year fail to find its very best part. Take note: you head up the Golden Mile, so-called due to its expensive properties, where princes, presidents and pop stars have stayed over the last 50 years. Keeping the mountains of the Serania de Ronda and the evocative peak of La Concha to your left, you will finally come onto Avenida Ricardo Soriano. Once here, look out for the shady tree-lined Plaza de la Alameda to your right and a line up of horse and carriages for the tourists. Park your car in the underground car park

MARBELLA FACTFILE

- Population - 130,000 (20 per cent are expats)
- Size - 114.3km²
- Length of coastline - 26km
- Origins - remains have been found from Phoenician, Carthaginian and Roman settlements
- Name - derives from Moorish settlement, 'Marbil-la'
- Tourist Information Office - Plaza Los Naranjos 952 823550

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Marbella special

Putting on the Ritz



AS you walk along the port at Puerto Banus, you see billboards displaying pictures of the Villa Padierna Spa, now famous as the holiday spot of the Obamas.

And, after spending a day here, it isn't difficult to see why America's First Family would choose to holiday in Marbella. Their cavalcade of cars would not look out of place among the hundreds of luxury yachts, Bentleys and Ferraris you see as you stroll around the harbour. I, on the other hand, do. Love it or hate it, Puerto Banus is Europe's number one haven of ostentatious wealth. The ritziest of Spain's marinas, it literally screams 'money' from every orifice. It's not just the visitors



PORT GUARD: The rhino means business

decked top to toe in designer label smutter or the shiny limited-edition sports cars. A modest 'weekender' yacht worth a mere 800,000 euros docked anywhere else would be impressive, but here it is completely overshadowed by a series of looming luxury liners,

owned by the likes of Roman Abramovich and the Saudi Royal Family, who are based here this summer. The smells of sea air, leather and mojitos each add to the overall haze of glamour. And nothing goes unnoticed by the hordes of tourists, who are distinguishable by the fact that they are all armed with a camera, myself included.

Passing a stereotypical yellow Lamborghini, whose owner is no doubt sunbathing atop a yacht somewhere in the port, the security presence here is very obvious. It's not surprising given the many millions of euros worth of cars and boats left

in their care, not to mention the designer shops lining the promenade. From Cartier to Roberto Cavalli and Dolce and Gabbana to Jimmy Choo, the portside is reserved for only the most exclusive of shops, interspersed with bustling restaurants and bars including the world famous Sinatra Bar.

It is not uncommon to find yourself sitting next to a high-class hooker

Everything is a sea of white, from the glistening yachts docked against a backdrop of traditionally-spanish white buildings. Pure, you might say. But, as always, where there is money there is sleaze, and you don't have to go far from the harbour to see that.

In the back alley just behind the main drag, you will find various sex shops and lap-dancing clubs. And even in some of the bars lining the port it is not uncommon to find yourself sitting next to a high-class hooker. Back portside however, there is an air of relaxation about the place, despite the obvious wealth, and it seems surprisingly civilised for a peak season afternoon in August. Speaking to locals, you are

told the best time to take a walk along the harbour is in the morning, when the sea is a mill pond and the port itself is tranquil and calm. But if, like me, you prefer to people-watch, the time to visit is definitely late afternoon or early evening, when the place is bustling with all types of people. The sound of many different accents and languages being spoken highlights the very international feel of this world famous port, which is also evident from the yachts' flags proudly waving their country of origin.

"Whereas two years ago most of our buyers were Spanish and English, these days they make up about ten per cent," says Cristofer Westermark, from Ventura Yachts.

For those with a few spare thousand to spend you might charter a yacht for a day from him, or perhaps from around the corner at Sunseeker, which is doing a deal for a 53-foot Portofino at just 3,500 euros for a group of up to eight friends. It is the perfect opportunity to really show off and, according to boss Dominic Byrne, they'll even come and pick you up in a limo as part of the price. "It will be a day you won't forget," he promises. I, unfortunately, was leaving the port on shanks pony, back to my scruffy, dust



BLING: Typical shopper covered Passat, parked ten minutes away to save a big parking bill. As I left I bumped into a lottery vendor pounding the streets in search of punters and couldn't help but wonder, who here would possibly need to buy a ticket? Or, indeed, be caught doing so? And then I thought, well, with the exception of the yacht owners, more or less everyone.



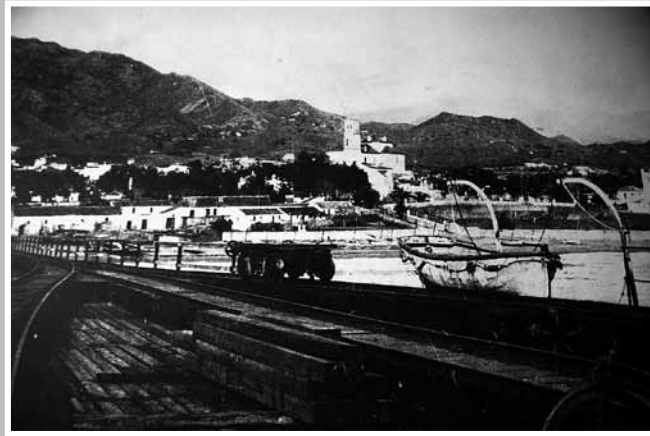
ONLY VIRGIN IN PUERTO BANUS: The figurine of Mary and (left) the Port



LUXURY: Line of Ferraris and other top cars

⁶ *Marbella special*

My, what changes



For centuries Marbella has been a delightful seaside town, first inhabited by the Phoenicians and Romans, and later by Europe's wealthiest, most privileged few. It is only in the last few decades though that it really grew. Back in the 1930s and 1940s, as these pictures show it was still a sleepy, undeveloped paradise



CHARM: From a fountain in the heart of the casco historico, to snapshots of the town's churches and old alcazar fortress, Marbella was always the most beautiful seaside town. It is incredible to see how little developed it was just 60 years ago



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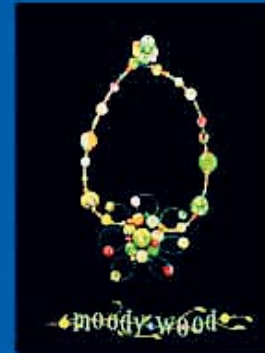


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A vibrant necklace composed of numerous small, round beads. The beads feature a variety of patterns, including polka dots, stripes, and floral designs, in a wide range of colors like red, yellow, blue, and white. The necklace is displayed against a solid blue background.

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⁸ *Marbella* special

THEY say it is essential to plan for a good shopping trip... but this was pushing it to the limit. Helicopters whirring overhead, 14 cars and 70 bodyguards and policemen in tow... welcome to a shimmy round the shops for Michelle Obama. Despite all the fuss, the wife of US President Barack Obama looked incredibly relaxed as she went shopping around the old town of Marbella with a couple of friends and daughter Sasha, 9.

I literally bumped into her as she wondered past El Balcon de la Virgen restaurant and asked her if she was enjoying her holiday. She smiled and said 'Yes thanks, I'm having a great time'.

I then asked if it was her first time in the town, to which she replied laughing: "It's actually my first time in Spain." After arriving in a specially imported Washington-registered jeep, she wandered into a number of

shops and made a couple of key purchases. In particular she bought two racy white dresses from a boutique for 42 euros (£38) each. A shopkeeper at Blanc du Nil said: "She was really taken by the thin cotton numbers." In total, she spent an hour wandering through the evocative heart of Marbella, buying a few other items, including 80 euros of beads from trendy French-run shop Babachic. Its owner Maxime Bougerol said: "She was in the shop for 20 minutes and was incredibly friendly."

Later she had a two-and-a-half hour supper at Buenaventura Plaza before heading home.



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A front-facing view of a silver Chevrolet Colorado pickup truck. The truck features a prominent chrome grille with the Chevrolet bowtie emblem in the center. The headlights are on, and the bumper is also chrome. The license plate is white with blue text, reading '800 002'. The truck is parked on a paved surface, and a building is visible in the background.

9 Oh, and buy the 'perfect little white dress'... or two

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Snapshots in the old town



CHARMING: Visitors to the old town, take a spot of lunch, a sangria or two, or simply watch the world go by



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Motor madness



**Giles Brown on the joys
of motoring in Marbella
in summertime**

AUGUST is a mad month for motoring in Marbella. If you thought that everyday driving up and down the coast was bad enough, wait until the hordes of tourists in their rent-a-cars are joined by Madrileño motorists.

And just to add a little extra spice into the motoring mixture, August is also the month when the annual pilgrimage of Moroccans heading for the ferry at Algeciras reaches its high point. You won't have seen anything like it since the Gumball Rally came to Hotel Puente Romano a couple of years ago.

Mind you, the coast has always been a magnet for a particular type of motoring maniac. The old N-340 was always described as the most dangerous road in Europe and a trip from Málaga airport soon proved why.

This was in the days before the sweeping new autovia that now whisks you from the airport to be in the Marbella Club in time for lunch. Then, picking up friends from the airport used to be a whole day affair, undertaken with as much planning and trepidation as a nude expedition up the north face of the Eiger (or Jordan).

The trip would take you through the centre of Marbella, around

the frankly terrifying Fuengirola bends by the lighthouse and finally through the equally terrifying (from the sartorial point of view) Benalmadena and Torremolinos. All of this without a comforting concrete central reservation to be seen.

My favourite section had to be the descending blind S bends between Los Boliches and Benalmadena.

Not only that, but tunnels were few and far between, so if you wanted to turn left, you sat in the "fast lane" praying for a gap in the traffic with one eye on the rear view mirror, hoping that somebody wasn't going to clout you up the backside and knock you into the oncoming cars. The Marbella Club was forever picking up the bits of mangled Maserati, battered BMW and frankly Fxxxx Ferrari as the jet set waited to turn into the hotel. No wonder James Hunt felt at home here. Popping down from his Guadalmina house for a pint of milk must have been much the same as racing in a Grand Prix.

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Elizabeth Gould
*on where to
spend your
money in
Marbella*

Covent Garden and more

MARBELLA is the Costa del Sol's Covent Garden and Bond Street rolled into one.

While Puerto Banus is the place to go for the big fashion labels (Gucci, D&G, etc), the real surprise is in the historic heart, where America's First Lady Michelle Obama recently spent an hour touring its range of quirky shops and upmarket boutiques.

In particularly she loved Babachic, a French-

owned bead and ethnic jewellery shop that imports colourful hand-made wooden beads from a remote part of India. "She spent 20 minutes here and 80 euros," says owner Maxime.

Sadly she missed the nearby olive oil shop D'Oлива (see below), which sells the best olive oils from around Spain - as well as numerous products, such as cosmetics made out of the oil.

For those who love cooking, Cuisine Paradiso is a great new cook shop run by Elvira and Jorge Vazquez. It stocks everything you need for the kitchen and also some new and innovative items. They also have an online shop. Nearby is the appropriately named 'Toy Shop', well three to be exact, all clustered together off Plaza de los Naranjos. They provide an Aladdin's cave of charming old toys and musical boxes, which children will be enchanted by.

Also well worth looking out for is fashion shop Nature, where owner Maria makes wonderful hand-made clothes, prints and decorative arts. As well as a lovely line in dresses, you will find a range of cool t-shirts

HANDMADE: Nature offers stunning clothes

for your kids.

Over the road look out for Casa del Te, which is a good place to enjoy exotic teas, hand-made shakes, juices and yoghurt drinks. You can, of course, buy a huge range of teas, as well as ethnic clothing and jewellery.

Look out, in particular, for the tiny street Calle Tetuan, where there is a good mix of shops, including Box, where you will find a superb range of presents and other quality items, from just two euros!

Over the road you will find El Costurero, which is one of the only shops selling needlework and *petit point* (embroidery) on the Costa del Sol. Vintage is big in the fashion world at the moment, with Kate Moss, Sarah Jessica Parker and Katy Perry all being huge fans. Deja Vu vintage clothing shop on Calle Pedraza is a beautiful shop with a great choice of high-end designer and vintage stock on offer including Chanel, Dior and Fendi.



Oh for olives

Shop Focus: D'Oлива, Marbella old town

IT took nearly two years to set it up. But the end result is well worth the wait. With over 60 varieties of olive oil, stylish shop D'Oлива in the heart of the old town of Marbella, is starting a brand that should have been set up decades ago. At first glance it looks like a top end wine shop, but you quickly realise that the stylish bottles are full of olive oil, from all over Spain. From the best in the world Portico de la Villa to the most expensive El Mil del Poalig, which costs 130 euros a bottle, there is bound to be something to tempt your pocket. And if, after trying a range of the best olive oils in town, you still aren't sold, you could always go for one of the fabulous range of cosmetics, all produced from olive oil. It is no surprise that David Gallardo and Marco Palazon's brand has just launched in Paris and is about to open shops in Malaga and Madrid. "People were very sceptical at first," explains Marco. "It just took two years to get the image and style right, but now people love us."



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CHIC: Team at Fabio
Espana boutique

Outside the Casco Historico you must make it up to the fabulous Fabio Espana in Centro Plaza by the bullring, which has a huge range of clothes for all ages and stocks everything from Moda in Pelle to Issue from New York. "We call it our department store," explains one of the owners Anita, who is the epitome of fashion, sporting a ten gallon hat and an ice cold bucks fizz at 5pm on a Friday afternoon.

It is conveniently located next to the coast's best known hairdresser Reflections, which has been running for over a decade, as well as VIP Pet Boutique, where you will get everything you need for your pet. Finally, if looking for somewhere to escape the heat of summer, why not tootle up to La Canada, the huge shopping centre on the ring road, where you will find all the best of Spain's fashion shops, such as Marks & Spencer, Zara, Mango and Casa. Even better, take the advert out of this special pullout and you can get ten euros off a purchase at Marks.

Design matters

FEW places have such a good range of quality design and furniture shops. With some of the wealthiest people in the world owning homes in the town, demand is high for quality products. The problem is finding them all.

One place that you will have no problem finding is interior design shop Originals, which sits on the Golden Mile. Set up over two decades ago by friends Deborah Pea and Deleen Burton, the business has undertaken the redesign of many a celebrity home. The shop has a great range of wallpapers, paints, lampshades, cushions and furniture, and the pair have even been flown abroad to work their magic.

It caters for the classic and the modern, the singular and the exclusive and works closely with all its clients to get the balance right. One of their particular address book secrets is a paint finisher called Jason, who works out of a nameless unit in a back street half way up the San Pedro to Ronda road. He is rarely there, hasn't got a business card or even a website, so you will only be able to find him through Debbie for now.

Other places worth checking out are Estuco in Centro Plaza, where you will find the Costa del Sol's only stockist of Farrow and Ball paints. The best spots are always hidden away and the Poligono Ind San Pedro Alcantara that sits near Nuevo Andalucia is no exception.

It is here that you will find a range of cool warehouses, such as Loft Design, where South African Tom Ungar stocks one of the best ranges of stylish, quality furniture and



*Marbella is the Costa
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accessories in Andalucia.

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Heading home in the 35 degree heat of a sweltering summer day, I couldn't help but wish I could have had such a unit in my car, that could have turned on my irrigation system, turned on the A/C at home and put the champagne on ice for my arrival.

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IT was with great irony that the *Olive Press* reported that Prince Alfonso de Hohenlohe's mountain estate was facing the indignity of a ring road being carved through it.

For the German aristocrat is the man often credited with lighting the touchpaper that led to the building boom on the Costa del Sol back in the 1950s.

Hohenlohe – a classic playboy with a love for the ladies – had been the svengali who brought in the necessary capital, both in human and financial terms, to turn the small coastal town of Marbella into a highfalutin millionaires playground to rival the likes of Cannes and Deauville.

It was in 1947 that the bright-eyed and charismatic Alfonso had been sent to the coast by his eminent father Prince Maximilian von Hohenlohe to purchase some land.

The 23-year-old son of six children first met up with his eccentric uncle Ricardo Soriano, who would often eulogise about the merits of the coast.

A self-proclaimed womaniser, Soriano was a huge fan of water sports, especially

Former playboy Prince Alfonso de Hohenlohe's mountain retreat is now being bulldozed – a far cry from the glitzy, star-studded lifestyle he enjoyed with the jet set during Marbella's zenith, writes Andrew Pearce

powerboat racing, and lived an enviable bohemian life.

While taking Alfonso on a jaunt along the coast in a classic charcoal-powered Rolls-Royce they, perchance, decided to stop in the then small fishing village of Marbella.

The bilingual Alfonso – who was a keen painter - was immediately taken by what he saw.

Sheltered by the dramatic Sierra Blanca, with crystal-

The crumbling empire of Marbella's 'King of Clubs'

clear waters just a stone's throw away. He ordered his father to sell off his wine cellars in Malaga and begin developing what was to become the first of many new hotels in Marbella.

Marbella took pride in being cut off from the hectic and stressful modern world

The well-connected prince then embarked on an impromptu campaign to convince all his high-flying friends that Marbella, not San Sebastian or Cannes, was the only place to be.

Despite the doubts, Alfonso persisted with his dream and it was later realised when he opened the now cult Marbella Club hotel in 1954.

He busily promoted his luxury accommodation, and, sure enough, the world's rich, famous and powerful soon began to pour in.

First up, the grand families of central Europe, including the Bismarcks, Rothschilds and Metternichs, began visiting the exclusive hotel.

Soon a string of well-known celebrities were following suit, with actresses including Ava Gardner and Sophia Loren, photogra-

pher Patrick Lichfield and racing daredevil James Hunt joining the in-crowd.

Even British aristocracy got in on the act, with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor (Edward and Mrs Simpson) enjoying the experience served up by Alfonso.

He even employed a piano player, Don Jaime de Mora y Aragon, who was directly descended from 56 kings and was also the brother of the Queen of Belgium.

"The people I had met in Hollywood, in New York, in Europe, they were the roots, the bridge that brought people to Marbella... who made Marbella," explained Alfonso.

Marbella took pride in being cut off from the hectic, stressful and often scary modern world. Indeed, news of the Cuban Missile Crisis did not reach the resort until it was over.

"Everybody had the most gorgeous parties when the rest of the world was trembling that World War III was starting," explains Rudi Schonburg, a former manager of Marbella Club.

And coining the nickname the 'King of Clubs', Alfonso's reputation quickly preceded him and he soon opened up a disco which got the club swinging every Tuesday and Friday night.

Despite revelling in its exclusive status, the Marbella Club was anything but formal.

"At dinner everybody arrived with a dinner jacket, but I said 'Stop! This is not the Marbella



DOWNFALL: After building the regal Marbella Club Hotel, Hohenlohe moved to Ronda and started a vineyard that recently had a ring road carved through it

way! You only wear a dinner jacket on New Year's Eve," recalled Alfonso.

As the inspired prince's creation boomed, so did Marbella and its surrounding hillsides. New restaurants, bars and sports clubs began sprouting up as the Costa del Sol quickly entered its so-called golden era.

Developers included Jose Banus, who built Puerto Banus marina and King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, who built a white palace (still there today) that is mod-

elled on both the White House and a mosque.

The likes of multi-millionaire arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi (who formerly owned La Zagaleta, Spain's most expensive real estate enclave in the hills en route to Ronda) were able to dock their luxury yachts in the port.

But as the celebrities flocked to the land of plenty, the cement mixers and Spain's national bird – cranes – arrived in force. Alonso assumed the role of head of the Costa del Sol Pro-

She spends the week at her office in Puerto Banus, and at the weekend Moneycorp's Cookie Bhoday can't wait to come back

ways very relaxed. Typically we'll have a great Argentinian steak at Patagonia or some excellent sushi at Osaka, then afterwards head up to Plaza de los Naranjos for a night cap or a boogie, perhaps at Buddha Bar. Sunday is chill out day, we normally get the Sunday papers and spend the day at Pedro's beach (the next beach bar along from Buddha Beach) where we catch up with friends, eat the best Gambas Pil Pil on the coast, have a few blanco Sangrias and just relax and enjoy the beautiful weather before Monday morning comes around again.



DEBONAIR: Alfonso with lady friend, while (top) drinking cocktails with Ava Gardner

moters' Co-operative. He lobbied vigorously for improvements in the local roads, airports and water supply.

His vision for the coast soon spurred the rapid growth of neighbouring Torremolinos as its grey concrete skyscrapers shot up along the seafront.

Yet thanks to Alfonso's vision, Marbella maintained its classy appearance while today, Torremolinos' buildings are now crumbling away into the seafront.

Alfonso and his friends ensured that Marbella was tastefully developed with low Andalusian white-washed houses and palm-filled gardens.

"Thanks to my initiative, Marbella's Golden Mile alone now provides 60,000 jobs," Alfonso once said.

And the arrival of the 1960s witnessed Alfonso and Marbella at the peak of their fame.

Hollywood stars, Arab sheikhs and former European royalty all accompanied Alfonso at his prestigious Marbella hang-out.

Celebrities Ava Gardner and Kim Novak were among the many high-profile girlfriends he dated.

Even Scottish acting legend Sir Sean Connery became a frequent visitor of Marbella's glitzy, star-studded clubs and bars.

While his friends called him the 'King of Clubs' or the 'Little Prince', locals came to know him affectionately as Olé-Olé, because of his difficult to pronounce surname. Yet, as the Costa del Sol dream began to spiral into uncontrollable development, Alfonso became aware of the monster he had helped stir.

Concrete towers were sprouting up as far as the eye could see, from Malaga all the way down to Estepona, almost 100 kilometres away.

Worse still, wanted British criminals began to take advantage of a lack of an extradition treaty between England and Spain.

This influx of crooks and subsequent crime left the idealistic Alfonso disillusioned with rich grandeur he once envisaged for Marbella.

After growing weary of the mass tourism that was lowering the tone of his town, he sold up all his Marbella business interests in 1978 in search of a new vision.

Entering his 60s, the idealistic prince settled in his last home with his third wife Marilys Haynes, a Gibraltarian divorcee.

He plumped for a mountain retreat, in the hills close to Ronda, with a trout lake, partridge wood and an impressive library.

And the ever-inventive Alfonso decided on another successful business pursuit – producing the soon-to-be award-winning wine Principe Alfonso.

And it was nestled in the heartland of Andalusia, close to the sleepy village of Arriate, where Alfonso – despite all the celebrities, parties and glamorous girlfriends – finally found true happiness before passing away, leaving his estate to his children, in 2003.

"I have lived in castles, in Venetian palaces and the world's finest hotels. I have watched the sun rise over the beaches of five continents and I have looked into the eyes of the most beautiful women of the universe," he famously remarked.

"Everywhere I sought my dreamed-of city and at last I have found it in Ronda."

So it certainly an incredible irony that little Arriate's much needed ring-road is concretising over the adored, final home of Marbella's development behemoth.

MARBELLA is a unique town, not just because of its climate, but also due to the peculiar planning situation it has lived through in the last 20 years.

It all began when a curious man Jesús Gil y Gil was proclaimed mayor in 1991 on a wave of frustration at the inactivity of the then Socialist government.

So angry were the local population with the policies of Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez that they were prepared to overlook the new candidate's obvious eccentricities and outbursts of rudeness.

Property developer Gil – who owned football club Atletico Madrid – promised to bring back greatness and quickly turned Marbella's urban planning processes into his own private fiefdom.

The end result was an incredible 18,000 illegal homes built in the town in little over a decade, while the Junta regional authorities and Madrid government turned a blind eye.

The changes took place through a series of shady planning deals with developers

It all started as soon as Gil came to power, when he launched an in-depth review of the 1986 town plan, or PGOU.

Not content with its strict zoning rules, he tinkered with it to allow a considerable increase in land available for building. The changes took place through a series of shady planning deals with developers, who paid the town hall 'compensation' in return for being allowed to build.

The problem was that much of the new land was already designated as parkland, beach or for other public amenities. Or there were strict restrictions on building density or height.

And, on top of this, a large chunk of the so-called compensation – or licence fees – went straight into the pockets of the politicians.

Some say up to two billion euros was taken by Gil and his cohort of crooks, who include Julian Munoz, Marisol Yague and the so-called svengali of planning Juan Antonio Roca. Eventually, this hotchpotch of individual agreements crystallized in a 'Review Document' initially approved by the Town Council in 1997, and subsequently followed by numerous amendments up until 2003.

The big problem for Gil and the town hall however, was that none of these agreements were ratified by the Junta or the courts. As far as they were concerned the only legal framework in place was

Plan to escape chaos

Lawyer Adolfo Martos Gross on how Marbella is extricating itself from Europe's worst planning nightmare,

the old 1986 PGOU.

This did not, however, stop the town hall, which continued to grant building permits and sign zoning agreements. And developers raised no objections, in view of the enormous capital gains they were making on their investments in Marbella.

It should have then been up to the Junta to step in and challenge the infractions. But neither the courts nor the Junta did anything to stop the town hall and thus an incredible 18000 illegal homes were built.

It is evident that, if the four-

star Senator Hotel could be built in the heart of Marbella with an illegal permit, it was because the regional authorities failed spectacularly.

Fortunately, the authorities finally stepped in and we got a new mayoress, who has returned some pride to the town. A new PGOU (it was ratified in May), which has imposed a semblance of order in the only way feasible: to legalise the majority of illegal homes.

Some illegal buildings erected on areas of particularly sensitive land are still going to have to go, but thankfully not too many.

So far 16,500 homes are eligible to become legal according to the PGOU, but they still have to go through a purgatory process, by which the developers are being ordered to pay fines in return for making their properties legal.

While the town hall is insisting the fines should be borne by developers, let no-one be lulled into complacency: if the developers turn out to be insolvent it will be up to the owners to pay.

We shall have to wait and see whether the town hall is prepared to go all the way and demand payment from owners, who genuinely bought in good faith.

But what is clear is that if they do pay the bill, they will always have the option of suing the developer if they can find him.

And some of them may even be able to sue the town hall, because, after all, it was the Marbella authorities that got us all into this mess in the first place.

Contact Adolfo at amg@gam-abogados.com

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Find true charm in the old town



COMFORT: At Hotel Morada and (top) Hotel Claude

While Marbella has thousands of hotels, the best place to stay is in the Casco Historico

By Dale Nottingham

THE true heart and soul of Marbella is to be found in the charming old cobblestone alleys that criss-cross the city's picturesque Old Town or Casco Historico.

Here, you will uncover a treasure trove of boutiques, bars, cafes and restaurants. And after a gruelling day's shopping and sightseeing, the Old Town is also the perfect place to spend the night. Arguably the most prestigious accommodation in the Old Town – or anywhere in Marbella, for that matter – comes courtesy of the exquisite Hotel Claude.

This luxury hotel sited in a meticulously restored and discreetly sumptuous 17th century mansion townhouse in the heart of the Old Town, is the epitome of style.

Here, German/Spanish sister and brother team Desiree and Franz have crafted a haven of refined elegance and understated luxury, after stints working as traders in the City of London... yes, both of them!

Franz still goes backwards and forwards from London, leaving Desiree to run the show on a daily basis, while also launching an acting career.

Somewhat less opulent but equally enchanting is the delightfully named La Morada Mas Hermosa, senora Paloma's little gem of a boutique hotel located in the calle Montebros. The seven themed rooms reveal an impressive attention to detail and Paloma's renowned breakfast is not to be missed. Check out the reviews on Tripadvisor to see just how popular this place has become.

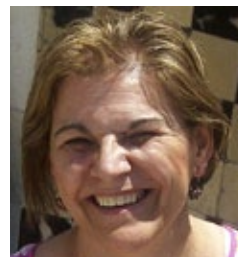


CHARMED, I'M SURE: Desiree welcomes guests at Hotel Claude

'OBAMA IS GREAT NEWS'

Vox Pop: What the locals have to say about Marbella

Frederica Puerto
owner of La Empresa
Pozo Puerto in the
Centro Plaza, Nueva
Andalucía for 12
years.



“The Obamas coming to Marbella is a special time for everyone who comes from here and will mean lots of money for people, especially at the Villa Padierna, where they have taken up most of the hotel! I am from Estepona but have been here for 12 years with my shop and it's a friendly place with good mediterranean food.”

Teresa Cavada, owner of Pocosita
childrenswear in the Centro Plaza,
Nueva Andalucia for 3 years.



“Marbella has everything from beaches to countryside, a good climate and good fashion and it is also a great place for golfers with many golf clubs around. It also has the best cinemas in the world which are in Puerto Banus, many theatres, and is very cosmopolitan with a great variety of people.”

David Fisher, managing director of Yanx bar
and cafe in the Centro Plaza, Nueva Andalucia
for nine years.



“Marbella is receiving some much better publicity now and good things are happening here. The Obamas coming on holiday will mean that we will suddenly get Americans who have never heard of Marbella before talking about the place. We have an American car club which visits here once a month and they were all talking about how it will put Marbella on the map. It's just a great place to be at the moment and there's a really happy feel compared to all the doom and gloom in other countries.”

Mahuel Klappenbach, Locksmith from the
Centro Plaza, Nueva Andalucia for 8 years.

“One thing people don't notice about Marbella is that the mountains that are the backdrop are beautiful and great for hiking, but people just tend to head to the beach and don't notice that. There are lots of celebrities here but I'm more interested in the tourists and normal people. My favourite place to go is Puente Romano where I am a juggler on the Suite del Mar. It's a lot of fun down there and better than Puerto Banus.”

Paul Forth, owner of VIP
Pets in Centro Plaza, Nueva
Andalucia.



“The best thing about Marbella is obviously the sun which, coming from England you don't see much of. It's open to everyone here, whether you want to go for a quiet meal or to a lively club. The nightlife is great and there is plenty of beaches, so it's a fun place to live.”

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18 Marbella special

Where to eat

AT the Olive Press, we love to celebrate 'green' excellence. We are therefore especially pleased to recommend the extremely popular Terra Sana, an environmentally principled restaurant – with adjoining shop – on the Golden Mile, where you will find fabulous food and very friendly staff. There are other branches at La Canada shopping centre, next to the H10 hotel in Nueva Andalucia and in Puerto Banus.

This summer it celebrates its tenth anniversary and it is a great place to come for healthy, but by no means boring food. Think wraps, crepes and a huge range of tasty salads and juices. If burgers, fajitas and quesadillas are your thing, then head up the road to Cafe Yanx in Nueva Andalucia. Great 'morning-after' breakfasts and excellent Tex-Mex dishes, combined with a bustling atmosphere, make this a fun place to visit. Around the corner you will find an interesting, recently-opened place, Charme café, that has some of the finest views around and a friendly owner Mahdi. Back in the Old Town, there are plenty of excellent places to eat. Forget the stuffy Michelin-starred joint, which is on the wane, and head to the friendly and always busy La Cuisine in the heart of the old town. Here you will have the perfect terrace to people-watch, as well as a great selection of tapas. One to certainly look out for is the atmospheric Linukas, which sits in a charming side street Calle Tetuan. A delightful family-run restaurant, owners Linas and wife Martina, who herald from Lithuania and Slovakia, serve up tasty, fresh international cuisine at prices that won't have you offering to wash the dishes.



HOSTESS: Martina from Linukas



FRIENDLY: The staff at Terra Sana make it a great place to eat

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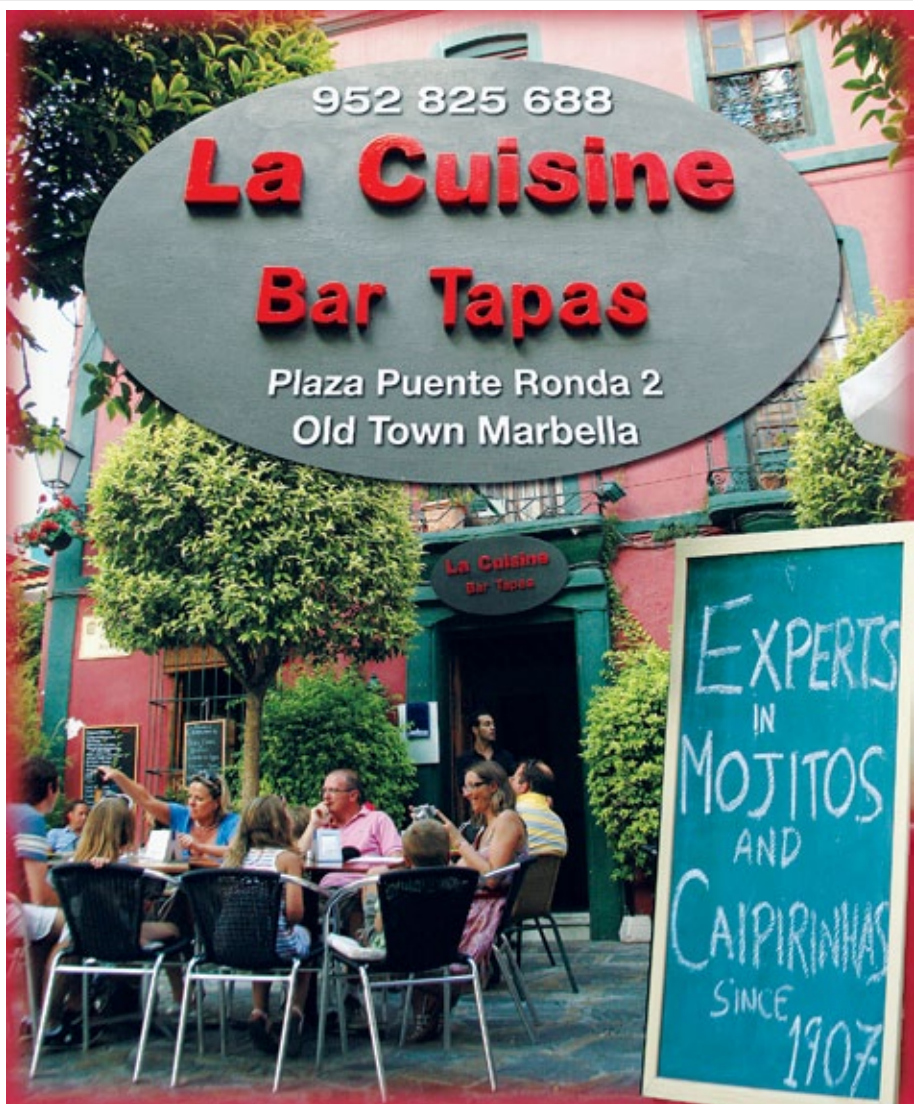
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