

All About Outdoor Activities

April 2011

A 16-page Olive Press insiders guide

The great outdoors

THE playground of Europe has finally come alive. As millions descend on Andalucia for their Spring breaks - Prime Minister David Cameron and all - the beaches and restaurant terraces are filling up again. But, while the majority of tourists baste themselves on the beach or watch the Easter parades, many of you will be looking for that certain something more.

Whether after an activity for the kids, or just a general outing, then Andalucia is full of excellent options.

From taking a mountain hike, to hiring a sailing dinghy, or from meeting Europe's only wild monkeys in Gibraltar to white water rafting inland, the region has it all.

From the unspoilt windswept coastline of the Costa de la Luz - where surfing and windsurfing spots are among the best in the world - to the beautiful mountains above the Costa del Sol, there is so much to do.

Why not take a trip to the Axarquía or the Serranía de Ronda for wine tasting? Or visit the charming Lake District, near Ardales, for a spot of canoeing or a daredevil walk along Europe's most death-defying walkway the Caminito del Rey?

Then, of course, there is always cycling, canyoning and ballooning, all fantastic activities to get your teeth into. And, if you are a real fan of excitement, you might want to head inland to Algodonales, where you will find one of Spain's premier spots for the exciting sport of paragliding.

Whatever you want, make sure to read the Olive Press's, comprehensive 16-page guide to outdoor activities, kicked off (right) with one of the most exciting action-packed adventures possible any-



Two peaks and a paddle

CANOEING: Writer Andrew Pearce up a creek WITH a paddle!

...or should that be Two Peaks and a Poo? asks Andrew Pearce about fabulous walking and canoeing challenge for outward bound lovers in Andalucia

AFTER scrambling heroically to the top of one of Malaga's highest peaks, there was only one thought that crossed my mind - where is the loo?

Despite providing stunning panoramic views, a fleeting opportunity to forget the stresses of life and the chance to negotiate some tough, almost virgin, mountain terrain, the Two Peaks and a Paddle trail unfortunately does not provide toilets.

But that's where nature comes in and dropping ones' trousers to scudding clouds and views of three different provinces certainly has its upside.

It was certainly a mouth-watering challenge being invited to climb two 1000-metre plus mountains and rowing five km across a lake in a day.

Being a keen sportsman and, having al-

ways relished tests of endurance, I confidently jumped at the prospect of a good day's graft in the mountains around El Chorro and the celebrated Lake District of Malaga.

My cockiness was to prove my downfall - my decision for a boozy Friday night out coming back to haunt me, when getting up at the crack of dawn.

The crucial aspect of the trail is timing. The first peak must be reached in time to enjoy the sunrise and the second must be triumphantly conquered to enjoy the same day's sunset.

This requires an early start (we met in Ardales at 5am) which is even less welcome with a bellyful of beer.

However, once the early grogginess had



TIME TO RELAX: A much-needed break at a cave house en route. Intrepid leader Martin (at front)

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been overcome, and we had embarked on the winding trail in the morning's dusk, the previous night's excesses were soon forgotten.

Hiking enthusiast Martin Levien, who was our unofficial guide for the day, ensured that the pace was brisk and our four-strong group soon reached the path's end in just over an hour or so. And then began our near vertical scramble to the top of the first mountain La Huma, which towers over the El Chorro area.

A word of warning to would-be trekkers – I highly recommend wearing trousers, even in hot weather, as the army of thistles will have their evil way with your shins – a lesson I learnt the hard way.

We quickly realised as we ascended the mountain that our grand plan to reach the summit as the sun rose would be largely scuppered by a band of uncharacteristic grey clouds.

Yet, after a challenging scramble, our spirits were anything but dampened by the low-lying cloud that greeted us when we arrived at the top.

It was a surprisingly cold morning at the summit which meant we were thankful for having brought precautionary jumpers, woolly hats and rain jackets.

Martin, the keen organiser, had the inspiration to bring a flask of hot coffee accompanied by a generous amount of chocolate.

This was the first real break for two

The peak to peak trail



IT'S OVER THERE: Martin points out the mountain we had conquered earlier

hours and when the clouds occasionally parted, we had the most breathtaking views over the unspoilt beauty that Andalucia can offer. Not even rain or cloud was going to spoil the moment...and then, as mentioned, nature called.

It had been a two-hour trip to the top, but the day, in terms of the challenges that lay ahead, had only just begun.

The descent back down was easily more challenging than the journey up and, quite inevitably, the hangover decided to strike, just when I needed to be at my sharpest.

I have always struggled with the morning after the night before and, in particular, I discovered it was my balance and awareness that was hardest hit.

While Martin - who is in his late 50s - practically ran down the slope, my technique

consisted of falls, trips and skids, amusing the group and holding up their more assured progress.

In between my regular stumbles I was still left awestruck by the surrounding mountains that towered over us as we traversed the rocky pathways.

The sun would intermittently break out from between the clouds to send rays of divine light onto small parts of the landscape. We stopped at one point to watch a partridge with her chicks and then stumbled across an ancient cave house. As Martin explained, this was a practically forgotten path, which criss-crossed ravine and dale en route to our breakfast stop at restaurant El Mirador beside Lake Guadalhorce.

After a few tough hours of tackling slippery slopes and biting shrubs we eventually arrived at the El Conde de Guadalhorce dam, from where

the practically forbidden – and extremely dangerous – Caminito del Rey begins.

It signalled the first third of the day was almost complete.

We celebrated the completion of the first trek with a hearty and much-needed breakfast of bacon and egg butties.

After a short break to recharge our batteries we carried our canoes, which were conveniently waiting at the cafe, down to the lake side. You might quite easily rent canoes coincidentally, from the cafe (and a few other nearby spots), as it happens. And then the 'paddle' stage began.

With consummate timing the sun came out for good as we rowed lazily across the tranquil lake, which stretches for miles and all the way to Ardales, in fact.

Having suffered a few hairy moments on the earlier hike, the ca-

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noes heralded the arrival of a very welcome relaxed stage to the day's event.

After a good two-hour row we arrived at our landing point, complete with Martin's jeep ready and waiting for us to load up and head onto a late lunch at the simple La Cantina, right beside the Conde de Guadalhorce dam.

After a few beers, I must confess there were rumblings about some of us stopping our day here. But after a bit of geeing up from Martin and his friend Larry – a former builder, who has opted for the sustainable life in the Mijas hills – we agreed to embark on the final challenge.

After a short drive to a parking place in the hills just above Ardales, our weary legs set off to conquer Mt Caparain, which looms some 1,300 metres above sea level.

Setting off at 7pm, the ill-effects of the previous night had finally been flushed out of my system as we undertook the final peak.

With comparative ease we determinedly soldiered up the much gentler, better maintained and marked mountain path that twisted and turned towards the summit.

As dusk descended we reached a plateau that was adjacent to the elusive peak we had been striving to conquer all day.

With an almighty push we fought past the remaining rocks and bramble to arrive at our promised land - just in time to witness the sun pass behind low-lying cloud!

With now customary timing Martin fished out some still cold beers from his rucksack and we toasted the Two Peaks



JUST SHORTS: Not recommended!

and a Paddle Trail... one of Andalucia's very best.

As if by magic, Martin had arranged for a friend, Bernard, to pick us up near the top at 10.30pm, when it was just turning pitch black.

It was perfect timing and we were soon being treated to fabulous hospitality at Bernard and Sue's house in a charming hidden valley near Ardales.

This is no fixed path as such, but the path can be followed in part, in total, or – most sensibly – from one's armchair.

For more general background info email Martin Levien at martin-diana@levien.co.uk



STEPPING OUT: En route for El Conde reservoir

Take to the skies

By James Bryce

ADRENALIN junkies looking for their latest fix are spoilt for choice in Andalucia, with the region carving out a reputation in recent years as a hub for Spain's adventure sports industry. Whether it's scaling vertical rock faces or exploring labyrinthine cave-systems, the province has it all.

But when it comes to experiencing the ultimate buzz, surely nothing comes close to the thrill of paragliding.

The so-called 'extreme sport' is now more popular than ever, with an increasing number of people taking to the skies. Not only does paragliding

Looking for an activity fix? Then few sports rank alongside paragliding...



allow you to feel the exhilarating sensation of flying, it also gives you the best seat in the house to take in the

region's breathtaking vistas as you soar over its famous *pueblo blancos* and beautiful mountains.

Andalucia offers some of the best and most reliable conditions in the world for paragliding and is certainly unrivalled in Europe, allowing people to experience the sport all year round.

The gentle nature of paragliding means that it is suitable for people of all ages and abilities, with various companies offering courses that cater for everyone, from complete beginners to experts.

A lot of people dream of flying and are really rewarded by how easy it is to learn

These include English-run Fly Spain, which has been based in the village of Algodonales, between Ronda and Sevilla, for over a decade.

Boss Rob Mansley, who runs weekly courses from beginners to advanced, said: "A lot of people dream of flying and are really rewarded by how easy it is to learn."

"You get to fly with Griffon Vultures. It's hard to beat that."

www.flyspain.co.uk



You WILL get wet!

Rafting is one of the most exciting day's out in Andalucia, writes Wendy Williams



SPRING is the best time to go rafting, insists Ignacio Arrate, who co-runs Andalucia's only rafting company Saltarios.

"Personally I think the best time of year is now, the water is at a good level, it is not as cold as in the winter, and there are less people than in the summer," he explains.

"But you can go rafting all year round." Certainly for those of you looking for a thrilling and unforgettable holiday adventure then a ride down the rapids must fit the bill.

Between the stunning scenery and the adrenalin rush there is a lot to commend it.

Moreover it is an ideal activity to enjoy with your family or a group of friends. Even if you go alone and get put with another group, after you've been thrown around in an inflatable boat dodging rocks and trying not to fall in, you are sure to be friends by the end. Attracting foreigners and Spaniards alike,

Saltarios has been offering activities for over 14 years with a group of highly experienced guides who between them can speak a host of languages.

The company organises trips in five different areas of Andalucia, at Benameji, near Antequera and in Granada.

Arrate explained: "For those who have more experience and want a more challenging time then we can organise something stronger and much harder."

"If people are more nervous, then we can organise a smoother ride. "We just want to make it fun for everyone."

And if rafting isn't your cup of tea, they also offer a kayaking school, canoeing and canyoning.

"Pretty much anything that can be done in the river," quipped Arrate. The only thing to bear in mind is that you will get wet.

For more information visit: <http://www.raftingsaltarios.com/>



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Hunger bike!

AMORNING'S cycle along the *Via Verde* is not only one of Andalucia's most enjoyable excursions, but – somewhat incredibly – one of the region's best food jaunts. The 38-kilometre hiking and cycling route through soaring mountain scenery between Olvera and Puerto Serrano is one of the true secrets of inland Andalucia. A clever ruse by the Andalusian authorities, the path heads along an unused railway track that was never inaugurated after the railroad company went out of business in the 1930s. While a lesson in economic meltdown, some clever work saw the potential to open it up to the public. Today, it offers a wonderful opportunity to have a relatively flat cycle ride through some of Andalucia's most primitive, unspoiled countryside. Bring your own bikes or rent them at the Estacion de Via Verde hotel in Olvera or further along the track in Coripe, from Andres at Coripe Rural.

It is just 10 euros for a morning's cycle and is certainly good value.



SECRET: Andres from Coripe Rural alongside culinary maestro Juan Ramon

Take a trip along Andalucia's best inland secret the Via Verde, writes Jon Clarke



There are children's bikes, trailers for babies and even a tandem for rent, from Coripe at least. I recommend starting in Coripe, heading uphill towards Olvera, onwards through a series of long tunnels, until we reached the amazing Penon de Zaframagon, said to be the largest Griffon Vulture colony in Spain. While a 24-hour live close-up feed is normally beamed back to a visitor centre below, sadly it is often shut. After about an hour, you will arrive in Olvera, in time for a morning coffee. With the heat of the day building up, turn around and hot-foot it back to Coripe, where Juan Ramon at the excellent restaurant

in Estacion de Coripe will serve your lunch at the very reasonable hour of 1pm. By rights it should be a hot dog and fried-egg sarnie sort of place. But owner Juan Ramon has other ideas. A keen local nature lover, this softly-spoken chap has a passion for food quite unlikely for such an isolated area. Working closely with his mother and friends in the kitchen, he knocks out a series of really, rather accomplished dishes. The avocado salad turns up with some unbelievably fresh prawns, cod roe and caviar, not to mention its strips of smoked salmon and a delicious seafood sauce.

Full after our lavish lunch, we almost took him up on the offer of a siesta upstairs

His fresh tomatoes alinados with shavings of garlic and rosemary compete with the best, while the hot tuna croquettes melt in the mouth. Even better for a starter though is the carpaccio of beef, with the thinnest slices of Manchego cheese, courgettes and mushrooms on top. It was a lesson in finesse.

After our starters, we dived into a fantastic main course of *carillada* (bull's cheek) in a plum sauce, as well as some tremendous skewers of monkfish and prawns. The puddings are nothing to write home about, but there was a nice moist almond tart and more Magnum ice cream flavours than my daughter could count. You can eat either inside the station or on the terrace outside, where on Friday and Saturday nights, Ramon does a barbecue. "I felt it was about time to bring some life to this village," says Ramon, who comes from Moron. "I've always liked food and love the combination of nature and good food. It works well as I am full nearly every weekend of the year." More than full after our lavish lunch, we almost took him up on a siesta in one of his cool bedrooms upstairs. It is advisable to book.

Call Estacion de Coripe on 620013708 and hire bikes with Andres at 655 526 716 or 955 858 675 or at Estacion de Via Verde hotel 956120656.

Take a trip into the heart of the Subbetica on the Via Verde cycle track, writes Tessa Norman



side Zuheros. In Zuheros itself you will find the most charming restaurant Meson Atalaya, which has a great *menu del dia*. At its eastern end you will find the Laguna del Conde, the largest lagoon in the Subbetica with a wealth of wildlife. It is close to the pretty village of Luque, which is spread out below a rocky outcrop topped

by the ruins of a Moorish castle, which is well worth a visit. At the other end of the track lies the large town of Lucena, known for its historical churches and a great place to refuel in one of its many tapas bars and restaurants. Even further east is Puente Genil, which is one of the oldest towns in Cordoba and has plenty of sites worth visiting.

The peak of outdoor Spain

Completely encircled by mountains Ronda is fast becoming a top destination for hiking, cycling and mountain excursions. Rarely a weekend goes past when Ronda does not have some sort of cycle, walking or running event taking place and there are numerous clubs and associations.

Ronda is now one of the main outward bound hubs in Andalucia. Hire a bike and explore, writes Doug Wills

Traditionally, in May, the local army regiment 'La Legion' (or Foreign Legion) puts on its infamous 101-km race that snakes around the nearby hills. A true feat of grit and determination, some 7,000-odd

cyclists, walkers and runners have up to 24 hours to complete the race. If this all sounds a bit too stressful you might try some of the gentler guided cycling routes offered by local company Cycle Ronda. According to its boss Dutchman Ferry Staleman: "Ronda is a lovely city, but the real beauty of Ronda is outside town. I am sometimes overwhelmed by the choices."

Excursions head out to Arriate, Setenil and Grazalema

With Staleman's help, excursions head out to the neighbouring towns like Arriate, Setenil, Ronda de la Vieja, El Gastor and Grazalema. You can hire bikes at his



Field of dreams

LOOKING for some action? Well paintball has plenty of that. La Casita Paintball is the Costa del Sol's new premium paintball field, with no expense spared in its effort to create a world-class paintball experience able to field 100 players. "Our field was designed to offer a realistic and fun game for all levels and age groups," says owner Chris Cousins. Located beside the La Casita campsite, near to Alcadessa, in San Roque, it specialises in private groups and parties. "But there are also daily walk-on games with no reservations needed," adds Chris, 27, who moved to Spain from New York. He continues: "Guns and equipment are available for rent or sale and we plan to add a professional speedball tournament this summer. "A huge World War Two scenario field is also currently under construction." All paintball customers are allowed to use the camping facilities and onsite cafe, with La Finca restaurant nearby.

Call 665-075-124 for reservations, opening May 1.



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An le in one

Why Spring is the best time for a good walk spoiled along the Costa del Golf, writes Jon Clarke

It should rightly be known as the 'second home' of golf. Said to have more golf courses per head of population than anywhere else in the world, Andalucia is a true golfer's paradise. There are nearly 100 golf courses dotted around the region with over half of them on the Costa del Sol. It is little surprise that around 700,000 people a year come to Andalucia primarily to play golf. It is a lucrative industry, but with so many courses it has become often difficult for the individual clubs to make money. Green fees are largely comparable to the UK, between 25 and 60 euros, but with all sorts of deals thrown in, depending on the club and time of year. Either way, with the winter rains having finally abated it is a great time to get out and play. And nowadays you can even play at night at Marbella's La Dama de Noche course. There is a great range of courses to choose and, in-

creasingly, courses are opening up in the interior too. Apart from the stylish Arcos Gardens in Arcos de la Frontera, another inland course is Antequera Golf, in Antequera. Most of the cities have courses, such as Sherry Golf, in Jerez, or the Real Club de Golf, in Sevilla. On the coast the well established golf clubs, include Santa Maria golf club, Miraflores and Marbella golf club. The oldest golf club is the Parador de Golf, just outside Malaga, near Ikea. It was built in 1925 and is a true links sitting right by the sea. The second oldest is Guadalmina, which is also said to be one of the most challenging. Oddly, some regions such as Granada have few courses, with one of the only courses Los Moriscos, in Motril. Jaen only has one course, while Cordoba weighs in with two. In Almeria, the driest region in Andalucia, there are increasing numbers of courses open, including the famous Desert Springs Resort, which has been heralded for its sensible use of water. The most famous, of course, are in and around Sotogrande, in Cadiz, where you will find the holy trinity of Sotogrande, Valderrama and San Roque. The selection of Valderrama as the venue of the 1997 Ryder Cup sealed the reputation of the 'Costa del Golf' as one of Europe's number one golfing destinations. Its perfectly kept greens, challenging fairways and stunning landscape - which see it often rated as Continental Europe's top course - make it by far the most expensive to play on the coast, at around 250 euros a round.

Let Gaston Golf organise your break

ONE of Andalucia's top companies for organising golf holidays is Gaston Golf, which was set up in 1993. Based in the port of La Duquesa it can arrange all sorts of golfing trips, including car hire, chauffeured minibuses and coaches, as well as all the accommodation. It has great connections with courses and clients from around the world. "We can give first hand knowledge of the condition of courses and know all the special offers," explains owner Bob Gaston. Call 952 936 803 or email info@gastongolf.com



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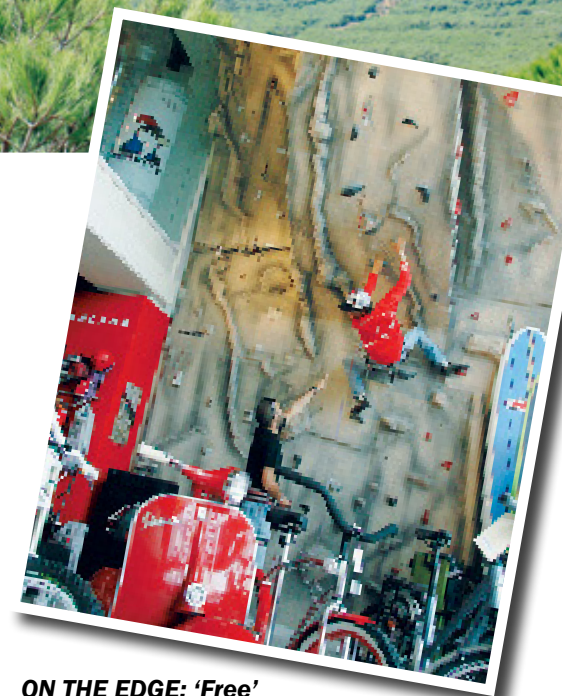


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On the crest of a wave



WHILE Tarifa is known for its kitesurfing, El Palmar is known for its surfing. Just half an hour up the coast this stunning (as-yet) undeveloped beach is a great place to learn how to surf. One of the best surf breaks in southern Europe, Surf El Palmar offers classes from beginners to advanced. "We can help you to refine your surf technique and learn new tricks, or simply have a fun day playing sports surrounded by nature," says boss Alvaro.



ON THE EDGE: 'Free' climbing wall at Art of Surfing



HIGH VIEW:
Bolonia beaches



EXTREME: Kitesurfing is adrenaline hit

The best walk starts from Punto Paloma, which is well signposted around four kilometres on the road out of Tarifa westwards. From here the signs are easy to follow. It is a stunning walk, and those that take it are rewarded with one of the most beautiful beach views in Andalusia, that of Bolonia.

Last but not least, don't underestimate the ornithological importance of Tarifa as the migratory gateway between Europe and Africa. Throughout the year over 200 species use the tip of Tarifa as a reference point in their journeys north and south. These include Griffon Vultures, Bustards and Golden Orioles.

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Get blown away in Tarifa

The area around Tarifa has become the kitesurfing and windsurfing capital of Europe... but there are so many other activities at your fingertips

TAKE a ride down the N340 out of Tarifa and you will see one of the most spectacular of sights.

Look towards the shore and – chances are – you will see hundreds of huge colourful kites bobbing up and down in the prevailing winds. Zoom in and you will soon realise that practically the whole coastline (well at least the 10km stretch to Punta Paloma) is being taken up by the latest hip sport of Kitesurfing.

It has literally taken the area by storm and over the last decade the traditional sport of windsurfing has been massively blown out by the new fashionable sport.

"These days about 99 per cent of our clients are renting kitesurfing equipment," says Miri from the Dragon shop and kite school, based in the town. "It has become so incredibly popular over the last few years."

Both Dragon and other shops like Art of Surfing rent out the kit from just 50 euros a day. Famed as 'the Wind Capital' of Europe, it is unsurprising that Tarifa's Valdevaqueros Beach is a Mecca for windsurfing and kitesurfing, even playing host to the World Championships recently. Alongside Diamond Head in Hawaii and Fuerteventura in the Canaries, there are no other places that rival it for constant winds, either the Poniente from the west or Levante from the east.

The best wind for kitesurfing is the Poniente, which comes in from Portugal. It measures between two

and five on the Beaufort scale and brings in a cooler breeze from the sea. It also happens to be the dominating wind in Tarifa.

"Either way the winds here in Tarifa are extremely constant and it is rare to get a week with no winds," says Bruno Muchada Suarez from activities company Art of Surfing. But what also makes Tarifa extra special, is its unique geography, making it an ideal spot for all things outdoors.

Winters are exceptionally mild and dry, even by Mediterranean standards, and it nestles near the borders of two national parks, with terrific walking terrain, and some breathtaking scenery.

"Tarifa is truly magic because of the contact here with nature," continues Bruno.

Having moved to Tarifa seven years ago, the friendly surfer has a real passion for sports and nature and his company offers everything from mountain bikes to climbing equipment.

This is immediately obvious visiting his shop, where the entrance boasts a two storey high free climbing wall for anyone to use.

"We don't charge for it and we will even lend you the equipment free if you fancy a go," he says. "We can't do better than that."

For those not keen on getting wet, why not head up for a walk in the hills West of Tarifa.

From here, you have views across stunning landscape in all directions, in particular inland towards Los Alcornocales Natural Park.

Tarifa is a truly magical place because of the contact with nature

MOVING from Germany to southern Spain to follow her dream, professional kitesurfer Maike Vollmer, 28, recently came sixth in freestyle in the 2010 Kitesurf Tour Europe. Here, *the Olive Press* asked her about her sport.

What makes kitesurfing so exciting?

Kitesurfing is one of the most amazing sports I have ever practised! And beyond that it is really flexible: You just need a board, a kite, wind and water. That's it!

Kitesurfers talk about 'airtime'. What does that mean?

That is when kitesurfers do big jumps, letting themselves get dragged into the air. Airtime is the amount of time the kite keeps you in the air. It is awesome – you get a wonderful view from above.

Is it difficult to learn kitesurfing?

Compared to other action sports it is quite easy to learn, the progression is really fast. Please note: It is important to take kitesurf lessons and get the right introduction into safety systems. Otherwise it can be dangerous. A standard kite course is about three to four days, after that you will be able to practise on your own.

What are your plans for the upcoming season?

I did the European Championship last year. This year I want to concentrate on the German championship as well, which will mean a lot of training. Thankfully my sponsors, including Wave-Bandits, Kite Centres, CORE and Nutcase allow me the chance to do this.




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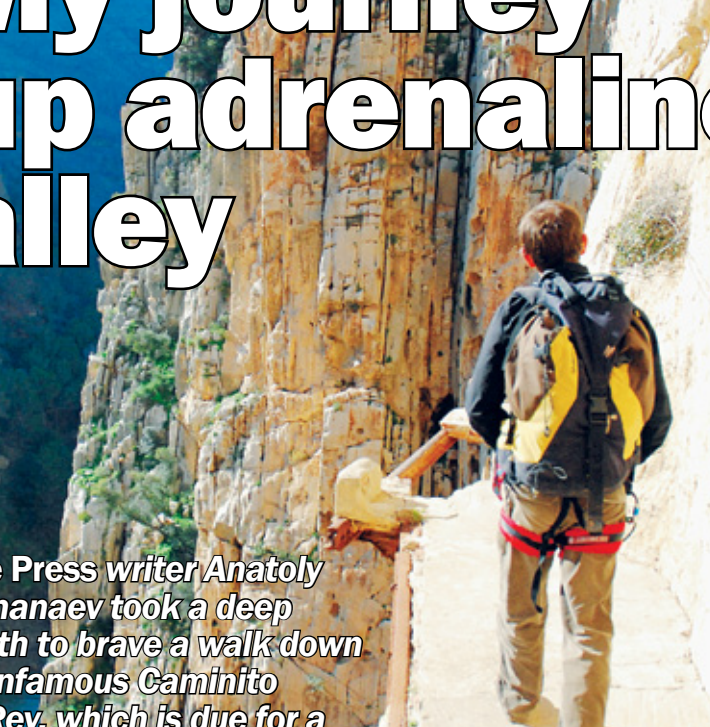
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A person with a backpack and climbing gear is walking down a steep, rocky path. The person is seen from behind, wearing a dark jacket, a yellow and black backpack, and a red climbing harness. The path is narrow and made of stone steps, leading down a steep, light-colored rock face. The background shows a deep valley with green vegetation and a blue sky. The overall scene conveys a sense of adventure and risk.

My journey up adrenaline alley

Olive Press writer *Anatoly Kurmanaev* took a deep breath to brave a walk down the infamous *Caminito del Rey*, which is due for a much-awaited 8.3m euro upgrade this year

CREEPING along the narrow exposed pathway hugging the El Chorro gorge I accidentally looked down through one of the glaring gaps in the concrete.

A river rumbled over 100 meters below me while a vulture, perhaps knowingly, circled overhead.

It was absolutely terrifying and for a couple of seconds I froze and thought there was no way I could go on.

But it would have been anything but easy to turn back.

I was already halfway along Malaga's infamous *Caminito del Rey*, the world's most dangerous walkway and, what could soon be, Andalucía's premier outdoor attraction.

Built in 1905 to connect two hydroelectric plants, the pathway has sadly fallen into serious disrepair.

Currently it is missing its handrails and in three sections the floor has actually caved in leaving just the metal frame.

It has been officially closed to the public since

1999 because of the safety concerns. In the last 15 years alone, six people have died on it and 30 people have been injured. But this has not stopped the path from remaining a rite of passage for any fun-loving Andalusian youth. And those willing to brave the heights are certainly rewarded with one of the most beautiful walks in the world.

On a good day the *Caminito* is full of adventure seekers as the El Chorro area is one of Europe's top climbing destinations.

"The guards took off parts of the wooden planks hoping it would stop people walking through," said my guide Martin Heywood, 45, from Merseyside, who has lived here for six years.

"What they didn't count on was that most people here are climbers."

But the hair-raising travail along the deteriorated concrete path, with its naked steel beams poking out above the abyss will soon become a thing of the past.

After nearly 20 years of promises, Malaga's provincial government has finally allocated 8.3 million euros to restore the walk.

Work is set to begin any time soon and by 2016 the *Caminito* is expected to become a

11 

When I visited it, the B&B was packed with outdoor enthusiasts from around the world recovering from a large communal meal the night before.

11 

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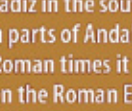
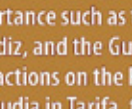
If you would like to discover an amazing historical Roman trail across Andalucía, then the Roman Route will not fail to disappoint. The Ruta Baetica Romana as it is known in Spanish, starts at Cadiz in the south the route winds its way across the northern parts of Andalucía to the north of Córdoba where in Roman times it established a point of connection between the Roman Empire's European and African territories.

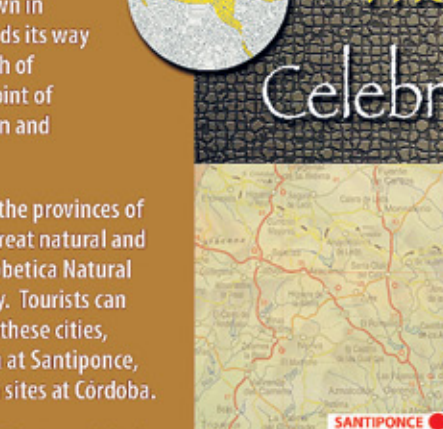
Today, the Roman Route includes 14 cities within the provinces of Seville, Cadiz and Córdoba and includes areas of great natural and geographical importance such as the Córdoba Subbética Natural Park, the Bay of Cadiz, and the Guadalquivir Valley. Tourists can visit the many attractions in the Roman Route in these cities, including Baelo Claudia in Tarifa, the city of Italica at Santiponce, the Roman museum of Ecija and the many Roman sites at Córdoba.

All of the information can be found on the Roman Route website in English at www.beticaromana.org. Copies of the guidebook can now be purchased on-line by following the publications link on the website in English.

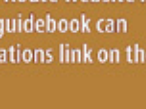
The Roman Route of Andalucía

Celebrating its Temples and Treasures









The temples and treasures campaign is funded by the Junta de Andalucía in partnership with the Ruta Baetica Romana and Andalucía Tourism.



The campaign is managed by Jan Templeton. If you require any further information please contact Jan on 957 703 355 or 689 279 306.








JUNTA DE ANDALUCÍA


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Andalucía




JAN TEMPLETON

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Rhino Car Hire is delighted to be a preferred partner of the Roman Route of Andalucía and is able to offer a discounted rate on car hire in Spain. For special rates please go to www.rhinocarhire.com



All of the information can be found on the Roman Route website in English at www.beticaromana.org. Copies of the guidebook can now be purchased on-line by following the publications link on the website in English.

The campaign is managed by Jan Templeton. If you require any further information please contact Jan on 957 703 355 or 689 279 306.

The image is a promotional graphic for a travel route in Southern Spain. The main element is a map of the region, with a white line and arrows indicating a travel path. The route starts at JEREZ, goes to CADIZ, then to TARIFA. From Tarifa, it heads north to OSUNA, then to MARCHENA, CARMONA, and SEVILLA. From Sevilla, it branches to LA LOUISIANA and ECUIA, then to ALMEDINILLA, ALMODOVAR DEL RIO, CORDOBA, and finally MONTORO. Each city is marked with a red dot and labeled in red capital letters. Two inset photographs are included: one showing a stone Roman aqueduct with a yellow car hire sign in the foreground, and another showing the ruins of Roman columns. To the right of the map is a vertical sidebar containing several logos and text. At the top is the logo for the Junta de Andalucía, followed by the text 'JUNTA DE ANDALUCIA' and 'CONSEJERIA DE TURISMO, COMERCIO Y DEPORTE'. Below this is the word 'Andalucía' in a large, colorful, stylized font. Further down are three small logos: 'Andalucía Turismo', 'Andalucía Empleo', and 'Andalucía Cultura'. Below these is the 'RUTA BÉTICA ROMANA' logo, which features a yellow silhouette of a running horse. Underneath is the logo for 'JAN TEMPLETON MARKETING CONSULTANCY', which includes a purple butterfly. At the bottom of the sidebar is a small cartoon character of a grey dog wearing a yellow shirt, with the word 'RHINO' written below it. To the right of the rhino logo is a block of text in English: 'Rhino Car Hire is delighted to be a preferred partner of the Roman Route of Andalucía and is able to offer a discounted rate on car hire in Spain. For special rates please go to www.rhinocarhire.com'.



JUNTA DE ANDALUCÍA
 CONSEJERÍA DE TURISMO, COMERCIO Y DEPORTE



Andalucía



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Come and try out a new walking adventure between San Roque and Ronda



Find the secret cache

AROUND the UK, more than 35,000 containers known as geocaches are squirreled away in car parks, hollow trees and nooks.

These geocaches are the key element of geocaching – a fast-growing game that uses GPS satellite technology for treasure hunts across the world.

Anyone can take part, and the great news is that many geocache locations are an excuse for a good yomp.

In Spain, a number of areas have joined the game, in particular around the Guadiaro Valley, between San Roque and Ronda.

The concept is simple: you look up geocaches

online, plot the coordinates into a GPS device and then embark on an expedition to find your hidden treasure.

The contents of caches vary from a logbook to toys, and one of the main pleasures is that most of the hidden caches are placed in a location that has special attributes.

Some are easy to find, others are well hidden and involve something of a hike.

As a means of promoting visitors to the Gaudíaro Valley, walk company *AndaluciaWalking.com* has hidden nine caches in special places around the area.

Set up by Paul and Synnove Darwent, who run Bar Alioli, in Estación Jímera de Líbar, they know every single track in the area.

Using GPS technology they have posted many of these walks on their website making them available for anyone.

Not everyone is armed with GPS, so *AndaluciaWalking.com* have expanded and offer walking tours in the week.

One of the most amazing walks involves a hike to the top of Ventana Peak at 1298m, which is partly along a paved Roman footpath. From the top, there are views across Andalucía and towards Africa.

Of course there is a Geocache hidden there to make your trip a bit more interesting.

Visit www.AndaluciaWalking.com for more info

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A walk on the wildside

Walking guide John Keogh picks out two hikes near Frigiliana

THE Tejada, Almijara and Alhama Sierras Natural Park – all 40,600 hectares of it – is an impressive mountainous mass which forms a geographical barrier between the provinces of Málaga and Granada.

It is a stark reminder of the harshness of life in Andalucía before the arrival of tourism and a fabulous place to escape for a wilderness adventure.

Echoing with the sounds of running water, the howling of the wind and, at times, the relentless downpouring of rain, it was always tough to make a living in these mountains. But water is very much the lifeblood of these towering mountains that are filled with deep aquifers.

The huge amounts of rainwater are stored in caverns which are best appreciated at the Caves of Nerja. In the summer nothing moves – it's so hot, but from October until May, these mountains become my playground and workplace as a walking guide.

Here are a few options available to you should you choose to venture beyond the villages and into the wild. *More info at www.hikingwalkingspain.com.*

El Fuerte

Medium - Four hours



The Stronghold (or *El Fuerte*, as it is known locally), was the site of the Moors Last Stand in Spain. There was once a large fortress atop 'the rock', which overlooks Frigiliana.

El Fuerte, was considered a holy place by the Muslim population and it was decided that here they would stand and fight to win or die.

From the bus stop in Frigiliana at 330 meters, to the top of *El Fuerte* at 980 meters, is a two-and-half-hour climb that is steep at first but the views from the top are incredible. It can take about four hours in all and strong legs and sound lungs are a prerequisite.

Up Cerro del Pinto

Easy - Three hours

When Capitan Pinto literally crash-landed in Nerja about 200 years ago after surviving a horrendous storm, he made his way up to the hilltop he had seen from the beach to erect a wooden cross as a way of thanking God for saving his men and himself from drowning.

There is a monument there to this day and it is still regularly attended by locals when they wish to pray or of-



fer thanks for something or someone in their lives. I have stretched the route

out a little so that it now takes about three and half hours with breaks and stops along the way.

It is no more than six kilometres in total with a combined total climb of about 450 meters. From Frigiliana into El Higueron following Ruta Del Imán to Cuesta del Sordo, down into Corral Del Pinto and then up to the top of Cerro Del Pinto for a look and a prayer and some lunch.

Return back to El Higueron by way of the road towards El Molino and then walk back up El Higueron past the waterfalls, we splash through the river until you reach Frigiliana once more. It's a nice way to build an appetite and a thirst. You can eat and drink in Virtudes Restaurant before heading home.

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As reported in our last issue, author Guy Hunter-Watts is undertaking a 21-day charity hike along the route of his walking book Andalucian Coast to Coast. Linking key archaeological sites and crossing six of Andalucía's Natural Parks, this 430km adventure is a true rite of passage for keen walkers. Meanwhile (far right) another expat is raising money in a charity hike

“The idea of a long distance walk linking the two great ocean's which cradle Andalucía had long intrigued me,” explains Guy Hunter Watts, 51, a keen traveller, who has written a series of books about Spain. “But after plotting the route across the southern mountains, life took an unexpected turn and the project lay dormant for almost a decade.”

I wanted the route to link as many of southern Spain's Natural Parks as possible

However, the appeal of charting the walk never diminished and on his regular writing trips he slowly sketched it out.

A born romantic, he was particularly moved by the notion that Carthaginians and Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans, Visigoths and Moors had all walked through the string of mountains that run across the south of the peninsula. He also found it hugely inspirational to think that it was along the valleys of southern Iberia that Man first walked out of Africa and into Europe.

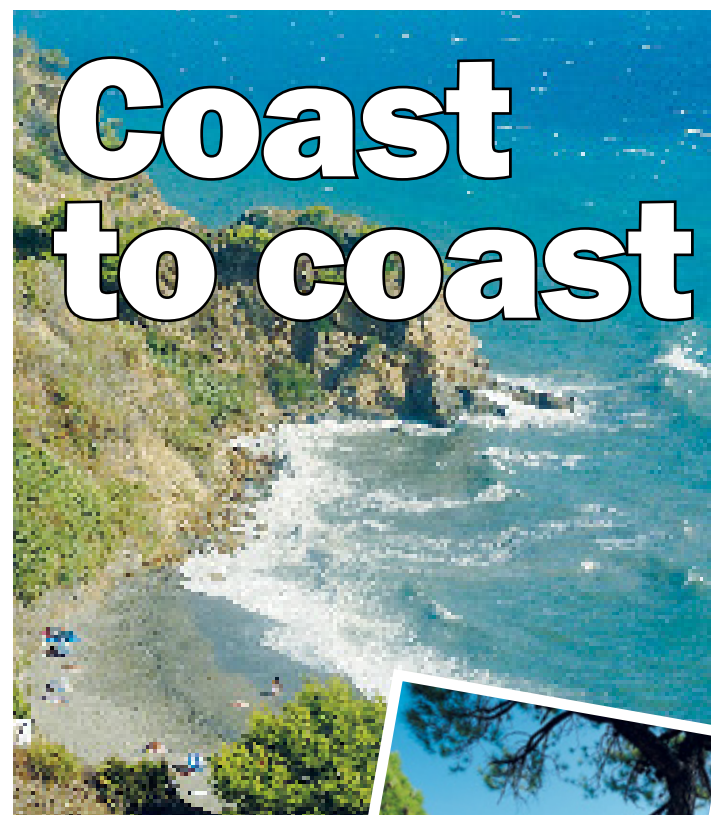
“The notion that the walk would be following in the footsteps of so many ancient peoples was both humbling and hugely exciting,” explains Watts, who lives in the typical white-washed village of El Gastor, near Ronda.

“If it was the Mediterranean that gave Spain its identity it was the Atlantic which would offer it a leading role on the world's stage and it was this temporal progression that made me decide to walk from east to west rather than vice versa,” he explains.

“I wanted the route to link as many of southern Spain's Natural Parks as

possible and for each leg to be structured so that it could be comfortably covered in a full day by anyone in reasonably good health,” he continues. “And, above all, I wanted to avoid tarmac at all costs.”

The result of months of research, trail-bashing and many a doubling-back is a stunning, 21 day trail which traverses no less than seven of Andalucía's most beautiful protected areas. The trail begins on the lovely stretch of sand beneath Maro, just east of Nerja. Cutting inland via the incredible Liman trail – an amazing first day of walking – the route leads on through stunning hilltop villages including Frigiliana, Alcaucin, Carratraca, Jimena and



WILD: Route starts at Maro beach and heads through rugged Axarquía (right)

Castillo de Castellar. The walk takes in fascinating towns, like Ronda and Tarifa and key archaeological sites like Barbastro, the Cueva de Nerja and the Roman ruins of Baelo Claudio.

Highlights of the Coast to Coast Walk

Natural Parks and protected areas

1. Parque Natural de los Acanilados de Maro/Cerro Gordo
2. Parque Natural de Sierra de Tejada, Almijara y Alhama
3. Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves
4. Parque Natural de la Sierra de Grazalema
5. Parque Natural de los Alcornocales
6. Parque Natural del Estrecho

Historical Sites

Bobastro – the mountain refuge of renegade chieftain Omar Ibn Hafsun
Carratraca – ancient spa settlement
Ronda – the Puente Nuevo and Moorish citadel
Castillo de Castellar – hilltop Moorish fortress and Roman footpath
La Casa de Piedra – early Christian church hewn from solid rock
Tarifa – ancient walled town at the confluence of two oceans
Baelo Claudio – some of the best preserved Roman remains in Spain

Several of Andalucía's most beautiful villages including:

Maro, Frigiliana, Canillas de Albaída, Carratraca, Ronda, Montejaque, Jimena de la Frontera, Castillo de Castellar and Tarifa.



It also follows long sections of Roman and Berber footpaths and leads you through deep gorges and over high passes.

The final section of the walk follows a sinuous mountain trail down to the Atlantic Ocean where the walk ends beside the beautiful beach of Bolonia.

Over the course of this 430 kilometre trail you'll see ibex and deer, mongoose and foxes, vultures and eagles, yet will meet with few other walkers along the way.

Should you walk the route in its entirety you'll have journeyed from sea to ocean through the heart of one of the most beautiful tracts of mountain in Europe.

“At the end of this Iberian odyssey I hope its followers will agree that the whole is even greater than the sum of the parts and that the walk will remain as treasured a memory for them as it does for me,” he concludes.

The Andalucian Coast to Coast Walk is out this week priced 19.90 euros. Visit



Expat Andy Cameron is embarking on an arduous trek from Rome to Ronda to raise 50,000 euros to set up a foundation offering support to families with seriously ill children. The Olive Press will be following his progress over the next few issues

Gelati and sore feet!

MY first four days of walking have been a significant challenge. It is anything, but easy, strolling 190 kms in such a short time. But finally I made it to Castiglione Fiorentino, the twin town of Ronda, where I live in Spain.

From Rome to Orvieto the terrain is mountainous, and every town is a medieval hilltop fortress, so doubly hard to reach.

As for my health, “ouch” is the only polite word I can use, my muscles are cramping despite the isotonic drinks, my feet are killing me and my motivation flags with every rude or inconsiderate encounter with the famous Italian motorists.

However, despite the setbacks I'm proud of my progress, and if it continues I could even get back to Ronda ahead of schedule.

The interesting thing is nobody knows where Ronda is, I have to explain ‘entre Málaga y Sevilla’ and I show them some of my best photos, then everybody says “wow, why don't they promote Ronda?” (ED: Good question!)

So it's possible you're wondering what I'm enjoying the most? Pasta, pizza, and gelati!

Next up Siena, Livorno, Pisa and Genoa and onwards to France.

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WITH blue skies overhead and a stiff, but constant breeze, a morning's sailing couldn't have been more inviting. But the wind pattern in Estepona marina was deceptive to say the least. While blowing a steady 10 to 12 knots inside the redoubt, the second our dinghy had waltzed out of the harbour walls, all hell broke loose.

We were suddenly negotiating five foot waves and a flukey Poniente wind gusting to up to 25 knots and gale force six.

It took all my weight to keep the four metre RS dinghy upright, as my instructor Tomas Puerta held a steady line westwards, en route to Gibraltar. After the initial shock – and a solid drenching – I got used

It put the wind up me

Jon Clarke returns to the sport of his youth for a surprisingly exciting day of sailing

to the seriously strong winds. "This is pretty standard stuff for this time of year," explained teacher Tomas, a former Spanish sailing champion, who has competed all around the world.

"The winds between Estepona and Gibraltar are pretty reliable, thanks to the Straits and it is rare to have a week with no wind." It was great to be sailing again after nearly two decades on dry

land. I had spent a number of summers as a child undertaking various sailing certificates at a sailing club in Devon, but somewhere along the way lost contact with the sport. What I had forgotten was the thrill of the boat breezing along, entirely driven by the wind, no need for an engine. At Tomas's school at the Royal Estepona Sailing Club you can hire a range of boats throughout the year from as little as 15 euros an hour. Classes for children start at 25 euros for the day and this comes with all the kit and wetsuits to keep you warm. My day out had been arranged by adventure company Experience Box and I am certainly going to return.

As if to highlight the strength of the winds the minute I jumped on a motorboat to get some pictures, Tomas took a tumble into the water having broken a foot strap. "But capsizing the boat is all part of the fun," he explains. "Getting wet is unavoidable, and most children love it." www.escueladevelaestepona.com

DRY LAND: One of Tomas's students prepares for a class



EXHILARATING: Sailing in Estepona



Something for the weekend?

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LOOKING for somewhere to explore this weekend, or perhaps this Spring? There is nothing better than having all the latest insider knowledge to pinpoint the hottest new restaurant, or most charming local hotel. The Olive Press' *All About Andalucía Insider Guides* offer you a refreshing alternative to the old fashioned guidebook. Written exclusively by our team of local journalists and writers – including celebrities such as *Driving Over Lemons* author Chris Stewart ('All about the Alpujarras') or former Daily Telegraph journalist, David Baird ('All about the Axarquía') – they are up-to-the-minute magazine-style supplements, full of useful tips, ideas and our own personal recommendations on where to eat and stay. Published as downloadable 'pdfs', they can be printed out or carried around on your phone or iPad. Regularly updated, each supplement offers a real taste of what this beautiful region has to offer to the inquisitive and adventurous traveller.

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A breakneck adventure

Anatoly Kurmanaev tries a spot of 'sphering' and 'canyoning'

AS most seasoned expats know there are numerous different activities available in Andalucía.

But one company, Experience Box, has managed to find an incredible 250 activities to offer to its clients, including bridge-jumping, ice-climbing and, what is known as 'sphering'.

"There is so much to do here, people are often actually overwhelmed by the options," explains its Belgian boss Rob Magits.

I got the enviable job of trying what is known as an 'adventure package', trying out a range of weird and wonderful sports.

The closest to home, took place just outside Puerto Banus, where Londoner Peter Smith rolls people down a 150-metre hill in a giant rubber ball at breakneck speeds.

Called 'sphering', it is certainly a real headturner...or should that be headspinner. You get strapped inside the giant ball and literally pushed downhill, it's that simple.

The result is a disorienting rush of adrenaline that actually lasts for hours after the roll. Next up was a trip inland to the stunning Genal Valley, near Ronda, for some 'canyoning',



READY FOR ACTION: Anatoly in the sphere

as it is known.

The source of the river Genal is full of waterfalls and boulders, making the walk down the river an interesting way to discover one of the most picturesque of Andalusian valleys. But just as you settle into a comfortable walking rhythm, a water current suddenly jumps up and sweeps you away. Going down the waterfalls was particularly fun. As you gradually lower yourself down the cliff, the water pummels your body before you let go of the rope and plunge into the cool pool beneath. It's a truly exhilarating experience.

Prices for activities start at just 30 euros per person. For more information visit www.experienceboxspain.com

WHILE not strictly a sporting activity, getting out into the hills for a spot of wine tasting is certainly a great way to get outdoors.

Wandering around the wonderful vineyards in the Alpujarras or Axarquía takes some beating for a day out. And with over 20 vineyards now set up around the Serranía de Ronda you are not short of *bodegas* to visit.

One of the most evocative has to be the stunning Enkvist vineyard, near Gaucín.

The three hectare vineyard, which sits in beautiful countryside with stunning views, was set up by Swede Richard Enkvist over a decade ago. The former media mogul and his wife have designed the *bodega* around the local oak woodland.

Initially people thought they were mad when they first picked the area to plant a vineyard.

For starters, there were no other vineyards for miles, there was no local appellation and everyone expected the heat in summer to destroy the wines.

"But what they didn't realise was that at 650 metres high, things cool down nicely at night in summer, which brings some welcome moisture," explains Enkvist.

nutty wine is full of earthy flavours and will improve considerably with age.

Having a vine time

By Jon Clarke

"We spent a long time looking for the right place, checking carefully on the geology and microclimate," he continues.

"We figured it couldn't be that hard to make a good wine here, after all the Romans made plenty of it 2000 years ago."

Some 12 years on and his faith has been repayed with a string of awards, including two gold medals for his red wines Ultimo Sueños and Suenos at the celebrated 'Concours Mondial' Brussels wine competition this year.

A mix of Cabernet, Tempranillo and even Petit Verdot, this complex,

A visit to one of the area's hilly bodegas is bound to keep you on your toes and entertain your palate

Another excellent wine is his sweet Moscatel Sofia, which is made out of grapes bought from a vineyard in Manilva.

It has the perfect balance of acidity and sweetness, and can be served with any dessert, or best of all, with a plate of *foie gras*.

Another vineyard, the other side of Málaga, in the Axarquía, is also doing well with Málaga's sweet wines. Her vineyard Bodegas Bentomiz, in Sayalonga, is currently producing 30,000 bottles of wine a year from the extraordinary steep slopes of the region.

Already exporting to over a dozen countries, many are being sold at the world's top restaurants, including Gordon Ramsay's Michelin

SUCCESS: Mr and Mrs Enkvist



starred joints in the UK.

"We have proven that it is possible to make these harsh slopes productive," explains Clara.

The *bodega* only has two hectares under vine, but 'controls' another 30 hectares farmed by local families. It is a wonderful spot to visit, the vineyard sitting on a steep slope looking down to the sea.

It is interesting to see how the vines – some of which can be up to 100 years old – are planted in hollows, which help to collect much needed moisture in winter.

They are also left to grow on the ground with the bunches of grapes protected from the blazing sun by foliage.

The vineyard is currently producing

over half a dozen wines, under the Ariyanas label, including a spectacular, flinty dry white 'Sobre las Finas', which stays in its lees in vat for four months before bottling. There is also an interesting red wine made partly from the indigenous Rome grape, first introduced by the Romans, and which the vineyard is experimenting with.

So good are the wines that British doyenne of wine Jancis Robinson awarded its sweet Moscatel a lofty 18 out of 20. "That's as good as Vega Sicilia, traditionally said to be one of Spain's best wines" adds Clara proudly. "We are very happy how things are coming on and really hope that the improvement continues."

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Pasión por la excelencia

It is always wise for a small wine producer to let the wine speak for itself. However, to receive recognition such as distinctions and prizes in different contests has a positive effect on your confidence and can be used as a guideline for the future.

The pursuit for the perfect wine continues.

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