

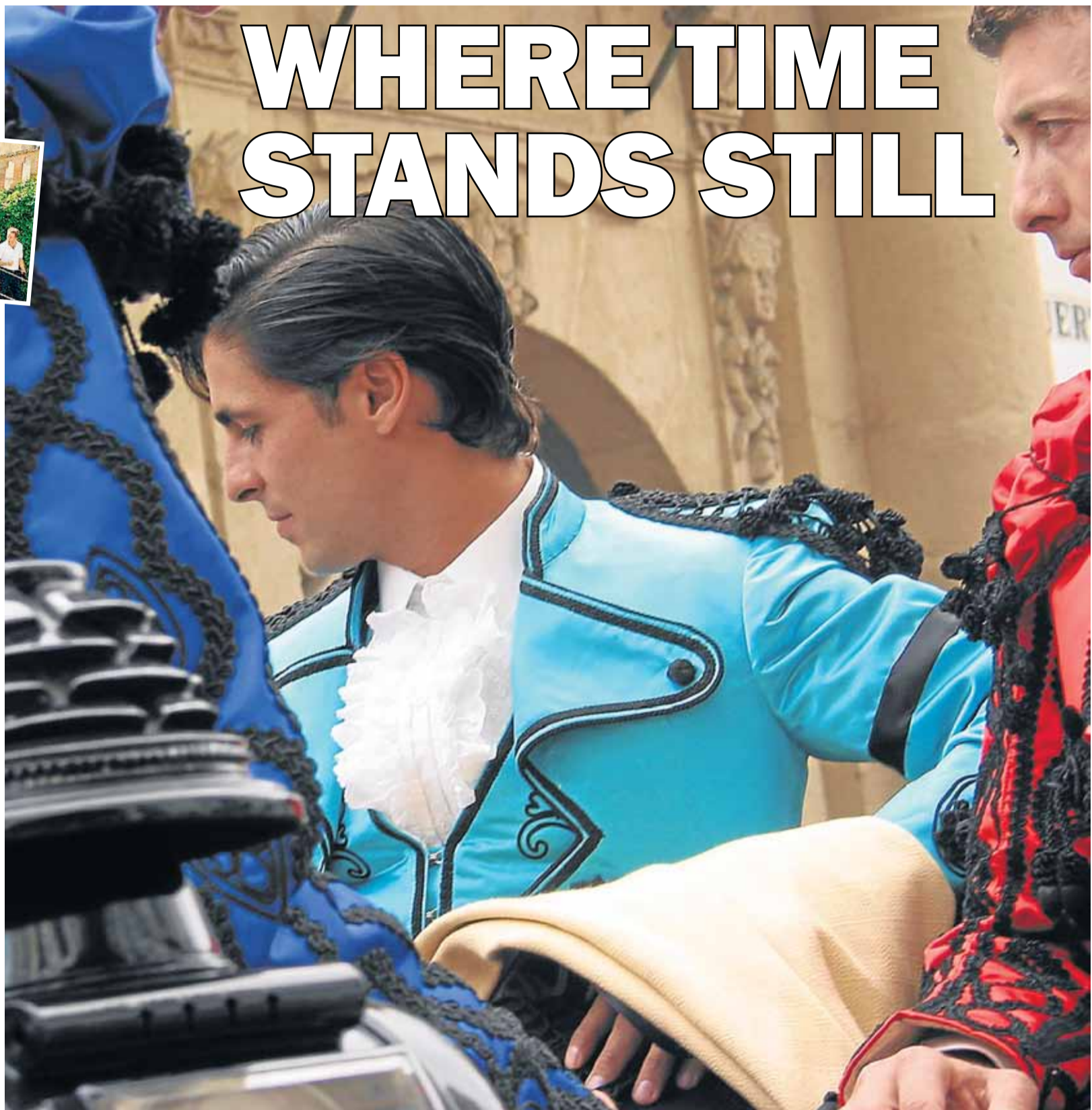
Jon Clarke follows in the footsteps of Michelle Obama... the Moors and the Romans before her

## WHERE TIME STANDS STILL



**PRESIDENTS MEN:** Obama and entourage descend into La Mina

There are over 300 steps down to the bottom of the old siege tunnel of the Casa del Rey Moro (House of the Moorish King) in the historic core of Ronda. But this didn't deter America's first lady Michelle Obama from witnessing first-hand how the Arabic defenders used to collect water during the regular sieges in the dark days of the 14 and 15th centuries. On a cultural break to explore the history of the Nasrid dynasty in Andalusia two years ago, she and her daughter spent a day in Ronda. Having wandered around the old town, visited the bull ring and the charming Palacio Mondragon, she decided to take a spot of proper exercise. By taking the steep staircase - 'la Mina' - down to the bottom of the gorge (which incredibly the vast majority of tourists do not do) she was really getting to appreciate the rich history of the mountain town. Restored in 1911, it had been



Turn to Page 24

**POMP:** Torero Fran Rivera Ordenez, who owns the Ronda bullring, en route to Ronda's famous Goyesca bullfight

Photos by Jon Clarke

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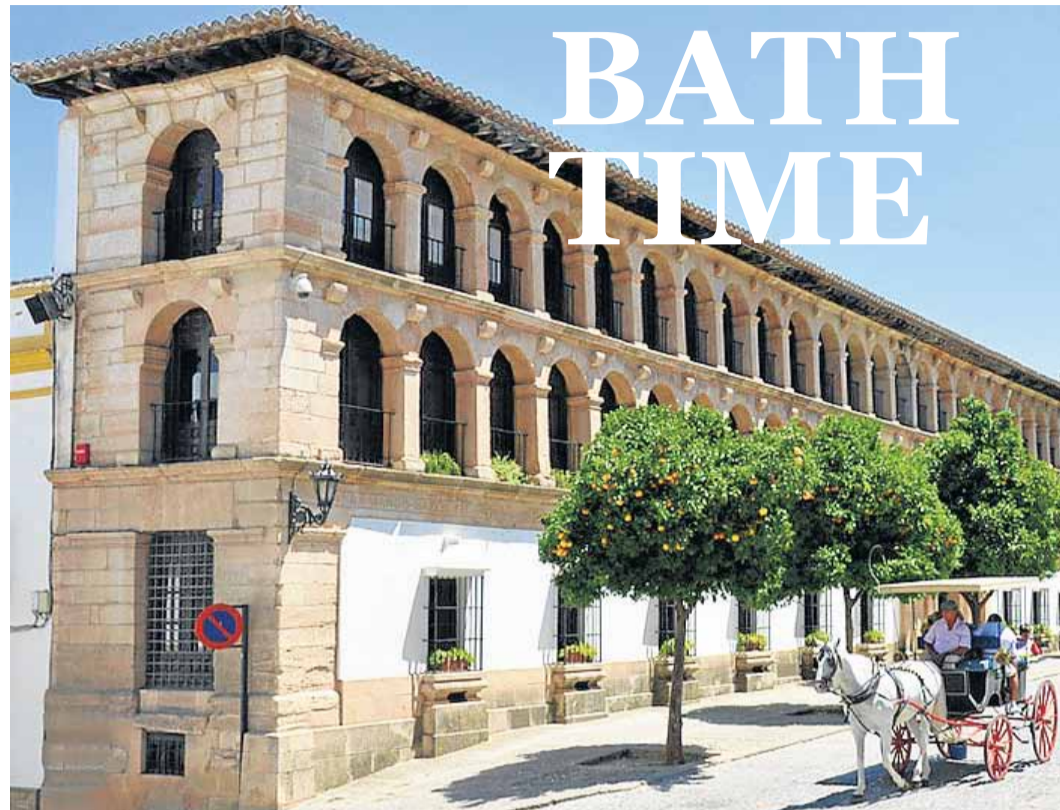
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dug by Christian slaves to get water from the River Guadelevin during the reign of Ronda's Moorish king, Abomelik. While it had been intended as a secret, it clearly didn't stay that way, as Christians living in the region used the refrain that "in Ronda you die carrying water skins". By the time of the collapse of the Arabic rule in 1485, Ronda had been receiving foreign visitors for some 1500 years. Established in 9BC, it is one of Spain's oldest towns and in Roman times was completely independent with a thriving wine industry and even with

**Roman Acinipo, a 20 min drive away is an incredibly haunting place to visit**

its own coinage, fittingly with a tendril of grapes on its flipside. A bustling military bastion known as *Arunda* - which means 'surrounded by mountains' - renovate any old building in the area and you are bound to find something of interest. Take the recent discovery at the 12 hectare finca of Morosanto, near Arriate, just outside Ronda. Here, on a lovely wide open slope, archaeologists have found a 'lagar' or grape-treading floor and pipes through which wine was transported




# BATH TIME

**HISTORY: Classical town hall and (top right) Roman Acinipo**

to vats. The discovery - among a series of columns, statues and a 21-metre Roman swimming pool and sauna - now means that historians can link the production of wine in Ronda to 3AD. But you can certainly feel the weight of the Romans just wandering around the old parts of the town, which is full of stunning corners, arches and doorways. One of its three main bridges across the Tajo (or Ronda's famous gorge) is often called the 'Roman bridge', although it is actually Moorish in origin. Look west from any vantage point along the top of the Tajo and try and spot the flattened out hilltop where the Romans built their formidable fortified

town of Acinipo. A 20-minute drive from the town, it is an incredibly haunting place, particularly during stormy weather, when you really feel you are on top of the world. Take a wonder around the site, where they keep finding new buildings every year, aside from the amazing amphitheatre. But before you take the drive up to Acinipo you should start any walking tour of the town at the oldest, most interesting part of Ronda down at its ancient Arabic baths. Said to be the best preserved example in Spain, the baths have little changed since Arabic Ronda - then on the extreme Western flank of the beleaguered Kingdom of Granada - fell to Christian monarchs Isabel and

Fernando after a long struggle. An atmospheric place built mostly in the 13th century, a virtual reality film takes visitors back to the days of Arabic Ronda, when the Moors knew it as Runda. In both English and Spanish ten minutes apart it is about as good an introduction as you are going to get to any town in Andalusia. From here it is an easy walk up into the *Casco Histórico*, which is a wonderful place to while away a morning or afternoon, and now until midnight on Fridays and Saturdays, with the town trying to encourage more tourists to spend the night here. You firstly head up through an evocative arch to the splendid Renaissance mansion known as the *Palacio del Marques de Salvatierra*, which has a portal




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## Isolation and bandits!

**DESPITE** being only 20 miles from Marbella and with much improved road access, these days it is still a slow 45-minute climb to get to the *Ciudad Sonada* (or City of Dreams), as it was christened by celebrated Dutch poet Rilke. Add to that a distinctly harsher climate (it is a good five degrees lower than the coast in winter, and five degrees more in summer) and a lot of people are put off. Much of this is to do with its formidable mountain boundaries, which for decades have served as the perfect barrier against the type of development - and thankfully people! - that have ravaged the nearby Costa del Sol. Everywhere you look are mountains and the city is flanked by the national parks of the Sierra de las Nieves and Grazalema as well as the formidable Serrania de Ronda to the south. So cut off was the town that it became famous for its bandits in the 18th and 19th centuries, when these outlaws frequently ruled the roost. Today their names are much revered, being used for restaurants such as *Tragabuches* or for wines such as *Pasos Largos*.

## Need to know

**RONDA** sits 113km from Malaga city, situated in the Serrania de Ronda at an altitude of 739 metres above sea level. The town is home to a population of around 40,000 Rondeños.

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## The Casa del Rey Moro was once rented by *Withnail* and actor Paul McGann

full of colonial images of Peruvian images. A few paces up the hill and you arrive at the aforementioned Casa del Rey Moro, the house of which is actually an 18th century mansion, which was once rented by *Withnail* and actor Paul McGann. Keep on going and you will finally get to the famous Tajo bridge and its breathtaking views, as well as the bull ring. It is one of Andalusia's top visitor attractions and particularly worthwhile for its Goya etchings and the perfect proportions of its soft sandstone arches. One of the oldest in the world it was here that Michelle Obama ended her tour, before fittingly taking a bite of lunch at a nearby restaurant. Best of all, as she left for the winding 45-drive back to her hotel on the coast, the world's most powerful woman is said to have told local dignitaries that she would "definitely be back."... and next time with her husband! Now that would be another fabulous step in the history of one of Spain's most evocative towns.

**Taking a circular stroll through the old town is a great way to understand Ronda's important history, writes Claire Wilson**

**S**ITTING on a plateau of large, rugged cliffs Ronda was unsurprisingly one of the last Moorish cities to fall during the Reconquest of Spain by the Catholic monarchs. It is easy to see why it was so hard to seize during a two hour walking tour around its old town. Start your walk at the top of the Tajo gorge, which is topped with ancient houses teetering on the cliff top.

Cross the famous Puente Nuevo (New Bridge), and head right, through the winding alleys, keeping close to the gorge. Be warned, though, looking over the walls at that 100 meter drop is not for the faint hearted!

At Plaza Duquesa de Parcent you'll come across the Santa Maria la Mayor church. Construction began in 1485 but was not completed until the 17th Century, which explains its combination of different artistic styles. The three naves include Gothic columns, which survived an earthquake in 1580 that destroyed part of the church. The image of the Virgin, one of the building's most important elements, is attributed to the work of Montañes or La Roldana, depending on which researcher you choose to favour.



# Hideout for centuries

Across the road you will find the stunning neoclassical town hall, with its stunning Ronda stone arches.

Head down to Plaza San Francisco and the charming Almorabar gate, a former Arabic gate and well-fortified entrance to the town.

From here, double back before heading into the eastern part of the old town looking out for the fabulous Mina, where the town's Arabic defenders could find water in a time of siege.

Further down the hill lie the Arabic baths, which are considered one of the best preserved in Europe and were still in use in the 17th Century.

According to the Muslim custom of the time, those coming into the city needed to be purified, explaining their location next to the ancient *Puente Arabe*.

From here, head uphill along-

side the north of the gorge until you arrive in the new town of Ronda.

You will finally make it back to the famous bridge, where just 200 metres away is the town's must-see Plaza de Toros, the oldest bullring in Spain and where the rules of bullfighting were also codified over 300 years ago.

Two famous bullfighting families have emerged from the ring; the Romeros being the first. Pedro Romero was the most notable of the Romeros, he killed more than 5000 bulls, without suffering injury to himself, during the course of his career.

A second dynasty of bullfighters emerged in the 20th century, the Ordonez family. Father

and son Cayetano and Antonio Ordonez have been credited with luring both Ernest Hemingway and Orson Welles into the crowds of spectators, thanks to their seductive bullfighting technique.

Antonio went on to found the famous Goyesca bullfight, now one of the most expensive, and well-attended, fights in the country. It takes place every September, and both spectators and fighters dress in traditional clothing and the town is decked out in decor reminiscent of the period.

The bullfighting museum within the ring has sections dedicated to these two families, among other memorabilia which gives a good insight into one of Spain's bloodiest traditions.



**DETAILS: Salvatierra palace, the Arabic baths and (right) Plaza Duquesa de Parcent**

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# Balcony of the Serrania



**Gaucin is the true starting point of the Ronda mountains and has a vibrant and buzzing art and cultural scene, writes Paul Whitelock**

IT'S called the balcony of the Serrania de Ronda and it's not hard to see why. Perched high on a rocky outcrop, surrounded by breathtaking mountain scenery, the

views from Gaucin stretch across not one, but two continents.

In fact, on a clear morning, Gibraltar lies brooding off the coast in the distance while across the short straits you can practically see the Moroccans getting ready for the day. It's hard to believe that Africa is so close.

Gaucin has also long been one of the hippest places to live in Andalusia.

A select holiday spot for the likes of the Sainsbury family, Fatboy Slim – and allegedly once Princess Diana – it has also become a popular town for many cultured expatriates – up to 300 – who have chosen to settle here.

It is this interesting and varied group of northern Europeans – many of them artists, photographers and writers – that gives the town a distinctly creative and prosperous air.

So organised are the dozens of artists, that they organise annual open days of their studios every year to show off their work.

Gaucin is only 30 minutes from the Costa del Sol, but it feels a million miles away.

It may not have the attractions of the coast below, or the key

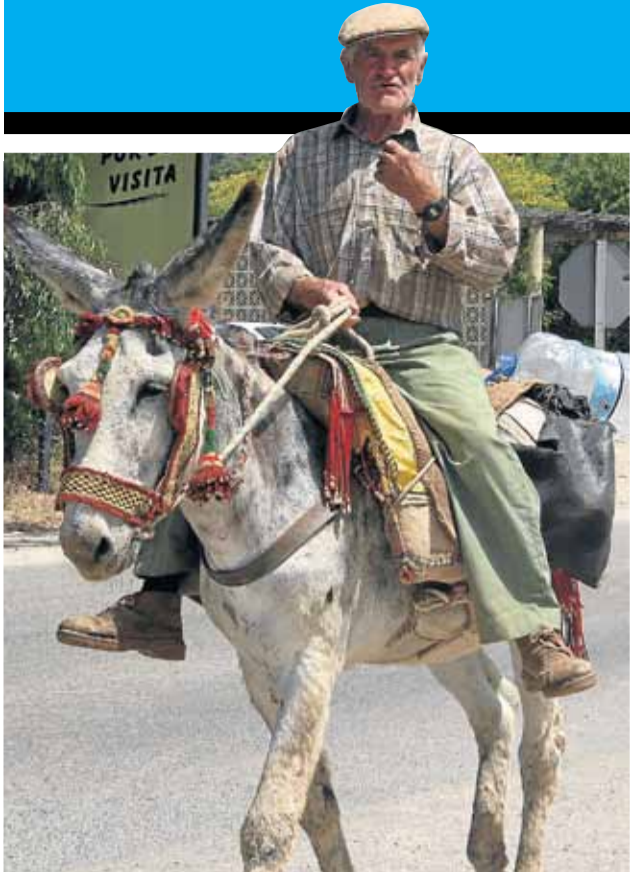


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**There are no supermarkets but you can get the UK Sunday newspapers**

tourist sites you find in nearby Ronda, but what it does have is a raw beauty and unspoilt countryside that sucks you in. Small enough to remain untroubled by supermarket chains (one of its best food shops Pura Vida is strictly organic, local produce) you can't even get an English newspaper. Oh! apart from the Sundays at the petrol station when a friend of the owner personally goes down to the coast to buy them. There are however, plenty of fantastic bars and restaurants and the narrow streets and shady squares are a great place to hang out in summer. Wander around and enjoy the jumble of whitewashed houses – many of them quite grand – lorded over by the historic arabic castle the Castillo del



**OLD WAYS:** Typical street scene, the Eagle castle above the town and a child and mother at a fountain

Aguila. Then take a ride out into the nearby countryside, where there are a host of excellent hotels or restaurants for a meal or somewhere to lay down your head.

Even better, get up early and take one of the superb walks that go in circular routes around the town. The countryside here is some of the best in the region and views are not in short supply.

The history of Gaucin is fascinating and pretty turbulent by anyone's standards. Archeological remains indicate a settlement here that dates right back to pre-historic times.

Subsequent 'visits' by, among others, Iberians, Phoenicians, Romans, Visigoths, Moors and the French have all contributed to a troubled history for the village.

The town's position at the head of the stunning Genal valley always made it subject to frequent attack.

Yet these invaders, together with the 'invasion' of northern Europeans in the last few decades, have all helped to weave the rich tapestry that is modern-day Gaucin.

But these newcomers are no trailblazers. Gaucin has been watching foreign tourists - and particularly the British - come and go for centuries.

Gibraltar was the key to Gaucin's early popularity with the British. From the late 18th century, many of those whom the Empire had dispatched to the Rock chose to spend their summer breaks in the cool of the mountains and away from the claustrophobia of Gibraltar. Ronda was a favourite destination, which led to British engineers to be commissioned to build a railway from Algeciras all the way to Ronda in the late 19th century, stopping conveniently in Gaucin.

But, even before then a famous hotel, the Hotel Nacional, was putting up tourists inside its historical four walls.

Run by a popular local figure Dona Clemen, it became an institution and only finally shut half a decade ago.

Previously known as the Hotel Ingles it is appropriate that the visitors book was dominated by British comments, such as one by a Royal Artillery captain, who

wrote that he was "satisfied" with his stay in 1882. These days the tourists tend to be a little bit more gushing and, while discreet, many of them come back time and time again. It is not hard to see why.



## ARTIST CENTRAL

*Photographer Jane Jewson on the creativity that has made Gaucin one of Andalucia's true destinations for artists*

**I**t is hard to avoid the influence of art in Gaucin. All around the town are scattered a series of brightly-coloured geckos, 250 in total - part of an art project inspired by the town's artistic leanings.

There are literally dozens of artists living in and around the town. They are inspired by its intensity of light and panoramic views over rooftops to craggy rock formations caressed by oak-clad foothills sweeping down to the valley floor and in the distance Gibraltar and Africa.

The group now own association, Art Gaucin and open studio weekends are promoted once or twice a year, with the artists are contactable via a new website [www.artgaucin.com](http://www.artgaucin.com).

One artist Lesley Riddihough's paintings are on display at Molino del Santo hotel in Benaolan, while Stephanie Thompson's delightful greetings cards can be bought at Bonissim, Karen O'connor's truly delectable delicatessen in Calle Luis Arminan.

Paddy Robinson offers painting classes, while Victoria Orr Ewing has lately joined forces with Ali Mudge and Lucy Verney to form Painting And Pilates in Spain.

Highly accomplished and prize winning artist Victoria heads the team which offers a choice of residential or non residential holidays. One exciting new arrival is Josaba Zabaleta Sanchez, whose stylish home in Calle Larga, near the 15th century church of San Sebastian is a charming spot.

His ground floor windows offer a tantalizing view into the artist's working studio space and it was impossible not to be moved by the moody industrial scenes of his large canvases.

Josaba's wife Maria, a former television producer, is also adding to the mix, by launching a wedding and events planning company Un Plan Sencillo.

The couple have come to Gaucin partly because of its reputation as a haven for artists and for the colourful and lighter palette offered by a landscape far less muted by the inclement weather conditions that often dull the terrain of their home ground in northern Spain.

To make an arrangement to view his work, go to [www.sanchezzabaleta.com](http://www.sanchezzabaleta.com) or her website [www.unplansencillo.es](http://www.unplansencillo.es).

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Voted the Costa del Sol  
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# An island of independence

*The scenic mountain village of Arriate has a very distinct feel to its 'snobby' near neighbour Ronda... and now it has Andalucía's top restaurant, according to Trip Advisor*

It is hard to imagine that the best restaurant on the Costa del Sol is at least one hour from the coast.

But, according to *Trip Advisor* this month, El Muelle de Arriate is not only the top eaterie on the costa, but also in the whole of Andalucía.

Either way, there can certainly be few visitors to Frank Rottgering's place that would feel cheated.

His charming restaurant – a former railway shack – in Arriate, 10 minutes from Ronda, is about as authentically Andalusian as you could ask for.

And that could easily be said about the village itself.

A buzzing place of nearly 5000 people, Arriate offers a great quality of life, well away from the usual tourist drag.

While just a short drive to Ronda it is a million miles away in character.

It wrestled control from its near neighbour over four centuries ago and its locals are fiercely independent of their *pico*, or 'snobbish', neighbours, who many Arriatenans say, lord it over the whole Serranía.

The eight-and-a-half kilometre square district – which is the smallest in Malaga province – has been staunchly left wing since the death of dictator Franco in 1975.

"It is certainly far more open and friendly than Ronda," explains local businesswoman Carmeli Gamarro, whose family firm Melgar have been curing and salting meat for many centuries.



**NEW AND OLD: El Muelle with Easter procession**

ing and salting meat for many centuries.

"The Arriatenos are wordy people, who have travelled the globe in order to work," she continues.

This was certainly the case as many of them had to emigrate to Switzerland, France and Germany to work in the tough em-

poverished years of the 1960s and 1970s.

These days, many of them are back and you can't help but notice the number of happy-looking pensioners hanging around watching the day go by.

One place Bar La Albarra is so famous for these old boys that one Dutch photographer put together an exhibition based entirely around its clientele.

The queue at Pedro Montesino's greengrocer usually snakes around the shop and is as good a snapshot of life in this Andalusian village as I can possibly conjure up.

It is here that his faithful customers patiently wait their turn, catching up on gossip and baracking Pedro, who is never short of a bit of banter himself. A hard-working man, he is up with the lark to locate his wonderful selection of produce and spends much of his afternoon delivering it around the nearby area.

"And as long as the locals keep supporting our local shops and demanding good quality goods then I will continue finding them," he says.

Pedro is typical of the Arriate stock. A staunch supporter of old fashioned village life, he spends most weekends enjoying the local countryside, when not looking after his ageing parents.

A keen hiker, he is forever in training for this or that, the highlight of his year being the annual 101km walk organised by nearby Ronda's famous Foreign Legion.

"It is the best thing about living in a country village like this," he explains.



**ROMERIA: Arriate style**



**TRADITION:**  
Easter parade and  
(right) an island of  
nature

It is little surprise that Arriate – after Ronda – is one of the only inland Malaga towns to continue to grow dramatically over the last decade. Much of this must be down to the town's reputation for being a party town. Despite being ruled by the IU (or Communist party) for well over a decade (the socialist PSOE party finally took over in May), there is more interest in having fun than the teachings of Chairman Mao. This might perhaps explain, why – despite its apparent hard left leanings – the town has some of the best known Easter parades in Andalucia. Highly competitive and reaching fever pitch around Good Friday, practically every family has a member in one parade or another. Indeed, such is the clamour to be involved, the brotherhoods even hold lotteries for the right

to carry the floats (or *tronos*) of Jesus and Mary. "It has always seemed a real contradiction to me," says Jose Antonio Coca, a local fitness instructor and masseur, who grew up in the town. "The processions are taken very seriously and they are very moving, but it is a simple fact that most of those involved hardly ever go to church and so it is really just down to the tradition." Aside from the 400 years of tradition that brings thousands of visitors to see the *Hermanidad del Santisimo Cristo de la Sangre y del Santo Entierro de Cristo* at Easter, there are other festivals such as the *Romeria*, the *Dia de la Vieja*, and the *Fiesta en el Aire*, which happens in a fortnight. "It is this sort of thing that really makes the Arriate people stand out," explains mayor Melchor Conde. "They are above all very generous; and always have an

open door and are happy to give you what they have." Another curious trait about Arriate is its wealth of musical talent. There are two town bands, a drumming group and 'everyone plays one instrument or another,' it is claimed. It is a tradition that can be traced back even before the origins of the town, when a mythical group of country musicians roamed the area playing music in the dead of night. Known as *La Aurora de Arriate*, the group of musicians still keep up the tradition playing in the dead of night on Sunday morning between the hours of 4am and 6am. With origins from Arabic times in the 13th century, the *coplas*, or local songs, have been passed down from generation to generation and became famous when in 1973 the British National Geographic Society recorded them for an album on



Spanish cultural music. A capacity for music is all too obvious with a visit to the incredible Los Caireles bar on the high street. There are few surprises in the Serrania de Ronda as pleasant as walking through the anonymous colourful frosted glass doors on a concert night in winter, when it will be full of hundreds of music fans of all ages, colours and styles. Much to do with the brothers Roberto and Monolo Rivera, who have a popular drumming troop *Arriadh Cumcum da*, the surprise is more the better, if you can persuade them to take you out back. If so, you will soon realise that the bar you are standing in is just one small corner of what was once – since the 1940s – Arriate's *Cine Ideal*. And what a gem it is.

Still standing today, with its main screen and stage - not to mention 350 original wood and leather seats bought from 'Cine Paris' in Malaga in the 1950s - best of all are the stunning brightly-coloured hydraulic tiles that line the entrance. "Our father was a real film fanatic," says Monolo. "This was one of the most popular cinemas in the Serrania. "People came for miles around despite the movies being heavily censored by the local priest and mayor, who would watch the film first demanding cuts all over the place." Running until 1988, when due to dwindling audiences part of it had to be converted into a flamenco venue, the brothers have kept it intact despite numerous offers from developers to turn it into flats. "This is our legacy and part of

our town's key history," says Roberto. "I grew up watching *Cine Paradiso* and always dreamt of one day opening the cinema up again. One day we hope to be able to find the funding to do that." For the time being, they are busy organising a new edition of the *Fiesta en el Aire*, for October which was modelled on an idea that came from their father in the 1950s. Taking place each October, the festival is an 'open air' celebration of the town's artists, musicians 'and creativity in general,' explains Roberto, who is himself a photographer. Weather permitting, the three day bash will see the whole town coming out onto the streets for a range of concerts, food and general fun. It is, after all, what Arriate is about.





## POET'S COTTAGE

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**C**OMPLETLY encircled by mountains Ronda is fast becoming a top destination for hiking, cycling and mountain excursions.

It is good news for the town as there is a huge boom in the number of people coming to Spain for activity and green tourism.

Tourism experts estimate that around 15% of the 60-plus million people who visited Spain in 2008 spent € 4.26 billion on eco-tourism. And the numbers are rising.

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.

In May, traditionally, the local army regiment 'La Legion' (or Foreign Legion) puts on its infa-

Ronda is now one of the key outward bounds hubs in Andalucía... but certain dark forces have been holding it back



**HIKING:** A walk towards Ronda from Grazalema

mous 101-km race that snakes around the nearby hills.

A true feat of grit and determination, some 7000-odd cyclists, walkers and runners have up to 24 hours to com-

plete 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."

With Staleman's help, excursions head out to the neighboring towns like Arriate, Setenil, Ronda de la Vieja, El Gastor and Grazalema.

You can hire bikes at his shop, or nearby at the shop of former *Tour de France* pro Jesus Rosado.

If walking, is more your thing,

## Pilates and painting



**CLASS:** At Victoria's house

**P**ainting and Pilates in Spain was born when three friends from Gaucin came up with the idea of pooling their talents to create an active and creative holiday experience.

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They launched this April to great reviews and all of their guests have already booked for next year.

There is also the option to get a group of friends and family together and organise a tailor-made holiday, with activities on offer to keep everyone happy, like horse riding, tennis, hiking or dirt bike riding.

Victoria is a painter whose bohemian side is expressed not just by her landscapes but by her beautiful house on the hill, with views that stretch all the way to Africa via Gibraltar.

The painting course takes place at her studio, where there is plenty of inspiration for even the most inexperienced painter. She trained at The City and Guilds of London Art School and has shown her work both here in Spain and London.

Lucy's delicious cooking fuels the holidays. She has been a professional cook for 20 years and formerly ran La Fuente res-

taurant in Gaucin.

Drawing on Spanish and Moroccan influences she creates seasonal menus that reflect her passion for food and local produce. Her raw food is delicious and healthy.

Alison Mudge started teaching yoga 12 years ago and trained as a pilates instructor three years ago. Her classes are tough but full of fun and accessible to all.

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**EVOCATIVE:** The Molino Canto walk near Arriate

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## FACTFILE: THE PICKS OF THE NEARBY SERRANIA

**R**ONDA is surrounded by two national parks, the Sierra de las Nieves to the East and the Sierra de Grazalema to the West. Both are full of wonderful walks and pretty towns. Here are a few suggestions for excursions out of Ronda.



then there are a series of excellent sign-marked walks heading off from the town in all directions.

A number head through the famous Tajo gorge, while others head off to 'secret' spots, such as the incredible fan-shaped cave, Cueva de Abanico, in a stunning nearby valley.

The famous GR-7, or 'gran recorido', which heads from Tarifa to Athens, also goes through the town, but it has been somewhat controversially cut off by developers a few miles north of Ronda to build a golf course.

It was this very development, known as Los Merinos, that led to an almighty battle with local ecologists and nature lovers early this decade.

Interestingly, its opponents included one Alastair Boyd - aka Lord Kilmarnock - who was sometimes credited with planting the seed for Ronda's outdoor renaissance.

Moving to the area in the 50s to indulge his passion of horse riding and to write, Boyd wrote two books about his travels through the nearby sierras.

"Every man should have his own sierra," Boyd wrote in his first book, *The Road from Ronda*, in 1967.

### Conservation

Curiously, it was his horseback travels that would later become a catalyst for Spanish conservationists in the late 90s.

When real estate developers threatened to over-run the mountain area around Ronda in the late 90s and early 00s, Boyd, a retired member of the English House of Lords, argued for development restraint and environment protection.

While the golf course scheme is still in the balance - officially illegal due to a lack of water - the dispute weakened Boyd's health and he died at 81 in March 2009.

For information on walks head to the tourist offices in town, or try and get hold of a number of good local books, such as that of Guy Hunter Watts, that give detailed walking info.



### 1 RONDA LA VIEJA (ACINIPO)

A 15-minute drive from Ronda at the top of one of the highest hills in the area the Romans built their ancient city. It still has much evidence of their skills with a large part of its amphitheatre intact and a lot more to look at, not to mention the views. The visitor centre is only open for the morning, but one can always climb up to the amphitheatre out of hours.



### 2 SETENIL DE LAS BODEGAS

Only 20 minutes drive away, the historic Roman town of Setenil is a real eye opener and amazing for photography. Nestled in the rolling landscape north of Ronda, it was built on a series of caves, which served to keep the wines of the Romans cool in summer, hence its name. It is best to leave your car outside the town, wander up to the old fortress before heading down to the famous overhanging cave for a fine tapas lunch. Next door are a couple of shops selling local olive oil-based shampoos and soaps.



### 3 GRAZALEMA AND ZAHARA

Grazalema and Zahara are two of the most evocative towns around Ronda. Both set in spectacular scenery and with some lovely sites, Zahara has a towering castle above it and a great restaurant Al Lago, while Grazalema (a beautifully conserved gem) was once the centre of the wool industry and you can still buy delightful rugs and bedspreads.



### 4 BENAOLAN AND MONTAJAQUE

If it is wonderful mountain scenery you are after and villages famous for their bandits then this pair are worth a visit. Montajaque has a cave with the oldest cave paintings in Spain, while Benaolan is the centre of the ham and sausage industry. There is a fabulous walk from Benaolan Estacion down the river to Jimera de Liber, from where you can get the train back. At each end is a great lunch spot, with Quercus and Molino del Santo.



Light and airy and perfect lock-up **VILLAGE HOUSE** in the heart of the Serrania de Ronda. Just ten minutes from Ronda, in one of the area's most bustling towns, the house has been carefully and sensitively converted to the highest standards. Largely sustainable using local materials and labour, it has double glazing, preinstallation for solar panels and low water use toilets. It maintains its original metre-thick stone walls and pantile roof and includes three bedrooms, two bathrooms, plus a huge roof terrace with views for miles. It also counts its own functioning well and big leafy garden, with olive and fig trees and a healthy vine.

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WHILE I have over 20 years experience with horses, I have learnt a lot from the local riders. Coming from a traditional horsemanship background I like to use my knowledge and mix it with natural horsemanship.

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# Journey to the top of the

Once of the most stunning ways to get to Ronda is via the celebrated scenic route via Casares and Gaucin, writes Claire Wilson

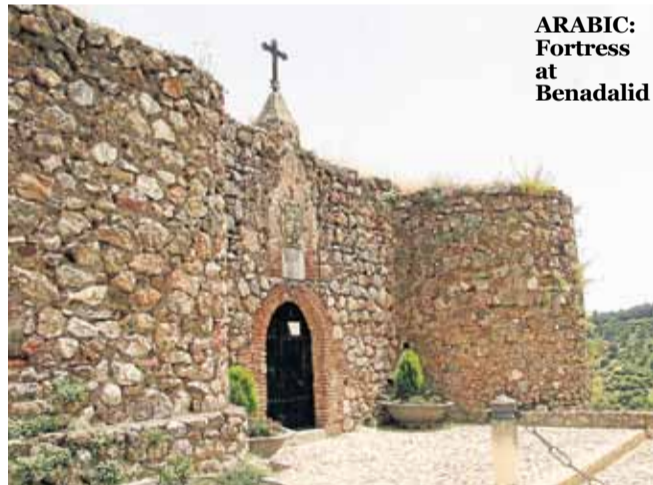
HERE are a few ways to get to Ronda, one inland from Malaga, via the Guadalhorce Valley, and the main one via the infamous San Pedro road, some 45 minutes of curves from the coast. One fantastic alternative is to take your time and make an adventure out of the journey, taking a slower, far less busy scenic route via Casares and Gaucin, which allows for dozens of photo opportunities and many stops for lunch or coffee. Your turn off is Estepona, where you head nine kilometres inland to Casares. Famous for the la Hediona spa, pure waters from which supposedly cured Julius Caesar of a liver complaint, the village is built around a 12th century castle which was founded by the occupying Moors.



ROMAN: The Hediona baths in Casares

Breathtaking on approach: it's a layered expanse of traditionally Moorish whitewashed buildings hug the cliff, some of which look precariously high. I challenge you not to pull up and take a photograph as it comes into sight! Casares is hilly, and it is easy to lose yourself in its back alleys and footpaths as you look in awe at the Moorish architecture. Your next stop is wonderful Gaucin. Sitting 600 meters above sea level, this pretty town is the start of the Serrania de Ronda proper. Dominated by the Castillo del Aguila (Eagles Castle), it was

originally a Roman stronghold which was subsequently expanded by the Arabs. From here, visitors will be treated to spectacular views of Gibraltar and, on a clear day, Morocco. Flamenco festivals, art exhibitions and other cultural events are a staple of Gaucin life, while bird watchers will be thrilled to hear the village is circled by flocks of eagles and kestrels, and various migrating birds depending on the season. Climbing further into the mountains you traverse the Genal Valley to your south and the Guadiaro Valley to your north. This charming route is littered with pretty villages that date back to Arabic times and most have just a few hundred souls inhabiting them. Great lunch stops include Molienda in Benalauria, or a short detour into Montejaque and Benaolan, two former bandit villages, where you will find the excellent Molino del Santo hotel and restaurant. It would also be a great place to stay and nearby you have various caves to visit and some of the best walks in Andalucia. All in all, the journey can take anything from two hours to two days. But it really is a delight, and no surprises a few years ago was dubbed officially a 'route of specific scenery'. Happy travels!



ARABIC: Fortress at Benadaliid



## What a chestnut!

JON CLARKE takes a stroll – and quite a few lunches – around one of Andalucia's best kept secrets

ON weekends Jesus and Rosa's charming restaurant Casa Grande in Alpendeire fills up with a healthy mix of foodies and walkers eager to try its celebrated local, organic dishes. The rest of the time you can hear a pin drop in the village, which boasts just 300 hardy souls, a couple of donkeys and a doctor (well, once a week at least). But this is not your average whitewashed Andalucian village. For starters, it is almost square in shape, it has almost no expatriates and it counts on a church that is almost the size of a 'cathedral'. And, that is what the locals call it. This is all down to one rather important Andalucian character. For it was here in the 1866 that a monk Fray Leopoldo was born in the town. A pious man, he is credited with a number of miracles and in 1961 the Vatican started the process of beautifying him, he now he has been honoured with saint status, his disciples – mostly of the Capucin order – are often found visiting the village. Either way, is a charming spot, surrounded by breathtaking countryside with some of the best walks in Andalucia.

Indeed there are few region's as evocative and unspoiled as the Genal Valley, where Alpendeire perches, surrounded by oak and chestnut trees.

Yet, as the crow flies, it is only ten miles from the concrete ribbon of the Costa del Sol... and 99.9 per cent of the holiday makers will not have heard of the little-visited area.

And more's the shame, because the expansive valley that spreads over 42,000 hectares between the coast and Ronda, is a paradise for walkers, wildlife lovers and foodies.

Part of the Serrania de Ronda, this lovely collection of villages – 16 in total – are a joy to visit, each boasting their own local ventas and with a number of comfortable and decent hotels.

"The fact that it is completely undiscovered makes it the perfect paradise for me," says Diana Beach, owner of Hotel Los Castanos, in nearby Cartijima. "Surrounded by a vast landscape of chestnut forests and craggy peaks, it is a great place to escape the rat race."

For many years I have enjoyed heading out to the valley for strolls, normally taking in one of the many good

restaurants, or some times packing a picnic. A particularly nice time to visit is the late autumn when the leaves of the valley's predominantly chestnut (or castano) trees start turning a bright, burning red. Earlier in September it is fun to take a walk and pick the numerous chestnuts that line the paths, before heading home to toast them on an open fire. "Chestnuts are the only stable business here," continues Beach. "Everybody is out in September and every family has their trees."

In total, there are four different varieties of chestnut trees, some of them up to 500 years old. Each local village picks them and sells them to a local cooperative that markets them around Spain and abroad.

The only other industry in the valley involves the production of artisan products, such as baskets, corbels, stools and blinds.

The latter – along with baskets and mats – are usually woven out of a plant, known as *esparto*, which is found on the high peaks known as the 'riscos' above the valley.

Making beautiful blinds, which can be seen on many traditional houses in Ronda, and further afield in Sevilla, they are usually made to order and are not cheap.

Without a doubt, the Genal Valley's main future will be tourism, with plans to open up the area with better roads and infrastructure.

Said to have one of Europe's cleanest rivers – the Genal – the area also boasts one of the last remaining Mediterranean Oak forests.

There are plenty of places to swim in the river, one of the best down below Juzcar, where just across the river you will find one of those remarkable little chestnut trees that makes your whole journey worthwhile.

For near this tiny village – now most famous for its Smurfs (see panel top right) – lies a former tin factory once with a royal seal, that now makes wonderful olive oil and is soon to produce its own wine.

In the process of being reformed by charming Catalans, Enrique it nestles in a secret valley and is peacefully sonified.

Best of all, it is only 45 minutes to Marbella, which is all the more remarkable.



STUNNING: The Antigua Real Fabra

The area is said to have one of Europe's cleanest rivers - the Genal

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# e world



## FEELING BLUE? JUZCAR WILL CHEER YOU UP

33



**L**OOKING for something completely different? Well Juzcar certainly offers an alternative look to the ubiquitous *pueblo blanco*.

For this tiny village is painted entirely blue... and in, what is bound to be a hit with anyone under the age of 10, the village was chosen by Sony Pictures to promote the two *Smurfs* film, in 2011 and 2013.

Juzcar beat competition from 200 other villages because it looked most like the fictional village where the Smurfs live.

Two years on and it has received over 200,000 visitors - that is more than 350 a day. Not bad for a village of just 250 residents - and no surprise then that locals voted to keep it blue.

Guided tours (Smurf-themed, naturally) are available all year round.



### What to buy - esparto bags

ONE thing to look out for in the Genal Valley are baskets woven out of *esparto* grass that grows in the area. Once the main source of income for many families in the Sierra de las Nieves, sadly *esparto* products are now a dying trade. In Igualeja however you can visit a womens' co-operative that aims to keep the tradition alive as well as forming jobs for locals.



**VISTA:**  
View of the Genal Valley, Frey Leopoldo (top) and a Stone Age circle (right)



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**At Algaba you can find out what Andalusia was like 5000 years ago, discovers Eloise Horsfield**



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about how our forefathers created fire, ground their bread, as well as decorated their homes. You can even find out what they did with their dead.

"We teach people about ancient Mediterranean ecosystems because this land has been occupied from prehistoric times

to the present day," explains owner Juan Terroba.

Algaba's work also includes research and teachings on the geology and ornithology of the area, as well as acting as a rare breeds centre for endangered cows.

These include the Spanish Pajuna – of which there are just 500 left (pictured far left) – as well as the Andalusian Cardena, which in the early 90s had been reduced to just seven individuals.

Thanks to the work of organisations like Algaba, there are now around 200 Cardenas.

Guests and groups can now come and stay at the centre's restored 250-year-old finca.

"It is certainly a place where people can come and get away from it all".

[www.algabaderonda.com](http://www.algabaderonda.com)

**VISIONARY:  
Juan Terroba**



**A**LIFETIME living in Jimena de la Frontera would do wonders for your health.

For most, jaunts across the historic town are likely to involve a challenging ascent.

All roads lead to Rome but, in the case of Jimena, these sloping streets wind up to the 13th Century Moorish castle that continues to watch over the cobbled lanes and lovingly maintained whitewashed homes.

The castle – a constant reminder of Jimena's intriguing past – rises up above the town, keeping a wary eye on the looming mountain peaks of the surrounding Serrania de Ronda.

And the short, but challenging,

## The good life

**You'll need stamina to live in Jimena de la Frontera...a town with a big heart, writes Andy Pearce**

walk to the all-seeing medieval stronghold is well worth the effort as panoramic vistas greet the eye once the steep hillside is conquered.

Once an important vantage point for the Moorish armies, the castle witnessed many battles as Christian armies laid siege in numerous blood-thirsty attempts to claim the towering site as their own.

Even before such struggles the

town has been home sporadically to the Iberians, Phoenicians and Carthaginians, as well as the Romans.

These days, however, such combat and instability is fortunately consigned to the history books as Spaniards and expatriates of varied nationalities contribute in equal measure to the vibrant social scene of what, at first glance, appears to be a sleepy Andalusian out-

post.

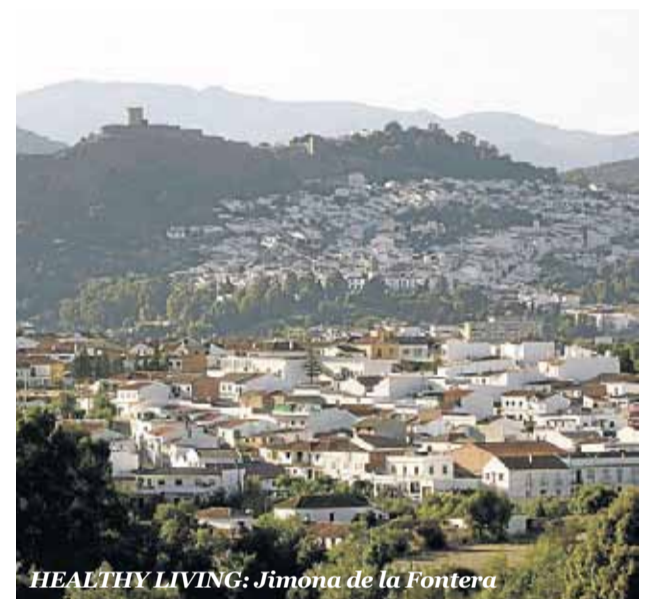
And it is this healthy relationship that immediately becomes apparent from just a few hours strolling the streets of Jimena. A visit to just one of the many inviting bars and authentic restaurants – which serve as the perfect refuelling stations once a winding road has been negotiated – will reveal the special bond that the townsfolk have successfully nurtured over recent years.

This mix of old and new, working together in perfect tandem, is one of Jimena's great hallmarks, the vast majority of its buildings – in many cases dating back centuries – still ooze their original charm after carefully-managed restoration projects.

Despite having changed in size and amenities considerably, Jimena remains worlds apart from the built-up coastal resorts that lie just 25 minutes away by car.

The development of the town has been witnessed by resident of 20 years Alberto Bullrich, who first visited Jimena a mere 40 years ago.

"Jimena used to be an extremely quiet but amazingly beautiful mountain town," explains Bullrich.



**HEALTHY LIVING: Jimena de la Frontera**

"I came back 20 years later and I suddenly saw the first signs of change. For instance, a medical centre had appeared.

"What is so special is that it is still a small town with a rural feel to it, but it has significantly opened up over the years and welcomed its ever-growing expatriate population without losing its original identity."

Glowing praise is no stranger to Jimena.

In fact, it was so highly regarded by Spanish King Alfonso XII that he declared in 1879 that it should be officially recognised as a town, rather than a village. Would-be walkers and intrepid explorers are blessed with the Parque Natural de los Alcornocales, which stretches away

from both the north and southern ends of town.

Bristling with cork oaks, called alcornoques, this natural park is home to an incredible array of birds and insects.

The potential treks include the 'Walk of the Old Mill' and the 'Walk of the Wolf and the Pigs', both begin in Jimena but soon take their followers on challenging circuits that are brimming with incredible views.

Not only is Jimena town home to some challenging daily treks as people negotiate the picturesque cobbled streets as part of their daily routine, but the surrounding countryside offers even more testing excursions. The town really does work wonders for your health!

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### JIMENA FACTFILE



The town was officially declared of Historical and Artistic importance in 1983. With a present population of just over 10,000 (some 1,000 of whom are foreign residents, many of them British), its narrow, cobbled streets and white-washed, tile-roofed Andalusian houses retain a village ambience.

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# Jimena de la Frontera - an ideal choice for a holiday or permanent home in rural Andalucía

Jimena de la Frontera is one of the most delightful of Andalucía's white villages. A striking Moorish castle which dates back to 711 A.D. looks down over the village.

With a population of just over 10,000, some 1,800 of whom are foreign residents, its narrow, whitewashed and often-walled, Andalusian houses are filled with plants from its subtropical greenhouse.

Surrounded by the majestic beauty of the Alcornocales Natural Park, it is located 25 Kilometres inland from Gibraltar on the road which leads north to Huelva, lying on a hillside between two rivers, the Guadalequivar and Guadalema.

From every part of the village, one can enjoy views across the beautiful countryside all around and down the valley to the Bay of Cádiz with the Mediterranean - and Mexico - beyond.

A major attraction for both locals and visitors is the very pretty river, the Guadalequivar. It is especially popular in summer when one can relax in its deep pools, but whatever the time of year it is a beautiful spot for fishing, swimming & walking along the river banks.

Another great asset to the village is the presence of the Museo de la Cerámica. Daily tours running between 10.00 and 12.00.

The relatively small, inland town, Jimena offers all residents and visitors every available facility. A modern medical centre, dental clinic, excellent municipal sports centre with outdoor pool, sports hall, football pitch, tennis courts, padel courts and more.

There are excellent local schools, a variety of shops and some excellent restaurants. There is even a cinema. A beautiful

Jimena de la Frontera is one of those places that draws you in again and again. It's a gem. If you want to live or visit Spain this is the perfect place!

## ANDALUCIA COUNTRY HOUSES Featured Jimena Properties



Ref. subject 22  
200,000 € + IVA  
Restored 3 bed  
village house with  
pool, garage, garden  
& swimming pool



Ref. subject 28  
470,000 € + IVA  
Unique country  
villa with pool,  
swimming grounds,  
outlet pools &  
stable. Close to all  
amenities



Ref. subject 16  
295,000 € + IVA  
A modern 4 bedroom  
country house with  
swimming pool  
with a 4 & 6 bedroom  
factory directly across  
from it



Ref. subject 17  
425,000 € + IVA  
A great 3 bedroom  
village house with  
fantastic walled  
garden including  
terrace, pool,  
courtyard & pool  
hall connected  
apartment to garage

## BUY YOURSELF A SLICE OF HISTORY The Fabrica de Borubas, Jimena de la Frontera



Ref. subject 27  
Now offered at an absolute bargain price of 325,000 €  
A unique opportunity to purchase one of the town's  
historical houses with a pool

The property belongs to The Duke of Medina Sidonia,  
built in 1778 and last bought & restored 200 years of ago  
recently

With all its every product in use and in ready to use  
kitchen built for the last stage of 18th - 19th  
century, it was used for the manufacture of a fabric of  
cotton and wool

The entrance shows the its proximity to the River  
Guadalequivar, a 500 m long canal was built to run the  
mills to use the water power. 2 km to the edge of town  
with its historical ground of 10000 m<sup>2</sup> (10000 m<sup>2</sup>)

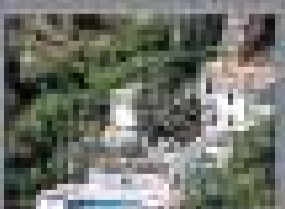
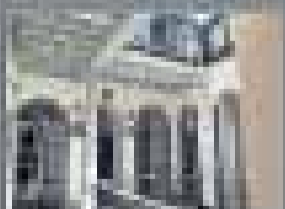
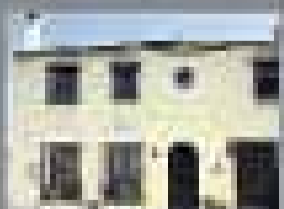
Today the property has a bedroom, 2 full size, kitchen,  
bath & fully equipped kitchen, spacious living  
with swimming pool, covered terrace and a beautiful  
terrace on the edge of the Alcornocales Park, one of the  
world's largest Park Urban Areas.

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# Serrania Services

## Inmobiliaria - Real Estate



Renovated White Village House, High Town

Ref 100271

**135,500 €**



Renovated white village house situated in the picturesque village of Grazalema. The house was renovated in 2001 and is built in the high part of the village, a typical house of the locality, a 2 storey building that comprises sitting-room with dining area, equipped kitchen, 3 double bedrooms (one in the attic) dressing-room and terrace 16.11m<sup>2</sup>. A very cosy house, beautifully presented and decorated in warm Mediterranean colours from the Al-Andaluz era. Electric heating. Hot water from gas. Possibility to enlarge the property. Ronda 30km. Malaga International Airport 134km approximately.



Cortijo Renovation, Cortijo Virgen de Las Montañas

Ref 100212

**295,000 €**



Wonderful opportunity to purchase a traditional Spanish Cortijo 400m<sup>2</sup> with land 130.000m<sup>2</sup> (32.1/2 acres approx). Cortijo Virgen de Las Montañas has a cobble patio, outbuildings and fantastic open views over the valley. The farmhouse would make a marvellous home, ideal for equestrian purposes, riding and training centre or rural tourism business, yoga, alternative medicine, accommodation. Water is abundant with a mains connection plus a natural water source and a private well. Electricity is connected. The property is located in an area of outstanding beauty with panoramic views. The village of Gaucin for all the amenities. Malaga International approximately 120km. The Coast only a short drive away.



Equestrian Finca, House, Stables, Paddocks, 5.5 H

Ref 100465

**485,000 €**



Country House, Pool, Orchard, Veg & 2.150m<sup>2</sup> Land

Ref 100190

**245,000 €**



Cortijo with Guest House, Stables & 400.000m<sup>2</sup> Land

Ref 100024

**890,000 €**



Village House with Commercial Unit, Ideal B&B, Views

Ref 100487

**110,000 €**

Ronda's leading estate agent with town and country properties in Ronda, Arriate and the Serrania. We also have a good selection of rental properties. Visit our website at

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## Buy a bomb factory



**EXPLOSIVE OFFER : Jimena's bomb factory**



It is being described as a 'unique opportunity' to buy a slice of Andalusian history. And it is hard to argue that the amazing 1778 building in Jimena de la Frontera does not fit into this category.

Called appropriately the 'bomb factory', it was built by the Duke of Medina Sidonia to manufacture cannonballs. Essentially a blast furnace, it produced 200 tons of iron annually and it made 84,000 cannonballs during the Great Siege of Gibraltar between 1779 to 1783.

It was later used to make machinery and even a bridge at El Puerto de Santa Maria.

Chosen for its location next to the River Hozgarganta and protected by Jimena castle it was the perfect site for a bomb factory. Today though it has been con-

verted into a private home with two self-contained holiday flats, with two swimming pools.

Sitting on the edge of the Alcornocales Park, and close to the Serrania de Ronda this really is a superb deal a €525,000, but due to a need to sell fast the owners would listen to offers of just under €400,000.

Being sold through Andalusia Country Houses, it is certainly one to visit. Said boss Karen Banham: "When clients come to us looking for property in Andalusia, we often hear they are looking for something with an income."

"Couples in their mid 50's are rarely ready to retire and this is the perfect new challenge."

And for this price it is a real 'bomba' (or bargain) as they say in Spanish. Contact Karen at [sales@andalucia-country-houses.com](mailto:sales@andalucia-country-houses.com) for more information.

## Learning the lingua

LOOKING for an inspirational place to brush up on your Spanish? Or really crack the language?

Rondalingua is a new language centre, whose objective is to help students learn languages in a fun, practical and effective way.

Whatever level you have, the teachers will take you through the labyrinth that is Spanish grammar to come out the other side with the skills needed to truly enjoy your experience of visiting or living in Spain.

The owners, Charlotte Wilmot and Jaime Lopez, endeavour to make their students' experiences enjoyable. And their team offers a wealth of experience in teaching.

With small groups, the classes are practical and personalised and Rondalingua now offers classes for native English/bilingual children, with a qualified and experienced teacher.

The classes are designed to encourage the children to develop their literacy skills; from Jolly Phonics for the little ones to creative writing and project work for the older ones.

There are some incredible deals to be had in the Serrania de Ronda

It is little surprise that the Ronda area has become one of Andalusia's most popular places to visit by those-in-the-know.

And equally no surprise that a large number of foreigners end up buying in the area, many working in tourism, while others have simply retired to enjoy the good mix of countryside and attractive local towns and villages.

There is certainly a wonderful range of properties from country fincas to flats and from village homes to grand town-houses.

"Whatever, if you enjoy a quieter life away from the rat-race, you like spectacular scenery and unspoilt mountain towns then the Serrania is for you," says agent Irene Ortiz, from Serrania Services.

"It is cheaper than on the coast and there is a huge variety of activities available, including bird-watching, ballooning and horse-riding." The capital Ronda is a big town

# High Life!

of 40,000 plus people and contains most of the modern amenities.

"It is a real bonus having a proper hospital, with a new one actually being built on the edge of town," adds Ortiz.

There are certainly many attractive properties both in the town and in nearby Gaucin, the Genal Valley or Jimena.

Closer by, one of the best bargains, is the stunning three-bedroom Poet's Cottage in the heart of the buzzing village Arriate, just 10 minutes from Ronda. (See advert)

This stunningly converted home has dropped in price by 40% to just €130,000 for an immediate sale.

Renovated to the highest standards with sustainability in mind, the stone built property counts its own leafy garden with a splash pool, as well as a massive vine-covered roof terrace with views for miles around.

In Casares you will be well catered for by Oscar and Anita at Villas & Fincas, who have been covering the Serrania – and further afield – for well over a decade.

Meanwhile in Gaucin, where there are some fabulous homes and properties, make sure to check out Gaucin Properties, run by Dianne Shotton, or CB Properties, also in the town. In Jimena, a stunning hilltop town, topped with a castle, around 1,000 expats have set up their home.

Local agent Andalusia Country Houses offers an interesting selection of village houses, from period properties to reformed houses with pools and gardens.

"We also have some true gems waiting for the right owner to come along and bring them back to life!" says owner Karen Banham.



**BARGAIN: Two Gaucin bargains, left, 4-bed house, €575,000 (CB Properties) above, 2-bed house €230,000 (Gaucin properties)**



We have an exceptional portfolio of properties for sale in GAUCÍN, the prettiest 'Pueblo Blanco' in the Serrania de Ronda. This delightful mountain village, with its Medieval castle silhouetted against the skyline, is surrounded by Natural Parks and has stunning views across the River Genal valley to the Mediterranean Sea, Gibraltar and into North Africa.



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# Mountain of repose

**You are spoilt for choice with a raft of romantic and hip places to stay around the Serrania**

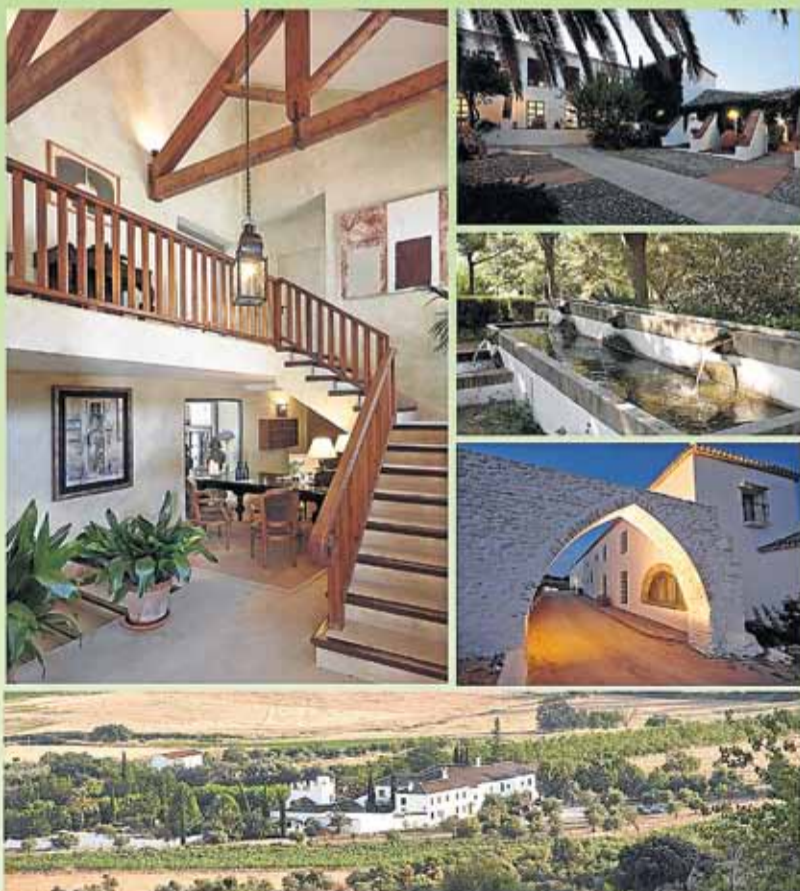
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**A**PPROPRIATELY dubbed the 'City of Dreams' by Dutch poet Rilke there are plenty of excellent places to stay in the Ronda area.

In the heart of the city you are spoilt for choice, with La Colegiata hard to beat on value and location. Sited in the most atmospheric square in the old town, you can really feel the weight of history and the charming Belgium-run hotel has been nicely renovated and its rooms are comfortable. In the countryside nearby are some of Andalucia's most hip hotels.

These include stylish Fuente de la Higuera, where British Prime Minister David Cameron has stayed, and Molino del Arco, which is a joy to visit, even if just for its amazing landscaped gardens.

The family home of local landowner and Anglophile Juan Clavero, who has a splendid eye for detail, it sits in a privileged position in the nearby Sierra de Salinas.

You might also want to consider Molino del Puente, run by friendly English couple Ian and Elaine Love, who also have one of the area's best restaurants.

A bit further away in Benaolan you must certainly consider incredible Molino del Santo, a classic rural retreat, which has been serving the area for nearly three decades.

Run by English couple Pauline and Andy, the hotel - number two in Andalucia, according to *Trip Advisor* - has the knack of keeping guests happy with just the right mix of comfort, good food and character.

Best of all, it counts on one of the best restaurants in Andalucia, run by its fantastic resident chef Gordon Brown.

Closer to Ronda, in the charming village of Arriate, you will find a number of great places to stay. The first, Hotel Arriadh, has been providing weary travellers with lodgings with the most amazing views imaginable.

Run by friendly Peruvian Eduardo, you will feel like you are staying in someone's home. Also in the village is the excellent Hotel

Embrujo, run by friendly Esther from Valladolid. It has a basement spa and is a minute walk from around a dozen tapas bars.

Meanwhile Poet's Cottage is a charming village house, with three bedrooms that can be rented from just 200 euros for the weekend.

Finally, if you are looking for real luxury, then plan to stay a long weekend in the amazing Alcantarrilla estate, which sits in two hectares of amazing gardens with stunning views.

An authentic farmhouse in Ronda's Llano de la Cruz valley, it dates back to Moorish (and even possibly Roman) times, and has seven bedrooms but can be split into two parts.

For campers, by far your best option is Camping Sur, a short walk into Ronda, with its own shop and restaurant, while a new complex Cedro Alto, near Montejaque, offers comfortable 'casitas' and apartments at great prices.

If you fancy staying in a complete rural idyll, then a weekend at Los Castanos in Cartojima will blow you away. This authentic hostel comes top of *Trip Advisor* and it is not hard to see why.

A little further away in Jimena you will find two splendid places to stay.

If complete comfort is what you're really after, look no further than the sumptuous Hostel Anon - a romantic getaway that always comes highly recommended.

Last, but certainly not least, if you are looking for something even more rural then head to La Vina de Linan, a luxury B&B sitting in wonderful surroundings in the countryside perfectly located near the Hozgarganta river.



**AUTHENTIC: Molino del Arco**

## surrounded by nature

Our stunning campsite just 1km outside Ronda is a fantastic place to relax.

As well as all the facilities of a campsite there are chalets to rent.

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**CHARACTER :** Eduardo from Arriadh Hotel (left), Alcantarilla (above) and Diana at Los Castanos and Molino del Puente



**PARADISE:** The grounds at Molino del Santo

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**IF YOU WANT THE VERY BEST IN RONDA...**



**...head for the area's most popular award-winning boutique Hotel**

When in the Ronda area, there really is only one place to head for if you are looking for something very special.

Whether you want to a comfortable bed for the night – in a stunning location – or an amazing meal alongside a mountain stream - or a combination of both - you must head for Molino del Santo in the sleepy village of Benaoján station.

You are only ten minutes from Ronda but a lifetime away from the hustle and bustle of the coast and tourist towns. An easy train journey from San Roque or an hour's drive from San Pedro near Marbella, will transport you to a different world of peace and tranquillity.

**Standards**

For 27 years Molino del Santo has been setting the standard for rural tourism and if you haven't yet visited, you don't know that you've been missing, Friendly staff, excellent food, wonderful scenery – a hugely faithful following return year after year to the security of high standards in service and attention to detail.

You really should know that this is wonderful walking country in the autumn. Why not join the owner and his dog on a regular Thursday morning walk before breakfast – or stride out at your own pace with the help of maps and trails provided by the hotel? Or just come and explore the local villages and sights from this delightful base.

And the food... Oh my! Every year the word is spreading more widely – there really is nowhere better to eat in the area. From simple but delicious snacks to full 8 course tasting menus with matching local wines if desired, you are going to have a great experience at reasonable prices. There is a lot of care going on in this restaur-

ant and you really should sample it soon! All menus are on the website [www.molinodelsanto.com](http://www.molinodelsanto.com)

**Special**

For any kind of special occasion, there is a team of friendly staff to ensure you have an unforgettable time. Birthdays, anniversaries, family reunions, - there are lots of reasons to make the time to visit Molino del Santo.



**Delightful Staff**

Trip Advisor raves, Michelin delights, lots of other guide books enthuse ... when are you going to get Molino-ed? English speaking staff are available to answer your enquiries and do all they can to ensure you have an unforgettable time and join the thousands who return regularly. But don't leave it too late – Molino del Santo closes its 2013 season on the 31st October. Visit soon – you'll wish you'd done it earlier.

**Molino del Santo, Hotel and Restaurant, Estación de Benaoján, 29370 BENAJOJAN, Málaga**  
[www.molinodelsanto.com](http://www.molinodelsanto.com) Tlf 952 16 71 51. e-mail : [info@nolinodelsanto.com](mailto:info@nolinodelsanto.com)

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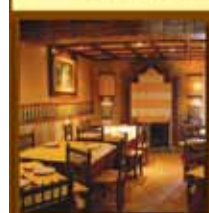

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**R**ONDA is, without a doubt, my favourite place to eat in Andalucía.

The town and nearby region offers an incredible range in both creativity and value and it is no surprise that nearly a dozen of the restaurants listed on the *Olive Press*' fast-growing website *Dining Secrets of Andalucía* are in the Serrania de Ronda.

From the creativity of Tragatapas and Casa Santa Pola, to rural idylls Molino del Santo and Al Lago, there is so much on offer.

Add in the soulful, unpretentious Alcocobar, historic Pedro Romero and the know-how of Pablo Piek at La Fuente and you have a potent mix.

And now, of course, you have supposedly Andalucía's best

# Best in Andalucía

**Dining Secrets of Andalucía editor Jon Clarke on why the Serrania de Ronda area has a dozen of the best restaurants in Andalucía**

restaurant, according to *Trip Advisor*, in El Muelle, in Arriate. This charming converted railway storeroom is well worth a journey alone, as many people have been doing over recent months all the way from Estepona and Marbella.

Run by talented Dutchman Frank Rottgering, it has truly come of age after just one year, offering a superb mix of local and international dishes.

All home cooked by a team led by the impressive Isa from nearby Alcala del Valle, there are not many places in Andalucía where you eat blinis with foie gras and a gazpacho made out of cherries. Well now you can have both.

Up in the heart of Ronda

there is a particularly good range of places to eat. In particular in Calle Nueva you will find a series of excellent places, cheek by jowl and vying for your custom. The best include the charming Casa Quino, a family-run joint,

**Ronda has an incredible range of creativity and good value restaurants**

where its big boss Joaquín does a great job in the kitchen, producing a range of classic local dishes. A keen photographer, he also has the best col-

lection of old photos of Ronda.

Next door, the pair also have a new place Nueva 13 more geared towards tapas and wines and with a very different style.

On a more imaginative front you must try evocative Tragatapas, run by former Michelin-starred chef Benito Gomez, who trained at El Bulli among other notable spots.

Here, you can eat plenty of creative dishes made from seasonal produce, including mushrooms and game. He also purveys a fantastic sushi of tuna, with soya and wasabi. Most exciting of all, is that one



**CHARM: Pedro Romero and (top) Frank at EL Muelle**

## A wealth of ingredients

**The Serrania de Ronda has one of the richest diversities of food in Spain, writes El Bulli-trained chef Maria Terol (right)**

**T**HE traditional gastronomy of the Serrania de Ronda is very much entwined with its local ecosystems, cultures and weather.

It is also heavily influenced by the fact that its local population was for centuries very isolated from the rest of the country by nature of its roads and communications. As a result its many towns and villages developed a subsistence model of agriculture, which involved growing the vast majority of its food in the area.

And because of its climate (it is one of the wettest places in Spain due to its location by the Sierra de Grazalema) and geography it has been blessed with an extraordinary range of high quality products, not found elsewhere.

As a result, there are more than 180 different species of mushrooms, which, when in season in autumn, in particular, are used in a variety of dishes.

*Niscalos, yemas, chantarella, setas de cardo, colmenillas, boletos*, they all have their own names, and they are mainly collected and offered to the many bars and restaurants.

Another fantastic local ingredient is goats cheese that come from its indigenous race of *cabra payoya* goats.

Then there is the fantastic arbequina olive oil, extraordinary ham products, much of it centering on Benaolan, as well as honey, wild vegetables, such as asparagus, and wine.

And don't forget the walnuts (some being used for liquor, *glace* and conserves) and the famous chestnuts that come from the Genal Valley.

Through the winter you will be frequently offered all sorts of game from wild boar to venison and from mountain goat to partridge.

Even better, the local farmers and villagers grow numerous and varied types of vegetables and fruits. In particular the tomatoes are fantastic, as are the peppers, aubergines and potatoes.

There are various edible wild plants, such as '*tagarninas*', and herbs that have a high nutritional and medicinal power. There are even edible flowers that I use in some of my dishes.

Finally, there is the now famous apple, the *Pero de Ronda* (or Dog of Ronda), which was rediscovered at Madrid's famous Fusion food fair a few years ago.

This stunning, sweet, crispy fruit is only found in a few farms between Ronda and Arriate, but is making a comeback. Try and find one if you can.

My company Inspira Art Culinary is a catering service that offers typical dishes of the Serrania as well as *pallas* from my local region of Valencia.

In particular my menu '*Por Soleares de Ronda*' represents a fusion between the old tradition and the new concepts of the culinary art.

**Maria Terol, moved to Gaucin from Valencia, having trained at El Bulli and under Sergi Arola in Madrid. Her company Inspira organises events, tastings and teaching courses. Contact her on 676748201 or email terolmaria7@gmail.com**



**El Porton**

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**MIX: Team at El Porton, Casa Quino and Nueva 13 owners, Benito at Tragatapas and Omar from Buenos Aires**

of his former proteges Pablo Piek, 23, has recently set up next door with a restaurant La Fuente.

In pole position opposite the Parador, Pablo is honing some of the exciting skills he learnt with Gomez, as well as recently voted *World Number One* restaurant Celler de Can Roca in Catalunya.

I tried one of the best *ajo blanco* soups imaginable with pineapple, coconut milk and miel de cana, as well as a great tapa of duck breast on toast with red fruits and mint.

Even better was his confit of cod served with red chard leaves and a cherry tomato, red pepper and onion ratatouille. Super refreshing.

If anyone can match the quality of these guys it would be chef

Ignacio at Casa Santa Pola, who certainly knows what he is doing and is close to many of Spain's best chefs.

The Catalan has worked around the country and is always up for a bit of experimenting, and he and his wife Felisa's gorge-side restaurant is probably the most beautiful in Ronda.

For atmosphere it is hard to beat Pedro Romero, opposite the bullring, where Felisa's brothers have carved a solid formula producing a string of traditional, but delicious dishes, in particular the Rabo de Toro.

Then, let's not forget the charming El Porton - an institution - run by friends Javier and Pepe for the past 40 years.

Steeped in bullfighting history, here you will find my favourite Ronda tapa, the wonderful

quails egg with ham on toast. In terms of charm and consistent quality, you will rarely find anywhere better than Almoobar.

Sitting opposite the old Arabic gate near the old town it is an emblematic and extremely popular local restaurant, with certainly the town's best wine list.

Run by a tight-knit team, it is the place to dine outdoors in summer and its owner Monolo is the most knowledgeable man around town when it comes to food.

Another excellent place to eat, just outside the town, is at Molino del Puente, where Ian Love has been winning plaudits for his tasty creations for many years now.

Set up with wife Elaine after a number of years on the coast, this is a great place to stay as well.

And yet there is more. In particular with the opening of a new vegetarian restaurant The



Spice Route.

The brainchild of urbane Mexican musician Cesar Hernandez, this is not only the Serrania's only such joint, but one of the best in Andalucia.

Using fresh ingredients and a wealth of herbs, he is proving that you can eat good quality food without meat. A sweet gazpacho of red peppers was fantastic, as was his great value chili beans with rice for just € 6. Indeed, there is nothing here for more than €9, except a few bottles of well-sourced wines.

For international food, Ronda also has a friendly Argentinian Buenos Aires, run by characteristic Omar. It is an excellent spot for tapas, breakfast or just a pint to watch the UK football.

For more information and an excellent guide to Andalucia's best restaurants visit [www.diningsecretsofandalucia.com](http://www.diningsecretsofandalucia.com)

**Steeped in bull-fighting history, here you will find my favourite Ronda tapa**

**Best rural options**



ON a journey out of Ronda (or en route), you are spoilt for choice with a trio of emblematic places to eat. Award-winning Molino del Santo, in Benaolan, is not just highly-rated on *Trip Advisor*, but in canny Scot Gordon Brown, (right) it has one of the best chefs in Andalucia. The food is impeccable and the location on a shady riverside terrace is beyond charming.

Equally good - and creative to boot - is American Stefan Crites of Al Lago, (left) overlooking the lake in Zahara. A massive supporter of local, seasonal ingredients, his restaurant has gone from strength to strength with help from the highly talented Mona. Conveniently you can now also stay the night with some lovely rooms upstairs. Last, but not least, if it is authenticity you are after, you must head for the converted olive mill that is Molienda in Benalauria. One of Malaga's pretty small villages, this is a true dining secret!



Serving home cooked dishes since 1997  
Menu del dia 9.80 euros

Casa Quino, C/ Nueva 11-13, 29400 Ronda  
Tel: 952 19 00 90 Email: quino250@terra.es

**NUEVA 13**

TAPAS ESPECIALES... 1'5

- \* PROVOLONE (Hot cheese with tomato)
- \* TORTILLITAS DE CAMARON (Shrimp omelette)
- \* TORTILLA DE PATATA (Spanish omelette)

BRAND NEW TAPAS BAR

C/ Nueva 13, Ronda  
605 150 745

Saturday 12th October  
11.00h - 17.00h

**AL LAGO**  
the hotel restaurant at the lake  
956 123 032 | 662 052 553

**HARVEST MARKET**

Local vendors and artisans come together to offer you a host of wonderful organic produce, regional wines, olive oil, chutneys, jams, pestos and tapenades, home baked breads and pastries and lots of hand made crafts and gift items; ceramics and glass, knitted children's clothes, leather bags and belts, jewellery, hand bound note books

There will be a kid's craft table to keep little hands busy from 12.00-14.00 and of course Al lago will be serving Indian inspired tapas, dishes and our market plates for 10.00 euros.

Don't miss our homemade toffee apples!

Date for your diary:  
**Flamenco Dinner 2nd NOV**

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