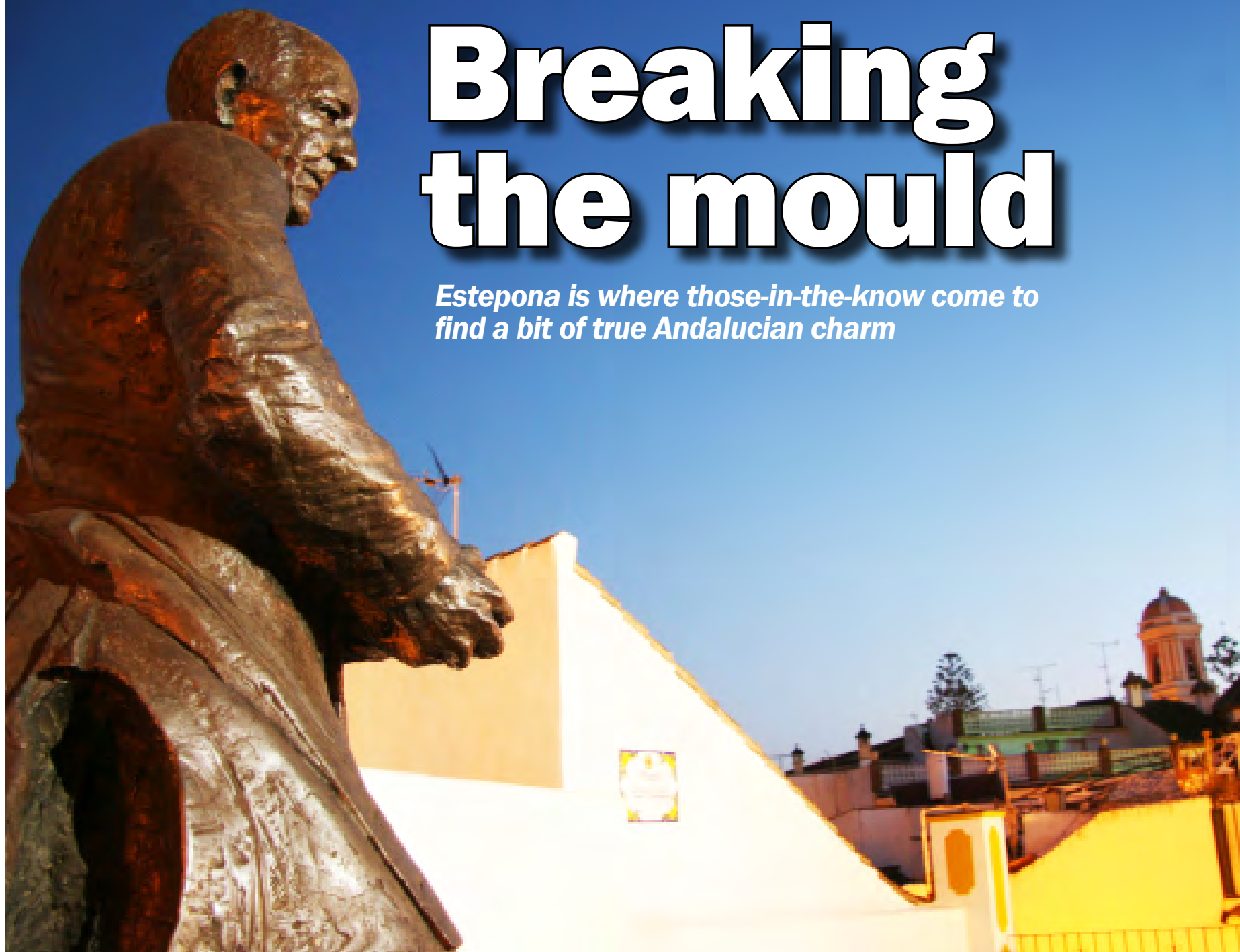


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A town of true Andalusian charm, Estepona is the place to find celebrities like Michael Parkinson, Rod Stewart and Cilla Black, writes Mason Jones

It doesn't take long to realise that Estepona is not your usual Costa del Sol resort.

While much of the coast has been heavily influenced by the English, French and Germans, Estepona has taken pride in sticking to its roots. Quite clearly the odd one out



Residents sip coffee under the orange trees while tourists admire the squares

on Spain's famous southern coastline, the attractive town has little of the rowdy or ostentatious elements so typical of most of its neighbours. Following the narrow cobbled streets up towards picturesque Plaza de los Flores, you soon get a flavour of the town's distinctly Andalusian charm. Bemused residents idly sip coffee under the shade of orange trees while small gangs

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Estepona Port Business & Internet Centre

In July 2010, Julie Evans and Nick Nutter established Estepona Port **Business and Internet Centre**. They soon realized that residents and visitors of all nationalities were demanding services and products not available locally. Within months the centre became agents for **courier** and **postal services** and suppliers of **Internet and telephone services**. Hardly a month passed without another product line being introduced, **cards, gifts, books, beach toys** and **souvenirs**. The business became exclusive suppliers, in Estepona, of **Barcino ceramics** and **Oliver Weber jewellery**. **Insurance services, car and bicycle hire** and **day trips** soon followed. The success of the business and its continued growth, even through the recession, is due to the diversity of products and services offered. Its location, next to a large free car park, is a key factor. Estepona Port Business and Internet Centre is ready to take part in the economic recovery of which there are already encouraging signs in the area.

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of tourists stop to admire the surroundings of the square. Around the corner, busy shoppers troop down Calle Real before store-keepers defiantly close at 2pm for their daily siesta, now something of a rarity for many towns on the Costa del Sol. And nowhere are the features of a traditional Spanish town more evident than from the doorway of Bar Gaspar. This minuscule watering-hole has sat proudly between Estepona's indoor market and the town's historic monastery since 1957.

From a kitchen not much bigger than a wardrobe, a vast selection of delicious traditional dishes are produced and fed to a friendly, but noisy bunch of regulars who visit the bar religiously.

"This area is the true heart of Estepona," explains regular Antonio Lopez, 34. "I have been coming here since I was a child," he adds, looking through a doorway to the market.

"My father and I would go to the market every Saturday morning to buy fresh fruit and vegetables like everyone else in the town, and then we would come into the bar to see everyone and eat tapas. "For us it was like going to church," he adds.

Named 'Estebbuna' by the Romans, the town is now littered with historic monuments from its Phoenician and Roman days.

"Just last month various 2,000-year-old artifacts were found around the town and outside my house," reckons local sailor Tomas Reyes. "It is a treasure chest of history here."

Delving further into to the rich history of Estepona, we find that the town was destroyed by the conquering Christians in the 15th century and rebuilt by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand almost a century later.

In 1729 Philip V granted the town a charter for 600 families to reside here and the town has continued its growth to this day with around 65,000 people now living here all year round.

And the melting pot of cultures which forms the town is still very much evident today. From the scattering of watchtowers warding off the Moorish invaders to the Arab-built clock tower and the 16th century castle ruins, the place is awash with history.

Another of the town's most popular attractions is the old Franciscan monastery which is now the Church of our Lady of Redemption.

Built in the 18th century, the church is formed by three vaulted naves and a tower which provides spectacular views of the whole town.

From here you can marvel at the true magnitude of the glorious Sierra Bermeja mountain range, which dominates the view inland.

Take a wander through the old quarter, admiring the white-washed houses and freshly painted flower boxes along the way.

Up above Calle Real the streets have now been pedestrianised and are dotted with plant pots and interesting buildings.

And this, according to its residents, is the real difference

It's a quiet holiday resort but you are only ten minutes away from Marbella

between Estepona and its counterparts along the coast. "It has definitely retained its Spanish-ness, and I think that's why people like to come here," said long-term resident Amanda Thomas, 49.

"We also have the best of both worlds, it's a quiet holiday resort but you're only ten minutes away from the nightlife of Puerto Banus or Marbella if that's what you want," adds the expat.

It is the sea and beaches, however, which many in Estepona would claim to be their greatest asset.

Although Estepona no longer relies on fishing as its main source of income like it did fifty years ago, dozens of fishing boats can still be seen leaving the port each morning, returning early in the afternoon to please local restaurateurs with the freshest of ingredients.

If you happen to be in the port when the catch is landed, you get a real sense of the bygone days of Estepona as a bustling fishing village.

Fisherman and wholesalers gather round as the catch is iced, auctioned and then transported throughout the region.

Walking out of the port, back towards the town centre, it is not uncommon to see fishermen hosing down nets or playing a game of cards in their lock-ups after a hard day at sea.

Not only does the port provide the town with high quality seafood, it is also home to some of the town's most popular bars and restaurants.

Each weekend, tourists, expats and Spaniards alike can be seen mingling at bars such as Reinaldo's, which many claim to be the port's oldest drinking spot.



minutes drive away on the road to Casares.

Perhaps celebrities are attracted to the town by one of the most highly regarded beaches on the coast, Playa de la Rada, which won a prestigious EC blue flag in 2009.

In the summer months this part of town comes to life with the opening of several chiringuitos that have lined the golden beach since the 1960's hosting various musical events and fiestas.

To the west is the wonderful El Cristo Beach, an increasingly popular cove which also runs events during the summer and has even hosted the odd wedding.

"It is one of the only unspoilt little bays left on the coast, it is so nice I chose to get married there," explains expat Pauline Olivera.

Estepona also boasts a string of high quality golf courses in the area such as El Paraíso, Valle Romano and Coto de la Serena.



ESTEPONA: Set in between stunning mountains and blue sea, it's the perfect seaside town

The town truly seems to have something for everyone, but spend just an hour wandering through its streets and you will see it retains a strong sense of character. In becoming very much part

of the growth in tourism on the Costa del Sol, Estepona has simultaneously broken the mould of the Spanish coastal town.

While becoming a magnet for estate agents, property

developers, foreign investors and celebrities, the town has some how managed to remain uniquely true to its Andalusian roots and continues to attract thousands from across the globe.

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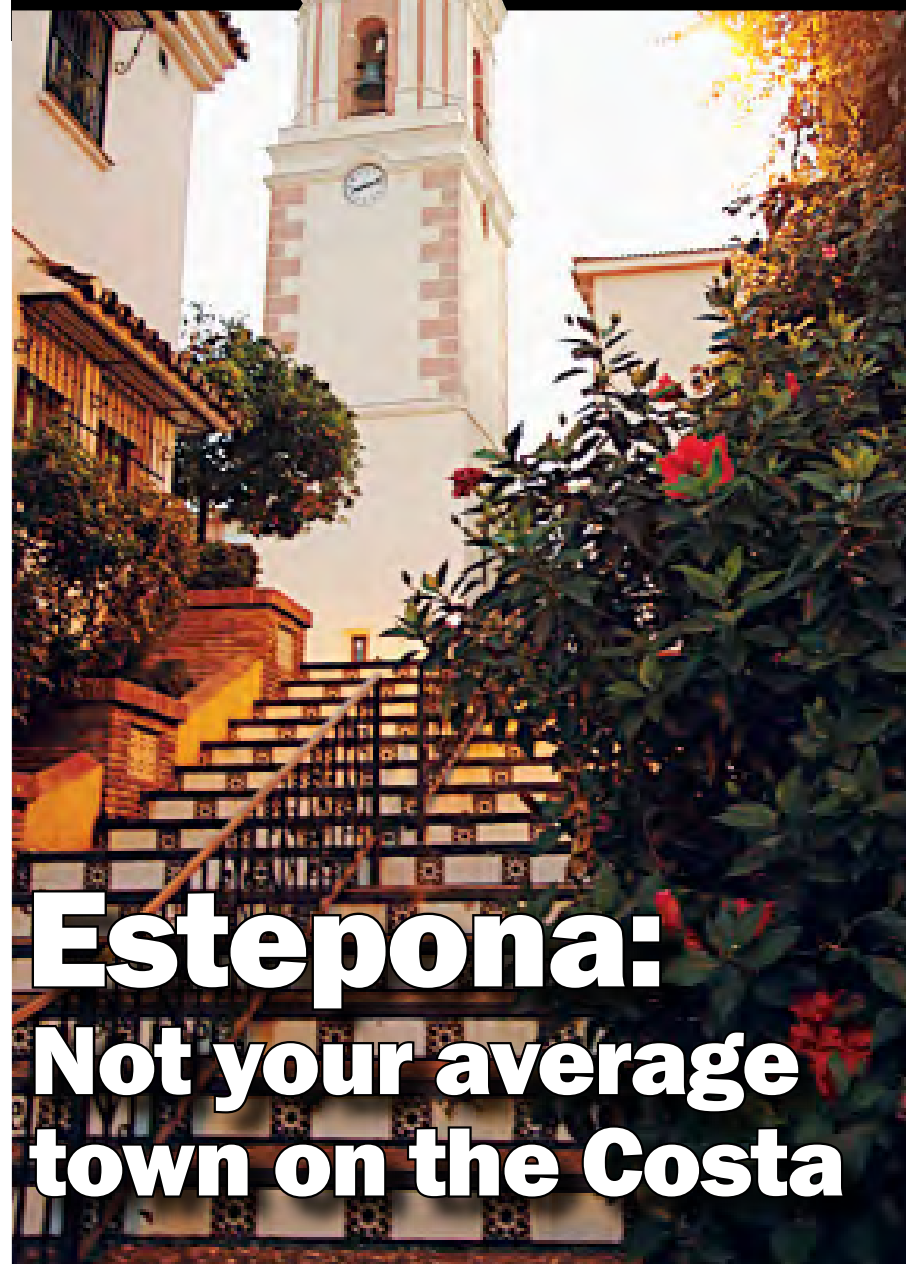
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Estepona: Not your average town on the Costa

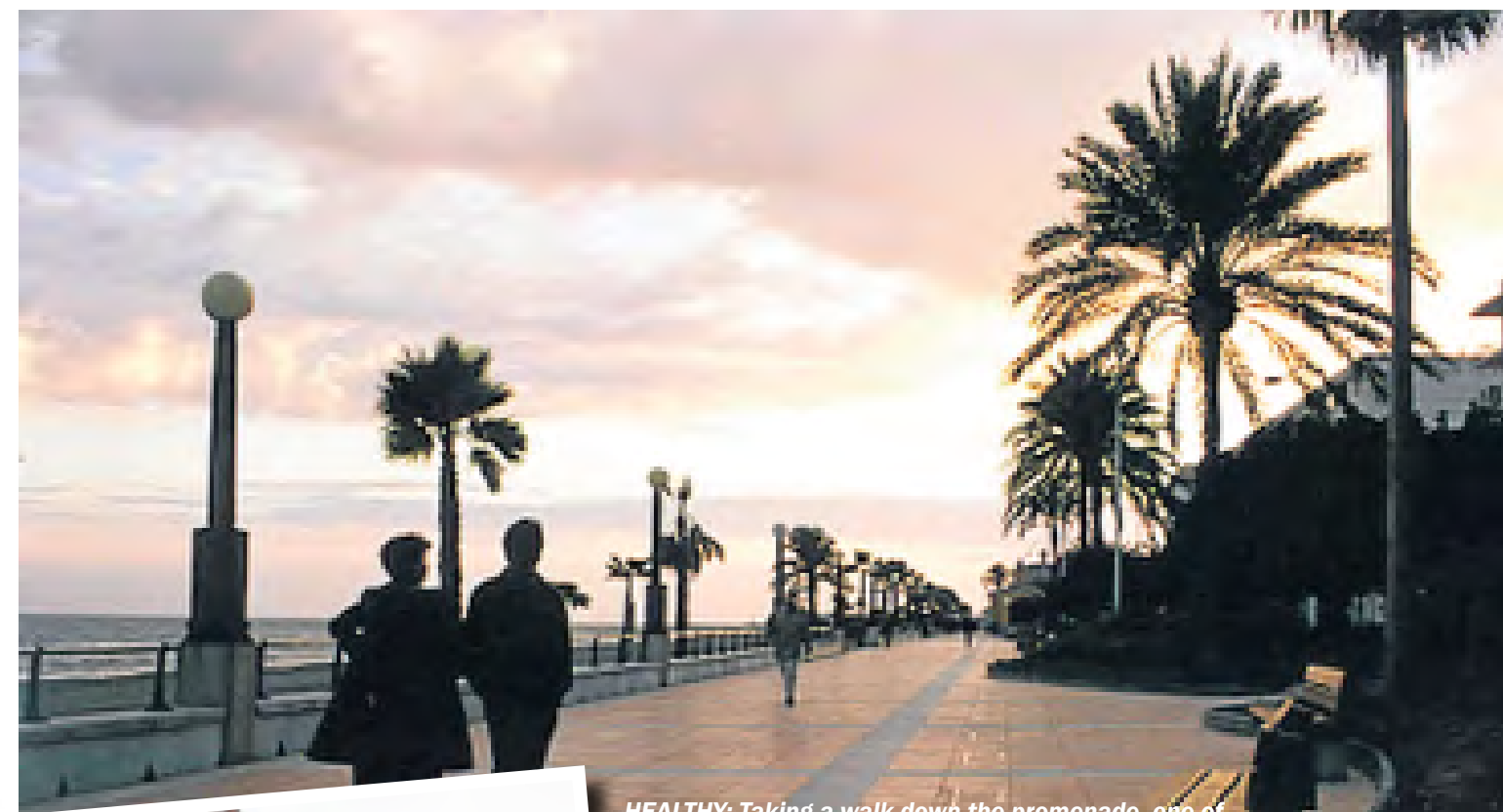
BEFORE I moved to Estepona, I started reading up on the Costa del Sol and imagined a string of skyscraper type hotels lining the beach. I pictured gaudy tourist shops and intoxicated holiday makers staggering out of the Irish

By Frances Leate

bars every night. I'd seen *Costa del Street Crime* on the TV and I must confess my pre-conceived impressions were not exactly good.

The small town of Estepona, once a tiny fishing village, is just 30km west from Marbella, but it couldn't be more different.

Forget the plastic fantastic mentality and the quintessentially English feel of Marbella and Puerto Banus, everything about Estepona is unapolo-



HEALTHY: Taking a walk down the promenade, one of the Costa del Sol's most scenic seaside walks, while (below) a typical street scene and a bull statue on the beach



real, authentic and unassuming Spanish town. Even in the more touristy areas like the marina, expats and Spanish residents gath-

The true heart of the town, though, is the tidy and clean promenade

er in equal numbers. Parts of the old town glow with a pueblo charm mixed with a Sevilliano vibe and their quaint squares with orange tress and ornate statues make the perfect place to chill with a coffee and tapas.

Friendly bars that draw a crowd of regulars, can be found on Calle Real while the steep pebbled streets leading off are lined with beautiful townhouses decorated with coloured flower pots and hanging baskets.

And this is one of the reasons why Estepona is one of the few places left on the Costa del Sol that still feels like it's in Spain. The town has been described in guide books as "jaded" and "shabby", yet I was amazed to find this proud little town actually rather pretty and upbeat. It didn't take me long to realise that far from being an English holidaymaker's playground it was actually a very

getically Spanish. In fact, if, like me, your Spanish is limited to "No español, nada" or "vino tinto por favor" you will struggle to go about your daily business. Many of the shopkeepers, bar workers, real estate agents, mechanics, hairdressers, police officers and taxi drivers do not speak English, although many of them do speak some.

rock of Gibraltar and even North Africa in the distance. wFrom good restaurants, lively bars and cafes to independent clothes shops and buzzing weekly markets, Estepona really does have it all-it just doesn't shout about it which makes it all so much better to discover for yourself.



KIDS PLAY

LOOKING for the perfect outing for the kids then visit Kids Kingdom in Cancelada. This fabulous indoor play centre has a ball pool and a climbing area and is great for parties, face painting events and Easter egg hunts. It is a great place for parents to have a snack and a coffee and watch their kids play. The venue, inside the Supersol building, can cater for birthday groups, special events and toddlers. There is also free wifi.

Tune up your body

PAUL Knight is one of the coast's only fully registered UK qualified osteopaths. Practicing from the Fit 4 Life clinic in Gibraltar and his home in Estepona, he trained in 2001 before moving to Spain eight years ago. Paul is able to help soften and relax tense muscles and release locked joints. He is able to easily spot misalignment and teaches clients how to correct their posture. "Like a well tuned engine, when the body is balanced it will function with the minimum of wear and tear, leaving more energy for living," he explains. Contact Paul on 625957673

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INTERESTED in natural healing? Then visit Reiki master Margarita Taylor-Schleppé at her new clinic behind Estepona bus station. A talented woman she and a range of therapists offer a huge range of treatments from Chiropractic Massage to Reflexology and from Acupuncture to Bach Flower Therapy.

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My donkey was towed away!

One long term Estepona resident Sonia Longman recalls the days when the main form of transport in Estepona was on four legs

Back in the 1950s there was practically nothing in Estepona apart from a smelly fish factory, where the supermarket Carrefour is today.

"When we used to get a taxi from Torremolinos, where we lived, to Gibraltar, I remember my mum giving us hankies with cologne as we passed Estepona to mask the smell of the glue made from fish oil," recalls long-term expat Sonia Longman, 69. Longman and her sister, who have run the local English bookshop Longmans for decades, started life in the town working on Spanish newspaper, *So! de España*. Working under the tutelage of Lord Cowley, who was a direct descendant of the Duke of Wellington, they were given the job of producing an English page within the paper every day.

"We always liked to push the boundaries and even once got reported to the Bishop of Malaga for using a photograph of a sexy girl in a bikini climbing a tree.

"It was in the days of Franco and the editor was summoned to Malaga to receive a dressing down from the Bishop. He got such a ticking off that we were forced to fill in the midrifts of all bikini photos with black felt pen so it looked like they had bathing suits on!"

She also recalled how - after she moved to the town in the 1960s - her sister's donkey was 'towed away' by the local police for eating flowers in the main square.

"It was taken to the slaughterhouse and my sister had to literally beg the fat local policeman to give her a lift there to rescue it just in time."



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30 *Estepona* special

Great place to buy

The property market in Estepona has remained healthy despite the crisis



THE property market may have generally been on the slide recently, but for one family-run enterprise in Estepona, business is booming. Not long in a new office near the port, Future Homes has even now set its sights on ex-

pansion into Marbella's property market. Set up in 2000, boss Victoria Lewis is buoyant about the future. "We have a waiting list of people looking to buy property so there is certainly a lot of demand," said Lewis, who runs the company with husband

Antonio and daughter Alicia. Another local agent who moved here from the UK has fallen in love with the very

and is always a nice place to come home to," reckons estate agent Adam Neale, who lives in the heart of Estepona's old town.

"You mostly hear Spanish in the centre and its atmosphere is distinctly Andalusian."

He lives around the corner from his agency Terra Meridiana in a former flamenco school with his Belgium wife Theodora and their three children, who go to school locally. Despite the recession and negative press abroad, he insists that the market for homes in Estepona remains strong.

"Many people have waited three years for armageddon but it simply hasn't happened," reasons Philosophy graduate Neale. "I think there is a sense of realism returning to the market."

Some of the success must certainly also boil down to the town's easy-going attitude and location.

"It's in a great location for

"You mostly hear Spanish in the centre and its atmosphere is distinctly Andalusian"


Spanishness of Estepona. "It is a true Spanish town

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31 *Estepona* special




SOLID: The town has a great stock of housing, insists Adam Neale (inset) with wife Theodora

the Costa del Sol and also Gibraltar and has everything infrastructure-wise," explains Theodora, who met her husband, while working in marketing in Moscow.

"The town is very child-friendly and there are countless after-school activities," she adds. "We have a sailing club, equestrian centres, tennis clubs, swimming clubs, so

much for the youngsters to do."

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No myth behind Man Friday



It has carved its niche as one of Estepona's distinctly different eastern districts. But how many people know how Man Friday got its name? The area of shops between Estepona and San Pedro was actually named after a Spaniard Jose Maria, who moved and married a Scottish woman in the 1970s. The all round handyman and engineer returned to the Benamara area of the coast with his new wife Maria Weldon 30 years ago. "He was a real handyman and we called him Robinson Crusoe, Man Friday and the name just stuck," explains Maria.

"Not only can you always park your car but you have a good range of shops"

Still running a supermarket (Aliprox), in the area, her son Stefan is also running the popular Amara bar and restaurant. "It's a great mix of Spanish and English businesses and clients," he explains. "There has always been a nice atmosphere here and we even have a couple of upmarket French clients." It is not hard to see why this small parade of shops is a popular stopping off place. Not only can you always park your car, but you have a good range of shops and even a hairdresser David, a keen Spurs fan. Aside from that you have Jane's card shop, that also doubles up as a place

to get your dry cleaning done as well as all your stationary needs... and there is even conveniently a new shop Minion selling English papers, as well as beach gear and souvenirs. Next door in a copse of trees is the fabulous cafe/kids hang out spot Funky Forest.

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Follow the Benavista road

STRETCHING along the coast eastwards towards San Pedro is one of the most popular places for expatriate British to live on the whole Costa del Sol.

But, while it is heavily populated by foreigners, the coastal zone from Cancelada to Benavista is completely different to the sprawling metropolis's east of Marbella.

Far less developed, considerably more family orientated and - best of all - with easily as many good beaches and chiringuitos.

And then there are the golf courses, which line the nearby hills.

"We are so spoilt for choice," says Hughie Holgate, 63, who runs the Benavista bowls club and next door restaurant Los Arcos.

"There are at least half a dozen golf courses within a mile of here and the facilities for families is great. On top of that you are only a short drive into the hills via the Ubrique or San Pedro roads."

The entrepreneur, a father-of-four, added that the bowls club was a real magnet for the area.

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

"We have many members, who play in leagues up and down the Costa del Sol," he explains. "And non members have their own green."

Down from here you find a string of urbanisations - Diana Park, Benavista and El Pilar - which are full of local shops and services.

They include a range of excellent butchers and cake shops, as well as English supermarkets, curry houses and British bars.

"There is pretty much everything you could need around here," says Pauline Kavenagh, who runs the Grumbles restaurant, which has been open since the late 1980s. And Peter Williams, owner of Golf City, adds: "The area is not too over-populated and there is lots of open space to enjoy."



BUZZING: Benavista bowls club

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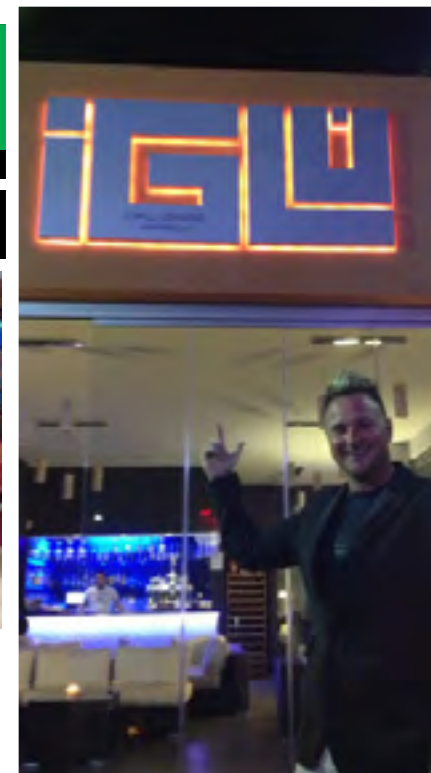
WHERE TO EAT



CAPTION HERE

Estepona has a fabulous range of places to eat from the Indian to the achingly hip, writes Jon Clarke

WITH a coastline that stretches for dozens of miles it is no surprise that Estepona has a good selection of restaurants. But what is more surprising is the sheer variety of eateries on offer in the upmarket coastal town and nearby coastline. In the heart of the town and in its port there are some excellent tapas restaurants and it is worth just taking a stroll around dipping in here and there to see what is on offer. One of the most popular places to hang out during the day and sample great tapas over a glass of wine is Antonio's. A real sun trap, it is often full and counts a group of friendly bar staff. Nearby is the Irish Fiddler, opposite the sailing club, which serves up a good range of beers and tapas. Heading out of Estepona you are spoilt for choice for good eateries. All the way along the N340 are a string of good chiringuitos and renowned restaurants such as Tikitano and Terra Sana in Laguna Village. Some of the best are in Benavista, where you will find the excellent Indian restaurant Masala. Well established on the coast for some years and with two sister restaurants up the coast, it is one of the best places to try some really top subcontinental tucker. Run by friendly Hamza, it is atmospheric and is all cooked from fresh, with some great



spicy dishes to boot. Across the road you must look out for Iglu, which is fast becoming one of the coolest spots to eat on the coast between Marbella and Sotogrande. Now with a fantastic new chef Gemma Hammond, who cut her teeth cooking for Britney Spears, Jools Holland and the Red Hot Chili Peppers when on tour, you are in safe hands. As well as cooking from the age of 15 and anchoring the celebrated King William IV restaurant, near Dorking, Surrey, for years, she has run the catering at Virgin's popular V festival and even cooked for the Crystal Palace football team. It's certainly an exciting menu and is extremely likely to draw in the cool crowd from Marbella this summer. Last summer it even featured in the Sky TV show Marbella Mansions starring Robert Webb. Back to the oriental and you must try out the Chinese restaurant Golden Sun, run by the friendly Laura and her team. Well established, you have most of the Chinese favourite dishes and you can even get lobster if that's your bag. Of course you must consider nearby Benavista Bowls Club, where you can eat at Bar Los Arcos or the Green Bar. Another exciting new place in Benavista is Neli G's set up by the very talented Neville Gaffney and his wife who used to run a string of top restaurants in Oxfordshire and Derby. This hip new spot is really filling a gap in the market and providing the perfect lunch and breakfast spot, open from 8am to 6pm each day.

A little touch of the Irish

IN ancient times, there was an unofficial commandment that stated: "Thou shall not drive through Benavista without stopping at Rory's for a pint." Well now everyone's favourite Irish pub is opening behind the Farmacia in Centro Mustang. Rory himself is a passionate fan of the old-style Irish bar and he and daughter, Lorna, have done much to create a truly traditional pub and an aesthetic delight. "Lorna is never happier than when there is a line of characters seated along the bar and the banter is in full flow," explains her dad. And if you're hungry try a bowl of Galway Fishmongers stew or Clonakilty Black Pudding. With a pint at €2.45, a Guinness at €3.95 and a Gin & Tonic at a mere €3 you can't go wrong.



Estepona



ORIENT AND ALL

A superb place for a sandwich, soup or special of the day, the kids will be spoilt with nice cakes, puddings and milkshakes. Across the road you should also look out for the popular Amara, which has been serving the coast for nearly two

decades and counts a very loyal regular following. Next door - particularly if you have kids - look out for Funky Forest, which has a great range of light bites and snacks. And then there is Mini India just opened up the road in CC

Diana nearer to Benavista. Sister restaurant of the Jai-pur Purple in CC Costasol, its owner Dave has an ambitious menu and alluring décor. All cooked from fresh, with top quality imported spices, there is even a decent selection of wines, in particular from Navarra.

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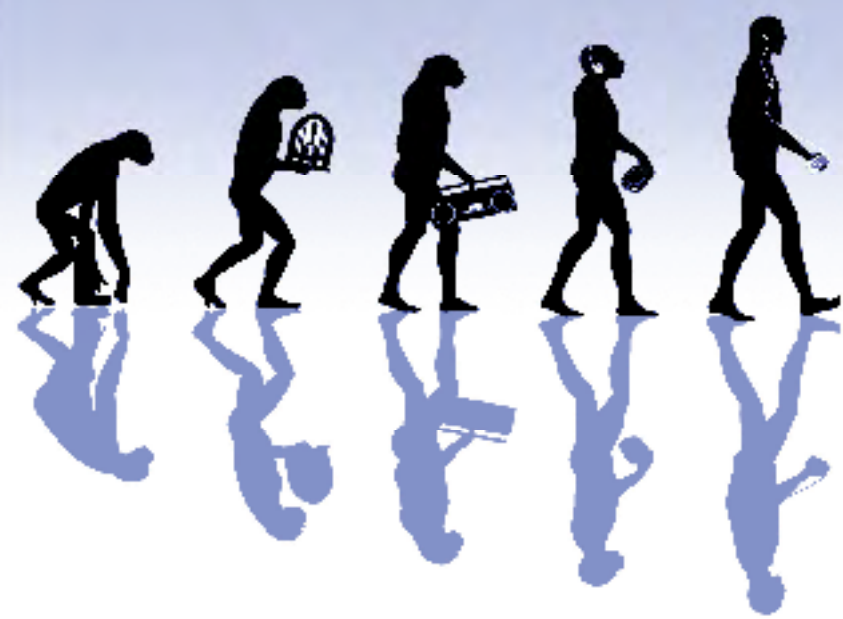


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Retro Estepona



OLD CHARMS, LITTLE CHANGED: A lot has certainly changed in Estepona over the last 100 years, yet in the heart of the old town, many of the historic buildings still remain. Here are a few old pictures of Calle Caridad in 1913 and Calle Real and its square in 1929. Also witness (top right) the virgin being paraded during Semana Santa... and three more old shots of the centre of town



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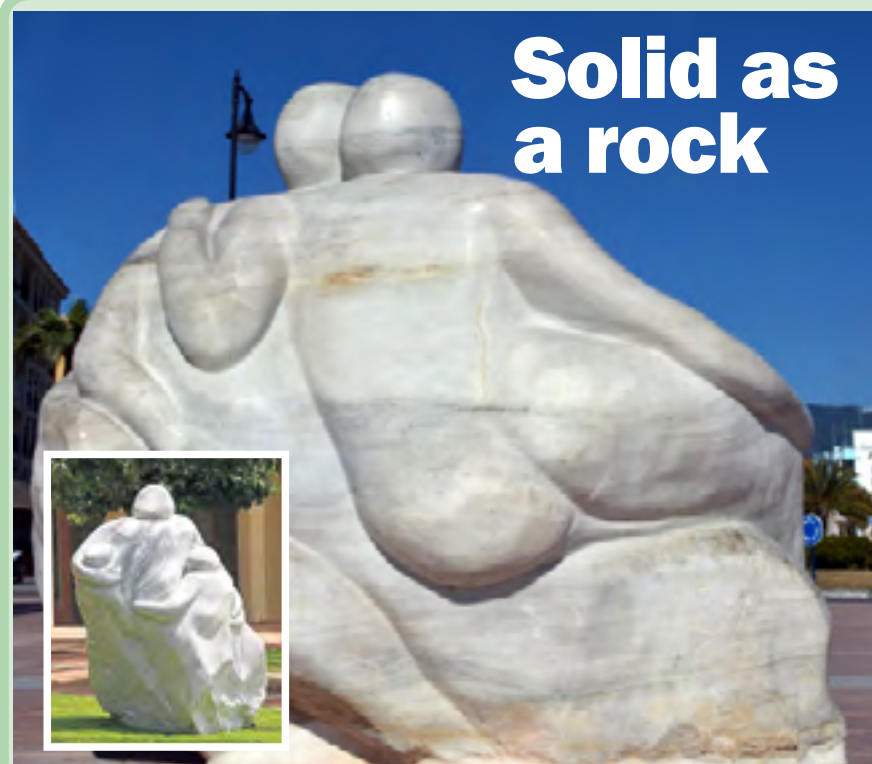
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Estepona special



THEY are actually rather difficult to miss. But it is worth keeping your eyes peeled for a series of massive sculptures by Scottish artist Toby Govan around the town. Having lived in Estepona since he was seven – his parents were both artists – it is perhaps fitting, that the sculptor has recently lent the town five of his works. The sculptures, weighing up to 2,500 kilos, are made out of stone and white marble from nearby Ojen, can be found in a number of places. Here, *Mothers are Unique* is to be found outside Estepona's Casa de la Cultura.

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