

All about Jerez de la Frontera

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My sherry amor

Liam Kirkaldy spends a weekend trying to understand the sleeping giant of Jerez

JEREZ means sherry, and like a cantankerous old English aristocrat the town has grown large on the stuff. In fact, the importance of the wine industry is obvious from the moment you set foot in the town. Arriving at Plaza Esteve in the heart of the old town on a Saturday lunchtime you could be forgiven for thinking

that it is a town of drunks, with packed bars leaving customers sprawled outside onto the pavement and into the nearby market. Tio Pepe is the town's most famous producer and there is no escaping the logos, which stretch across the old town and down to its bodega... not to mention nu-

Turn to page 24



GLORIOUS JEREZ: A sunset of memories with flamenco and Tio Pepe (inset) each stalwart attractions



MAIN PHOTO: by Jon Clarke

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Even Islamic forces did not kill wine trade



TRADITION: Trying a 30-year old Amontillado at Bodega Tradicion

From Page 23
merous roadside hoardings around the region, along with the famous bull of Osborne, from the nearby town of El Puerto de Santa Maria. If you follow the stream of tourists (many carrying Tio Pepe souvenir bags) down from the market, you will arrive in Plaza Arenal, a beautiful spot, originally used as a space to amass troops before battle. Nowadays more laid back in atmosphere, bitter orange trees and date palms line up regimentally around the cen-

tral fountain as a substitute for the soldiers, who would once have stood in the same spot, with more cafes, bars and restaurants springing up beyond. Here, you will find a statue of the brother of Fascist Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, the man credited with inspiring former dictator Franco to launch the civil war.

Dressage

While not exactly PC, he is at least usually topped with a flock of dirty pigeons, alongside a building draped with banners, serving as the region's headquarters for the anarchist trade

union CNT and communist UGT.

But all around the charming centre you will find an amazing catalogue of grand and sizeable mansions, the majority built out of profits from the sherry industry.

Jerez's remarkable growth was kick-started by the arrival of large-scale wine production in the 17th century, but sherry and wine have been produced in the area for around a thousand years.

Even the arrival of Islamic forces in 711 did not kill the wine industry, which was tolerated as a 'source of energy' for troops.

When sherry was first exported to England in the 13th century the drink took the name of the Jerez, albeit by an anglicized version of 'sherry'.

Wandering outside the Tio Pepe bodega, which sits next to the stunning Cathedral de San Salvador de Jerez, I met a local woman, Pilar.

She explained that the town had been transformed as the wine production process became more technologically advanced, changing the local economy and the job market in the process.

As time has gone on, she said, tourism has become more important to keeping the town's economy afloat. Andalusian horses are a good example of the way the town is trying to take advantage of its assets.

Originally used as a war horse, and historically used as a gift to European kings, the Carthusian breed of the Andalusian Horse is now used for activities ranging from dressage to polo.

Displays are regularly held at The School of Equestrian Art, which promises a tightly choreographed 'equestrian ballet' (as seen recently on a BBC programme about trains in Spain presented by Michael Portillo) though visitors should be aware that shows are less frequent in winter months, only staged on Thursdays from January to March.

But to Pilar, there is only one must-see attraction in Jerez - flamenco, with the city boasting an annual festival in November and being credited as one of Spain's key centres for the musical genre.

The club - Pena Flamenco Los Cercinalos - sits on a quiet back-street, with only a small plaque on the door distinguishing it from the houses on every side.

After being ushered inside the building by a low-key doorman, who seemed to have confused a bouncer's outfit with that of a west country farmer (I didn't even know you could buy



JUSTICE: Statue of nationalist soldier has an unwelcome visitor



ALCAZAR: The Moorish fortress has stood since the 12th century and is a fantastic visitor attraction for the children

tweed in Spain) I arrived in what looked like a cross between a nightclub and a town hall, with a few hundred chairs surrounded by photos of flamenco's heroes from times gone by, along with the obligatory Tio Pepe logos.

By the time the show got started, I was lucky to have space to stand, let alone get a seat. A distinguished-looking man arrived on the stage, and announced a long list of dos and don'ts for the performance ('if you wish to chat, get out! If you wish to smoke, get out!'), creating an atmosphere more akin to a bare knuckle boxing competition than a light-hearted night of music.

Debated

But then the music started and the performer for the night - Luis Lara - brought the crowd to silence with a slow, moving song, accompanied by a guitar and two backing singers.

As the guitar began to play faster, and the singer's wails became more pronounced, parts of the crowd began



CULTURE: Jerez is a place where tradition lives on

to shout and wave, until the room rose up into a crescendo of energy. But tourists should be warned - the flamenco on show in

Jerez is a million miles from the cruise-ship stuff of frilled shirts and flamboyant costumes. This is serious stuff. Though its origins are hotly debated, it is agreed that flamenco moved across Spain from Andalusia during the 19th century, brought by refugees and travelers who were forced to flee their homes.

Jerez became a hub of flamenco partly because of its status as a haven for gypsy communities evicted from elsewhere, and the songs reflect the pain woven through their stories.

And in many ways, flamenco songs seem fitting in a place which is still stinging from the economic crisis. Indeed it is one of Spain's poorest cities, with a debt to the tune of over a billion euros and an unemployment level of 40%.

Earlier Pilar had told me about her job. She works with 17 to 20-year-olds, helping them to start their own businesses, in an effort to diversify the local economy, still struggling underneath a cloud of corruption and poverty.

Walking home after the music finished, Pilar's words were starkly brought to life. Turn-

ing a corner, I met two boys, in ragged clothing, going through a bin for food. When I told them I had no cigarettes they ignored me, resuming their hunt.

The encounter left me pondering the reality, lying behind the idyllic image of wineries and dancing horses presented by the town. The songs make as much sense today as they did when they were written.

But any thoughts of the recession's effect on the young was knocked from my head the next morning.

It really takes a special type of chaos to go beyond the level normally on display in any given Spanish square at the weekend, so when I heard the noise coming from up the street I knew that someone must have gone to a special effort.

It sounded like a cat-murdering contest was being held at 11am on a Sunday morning.

The reality was that Jerez was hosting seven different marching bands from the surrounding area, which met in the square just outside Convento de Santo Domingo - the thirteenth century church bordering the square.

Drums

After an hour-long, ear-splitting warm-up, which at points merged into a pulsating social get together, the bands made their way - one-by-one fortunately - down towards the city's most impressive monument, its Alcazar.

The drums provided a fitting atmosphere to the Moorish fort, which still retains a military feel, with a sand floor and sparse lay-out. Built in the 12th century by the town's Moorish rulers, the Alcazar acted as a seat of political and military power for hundreds of years, and - with architecture that brings you away from Europe and into north Africa - it still acts as a symbol of the town's historical significance.

After a few hours the bands packed up and moved on, returning the old fort to a state of peace, and for an hour I simply took in the stunning surroundings of the fort and the park beyond it.

Just another day in Jerez's long and captivating story.



GONZALEZ BYASS: The bodega guards its secrets jealously



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All about Jerez de la Frontera

Jon Clarke discovers that behind the city's grandeur lurks a true laid back happiness

Alegria, alegria, alegria

My first taste of *alegria* didn't come from a glass of cool, refreshing *Fino* nor from the swirl of a flamenco dancer. It came from a huddle of dishevelled homeless people as we emerged into sharp sunlight from one of the city centre's typical merchant houses. We had encountered hard stares from them half an hour earlier. But now the Jerezanos - the majority gypsies - were getting into full voice to a classic flamenco *buleria*. Carrying the look of beggars, but with considerably more class, the thread-bare gathering were literally singing and dancing with joy - or *alegria* - as a local soup kitchen dished out their lunch. Just off Plaza de Belen, in one of Jerez's traditional gypsy quarters Barrio de Santiago, their smiles were now genuine and the mood infectious. A slightly down-at-heel quarter of the city, most famous for its sherry and horses, there are few words to describe the splendid architecture, which in the 16th to 19th centuries housed some of Andalusia's richest merchants.

Jerez - a potted history

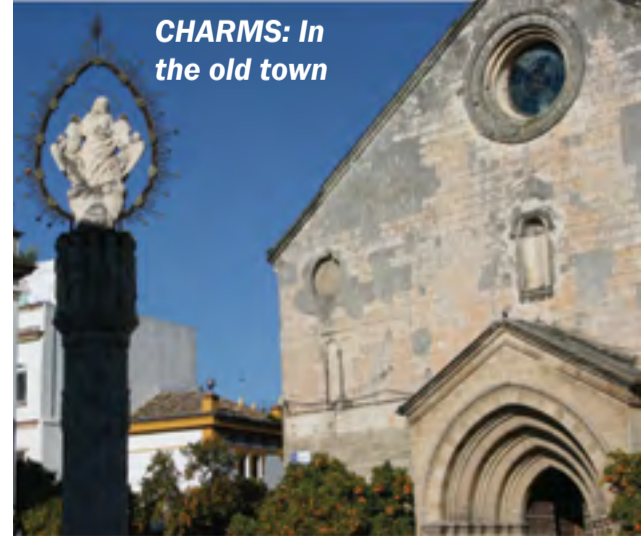
JEREZ was founded in 1000BC by the Phoenicians, before the Romans developed it, leaving tellingly, among other items, a mosaic depicting vine leaves and tendrils. Always a favourable site for wine with its chalky albariza soils, it was the Moors however, who in 711 named the city Scheris, from which its current name and famous wine heralds. While it was the 500 years of Moorish rule to which the city owes much of its rich culture, the British actually made the city rich when by the 17th century around 70 per cent of the area's wines were being exported to England. Drunk by Kings, Shakespeare's character Falstaff in King Henry the Fourth, regaled that sherry 'ascends into the brain; makes it quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery . . . and becomes excellent wit'. At its peak there were said to be 10,000 bodegas in the city, with hundreds of English merchants setting up alongside the Spanish. It is even said that Sir Francis Drake worked as a merchant before going on to command the fleet that later sank the Spanish Armada in 1588. In the claims by historian Diego Parada, his well-chronicled hatred for the Spanish came after he was attacked and beaten up by another merchant called Melgarejo.

Overshadowed
The enormous old palaces - many with gateways and courtyards large enough to lodge a number of horses and carriages - seem to be sitting, almost waiting for their second wind, in a city which is often described as one of the poorest (or cheapest) in Spain. An area now sparsely inhabited by mostly pensioners, gypsies or students, the houses are impossibly large (many over 1000 metres square), with balconies and intricate facades. Properties to put half of Mayfair in the shade, it is clear the sort of privileged lives that the wine makers and big landowners had in those days. . . and also, unsurprising, how for a long time the Jerez region was known for its large number of anarchists. While in many ways the city still reeks of old money (the anarchists are long gone - or were put to the sword), mostly Jerez

is a city waiting for change. Two hours from the hustle and bustle of the Costa del Sol - and overshadowed in size and reputation by Sevilla and its nearby neighbour Cadiz - it might seem to have a job on its hands. But hopefully not for much longer with a distinct sense that things are on the up, particularly with various projects now finished and the centre of town generally looking well cared for. It has been a couple of years since my last visit to the city and, apart from a quickly obvious improvement in its restaurants; the area around the Alcazar has been transformed. A clever use of urban space it is now easy to park your car below it and, of course, the famous Gonzalez Byass bodega is conveniently right next door. And then comes its location. Little more than 20

minutes drive to the beaches of Puerto de Santa Maria and Sanlucar de Barrameda, it is also close to the largely unspoilt beaches around Vejer and Chiclana. The mountains of the Grazalema and Alcornocales Natural Parks, as well as the cities of Sevilla and Cadiz, are only a half-hour drive, and one of Spain's most important nature reserve's Donana is literally on your doorstep.

Fashionable
"There is no doubt that Jerez is ready for a boom," says Patrick Reid, who swapped his job in corporate affairs at London's fashionable Groucho club to running the family business in Jerez nearly a decade ago. "It is a slow burn, but it is a strategic and affordable investment." As well as running two hotels, Reid and his brother Anthony - whose mother is from the city - run a business Benchmark offering a service to potential investors. Based out of the family's ancestral home, a beautiful country mansion and hotel, called Hacienda de San Rafael, they are using their local credentials to guide people through the complicated maze of Spanish property ownership. According to one local English businesswoman Jo Francis who is the dynamo behind charming Hotel Chancilleria and the top rated restaurant Sabores, it is well worth moving to the city. "It is an incredibly friendly place unlike, say Sevilla, where people can be quite arrogant and rude. The pace of life is much slower and people are gentle and make an effort to be nice."



CHARMS: In the old town



HAPPINESS: Gypsies sing and dance for their lunch in the old town

MAIN PHOTO: by Jon Clarke



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Vintage year for language school

Jerez language school has a special bottle of Oloroso sherry made to celebrate its 30th anniversary

By Liam Kirkaldy
 THE 30th anniversary of Jerez-based language school Ten Idiomas has been commemorated in the only way the town knows how – with a new bottle of sherry. Sherry maker Gonzalez Byass

has produced a special blend of vintage Oloroso, which also coincided with the 100th anniversary of the Cambridge proficiency exam. The wine is made up of 11 different vintages – one for each decade of the last century – from 1913 to 2013. Ten Idiomas owner Gerry Ryland said: "This is a unique blend and one which could never be repeated with exactly the same characteristics. I sent a dozen bottles to Cambridge University and one will be included in the centenary time capsule, others being opened and enjoyed at various dinners held to celebrate the centenary." Ryland, who is one of the longest established expatriates in the city, added: "We have a close relationship with the wineries – we even do a special course focusing on the world of sherry, including visits to the wineries."



Ten Idiomas is considered one of the most prestigious language schools in Spain, and regularly receives pupils from leading UK schools, including Eton and Harrow. See www.tenidiomas.com for more information

Back to the future



Sherry Golf

It is certainly one of the sweetest courses in Andalusia. Indeed, Sherry Golf, in Jerez, boasts three courses, a golf academy and two putting greens among a range of other facilities.

Since it opened in 2004, the course has played host to a number of championships, including the King's Cup, the Queen's Cup and the Volvo Masters Amateur.

It is also the official venue of the Qualifying School for the European Tour.

The course itself was designed by Global Golf Co, and has the benefit of being both a walkable course for amateurs and a challenging one for professionals.

ACTIVATE LANGUAGE

Another option to brush up on your language skills is with Active Language in Cadiz.

The school has recently launched a part time course aimed at helping more elderly expatriates brush up on language skills following retirement. The course takes place in both Cadiz and Malaga and is one morning a week. Visit www.activelanguage.net for more information.

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Nobody can accuse Jerez of not keeping traditions alive. Throughout the city there are numerous reminders of its esteemed past, soaked in its history of wine. From (above left) the industry a century ago to snapshots around the city today, including wine tasting at Bodega Hidalgo, a wonderful painting at Bodega Tradicion, the sherry girls from Tio Pepe and preparing one of the Gonzalez Byass vineyards by tractor



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where to eat

Tapas revolution

JEREZ has finally got a series of top class places to eat to accompany its wines, discovers Jon Clarke

FOR a long time you had to venture to El Puerto de Santa Maria if you really wanted to find somewhere exciting to eat. But now El Faro and Michelin-starred Aponiente (see review in Food and Drink section of main paper) have some real rivals right in the heart of Jerez. More of a tapas scene than a full sit down number, the axis of this food revolution is Calle Latorre where you will find the stunning Reino de Leon and near neighbour Almacen.

Billing itself as a 'gastrobar', Reino de Leon is carved out of the ancient walls of the city and has a charming ambience. Around the corner you will find the trailblazer of the new scene Albala, where Israel Ramos is really turning heads with a mix of elegant and original dishes. Trained at, among other places, El Bulli, his stand out dishes include stunning pork trotters with rabbit and boletus mushrooms, a real winner, as well as roast suckling pig, with sweet potato puree and cauliflower, which had a nice balance of flavours. The pudding, Mostrachon de Utrera, was a heady mix of royal jelly, cream of vanilla, lemon ice cream, crushed ginger biscuits and orange marmalade. Nearby, on Calle Consistorio, look for Cruz Blanca, a classic home for gourmands for years. This friendly place serves up the very best in ham and cheese to compliment the city's wines and is always buzzing with local clientele.



NEW TALENT: Jose Luis from Reino de Leon and Julian from Albores

The menu is also enticing with a huge list of tapas changing regularly by the season and created by an army of chefs in the kitchen, Jose Luis leading the charge.

When a group of chupa chups of pork came out along with a boiled egg with truffles and foie in a yoghurt pot and I knew this was something a little different.

For restaurants the very best is Sabores (don't just take my word, have a look on Trip Advisor). Sitting in a hip area just a five minute walk from the centre, chef Jose Luis trained in Sevilla before working for many years at Can Fabes, under Spain's famous three Michelin starred chef Santi Santamaria. He recently made the final of the Gourmet Madrid food fair, while his pastry chef Julia makes all the desserts. Best of all there is a good choice of tapas, small dishes and full dish options.

Top tip go for the salmorejo. Another ambitious chef is Julian Olivares de las Heras, who has recently set up nearby with his stylish Albores. Meaning 'new beginnings' it is founded on the 'seven principles of food... salt, potato, tomato, olives, grapes, cereals and coffee,' explains Julian, who changes the menu regularly. This attractive joint served up a fantastic tuna tartare with caviar and wasabi sauce as well as an amazing deep fried octopus with potatoes and paprika, both a stylish and tasty dish. Yet another stylish joint, this time with a slant on live flamenco music, is Las Cuadras. Set in the home of long established ex-pat David Fraser-Luckie this is a must-visit for lovers of food and authentic venues.



TOP OF THE PILE: Sabores' stunning garden



AUTHENTIC: Owner David at Las Cuadras in front of photo of his father back in the 1970s

CREATIVE: Israel at Albala with his stuffed pork trotters (right)



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where to stay

Sleep like a king

If you are looking for historical and authentic places to stay then you are really spoilt for choice in Jerez. In the centre, look out for Chancilleria, sustainably developed by English expat Jo and her husband Anthony. Its rooms are lovely and quiet and it has a fabulous restaurant Sabores. It is also just a very short walk into the centre of town. Well established Casa Grande on the other side of the centre is run by charming German host Monika. This grand old townhouse is well located and the rooms are comfortable with free wifi and

the breakfast is particularly worth noting. Best of all Monika is well up on the local sheries and can organize a range of tours as well as produce a decent range in her very own hotel bar. A great countryside option is the beautiful Casa Vina de Alcantara, which sits in a peaceful setting alongside one of Gonzales Byass's vineyards ten minutes drive out of Jerez. Owned by the famous wine family here you will be treated like royalty and sleep like a baby. Its grounds have a splendid landscaped area and pool and the house has a comfortable dining/sitting area with a roaring fire.



GRANDEUR: Dining table at Casa Vina

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Sherry: The marriage vows renewed

Wine specialist Justin Roberts (right) on the great sherry comeback!

FORGET this year's sherry bar craze in London. In recent years sheries have crept back onto the wine lists at restaurants around the world. This is no surprise considering sherry with food is a match made in heaven - well a foodie's idea of heaven at least. This is a wonderful development, as for a long time sherry had fallen out, was divorced even, with the foods it complements so beautifully. Luckily for gourmands and not-so-gourmands, there has been something of a renewal of vows. Sherry and food are definitely getting married again! Thanks to sherry producers like Rey Fernando de Castilla and

Equipo Navazos, who make sheries in the way they did when sherry became famous in the first place, there is growing interest. There are some real treasures hidden away in the sherry bodegas just waiting to be unlocked! This marvellous drink is made mostly from a single grape variety, Palomino along with Pedro Ximenez and Moscatel, which are used to make sweet wines. Time, nature and a bit of expert attention morph the wines from these three varieties into over a dozen different styles of sherry, ranging from bone dry to super-sweet; pale green to almost black, and everything in between. There are two broad methods used to age sherry inside the barrel (or butt as it's known in Jerez): either under a layer, or veil if you are feeling literary, of a special blend of yeasts called flor, which float on the surface of the wine sealing it off from the atmosphere or without

flor and exposed directly to air. The flor wines are fortified to a precise level which encourages the growth of the special yeast, blocking out oxygen from the wine and working its magic on the liquid beneath. These wines are known as a Fino (or Manzanilla if they are aged in

Try Fino or Manzanilla with some anchovies cured in vinegar

the nearby town of Sanlucar de Barrameda). Wines destined for 'oxidative' ageing, so fully exposed to air and thus oxygen, are fortified more than Fino, preventing the formation of flor. These are the Olorosos. A third category, the Amontillados, start off ageing under flor and end up open to the air. Something common to all sherry is the solera system: An incredibly simple ageing method which defies concise explanation! It's main advantage is that it irons out differences



WHICH TYPE?
If it swims - Fino
If it flies - Amontillado
If it runs - Oloroso

REBORN: Sherry is staging a come-back

For the dry sheries, this rule of thumb seem to work well:

If it swims - Fino
If it flies - Amontillado
If it runs - Oloroso

The sweetened versions of the Amontillado and Oloroso, usually known as Medium or Cream.

Sherry pair up very nicely with salty, blue cheeses. Lastly, the very sweet Pedro Ximenez or PX sherry can be a dessert on their own, or poured over ice-cream as it often is in Jerez. Fino and Manzanilla are always best ice-cold, and the rest of the sheries benefit from a bit of chilling.



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All about Jerez de la Frontera 33

Jerez is a fantastic place to look for a slice of history at historically low prices, writes Jon Clarke

Where grandeur comes cheap!

THE first thing you notice on a stroll around Jerez are the grand townhouses and lovely squares. The next thing you spot are the numerous British names from the sherry business, including Harvey's, Duff & Gordon and Williams & Humbert, all of whom helped to make the city great some 200 years ago. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the stunning run-down quarter of Barrio de Santiago, right in the heart of the old town.

Many of the buildings have gateways and courtyards large enough to lodge at least one, maybe two, horse and carriages. Impossibly large (most are between 500 and 1000 metres square), with balconies and intricate facades, these were once the homes of wealthy landowners or the merchants who made their fortunes from sherry two to three hundred years ago.

While in many ways the city still reeks of old money (and you will see a lot of Ralph Lauren-clad traditional types) the city's land values are more comparable with cities like Badajoz in Extremadura than nearby Cadiz or Sevilla. Indeed the prices are often



LORD OF THE MANOR: Typical Barrio de Santiago home, (inset) Pablo and Caroline Ruiz Amo

half those of its closest rivals. "There are so many incredible deals to be had here," explains Caroline Ruiz Amo, from local agent Urban Oasis. "Prices have dropped by over 50% and they were cheap already. It is a real buyers market out there."

She points out that they recently sold an old place of 475m square for just 75,000 euros and there are plenty of old houses available to renovate. The agent, who works with her brother Pablo, has spent the best part of the last few years

promoting the city around the world. Having studied in Switzerland, Sorbonne and the UK she is well qualified to help anyone purchase property in Jerez. Contact her or her brother on 956168400 or visit www.urbanoasis.es

A campus of excellence

Backed by the British Council and the Cambridge Exam Board, Campus el Sabio is growing fast, writes Jon Clarke

IT has been an exciting four years for Campus El Sabio. Starting with just 16 pupils in 2010 the school now counts on 260 pupils from 14 different nationalities.

"We are growing because of the crisis and not despite it," explains director Sigve Austheim, an affable Norwegian.

He puts this down to a combination of reasons, not least the fantastic facilities of the school that sits on a greenfield site next to Sherry Golf on the edge of Jerez city centre.

But also as the local Spanish, who make up 70% of the school, are realising that for their children to get on they need to learn English.

"A good level of English will be vital in the future and the local and so called bilingual schools are not able to offer this," he explains.

"We have also made classes in Mandarin compulsory for two to three hours a week."

It has been anything but an easy process getting the school up and running and fully registered to teach.

The Sage British school, as it is also known, has cost millions of euros to equip and now counts



on the full backing of the British Council and Cambridge Exam Board.

"Pupils are now sitting IGCSEs and will start on their A-levels next year and the Cambridge board has described our facilities as among the top 10% in Europe which is excellent," he continues.

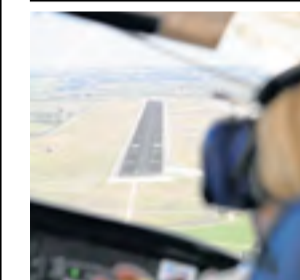
The school has 20 teachers and also teaches some classes in Spanish, in particular in the subjects of social science and Spanish language.

It also has a very heavy emphasis on sports. "Along with academic importance it is one of the key pillars of the school," explains Austheim, who previously worked with former England manager Glenn Hoddle's football school at the campus.

As well as links to numerous sports academies around the world, who often visit, there are regular excursions for the pupils to do scuba diving, kite surfing and kayaking.

And, as if to confirm this belief, he points out that every pupil has two hours of golf lessons a week included in the fee.

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It was the first school in Europe to be granted authorisation by the Civil Aviation Authority to conduct Multi Pilot Licence training and the first in Spain to be granted approval for Air Traffic Control Training.

"This certainly can only bode well for the future of this remarkable pilot training academy and for the quality training of our airline captains of tomorrow," adds Schoombee.

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Gerry Rylance, owner of Tenidiomas, and daughter Carlota



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