

# All about Sotogrande

Aug 07, 2013

A 12-page Olive Press supplement

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**It's two parts old money to one part nouveau riche with a dash of blue blood, shaken and stirred by the gladiatorial sport of polo. That's Sotogrande in August, when the A-List's in town and ready to party, writes Belinda Beckett**

“So have you read the book?” I asked polo star Jack Kidd when I met supermodel Jodi's hunky elder brother at Santa María Polo Club.

I was referring to Jilly Cooper's raunchy novel, *Polo*. After all, Jack's in it! He's one of 'The Heavenly Twins', described as: 'vastly brave, blonde and stocky like two golden bear cubs, it was said that any girl in the twins' lives, and there were legions, had to play second fiddle to polo and the other twin.'

"I don't need to read the book, I live the life," Jack retorted, not flattered to be a chick-lit hero.

*Polo* the book may be a work of bad fiction but Cooper's world of 'bankable patrons and bonkable players' is not so very far removed from what goes on during 'the Sotogrande season'. (*Aficionados* really do joke that polo is also an acronym for 'pants off, legs open'!)

On the field, too, it's a fast-action game that knocks Sotogrande's other top spec-



**PUCKS AWAY.** Jack Kidd and sister Jodie (left) while (right) Wills and Harry and spectators

ument, a World Polo Tour fixture ranked among the top three in Europe. From 27 July-1 September, 30 teams

**That's an open invitation to ogle the world's top players thrashing mallets about in the saddle**

of riders and 1,000-plus ponies battle at Santa María for Gold, Silver and Bronze Cups, watched by 50,000 spectators drawn from a *Who's Who* of high society.

Land Rover is this year's



tournament sponsor, with many other high-end brands linked to the trophies and

**Turn to Page 25**



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## Sotogrande special

From Page 23

après polo parties where the Taittinger will be flowing until la madrugada.

But it's not only its 11 polo fields and high-net-worth summer residents that set Sotogrande apart from the hoi polloi. You won't find it on most maps because it isn't a town, or even a village. It's an urbanisation run by the NH Hotels Group, albeit the largest and most exclusive privately-owned residential development in Andalucía. Wedged between Gibraltar and the foothills of the Sierra Almenara and sliced into two halves (Alto and Costa) by the coastal highway, it's part of the municipality of San Roque in Cádiz province, although much better appointed. This postage stamp-sizes 20km2 community boasts a huge range of activities, bars and restaurants.

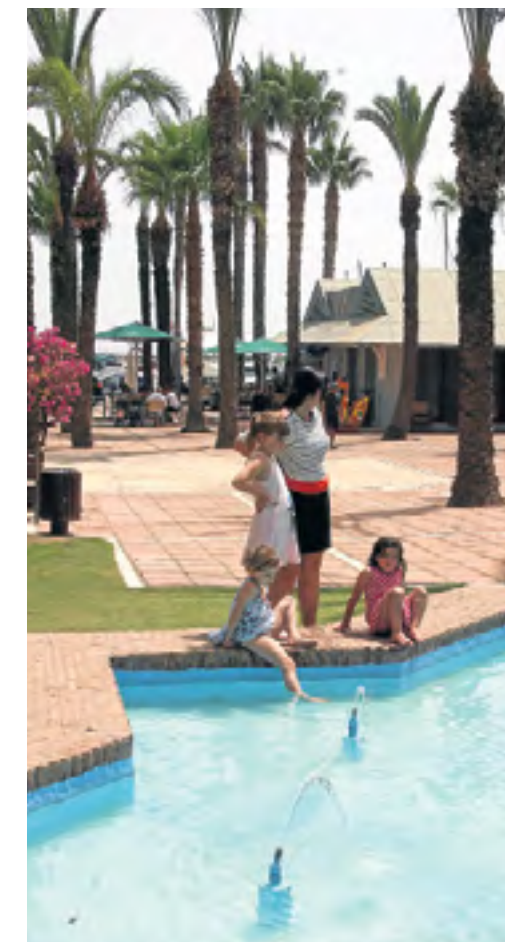
With a nature reserve, its own church and international



**BEGUILED.** Belinda Beckett

school and a private hospital clinic with the latest radio-diagnostic equipment, it's got as much as any proper town, with bells on.

Just as its multi-millionaire founder Joseph McMicking promised in 1962 when he bought five fincas to create the ultimate family sports resort, Sotogrande has "matured like a good Camembert". Well-considered planning has created an urban area of startling natural beauty surrounded by cork forests, golf fairways and protected natural parkland around the River Guadiaro estuary, crossed by a rickety boardwalk, that's an ornithologist's paradise. A long wide avenue spliced by pink and yellow oleanders, magnificent mansions peep from between lush conifers and



**COOLING DOWN:** In a pool in the port

palms (two of the original houses have been declared buildings of cultural interest, along with the Real Club de Golf Sotogrande). Speed bumps preclude low-chassied Flash Harry sports cars (all you can hear is birdsong and the swish of garden sprinklers). This is green wellie country so you're more likely to see mud-spattered SUVs packed with kids and dogs.

Sotogrande might never have existed if Swissair hadn't sent a pair of complementary flight tickets to the Philippines-based Ayala Corporation (which gave its name to Sotogrande's second polo club). McMicking was the CEO while the man he sent to scout for land to realise his dream resort was Enrique Zóbel, the founding father of polo in Sotogrande.

His brief was to find an estate with good travel links and "an abundance of water".

Gibraltar being the only 'good travel link' (Málaga airport consisted of one Iberia desk and the N340 didn't reach this far) Sotogrande's early settlers - mostly wealthy families from the Philippines, Belgium, Austria and France - flew in via London. In the early

years they had to make their own fun, taking it in turn to throw lavish house parties. Soon the cream of European aristocracy was summering in Sotogrande alongside the Domecq sherry and Ford car families. The Spanish arrived en masse after 1969 when

**Although it hasn't escaped la crisis Sotogrande snob appeal keeps prices more stable**

Gibraltar was cut off by Franco's border closure.

In the 70s, to attract the professional middle class and correct the estate's ailing balance sheet, Sotogrande opened its multi-coloured

port. Although quite densely urbanised, homes are still bijoux. Apartments at Ribera del Marlin showcase the last word in domotics and many come with a yacht mooring. Although it hasn't escaped la crisis, Sotogrande's snob appeal keeps property prices more stable.

But the development that was to be the jewel in the port's crown is a sad sign of the times. Blue Sotogrande waterfront shopping village still stands like a jilted virgin bride, many of its bricked-up locales unbreached. The arrival of local décor Queen Patricia Darch and stylish new restaurants, plus the very 'up'-market Sunday market - hippy chic clothing and the best pepper grinders this side of Harrods, sold by Barry 'the Spice Boy' - are finally doing their bit to foster a

Covent-Garden-Sur-Med vibe.

Despite the seasonal influx of wealth, Sotogrande's 50th anniversary was not a golden year. The 'seasonality' of tourism here is half the problem. In 2012 the estate reported losses of €68 million, not helped by the axing of its big autumn income-generator, the Andalucía Masters Golf Tournament at Valderrama, another victim of the crisis. (Don't even mention the Volvo Masters, now just a distant memory.)

So this month, do yourself and Sotogrande a favour. Go watch some polo (but not in your €4 Carrefour polo shirt, puleese). They might not need you in August but they will later on - and you'll be back. Jilly Cooper says so!

"Polo is a drug only curable by poverty or death." (From Polo by Jilly Cooper)



**PRIVILEGE:** Sotogrande marina is a wonderful spot for a stroll or lunch, while (top) paddle surfing in Guadiaro



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## A tribute no more



**GUESTS who showed up at this month's Cafe Society Folk and Poetry Club got a huge surprise when a tribute to Albert Hammond turned into the real thing.**  
The audience went wild when the tribute night, which began with the Valerga brothers, sported a guest star in the second act.  
Hammond kept them going all night with his own material, as well as classics he penned for other artists including - 'One Moment in Time' (Whitney Houston), 'When I Need You' (Leo Sayer), and 'To All The Girls I've Loved Before' (Julio Iglesias).

## Sweet charity

**Sotogrande's most popular folk night at The Cafe Society in the port gathers the crowds and helps support local animals**

**T**HE folk scene has all but disappeared in mainstream music. The likes of Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell have been replaced by near-naked cheesy pop princes and princesses.

The music of the 60s was inspirational to so many, and their influential rhythms should not be forgotten.

One man, Denis Valerga, has ensured that his home town of Sotogrande will never be forgotten. The Cafe Society Folk Music & Poetry Club began eight months ago as a place for those to share their love of art, folk music and poetry.

The monthly event, also raises funds for the local cat shelter 'Segunda Oportunidad' and all who come and play, play for free.

Since its launch its shows have regularly sold out, which is not surprising when it is supported by art-

ists such as Seila Guerrero, Jemma Rocca, James Cullatto, Matt Parkin and Peter Chichon.

In fact, it is impossible to get tickets on the night!

The cafe is more than just a platform for the established musicians. Denis believes that unknown artists are vital and opens his doors to acoustic and folk artists from Gibraltar and

Spain. Denis is often found on stage and together with his brother, Henry, where they perform a tribute to the greats.

To get involved, or to just watch and appreciate the music contact Denis on 616 56 08 77. It takes place at Spinnakers Restaurant, 12 Ribera del Marlin, Puerto de Sotogrande. Music starts at 8.30pm



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# Second home of golf

**A**NYONE with half an interest in sport will remember the fantastic last few holes of the Ryder Cup in 1997 when Colin Montgomey played the best round of his life.

That was at Valderrama, which is now viewed as one of the must-play golf courses in Europe, beautifully maintained, but sometimes thought to be a touch too hard at times.

There are five other golf courses around Sotogrande, the first being Real Club de Golf de Sotogrande, also known as the Old Course, which was the first course built.

Well maintained, it is said to be a dream to play after its trickier sister Valderrama.

It was here that the so-called Bermuda grass was first introduced into Spain.

The other courses include La Canada, La Reserve, San Roque, as well as Almenara, which is up in the hills and where celebrities Glenn Hoddle and Glen Johnson have homes.

"There are few places with such a high concentration of golf courses," says Ian Bateman, of Holmes estate agents.

"When you add the fabulous tennis facilities and polo club, with its 11 full size courses, the facilities in Sotogrande are second to none."

**PIONEER:**  
Planting  
Spain's first  
Bermuda grass  
(top) and  
Sotogrande  
today and  
(inset) Monty  
on winning  
form in 1997



# The hidden treasures of Sotogrande

*More than just a billionaire's playground, Sotogrande has plenty for you to discover*

## Kids getting into the swing of it

**C**HILDREN from all over the south of Spain will be coming together on Sunday August 18 to take part in the Promises Youth Golf Tournament at the Club de Golf La Cañada. Organised by Alejandro Borja Ocaña, it will bring together players of all skills to compete in the five categories of Youngsters, Kids, Cadet and Junior under Stableford mode. The top three in each category will receive prizes and special awards. The competition is supported by professional players Alvaro Quiros and Gonzalo Fernandez-Castano. Registration will take place through self-Club La Cañada (956-794-100).



**T**HE main port in Sotogrande attracts the wealthy, but unlike nearby Puerto Banus and Marbella, these affluent individuals don't want to be photographed falling down drunk – or indeed photographed at all.

It isn't a place to show off your Prada handbag, or lounge on your yacht with the biggest bottle of Bollinger you can find.

The area centres around its port, which sits alongside two fantastic beaches, one where a sailing club has famously offered the area's children sailing lessons for over two decades.

The port is a real warren of shops and restaurants sitting on a number of squares and with wonderful views across boats towards Gibraltar in the distance.

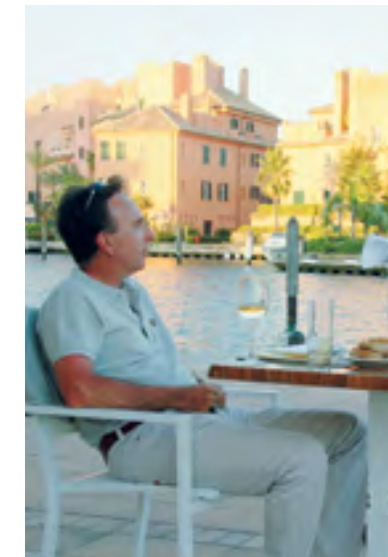
Built in the 1960s, the port's architecture is a kaleidoscope of magnificent colours, and designs from traditional Andalusian through to Moorish and cutting-edge 21st century show homes.

The buildings are so impressive that in 2008, three signature buildings were declared as being of cultural importance - Biddle House, by Francisco Javier Carvajal, the Zobel house by José Antonio Coderch, and the Real Club de Golf by Luis Gutierrez Soto.

Even the golf courses are beautiful. The NH Hotel Almenara course was designed by Ryder Cup champion and respected course architect David Thomas, while Valderrama and Sotogrande are two of the most respected in Spain.

Just down the road is San Roque, a town with a rich history, where evidence can be found of Prehistoric, Phoenician, Carthaginian and Moorish occupation.

Meanwhile, you can't mention So-



togrande without discussing polo. The Santa Maria Polo Club is world famous and hosts some of the best tournaments in Spain.

The Tennis and Paddle Club, at the Sotogrande Racquet Centre, has professional courts for both sports and an extensive timetable of classes.

Water sports can be found practically everywhere, including at Centro Nautico, where you can go out for the day on a kayak or boat.

A short drive away and there are a host of activities on offer. Or, if you would prefer to cycle or walk, there are numerous routes that will take you to the mountains.

A favourite of locals is the Sotogrande to Castellar route. Taking about three hours, it is not for the faint-hearted, but is well worth it when you see the views, and the castle!

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## A BYGONE ERA



**Sotogrande is celebrating its 50th anniversary this month, and what a glorious history it has. Here are two classic pictures from a bygone era... one of a group of polo players and another of fox hunting in San Roque**

## Art reflecting life



RAMON Corrales Andreu's passion for photography started at 15, when he took an interest in his surroundings and explored them with his camera. His exhibition, *Com-*

*pendium*, at the Gallery Nando Argüelles in Sotogrande Marina, reflects his travels with his friends and family throughout Spain, and abroad. The display includes 30 photographs,

printed on vinyl and an audiovisual piece entitled *Man is what interests the man*. Here, Sotogrande port at dusk. *The exhibition runs from Thursday August 1 until August 17.*

# Re-oxygenating the body

**Elizabeth Gould visits the Soto Wellness centre to top up her Chi**

AS you get older joint stiffness is as common as summer rain in the UK. Exercise can help relieve the pressure, but not everyone has the time to take exercise daily.

What if you could get the benefits of a 90 minute brisk walk in only 15 minutes? Well, thanks to Soto Wellness Centre, you can.

I visited the centre, recently opened in Mar Y Sol, by Steve and Julie Hickey, to experience this miracle treatment.

The Soqi bed uses infrared and Chi, motion energy, to penetrate up to 5cm into the body to open capillaries and arteries, and re-oxygenate the body.

The bed looks rather like a tanning machine. Laying on the couch, with my feet slightly raised, the machine enclosed my

body. I was gently rocked by the Chi, while warmed by the infrared, listening to classical music.

For 15 minutes I was rocked, and then had a further 30 minutes of infrared treatment – knowing I had completed my exercise for the day really wasn't a chore! As the session ended and a eucalyptus flannel was placed on my face, I felt totally relaxed.

The Soqi bed has been known to improve circulation and burn calories. I will definitely be going back again, not just for the Soqi but for one of the many other treatments that Soto Wellness provides.

To book a free Soqi taster session, contact Julie or Steve on 956695564. [www.sotowellnesscentre.es](http://www.sotowellnesscentre.es)

## Recycle, re-use



**TRAWLING** the shops looking for that one piece of furniture that will set your whole living room alight can take hours, days, even weeks.

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The shop is also packed-full of unique articles that may be a perfect fit for your home.

Kate started up the business to provide something unique, and has been run off her feet ever since.

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**HENRY'S:** It has a friendly, laid-back atmosphere

### Where to stay

UNLESS you happen to have a spare million it is hardly likely that you will be buying a home in Sotogrande anytime soon.

Luckily though, there are a couple of reasonably-priced hostels on the edge of the resort, the best by far being the stylish great-value boutique hotel Milla de Plata (pictured).

Overlooking Torreguadiaro beach, this stunning place is the brainchild of dynamic local businessman Cristóbal Rodríguez, who has a keen eye for detail and a great way with the public.

After setting up two dozen businesses in the area he has settled on being a hotelier and has very much stamped his



style on the place.

An exceptional use of light, it feels very St.Tropez with its dozen spacious white bedrooms literally overlooking the sea.

Outside is a small pool and a great chill-out terrace with a series of comfortable day beds to lounge on. It has a great restaurant to boot, but its friendly staff take the biscuit.

# Foodies delight

**Andalucía's most exclusive enclave has its fair share of restaurants, writes Jon Clarke**

### Where to eat

SOTOGRADE is a true port of discovery for diners.

There are so many interesting and exciting places opening which is quite remarkable considering the recession. In the port itself the Hairy

Lemon is fast becoming one of the top hangouts serving fresh homemade food all day.

There is a good wine list and over two dozen tapas created by chef Lorenc, who spent 14 years working in the restaurant trade in London.

The best include teriyaki duck breast with wasabi coleslaw, spicy fish wontons and Thai fishcakes.

The restaurant claims to be the most child-friendly restaurant in the port and there is music in the evenings.

Also in the port you might want to check out the excellent Belgian-run La Terrasse, or Spinnakers, owned by friendly couple Monica and Janus



**STUNNING** La Cabana and (left) Lorenc at Hairy Lemon

(John) from Budapest.

If it is romance you are after, then head out of the port towards 'Alcaidesa', where you will find La Finca.

This 200-year old country house was once the nerve centre for one of the area's biggest estates.

Today, ancestor Syrie Blanco

Walsh and husband Chris have turned it into an atmospheric escape, full of charm and creativity. The candlelit garden at the front is simply beautiful.

The Thai fusion menu comes courtesy of Benny, an amiable Thai/American friend, whose classics include wild boar masaman curry and a rosada



baked in banana leaf.

It's a fun place to visit with live music on weekends and the food is refreshingly different to what you would typically find in the area.

Another fabulous secret spot is La Cabana set inside the beautiful Antiguo Cortijo de Valderamma, next to the Hipica riding school.

The setting is stunning and it offers a fantastic array of top quality wines and an enticing menu.

It was recently set up by well established local restaurateur Juan Jose Barrero Pascual, who has run the long running Molino del Conde Castellar restaurant for decades.



**The place sits on a tree-lined avenue and has a fresh, creative menu and stylish tapas**

**MIX:** JB's, the team at La Finca and one of Thai chef Benny's creations



He also now conveniently owns another tapas restaurant Molino del Conde Guadiaro, in Pueblo Nuevo de Guadiaro.

This spot sitting on a tree lined avenue has a fresh and creative menu and the tapas are stylish and delicious. Particularly good is the white chocolate pyramid with fruits of the forest.

Nearby in Pueblo Nuevo look out for Henry's, a new sports bar with a friendly, laid back atmosphere.

There is a decent bar menu,

good value snacks and plenty of games including pool, table football and a competition darts board.

Another newly-opened spot is JB's Cafe Bar in Torreguadiaro, which was renovated by owner Jane and her husband.

It is a great place to go for home cooked food. They are open for breakfast and lunch and also serve lovely home made cakes.

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