

ROADBLOCK: Herd of goats en route to wards Maroma mountain near Sedella

Tolkien-shire

Wild soaring mountains, crystal brooks and elegant white-washed villages. Tom Powell is blown away by the stunning, varied Axarquia region en route to its 'crown' of Comares

DIPPING your feet in the cool Mediterranean, in a Nerja cove backed by a buzzing town with bars, restaurants, tapas and ice cream, is a wonderful experience. But the first sip of beer as you gaze out across the breath-taking Axarquia landscape from the hill-top village of Comares - following an epic drive through mighty mountains and whitewashed pueblos - is simply unbeatable.

The Axarquia is best appreciated when you head inland from the coast, and the transition from Nerja's tourist hum to tranquil mountain beauty doesn't take long. Within minutes of leaving the beaches behind me in the morning sun, I was ascending a winding mountain

road, marveling at the mountains specked with isolated white homes as if they had been sprinkled on the landscape like hundreds and thousands. My first stop was in Archez, nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Almijara, and it set the bar high. The only

noise came from a stream trickling down from the mountains above and the distant engine of a tractor. A street so narrow that obese tourists could struggle to pass led to a charming mini-plaza with geraniums adorning houses and the quaint church of Nuestra Senora de La En-

carnacion. The eye-catching fourteenth century tower is the minaret of an earlier mosque, the clearest evidence of Archez's Moorish roots. Five kilometres further on sits gleaming white Salares below the Maroma mountain. This elegant vil-

lage, built on olive oil and wine production, is the smallest municipality in the Axarquia. But make sure to stop. The mazy streets are home to plump old ladies snoozing in the morning

Turn to page 20

Picture by Jon Clarke



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Walk the Walk

ART lovers in the Axarquia will be able to enjoy all styles of arts and crafts at the sixth Art Walk-about in Competa. Due to take place over the weekend of April 19/20, the event aims to bring together the community in an animated and artistic atmosphere at various venues in the town. Works on show include paintings, photographs, graphics, drawings, ceramic bowls and bronze sculptures. In total there are 19 artists from many countries living and working in the Competa area.

For more details on the event visit www.competaart.com



ROAD TO COMARES: Locals in the hills on the tracks around Comares

In search of the ‘white crown’

From Page 19

sun, colourful potted plants and the odd child playing. On the other side of town stands an ancient stone footbridge that radiates a true sense of adventure and history, like something out of Tolkien's Shire. Beautiful little *pueblos*, pickled in hundreds of years of Andalucian sunshine, began to fade into each other as I continued to cruise the mountain roads - not entirely sure if I was heading remotely in the right direction.

My drive roughly followed the Mudejar route, which takes in five Moorish villages and countless incredible views. I passed through Sedella, Canillas de Aceituno and La Vinuela, each with their individual towers and arches, plazas and piles of potted geraniums. The latter is, by local standards, a 'new' pueblo as it was only formally recognised in 1764. The landscape is so relentlessly spectacular that I felt guilty for not stopping at every single viewpoint and giving it the five minutes gawping it demanded. But I would never have made it to Comares. Although a day spent journey-

ing between these villages is still highly enviable. The roads were sensational - the kind you see on *Top Gear* when they're testing supercars. And the cyclists obviously thought so too, often found tackling mountain climbs in their droves.

The first glimpse of the Vinuela reservoir - just outside Canillas de Aceituno - made me desperate to drop everything and dive head-first into its sparkling blue waters. The turquoise reservoir helps supply the city of Malaga but has also

seen a recent boom in housing construction on its shores. The area is home to plenty of expat British and increasingly Scandinavians, Dutch and Germans. Their main hive is the legendary Puente de Don Manuel, where they can count on a cluster of English stores, an Irish bar, great fish and chips and conveniently a curry house.

It was from near here that I suddenly spotted what looked like a white crown adorning a hilltop on the other side of the lake. It took



ARCHEZ: A beautiful pueblo pickled in the Andalucian sun



ADVENTURE: Salares bridge, (right) Comares and (inset) Migas

me a few minutes to realise that this snow-cap cluster was Comares, my garret for the night. This 'spectacular place gives a whole new level of meaning to 'mountain-clinging'. It looked majestic and intriguing up high and compelled me to focus on the destination, having indulged in the journey all morning.

Benamargosa was my penultimate stopping point, another impeccably white village this time surrounded by citrus orchards and avocado and mango plantations. From there the corkscrew road to Comares climbed higher and higher, but its death-defying hair-pin bends were worth it. It was all leading up to that moment when I

stood atop the mountain and gazed out at this sublime region. Sierras dressed in a patchwork of pueblos, plantations, winding roads and isolated homesteads spilled down towards the sparkling coast where Torre del Mar can be seen hugging the shore.

There is a walking route around Comares laid out by pretty ceramic footprints, taking in numerous *miradors*, the Castillo, the peaceful cemetery and ending back in the central square. The remains of the Moorish fort stand highest of all.

It turned out to be the stronghold of ninth century rebel leader Ibn Hafsun - here and at nearby and appropriately named Masmullah - who is

Villages twinkled and coastal towns shone, while a donkey brayed below

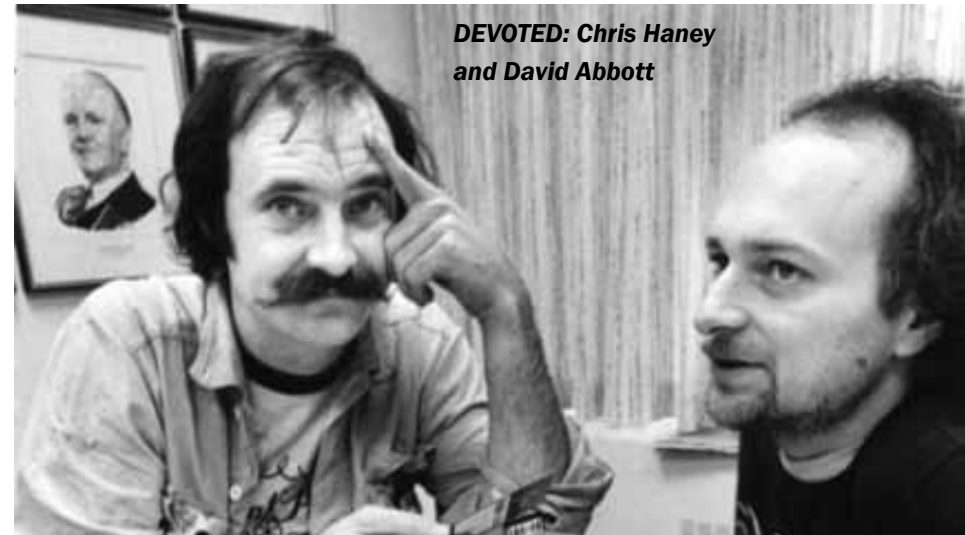
Q: What has Nerja got to do with Trivial Pursuit?

A: It invented it



It is possibly the most successful board game of all time, with over 100 million copies sold in 26 countries and in at least 20 languages... and it was born in the Axarquia. It happened after two young Canadian journalists stayed in Nerja in the winter of 1980, having quit their jobs to work on the game and persuade investors to part with their money. Chris Haney, a high-school dropout, had been working as a picture editor in Montreal while his friend David Abbott was a sportswriter. The pair lived at El Capistrano, a villa resort where Haney's parents had a house, and they allegedly worked 16 hours a day thinking up questions for their game - fuelled by San Miguel. And lots of it.

But while they enjoyed the paella, the beer and strolls along the Balcon de Europa, they struggled to find investors for 'Six Thousand Questions', as it was originally called. Just one Nerja resident decided to invest, a Canadian barman. He is now a millionaire. The game went unnoticed for two years. They lost money on every copy they sold and it looked to be a disaster. But then once the first cheques starting rolling in they never stopped. Within months it was selling by the million and in 1984, *Time* magazine called it 'the biggest phenomenon in game history'. And it is still incredibly popular, with Nerja's first Trivial Pursuit tournament currently being planned for this year.



DEVOTED: Chris Haney and David Abbott



Pictures by Tom Powell



recognised by information boards across the village. I found myself completely alone in this serene place, bar the occasional locals sweeping outside their home. Despite being very small, it took me a long time to walk around as I couldn't help but stop and admire the view every few minutes. The square - where I tucked into a gigantic portion of fried pork and chips - was only made louder by the snoring of a middle-aged man, slouched against his front door. There is no escaping the heat up on the mountain though and I was aggrieved to discover the municipal

pool is only open in the summer months. The Axarquia is undoubtedly a hiker's paradise. There are many clearly signposted routes heading out of Comares and infinitely more that aren't publicised in leaflets. After taking a short walk around the edges of the village I headed back to my hotel located on the road into Comares, Hostal Atalaya. It is a simple yet charming place to stay, with legs of ham, jugs of wine and quirky lamps hanging from wooden beams in the bar. I sampled a hearty local speciality called Migas, a dish piled high with fried

bread crumbs, spicy sausage, pepper and slices of orange. The kind of stomach-satisfying food I could imagine tasting like heaven after



Dead interesting

SAID to have been designed so the dead would not turn their backs on each other, it is claimed to be the only round cemetery in Spain. Now locals in Sayalonga hope that their unusual graveyard, built in 1840, is to be promoted better as a tourist attraction. A visitor centre is now open and a local historian is urging the authorities to designate it a BIC, or site of specific cultural interest.

a day laboring in the Axarquia sun. After filling up further with plump, juicy olives and fried white fish, I retired to the hotel's south-facing balcony to feast instead upon night-time views of the Axarquia. The villages twinkled and the coastal towns shone, while a donkey wheezed its way back up the mountain road below me. The tourist leaflets refer to Comares as the Balcon de la Axarquia (balcony of Axarquia), but I can't help but feel that is an understatement. It's the crown.

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SCENIC: View from Nerja's Balcon de Europa

Nerja resident for 30 years, here are Linda Maria Zima's top tips for visitors

TAKE breakfast in Italica, an ancient coffee bar in Plaza Cavana where you will be taken back in time.

- Visit El Salvador church and the Balcon de Europa, easily spotted by the 500 year old tree. Don't forget to say hello to King Alfonso XII.

- Verano Azul park, named after a famous black and white series filmed in Nerja in the 70's, using some locals as actors.

- You must visit Maro, to the east of Nerja, 'a small village with a big history'.



Molasses of fun

It could be called one of the sweetest spots in Spain. Quite literally that is, thanks to its sugar cane factory. But Frigiliana, which sits on the edge of the Parque Natural Sierras de Tejeda, Almijara y Alhama, has also won prizes for being the prettiest village in Spain thanks to its immaculately kept, flower-bedecked cobbled streets.

The miel de caña factory in question - El Ingenio - is set in the magnificent 16th century mansion Nuestra Señora del Carmen in the heart of the town.

The only one still functioning in Spain, it chugs out deliciously sticky molasses - or treacle - on an hourly basis.

The building, which unfortunately is not open for public visits, is one of four traditional water mills in the town, the other three are now private houses. The mansion was built in renaissance style for the

The coastal pair of Nerja, with its stunning beaches and top restaurants, and Frigiliana, with its sugar cane factory and cobbled streets, compliment each other perfectly, writes Tom Powell

lords of Frigiliana, the Manrique de Lara family, and was used as a sugar mill before becoming a factory. Frigiliana, with its mosaic cobbled streets and whitewashed houses, probably rues its proximity to the coast and the resultant daily droves of tourists.

Built on the side of a mountain, its streets are remarkably steep in parts, but it is a lovely place to explore, not least with its spectacular backdrop of soaring mountains and forest.

Small shops, bars and restaurants can be found hidden away down an alleyway or

through an arch. While traces of the old Moorish castle remain above the hilltop where spectacular coastal views are also found.

Nearby, take a light lunch at the Garden Restaurant at the top of the town, which overlooks the factory and offers the best views around.

Despite its hilly location, the village won the Premio Reina Sofia 2013 award for universal accessibility because of its wheelchair friendly ramps and rails.

Just 6km from this gem of a pueblo - and a delightful walk if you're up to it - lies the quirky coastal town of Nerja.

This charming resort - the Costa del Sol's prettiest (although Marbella and Estepona might argue) - has fought off high-rise development and remains one of Spain's most upmarket tourist resorts.

It has a distinctly laid back feel about it and is far more scenic in terms of its coastline than any of its western rivals.

Flanked by the dramatic Sierra Almijara, Nerja has retained an authentic air in its narrow winding old town streets, rocky coves, powdery sands and glistening waters.

Nowadays it is a tourist hub but not that long ago Nerja was a dirt-poor fishing village. It was still well off the map in the late 1950s when tourism started taking off west of Malaga in spots such as Torremol-

A true Verano Azul fan can make a pilgrimage to the various spots in Nerja associated with the programme

- **Verano Azul park.** Here you find a replica of Chanquete's home, a battered fishing boat, where the 'pandilla' (gang) used to meet the old sailor and listen to his wise advice. Plaques around the park depict members of the cast

- **The street** running by the park is named after Antonio Ferrandis, the actor who played Chanquete. He died in 2000

- **Nerja Town Hall.** A portrait in oils of Chanquete hangs in the town hall

- **Paseo Marítimo Antonio Mercero.** The road running alongside Burriana beach bears the name of the series director and there is a commemorative plaque



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Don't be warded off by the 'phantom'

THEY are easily the most popular tourist attraction in the Axarquia and it is little surprise that Nerja's caves pull in thousands by the day. While some describe them as over-commercialised and not worth the money, the caves are in fact some of Europe's finest.

Despite enormous crowds at peak times, within seconds of descending the stairs you are in an extraordinary place, worlds away from Nerja and the sunny coast.

A marvelous glistening underworld of stalactites and stalagmites, sprouting and dripping into weird and wonderful formations, with each flight of stone steps the eerie caverns get more impressive.

The 'phantom hall' in particular - so called because of the ghoul-like appearance of its structures - is astounding.

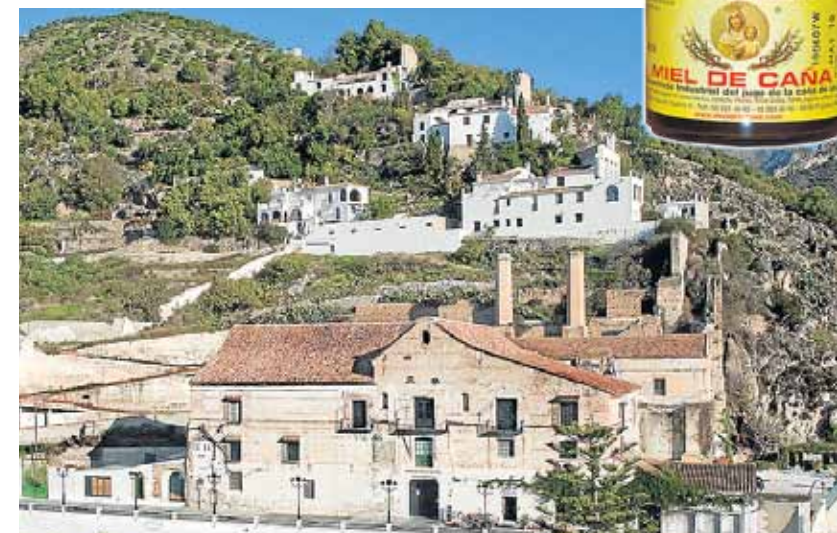
The vast caves also boast the



world's largest stalagmite; a 32 metre high column verified by the Guinness book of world records no less. And there is a campaign currently underway to get the caves officially recognised by UNESCO as a world heritage site. The site was allegedly discovered by five local lads in 1959, when they went hunting for bats. After dislodging a couple of stalactites they were able to descend into a huge cavern where they found skeletons and ceramic pottery. The caves were officially opened to the public in the summer of 1960.



DISCOVERY: Frigiliana's steep steps are worth the climb and (right) its sugar cane factory and its produce



nos and Marbella.

But then came a stroke of luck. Five boys on a bat-hunting trip stumbled upon the opening to a cave on a hillside above the tiny fishing village of Maro, a few miles east of Nerja. Vast caverns were revealed,

with spectacular rock formations of evidence of Paleolithic man.

General Franco himself came to view 'Cuevas de Nerja' and coach-loads of visitors followed suit. During the 1970s the boom really began with increasing numbers of Europeans coming on holiday.

But it took television to really awaken the rest of Spain to this burgeoning resort. Wherever you go in Nerja, a certain name keeps recurring. There are Verano Azul (Blue Summer) apartments, a Verano Azul travel agency and bus company, a Verano Azul park. You may even find a bar serving a Verano Azul cocktail.

The real joy is found in the small coves below the town or nearby in Maro

ing Sollun, Carabeo and the newcomer Fusion - are vying to be the best.

The main plaza and surrounding streets - centred on the large palm-lined promenade of the Balcon de Europa - are alive with activity, but it doesn't take long to lose the crowds.

There are many miradors with benches

perfect for a lunch-stop. At one, a woman tried desperately to make me buy a sprig of lavender for five cents. "I'm sorry, but lavender just won't go with the jamon in my sandwiches."

There were also massages and designer watches being flogged to tourists - and this is just in March.

The real joy is found in the small coves just below the town, or nearby in Maro that you share only with a crazy German who chases seagulls and a young Spanish family.

When you sit against a rock, feet dangling, fresh from a 'swim' in the late afternoon sun, the cove can seem so peaceful you lose track of time.

Nerja's beaches are cut off from the town, they are not backed by a road but by a cliff-face. You can sit on the sand and not see any sign of civilisation; just rock-studded coastline meets blue sea in both directions.

This is the very best of Nerja and thank heavens there is one town left that gives a clue as to what the Costa del Sol must have once been like.

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SPLENDOUR:
 La Vinuela

Having organised horse treks around the Axarquía for five years Alain and Jackie of Finca Don Carmelo know the area's most beautiful spots. These include:

• The breathtaking views of Guaro

Don't miss the birthplace of the river Guaro! The area is a hiker's heaven, and restaurant El Caseron de Guaro is the place to be for tapas with a view.

• Take a bath with the devil at Baños de Vilo

When our cortijo was being renovated and we didn't have a shower, we came here to take baths in the sulphur spring, which was recently restored with EU money. It's only a hole in the ground, but the scenery is idyllic with the river running beside it. The water is also good for your skin.

• The old railway line to El Cañuelo

La antigua vía is still a landmark even though they took away the rails in 1954. You can just imagine what an incredible journey it must have been, coming by train from the coast to Ventas de Zafarraya. You can walk all of it, the best stretch though is Periana to El Cañuelo, where the 'mountain bar' can be found.

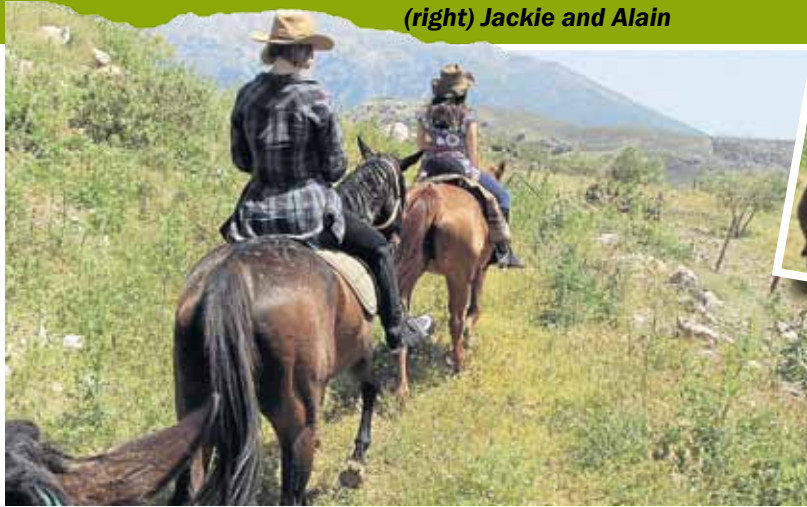
• Picnic at Lake Viñuela

The lake of Viñuela is a reservoir and while swimming isn't encouraged, the splendour of the lake is best enjoyed from the picnic area of the little hamlet Las Mayoralas. The ever changing colours of the water never cease to amaze. If you forgot to bring your picnic you can have lunch at restaurant Las Mayoralas next door.

• Back in time at Veleta

Entering Cortijo Veleta is like stepping back in time. Antonio, Antonia and their son Jesus are the owners of this old farmhouse/restaurant. They grow their own veggies and make their own wine and Antonio even made his own furniture from old olive wood. It's only open on weekends. If he's in the mood Antonio will sing you some flamenco at your dinner table.

RIDE OF YOUR LIFE: A trek and (right) Jackie and Alain



A pair of seasoned hacks gave up journalism to run a horse-riding business, writes Eloise Horsfield

Still hacking

AS I trot along an unused railway track deep in the Axarquía countryside, I wonder whether there is anything in the world I would rather be doing.

And as our gorse-lined route leads us through the Guaro Valley – providing a fantastic opportunity for vulture and eagle spotting – I realise I have not seen a single vehicle since setting off from Periana hours before.

It is pretty incredible for the Axarquía, where sadly an estimated 22,000 illegal homes have been built since the 1990s – of which up to 8,000 are on protected land according to green group *Ecologistas en Acción*.

"This is probably the only road in the Axarquía with no illegal property on it at all," jokes one of my hosts, Alain Grootaers, of Finca Don Carmelo, as we mosey along in the warm, afternoon sun.

Our route will cover around 15 to 18km throughout the day and take us from 350m to 950km – although thankfully the horses will do most of the work.

Alain, 49, from Belgium, and his Dutch wife Jakobien Huisman, 43, left behind city jobs in Antwerp five years ago to discover the idyll of rural Spain, and the horse lovers now offer an attractive range of equine treks.

Shortly after arriving I am introduced to my mare, Deliciosa – or Dee for short, who like most of Finca Don Carmelo's horses is mixed breed English/Arab. "We find pure Spanish-blooded horses a bit unpredictable, which is the last thing we want for taking out punters," explains Jakobien, who began riding at the age of eight.

I am pleased to find Dee poised and steady, and as Jakobien informs me, can even be relied on for her steady appetite.

"She'll stop to eat whenever she gets a chance," she laughs. And sure enough, just as we're saddled up and about to set off, Dee saunters over to the nearest pile of hay and starts tucking in. As well as Dee, the couple's 14-strong herd also includes foals Alfarnate, Baila and Colorado, plus Jakobien's 30-year-old mare which she brought from Belgium.

"It's really old for a horse and it cost a fortune, but I just couldn't bear to part with her," she says. Soon we are off, heading around the pretty village of

Periana and through a shady olive grove.

Meanwhile I learn more about this energetic couple, who didn't think twice about taking daughter Julia, then 11, off for a year-long trip around Asia before settling in Periana.

"People said, 'Why are you burying yourselves in a small Andaluz village?'" says Jakobien, originally from Holland. "But we didn't see it like that. It was simply time to do some-

thing else." Jakobien is a travel journalist contributing regularly to Belgium's biggest newspaper, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, and Alain is also a prolific writer whose achievements include setting up Belgian men's mag *P-Magazine* back in 1998.

As if running horse treks wasn't enough, the pair also produce organic olive oil which is shipped back to upmarket restaurants in Belgium.

"I made a lot of contacts when I presented a cookery programme for a while," explains Alain. Soon we turn onto the stunning country road, which in the early 1900s housed a railway line ferrying industrial materials to and from the coast.

Today it's an incredibly picturesque track boasting views over Lake Vinuela.

"You'd almost expect to see some Indians appear from over that ridge, wouldn't you?" jokes Alain. Once we are used to the rhythm of our carriers, Alain

suggests we try a trot – and the next thing we know the horses have upped their pace, taking his animal as their lead.

Although a little unsettling at first for someone who – despite my surname – has never spent much time on a horse, I soon feel comfortable with the quicker rhythm.

Back down at walking pace, Alain and Jakobien lead us to a trough where the steeds take turns to enjoy a well-earned slurp – apart

from Dee who goes straight for some wild mint. After a downhill section, where all our stomach muscles are given a mini work-out, we grind to a halt at the village of

El Canuelo for lunch. El Canuelo is a tourism complex owned by former London art dealer Edward Crawshaw, where we are spoilt with a leisurely three-course meal as we absorb breath-taking views over the lake.

"It's wonderful that Jackie and Alain are offering these horse treks because no-one else seems to be doing it," says Crawshaw. And despite a jovial ambiance, we are instructed to go easy on the booze in view of the 'drive' back.

"We don't want to be over the limit – the same laws apply to driving a vehicle as they do for horses, sadly!" says Alain.

Finca Don Carmelo offers a range of treks from half-day to eight-day. Prices start at €60 per person. Over 12s only. See www.fincadoncarmelo.com

The steeds take turns to enjoy a slurp - apart from Dee who stops to eat wild mint

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One-eyed bandit!

David Baird follows in the footsteps of the bandoleros, who made the Axarquía infamous

ABOUT the biggest hazard you will meet on the back roads of the Axarquía is a herd of goats, a lorry overloaded with farm produce or a hostelry inviting you to dally for a lazy hour or so. But it was not always so. *Bandoleros* – or bandits – were once a major feature of life in this area.

Colourful types though they were, it did not make the experience of having your valuables purloined at the point of a blunderbuss any pleasanter. In the years following the Napoleonic Wars, so lawless were the roads that the English writer Richard Ford advised travellers to bring along 'a decent bag of dollars' to appease any highwaymen you might meet. He also suggested carrying an impressive-looking watch, noting: "The absence of a watch can only be accounted for by a premeditated intention of not being robbed of it, which the *ladron* considers as a most unjustifiable attempt to defraud him of his right."

One of the most notorious 19th-century

bandits was *El Bizco* (the one-eyed bandit). They remember him in his birthplace, El Borge. Take a ride up there and witness how the landscape becomes steeply undulating, clothed in olive groves and vineyards.

Several streets are named after revolutionary heroes such as Che Guevara, the legacy of a leftwing, anti-monarchy mayor who often made headlines with his controversial decisions.

The Mudejar-Renaissance Rosario church is impressive, with immense pillars supporting its three naves. Look for two holes in the weather-vane atop the church. They were allegedly made by *El Bizco*'s shotgun.

The vane had never worked but – after he blasted away – it functioned perfectly. Otherwise *El Bizco*'s record is pretty gruesome. With his comrades in crime, Frasco Antonio and Manuel Melgares, he terrorised the whole area. At times, these cut-throats were used by unscrupulous 'caciques', powerful land-owners, to sway local election results. Wander down a maze of narrow



CAPTURED:
Infamous bandit El Tempranillo was finally captured and kept at Venta de Alfarnate (left)



streets and at the bottom end of the village you find the olive mill where *El Bizco* was born. It has been converted into the Posada del Bandolero, combining an attractive hotel, restaurant and museum. At the side of the bar you can see the original mill-stones and a deep well. *El Bizco*'s chum, Melgares, meanwhile is said to have committed one of his most daring crimes in Frigiliana (six kilometres inland from Nerja). Disguised as a priest, he entered the *Ingenio*, the mansion owned by the Counts of Frigiliana, pointed a pistol at the manager and made off with around 100,000 pesetas.

Today the *Ingenio* houses the last factory in Europe producing *miel de caña* (molasses), on sale in local shops. Frigiliana was a flash point in the 1940s when anti-Franco guerrillas based in the adjacent sierras sought to provoke a general revolt. In a bid to discredit them, Franco's tightly controlled media labelled them '*bandoleros*'. If you hike into the mountains with their abrupt inclines and deep gorges riddled with caves, you can see how difficult it was for the Civil Guards to track the guerrillas. High up, near a pass called the Puerto de Frigiliana, lie the ruins of the Venta Panaderos. Once this inn was a welcome rest stop for muleteers en route



to Granada and a meeting place of footpads, smugglers, guerrillas – and Civil Guards. Locals tell anecdotes about how the guards would suddenly arrive, discover meals which the guerrillas had ordered and proceed to scoff the food themselves.

Just east of Nerja is the Río de la Miel valley, a delightfully peaceful spot but once a refuge for smugglers. When guerrillas landed from North Africa, they trekked up this valley to their bases in the mountains and Río de la Miel became such a breeding ground of resistance that it was called 'Little Russia'.

El Tempranillo's claim was: "In Spain the king rules, but in the sierra I do"

Almost every village has some tale to tell about smugglers or bandits. Such as Benamargosa, up a well-watered valley north-west of Vélez-Málaga. A couple of centuries back it was dubbed *Gibraltar Chico* (Little Gibraltar) because the inhabitants were renowned as smugglers, particularly of tobacco. These days Benamargosa likes to think of itself as the Oasis of the Axarquía. The sheltered environment and benign climate allow tropical fruits such as mangoes and avocados to flourish on the fertile lands bordering its river. Perhaps most famous for its association with the lawless past is a lonely inn standing on a crossroads at one of the highest points of the Axarquía. To reach it, you take the old road from Málaga to Granada, the A6103. It

weaves its way through the forested Montes de Málaga then past limestone crags to the Venta de Alfarnate. First opened in 1691, this inn, standing beneath the rocky buttress of the Tajo de Gomer, claims to be the oldest in Andalucía. At weekends it is crowded as '*domingueros*' (trippers) tuck into roast kid, partridge and pork. In the past all manner of travellers stopped here. A plaque notes: "In this Venta on April 21 1850 the Mail on the way to Málaga was stolen by a group of 12 armed men. The bandits took particular care to seize a packet of Government prosecutions and criminal lawsuits coming from the Granada chancery."

On one occasion in the 19th century, a horseman rode up as the customers were tucking into gazpacho from a common bowl. Told there were no spoons left, he used the crust of a loaf to scoop up the cold soup – then produced a pistol.

"Now," he commanded, "do the same as I do. Eat your spoons!" They recognised him as El Tempranillo, Andalucía's most notorious bandolero, whose claim was: "In Spain the king rules, but in the sierra I do."

They were forced to chew their wooden spoons. On other occasions, El Tempranillo was more gallant. Always courteous, if he stripped a lady of her best jewellery, he would kiss her hand and assure her: "Such a pretty hand needs no adornment." Truth to tell, those bandits were hardly a bunch of Robin Hoods. Most would have robbed their own grandmothers given the chance. But time has cast a romantic aura over them, popular mythology has embroidered their characters and their memories have been enshrined in everything from museums to the names of gourmet dishes. Ford maintained that travellers often exaggerated the bandit peril. When he inquired about thieves, "according to all sensible Spaniards, it was not on the road that they were most likely to be found, but in the confessional boxes, the lawyers' offices, and still more in the bureaux of government." Bless my soul – some things don't change.

Learn more about the outlaws in Francisco Montoro Fernández's book Bandoleros de la Axarquía (Acento Andaluz). David Baird is the author of East of Malaga (Santana Books), the definitive guide to the Axarquía, as well as Sunny Side Up – The 21st century hits a Spanish village and Typhoon Season. These are distributed by Maroma Press (<http://maromapress.wordpress.com/>).



RUINED: An old mill in the Río de la Miel valley once used by smugglers

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A thirsty mess

Tom Powell takes a dawn hike from Comares

ROSE early from my bed on the outskirts of Comares, eager to stretch my legs on one of the walking routes before getting back in the car. I opted for the Ruta Lavadero, described as 'medium difficulty'.

The gentle dawn stroll through Comares was set to the tune of birdsong and a cow mooing down the mountain somewhere.

I said 'hola' to a donkey in a garden and set off into the rising sun, which was splashing fuzzy pinks and oranges over the sierras. The route was well signposted... That is unless, like me, you tend to go running up every rocky path to see how the view differs.

Needless to say, within an hour I was pretty lost and tales of people going walking up in the Axarquia (in particular around Frigiliana) and never returning were present in the back of my mind.

I passed just two other people on my hike and they seemed to be equally struggling with the combination of heat and mountain.

The beauty of Comares being atop a mountain though is that you will always know roughly how to get back there. And so I continued to tread a path over the rocks, through the pine forests and past the farms and luxurious houses, while always keeping one eye on the white-topped mountain.

A few hours of glorious hiking later I found myself back on the road into the pueblo; a sweaty, thirsty mess.

All along the watchtower

An oceanside ramble departing from one of the Axarquia's prettiest villages by Guy Hunter-Watts

THIS 7km walk is among the easiest in the region... and easily one of the most beautiful.

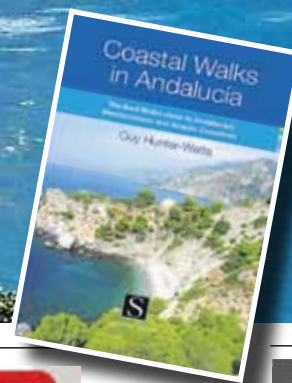
A there-and-back ramble with a short loop beyond the Torre de Maro it forms one of series of Axarquia walks in my *Coastal Walks of Andalusia* book.

The walk begins in Maro, near Nerja, one of the few villages that has escaped the urban sprawl that you come across in so many places along Spain's southern seaboard.

After cutting down towards Maro's beach - which is worth a quick detour - you head on towards the torre through a swathe of irrigated terraces.

Here you will find an amazing spread of banana, avocado, custard fruit and vines being cultivated as well as tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers in the plastic-covered greenhouses: you'll soon see why this part of Andalusia's coast is known as the Costa Tropical.

A steep climb leads up through pine forest to the Torre de Maro. On a clear day, looking east and west along the coast, you'll spot other watchtowers with which this one once communicated, sending warnings by smoke or fire should a raid by North African corsairs appear imminent. From the tower a short loop leads back to the track you followed earlier from where you return to the village past the old sugar cane factory.



The Nitty Gritty

Distance: 7 km
Time Required: 2.5hrs
Rating: Easy
Total Height Gain: 225m
Map(s): ING 1:50000 Motril 1055 (19-44)
Water: No springs so take plenty

THE walk begins just beyond the roundabout at the entrance to Maro, on the western side of the village, next to the Hogar y Centro Social de Maro. From here walk east. As you reach Bar La Entrada turn right along Calle Virgen de las Maravillas. The road bears right then left as it skirts round the edge of the village. Passing Hotel Casa Romántica de Maro you reach an esplanade. Here cut right down a flight of steps. Passing the old sugar cane factory, El Ingenio, you reach the MA138. Turn right and follow the road down towards the Playa de Maro beach for 700m. At a point where the road loops hard right cut left up a dirt track. **(15 mins)**

Becoming concreted the track loops right and reverts to dirt. The Torre de Maro comes into view as the track loops hard back to the left for 75m then reaches a small brick water deposit to the right of the track. Here branch right along a narrow path which runs beneath a breeze block wall. Reaching a fork take the higher, left branch which runs on between greenhouses before descending steeply to a track. Angling left you pass a ramshackle house with a cylindrical water deposit. **(25 mins)** Passing right of another house the track descends for a short distance between groves of avocado and custard fruit as it contours round a barranco.

Climbing once more you reach a sign for Paraje Natural and a junction. Carry straight on, climbing more steeply, to a point where a track angles up to meet yours from the right. Here angle hard back to the right and follow a track which gradually angles back towards



the sea. Passing an area where the track broadens out cut left up a path which leads steeply up to the Torre de Maro. **(40 mins)** Leaving the tower head north along a rocky track until you reach a point where the pines to either side of you become denser. Here cut left at a cairn along a narrow path which angles down through the trees to reach a track that cuts down towards the N340. Here angle left along the track back to the point where you left it earlier then retrace your steps back to the top of the steps above El Ingenio. Here turn right along the esplanade then continue straight on along Calle Real. Reaching a junction and turning left after 250m you return to the start point of the walk. **(1 hr 40 mins)**

Coastal Walks in Andalusia (ISBN 9-788489-954939) by Guy Hunter-Watts contains a selection of 50 walks close to southern Spain's Atlantic and Mediterranean coastlines. Routes vary in length and difficulty but are all within the capabilities of anybody in reasonable health who walks on a regular basis. The book is available at all good bookshops as well as from amazon.co.uk.

Sensory centre

It is a community centre with a very big difference. Su Derrick, who runs La Vaqueria, in Benamargosa, is a true live wire of creative energy.

Aside from the fabulous range of arts and crafts inside her shop, the mother-of-three now counts on a 'sensory garden' with outdoor sculptures and an eco-herb garden. There are mosaic mushrooms, a bottle wall of 500 bottles and much much more in this work in progress. Derrick arrived in the Axarquia 30 years ago, via France and Torremolinos where she worked as a 'pavement artist'.

As well as giving art classes, her enterprising daughter Lucy, 19, has recently opened a second hand furniture emporium next door. And her fellow siblings Josie, 22 and Ben, 18, are on hand to help out and bring a range of their own ideas to the mix.



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El Convento is a typical Spanish tavern located in the historical centre of Vélez-Málaga in Calle Los Moros, which has been restored to its original state in the 1960s when it was awarded 'the most picturesque street in Spain'.

It is only a few metres from the Plaza de las Carmelitas and opposite Teatro de Carmen. El Convento is wonderfully reminiscent of the old traditional taverns and inns, which are sadly lowly disappearing, promoting the retention of the style of a bygone era. Sample one of chef's mouthwatering dishes or a selection from the wide variety of tapas, typical of the Axarquia, complimented by your choice from our selection of wines. Come and try our most popular starter, ajobacalao, available throughout the year.



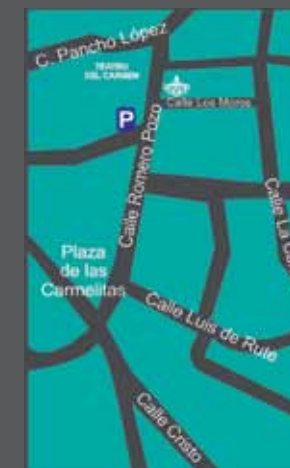
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CARING: Christa and Jan at Palacio Blanco

30 All about Axarquia

WHERE TO STAY

FROM rural, rustic retreats to charming beachside hotels, the Axarquia has got the lot.

But few places beat the amazing Hotel Carabeo in the heart of Nerja with its nine romantic rooms, many overlooking the sea.

Now well established, the team have given the rooms a complete overhaul this year and, in particular, the top floor suite with its huge spacious outdoor terrace and rooftop bath is a room to die for.

Another great central spot in Nerja is Hotel Toboso, which couldn't

From boutique to rustic rural

The Axarquia has a great selection of places to stay, discovers Jon Clarke

be in a better location in the heart of town by the emblematic Balcon de Europa.

The rooms are fantastic in size and you are right next to the excellent Cochrane's Irish restaurant and bar, which is good for a local meal and has the best terrace in Nerja.

Another wonderful place to lay down your hat is hotel Palacio Blanco in Velez Malaga, which has been taken over and much improved by capable Dutch couple Jan and Christa.

This historic building right in the heart of this gem of a town is stylish and oozes comfort.

Breakfast is excellent and this charming professional couple go out of their way to help guests settle in and recommend

sites and restaurants nearby.

If you are looking for something more rural, then few places come as luxurious as Cortijo Piltraque, near Colmenar.

Sitting in the most wonderful location, with some of the best views in Christendom, this wonderful spot has been set up by Belgium couple Hubert Deckers and Annemie Tielens. He was a well-known chef back in Belgium, while she was a psychologist.

Queen

It is a stylish place where no expense has been spared, in particular with its giant solar heated swimming pool and expansive bedrooms with roll top baths and beds that cost €10,000 each and are even slept on by the Queen of England, it is said.

They also recently won a Belgium equivalent of TV programme Four



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April 2 - April 16 2014



RETREAT: Piltraque and (right) a fabulous suite at Hotel Carabeo

in a Bed.

The hotel that came second in the programme coincidentally, Casa los Dos, is also a wonderful rural retreat, much nearer to Competa.

The Dutch-run B&B sits in a tranquil spot down a country lane between the village and the sea. The accommodation is incredibly clean and stylish and you are guaranteed a mean breakfast, in fact one of the best I have even had in Andalucia.

Also just outside Competa is Hotel Alberdini, where many rooms come in Gaudi-style casitas with spectacular views. There is the added advantage of having an excellent restaurant.



EXCELLENT: Restaurant and views at Alberdini



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WHERE TO EAT



TEAM: At Frietkot
Jon Clarke takes a ride around a rich variety of the Axarquía's best restaurants

WITH some of the best ingredients in Spain there is literally no excuse to serve up bad food in the Axarquía. And thankfully there is a nice range of restaurants serving the best. One of the most exciting recent openings is that of Swedish eaterie **Fusion**, in Nerja. Set up by Kim and Fredrik Kullberg, a well travelled couple, with five children no less, attention to detail is spot on with fresh flowers, candles and dishes to match. It is exactly what it says on the tin, a fusion eaterie that takes in Fredrik's influences from around the world, in particular three years living in Thailand. Formerly the head chef at footballer Tomas Brolin's restaurant Uhdici, in Stockholm, he produces some top dishes, including a lovely plate of fresh foie on toast with rocket salad and a blackberry reduction. There is a lot of experimental stuff here too including the tuna in poppyseeds with soba



TALENT:
Juan at Sollun and a dish (below)

MELTING POT



noodles and 'Irish moss', a dish you really want to jump on, both spicy and succulent at the same time, as well as the wild boar hot pot with shitake mushrooms, exciting, original and tender. Another fabulous Nerja restaurant **Sollun** has been producing consistently some of the best food in Nerja for years. Recently moved to a new spot on Calle Pintada it is named after owner Juan's two children Sol and Luna. Originally from Albacete, he famously set up a Michelin starred restaurant in Marbella

(which he asks not to mention) before falling out with its owner and setting up alone in Nerja. The food is light and original, including a beetroot and strawberry 'porra' in a vinaigrette with mackerel. Other highlights are his pork cheeks, with sweet potato and honey, parsnips and wild mushrooms, his splendid scallops with pork belly and cauliflower and the amazing white chocolate desert, with yogurt, cheese and passion fruit.

A Michelin starred wine

A small Axarquía winery is now producing six wines served in 28 leading restaurants in a dozen countries

IT is one of the most stylish buildings in the Axarquía. Sitting half way up an impossibly steep hill with amazing views, it is from here that a Dutch wine producing couple have taken their wine to the world. Bodegas Bentomiz is now selling its wines in 28 Michelin-starred restaurants in 12 countries globally. And its six wines, three whites, two reds and a rose have won many awards. Here, Clara Verheij and André Both have rescued the abandoned vineyard above which they built their home. Recognising the enormous potential of the local Moscatel de Alejandría vines, they have had rave reviews from wine journalists and sommeliers.

Aromatic

The Axarquía's unique *terroir* such as the vineyards steep slopes and the closeness of the sea, all provide an ideal microclimate for the grapes. The vines – some over 100 years old – are grown in hollows to collect water, and are cut back to bushes, so that the leaves protect the maturing grapes from that scorching summer sun. André and Clara have invested heavily in modern equipment and make naturally sweet or unforti-



AWARD WINNING: Modern Bentomiz

fied wines in their temperature-controlled stainless steel tanks. They also produce a red from a blend of grapes: Petit Verdot, Tempranillo and Romé, a little known vine indigenous to the Axarquía. They named their aromatic wines Ariyanas, after a nearby Moorish hamlet, which comes from the Arabic word for aromatic. The pair got their wine known by taking mini European tours to wine fairs and celebrated restaurants, getting an 85% success rate. "If the sommelier tried our wine, the restaurant purchased it!" says Clara. Why not come up for yourself, as Clara explains: "Visitors enjoy seeing the vineyard and get an understanding of how the wines are developed – before enjoying the wines with a guided tasting. For larger groups we offer home-made tapas, each paired with a particular wine." www.bodegasbentomiz.com

All about Axarquía

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TOP OF THE TOWN: Garden Restaurant soars above charming Frigiliana

Another highly-rated eaterie is **Carabeo**, whose setting could not be improved sitting on desirable Calle Carabeo overlooking the sea. Well established as a hotel as well as a tapas bar and restaurant, it is run by the very talented, hard-working English businessman Lucan and his sidekick Belen. They are big on style and there are some amazing paintings and a very seductive fin-de-siecle atmosphere with wood panels and leather chairs. Lighter bites can be enjoyed at tapas bar 34, where you will eat some amazing prawns in beetroot jus or the apple and mince meat tarts. Another new Nerja restaurant is Belgium-owned **Frietkot** (soon to be renamed), which is run by the friendly Aline and Nick de Wilde in the heart of the old town. This capable couple produce some Belgium classics including fantastic prawns with red peppers and garlic, superb mussels with pesto and gratin, and best of all Belgium stew in beer.

the town into an oasis of calm and style. The food is incredibly fresh too, with everything made on the premises 'no tricks, just good fresh local produce,' he explains. I could eat his *Bunelos* of mushrooms and onion with an aubergine chutney and mint and lime yogurt sauce every

the 'most picturesque' in Spain. There is a nice range of tapas and a decent range of wines by the glass. In Competa try the highly rated **Alberdini**, where Inez and Emmanuel have created a wonderful retreat, both warm in winter and breathtaking with its views and terrace in summer.



ABLE:
Fredrik and Kim and a creation at Fusion in Nerja



STYLE: Velez mayor and owner at El Convento, while tapas (right) at charming Carabeo



day for lunch they were that delicious. Over in Velez Malaga you must look out for the stunning recently converted **El Convento**. Installed in an old convent, surprise surprise, with high ceilings and beautifully preserved features, local businessman Jose Manuel Garrido has pulled a real rabbit out of a hat here. It has a lovely outdoor terrace and sits on a street twice voted

A cultured pair, vegetables are locally sourced and the kitchen is certainly adventurous. In Puente don Manuel meanwhile, you will find the **Town Fryer** serving up the best fish and chips for miles and the recently opened **Bar Rendezvous**, great for all day breakfast and fresh food by the day. Here, friends of 25 years Sue and Jackie, who previously ran the catering at Castle Combe race circuit, put on a splendid range of dishes, including the classic *Rendezvous Royale*, basically bubble and squeak topped with a poached egg and crispy bacon. Finally make sure not to miss the nearby **Morenos**, which is an upmarket spot now with its own pool table. Extremely popular with locals it has a great selection of food and bar snacks. It is also popular for its nightlife and various live acts.



FRIENDS: Jackie and Sue at Rendezvous

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Nerja

Spanish Cortijo with land – 2 double bedrooms – one family bathroom – Main living area 40 m2 – open plan kitchen – below private bar and two storage areas – Easily reformed to suite – Avocado trees – Citrus Trees- 5 minutes from Nerja center – Views sea and mountains – roof terrace – Garden and terraces – Cemented road – Fire place – South Facing – Plot 500m2 – Possibilities to purchase adjoining land. **189,000€**



The best properties are selling in Nerja in record time, discovers Tom Powell

Magical market

WITH its charming mix of Andalusian spirit and international vibes, Nerja is steadily becoming one of the most desirable up-market tourist towns on the coast. Homes with large terraces and sea views – for those who can afford it – are particularly popular. And with prices

at an all time low; there is no time like the present to up sticks and move to this 'magical' town. Christina Bergsten, of Swedish estate agency Fastighetsbyran, says: "We are selling very well." "Sometimes the best properties are sold before they have even been advertised!" Certainly things have been

hotting up in Nerja recently, agrees lawyer Nacho Escobar. His company Lex Luris currently has half a dozen sales going through, some 10% more than last year. "It is excellent news," adds the lawyer, who covers the entire Axarquia area. A standard two bedroom home with a terrace and



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PROPERTY SPECIALISTS: Lawyers Nacho and Sabina at Lex Luris, team at Fastighetsbyran and Linda Maria Zima (right) from Inter Sales Nerja

sea view, and not in need of work, currently costs between €200,000 and €250,000.

Nerja is free from the concrete high-rises that have helped lower property prices in other coastal resorts, but this does mean buyers must pay more than they would in Torremolinos or Calahonda. "Nerja is steadily and subtly becoming an up-market coastal town," believes Lin-

da Maria Zima, of freelance estate agency Intersale Nerja.

"It holds its prices more than other coastal towns because there isn't a lot of property and it is a bit special with its low rise buildings, mountains and coves," adds Zima, who arrived in Nerja with her Portuguese husband 30 years ago. Those buying property in Nerja, Frigiliana and Torrox



have been predominantly Scandinavian over recent years, although more recently many British people have been returning to the market.

Escobar from Lex Luris agrees. "The British are definitely coming back after seven years away."

Nerja's particular appeal is not only in its multitude of coves and beaches backed by cliffs and not a main road, but by the friendliness of its Spanish residents.

"Nerja is also beautiful, it has the Andalusian style and is very charming," adds Bergsten, who has lived in Spain since she was seven and moved to the Axarquia 20 years ago.

Property fairs

"Expats are lured by the appeal of skiing in the Sierra Nevada in the morning, then sunbathing on the beach later that afternoon."

And Fastighetsbyran, who have ten offices across Spain, have been operating in Nerja since September 2011 and receive most clients through their website and property fairs in Sweden.

Linda Maria, from Carlisle in England but has lived in Spain for 30 years, concludes: "I have seen Nerja grow from 12,000 people to 25,000 people registered, and there are many more that need to register. "The town draws really cultural and professional people. It is a great mix and I am very happy here."

For more info contact www.fastighetsbyran.se or www.intersalesnerja.com. Nacho Escobar can be reached at nacho@lexlurisabogados.es

Better mix

It has been the best start to the year since Tim Whiteley launched his estate agency Villa Solutions 12 years ago.

And while declining to discuss actual numbers, the agent, based in Puente don Manuel, insists the mix of buyers in his inland Axarquia area is better than ever before.

"We have got a good mix of English, Dutch, Germans, Scandinavians and Belgians. They have been my saviour."

"They are so different to the British buyers and buy in the right way. They always take notes and photos and look carefully at the quality and value of the build, as well as the pool."

Ultimately it has led to a 'more cosmopolitan mix' to the area. "I expect to see a Belgium bar opening soon," adds the agent, who has 230 properties on his books in a roughly 15 mile radius around the town, including Periana, Alcaucin and Canillas.

Aside from becoming well known for offering a snail farm to clients on a hit TV programme in 2004, Whiteley is also known again for negotiating the sale of a property owned by pop star Mikey Graham of Boyzone this year.

It began with TV show *A Place in Spain*, in 2004, when he tried to find Welsh couple Lee and Cheryl the perfect home to buy in the Axarquia.

"But I straight away realised that satisfying their limited budget and ideas was going to be a difficult task," explains the estate agent, 35.

That said, the publicity was fantastically good for the company, which ended up featuring in 10 episodes of the show.

"Clients still ask me about the snail farm and how it is doing," explains the father-of-one, from Wiltshire.

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Centro Comercial El Zoco, Nerja

By John McCann,
Senior Partner,
Blevins Franks

OVER the last 15 years
there have been a
number of initiatives
to clamp down on off-
shore tax evasion, each one
whittling away at financial pri-
vacy as we knew it. Now we will
see the introduction of global
automatic exchange of finan-
cial information.

The 2008 financial crisis
prompted governments, des-
perate to increase tax revenue,
to renew the campaign against
offshore tax evasion. Off-
shore centres fell into line and
around 1,100 new tax infor-
mation exchange agreements
were signed.

These are agreements between
two jurisdictions and generally
provide for information provided
on request. Last year saw a piv-
otal move to multilateral agree-
ments, where several countries
share vital information. This
will happen automatically each
year, regardless of whether
someone is suspected of tax
evasion or not.

In 2010 the US enacted its For-
eign Account Tax Compliance
Act (FATCA), which requires
foreign financial institutions to
report account details of Amer-
icans to the US authorities.
Working with the G5 (Spain,
UK, France, Germany and Italy),
they developed a model for the
'intergovernmental agreement'
to be used to implement FATCA.
In April 2013, the G5 an-

The end of financial privacy



nounced their intention to ex-
change FATCA-type information
and promote it as the global
system of automatic infor-
mation exchange. Over 40 ju-
risdictions have since joined the
pilot group.

In September, G20 leaders
announced plans to introduce
automatic exchange of infor-
mation as the global standard.
Then in February, the Organisa-
tion for Cooperation and Devel-
opment (OECD), working with
the G20, released the Com-
mon Reporting Standard cov-
ering the rules to be imposed on
global financial institutions.

The Standard is specifically
designed with a broad scope
across three dimensions:
1. The financial information to
be reported includes all types
of investment income, and ac-
count balances and sales pro-
ceeds from financial assets.

2. Besides banks, custodians,
brokers, certain collective in-
vestment vehicles and certain
insurance companies need to
report.

3. Reportable accounts cover
those held by individuals and
entities such as trusts. Finan-
cial institutions will deter-
mine the residence of each
client and collect data on their
assets and income. This will be
forwarded to the tax authorities
in the clients' country of resi-
dence.

EU developments

The Savings Tax Directive is be-
ing revised to cover investment
funds, pensions and innovative
financial instruments, and cap-
ture payments made through
trusts.

The revised Administrative Co-
operation Directive, to apply

from January 2015, introduces
automatic exchange on em-
ployment income, director's
fees, life insurance products,
pensions and immovable prop-
erty.

The EU is also closer to reach-
ing agreements with Switzer-
land, Liechtenstein, Andorra,
Monaco and San Marino on
their revision of their savings
agreements.

How could the loss of financial
privacy affect you? Is your tax
planning fully compliant? Are
your assets as tax efficient
as possible? International tax
planning is very complex these
days; it is essential to seek spe-
cialist advice.

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April 2 - April 16 2014



I had a dream

**Peter Langdale on how he
set up his business Garden
la Palma in Velez Malaga**

IHAD a dream. The year was 1985, Spain was
entering the European economic community,
and I wanted my own business.

Being a third generation market gardener, a
pioneer in iceberg lettuce production, mixed with
a little experience of growing in southern Portu-
gal, the future in Spain looked a possibility for
such an adventure.

After a two week intensive Spanish language
course, our house sold and furniture stored, my
wife Gill, daughter Victoria (not quite four years
old) and I boarded the ferry at Dover.



**DREAM: Peter's massive nursery and
(top) his team picking parsley**

From those early days we grew to be one of the
Axarquia's foremost horticultural businesses
and saw many changes over this period.

As I cast my mind back I see a very different
Velez. If I dwell upon the farming back in 1986,
most notable was the production of sugar cane.
Working sugar mills were still going strong in
Velez-Malaga, Frigiliana and Salobreña. During
late April and May the sky would turn black as
the cane was cleaned out by burning, prior to be-
ing harvested.

Unfortunately what goes up
must come down and so all the
ash that went skywards began
to fall wherever the wind took
it.

Iceberg lettuce full of cane ash
was not a good selling point!
All the cane was hand-cut and
hand-loaded onto the trucks to
be taken to the mills.

The men carrying out this work
had to be incredibly fit as it
was physically very demanding
and incredibly dirty. They were
as equally black from head to
toe as any coal miner with their
only recompense, the hope of
being the highest paid field
workers in the comarca.

Readers. How many of you
have just bought strawberries?
No doubt many of you, and
these berries, like hundreds
of tonnes more, will almost
certainly have been produced
in the area around Huelva and
Almonte.

28 years ago this was not the
case, with the Axarquia being
the biggest exporter of straw-
berries.

The Trapiche based co-opera-
tive TROPES, now known world-
wide for its avocados and man-
goes was founded on the straw-
berry business.

In the spring of 1987 this co-
operative produced and export-
ed in excess of 3,000 tonnes
of strawberries along with im-
portant quantities of fine round
beans. (Now imported from Ke-
nya).

As the strawberry crops disap-
peared the majority of the land
used was planted with avoca-
dos and later probably man-
goes.

The development of these
crops I will leave for another
chapter and another day.

Unexplained

Some 16 days later just as the sun was setting I
arrived on a farm at Trapiche, near Velez Malaga,
in the heart of the Axarquia.

An unexplained gut feeling persuaded me that
this was the starting line for us.

Many Olive Press readers know this it as Finca La
Palma, the site of the Tuesday Farmers market.

A very international (family) affair



SUCCESS: Peter and Heiko

ALREADY a heavyweight with opticians shops in a num-
ber of Europe's big cities, Heiko Stumbeck raised quite
a few eyebrows when he opened up a shop in the Ax-
arquia.

The addition of Optica Heiko by Heiko in Torre del Mar in 2003
came about after one particularly nice break in the area.
The family had often been on holiday in the village of Cajiz,
near Velez Malaga, and Heiko fancied trying his chances in the
area.

The young German - who designed and produced his own spec-
tacles - had opened his first opticians in Denmark at the age
of 30.

He went on to open branches of his company in Berlin, Ham-
burg and Paris, as well as little Torre del Mar.
The shop in Torre, with one of largest and best quality ranges of
glasses on the Costa del Sol, is now run by his son Peter.

Peter, who owns the shop, studied to become an optician in
Copenhagen, and apart from a few years in the Danish army,
he has always worked as an optician.
He speaks German, English, Swedish, Norwegian and Spanish.

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