



# Mijas Immense

**There is so much on offer in  
Mijas aside from riding a donkey,  
discovers Imogen Calderwood**

**T**HERE are two main types of tourist who visit Mijas pueblo. The 'watch-everything-through-your-camera-lens type' and the others, who try to avoid them at all costs.

The latter spend their days seeking out authenticity, while the former are so eager to document everything going on and tick boxes that they often forget to actually enjoy themselves.

What is striking about Mijas is its ability to satisfy these types of tourists and a lot more genres to boot.

For starters, anyone interested in Andalusian history will love its municipal museum and well preserved churches, while foodies and wine lovers are increasingly finding themselves spoilt for choice with a growing range of decent places to 'tapear' in the centre.

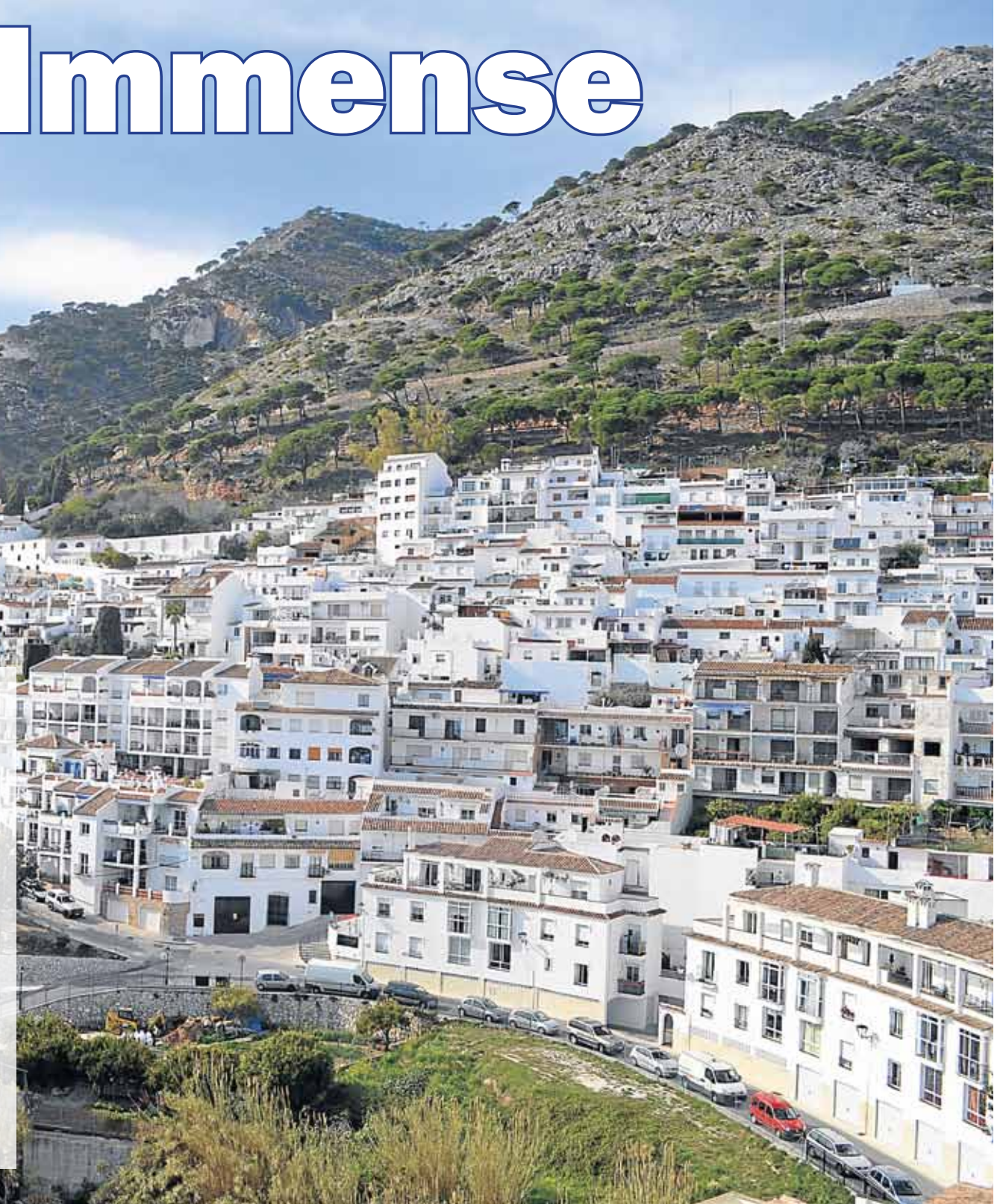
Above all, being a tourist in Mijas is easy. The town hall and tourist office has it down to a tee. Maps and walking-tours are carefully planned and signposted, with the translations at its sites - for once - making perfect sense in English.

I set off following a 'yellow line' walking tour that snaked through the town, promising to show off the best of its streets.

Among the initial highlights of the tour is the shrine of the Virgin of the Rock, a cross-between a cave and a chapel carved out of the mountainside, dedicated to the patron saint of Mijas.

From the nearby El Compas viewpoint, you can take in

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**GRAND CRU ANDALUZ:**  
Mijas centre

# Authenticity town

*From Page 19*

the phenomenal panoramic views along the Costa del Sol that form the backdrop to the shrine. You could linger here all morning, admiring this leafy haven and enjoying drinks at the small cafes lining the walls of the vantage point. But the walking-tour marches on, enticing us towards the central hub, Constitution Square. The second plaza is less concerned with cafes, and is definitely the commercial centre of the town. Countless streets radiate out, lined with artisanal shops - packed with ceramics and trinkets - that seem to have grown

out of the mountainside itself. The haphazard development of Mijas leaves the impression of organic growth - shops come in all shapes and sizes, adapting themselves to the natural landscape. From here the route slopes upwards, in the direction of the bullring, unusual due to its oval shape, and surrounding gardens. Ceramic designs on the walls commemorate some of the history of the bullring, built in 1900, as well as some of the best-known matadors that have performed there - including Paquirri and Paloma Linares. During the summer months, there is the occasional bullfight

and horse shows on Sundays, but during the winter visitors can still tour the inside and admire the architecture. It wasn't long after the bullring that I fell off the walking tour map and was forced to start exploring for myself. However, it's in getting lost in Mijas that you start to see how the town appeals to the type of tourist that craves authenticity and unspoilt Andalusia.

**Soon you are in stunning hills scattered with wild flowers, olives, pines and oaks**

an impression of the village as a whole, of its almost regal position over the rest of the coast, and the stark contrast between it and Mijas Costa. Soon you will find yourself in stunning hills, scattered with wild flowers and wild olives, pines and oaks. There are tracks in all directions and the wildlife and birds to be seen in abundance. Back down in Mijas pueblo it is

clear that the town hall is trying hard to promote its history and nature. One thing that caught my eye was a display of 'esparto' products (a kind of wild mountain grass) in the municipal museum. Traditionally collected from the nearby hills by women folk, it was woven into a huge array of items including shoes, hats and bags, many sold to tourists over the years. It became an invaluable source of income for some of the town, and recently the town hall has launched a new drive to bring it back. On a plaque in the museum, beside an evocative picture of a local peasant stitching it

together, was a moving elegy to the trade. It read: "One has to be born to the work in the mountains. Collecting esparto sounds easy, but it isn't. The mountain changes every year. It is full of cracks and holes that are covered with weeds, one must know how to walk there. "I have travelled as far as Granada and Cordoba to collect it. On these trips, you had to sleep under trees, even at Christmas when it was far too cold. In the end we managed to save around 300 to 400 pesetas. We were used to living with so little in those times."



**FACES AND FIGURES:** Local pensioner and a statue by church tower

together, was a moving elegy to the trade. It read: "One has to be born to the work in the mountains. Collecting esparto sounds easy, but it isn't. The mountain changes every year. It is full of cracks and holes that are covered with weeds, one must know how to walk there.

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Much of the museum tells of the difficult times from the beginning of the last century, particularly for women, whose job it was to work the land, while their husbands went out to seek work further afield. One elderly woman tells of how, after the civil war, the women were so poor that they had one dress for work and one for holidays. "It was a life of miseries a thousand times worse than I can explain," she explains. It is one of many museums in the heart of the old town and there is plenty to keep you occupied for a day.

The town has ultimately struck an impressive balance between encouraging its thriving tourist industry and maintaining its authenticity.

The streets have been carefully looked after and the level of tatty souvenirs are kept to a minimum.

An urbane man, its mayor Angel Nozal, a former insurance agent, has travelled the world and speaks a number of languages.

He is also a keen walker and has, in particular, worked hard to promote the town's many paths - there are said to be over 100 public footpaths around it - and green spaces.

Shortly before lunch I found myself surprisingly attracted by the idea of embracing tradition and seeing a few local paths by experiencing a classic 'burro' taxi.

It was seeing a group of Japanese women clearly enjoying



their donkey-tour that inspired the notion - reassured that the unsettlingly small donkeys could take the weight of an adult. It is an excellent way to see the town and there are various ways to do this whether astride an animal or in a more traditional horse-and-cart. Without a doubt the village is at its most beautiful around 5pm, when the sun starts to set among the houses, and the recently departed tourist coaches leave behind them a strange sense of nostalgia. Mijas is a village to amble round. Lose the map and point yourself away from the centre. In particular I recommend looking out the Plaza de los Siete Canos, and you'll find yourself in the midst of an unspoilt, typical Andalusian pueblo. Doors are open, children play in the street, and shrivelled old men



**ANCIENT TRADE:** An esparto weaver and her wares



# Ass good as it gets

THE donkeys of Mijas demand to be recognised as one of the town's oldest tourist attractions, calling out to passing tourists with brays and snorts, and drawing the eye with multi-coloured decorations. But over the half century that the donkey taxis - known as 'burro-taxis' - have been operating, the profession of the taxi driver has undergone a dramatic evolution. The first donkey drivers, in the 1960s, but were villagers who worked in the mountains, persuaded by tourists to let them take photos and ride their donkeys. The tips paid by the tourists were often more than the day's wages, and enterprising villagers shifted their priorities from farming to donkey-driving. From these humble origins a thriving tourist industry was born. But who are the people walking alongside the donkeys now?

Hassan Habib, 25, moved to Mijas from Pakistan, and is one of many struggling to hold down a full-time job in Spain's current job market.

Hassan is really an accountant, but drives donkeys as a way of making ends meet. "It's really difficult for me because there are just no jobs," he says. "This is a way of earning money. But it's hard work. In the summer we can go out up to 20 times in a day, with each walk being around 20 minutes," he continues. "That's a lot of time, both for us and the donkeys, to be walking around in the heat. We all get tired."

However, the donkeys are an integral part of the Mijas tourist industry and are the main draw for thousands of tourists each year. "It's part of the culture here, you couldn't get rid of them. The donkeys are such a big part of what makes Mijas, Mijas."

# THE MOLE OF MIJAS

IT is one of the most remarkable stories to emerge from the Franco era.

Now best known as 'The Mole of Mijas', Manuel Cortes Quero was the last Republican mayor of the pueblo, from March to November of 1936.

However, when the town fell to dictator Franco's nationalist troops during the Spanish Civil War he was forced to abandon his wife and newborn daughter and flee the town under the cover of darkness.

However he returned in 1939, willing to sacrifice his freedom in exchange for living under the same roof as his family, making himself a prisoner in his own home.

For 30 years the Mole stayed hidden, driven by his belief in democracy and socialism, tucked in a cramped space under the stairs behind a false wall.

"I pulled out my own teeth, as soon as I got an ache," Cortes told his biographers Jesus Torbado and Manuel Leguineche, authors of the book 'Los Topos' (The Moles).



"I would work at the tooth until it was loose and then I would yank it out with my fingers, without any pliers or tongs. I pulled out nine or ten teeth this way." In 1960, after 21 years of hiding, Cortes' daughter Maria got married.

## Kiss

"I had to make do watching her come out of church through a little hole above," he said.

"The wedding procession left the house and after the ceremony Maria scurried away to come to my room and kiss me, just as we had planned." Listening to the radio on March 28, 1969, with his ear pressed to the wall, Cortes heard the news that he had been waiting 30 years to hear.

The government had granted amnesty to those people who had committed crimes from July 18 1936 to April 1 1939. "I got a lump in my throat



**HIDEOUT:** Quero's room and (top) with radio

because of the emotion of the moment," said Cortes. "I couldn't think straight." The then mayor of Mijas, Miguel Gonzalez Berral, accompanied Cortes to the headquarters of the Guardia Civil in Malaga, where the world's press waited to hear the confirmation that he was finally free. "Was it worth it?" asked Cortes. "I never lost faith in democracy. The tyranny of the dictatorship could not last forever."

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## All about Mijas (& La Cala)

# Healthiest drink in the world

IT is hard to believe but not only was the coast from Malaga to Mijas once lined with vineyards... but the sweet wines produced were sold to churches, hospitals and even schools!

In an incredible exhibit, the Mijas wine museum has a series of labels from the time which demonstrate the importance of Malaga wines. "They were some of the world's most important wines back in the 19th century and were seen as being healthy," explains owner Carlos San Juan. Called 'reconstituyentes', they were recommended for patients convalescing, as well as for children as a 'crema infantil'. The vineyards completely sur-

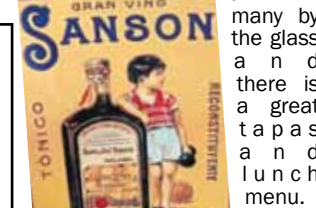


**TOP TIPPLE:** Malaga's wine was once recommended for patients and even children (below)

rounded the city of Malaga, which had hundreds of bodegas producing the mostly sweet wines made from Moscatel and Pedro Ximenez grapes. "There were a staggering 200,000 hectares under vine in the Malaga region," continues San Juan, who previously ran the wine museum in Ojen. Sadly that all came to an end with the phylloxera virus that spread through Spain in the



1870s and the industry was never the same. However, it was the wine industry which is credited for helping to make Malaga one of Spain's main cities leading the industrial revolution. As well as being a museum, the shop, which has now been open for 10 years, has one of the best selections of Malaga wines in the province. You can



many by the glass and there is a great tapas and lunch menu.

**BOFFIN:** Carlos San Juan

# No small feat

Professor Max's Wagon of Miniatures is one of the world's best small museums, writes Imogen Calderwood

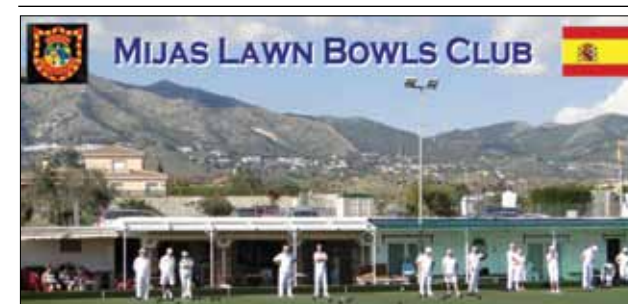
CERTAINLY one of the more baffling attractions that Mijas has to offer is the museum of miniatures. Juan Elegido Millan, a magician better known by his stage name 'Professor Max', insists he was forced into collecting miniature works of art due to economic difficulties...and because his house was too small to collect normal size artworks.

His collection includes a version of *Da Vinci's The Last Supper*, painted on a grain of rice and a bullfight painted on a lentil. The collection also includes various sculptures carved into toothpicks and sticks of chalk, and three dried fleas that someone has painstakingly dressed up as a family, complete with father, mother and child. A large number of the pieces are anonymous, but the undoubted star of the museum is artist David Reyes, 43, from Cordoba. Reyes visited the museum as an eight-year-old boy, and can now put his name to about



**WAGON OF WONDERS:** The Museum and one of its bizarre exhibits

half of the artworks in the collection. Some of his pieces include *The Titanic*, painted on a grain of rice, *Velazquez Las Meninas*, painted on a pinhead, and unbelievably 'Bullfight', painted on the point of a pin. Having belonged to the family of Professor Max from its opening in 1972, the town hall took over ownership in 2012. All proceeds from the museum now go to AFE-SOL, a charity founded in 1999 to provide help for the families of people with severe mental illnesses.



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**Grotto of gifts  
at Tamisa**

IT was first used in the time of Muslim king Omar to store food and arms. Now an astonishing cave in the heart of the pueblo is being used to store wares of a very different kind. La Gruta stocks a great collection of jewellery, art works and other artisan goods from around the province and world. Brands include Lladro, Majorica, Gucci and Tisot. The family-run business, Tamisa, has two more shops 'El Shop' and 'Tamisa' nearby.

# Bowled over

WITH more expats than just about anywhere in Spain it is not surprising that there is a well established bowls club in Mijas.

Founded in 1989 the Mijas Lawn Bowls Club was bought by its members and completely renovated in 2001 after its previous owner tried to sell it. It has six rinks and memberships are available on a monthly or annual basis. The members take it in turns to run the bar and they are split into five teams. "It is a great place to come and bowl and we are always looking for new members," explained Christine Wilson. "There is even a bus stop



right outside and a bus comes up from Fuengirola on a regular basis." Coaching is available and people can also simply come and bowl for a day for €8, and can rent shoes and bowls for just €2 euros.



**IT'LL TURN OUT ALL WHITE:** Mijas Bowls Club

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# Hardly a scar in sight

**Legendary gangsters and A-list celebs have all sunned themselves on the golden beaches of La Cala de Mijas, but thankfully the 'last village on the coast' has not been scarred by overdevelopment**

LONDON-born gangster 'Mad' Frankie Fraser, Kray minder George Dixon, and the notorious Ronnie Knight, have all hung out in the charming village of La Cala. Having terrorised London's gangland for decades, fending off inquisitive tourists (and the odd journalist) must have felt like a stroll on the beach. Remaining defiantly low-rise, La Cala has absorbed the waves of tourism that batter it from all sides, yet its back streets and two-storey terraced houses have maintained a distinct Spanish feel. The beachfront fisherman's cottages have not only survived the tourist boom, but were actually a major part of what drew the tourists to the village. It is testament to both the families and authorities that the vast majority of these homes have been in the same Spanish hands for decades. "Apart from one street we call Coronation

Street - which was built 25 years ago, and is full of English - most of the old part is Spanish," explains one local shopkeeper, who grew up in the town. "Unlike many other towns along the coast, most homes here pass from generation to generation. There is no way my family would sell to the English or Germans. That is why it keeps its ambience."

**Even up to the 1970s, almost all local transport was conducted by donkey**

A series of British celebrities have also visited the resort, including TV presenter Chris Tarrant, Status Quo frontman Rick Parfitt, and Gerry Marsden, leader of Gerry and the Pacemakers. The most prominent celebrity though, to quit the rat-race and move to La Cala is Liverpool comedian Stan Boardman, who says it has always been his favourite Spanish resort. "It's one of the few places left on the coast that still has a local village feel," Stan told the *Olive Press*, mug of tea in hand and a steak-and-kidney pie on his plate. "There is still a very Spanish feel and people are friendly."

Stan was undoubtedly drawn by the romance of walking the same streets as the notorious British gang leaders. "I was at Banditos in Marbella with Mad Frankie and Freddie once," he quipped. "We had a great dinner of broken leg of lamb, bruised spare ribs and black-eyed peas." There is no doubt that La Cala truly comes alive in summer, as the beach and neighbouring restaurants start to hum with people. But the big mix of Spanish with English, German, Dutch and Scandinavians is quickly apparent. "We do not want anyone to feel like a foreigner in Mijas, no matter where they come from," insists local councillor Mario Bravo. Historically a place of defence, La Cala's past is hinted at by the fortified watchtower in the centre of the village.

The tower was originally part of a series along the coast that provided an important system of defence during the 12th century, warning Fuengirola, Benalmadena and Marbella of the presence of pirates and enemy ships. Now a museum and tourist information centre, the tower's exhibitions tell the story of General Torrijos - who led a revolt against King Ferdinand VII's regime in 1831 - the history of other coastal watchtowers, and the traditional fishing customs of the Mijas Costa. It was only four decades ago that the village consisted of little more than the watchtower and half a dozen fisherman's cottages. Even up to the 1970s, almost all transport was by donkey, recalls Pepe Martin, 56, who has lived in La Cala all his life. "I was actually born in Malaga and my mother got there just in time with an hour donkey ride to Fuengirola, where she took the train," he explains. A gardener at Las Buganvillas urbanisation, he explains how back in the late 1950s most

## Bunker down



ONE of the best places to stay if you are coming to Mijas to play golf is the splendid Hotel Tamisa Golf, a charming small hotel located right next to Mijas golf. Dubbed the 'Jewel of Mijas' this friendly place, run by amicable Scotsman John Peach, even brings out its own golf magazine once a month. The rooms are comfortable, there is free wifi and you are just a stone's throw from the attractions of Fuengirola.



**HISTORIC:** The old watchtower in La Cala, a view across a stormy beach and (top right) Stan Boardman outside Sully's Bar

of the land in the area was split between two big families, the first a German family called Berne and the other a wealthy Malaga family



called Cotrina. The two families between them owned most of the land up to Fuengirola and inland towards

Mijas village. "They had most of the land carved up between them and employed many local labourers," he adds. His family had a little bit of land of its own, where they grew vines to produce raisins.

# The best of both worlds

**Nine years after moving to Spain, life remains 'muy bien' in Mijas Costa for journalist Clive Jacques and his wife Nena. Here he explains why**

LIFE is good living on the doorstep of La Cala de Mijas, a village that retains a year-round charm all of its own. Compared to the rowdier neighbouring resort of Fuengirola just ten minutes drive away, La Cala eeks out a generally sleepy and quaint local existence with both resident and visiting families soaking up as Spanish-a-flavour mix to local life as required. Residents who want Spanish can easily find it. Those that want expat can get it. And for many who want the

best of both worlds here it is, existing alongside one another throughout the very breathing pores and daily existence of this former fishing village. La Cala remains safe, friendly and appealing with its own identity, and while it will never be totally sleepy again following development over the last three decades, happily nor is it following the route many coastal villages have sadly gone along in recent years. The village has seemingly never forgotten its past and has chosen not to offer noisy bars, late-night discos and high-rise

**QUAINT:** A typical La Cala street scene

apartment holiday homes. Peep beyond the Boulevard running the length of the village heart and there are quaint, narrow, and frequently pedestrianised streets lined by small terraced properties, home to both Spanish and expatriate families. The face of La Cala has changed little in recent times and while sadly some surrounding countryside has been scarred forever by huge housing developments, the village thread to life in La Cala village lives on, unable to expand unless it goes upwards...and that has not been the chosen route. Yes there is an Irish bar, plus a few late night bars, but by the time Puerto Banus really gets heady 25 minutes away, La Cala village is in general tucked up and asleep for the night. The local restaurant scene is strong, with the former Mijas Playa - recently renamed Howies - a discerning eatery popular year-round, along with Ole where Mine Host Juan offers as warm a welcome as any along with a varied and interesting menu and an outside terrace that looks down on the village. There is no better value for money than at the town hall-run Pensioners Bar that at

tracts from morning to night domino-playing locals along with tourists tempted in by its key beach location, and alongside nearby market stalls offering everything from art to fridge magnets. While Indian and Chinese food fans have a choice of several outlets in La Cala, other street-side cafes, many with a strong Spanish flavour, offer equally welcoming and tasty menus, the majority competitively priced. Stroll along the rarely crowded local beaches, sit enjoying a coffee watching the world stroll past in a local cafe, or enjoy tapas and a beer at a local bar...what more can one seek or hope for in retirement. And those that find time on their hands there are regular council-run courses, including Spanish and art, a popular local gym and much more besides. Just 25 minutes drive from the airport, La Cala also boasts excellent bus connections to both Marbella and Malaga. So what about negatives? Any need to find parking spaces in the summer is a constant challenge, but the council that annually spends thousands beautifying the village has to-date yet to introduce paid-for street parking. Good work, La Cala!

**La Cala village is unable to expand unless it goes upwards and that is not an option**

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## Mijas News IN BRIEF

### Transformation

PLANS are in the pipeline to give the old historical centre of Mijas a new lease of life, including the conversion of a slaughter house into a day care centre. The project, masterminded by Plan Qualifica, will restructure the Plaza Virgen de la Pena, overhaul the calle Malaga and calle La Canada de Gertrudis, and create a museum about the *La Puente*.

### Hablas ingles?

A BRAND new TV programme has launched, specifically for English speakers on the Costa del Sol. The programme, Costa del Sol Community, offers an hour of entertainment covering health, beauty, fashion, social life, golf, food and wine. Hosted by Luisa Machen, the show follows Mijas International, as part of the Friday afternoon International Section.

"My grandfather used to own a lot of vines but they all died when the phylloxera virus hit. But we grew other things as well and shared farming equipment with other families in the area. "It was beautiful back then, the land was so unspoilt and the fields were full of life. We had an incredible time growing up here. "If you had a little bit of land you could live very well, but if you lived in the town of Fuengirola with no land say, you would be pretty poor," he explains.



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# Man on a mission

HE had never even heard of the Costa del Sol when he arrived in the Swiss Alps to work as a ski rep in the 1990s.

But now softly spoken Canadian Thomas Weller has built up an empire of restaurants and shops in Mijas pueblo that makes him definitively one of the costa's leading expat businessmen. With a pair of fantastic restaurants (Taberna Meguinez and Aroma cafe)

**The Olive Press talks to influential businessman Thomas Weller, who owns five shops and two restaurants in Mijas**

- which he shares with business partner Hugo German - and no less than five shops, he is never short of something to do. He was first enticed over here with an offer of setting up a photography company on the coast.

The business was an enormous success, in particular taking pictures of golfers and golf courses.

Weller's first boutique venture was the opening of 'Mariposa' in 2001, a little shop that now nestles among the four further boutiques and two restaurants that make up his kingdom.

"There are a lot of other shops here, and the key to everything is being different. We're always looking for new designers, products and names that don't exist here yet," he explains.

He continues: "I remember being terrified at the idea of spending 75,000 pesetas (€450 euros) a month on a shop. It seemed like a huge amount of money at the time," he continues. "And now it's one of our smallest shops."

Following the success of 'Mariposa', Weller opened a string of boutiques over the next few years, including the largest candle shop on the coast, an artisan ceramics store, and a shop selling handbags and costume jewellery.

"We had the first shop in Mijas to sell cosmetics made from natural products like olive oil, avocado and

aloe vera, all of which come from local sources," he said.

"And it's all about argan oil right now, that's our newest thing. It's very expensive because there are such limited stocks, and because it's such a high-quality product," adds Weller.

## Secrecy

The fifth boutique, a designer clothes shop 'Fish', is really the realm of his wife, Argentinian Jessica Davio, but the couple combine their efforts to become an imposing presence in the pueblo.

The most notable characteristic of Weller as a businessman, is the huge range of ventures that he is involved with.

"I think it's good to be involved with lots of very different projects, and to always be taking on something completely different," he says. "That way, if one thing starts to lapse you can always rely on the others."

Weller adds that retail in Mijas has definitely taken a hit during the recession, allowing him to focus on his second sector, the restaurants and cafes in the town.

Both Cafe Aroma and the Secret Garden Restaurant, which opened in 2003 and 2008 respectively, and operate in the same building, are well-known and hugely popular venues in the pueblo.



RESTAURANTEUR: Thomas in Aroma

The Secret Garden's unique appeal is, unsurprisingly, its secrecy - it can only be accessed through the back garden of the Cafe Aroma.

Restaurante Taberna Meguinez, which only opened last year, is already following in the footsteps of its older siblings and is quite a hit with visitors.

Weller insists he rarely makes concrete plans for the future, putting his success down to being fortunate with timing and working incredibly hard... although he does mention vague ideas of moving in to holiday flat rentals.

Despite admitting that he didn't expect to 'end up in Spain', Weller is clearly full of affection for the little pueblo that has become both his place of business and his home.

"Mijas is the best place on the Costa del Sol," he said. "I'm very proud to say that this little town stood up strong in the crisis, because of everything that it is."

"And despite the waves of foreigners that come and go, Mijas hasn't lost its soul or character. It's still just the same as when I first arrived."

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**Expats Jason Godwin and Eli McCarthy are creating an innovative new chocolate 'happiness lab' in Mijas**

## Making Willy Wonka proud

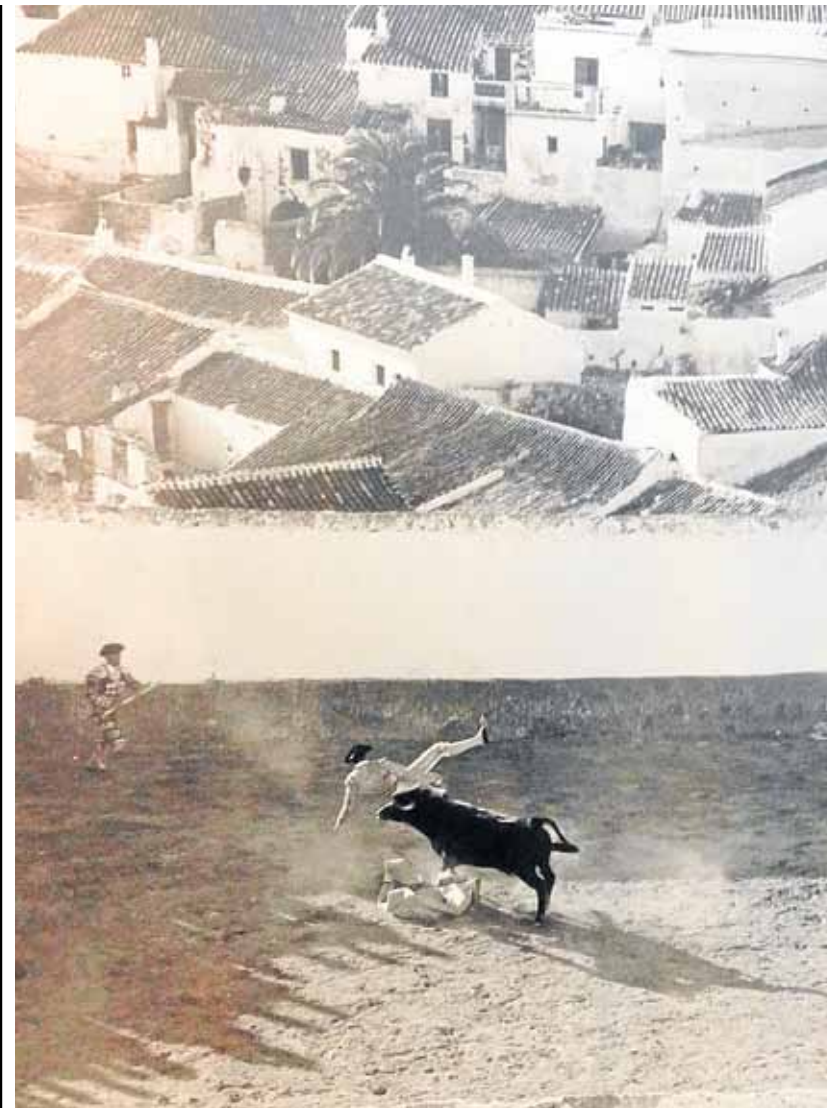
**A**N interactive projection, a secret passageway and a doorway for 'oompa loompas' are just three of the exciting innovations being installed in a new chocolate factory in Mijas. Part of the wild and wonderful imagination of its expat owners Jason Godwin and Eli McCarthy, it is set to be one of the most exciting new museums to open on the coast this year. Making Willy Wonka proud, the factory will offer excited children (and adults) a tour into the history of chocolate-making and the opportunity to make their very own bars. Set next to a series of ceramics and trinkets shops in Plaza Virgen de la Peña, it is being created for a small fortune and runs deep into the ground. The couple already have two chocolate factories in the town - the current one the Mayan Monkey in Plaza de la Constitución, always buzzing with punters. But when a prime site cropped up nearer the town hall, they couldn't resist the opportunity. Combining a factory, a museum, a cafe and a shop, Jason describes the new venture as a 'happiness laboratory'.

"Eli and I decided we wanted to do some-

thing fun, something that the tourists can really feel warm and fuzzy about," said Jason. "Because it's good to have fun in your work life as well. And what's more fun than a chocolate factory?" Jason's description of the factory gives the impression of a real Roald Dahl creation, complete with secret doors, chocolate-lined corridors, and glass walls revealing ingenious chocolate-making machinery. Godwin has been on the Costa del Sol for 22 years and is full of admiration for the pueblo that houses his chocolate empire. "It could only ever have been in Mijas that we undertook this project. It's because of the all-year-round tourism, it's always full of activity." As a cultural heritage site, the town hall has to scrutinise all planning applications to ensure everything fits with the town's traditional aesthetic. However, in a bid to support tourism and boost the local economy, the town encourages new businesses and entrepreneurship. "They are really up for backing small businesses and looking to help ideas that will employ people," said Jason. Mayan Monkey not only make all their own chocolate, using locally sourced ingredients, they also offer chocolate-making workshops which include an introduction to the chocolatier craft. But Jason and Eli insist they never want to take their business too seriously. "We don't want to be snobby about it, and we didn't want to try to pass ourselves off as experts," said Jason. "We just want to encourage people to find out more about chocolate and enjoy themselves while they're here."

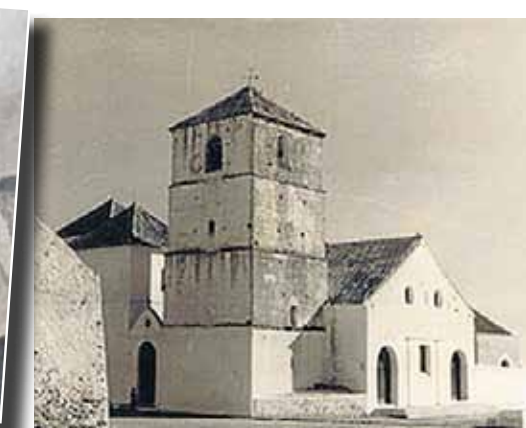
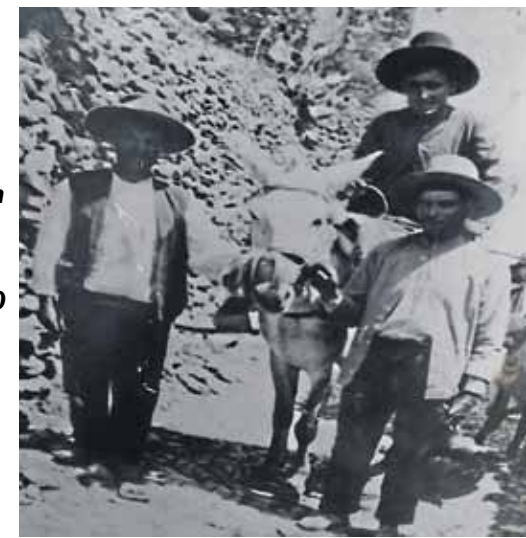


**CHOCALOLICS: Eli and Jason and (right) the main Mayan Monkey shop**



## OUCH!

**DAYS GONE BY: A going by a bull is just as painful today as it was in yesteryear, but don't tell that to this matador... and my oh my, what a quaint place La Cala once was, all green fields. But what's that curving around it... yes an early version of the N-340 with a few less cars mind you. Mostly people went around like this (right) and with appropriate sun hats, while (below) ladies freshen up at a village fountain and (bottom right) a view of the church of the Immaculada**



## A long stretch of sand



**PLAYTIME: Kids boat in La Cala**

**F**ROM Fuengirola to Marbella, Mijas Costa's 12km stretch of golden sand is divided into several sections, each appealing to different types of holiday-maker. El Faro's rocky, rugged coastline leads to a surprisingly sandy beach, with beach bars and restaurants, and sunbeds for hire in summer. El Faro also offers the town's best fishing, and you can see the fishing rods set up along the shore late into the night.

La Cala de Mijas, presented with an EU blue flag for quality, is ideal for children and its 2km long beach is a haven for families, with a huge range of facilities and services and the kids will love the huge play boat and swings. At Butiplaya, sometimes referred to as Torrevieja Beach, you will find a fantastic 1.5km stretch of sand, which has also been awarded an official blue flag. Loungers and parasols are available to rent on this famously

safe and family-friendly beach.

At El Cabo Rocosco the rocks that line the water's edge make this the quietest of the Costa's beaches, with lots of nooks and crannies for peace-seekers to tuck themselves away.

The area just in front of Chiringuito Antonio is ideal for swimming, and the area around the rocks is the best on the coast for snorkelling.



**GOLDEN STRETCH: The 12kms of beaches of Mijas Costa**

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All about **Mijas**  
(& La Cala)



### Gym-tastic

**H**E has been running gyms on the coast for over two decades, so Tommy Farrell (above) knows a fair bit about helping you get fit. His gym Bodyshape in Mijas Costa, near Fuenigüera, is full of machines, including nine running machines and the only *stairmill* in the area, which is great cardiovascular exercise, and works your legs. "You can go up the Empire State or the Eiffel Tower," explains Tommy, whose wife runs the successful Boyds gym at Sunset Beach Hotel in Benalmadena. There are 56 classes a week and a great range of members. "We have had 227 people sign up in March alone so far," adds Tommy.

# The light switched back on

*Mijas is seeing a sudden upswing in buyers and there are still plenty of good deals out there*



**GOOD YEARS:** Some of the team at Homefinders

**A**FTER a recession that has seriously affected the property market throughout the region, sales in Mijas are finally picking up again. One of its best established agents Mijas Properties and Holidays has no less than eight sales going through in the pueblo alone. "It is like someone has suddenly switched on a light this year," explains owner Susanne Teres, who has run the agency for 30 years. "After several years of real hardship people are deciding to buy again and we have got a lot of sales going through. "Some of the offers are quite low and we have had to lower

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March 19 - April 2 2014



**PROJECTS:** There's some great deals about, says Andrew Partridge (right) with employee

our commission to get some sales agreed but so be it, we are finally getting interest again," continues Teres, who previously worked as a stylist in London.

The boss of nearby Palomino Properties insists that there are luckily a few deals to be had, but mostly the owners are not dropping their prices much.

"There are some bargains out there, but generally people don't need to sell so the prices are staying high," says Virginia Palomino, who previously worked as an accountant for Exxon oil company in Canada.

"That said, since 2011 we have had a good market for cheaper run down properties

and that continues." Down on the coast, Homefinders, in La Cala, has also been having a great start to the year.

"In the last six months of 2013 we sold no less than 22 properties, nearly four a month," says sales manager Andrew Dodd.

### Buyers

"And some things we were selling at €120,000 last year are going back on at €135,000 to €140,000." Most of the buyers of holiday homes that are propping up the market are Scandinavian and British but they have had buyers from Belgium, Germany, Ireland and Italy.

"And we even had a Greek buyer who bought our cheapest property for €37,000," he adds. However, he continues: "I can't get enough properties to sell around La Cala," he continues. "And ones with a sunny aspect, sea view and a decent price get snapped up very quickly." Another local agency La Cala Sales and Rentals has also seen some decent movement this year.

### Established

Its owner Andrew Partridge, who has lived on the coast for 20 years, is confident that 2014 is going to be a big year. "Not just for sales but also for rentals," he explains.

Finally, it would be worth checking out the properties of Mijas Real Estate on the road up to the village. Well established, it has a range of good properties and places to rent.

For more information contact [www.lacalasalesandrentals.com](http://www.lacalasalesandrentals.com) and [www.homefinders-network.com](http://www.homefinders-network.com) in La Cala and [www.palominoproperties.com](http://www.palominoproperties.com) and [www.mijasproperties.com](http://www.mijasproperties.com) in the village... also visit [www.mijasrealestate.com](http://www.mijasrealestate.com)

**SHORTAGE:**  
Agents need  
more coastal  
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### 3A-1101 SUPERB CORNER GARDEN APARTMENT - 3 BED 2 BATH

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### 3DP-0036 BEACHSIDE DUPLEX PENTHOUSE - 3 BED 3 BATH

Fantastic opportunity to acquire a superb 3 bedroom, 3 bathroom beachside duplex penthouse that has superb sea views from the sunny south west facing terraces. The property has a spacious I shaped lounge/diner, modern kitchen and shower room on the lower floor. Upstairs there are 3 good sized bedrooms and 2 further bathrooms (one en-suite). Excellent views from both terraces. Located a stones throw from the beach and close to all amenities.

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**La Cala Sales and Rentals**



Stunning sea views and golf views can be enjoyed from this 2 bedroom 2 bathroom duplex penthouse. Large sunny south facing terrace, air con, underground garage and storeroom are just a few of the features included in the very competitive price. Located just 5 minutes' drive to La Cala.

**Price:** 159.000€

**Location:** Calanova

**Ref:** R2011694



Villa located only minutes from the beach and close to the village of La Cala. Recently modernised and benefiting from 2 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms this property would make the ideal rental investment property. The property sits on its own private plot with the use of a communal pool.

**Price:** 189.000€

**Location:** El Chaparral

**Ref:** R873990



Recently reduced this large villa is located in the popular urbanisation of Torrenueva and within 5 minutes' walk to the beach. The property currently consists of 2 separate apartments one with 3 bedrooms 2 bathrooms and the other 4 bedrooms 3 bathrooms. Private pool sea views, south west orientation and private driveway are just a few of the features.

**Price:** 399.000€

**Location:** Torrenueva

**Ref:** R233081



The villa with the view. Spacious property with south west orientation, private pool and fantastic views over the bay of La Cala. Everything has been upgraded in this beautiful property which is ideally situated only 5 minutes' walk from the village and even less to the beach. Viewing highly recommended.

**Price:** 490.000€

**Location:** La Cala

**Ref:** R2152997

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**All about Mijas (& La Cala)**

**Singing for your supper**

**There are so many excellent places to eat in Mijas and many have live entertainment, writes Jon Clarke**

IT has been two decades since Juan Gomez opened Ole restaurant in La Cala de Mijas. A true local on the road to the hipodromo, his clients are a massive mix of Spanish and just about every other nationality on the planet. It is hardly surprising that this is one of the area's most popular joints to eat: Juan is a charming host – speaking perfect English – and puts a great emphasis on fresh ingredients. Much of it comes from his finca near Ronda, where he decamps at the weekend when he 'has a moment to spare'. Otherwise he changes the menu regularly and insists on having at least five or six different tapas every day depending on the season. Expect to eat fantastic stuffed red peppers, delicious lettuce hearts with anchovies, and great salmon cooked in a spicy dill sauce. Also in La Cala you must check out the recently opened Howies restaurant that used to be Mijas Playa. Named after its new co-owner Howard Conder – who was in the Barron Knights and has produced records by the likes of the Pretty Things – it is THE

**SERVICE WITH A SMILE: Lunch at amazing Alcazaba**

place to visit in the evenings if you are looking for live entertainment.

**Michelin**

"There will always be live music," explains co-owner Luigi Sabbatucci, from Rome. But food is also important, with the restaurant recently taking on Michelin-trained chef Cristobal Aragones, from Malaga. "It is an international cuisine with charcoal-grilled meat and the finest seafood on the coast. Scallops, oysters and lobster

are very popular," continues Sabbatucci, who previously ran Mijas Costa. Up the main road a little towards Calahonda look out for Snack Attack, one of the busiest restaurants/cafes on the coast. Its capable owners Mark and Robert run a tight ship and are busy throughout much of the day. Start the day with an amazing Eggs Benedict or Florentine or go for the great value €3.95 breakfast deal with all the trimmings. They also own the popu-

lar cocktail bar and lounge venue Bar Tuta next door. Up in the pueblo itself, the pick of the bunch must be Alcazaba with its breathtaking views up and down the coast. It has an amazing dining terrace and at nighttime, if windy, it is still a great place to eat. Its owner Andres Ruiz Quero also owns three other restaurants in the village and opened his first, Virgin de la Pena, 33 years ago. "I was working in restaurants, cleaning plates at the age of 11," he explains. "I didn't like

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**VARIETY: Aroma, the wine museum, Japanese diners at Taberna Meguinez, and host Juan at Ole with one of his tapas**

school and so it seemed like a good option at the time even though I only got 100 pesetas a day." His hard work and guile has led to a menu, with a great range of international dishes, but you certainly can't go wrong with his fresh fish in salt or the amazing gambas pil pil starter.

**Authentic**

Another great place to eat in the village is Aroma, also known as the Secret Garden, which is a little paradise hidden behind a more typical white walled restaurant. This amazing garden is a delight to eat in any season and the menu at Aroma is a nice mix of authentic Iberian dishes alongside Argentinean fare – particularly big steaks - thanks to its co-owner Hugo Germen Next door make sure to look out for Taberna Meguinez (which means 'Are you winking at me?') which has recently been bought and renovated by the owners of Aroma, Hugo and Thomas Weller, a Canadian

who also owns a number of shops in the town. "It was one of the famous restaurants from the 1970s, known for its jamon," explains Weller. "We wanted to help bring it back to life." They have certainly done that and while serving up a much more modern menu it retains its charms from days gone by. Another good place to try in the village is Oscar's Tapas Bar, set up a decade ago by a group of friends who met while working in India. The trio, Rocio, from Spain, Tony, from Croatia, and Stefano, from Italy, had been working for NGOs but decided they wanted to try something different and, as Rocio was from Malaga, that is where they headed first. "We found this little place 11 years ago and initially planned to do a B&B but ended up doing the restaurant," explains

Stefano. A great place to eat the views are superb and the ambience pleasant. "We have a lot of regulars who keep coming back and tourists from just about every country feel at home as we speak so many languages," he adds. If you are looking for cakes and a great cup of tea make sure to look out for TLC, the cream teas are legendary. Finally, a Mijas supplement wouldn't be complete without a mention of Valparaiso. This institution just off the Mijas road has been visited by just about every celebrity to hit the coast over the last 30 years. Aside from David Beckham, whose in-laws are good friends with the owner Raffaele, you will find photos of hundreds of celebrities on the wall, including Cliff Richard, Piers Morgan, Bruce Forsyth and even Liam

**CELEBS: Beckham at Valparaiso**

Gallagher from Oasis. The food isn't bad either and the entertainment by a range of local musical stars, including opera on Monday nights is superb.

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**All about Mijas**  
(& La Cala)

# A quarter of ideas!

It has been 25 years since Lars Viggo, 69, decided to open a shopping and business centre in the countryside near Mijas pueblo. Back then it was practically the only building on the Mijas road surrounded by green fields 'and we had no idea if it would work', he explains.

"In fact there was no real planning, sh\*\* happens," explains the jovial Dane from near Copenhagen. Having sold his shipping and transport company in Denmark in 1988 he was looking for a new challenge and Spain hit the mark.

Arriving here with his young family including son Kasper, 28, with whom he now runs the business, things developed fast. The centre has grown rapidly and now counts over 20 businesses, the majority of them



**LAID BACK: Relaxing in Centro Idea at Da Brunos**

— around 75% - from Scandinavia.

"It started with one big furniture store Muebles Danesa and grew from there," explains Kasper, also a musician and songwriter, who

studied music in Berklee in Boston and later Liverpool University.

"It is probably now the biggest concentration of Scandinavian businesses in Andalusia if not Spain," he

## The charm of Mijas not lost on business

It has been just over two years since Sarah Hawes launched a Spanish arm to the bustling UK diet company Cambridge 800.

And while the company is now in dozens of locations around Spain, including the Balearics and the Canary Islands, it all began in Mijas.

"I've been through many parts of Spain and this area takes some beating," explains the 55-year-old from Surrey.

"I felt that Mijas could benefit from corporate business and I've never once regretted the decision to come here" adds Hawes, who relocated here with her husband Mike earlier this year.

Based out of her office in Centro Idea on the road up to the pueblo, she is also quick to praise the Mijas Foreigners Office and town hall, which helped her to set up the company in the town.

"They're really good at helping foreigners integrate and if you have any enquires they are just superb"

A huge golf fan, who is passionate about the Spanish lifestyle, she continues: "I've been in love with Spain ever since my parents started coming here" she said. Visit [www.cambridge800.com](http://www.cambridge800.com) or email [info@cambridge800.es](mailto:info@cambridge800.es)



**THRIVING: Sarah (in red third from left) has seen huge growth**

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boutique  
**Viggo**

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35

**centro idea**

# century

**Centro Idea has one of the largest concentrations of Scandinavian businesses in Spain**

continues. This is typified by Mugge Fischer, who has run his Scandinavian marketing and publishing business Norbom from the centre for 20 years. "It is a great place and works for us," explains Fischer. Under the one roof, you can also find fashion shops, including Viggo, and boutique Daniella, health shops, like Vitamina and insurance agents like Kaas & Kirkemann.

## Hard work

Its owner Pernille Kaas, who set up in business at the centre in 1996, employs a team of 10 agents who speak a range of English, Spanish and Scandinavian. The key to our success is hard work and good service," explains the businesswoman, who moved to Spain after completing a degree in languages at

Copenhagen University. Meanwhile, Cort Idea has an amazing selection of fabrics for any interior design project, as well as shutters, awnings and blinds. They also act as an agent for the UK's leading company Designers Guild. "It is great to have so much under one roof," continues Kasper, who has his own music website [www.ste-reosnakes.com](http://www.ste-reosnakes.com).

"We want to have things you can't get elsewhere and try to get as much under one roof as we can." Nowadays shoppers can also treat themselves to a great snack or meal at Da Bruno, which has opened in the centre. And downstairs look out for the gym and fitness centre alongside the UK business Cambridge 800, which has grown from this small office to cover all of Spain in just two years.



**TEAM: Kasper and Lars**

**VITAMINA**  
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Centro Idea  
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## what's on in Mijas

### Walking tours

On Sunday March 23, you can explore two new routes mapped out by the Tourist Office: 'A tour of La Cala de Mijas', and 'Ascending the north face of Pico Mijas'. The first will meet at La Cala Watchtower at 9am, the second will meet at Osunillas Sports Centre also at 9am. To sign up to the free event, call 952 589 034, or email [turismo@mijas.es](mailto:turismo@mijas.es), or in person at the Mijas Tourist Office.

### 'Atmospheres' Exhibition

Until April 21. Casa Museo de Mijas Pueblo is hosting 'Atmospheres', a new exhibition from painter and photographer Clara Gamazo.

### Flamenco dancing

Every Wednesday, 12pm. A free demonstration of the spectacular traditional art of flamenco dancing, organised by the Mijas Tourist Office in the central Plaza Virgen de la Pena.

### Flea market

Every Sunday, 9am-2pm. Chock-a-block with bric-a-brac, the stalls of this second-hand market held at the Hippodrome racecourse, offer everything you could imagine and more.



LEANT back, shut my eyes and let the strong jet of hot water gently massage my neck. For a moment I was back in Koh Samui.

Surrounded by greenery and trees, the stylish, state-of-the-art spa could easily have been in a stylish Thai hotel.

But this was La Cala Resort, a couple of clicks inland from Mijas Costa, and easily one of the best appointed golf resorts and spas in southern Spain.

A true valley of calm, I was spending a weekend at the venue that had originally been picked for England's pre-tournament training camp prior to the 2012 Euros (it was later used by Stuart Pearce's Olympic team).

But La Cala Resort has long been a hang out for football teams, including Everton, Steaua Bucharest and Zurich Grasshopper, unsurprising with its fantastic facilities that include no less than THREE 18-hole golf courses, grass football pitches, large gym and aforementioned spa.

### Top Class

It is also said to be frequented by plenty a Premiership footballer away for a few days of R&R with his family or mistress perhaps.

I was lucky enough to run a rule over its rooms and facilities and check out its restaurant, which has an excellent new chef Ivan Alvarez, from Madrid.

From a foodie family in the capital, Alvarez grew up surrounded by top class ingredients and has cut his teeth in a number of restaurants and hotels around the country, including three Michelin star restaurant Arzak in San Sebastian.



CHILL: In the spa and enjoying top class food, including this scallop salad

He's only been there a month but he cooked a turbot to a tee, as well as a splendid scallop salad with walnuts, ham, cherry tomatoes, green shoots and even grapefruit.

Much of the resort's recent success has been to do with its young manager Patrick Murphy, 41, who heralds from an Irish farming background, but who has worked in many places around the world

and trained at a Galway catering school. He is working hard on the resort's branding and managing change, both in its offering and the change in clientele, when and how they stay.

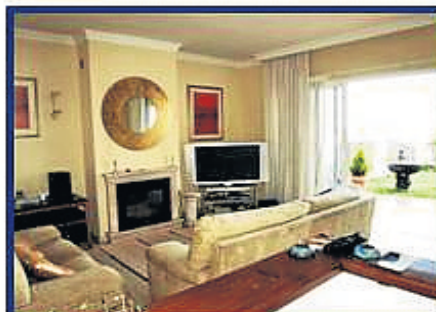
With future golf bookings up 6% on last year and advance bookings in the hotel up 15% one might say he is having some success.

"The challenge is to manage change and to constantly look for new revenue streams," he explains, in particular referencing the so-called MICE market comprising Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events, which has grown nicely over the last year.



Mijas Properties has been established since 1984 and have a extensive portfolio of apartments, townhouses and amazing villas for SALE!

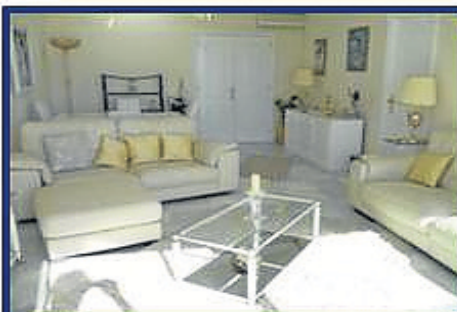
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Here are just a few of the fantastic properties we have on the market – for more information on these properties and others available – please pop in & meet us!

Located on the main street in Mijas Village, towards the Town hall, next to Zurich

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