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A breath of fresh air

The mountains, rivers, wildlife and greenery of the Guadalhorce Valley feel a million miles away from the Costa del Sol, writes Tom Powell

PICKING my way up a stony mountain ascent, swirling in butterflies, geckos and sun-loving flowers, I was suddenly smacked in the head. Not by a drunken tourist stumbling out of a bar, but by an enormous falling pine cone, from a towering tree above. It is hard to believe that this soaring region, on one side of the Guadalhorce valley, is just a 45 minute drive from the bustling Costa del Sol. I found myself in complete, awe-inspiring solitude on a morning's stroll through the Sierra de las Nieves natural park, near Tolox. Bursting with flora and fauna, it is so refreshing to retreat up into this wild and verdant valley, where birdsong quickly replaces the noise of car engines.

Continues on Page 26

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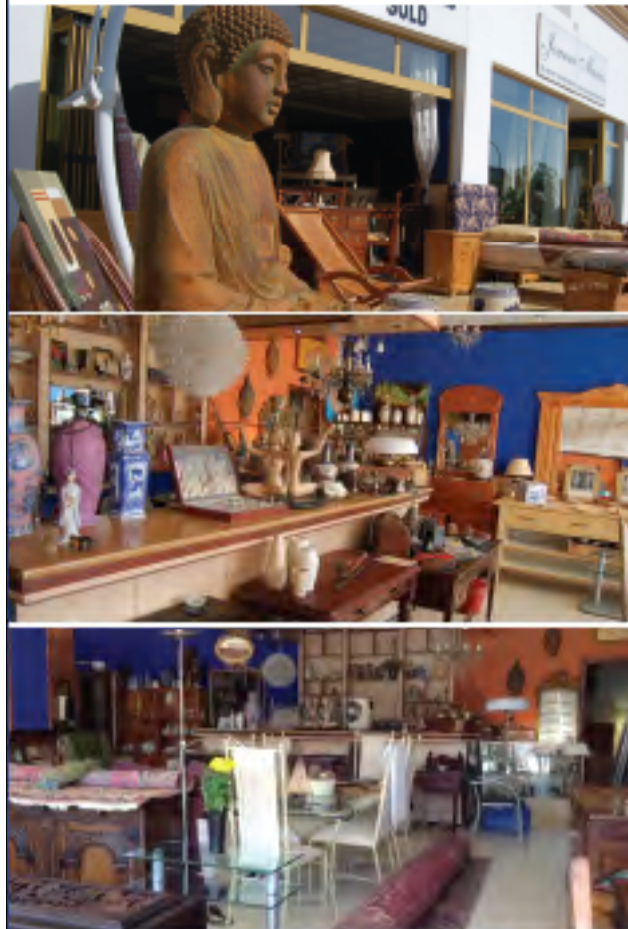
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SPECTACULAR: The Guadalhorce Valley backed by the Sierra de las Nieves mountains



Start of a love affair

From page 25

Criss-crossed with streams, as well as modern and ancient acequias, or man-made water channels, it is said to be one of the most agriculturally rich areas in Spain.

I began my love affair with the Guadalhorce valley in the small, white village of Tolox, af-

Along a 4km zig-zagging mountain track, I could tell this place was a bit special

ter a spectacular drive taking in Monda and Guaro. It is a charming place, where life is relaxed, bathing in the shadows of the towering mountains that provide its spectacular backdrop, like an old Andalusian woman sitting contentedly in the shade.

At the entrance to the park is the Fuente Amargosa Health Spa, quietly attracting a steady stream of tourists with its 'healing' water, taken from the



BLANKET: White towns of the valley, pictured here is Alora

mountains. And it is by passing this spa and heading further up the gravelly mountain track that I reached my lodging, Cerro de Hajar hotel.

Along a 4km zig-zagging mountain track, I could tell this place was a bit special. Originally built by the Junta more than ten years ago, it had been typically left unused. That all changed when three

young entrepreneurs - Guillermo, Martin and Eugenio - stepped in and created this tranquil, charming place, with an incredible restaurant serving wild and hearty mountain food.

"Lots of people come here for the spa, but also for walking and exploring the beautiful surrounding area. The location is amazing," explained Martin. Like similar hotel, Refugio de

Juanar, near Monda, it certainly provides the perfect base for exploring the nearby park, with a pool overlooking the valley to cool off in afterwards.

It also boasts its very own spa, with that same healing water, known as 'amargosa' because of its bitter taste.

Sierra de las Nieves is actually a hunting reserve, but also provides a wealth of tourism options for those eager to see

FROM BOYS TO MEN



EVERY boy wants to grow up to be a soldier and in Alhaurin el Grande it is no different. Here, a group of teenagers practise moves with their rifles in the hope of one day following in the footsteps of the Foreign Legion that marches through its streets at Easter time



BEACONS: The Castillo above Yunquera provides stunning views of the valley and (right) the Arab tower at Alora's castle is incredibly well preserved

what Spain has to offer besides beaches.

Hiking, cycling, off-roading, watersports, horse-riding... you could spend weeks just exploring this park.

The park spreads out right the way across to Ronda, with jagged snow-capped mountain peaks in winter - hence the name.

Some parts are still scarred by the fires that ripped through the forests and plants in the early 1990s, leaving charred tree stumps and black twisted branches in their wake.

The next morning, after a stroll, I headed across to another mountain village called Aozaina, which is surrounded by olive groves, orchards and fields. Stone arches mark the way into the charming centre, dotted

House martins and swallows dart overhead on narrow streets, abundant in life

with tapas bars, coffee shops and traditional white-washed homes.

Here the striking Santa Ana church dominates the skyline, complete with a courtyard serving up spectacular views towards the Sierra Prieta.

My next stop, Yunquera, even higher along a mountain road towards Ronda and El Burgo, also oozed freshness.

Full of house martins and swallows darting overhead on narrow streets and an abundance of life and colour missing from the coast.

El Castillo sits about 500 metres above this town, one of the highest points in Malaga province, and stands boldly as its emblem.

This ancient tower is believed to have been built by Arabs as a watchtower during wars. Nowadays, it has been refurbished as an information centre for the Sierra de las Nieves park. It has also been recognised as a site of historical heritage and cultural interest.

The area around the town is home to numerous hiking routes and viewpoints, making



HIDEOUT: Hotel Cerro de Hajar sits along a 4km dirt track

Yunquera another great base for exploring the park.

On the other side of the Guadalhorce valley, the Sierra de Mijas is another amazing place for walking and hiking and is also being considered for natural park status.

It is here where the region's principal towns can be found, including Alhaurin el Grande, Alhaurin de la Torre and Coin - the region's capital.



AWESOME: Caminito del Rey to open soon

These places have proven to be increasingly popular with expats looking to immerse themselves in a more authentic 'Spain', while keeping the coast, Malaga airport and big cities within arm's reach.

"This region is so popular with Brits, which you might not expect at first," said David McGovern, owner of Manhattan bar in Alora on the northern side of the valley. "They are close to the coast, but it is more scenic, interesting and varied here in the valley."

Following the Malaga railway line you head up to Pizarra and Alora on its way towards Antequera and the world famous climbing area of the El Chorro Gorge.

Here, you will find the infamous Caminito del Rey, a spine-tingling walkway along the steep walls of the gorge is due to be reopened to the public next year.

You might also consider visiting the historic spa town of Carratraca, which now has an award winning spa hotel, and then the ancient settlement of Ardales which lies just below the lakes and rivers that feed the Guadalhorce river itself.

On the way up to the hills take any of the dirt tracks for a stroll and you will quickly come across herds of goats and sheep and often mules ploughing between the olive trees.



Andalucia's own 'bread basket'

THE Guadalhorce valley is 804km2 in size, and home to around 150,000 permanent residents, while many more own second homes there.

It has always been known for its citrus production, with orange and lemon plantations stretching out in every direction from the valley's towns.

Of the eight municipalities, Coin is the biggest. But towns such as Alhaurin el Grande, Alora and Cartama are also immensely popular with expats.

While first colonised by the Romans, it was the Moors who have had the largest influence on the area.

Everywhere there is evidence of their work, which tamed the tumbling streams into irrigation systems and brought fertility to the whole of the valley.

But while the region has been termed one of the bread-baskets of Andalusia since Roman times, the locals have long struggled with fluctuating rainfall, which can still bring devastating floods to the whole of the valley or leave the land parched for months on end.

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OUTLOOK: The castle looks across the Guadalupe Valley

Tom Powell takes a stroll up to the ancient Moorish redoubt in Cartama

STANDING atop a hill, bathed in floodlights, Cartama castle at night is a magical juxtaposition of ancient and modern. The crumbling remains are lit up beautifully by lights, recently installed by the town hall. But by day the castle is equally



Castle in the sky

worth visiting, as it is a hard task to find any other place offering such far-reaching and diverse views of

the Guadalupe Valley. Cartama spreads out beneath this hill at the head of the Rio Guadal-

horce, where a restored iron bridge spans the river and connects the town with its train station.

A rocky, zig-zag path begins from the main square and leads up to the castle, with pine trees providing shade and benches available for much-needed breathers. At the top stands a pretty shrine to the town's patron saint - the Ermita de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios. Built in the 17th century over the top of the original 15th century building, the sanctuary was restored as recently as 2007. Inside the shrine you can see an ornate ceiling, crystal chandelier and elaborate decoration, contrasting with



SHADE: Much needed on the climb up the castle

plain wooden benches for the congregation. Further up from here are the remains of the 10th century Moorish castle. The crumbling walls immediately set the imagination running, conjuring up images of this once impenetrable fortress. The first defensive wall originally had 10 towers and the second eight, but the expansive views will always remain just as strong.



PRETTY: Cartama's 17th century shrine

Lighting up the skies

OF all the fiestas of the Guadalupe region, the most spectacular by far must be the famous and dramatic procession of the Virgin of the Rondeles from the Hermitage of Veracruz to the Church of Santiago Apostol through Casarabonela's steep narrow village streets. The only lighting for this unique event held every December comes from the burning of the oil soaked esparto grass (or rondales) which illuminate the passage for the team carrying the Virgin. In 2001 the procession was designated a fiesta of national tourist interest.



FLOODLIT: Virgin's route lit by torchlight

Advertorial

Funeral planners take over

It all began from a small office in a narrow backstreet in Alhaurin. And in just eight short years, Iberian Funeral Plans has expanded into Portugal and opened no less than nine new offices. The British-owned independent funeral planning service has undergone a dramatic expansion process and is still looking to grow more. Iberian already has offices in the Algarve, Manilva, Alhaurin el Grande and Nerja, Majorca, Huelva, Tenerife and Alicante, and is continuing to grow at an incredible rate. Director Stephen Nelson explains: "We've grown through our customers, so it's all been a very organic process. We expand with customer driven requests, so we grow from within. "We are opening where our services are needed, so we go wherever there's an expat community base." Iberian has proved to be a success because of the caring and understanding attitude of the staff, he insists.



"When somebody passes away their families are usually in shock and not thinking straight," he continues. "We understand that this is a time that people must not be pressured. We take care of everything so the situation doesn't have to be any more difficult than it already is for our customers." For more information, visit www.iberianfuneralplans.com or call 952 491 788 for the Costa del Sol office.

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THRILLED: Mayor Villanova

Alhaurin el Grande is slowly returning to the days when it was known as the 'Garden of Allah' by the Moors and as the 'Garden of Eden' by writer Gerald Brenan

A sporting year

Alhaurin de la Torre named Sports Capital of Europe for 2015

AN incredible 200 sports competitions are to be held in Alhaurin de la Torre next year. The benchmark figure has been set after the town was chosen as 2015 European Sports Capital. The European Capitals and Cities of Sports Federation (ACES) announced that the bustling town near Malaga will hold the honour. Mayor Joaquín Villanova explained what a fantastic place Alhaurin de la Torre was for sports, not just due to its great weather, but because the town is home to 38 sporting facilities, where over 60 different sports are practiced by nearly a third of the population.

It was in Phoenician times that Alhaurin first became a market town, as the already established Iberian tribes bartered their goods with the new arrivals from Lebanon. Later the town thrived under Roman occupation when a number of wealthy merchants from nearby Malaga made money from the rich mineral deposits in the nearby hills. They built sizeable villas, such as Villa de la Mata, and labelled the town Lauro Nova. Evidence has been found in the numbers of coins, statues and pillars, a trio of which stand pride of place opposite the town hall today. But it wasn't until Moorish times that the town really blossomed, as the Arabs planted new crops in the wide fertile valley that is crossed by two rivers, the Fahala and Blas Gonzales. They introduced acequias (or water courses) to irrigate the entire valley and built a number of important mills, such as the Molino Morisco de los Corchos. An area of particular beauty

Market town



- not to mention an extremely clement climate - it had soon taken on an appropriate new name, that of 'Garden of Allah', or Alhaurin.

Remnants of the eight centuries of Arabic rule can still be found, particularly at the Arco del Cobertizo, which was a gateway to the medina,

that had a souk, specialising, among other products, in silk. But the best way to get a feel for the past is to take a walk out into the countryside, in

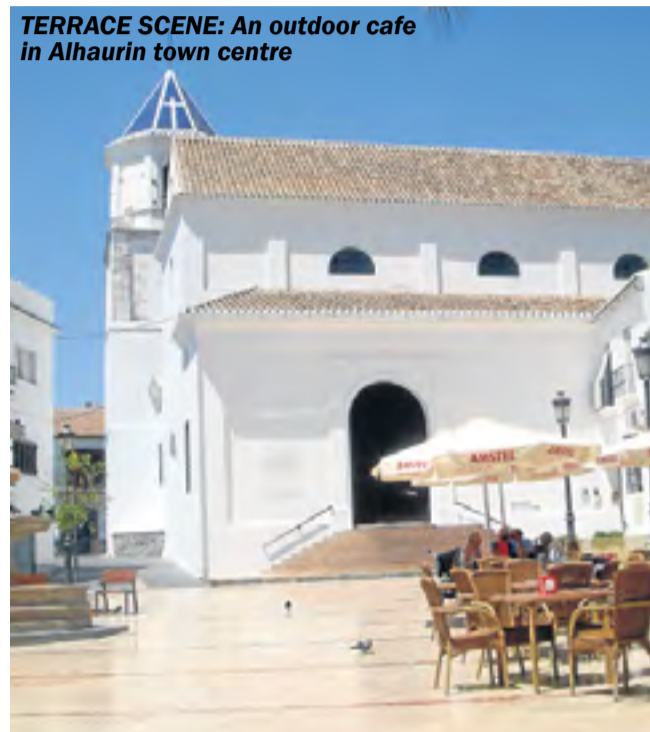
particular in the area known as Hurique, on the back road to Coin. Parking your car at the charming hotel Finca la Mota, where



GREEN AND GREAT: From the Arabic fortress of Hurique to town centre church

for millennia

you can get a great lunch, you walk down into a lovely valley full of mixed agriculture. Alongside charming white-walled ruins, sit small farmsteads of orange and lemon groves, orchards of plums and peaches and herds of goats and sheep roam around. In the middle distance, seen from miles around, is the imposing 12th century Arabic fortress of Hurique - see photo left - which is well preserved and mirrors a similar fortress, called Ortegicar, near Ronda. Keep on going and you will eventually come to the even more beautiful open space of Barranco Blanco, where the famous Timoto advert was once filmed underneath its waterfall. One of the last towns to be conquered by the Catholic kings in 1485, it was eventually merged with Alora, Cartama and Coin in 1666 to form a single entity known as the Four Towns. But it was anything but plain sailing for the united municipality and there were epidemics of plague and even an earthquake in 1680. Later, Alhaurin was occupied for four years by the French during the Peninsular War in the early 19th century, which led to the inevitable destruction and upheaval. Since then, apart from the turbulent period during the civil war, the biggest threat to civil peace has been an influx of English hooligans, who thankfully have now all but gone. There is no doubt that Alhaurin el Grande has been through a dramatic transformation over recent years. While it had become a little scruffy a decade ago, wandering around the old town there is a new swagger about the place. Businesses are opening and the type of expat now coming to live here is more interested in integration, learning the language and enjoying the town's culture. Don't be put off by its rather ugly outskirts. Head west from the roundabout on Calle Gerald Brenan and you are soon in the



TERRACE SCENE: An outdoor cafe in Alhaurin town centre

Famous for decades



ALHAURIN has been a popular hideout for celebrities and writers for a century. It was celebrated hispanist Gerald Brenan, who first settled in the town in the 1960s, living there for two decades. Brenan, famous for his evocative South from Granada and benchmark civil war tome The Spanish Labyrinth, described the town as his 'Garden of Eden', before moving just down the road a little to Churriana, nearer Malaga. Other more recent celebrities to enjoy the area include Status Quo's Rick Parfitt, who lives with his wife and kids near the town, while Claire King from Emmerdale is a regular visitor, as is singer Neneh Cherry, who has been a few times on holiday. It has even been said that Coronation Street's Bet Lynch has a place in the area, having been spotted shopping in Mercadona a couple of times.

Albaicin barrio, which got its name due to similarities with the same district in Granada. Nearby, leafy Plaza Alta is abuzz with children's voices and roadside cafes ply their trade late into the evening, while further up the ancient Vera Cruz chapel sits alongside one of the best 180 degree views in inland Malaga. From here you can see why, while nearby Coin might be the official capital of the Valle de Guadalhorce, Alhaurin has always been the real nerve centre. The views stretch for miles around, down towards Malaga

airport and up into the Sierra de las Nieves mountains. At 240m above sea level, the town sits in a commanding position between the 1,100m tall Sierra de Mijas and the fertile valley below, where everything from olives to avocados have been grown for centuries. The streets are tidy and the old buildings have been generally well preserved. There is even a modern new library in the heart of the town. But Alhaurin at its best is the nearby countryside be it heading into the Sierra de Mijas or the valleys below. Come and see the difference.



THE vast mountains of the Guadalhorce valley and views down to the coast make Malaga Monte Parc one of Andalucia's stand-out campsites. Just 20 minutes from the beach, 45 minutes from the famous Guadalhorce lakes and surrounded by great cycle tracks and walking routes, the Malaga Monte Parc - also a mobile home park - caters to every taste. Expat Lorraine Chaudry discovered the old abandoned campsite on the outskirts of Alhaurin de la Torre, in 2004, and has since converted it into an ideal park for holidaymakers or residents. "My vision then was to offer each of our clients the opportunity to wake up in the morning to the spectacular scenery," said Lorraine. "To be able to sit on the decking of your mobile home, eating breakfast and basking in the sun, with the amazing backdrop of the Sierra Nevada mountains - there's nothing else like it. Neighbouring Alhaurin de la Torre - just five minutes from the park - is known for its Japanese gardens, beautiful walkways, open air gyms (if you're feeling fit) and a vast number of speciality tapas bars, as well as fiestas held practically every month. Take the bus to Cartama and get a train to Malaga where you can use the new Metro system to get around, or jump on the tourist bus to get the best information and great views of Malaga City. And what's more, Malaga Monte Parc is just a 15 minute drive from Malaga airport. How easy is that? The last option of course is to stay on Malaga Monte Parc, relax around the pool, play chess in the garden, or simply link up to our free wifi, take a book from the book swap library, or join us for a sizzling steak on one of the steak evenings. For further information see the front page. Bring the advert with you and join us for a complimentary glass of wine or a cana. For more information, visit www.malagamonteparc.com, email info@malagamonteparc.com, or call 951 296 028

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All about Guadalhorce Valley

Alora, at the heart of the Guadalhorce valley is beginning to unveil its fascinating historical importance, writes Tom Powell

ALORA is much more than another white-washed, sleepy Andalusian pueblo.

Despite keeping its fascinating history to itself with unwarranted modesty, this town has blossomed into a hive of cultural activity.

Marked out by its stunning Arabic castle atop Cerro de las Torres hill, the sprawling streets are brought to life through Moroccan and Roman influences before them.

However the castle is even older and was originally built by Phoenicians,

before being expanded under Roman rule. And later destroyed by Visigoths in the fifth century before the Moors finally came and re-built it.

It is a wonderful place to visit - if you can get in - and the Muslim minaret is still clearly visible today, protruding defiantly from the elegant and immaculately preserved castle.

Local history expert and museum worker, Maria Jose, gave me an insightful tour of the castle and its chapel, built in 1462.

There is a particularly well-preserved oriental arch, a fantastic watch-tower and a multitude of ruins that quickly set the imagination running.

"You can see evidence of all the different ages of the castle, it is so interesting and such a shame that so few people come and see it," she said.

It is true that the castle is generally not open to the public, despite an expensive overhaul some years ago.

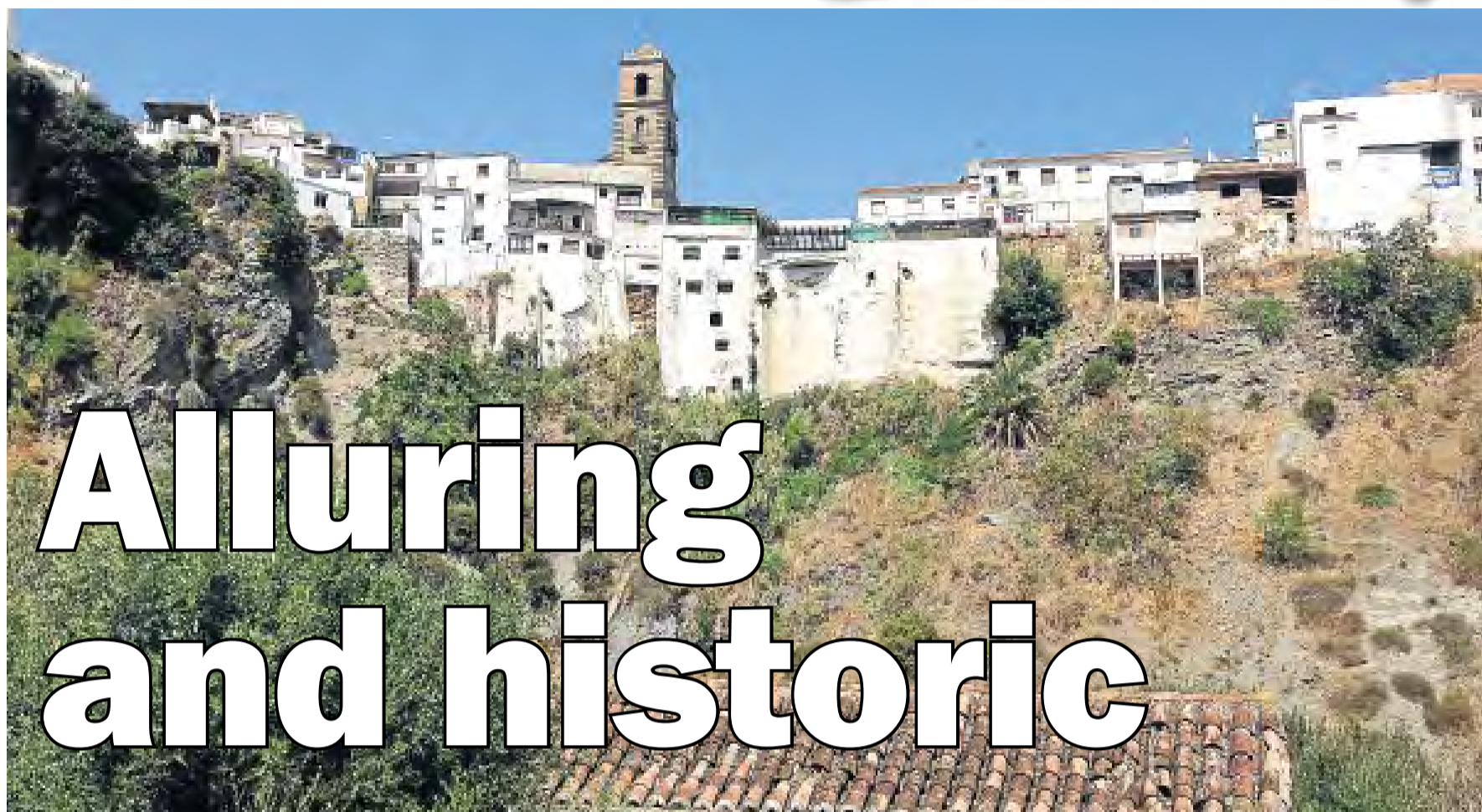
Now, however, a local tour operator Kora Buggel, from Berlin, is hoping to change that.

She can organise tours of the castle and is trying to put on an event with a market and concert to promote this wonderful piece of Alora's history.

Whether open or not, the view from

outside the castle walls down the Guadalhorce valley is very spectacular. Stretching across endless olive tree plantations, it is dissected by the river itself, roads, and clustered hamlets.

A short walk down narrow traditional streets leads to the town's lowest-lying square. Here stands the impressive



Alluring and historic

17th century Catholic church of La Encarnacion, which somehow appears to be even larger on the inside.

Adjoining the church is the municipal museum, complete with ancient pottery, historical displays and intense mustiness.

It is a Mudejar construction dating from the 16th century and supported by stone pillars and columns.

As if by fate, some of the pottery on display was actually found on the site of Kora's current home, in the countryside below the castle. Unfortunately, the information is only in Spanish at the moment. Even more reason for the Kora Travel team to launch their new Alora tours.

"Alora is such a wonderful town, there is so much culture to see in the artists, history and of course, the best food in the region is here," she explained.

Of the numerous town *ferias*, October's celebrating the town's 'sopa perota' is the most famous. Each 'barriada' cooks its version - a delicious thick soup made from local vegetables and bread - in an enormous stone pot, and then dishes it out free for all to sample. There is also a handicraft fair at

the same time, showcasing the best of Alora's artists and the oriental influences.

Hidden right in the heart of the town is an old *molino*, where olive oil was traditionally produced but it is now used for the occasional concert.

Various small museums and bars have sprung up in the centre since



STATUE: In historic Alora

the turn of the century, as this town continues its legacy as one of the most important settlements in the Guadalhorce Valley. It is certainly a bustling place, much busier than I had imagined.

One of the highlights is the small bodega belonging to José Miguel Pérez Hidalgo, which produces a range of wines from the Guadalhorce valley's vineyards, and offers tasting sessions to organised groups. The wine is bottled by hand and sold in restaurants across Malaga province. Another interesting place to visit the railway station area below the castle by the river.

Flood

However it was here, just two years ago, where the houses were struck by a terrible flood, killing livestock and destroying homes.

From the castle it is easy to see where the river ripped apart a bridge, separating Barriada Estacion from neighbouring Barriada del Puente.

David McGovern, owner of Manhattan bar opposite Alora train



FASCINATING: Alora is much more than a sleepy pueblo, while (right) is mural depicting the town's history, the 17th century church and (bottom) view from the castle

station, recalls the water flooding all of the surrounding buildings, reaching metres high.

"It was awful, people lost all of their possessions and were left homeless for 18 months," he said.

"I gave my Nike trainers to a man who lives just across the river from us, and he's still wearing them now!"

And Manhattan, despite at first appearing slightly out of place in rural Andalusia, is undeniably popular

with both expats and locals.

After a night spent extremely comfortably with friendly hosts, hearty food and a relaxed atmosphere, I could see why.

The building used to be a warehouse for olives, lemons and oranges, with train tracks coming right up to its entrance for loading.

And after opening up as an American diner and hotel three years ago, Manhattan continues



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Made in Morocco, open in Alora

HAVING lived in Morocco for eight years and then worked in the travel industry for 10, it's hard to imagine a better tour guide than Kora Buggel for this mesmerising North African country. Now residing in picturesque Alora, at the foot of the hill which holds up the Arabic castle, Kora is also hoping to promote the town she has fallen in love with.

"I moved to Alora because of its Moroccan flavour, evident in the architecture, artists, food and culture," said Kora, originally from Berlin. Together with British expat Sheena Thatcher, they organise a range of tours to Morocco to suit all tastes, in English, German and Dutch.

Kora Travel specialise in showing people the magic of Morocco, but now want to promote their own home, Alora

"Our tours are different to the norm, we head away from the mass tourism zones and try to show people a more authentic Morocco," explained Sheena. "But of course that doesn't mean we miss out on Marrakech!"

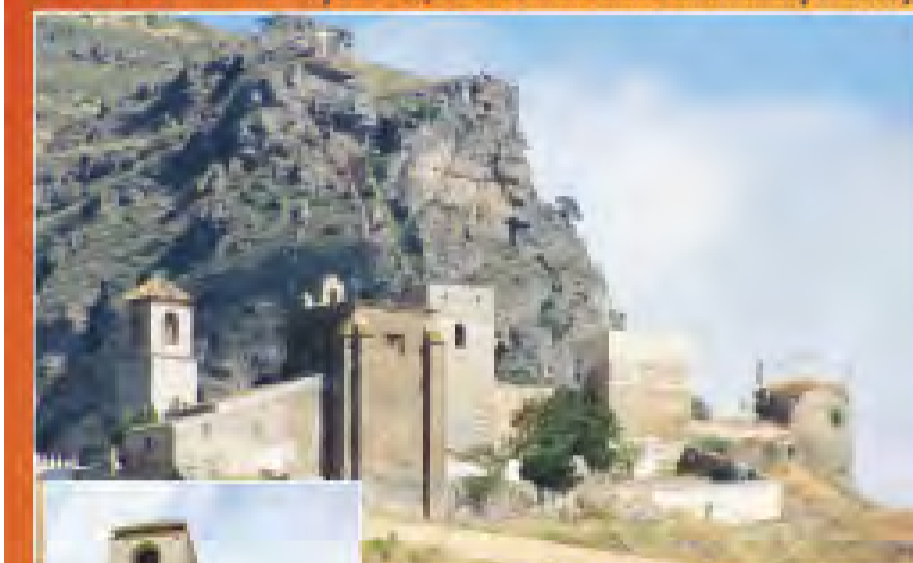
Relaxing, tranquil yoga trips, art and photography workshops, music festivals, Royal cities and ladies-only tours are some of the tantalizing experiences on offer.

But Kora remains adamant that her absolute favourite is the magical Southern desert tour, which also takes in Marrakech.

Trekking on donkeys and camels, resting at oases and sleeping in the finest *riad*s, hand-picked by Kora, this is the 'ideal way to explore, experience and enjoy Morocco'. "We look after people from the start to the end of their holiday, making sure they are comfortable, safe and happy throughout," said Kora. Tours can be tailor made around the places you want to see and the length you want to stay, and they also specialise in organising bespoke tours for groups, clubs or large families.

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Let us help you get the best experience possible of Alora and the stunning view by Guadalhorce Valley. Tailor-made tours and specialist events including:

- 3rd to 5th October 2014 Sopa Perota in the white village of Alora. Experience the richness and local gastronomy of the Guadalhorce Valley. 3 days €230
- 10th to 12th October 2014 Art workshop weekend, exclusive painting classes with ARTISTO! Marina van Stekelenburg. Half board in a stylish 19th century town house. €290

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13th and 14th September 2014 Jazz Festival in Benalup / Tarifa. €230. Working in conjunction with Miss Town Hall.

19th to 20th October 2014 Marrakech and the beautiful surrounding area. Travel by coach or fly from Malaga. (included in the tour, 7 nights half board in 4* accommodation, a trip to the Duda Valley, excursion to the former Portuguese city of Essaouira, visit to the fascinating gardens by Yves Saint Laurent, a special dinner in the atmosphere of Marrakech, plenty of free time to explore and enjoy this wonderful city. Working in conjunction Kora Travel Agent. €1150 by coach from Costa del Sol or €1490 fly from Malaga to Casablanca.

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Why Coin - the capital of the Guadalhorce Valley - is closely connected to Captain Cook, Christopher Columbus and Eldorado... not to mention citrus fruits

It is no surprise to find an orange tree on Coin's coat of arms. The town is literally surrounded by citrus plantations, with the area a true rural community. Despite growing considerably over recent years the town still has a curious sense of being both bustling and rural in equal measures. You still regularly see tractors and quad-bikes buzzing about its narrow streets and there are plenty of businesses dedicated to agricultural pursuits and farming tools. Much of this is thanks to the Moors, whose clever use of water and love of gardens and planting, left the surrounding countryside full of profitable businesses, who sold to the coast and, indeed, further afield. Thankfully when the Arabic invaders were ejected from the town in 1485, after a long



Bitter sweet living



BEAUTY: Captain Cook admired Coin and the surrounding plantations

siege, the town's Christian Crusaders from the north, who may have included Christopher Columbus, didn't alter much.

Legacy

The legacy of using acequias to water the fields is still used

today and the countryside is among the wealthiest in Andalusia growing citrus fruits, avocados and pomegranates, in particular.

This agricultural legacy was clearly noted by British explorer Captain Cook when he visited the town, along with Cártama and Alhaurin

in 1829. Travelling with the Royal Navy, he was mightily impressed.

"These villages are on rising ground above the river and in beauty of situation and cultivation cannot be excelled," he wrote. "They afford a specimen of the whole country when pos-

sessed by the Moors, being surrounded by gardens with orange, lemon and palm trees and abounding in all the fine as well as the more common fruits."

Over 4,000 foreigners are said to live in the mountain town of around 20,000 people. The majority Brit-

ish - but increasingly with a large number of Dutch and Germans - they enjoy the more relaxed country town living, while still having excellent connections for the airport and nearby Costa del Sol. A big town, it has the quality of life of a village and a



A top spot

Insurance agent Jacqueline Caplan lists her top 10 reasons to live in Coin

- 1 There is a large football ground with many different teams from seniors to juniors all of whom play in leagues throughout Andalusia
- 2 Legend has it that Christopher Columbus was among the Christian troops who laid siege to the town during its final Moorish phase
- 3 There is a state-of-the-art library called Fernando de Hermosa y Santiago. As well as many books, of course, there is a book club and they have now installed free WiFi
- 4 Coin has TWO ferias. One in the month of May and one in the month of August
- 5 Day of the Orange in May is a popular day for folk in the Guadalhorce Valley, who all get together bringing along their citrus fruits and the main meal of the day that is handed out to locals is salads, pudding and boiling soup
- 6 Dia de la Cruz sees a religious figure taken from one of the many churches in Coin and carried round the town. The streets are decorated and the best decorated street wins a cash prize
- 7 SACAB. This stands for Salon Andaluz del Caballo, which is a big horse event
- 8 There is a cinema in Coin with seven screens. They put on films in English on a regular basis which are very popular with expatriates
- 9 Restaurants come in many different flavours and include Italian and Indian
- 10 On Sunday La Trocha shopping centre holds a large car boot sale which is extremely popular and gets very busy

very laid back feel. Best of all, it has a lovely average annual temperature of 15 degrees.

It was the Romans who gave the town its first name 'Lacibus', it became an important market town and transition point for the minerals being quarried in the nearby Sierra Blanca.

Marble from these quarries was used in the construction of the Roman town of Italica, or Roman Seville, and the mining of iron ore and marble continued into the 19th century.

During the time of the Visigoths, like many places in Andalusia, the town lost its lustre and largely fell into ruin until the Moors conquered the region and rebuilt it around 929 AD.



The town has grown rapidly over the last two decades and even counts its own



RELAXED: Locals in Coin and (left) alternative transport

shopping centre La Trocha, with a cinema and branches of Dunnes and Corte Ingles.

It is a popular shopping trip for expats who come from all around the region, and even the coast... and, best of all, here you will find a big Sunday market, which on its day is one of the best attended in Andalusia, with people sometimes queueing up all night to get a stall, it being so over-subscribed.

EMPTY: The old set today and (inset) some of the cast



Biggest flop in British TV history

It has been well over a decade since *Eldorado* slunk from the TV screens with a whimper and an *hasta luego*. While there have been various stories of its return, it still remains the biggest soap opera flop in British TV history. Ham-strung with problems from the start, the show suffered from poor casting, bad storylines and cringing performances by ac-

tors, many of whom didn't even know what a read-through was. Indeed, the only thing producers had no shortage of was sunshine, with the set appropriately built in the hills above Coin. Today it stands as a sad (and to be fair, rather tacky) reminder of the BBC's failure to replicate on screen the life on the Spanish costas.



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Posh with a capital 'P'

WHEN it comes to pedigree they certainly take some beating. While established in Alhaurin el Grande since 2004, Posh Pets Spain has over 60 years of experience working with pedigree dogs.

Founder Rachel Goutorbe has a long established history of showing, judging, breeding & gundog work.

Indeed, her family kennels with the 'Upperwood Affix' are still among the top breeders and trainers of Setters and Pointers in the UK and export their famous bloodlines all over the world.

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Whether it is a full groom or clipping service, teeth cleaning with a scrape or polish without sedation

Posh Pets provides an array of pet accessories and products, as well as Pet ID tags that are engraved on site.

The centre has also established itself as a popular training centre for groomers from around



POOCH PAMPERING: One lucky pet



ROYAL GUEST: Dogs are treated like kings

Europe, with recent students coming from Ireland, Switzerland, England, Malta and Lithuania.

The Boutique Dog Hotel and Cattery boasts excellent facilities for play and rest and even comes with sun beds, paddling pools and toys.

The cattery rooms have a full panoramic view at the bottom of the orchard away from any dogs complete with cat trees, toys, music (favourites include Love Cats by the Cure, Best of the Stray Cats and anything by Atomic Kitten) and for the occasional chilly evening the cats are provided with radiators.

Pet transportation has also become a major service with the company now relocating pets all around Europe to their new homes.

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More and more people are looking for an authentic Spanish life in the wild and green Guadalhorce Valley, writes Tom Powell

Into

SUN-SEEKING expats and second-home buyers are rapidly opting for the beauty of

the Guadalhorce Valley over the glamour of the coast, according to local estate agents.

As Marbella drags the coastal property market out of the economic crisis, things are looking up in the valley too.

More and more buyers – predominantly British – are snapping up second homes in the region, more so than permanent moves.

And with the valley increasing in popularity, estate agents are discovering that supply is lagging considerably behind demand.

"We are desperate for people looking to sell property in the Guadalhorce Valley, as there is no shortage of prospective buyers," explained Jo Wood, owner of Grapevine Properties, based in Guaro.

TOP PURCHASE: In Guaro



the valley



WELL INFORMED: Jo and Graham Wood of Grapevine Properties

"Prices won't be dropping any lower now, and if things continue to be this busy they

will begin rising again by next year." It appears that confi-

dence is returning to the towns and villages of the valley too, with more bars

and museums springing up encouraging more movement in the property

market. And there are numerous other reasons why people are lured north into the Guadal-

horce valley.

The area has a great series of large market towns, such as Coin and Alhaurin el Grande, as well as Malaga and the Costa del Sol

airport right on your doorstep.

But Jo believes moving to the valley is more of a cultural than logistical decision.

"It is a different way of life and a far more authentically Spanish experience here," said Jo, originally from Yorkshire but moved to Spain with her husband and three children 15 years ago.

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GOOD DEALS: To be had in Alhaurin de la Torre



On the up in Alora



IT has been an exciting year-and-a-half for Alora's leading agent Margaret Mitchell.

The boss of Alora Properties, who has been based in the area for 16 years, has had an incredible 30 offers accepted since January last year.

"And I completed on two properties alone on Friday," added the friendly Scot, who was born in Faslane.

But it has been anything but an easy ride for Mitchell, who has seen 12 agencies close in the area over the last five years.

"Since the recession began it has been tough," she explained.

"There used to be 15 agents here, now there are just three.

"Between 2008 and 2012 nobody was buying, but now things are definitely picking up nicely and thankfully prices are not yet going up."

Prices in the area are very reasonable with country fincas, the few that are



IN DEMAND: Homes in the picturesque town of Alora

left, coming in for around €150,000 to €180,000, three-bed country villas at around the €200,000 mark and townhouses for under €200,000.

She explained that there was now a healthy mix of buyers from the UK, Holland and Belgium and she was expecting more to come next year.



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AP638 - Traditional village house located in the historic centre of Alora pueblo. Accommodation over two levels consists of 2/3 bedrooms, sitting room, kitchen and bathroom. This property has two entrances as it extends between two parallel streets and has the rare commodity of a garage.

BARGAIN PRICE - 50.000 €

GOOD SELECTION OF COUNTRY VILLAS



AP769 - Attractive well maintained country villa enjoying a rural but not remote location between the pueblos of Pizama and Cártama. Accommodation all on one level offers a large sun lounge, living room with fireplace, 3 double bedrooms, kitchen and bathroom. Small easily maintained garden with pool and a garage/store room.

DRASTIC REDUCTION TO - 99.000 €

CHARACTER PROPERTIES COTTAGES TO CORTIJOS



AP859 - 200 year old tastefully restored Cortijo set within 18.510 m² of irrigated land planted with various fruit trees. Accommodation over two levels offering 2 sitting rooms, 4 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms and large kitchen leading out to a generous Andalusian patio. There is a large swimming pool and terrace hosting fantastic views. Rural but walking distance to Alora pueblo.

ATTRACTIVELY PRICED - 264.000 €

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14 All about Guadalhorce valley



ALLURING: Juanar's terrace and location (right)

THERE are some amazing places to stay in the Guadalhorce Valley. But you would be hard pressed to beat the chilled out Finca la Mota, in Alhaurin, that was once one of the biggest estates in the entire valley. The 350-year-old farmhouse sits in its own secret valley, surrounded by stunning countryside and with views to match. Run by Dutch father and sons Reuben and Danny, you enter into a classic patio Andaluz with a huge pool and its own terrace restaurant. Inside it is charming with comfortable rooms and a separate dining area. A lovely shady pool and views to match make up the scene. Another fantastic rural option is Hotel Cerro de Hajar, in Tolox. Sitting in one of the most privileged spots in the heart of the Sierra de las Nieves, the views are to die for and, best of all, the hotel has a great restaurant to eat in as well. Wake up to birdsong and head

WHERE TO STAY



Rural retreat

up into the nearby hills for a proper escape from the norm. Another amazing place worth considering is Refugio de Juanar en route to the valley in the nearby Sierra Blanca mountain range that divides the Guadalhorce Valley and the coast. Once a state-run *parador*, this incredible spot was taken over 30 years ago by four partners in a sort of management buy-out. Little has changed since then and it has a very authentic, rather eccentric and laid back feel. Just a short drive to Monda, it sits in the heart of dense pine, olive and chestnut woods and



HISTORIC: Finca la Mota

counts on its own swimming pool and excellent dining room and bodega. It is incredibly close to the coast (less than half an hour) yet feels like one of Andalucia's most incredible retreats. Best of all, in the morning, you can walk up into the hills to a viewing point, the Cruz de Juanar from which you can see the whole coastline.

15 All about Guadalhorce Valley

WHERE TO EAT

WITH an incredible range of local produce it is no surprise you can eat well in the Guadalhorce Valley. Casa Paco attracts diners from far and wide and understandably so, not just for its amazing range of fresh fish and sea food, but also its stylish interior.

It has also been running since 1985 with current owner Juan starting to work there at the ripe old age of 16. A charming livewire with a young family, he works extremely hard to make sure the offering is continually fresh and of the season and it is not for nothing this is one of the genuine 'dining secrets' of Andalucia.

The hot *conchas finas* are always incredible, while the razor shells are as fresh as can be and the grilled langoustines unforgettable. A stuffed tomato with tuna, egg mayonnaise and prawns is superb.

Idyll

La Mota on the outskirts of Alhaurin, in its own secret valley, is another extremely popular rural option. Run by a Dutch family, you dine on a candle-lit terrace at night surrounded by mature pine, orange and avocado trees.

A classic rural idyll, the diners are spoilt with a great mix of international dishes, with a slant on the oriental, Moroccan and Thai. A superb herring came on brown bread with a delicious cucumber and onion dill, while the chicken satay was as good as anywhere in the valley. The Thai prawn and chicken curry came in red, green or yellow depending on your preference for spice and was delicious. The apple strudel was a sure fire winner to finish. Just up the road is the French stalwart El Postillon, sitting in a fantastic terrace overlooking a leafy garden and with views into the nearby Sierra de Mijas. But you are here for the cooking and Xavier Sierra, who has done his time training around Spain and France, knows how to put a few dishes together, such as great terrine,

Creative cuisine



TASTY: Oliver's, while (right) Casa Paco and a prawn-stuffed tomato, (below) Mota's terrace and a delicious herring on brown bread



lovely seafood 'gratin' with prawns and scallops or a fresh sea bream. Best of all, the three-course set menu is a steal at 19 euros.

A new restaurant worth checking out is Oliver's in the heart of town. Recently opened by Ron Birkett and Karen Bradshaw, the couple have lived in Spain for 30 years and know a bit about cooking. It's a daytime joint, with a great range of healthy options such as salads and quiches. However, they also do pies and BBQ ribs, as well as a great battered cod, with chips and mushy peas, as well as a Sun-



day roast with fresh veg for just €7.50.

Over in Coin, you must try and look out the popular Orange Tree restaurant. An increasingly popular place to hang out, it has lots of car parking outside with great food. Run by David, Tina and family, you will always get a great welcome. Over in Coin, you must look out the adventurous and highly romantic, Bohemia restaurant in the centre of town. The owner Pedro Trillo has incredible talent both for his interior design, food and original tapestries which line the walls.



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MAESTRO: French talent Xavier serves up a great terrine on his terrace at El Postillon

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16 Property

And the survey says: you need your property looking at



WHEN buying property in Spain, it's all too easy to fall in love with the dream and forget about the reality of what may lie beneath the postcard-perfect image. Having a survey done means never having to say, "I'm sorry I bought the place." If you're from northern Europe and have ever purchased a property, at home, you almost certainly had a survey carried out, to ensure an expert told you what you were looking at and what you might need to look out for. Sometimes, however, buyers skip the survey stage in Spain, only to discover, too late, what they wish they'd known before buying. To take a closer look at what you should be looking at when buying in Spain, we spoke to Michael Millgate, a partner of Belilos, the Gibraltar-based firm of civil and structural engineers that has worked on some of the Rock's biggest projects over the last quarter century, like King's Wharf, the territory's tallest building, and the new 600-unit Mons Calpe public-housing scheme. In the last five years, Belilos conducted more than 50 structural conditions surveys in southern Spain, from Cádiz to Murcia, offering clients ex-



pert opinions on what they may find behind those lovely white-washed walls and terracotta tiles. Michael, who is qualified as a structural engineer in Spain and the UK, has over 30 years' experience in the sector and remains 'passionate about providing excellent service at good value'.

Foundations

Michael admits some buyers here, including a lawyer in recent memory, seem to leave their common sense on the plane, especially when they think they've stumbled upon the last cheap *cortijo* in the *campo*. What they don't realise, until they notice their pool is heading downhill fast or the town hall comes knocking with a summons for planning

infractions, is that having a survey done can save hassle and money, in the long-term. "Our clients are mostly first- and second-home buyers from the UK and the north of Europe," Michael explains, "but we also act for, and against, insurance companies and, increasingly, for communities. Our structural work concerns the fabric of a building, from skin to foundations. We inspect the property, diagnose problems, identify remedies, and value the cost of repairs to make things good." Under Law 38/1999, on building planning, better known as the LOE, Michael notes that buyers of properties built after 2000 are 'fairly well-protected', with a right of recourse against architects, builders, and developers for structural faults: "The

LOE saves the gullible from the worst that can happen," he says.

Moreover, Michael points out the fact that projects built post-2000 must be registered for 10 years with the architects' and engineers' societies in the province where a property is located, provides another guarantee for buyers of new and recently built properties. Older properties, however, and those in rural areas often do not offer the same security should something go wrong.

A structural conditions survey – which normally costs between €750-900 and takes a maximum of two weeks to complete from the first contact with a client, to commissioning the work, to inspecting the property, and producing an in-depth report – represents a very reasonable expense for a prospective purchaser. After all, how much is your peace of mind worth?

"Most of us live in an economy where the largest single investment we make in our lives is our home," Michael concludes. "The price of a survey is negligible when buying a property that can be upwards of a million euros, but the cost of repairs can be significant. That's the real value of what we do."

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