

# All about *Sierra Nevada*

Vol. 9, Issue 203 [www.theolivepress.es](http://www.theolivepress.es) December 23rd- January 6th 2014



## No business like snow business

*There's nothing like a day on the pistes for conjuring up the Christmas spirit. Ice queens Imogen Calderwood and Jacqueline Fanchini sloped off for a taste of the 'high life' - sadly without the king - in the snow-capped peaks of the sunny Sierra Nevada*



**BIKINI SKIING:** A group of thrill seekers enjoy the weather

**P**OWDER snow crunching beneath your feet, sun warming your face, kamikaze snowboarders flying through the air... nowhere on the Iberian peninsula are perfect skiing conditions such a safe bet as in the Sierra Nevada. Christmas card views, adrenaline-pumping thrills and cloudless skies for catching an out-of-season suntan - the resort sometimes nicknamed the 'Costa del Ski' has it all! Famously, you can ski here in the morning and then head down for a spot of water skiing off the Granada coast (just down the road) in the afternoon.

Turn to Page 18



**REGAL RESORT:** King Felipe enjoyed the high life just months before his coronation

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# All about Sierra Nevada

## Economic peaks

**THE Sierra Nevada generates a massive €400 million per season for the Granada region, as well as employing more than 8,500 workers. Tourists spent more than €196 million in the 2013-2014 winter season, with an additional €46 million spent by local residents and workers, according to a study by the University of Granada.**

### Jobs

**Using input and output tables to establish the extra knock-on effect of this spending and the total economic input is €411 million.**

**A total of 54% of this goes into the resort itself, 20% goes into the city of Granada, and the rest into Andalucía and Spain.**

**To maintain this, the resort requires 8,592 workers during the season, which corresponds to 1.6% of the jobs in Granada province.**



From page 17

And fanatics can even ski - in bikinis and swimming costumes, if you fancy it - at Europe's sunniest ski resort, usually well into May.

The land of 'sun, ski and sangria' is incredibly just a two-hour drive from Marbella on the toll road... and an hour and a bit from Malaga.

Despite years of family skiing holidays, neither of us believed that such good quality snow could possibly be found so close to the beaches of the Costa del Sol.

And nothing beats the feeling of turning the last corner on a perilously-twisting mountain road and catching your first glimpse of the white stuff.

It's a childish thrill that never fails to delight and our weekend away in the Sierra Nevada ticked all our 'winter wonderland' boxes.

The highest mountain range in southern Europe, the serrated edges of the peaks - Sierra fittingly also means 'teeth of a saw' - cast a spectacular skyline against the sunset as we wound our way towards the ski resort.

Motorists tailgate each other like ducklings hurrying to keep up with their mother, almost appearing ner-



**PRISTINE:** Adrenaline addicts zoom down the stunning white slopes

## Slide away...

vous of being stranded alone on the steep uphill road or coming to grief on a tight bend with a sheer drop below.

As we crossed spectacular mountain passes panning out into valleys, we were treated to dramatic views down to Granada far below, with its landmark Alhambra Palace and reservoirs glowing in the golden late-afternoon sun.

When driving at dusk, watch out for bovine obstacles; we came dangerously close to taking out a family of cows ambling slowly across the road in search of grass.

The Sierra Nevada has one of the longest ski seasons

in the world, kicking off in late November and welcoming visitors for glacier skiing into May.

Although early in the season, just 45 km of pistes are open out of a potential 110 km, it is the first resort in Spain... and one of the first in Europe to be properly open and underway.

As well as a significant snowfall at the end of November (just in time for the December 6 'puente'), the snow machines work around the clock and a healthy amount of white powder has already set the bar for the coming months.

Although arriving at the resort woefully unprepared for a day on the slope - leggings are no protection



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from the icy cold – the good people at Surfin' snowboard shop kitted us out, even loaning us a pair of one of their instructor's waterproof trousers. We would have liked to borrow his 'professional ski legs' too... in more ways than one!

As the rising sun set the snowy peaks aflame the next morning, we were on fire too, anxious to fit in as many runs as possible. We'd heard a rumour that if you don't park your car at the lift station before 9am, you haven't got a chance, but there was still ample parking at lunchtime.

The queues for lift passes and chair lifts were short but if you visit later in the season, or during the school holidays, particularly *Semana Santa*, Christmas week and *Semana Blanca* in February, it can get a little congested. Outside of those three weeks you should have no problems.

Thanks to a €3.1 million cash injection from the Andalucian tourist board – which has also contributed three new lifts this season – the price for passes has remained the same for the last four years (€45 for an adult day pass).

Wrestling skis onto lifts while kitted out like Michelin men is an art in itself but finally we made it to the top, two snow queens surveying our kingdom! Then it was downhill all the way ... in a really good way!

The slopes open at the moment are easier blues and greens, heavily dusted with powder



snow – ideal for families and those – like us – getting back onto snowboards after a few years' out.

Risk-takers will be happy to hear that the more challenging red and black runs will be open as the snowfall increases, along with the impressive Sulayr Snowpark which boasts 110 different ramps and rails and the largest ski-jump in Europe.

At night, you will also not be disappointed. As well as a fantastic range of amazing restaurants, which gets better every year, there is some fun nightlife.

This year, there are some exciting new openings, including the beautiful tapas bar Tito Tapas,

a brand new Japanese Jinsei and the hip El Club de la Montaña, run by local dynamos Luis and Mayte.

Then there are no less than two new wine bars and even a fabulous new Portuguese cafe. Nothing is standing still.

For a cosy, friendly atmosphere combined with a spectacular array of spirits, head to Bar Ski in the main parade, where owner Sebastian Hollanda Lopez has been a cheerful fixture for the past 28 years.

Like most places in the resort, the 'free tapa with your drink' deal offers the perfect opportunity to sample some of chef Paco Martin Ortega's delicious cooking.

And there's nothing like a comforting cup of hot chocolate for warming the cockles, on tap at Mama Goye's chocolate shop. We returned from our Sierra

**JOYFULL: Skiing with the family, an instructor or friends, it's always a fun experience**

Nevada sojourn only slightly battered and bruised and positively glowing with festive cheer.

That's another special characteristic about this sunny winter sports resort. Your snowman won't melt. Thanks to the resort's high altitude, you could build one in November and pay it a return visit in the New Year!



**EXPERIENCED: Jose Antonio and Mayte at Skisol**

## Customer is king

IT is a classic family business.

Jose Antonio Lopez and his wife Montse are often joined by their two children at weekends when the resort gets busy. But thankfully it's not too far, the family living in nearby La Zubia, just at the foot of the slopes.

In an excellent location, their shop Skisol has some of the best quality skis and snowboards to rent and customer service is the key to its success.

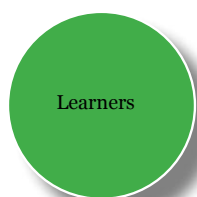
"We always put the customer first and have plenty of returning business," explains Jose Antonio, who has been renting out skis in the Sierra Nevada for 35 years.

Best of all, the prices have not gone up for a decade, with boots and ski rental costing just €23 and the entire kit for just €18. "And we don't just rent out any old equipment... we buy at least 50 new pairs of boots alone each season," he adds.

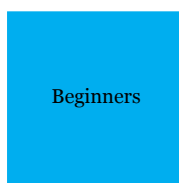
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### This year there are some exciting new openings

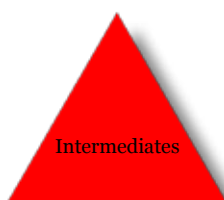
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# It's snow joke

**Jon Clarke on the terrors of trying to teach your own children how to ski**



MOVIN' ON UP: Maia and Alfie (left with dad) and above at lesson

**I**f there's one golden rule of skiing, it's DON'T teach your own children how to do it.

It was a lesson I learnt the hard way when I recently found myself flailing down a green run in the Sierra Nevada with both my youngsters in tow.

Enthusiastic and fearless - like their dad - they had somehow persuaded me to take them up for a couple of runs before their scheduled lesson was set to begin at 11am.

But when we all fell over in the first lift queue I got the hint that I might have been a touch foolhardy.

Pulling them both up again we finally alighted the chair only for Alfie, my five-year-old, to fall off the other side, stopping the lift for him to be scooped up by the lift operator.

Within 30 seconds of moving again came the first cry of cold and then the announcement that he was 'not going to ski down'.

And after falling over again as we got off the lift, I felt pretty certain he was going to have to be carried down.

However, he suddenly got his ski legs and we took off - well tumbled really - down the slope. I had tried to get their skies into the classic snowplough position and told them to head sideways not straight downhill.

But, of course, it doesn't work like that and while Alfie went left, Maia, eight, shot off to the right, screaming blue murder.

A horrible moment having to decide which of your two children to save, I plumped for the youngest, a daredevil, with no fear, but no sooner had I picked him up, I skidded off after Maia, who was by now on a totally different run 100 metres away and in floods of tears.

We regrouped and I attempted to get them to follow me down in a zig zag with promises of bravery medals and hot chocolate at the bottom.

After five falls each and a shout from an angry teacher, when we bombed straight through his class sending the pupils tumbling, they made it to the bottom with, guess what, huge smiles on their faces.

It was a lesson in damage control and I just about passed, but I vowed to leave the job of training them to the professionals.

The rest of the hour before their lesson was spent on the very, very nursery slope (and its bizarre 'magic carpet' tunnel), luckily with a Dutch friend and her daughter, who was an equal novice.

Up there on the one-degree slope practically nothing can go wrong, and it was a huge relief when I handed them over to the very capable teachers at the EOE ski school, whose patience apparently

knows no bounds.

So why on Earth am I so keen for my youngsters to learn to ski?

The unselfish reason is I want them to develop a skill that will keep them fit and that they can enjoy for years to come.

The selfish reason is that I want an excuse to go to the Sierra Nevada as much as possible throughout the season.

For there is nothing as lovely as taking in the mountain air and breathtaking views of the Sierra Nevada. Bright sunshine, a gentle breath of wind and a glass of Veuve Clicquot in the champagne bar on the way down.

Now something of a winter ritual since moving to Andalucia over a decade ago, a day or weekend away in the Granada skiing resort is always great fun.

Heading up with friends, there are usually between 50 and 100kms of runs in a good year and the choice of places to eat in the resort is surprisingly good, not to mention good value compared to the normal skiing resort prices.

Then, of course, you get the health benefits. All that fresh air and movement for hours at a time has got to be good for you. My search engine produces millions of results when the keywords 'health benefit' and 'skiing' are entered.

A random look at one describes it as such: "Pure zingy mountain air contains lower levels of oxygen than we are generally used to... the body becomes more efficient in its circulation and oxygen delivery... which is great for sluggish desk-bound types!" Quite.

It goes on to talk about stress-busting, facing fears and overcoming frustrations.

Without a doubt few things are as exhilarating as heading to the top of the highest ski lift, at 3,300 metres, just below Mulhacen, where the views make the Mediterranean below look like a small pond, with half the coastline of Morocco clearly in view.

It is an amazing place, although it can be a little nippy up there with the wind whistling past, so make sure to bring a coat and jumper.

From here, competent skiers are spoilt with the amazing runs of the Laguna de las Yeguas area, including the celebrated Olympic run, which is full of twists and turns.

Here, you can sometimes find yourself skiing alone midweek and the sheer nature and landscape are spectacular.

Pradollano itself is a pleasant place to simply take in the air or a spot of lunch, and there is a fair amount for children to do, with entertainers and Disney figures wandering

around, particularly at Easter and Christmas.

It has also, rightfully, got a good reputation as being a resort for fun, with the famous apres-ski being some of the best in Europe.

The resort really started to evolve quickly from 1995 when the World Skiing Championship was scheduled to be held there (it actually took place the following year due to poor snow).

"Since then the infrastructure changes were huge and it is now a big resort," explains Giles Birch, who has run the rapidly-growing British Ski Center for over two decades.

"It has one of the longest seasons in the world, opening at the start of December and often going through to mid May. There have even been

snowfalls in June and when the snow and weather are favourable, the openness of the terrain provides some of the most exhilarating off-piste skiing to be found anywhere."

And so it ultimately came as a lovely surprise that after one of the most exhilarating mornings skiing I could remember, I picked up my kids with huge smiles on their faces.

I proposed lunch down in the resort with their mother, to which they screwed up their faces and insisted it should be a bocadillo and chips at the top, followed by an afternoon's skiing with dad.

I can tell you it got better. And by the end of the second day, these two tornadoes were hooked. It made my year.



NO TUNNEL VISION: Maia and Alfie on the way up

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## All about Sierra Nevada



OLD TIMES: A rusty old bus used to bring skiers up, who then stayed at one of the albergues (above) and then trudged to the top by shanks pony

### While in Granada why not also visit...

#### Alhambra and the Albaycin



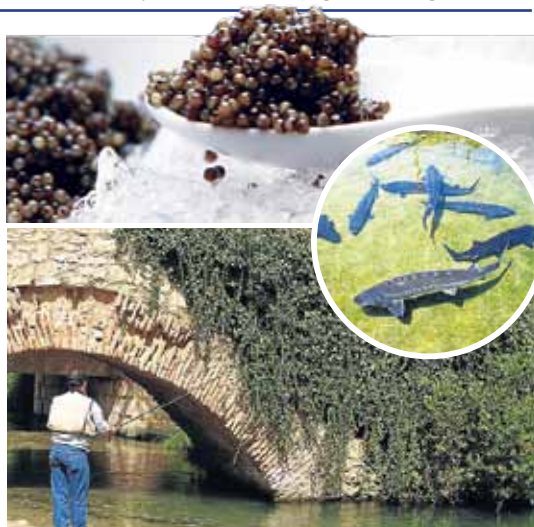
**G**RANADA city is famous for its stunning Arabic monument The Alhambra, but why not spend a day wandering around its largely pedestrianised former Moorish quarter the Albayzin, where you will find some of Andalucia's most charming

hotels and truly step back in time. The city also counts on a special train that takes tourists from the Albayzin to the Alhambra via the city centre, which is also worth a visit. It's Andalucia's main university town so there is normally plenty of cultural offerings on the agenda.

#### Riofrio

**R**IOFRIO is one definite stop-over for foodies. It is here that UK celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay found, what he described as, the 'best caviar in the world'. Conveniently right next to the main motorway enroute to the slopes, you can park up, have a coffee in one of the many bars, then head under the motorway bridge to the fish farm, where a Finnish company is currently breeding no less than 30,000 sturgeons from all around the world.

Aside from the famous Russian caviar, there is caviar from Iran and also - the one Ramsay liked - an organic caviar, which takes up to 20 years to create. While it is not cheap it is the perfect Christmas or Reyes present.



#### The Alpujarras

**T**HE inspirational home of author Chris Stewart nestles on the southern slopes of the Sierra Nevada and in its adjacent valley.

Built by the Berbers after the Moorish invasion of 711AD, the Alpujarras' tiny mountainside villages with their flat-roofed houses and maze of narrow streets echo those of the Berber's homeland in North Africa.

The relative isolation of this beautiful, mountainous region has kept it free from over-building and helped retain its typical Andalucian tranquility.

The celebrated trio of Bubion, Capileira and Pampaneira are stunning, while Trevelez is famous for its ham.

Towns such as Lanjaron and Orgiva are well worth a visit and a sidetrip to this magical region could easily keep you occupied for two or three days.

If you plan to stay over there are some great places to stay but few beat the amazing new b&b Valle de Lunas in Tijola, near Orgiva.

Run by a charming British couple it is oozing style and comfort and sits in the most enviable position with lovely views and attractive grounds.

You might even fancy popping along the road to visit near neighbour Chris Stewart himself.



# Artisan times

### Boss of the Sierra Nevada's biggest skiing school EOE Juan Luis Hernandez recalls his early days on the slopes

WHEN he first arrived on the slopes at the age of 10 it took well over an hour to get there from Granada and the ski lifts comprised one stretch of wire that dragged you about 200 metres.

"It was pretty artisanal and rudimentary to say the least," explains Juan Luis Hernandez, who frequently came up to ski with some of his six older brothers.

"You couldn't rent skis and there was hardly anywhere to eat or stay, but there was something very special about being in the mountains," he continues.

He had soon bought his own set of wooden skis - which he still has today - and in 1969 came up to start his first job.

Some four decades later and the amiable *Granadino* is running Spain's biggest ski school. With 80 teachers and countless ancillary staff, the Escuela Oficial de Esqui, is even bigger than any of its counterparts in the Pyrenees.

"And we have around a dozen different nationalities and everyone is required to speak English," he stresses from his plush new office by Borreguiles ski lift and overlooking the resort's main square.



LEGEND: EOE boss Juan Luis with his first set of skis

"In fact if they can't speak English we don't hire them."

This has become increasingly important over the last few decades with British being the second most important group of visitors to the slopes, alongside the Portuguese.

"And on top of this you have all the other northern Europe-

ans who all speak English," he adds.

"And now we have the Russians arriving, so we have hired a Russian journalist from the coast to work in our reception."

For more information contact [ee@ee.es](mailto:ee@ee.es) or visit [www.ee.es](http://www.ee.es)



BIGGEST SCHOOL: EOE is Spain's largest school with 80 instructors with 12 nationalities





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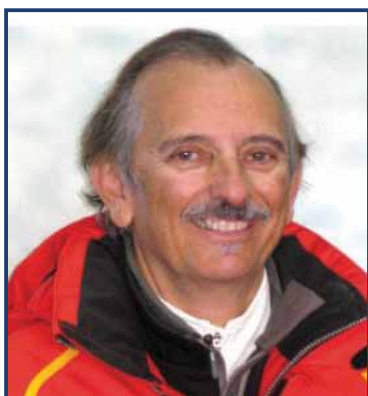


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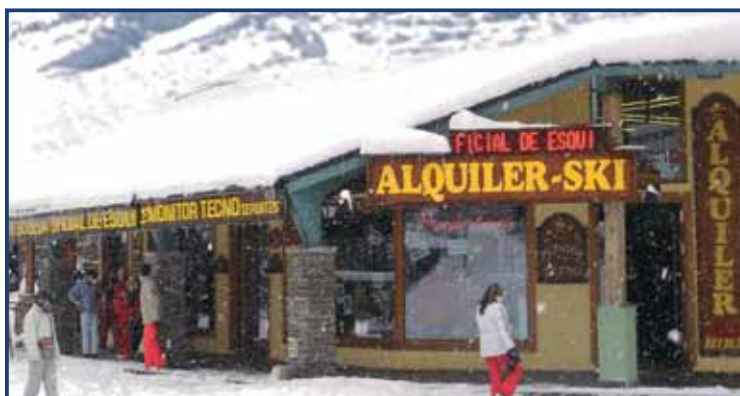


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# All about Sierra Nevada

Downhill



## from here

**The Olive Press sent reporter Annabel Grossman (left in green goggles) to try out one of the most bizarre (and hardy) days out that Andalucia can offer... bikini skiing in the morning and a Puerto Banus champagne spray party in the afternoon**

EVER since I first set foot on the slopes a couple of decades ago, I've always been keen to bundle myself up in as much cosy ski gear as possible. So when *the Olive Press* sent me up to the Sierra Nevada with little more than a bikini and a pair of ski socks it's fair to say I was more than a little apprehensive. But never one to turn down a ski trip, there I was at 5.30am, skimpy swimsuit in hand heading up to the mountains.

We've all heard the old adage of ski in the morning, sunbathe in the afternoon, and the Sierra Nevada is one of the only places in the world where this is do-able.

But last May I was challenged to take the whole concept one step further. I was going to attempt to ski in the morning and then make it down to Marbella in time to live it up at the Ocean Club's famous champagne spray party. But the catch was, I was to spend the whole day wearing just a bikini.

Fair enough - it was the start of May, the sun was shining in the mountains, and a bikini is the standard attire for the Ocean Club. But swimsuits in the snow? Really?

Standing at the bottom of the ski lift I'm not feeling terribly confident. I've been assured that plenty of people will be in their swim gear for the final weekend of the season but all I can see are skiers all snug and warm in their jackets and salopettes giving me rather strange looks.

However, once up on the hill everything changes. The atmosphere is riotous, with

skiers charging around not only in bikinis, but swim shorts, armbands and rubber rings - and there's even a surf board thrown in for good measure. And - although it's a little chilly on the chair lift - with no wind and plenty of sunshine I'm almost glad to be rid of cumbersome ski gear for once.

In fact, it takes only seconds for fears of painful wipeouts and potential frostbite to evaporate and I'm off tearing down some of Europe's highest and most beautiful mountains. I've always believed skiing is the best natural high possible, but in a bikini it's just that little bit better - the feel of sun and mountain air on your skin is incredible, the adrenaline is pumping and there's great potential for an even tan. Admittedly, there are a couple of bloodied knees coming off the slopes and I can see that swimwear may not be the most practical attire for a sport where hitting the deck is cold, hard and painful (snowboarders note!). But it doesn't take long for me to decide springtime skiing is

than a little sunburned) so at 3pm it's back in the car for the two hour drive to Marbella. I'm not too worried at this point. After all, the hard part's over and all I have to do now is sip champagne by the pool at one of Spain's most fashionable clubs. No problem.

However, as I stride through the door past a couple of 6ft models in heels and full make up and am met by a bunch of ripped lads spraying Veuve Clicquot and pumping their fists, I'm beginning to think this might not be so easy. I'm suddenly very aware of my ragged hair, odd-looking goggle marks and smudged make up - hardly the standard look for Marbella's hottest opening party.

But this isn't the time to let the side down, so mojito in hand I head towards the 'beds' which surround the pool. As anyone who's been at a champagne spray party will know, it's something you won't forget in a while. If you can handle the eye-watering prices, TOWIE wannabes and the rather staggering waste of champagne, then you're sure to have a great time.

And despite my achy muscles and stinging sunburn, I find that I'm actually getting into the spirit of it all. However, when the girls start falling off their designer wedges and the stag parties begin to disband, I decide it's time to call it a day and finally retreat to the comfort of a T-shirt.

So it seems that sun, snow and spray can indeed be done in a day. Is it practical? Hardly. Will it catch on? Probably not. Affordable? Not at all. But would I recom-



**LUNACY:** As far as the eye can see skiers and snowboarders with clothes







**COOLING OFF:** Annabel (inset top) cools off at Ocean Club, surrounded by party-goers spraying Veuve Cliquot champagne



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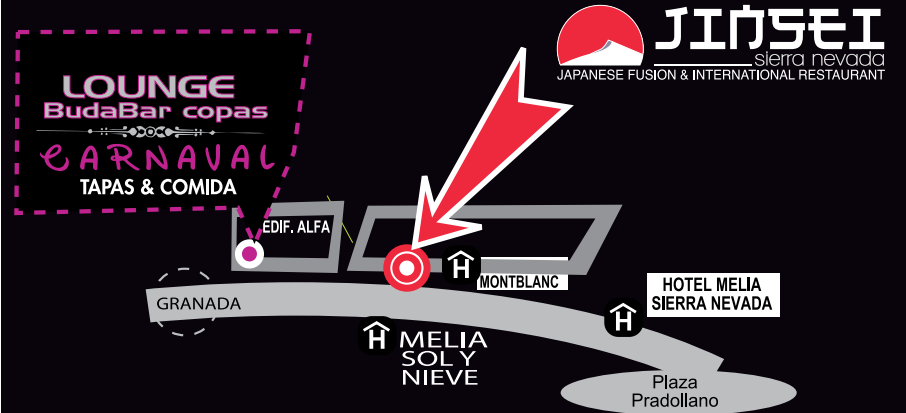
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## All about Sierra Nevada

Where to eat

# On the up!



Sierra Nevada has one of the best mixes of quality restaurants in Andalucía, writes Jon Clarke



A BRAND new Sushi joint, a Portuguese cafe and two new wine bars, it is fair to say nothing stands still in the Si-



erra Nevada. The real plaudits however must go to **Tito Tapas**, one of the most stylish new openings on the slopes for years. Contemporary and cutting edge, the beautiful wine and tapas bar has been carefully created by the team behind Tito Luigi in the same block. Hundreds of thousands of euros have been spent on importing German wood, an incredible sound system and a chef from Menorca, who really knows his onions. It is an excellent place to start the evening with cocktails from 4pm, while it has a decent wine list and new tapas being created by the week.



NEW ADDITIONS: Sushi at Jinsei and Tito Tapas, while (top) Vertical and (left) Jose Carlos at legendary Casablanca

Another fantastic new opening is **el Club de la Montana** by the guys behind Campo Base. This fun, original spot, just up from Tito Tapas, has its very own eclectic style, focusing on Rock and Blues music and with a series of original album covers on the walls.

The menu is broken into sections, including 'finger food', 'mountain Tex Mex' and 'Tortillas' club' and the tacos with

oxtail and an allioli of truffle was the sure-fire winner. In the very same block it gets even more exciting with the opening of a new Sushi joint **Jinsei**. Set up with help from a chef trained at Michelin-starred Kabuki in Madrid, this amazing addition is bound to win plaudits and gain a strong following, particularly thanks to its great-value €14 five course lunch, which comes

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**FISH AND FOWL:** Antonio at La Lonja and a waiter at La Visera

with sushi, makis and gyozas, not to mention a delicious spinach soup to start.

Another great tapas bar, with a real slant on top quality meats, is **La Carreta**. It has a superb selection of hams and chorizos and its owner Paco is a real whizz on the grill, and a jolly chap to boot.

Next door, you will find a little slice of Sierra Nevada history. On the walls of restaurant **Tito Luigi** lies the evidence that he has provided good food and ambience for the last 26 years.

Alongside photos of the king with owners Javier and Luis are snaps of politicians, flamenco stars and bullfighters who have all come up to enjoy his unique brand of hostelry. As well as organising parties in his 'secret' cave at the back, diners are treated to a great range of pizzas, salads and pasta dishes in his wood-beam restaurant. My pick: most definitely the spaghetti with salmon and caviar.

Another real institution is **La Lonja**, which is the best



**GRILL KING:** Carreta's Paco

place, by far, to eat seafood in the mountains.

Buzzing at lunchtimes, the selection of *marisco* is impressive and there are always fresh lobsters waiting to be cooked.

On the slopes for three decades, boss Antonio began life as a waiter in Granada, but now counts the King as a four-times visitor.

He has another restaurant in Sanlucar de Barrameda and unsurprisingly stocks its famous langoustines, as



**INSTITUTION:** Tito Luigi, and (below) tacos at Club de la Montana

well as knocking up a fine tuna tartare and some great shrimp frittatas.

Next door, try not to miss **Bodega Casablanca**, run by Jose Carlos Villanueva, who grew up on the slopes, with his father opening one of the first hostals in the 1960s.

He, of course, knows a fair bit about catering, and the bar has a great range of photos and memorabilia and is a great place for tapas or simply to hang out.

His chef Mari Fe, from Pais Vasco, knows a bit about food too and you will love the prawns wrapped in

potato with a soya mayonnaise, as well as lovely lamb chips with whisker-thin wild asparagus.

Without a doubt, the most consistent place to eat in the Sierra Nevada is the brilliant Italian **Ci vediamo**, where chef/owner Stevie Silva produces a great Michelin-starred range of food.

Silva, a professional snowboarder, is a massive meat fan, but also has a great range of light bites, a splendid pizza oven and some chestnuts such as a superb duck roll with ginger, guacamole, tuna and soy sauce.



There are fabulous mini 'gambas pil pil' hamburgers and a lot of the classics such as raclette and provolone with tomato. That said the pesto pizza takes some beating and the wine list has a superb and good value range.

For a great place to eat overlooking the slopes make your way to **Tia Maria**, which has a good mix of dishes and is a great for breakfast. Another sister restaurant of Tito Luigi, it is also very much an institution - open for 17 years - and with a

decent selection of Tex Mex dishes including guacamole, quesadillas and ribs.

Last, but definitely not least, if you want to enjoy the best terrace in the Sierra ensure to get a table at **La Visera**.

This wonderful spot has been in operation for 20 years, run by friendly

Jero, and has a great range of home cooked dishes, including a fabulous chicken fajita, with melted cheese, curry sauce and veg. And the cheesecake pudding wasn't bad either.

Finally, for coffee, **Vertical** is hard to be beaten and also has a great range of snacks and light bites, including hot dogs for the British clientele.



**MEAT FEAST:** Stevie Silva (left) and chef at Ci Vediamo



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**Snowboarding is an activity that is very popular with people who do not feel that regular skiing is lethal enough.**

Dave Barry

**Skiing: Who would have thought it could have become so popular since Norwegian Sondre Norheim invented the modern binding in the 19th century and called the resulting downhill traverse *slalom* (meaning tricky route)?**

**I do not participate in any sport with ambulances at the bottom of the hill.**

Erna Bombeck, 1927-1996

## Brits on the pistes

**British ski teachers Giles Birch and Jonathan Buzzard still love the Sierra Nevada two decades on**

**W**HEN Jonathan Buzzard walked into Sierra Nevada's seminal Crescendo bar in the early 1990s, Giles Birch knew he had found his man. With a long flasher's mac, 'big hair' and a friendly, outgoing persona, he knew he would make the perfect transport rep. In his first season working as a coordinator for the big travel companies, including First Choice and Thompsons, Birch needed someone with a bit of knowledge and experience to help him out. "I had no idea what was going on but had been told that Crescendo was the place to find the Brits and the reps-in-the-know," he recalls. "Next thing in walks Jonathan with just the right attitude and he was soon helping me deal with the three to four flights we regularly dealt with on a Sunday."

The pair are still working together some two decades later, collectively running the extremely successful British Ski Center from their base near the resort. Great mates, they both now teach, as well as sort out holidays with the help of two staff, Kristel and Alastair, for hundreds of clients each year.



**DAREDEVIL:** Snowboarders aren't the only ones who like thrills



**GOOD FRIENDS:** Giles and Jonathan have worked together for 20 years

"Of course things are completely different to what they were back then," explains Buzzard, who lived in Marbella in the golden years be-

fore it was ruined by corrupt leader Jesus Gil.

"We used to bring in thousands of foreigners every week, but after a couple of dry years in the 1980s the resort's reputation suffered badly and things all began to change.

"Luckily the snow came back, but these days it is all independent travelers and the agencies have all but disappeared."

Of course there have been some bad years such as 1995 when Buzzard recalls cycling up Borreguiles run on a mountain bike in shorts on Christmas Day.

"But generally it is as good as

most other international resorts and the range of skiing and schools is hard to beat," explains Birch, who particularly likes the length of the season.

"We start in late November and stay open until early May while other resorts don't open until mid December and end their season in March."

This is partly due to the resort's altitude and the quality of the snow which is constantly worked on during the night.

"That's why you'll never see slush even in the latter part of the season," he adds.

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## King of the slopes



**ROYAL LUNCH:** King Felipe VI (far left) and (right) with Alejandro Berdejo (in white) at Nevada Terrace

**How a well-connected Sevilla couple is sprinkling a bit of stardust on the slopes, writes Jon Clarke**

WITH a glass of champagne in one hand and a foie and boletus burger in the other, the future king of Spain could not have been happier.

After a morning's skiing in the Sierra Nevada this February he bowled up for a spot of lunch at the trendiest bar in the mountains, half way down emblematic piste el Río.

With a group of friends, including his old skiing teacher, he tucked into three different types of burger and a bowl of lentils at the hip Nevada Terrace, sponsored by champagne house Veuve Clicquot.

Off protocol and in fantastic form, he liked the place so much he came back the next day, with a different group of pals.

"He said he wanted to ensure that the quality was as good as the previous day," explains



**SUPERCool:** A live concert on the slopes at Nevada Terrace



**GOOD TIMES:** At a party

boss Alejandro Berdejo, who served him on both occasions. "It was a massive surprise for us on both days," adds the friendly Sevilla-born businessman, who is slowly sprinkling a bit of stardust on the resort via his marketing company Event10 which he runs with his wife Silvia Peris, one of Spain's top PR-gurus.

Through their champagne terrace and a hip new apres-ski bar N'ice on the resort's main square, the couple are helping to make the Sierra Nevada glamorous again.

"We are hoping to make the place as hip as it was in the 1970s," explains Silvia Peris, who has plans to bring some

exciting international names to the slopes this season.

"We are entering a new golden age for the Sierra Nevada and are promoting its amazing way of life, its weather, food, champagne and style," she adds.

The couple certainly have pedigree having spent the last two decades organising parties and events around the world, including the birthday parties of George Clooney and Cindy Crawford in Los Angeles... and visits for Prince Charles and Nicole Kidman to Spain.

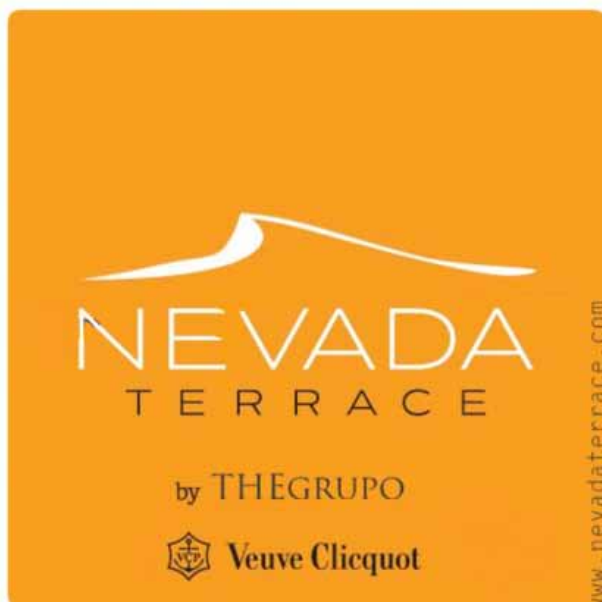
While both are from Sevilla, Silvia partly grew up in Beverly Hills, where she became friends with Kevin Costner, which opened a lot of doors.

In contrast husband Alejandro has very much a solid catering background, having studied hotel management in Switzerland, before working for the Movenpick chain in Germany and later setting up his own hotel consultancy firm in Spain.

"We are working really hard to try and create a buzz on the slopes but, above all, keep the prices down. You can have a glass of champagne with us for just €7 and the tapas is not expensive."



**BUBBLICIOUS:** Party girl and (inset) Silvia Peris with a friend







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# All about Sierra Nevada



**Not certain about skiing? Why not take a mountain adventure with Telemark ski school instead**

**T**HERE is off-piste... and then there is off the scale!

With Telemark you can have a wilderness trip that literally ends up in another world... the charming cobbled villages of the Genil valley.

Specialists on the slopes for over two decades, the company offers one and two-day cross-country adventures into the mountains.

Both trips end up taking you through deep off-piste snow onto narrow mountain tracks.

"We try to put an emphasis on ecology and nature and it is impressive to see the typically old farmhouses in the area and how little they have changed," explains boss Luis Casanova, who spends the other half of the year in Africa.

"It is a real, fun adventure, something you will not forget."

"Best of all, a team of mules ends up helping to bring your stuff back to Pradollano," adds Casanova.

The day trip costs just €100 per person and includes transport and lunch.

Another popular pastime for those who don't fancy risking life and limb on the pistes, is to have a day of cross-country ski-



**DONKEY POWER: Back to basics off piste**

ing on two or three well established paths around the resort. "It is great fitness and you do get to enjoy the fabulous views and nature at the same time," Casanova adds.

The company also organises

events ranging from hard-core uphill climbing for mountaineers to a half day soft snow walking trip with snow rackets.

For more info visit [www.telemark.es](http://www.telemark.es)

## Piste protocol

**BEFORE** you alight from the ski lift and launch yourself at high speed down a steep, powdery slope like the man in the Cadbury's Milk Tray advert, check out the traffic!

Just as there are rules of the road, there's a protocol on the piste, as head-on collisions are just as likely on snow as on tarmac.

In winter sports etiquette, the main rule of thumb is to respect your fellow skiers and snowboarders.

It's important to be aware of your abilities and try to be in control of your speed and trajectory, adapting to the weather, terrain and snow conditions as well as the density and flow of traffic.

When choosing your route, make sure that you don't endanger those ahead.

When overtaking, leave enough space for those in the slow lane to make any voluntary or unexpected movements.

If you do end up crashing into someone, or vice versa, try to clear the piste quickly.

Bear in mind that, technically, names and addresses between parties and witnesses should be exchanged as they would in a road accident.



**SAFETY FIRST: Don't rock your ski lift**

Also, if you see an accident, you are 'duty bound' to assist those involved. So keep your eyes open, be considerate and have fun!



# Slip-sliding... to sleep

**Everything from modern to traditional and from cheap to luxury can be found in the Sierra Nevada**

IT is hard to describe Pradollano as an authentic mountain village. But, with a metre of snow on the ground and the sun finally out, it certainly has its charms.

In terms of places to stay there are plenty of modern hotels, such as the stylish **Melia Sol** in the heart of the town or the five star **Vincci** at the top of the hill. But by far the most charming has got to be the stalwart **Ho-**

**tel Kenia Nevada**, which is well located near the centre of town and open most of the year.

Run by the friendly Don Pedro – who used to ski for the country as a youngster – it is clean, well run and serves up one of the best breakfasts in Spain.

It also has a gym, with an amazing in-house masseur Belen Gomez, and plenty of communal areas, filled with charming old furniture.

Another true stalwart for those on a tight budget is **Hostal Los Puentes**, ten minutes outside the resort, which also has an excellent restaurant with superb home-cooked food.

Open now for nearly 40 years, the owners are friendly and make a big effort to make you feel

## Where to stay



**GOOD TIMES:** Supper at Los Puentes, while (left) the Melia

at home. You can park for free and get up early to drive into the resort.

Back up in the town, if it is

luxury you are after your best bet is the **Melia Sol y Nieve**, which has a celebrated spa and all the modern feel of a



**LEGENDARY:** The Kenia Nevada is the Grande Dame of the Sierra Nevada



top urban hotel.

Comfortable luxury rooms, a number of top restaurants and a superb location right in the centre of the resort you can't ask for more.

Sadly the hippest hotel the slopes had seen for decades, **El Lodge** (opened by the Marbella Club group two years ago) is no more, after it was gutted in a fire earlier this year.

Burning down in just a couple of hours, the good news is that it is currently being rebuilt in the same location. It is due to open by the start of next year's season.



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