

From Moorish invaders to Buddhists and from dolphins to its own 'Guiri Army', Benalmadena is the quintessential good time had by all, writes Tom Powell



TRILOGY OF THRILLS:
A castle, an underwater adventure and a Buddhist temple make Benalmadena special, while Torremolinos is the heart of the Costa del Sol revolution

Where magic is made

In Benalmadena, being a 'guiri' has taken on a whole new meaning.

The derogatory term for foreigners has been turned on its head by the legendary 'Guiri Army', Malaga FC's die-hard British expat fan group.

As a prelude to every home game, this motley crew gathers in the seaside resort before heading off to Malaga on their personalised bus to cheer on the Spanish football team they have made their own.

This is not the behaviour of your average British guiri, more likely to be seen sporting flip flops and Union Jack shorts and checking the Premiership scores on his iPhone.

These are the actions of integrated expats who have become a part of local Spanish society... and don't they just love it!

That's Benalmadena all over, a cosmopolitan triple decker sandwich of a town which welcomes Arroyo de Miel and its buzzing Benalmadena Costa into its warm municipal embrace.

All this rolled into one, means one key thing: there really is something for everyone. And guiris especially, as the Moors discovered when they invaded the Iberian Peninsula centuries ago, bring huge prosperity to the pueblo in the hills where Benalmadena's

Continues on Page 18

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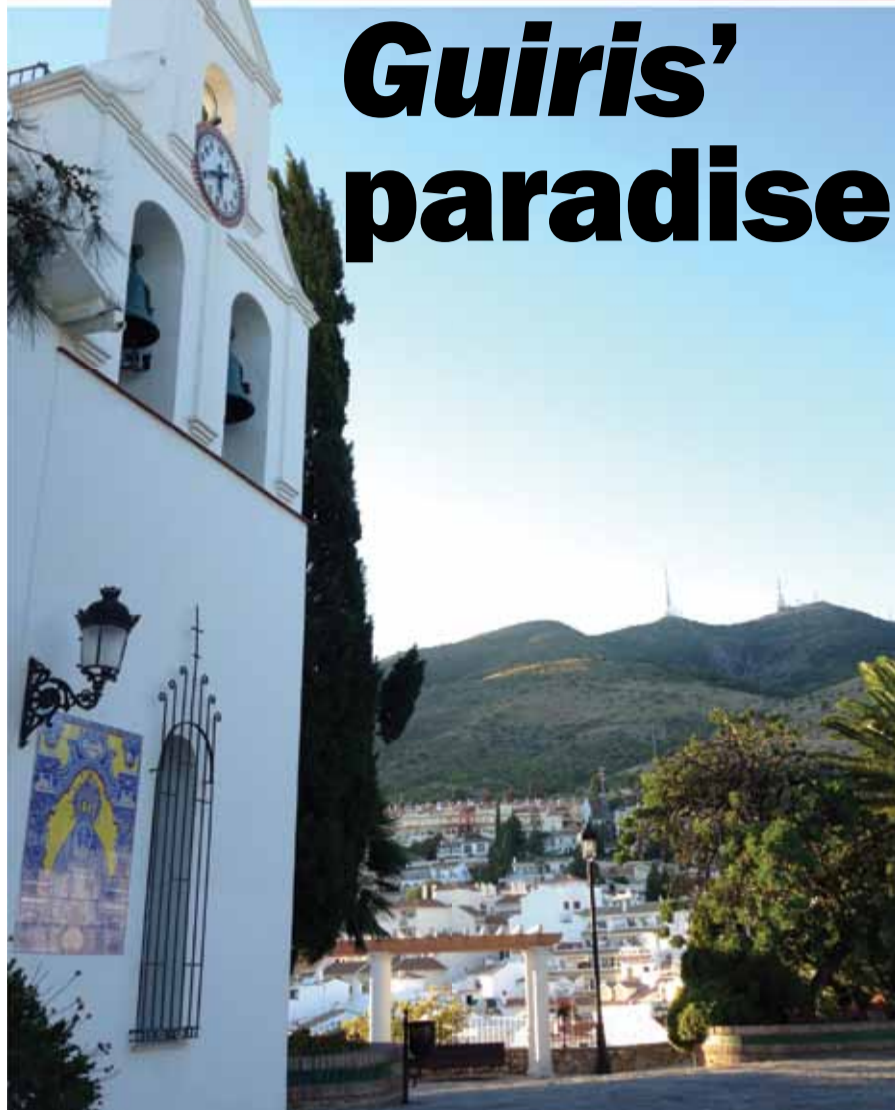
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Guiris' paradise

From Page 17

story began. The Muslims helped develop agriculture, introducing sugar cane, figs, grapes and mulberry trees from the East during the 11th century, when the local population was concentrated within the pretty walled town. But that's another story. My own journey began above the pueblo, with the monument that you can't help but notice every time you drive along the A7 coast road: the Stupa. Looming above the sprawling town, this striking Buddhist temple was built 12 years ago, a reminder of Benalmadena's multicultural nature. The final project of Buddhist master Lopon Tsechu Rinpoche (another guiri), it was inaugurated in October 2003. At 33 metres tall, the Stupa is the largest of its kind in Europe and the peace and harmony it promotes is enhanced by the panoramic views of glistening Mediterranean waters lapping against the shores below.

Sugarcube

And if the temple leaves you feeling a tad too mellow, the Mariposario, or butterfly park, across the road will soon have you all-of-a-flutter. More than 1,500 exotic butterflies dwell within the walls of this Thai temple-cum-tropical paradise, flitting nonchalantly between waterfalls and windows, flowers and foliage. But don't linger too long, as there are other worlds to explore below, not least a pueblo to rival any in Andalusia with its enchanting, sugarcube houses and flower-filled streets. Standing 280 metres above sea level, Benalmadena Pueblo's tranquil exterior – clustered around Plaza de Espana – hides an attractive little village replete with great-value tapas bars and picturesque squares.

VILLAGE LIFE: Benalmadena Pueblo is as pretty as any in Andalusia

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LAND OF ADVENTURE: Bil Bil castle on the coast, a quirky statue and (inset) the cablecar to the mountain top and a bizarre roundabout decoration



But the highlight of any trip up to the village has to be the wonderfully bizarre castle, built just 22 years ago in honour of Christopher Columbus and the New World explorers.

Castillo de Colomares (pictured, page 17) would be at home in Disneyland with its fairytale turrets, but it was here that Doctor Esteban Martin, a talented amateur architect, erected his masterpiece.

A flight of Gothic, Byzantine, Romanesque and Mudejar fantasy, whose ornate towers and spires rise skyward like an illustration from a Grimms' fairy tale, the castle took seven years and many millions of pesetas to build.

A replica of one of Columbus' ships - the bow of the Pinta, jutting surreally from the walls - hints at the real reason for the existence of this curiosity.

Where you'll be rewarded with more than just spectacular views

It was inaugurated in 1992 by the last descendant of Columbus, with a mass held by a priest from Palos de la Frontera in Cadiz province, the port from which Columbus set sail.

Heading down from here, you arrive in Arroyo de Miel, a very different proposition where the action really starts to get going. A town in its own right, Arroyo boasts the coast's number one amusement park, Tivoli World, with some 40 rides and a whole variety of shows. Tivoli is one of the highlights of any trip to Benalmadena, whether the parents like it or not!

Unless they suffer from vertigo, they'll definitely prefer Benalmadena's most iconic tourist attraction, one that can be seen from miles around.

The Teleferico cable car ferries hundreds of people each day over the A7 and up to the peak of Mount Calamorro, where you'll be rewarded with more than just spectacular views. Various shows take place at the summit throughout the afternoon, including galloping horses and falconry displays.

It's fair to say that if you try out everything Arroyo has to offer, it will be days before you even make it down to breezy Benalmadena Costa.

This is the beating heart of the town, blossoming out from big beautiful La Paloma Park with

its endless gardens (all 20,000 square-metres of them) and scenic swan lakes which are home to many other visiting bird species.

An oasis at the centre of the metropolis, the park is a favourite with joggers and those who need to retreat a while from the racy pace of the paseo, Benalmadena's bar-lined seafront.

If you've got this far, it's definitely time for lunch. And for good food, great beaches and a buzzing atmosphere, the 2km seafront is right where it's at.

From Benal Beach to the port, an eclectic range of bars, restaurants, cafes and shops compete for your attention. With a coastline spanning almost 10km, there's a *playa* made to

measure for you and your family, whether you prefer quiet coves, sporty beaches, somewhere close to a chilled beer or even if you like to get naked on the naturist 'strip'!

Me? I prefer the one near the Arabic-style Bil Bil castle, its red walls flanked by cool fountains shimmering in the sun's rays. Built by a Frenchwoman in the 1930s, today it's the picturesque setting for concerts, exhibitions and weddings.

One place that is always busy is Minigolf Benalmadena, where manager Mark Tyndale, 28, is constantly on hand. "I love Benalmadena because it is so friendly," he says. "I've always lived here and it really feels like home."

Back from the beach, Calle Bonanza is the social hub. It's here, in the Lounge Bar, that the Guiri Army congregates to practice their chanting in sup-

After dark, a myriad of lights twinkle along the waterfront

port of Malaga FC. While, for the young and hip (but maybe not the parents), there is nowhere better than neighbouring Ibensa Square to spend a

sunny afternoon with friends in one of the many vibrant bars. But the jewel in Benalmadena's crown is, undoubtedly, Puerto Marina. There are many reasons why it has won the 'Best Marina in the World' award more than once.

Distinctive for its Moorish-style architecture, its minaret-shaped domes are so like swirls of Mr Whippy ice cream, they cry out to be topped with a Cadbury's Flake.

The serried ranks of designer boutiques, bars and restaurants cluster around artificial islands of apartments reached by oriental bridges and there's always an upbeat vibe.

By day the marina touts many tempting watersport options, from scuba diving to water skiing, dolphin cruises and glass bottom boat trips.

The restaurants in the port do a roaring trade day and night and you'll find some of the best places to eat fish here.

After dark, when a myriad of lights twinkle along the waterfront, and the trendy outdoor disco pubs pump up the volume, the port really struts its stuff.

The parents might not like that either but order them up another cocktail and they'll soon be dancing the night away 'til dawn.



CHARMING: The pueblo


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In the swing



Benalmadena offers a lot for golf lovers, writes Tom Powell

BENALMADENA is blessed with six of the best golf courses on the coast.

The balmy temperature, great transport links and beautiful scenery make the surrounding area perfect for a round of golf.

It even boasts one of the *grand dames* of the Spanish game, Torrequebrada, which opened way back in 1976.

A more recent star of the show is Benalmadena Golf, which teed off 10 years ago, but has matured into a wonderful course for beginners and experienced golfers alike.

Professional

The 9-hole pitch and putt course, embellished with lakes and waterfalls, also offers one of Benalmadena's top-quality restaurants, Baboo, with its hip outdoor ter-



PERFECT SETTING: The course at Benalmadena Golf

aces and creative international menu.

The Benalmadena Golf president explains: "Our course is brilliant for families and complete novices as well as experienced golfers who want a quick game."

"It is easily accessible from the main road with 150 park-

ing spaces.

"We are also very proud of our excellent golf school with three professional teachers and floodlit practice area."

"And after a class or a round of golf, Baboo restaurant is the perfect place to relax with a drink or meal and enjoy the sea views."

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Wet and wild!



SEALIFE has been wowing visitors with its mesmerising marine life for two decades and the marina-based expo of ocean oddities is still growing. The best walk-through underwater park on the Costa del Sol, it is the stand-out attraction in Benalmadena's incredible range of wildlife wonders. An entry ticket takes visitors on a spectacular stroll along the seabed - no oxygen tanks required - to view aquatic species from the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans as well as the Red Sea. It is a fascinating voyage of discovery through the habitats of starfish, stingrays, seahorses and many other exotic species. Selwo Marina is another of Benalmadena's magical marine attractions, home to dolphins, sea lions, penguins, turtles,

Sealife turns 20 this year as Benalmadena continues to make an almighty splash with its attractions

piranhas and tortoises as well as parrots, reptiles, scary tarantulas and other terrestrial creatures. Visitors can swim with the sea lions, alive with dolphins, explore a forest of squirrel monkeys, or sit back and enjoy a display of exotic birds from around the world. If you like crocs, meanwhile, head over to the Crocodile Park, where there are over 200 of them, including Big Daddy; weighing in at a terrify-

OCEAN ADVENTURE: Benalmadena's Sealife is a tunnel of fun, while (inset) dolphins at Selwo



ing 600kg; the largest croc in Europe. Benalmadena's unexpected menagerie is completed by the Butterfly Park, up by the Buddhist Stupa, while in Parque de La Paloma, you will find ostriches, turtles, goats, brightly-

plumed peacocks and all kinds of birds and waterfowl strolling around.

A journey to the top of the world



OPEN WIDE: Croc park

IT is a journey that will never be forgotten... and on a clear day you can see Africa from the top of the Teleférico in Benalmadena. The 800 metre ride from Arroyo de la Miel lasts 15 minutes, taking visitors up to the top of Mount Calamorro in the Sierra de Mijas - the highest part of Benalmadena - to a spot offering spectacular views of the town, the coast and beyond. Opened in 2000, the Teleférico has become one of the main attractions in the town. There are three kilometres of well-signposted hiking trails, leaving from the top, and arriving at various viewpoints. It is also possible to spot hawks, eagles and vultures from the peak. The cable car runs from 11am to 7pm throughout May and June, though it is closed in high winds. It is open for longer in the spring and summer.

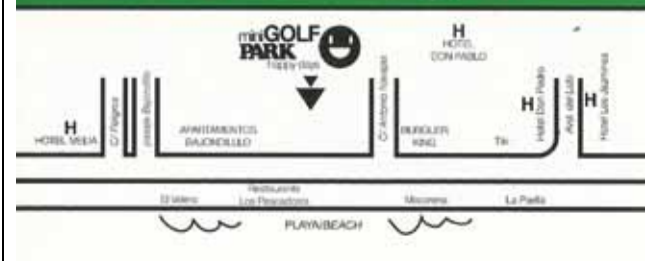


DON'T LOOK DOWN: Cable car

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PROUD: Garcia values Benalmadena's 30% expat population very highly

Mother on a mission

The Olive Press meets mum-of-two Paloma Garcia Galvez, Benalmadena's PP mayor, who is dreaming big for the town's future

A NEW theatre, a new train station and a €15 million access project for Arroyo de la Miel... these are just three of the exciting projects planned for Benalmadena this year. "There's a lot on our plate," explains mayor Paloma Garcia Galvez, who is keeping her fingers crossed for a successful re-election campaign in the local elections next month. "We're planning to remodel the Paseo Marítimo in Torrequebrada, reform Plaza Ole, and do a lot lot more," she adds. It's certainly been an exciting couple of years since the Madrid mother-of-two was elected as mayor of the town, after a vote of no-confidence for the previous mayor. Teetotal and committed to the town, Garcia moved to Benalmadena as a child in the 1970s from the capital when her father got a job at Torrequebrada casino. Now, after a career in law, she has come back full circle to serve her town. And it is fair to say that Benalmadena has evolved staggeringly fast over the last decade, from a quiet village to a bustling

tourist hotspot. Garcia really believes in the riches of Benalmadena, insisting it offers the best concentration of attractions and entertainment for families in southern Europe. From considerably reducing the town hall's debt to implementing a new NIE and DNI office, the latest plan she has brought in is to benefit dozens of struggling businesses. On top of this, a separate employment strategy is set to help around 400 local families. Above all she really values her expats, speaking good English herself having studied in the UK and also sending her two children to bilingual schools. "Our expat population is incredibly important, 123 different nationalities make up over 30% of the population and this diversity makes us so much richer," she says. Garcia continues: "I would urge anyone who hasn't signed onto the Padron to do so as it has so many benefits. And for non-residents - just come and see our marvellous town as we'll welcome you with open arms."

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All about Benalmadena and Torremolinos

HAPPY: Some of the successful Sunset Beach team



Swingin' and winnin'

IT is 1.30am in the wee hours of Tuesday morning when I creep down to Sunset Beach Hotel's Moonlight show bar expecting to find everyone asleep and the cleaner doing a whirl.

It is early April, after all, and the season is not yet in full swing. However waltzing (and whirling, for that matter) is much more the operative word here, as the place turns out to be packed, mostly with a group, 100-strong of jivers.

They are spinning around the dancefloor and having a whale of a time... and like a lot about Sunset Beach, it is infectious. Without a doubt, one of the true success stories of the recession on the Costa del Sol, the Benalmadena Costa hotel is buzzing. Occupation is up yet again this year (having seen a six per cent rise last year) and this institution is catering for 1,900 guests in peak season - and rarely under 1,000 at any time of the year.

And is it any wonder, with the amount of facilities and activities on offer, including aerobics, cookery and Spanish classes all year round, not to mention billiards, live music and power walking. And then come the weddings, with



around two dozen in September alone.

"We get over 80 a year and starting at €5,400 (40 guests) we think that is terrific value," explains manager Mark Wardell. It doesn't seem much. But, of course, by the time you have factored in the guests rooms, their meals and mini-bar tabs (the majority are Irish, after all), it becomes a profitable business for the hotel.

Sitting on a fantastic headland next to two lovely beaches, it is perhaps no surprise that Sunset has continued to grow for the last seven years.

An incredibly well-run ship, the hotel - one of the biggest on the Costa del Sol - consistently delivers to

With an incredible range of facilities, activities, dance groups and shows, it is no surprise that Sunset Beach Club is one of the Costa del Sol's most successful hotels, writes Jon Clarke

holidaymakers from all around the world... over 50 different nationalities this year so far! And it definitely does not scrimp on food, entertainment - or indeed on its fantastic rooms - having spent a whopping €22m upgrading its facilities since the Millennium.

Without a doubt the price/quality level is one of the best in Spain and the food in all three restaurants is excellent. Locals rave about the live concerts which are free to expats, as well as the fantastic pool and playground area for kids. But there is so much more, when you factor in the supermarket, a hairdresser and nails specialist, not to mention numerous trips, events and classes.

"This is one of the best places to take the kids for a weekend as you will literally not get bothered at all. There is so much for them to do," said one local expat.

I was particularly impressed with the excellent Boyd's Gym, owned by a local brother and sister team, which has been running for two decades and has loads of train-

ing courses, zumba, cardio combat... and even an osteopath and masseur on hand to pamper your every need! There is a Padi dive school by the pool, where you can learn how to dive in a great value day's beginners course, which ends up looking at fish around the nearby rocky headland. "My ideal guest never leaves the premises and is never in need of anything," explains Dubliner Wardell. "Security and safety would always be our number one priority but on a day to day basis from the moment the cleaning team moves in at 2am to the last bar closing at 4 am our real job is to

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There is a lot going on at Sunset Beach and the statistics speak for themselves. The 554 rooms and communal areas are looked after by a team of up to 69 cleaners, who process a staggering 450,000 kilos of laundry every year! The food and beverage team meanwhile counts 71 staff who work tirelessly in the various outlets from a la carte dining, poolside snacks, lobby/cocktail bar, beach bar, beach club, show rooms and banqueting. Then there are 14 'animation' girls and guys whose sole purpose is to make young and old guests alike have a fun-packed visit.





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Where world

Rob Horgan discovers a transformed Torremolinos, the Spanglish, sun-kissed spiritual home of the Costa del Sol package holiday



PIN-UP resort of the package holiday in the 1950s, home to a multitude of international expats and one of Europe's top gay scenes, like a fine wine Torremolinos just gets better by the year.

The town where Frank Sinatra famously got himself arrested - and fined 25,000 pesetas - over a brawl with paparazzi in 1964 hasn't looked back since those heady early days when sexy Swedes hit the beaches in their topless hoards and even covering up in a full bikini was likely to land you in one of Franco's jails.

What a difference a few decades make! Today you'll find a much more exciting town, one that has always led where other resorts followed, never afraid to be itself.

Indeed, celebrated journalist Mark Jones includes Torremolinos in his list of the '50 Most Authentic Places in the World' for *British Airways' High Life Magazine*.

Jones singles out its effortless blend of fishing village mixed with modern resort while re-

not just for a two-week holiday, but to live and enjoy the life-style permanently.

In many parts of town you can hear more English spoken than Spanish, and even French, Dutch and Scandinavian in this cosmopolitan Babel. Belgians too - anyone heard the one-hit-wonder Stella's upbeat song, *Torremolinos*, which charted in 2008?

Behind the seafront tourist strip, British home comforts are all on offer: fish and chip shops, a Rose and Crown pub... there's even a carvery.

However, Torremolinos has not forsaken its Spanish roots. For every Irish pub, there are two chiringuitos; for every fish and

designer stores.

And behind its 20th century facelift, it is not hard to find the vestiges of the fishing village that once was.

Make your way uphill to the outskirts of town and you'll catch whispers of those former days. Around the Plaza de Toros (bullring) I watched children play among a fleet of rotting old fishing boats, not quite forgotten but pushed to one side.

The town has embraced its transformation rather than dwelling on its past.

Squares like Plaza de Espana and Plaza Federico Garcia Lorca in the historic quarter feel authentically Spanish, and locals still predominate in the

The Parque de la Bateria, to the west, provides spectacular views from a series of miradors, while the botanical gardens to the north showcase the area's timeless natural bounties.

If you s... an anti... crisis w... lived lik... Beast, ... warp.

The attraction of a home-away-from-home brings thousands of tourists to the area

maintaining 'comfortable within its own skin', dismissing the 'Carling and chips image as only fake-tan deep'.

Nestled in the foothills of the Mijas mountains, Torremolinos is a unique mesh of cultures, not quite Spanish, not quite English, not even Spanglish any more.

The transformation from seaside hamlet to holiday resort superstar began in the 1950s when the first jumbo charter flights from northern Europe hit the runway at Malaga airport.

With its large, modern hotels and cheap deals, Blackpool and Brighton were quickly forgotten as everyone was off to sunny Spain.

Come the 1960s, fishermen were outnumbered by hotels and the future of the Costa del Sol was sealed. '*Una paloma blanca!*'

Other resorts couldn't wait to copy the trend. An Irish bar, next to a tapas restaurant, next to a souvenir shop, squeezed between two high-rise hotels with sea views became the blueprint for the rest of the Costa del Sol.

The rebirth of Torremolinos has arguably impacted modern-day Spain as deeply as the Civil War or the death of Franco.

Today, the attraction of a home-away-from-home brings thousands of tourists to the area,

Shhh! It's a secret

A BRAND new magic show, The Chamber of Secrets is on its way to Torremolinos.

Opening in May, World Championship of magic winner Matthew Wright will be joined by singing sensation Alarna Love and very special guests from around the world.

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But now, in this two-and-a-half-hour, English-language, all inclusive show, their secrets will be revealed.

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chip shop, three or four tapas bars.

The melting pot of people is reflected in the mix of restaurants. The blend is a 'best-of-both-worlds' compromise which encapsulates the duality of the area.

A walk down bustling Calle San Miguel - trodden barefoot by French bombshell Brigitte Bardot many years ago - reveals a liquorice allsorts of local shops and tapas bars sitting comfortably between British pubs and

cafe bars here.

The town's numerous ferias spread throughout the year are another reminder that the Spanish population still has a huge say in what goes. September's vibrant Feria de San Miguel attracts a cosmopolitan crowd of thousands precisely because of its unmistakably Andalusian character.

Remove yourself from the hustle and bustle of the coast and there are other flavours of former times to be found.

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...s collide



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...to the male midlife...
...with the promise of a life...
...like Ray Winstone in Sexy...
...you're living in a time

In fact, the balance between native and settler demonstrates a harmonious cohabitation which has rarely been so successfully replicated.

With its eternal ability to accept new customs and adapt, trend-setting Torremolinos will continue to attract Spaniards, Brits and half the world and his wife for years to come.

AUTHENTIC:
Down to Earth Torremolinos is full of history

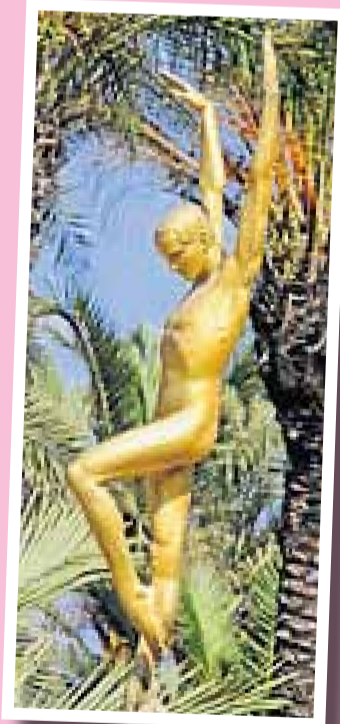
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LGBT-ers from around the world are flocking to splurge a rainbow of currencies in Spain's gay capital, as Rob Horgan reports

and he was forced to turn a blind-eye. It was another first for the pioneer of package tours in Spain, and Torremolinos soon became known as the home of the 'pink peseta'. Today the resort proudly flaunts its officially-designated gay beaches. The one in front of the popular El Gato Lounge is a clear favourite, identifiable by its large rainbow flag and groin-to-groin line-up of mainly male sun worshippers. Off the beach, the gay social scene centres on the La Nogalera complex in the heart of the town, where gay bars sit cheek by jowl with family restaurants and hetero haunts, a symbol of the town's liberal attitude. Given the 'macho' reputation of Spanish culture, many first-time LGBT visitors are surprised at the warm welcome from locals. And why not? Tradesfolk have these tourists to thank for their livelihoods. Beyond the packed nightclubs and visible renovations, the town has been working hard to draw international business people into its gay scene. In 2010, Torremolinos debuted its now annual Expo Gay, which brought more than 15,000 visitors and 180 exhibitors to the town over three days. Last year, the resort hosted its first International Day of Transvestism during the now iconic Gay Pride celebrations.

This year's outrageous four-day extravaganza, held at the end of July, is set to be even bigger and better, as it marks a decade since civil partnerships were legalised in Spain. The gay capital of the coast is determined to hold on to its title and keep reinventing itself. Torremolinos has gone beyond pink. Today its violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red - all seven colours of the LGBT rainbow.



VIBRANT:
Torre's gay scene



Harleys for hire



OWNING a Harley Davidson is every biker's fantasy but out of the price range for many. However, for the last three years the guys at Iron Skull Motorcycles have been making those Easy Rider dreams come true. One of the Costa del Sol's only Harley hire shops, the wheel deal suddenly becomes more affordable for all. From as little as €150 a day, you can feel the thrill of one of these superbikes throbbing between your thighs. Roar off into the sunset and make the dust fly on the backroads of Andalucia like never before. The authorised dealership hires bikes of varying sizes and pedigree, including scooters for more sedate drivers and can find parts and accessories and also sells new and second-hand bikes. They can even help you keep the noise down with silencers that use Kesstech Legal Sound Performance technology. Find Iron Skull on Avda Carlota Alessandri, 146, and you'll be ready to hit the road.

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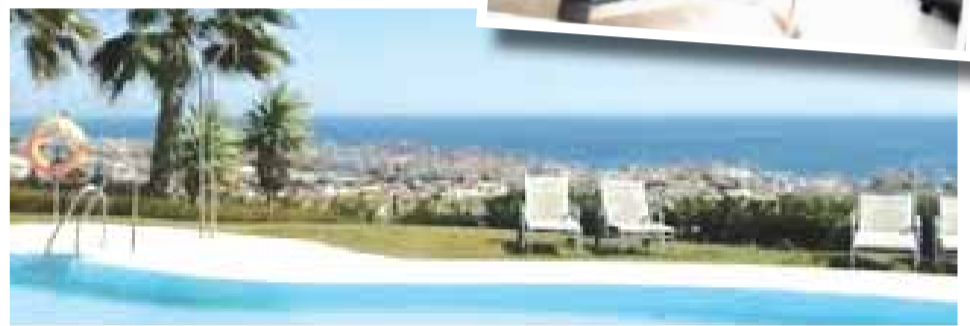
We love it here! Our last home was in the country and we was limited in life, now I can do everything and anything knowing I have great people watching over us that really do care.

Mr & Mrs C

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Mr P

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Seminal 1970s book *The Drifters* put Torremolinos on the world party map

The sex revolution

SANDS OF CHANGE: Torremolinos was the place to be in the 1970s

HEDONISM, hippydom and Harry's Bar made the world go round for expat pioneers forging the Costa del Sol's new 'permissive society'. And nowhere was this better portrayed than in *The Drifters*, James Michener's evocative 1970s portrait of the coast during the sexual revolution. It came despite the stranglehold that dictator Francisco Franco had over the country. Hand in hand with the Catholic church, bikinis were illegal - as were all forms of sexual freedom and contraceptives. But then came the masses - with American war veteran Harry Hubert in the vanguard. The inspiration for 'Joe', the main character in Michener's seminal novel, Harry owned a bar in Torremolinos described by friends today as 'the former heart of the Costa del Sol'. This was party HQ; the hippest bar in Spain, if not southern Europe, a forerunner to the fornications we see in Ibiza today. Harry's Bar, in still-chaste Spain, became a haven for pot-smoking, LSD-tripping travellers, a place to hear the latest sounds from London and California and meet enough Scandinavian girls to bed two at a time, a skill philanderer Harry was famous for. Up until this point, courting had been a strictly Spanish affair; which meant hanging



around in the street, trying to catch a glimpse of your potential sweetheart through barred windows (*rejas*). There was no chance of sex before marriage but, if you were lucky, you could have a sexy conversation with the girl of your fantasies. The arrival of the first Swedish package tourists - along with the Germans, Dutch and, later, Brits - changed everything. Girls went all the way, cast-

ing aside their inhibitions, and guys lapped it up. The science behind the sexual scene is brilliantly conveyed in the *New York Times* bestseller, which introduces us to a close-knit group of youngsters who enjoy bed-hopping and 'sexperimentation'. At one sex party in the hills above Torremolinos, a gay expat Brit pays Afro-American Cato Jackson to spend time at his house, naked, purely to indulge his fetish for voyeurism. With money pouring in from this new tourism, it 'paid' the authorities to turn a blind eye to the louche liberalism, with one exception, as Michener notes. Long-haired hippies were packed off home.

Night on the town

THOUSANDS of visitors splash their cash at the largest marina in Andalucia, which boasts berths for over 1000 yachts, each year.

Whether it is a romantic meal, drinks with friends, live music or bopping 'til you drop, the port has it all.

Away from the waterfront, the aptly-named Bonanza Square also buzzes with the partying hordes during the season and at weekends in winter. Then there is nowhere quite like '24-hour Square', so-called because the party never stops! If you like a little sporting action, show off your pool and dart skills at the Beer Garden. The darts team play in a Spanish league and are the only Brits ever to win it. Players have even been scouted to represent Andalucia and the pool team, now in its 11th year, has toured Spain, playing as far afield as Barcelona.

Drifters excerpts:

Come to Torre!

'The travel agency advert showed a life-size Scandinavian girl in a swimsuit standing beside an ancient stone windmill, overlooking the Med. Only three words appeared on the poster, but they carried a mighty impact: 'Come to Torremolinos'.

Never refuse sex

'He told us there were five rules for successful travel. Never eat in any restaurant called Mom's. Never play poker with anyone called Doc. Get your laundry done at every opportunity. Never refuse sex.'

Lose the calendar

'Torremolinos is an obligation,' the girl told her as they sat in the bright spring air that filled the sidewalk. It's the only place I recommend, and since it's a short trip, we don't make much money on it. The boss asked me, 'Can't you bring yourself to like Crete?' and I told him, 'I'll like Crete when I'm as old as you are.'

'In Torremolinos there are few disappointments' the girl said, 'because there's music and the beach and young people who have lost the calendar.'

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All about **B**enalmadena and **T**orremolinos

Back on track

Demand for property in Benalmadena has shot up in recent years, writes Tom Powell

PERFECTLY located for the airport and the city of Malaga, not to mention great facilities and beaches, it is little wonder the Benalmadena property market is buoyant right now. Indeed, the past three years have seen a real upturn in the local property market.

Prices have not just stabilised, but they are on the up, coupled with demand to live in what has become one of the Costa del Sol's most sought after locations. Homes are now selling for between 30 to 40% more than they were in 2012, according to local agent Hans Friederici, boss of the Viva Estates office in the town.

South African Friederici, who has worked in Costa del Sol property since 1986, believes the town's excellent infrastructure is to thank for



FULL STEAM AHEAD: Benalmadena's train station makes it popular with expats according to estate agent Hans Friederici (right)



the increasing demand. "It is a complete town in itself and very close to the airport," he explains. "It is also a real bonus having the railway station here taking you straight to the airport as well as Malaga." On top of this, he insists, sellers are being much more realistic these days about pricing their homes. "Before the crisis, properties were valued much higher than they were actually worth," he says. Three years ago there was a typical drop of about 30%

between the asking price and the final acceptance, but that drop is now only about 6%, he adds, a clear indicator of the progress made. The town has something for everyone with 'unlimited family fun' on offer as well as infamous 24 hour partying for adults who want to let their hair down, and more grown-up areas for when the oldies want some alone time. "The market here is definitely in a good moment, it is not like the heady days I remember years ago, but it has im-

proved vastly," says Hans. "The golden area right now is anything within about ten minutes' walk of the paseo maritimo," he adds. Viva, which has a great central office by the beachfront and windmill roundabout, has been in business on the Costa del Sol for 18 years. It now boasts 14 separate offices in total up and down the coast.

Visit www.yourviva.com and email at hans.friederici@yourviva.com



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NERVE CENTRE FOR THE 'GUIRI ARMY'



DIE-HARD FANS: Malaga FC's Guiri Army

THROUGH the highs and lows of the last 20 years, Malaga Football Club has enjoyed the unlikely – and truly devoted – support of a group of British expats: the legendary 'Guiri Army'.

And the man behind it all is Benalmadena-based expat Dave Redshaw, who also wrote the first Malaga FC history book. The 40-strong supporters club essentially began with a bus, which Dave organised to take fans to games from the Lounge Bar.

Nowadays a decent crowd of tourists and expats meet every matchday to prepare for the ensuing match.

A billowing Guiri Army flag makes it obvious where the crowd sit in La Rosaleda stadium, alongside battalions of Spanish supporters, united in a simple desire for goals.

"We're all mates," explains Dave. "We all support Malaga and they love the Guiri Army."

And if proof were needed, the ritual rousing round of 'Oh Malaga is wonderful' should do the trick.

Champions League semi-final or a lower-league scrap, the Guiri Army will keep their corner of the Rosaleda alive and kicking for many decades to come.

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All about Benalmadena and Torremolinos

High steaks

WHEN it comes to staking your money on a meaty treat, look no further than Longhorn Restaurant, in Benalmadena Pueblo.

The incredibly popular Sunday and Monday BBQ recently celebrated its first birthday.

From 1pm-10pm on Sunday and from 6.30pm on Monday, you can eat as much as you like for €16.50, including a great range of meats, mixed salad and a baked potato.

With a beefed-up kitchen team, the restaurant is now open every evening from 6:30pm.

But the dish to get every meat-lover's juices flowing is the speciality 'dry-aged' steaks.

Hung for between 21 and 28 days at 1°C and at 60% humidity, the meat's flavour subtly deepens due to enzyme activity.

Only cows older than eight and reared exclusively on pasture are selected for these cuts, and the result is a world-class full-flavoured steak, big enough for up to three to share.

Meanwhile, the sixth 'steak tasting day' is set for May 16, from 1.30pm - 5pm, with eight different meats and various wines available for sampling. At just €20, that's something to get your teeth into!

Visit www.longhorn-del-sol.com or www.facebook.com/LonghornPueblo

Top tucker



HIP: Baboo and (inset) squid dish

Benalmadena and Torremolinos have finally got a dining scene of which to be proud, writes Jon Clarke

ASIDE from counting on its first award-winning chef Diego Gallegos, of Sollo, who recently became 'Spain's best young chef' at **Madrid Fusion** (see review on page 45), Benalmadena has a superb mix of international and Spanish restaurants. One of the most romantic must be **Blankko**, sitting on an incredible headland by one of the old defensive forts in Torremuelle.

Set up by a pair of capable Iranian businessmen, you sit overlooking the sea, with stylish white tables and an exciting menu.

Overseen by executive chef Amador Fernandez, there are plenty of creative flourishes,

such as the caesar salad served in a crunchy case and a delicious squid salad with fennel.

Another stylish place to eat is at **Baboo**, up in the hills beside Benalmadena golf, where you can eat an excellent value set lunch, which includes dishes such as stuffed squid in their ink and a delicious seared tuna with fresh tomatoes.

You sit on a choice of wonderful terraces with views down to the sea or into the pine-decked mountains, or inside in the

cool, airy dining room.

Nearby, the excellent wine bar **Jaque Mate** has over 100 references and many by the glass, and some tasty tapas to boot. This bustling spot, popular with Spanish and expats alike, is a great place to watch the world go by at both lunch and dinner time.

Down on the coast, a surprisingly good place to eat is at the **Sunset Beach Club hotel**, which has its extremely popular restaurant Luna Beach club sitting right on the sand.

baboo

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An amazing location, the chef serves up great value fresh food seven days a week. Up in the Pueblo there are some fantastic places to eat, with the surefire winner being steakhouse **Longhorn**, run by the capable Claus and with an excellent and varied menu (see sidebar, left). Another top gem is fabulous Italian **Pala d'oro**, which is set around a patio and with a cool, stylish interior.



Hosts Sandro and chef Mateo Manzato, from Venice, have a great repertoire and you will love the gnocchi stuffed with courgette and a natural goats cheese Asiago, especially imported from Italy, while the speck ham with rocket and walnuts and a balsamic sauce had



SMILES: At Cervezateca, Jaque Mate and Vintage 8

just the right balance. Finally, as mentioned, if you are looking for genuinely award-winning food you will have to head to **Sollo**, at La Reserva de Higueron, soon to become a Hilton, where culinary genius Diego Gallegos, 31, (pictured, below) hones his trade.

Terrific Torre

One of the most exciting food revolutions is quietly taking place meanwhile in nearby Torremolinos. Buoyed by the pink pound and the proximity to Malaga city, it is little surprise that there is a superb range of quality tapas joints and surprisingly good restaurants. In particular, look out for **Taberna Mansiega**, where tradition has been truly turned upside down! Roberto and Charlie have created a venue that welcomes food and wine lovers equally. There is great tapas with a twist and a menu featuring the freshest seafood, quality meats and fusion food to engage the palate. There is also a great wine cellar featuring over 50 different wines and champagnes. You must also check out Vin-

tage 8, an arty restaurant which is doing great business just off the beach. The owner Ben, a Moroccan, who trained in France, has a passion to bring art and gastronomy together and the place is full of original paintings and other artworks. It is perhaps little surprise, he being the son of a composer and with a brother as an opera singer. Last, but not least, if you fancy a beer, a proper one, then you need to visit **Cervezateca**. A genuine joy to the world of beer, Belgian Stefan has a menu of over 100 beers and a beer bible to understand them. Each drink has a unique glass and an education can be offered. Think of Stefan as your sommelier of the humble brew and, even better, bring your own food, to eat on the terrace outside in the sun.



SUBLIME: Dish and location at Blankko

Like a whirlwind

WITH two bar/restaurants, a property company and a business promoting musicians on the coast, Katrina Bradley fits a fair bit into her week. "I'm a bit like Hurricane Katrina, a little unstoppable," explains the 54-year-old human whirlwind, who's living proof that the words 'expat' and 'success' can mix. Now the proud owner of recently opened Bar Nevada, as well as Woodies, she is shaping up for a busy season. "I've done a load of differ-

ent things but now I am really focused on the restaurants. I have a real passion for food and I think that is what has made it a success." The Glaswegian was a teenager when she moved to Benalmadena in 1980, and has since married a Spaniard and brought up three daughters. "When I first arrived 35 years ago it was very quiet. Even the beaches were empty," she says. "Seeing it go from nothing to how it is today has been incredible, like watching a child grow." She worked at the Sunset



SUCCESS: Katrina

Beach hotel when it first opened two decades ago and has also volunteered for years with Age Concern. "I will always be here, everybody knows me for a workaholic and I don't plan to go anywhere soon!"

BAR NEVADA

Katrina from Peacocks has relocated to Bar Nevada in front of Bonanza square.

Still serving excellent food. Serving breakfast & bar snacks from 10am

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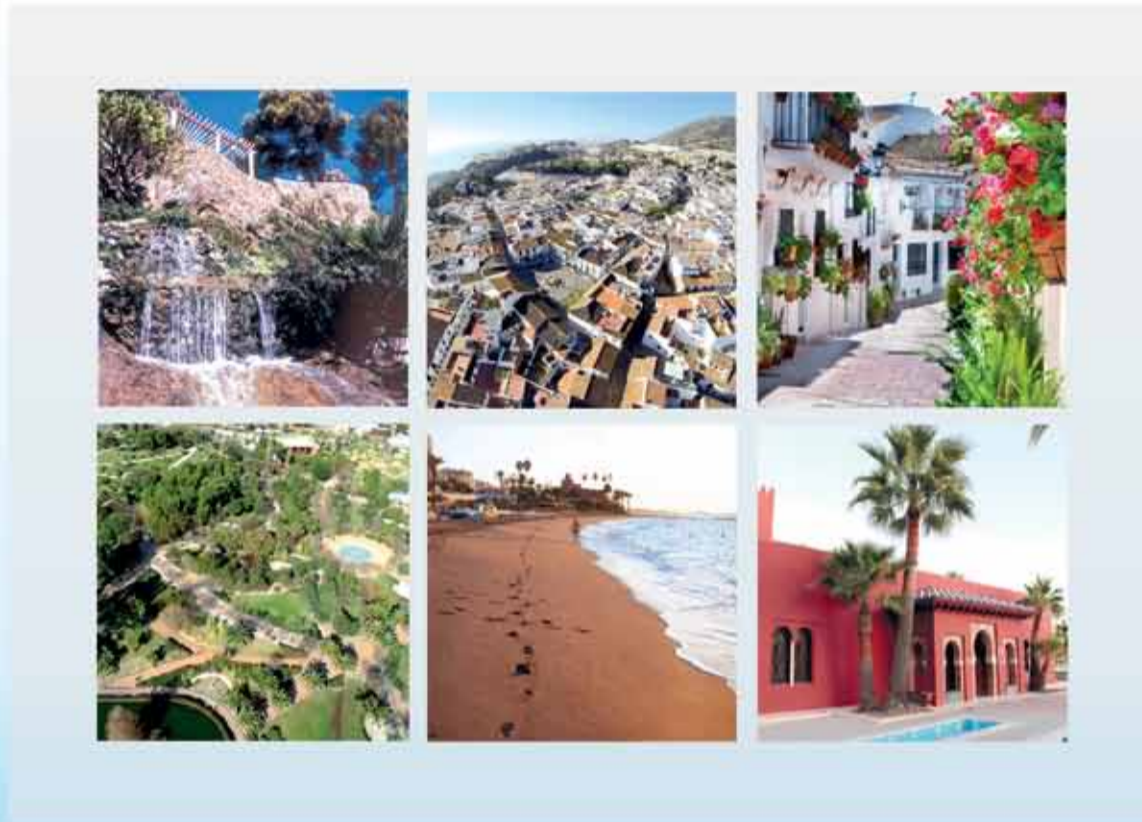
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