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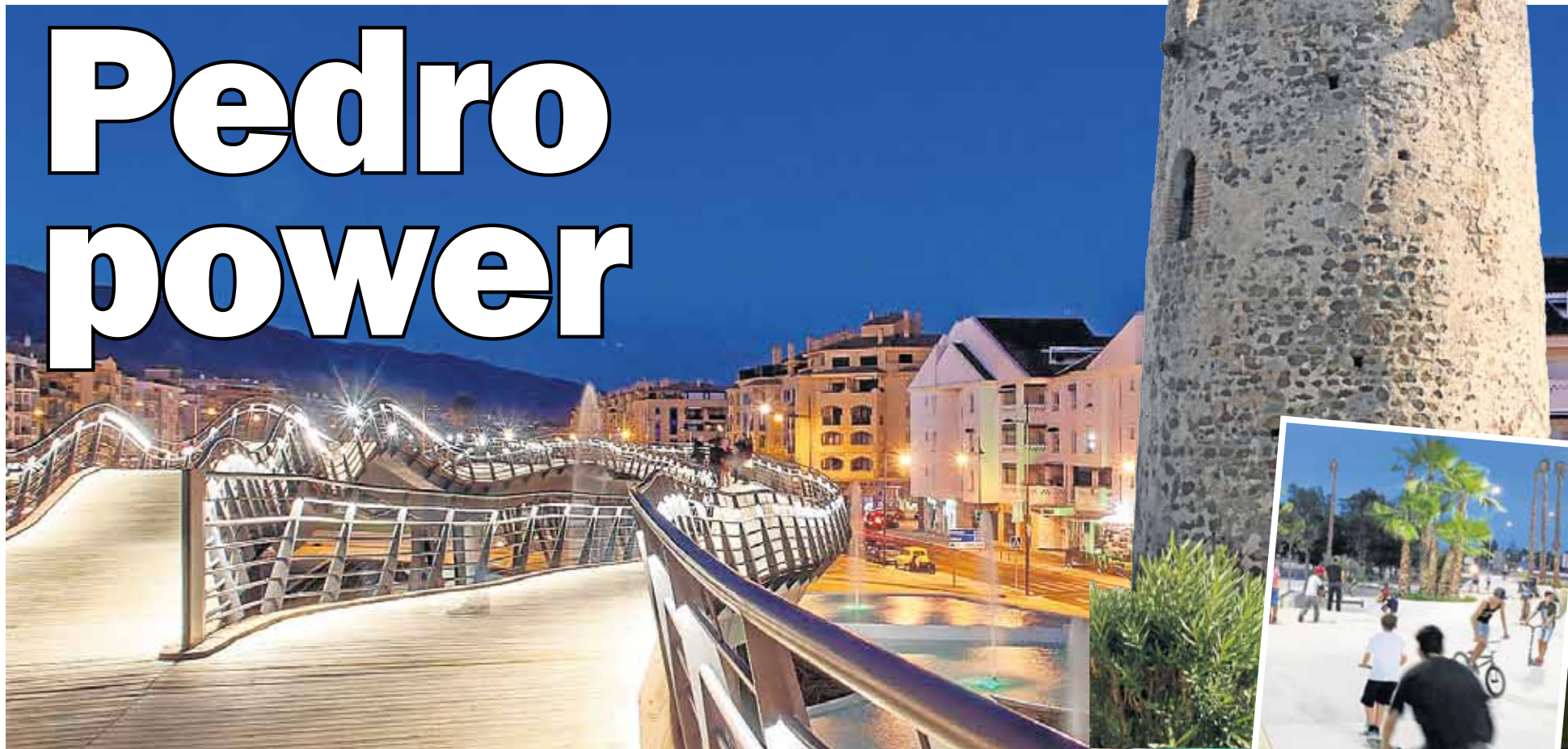
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Vol. 9 Issue 224 www.theolivepress.es

October 15th - October 28th 2015

Pedro power



HISTORIC CROSSROADS: San Pedro's boulevard leading the way, while new skatepark (right) and tower

Once the 'squeezed middle' between Marbella's seductive glitz and Estepona's arty edge, San Pedro de Alcantara is pushing to take centre stage in its own right, writes Joe Duggan

THERE are five towns called San Pedro in Spain but there's only one San Pedro de Alcantara. And now the town that has hid its light under a bushel for so long is standing up to be counted.

Not content to remain one of the Costa del Sol's hidden gems, the 35,000-strong municipality crouched in the Serranía de Ronda's foothills is stepping boldly into the future and carving a name that is glittering as brightly as either of its illustrious neighbours.

The tree-lined promenades and outdoor spaces offer a refined brand of tranquility and the town has retained a strong Spanish core that has been lost by other coastal resorts.

For motorists speeding along the A7, San Pedro may be most synonymous with the tunnel burrowing beneath it. But instead of going underground, it's well worth 'going over the top' to explore this fascinating corner of the Costa del Sol.

In fact, the tunnel is part of a project of urban improvement that is hoisting San Pedro's profile high. Its completion - after a tortuous five-year gestation - has shaved valuable time off the local commute and opened up access to the town.

"What we like about San Pedro is it is still very Spanish," said Hostal Plaza owner Karen Wynn.

"It still feels like Spain, although we have lots of international restaurants. They are spending a lot of money on the town and we have returning guests who say how much they can see things improving."

The most striking manifestation of these improvements rises before you as you pull off the motorway. San Pedro's elevated iron walkway feels like a bold statement of intent.

The walkway weaves over cool, clear pools of water, lifting San Pedro's citizens

Part of the €6 million boulevard project that has been completed this year, the walkway weaves over cool, clear pools of water, lifting San Pedro's citizens up and offering a first-rate view of the area's most prominent mountain, La Concha.

This new communal space is hugely popular and a testament to good civic planning that is putting Sampedrenas first.

"The boulevard is fantastic," says Anne McArthur, treasurer of San Pedro's Art Club.

"The facilities for children are amazing. San Pedro is really up and coming and the boulevard is bustling in the evening, when it used to look quite rundown.

No surprises with six play areas, a skate park, an 800-capacity amphitheatre and synthetic skating rink. As Marbella's new mayor Jose Bernal tells *the Olive Press*: "It has been an amazing civic project and San Pedro is now a very stand alone town, in charge of plenty of its own decision making."

"When the so-called Guadaiza Plan - next to the Ronda road - starts to come together it is going to further revolutionize the place."

The huge area of development that sits alongside the Guadaiza river is set to have a series of private projects, including a shopping centre, hospital and even a university.

"There will also be plenty of entertainment for families and kids and we envisage the first projects being finished within the next couple of years."

This spirit of renewal has long been woven into San Pedro's DNA.

General Manuel Gutierrez de la Concha, the Marques del Duero, purchased the barren colony in 1857. With malaria scything through the local populace and poor irrigation from the surrounding Guadalmína, Guadaiza and Guadalmansa rivers, the Marques introduced a

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Working together in harmony

From previous page

series of innovative agricultural reforms including a training school for local farm workers, bridges, dams and state-of-the-art agricultural machinery. His statue stands next to the old town, keeping paternalistic vigil over San Pedro, first foot forward with his back to Marbella. The old general's positioning may cause Sampedrenos to smile wryly. The two neighbouring towns enjoy a friendly rivalry that has even led to

competitive cocktails - the Marbella and the San Pedro, both unveiled last month. And the plucky civic upstart has been shaking things up for big sister Marbs in other ways.

In Marbella's corridors of power, San Pedro's own separatist political party, Opcion Sampedrena (OSP) is dogtightly fighting the town's corner.

OSP, born in 2006, has lobbied unsuccessfully for years for San Pedro to cede from Marbella Town Hall.

They became 'kingmakers' this summer after the election of two OSP

trim command the Plaza de la Iglesia. The triple-arched naves inside the church withstood a fire during the madness of the Civil War and the building's enduring elegance and design are another legacy of the Marques del Duero's reign. ('No mobiles inside,' the front entrance sign sternly commands. 'God doesn't use them'.)

In the evening, the young and the old of San Pedro congregate on shaded benches around the statue of St Peter, and the square bustles with a market on Saturdays.

A long, winding pathway leads walkers through this airy, open space

Strike north from the old town, through the industrial estate, to reach the wide expanses of the Parque de los Tres Jardines. A long, winding pathway leads walkers through this airy, open space under the gaze of La Concha's vertiginous peak.

If you're feeling the heat, a trip to San Pedro's Wakeboard Centre will cool you down and re-energise you too, as the taut cable propels you, body and board, through the water.

Those yearning for the more briny carress of the Mediterranean should head south along the shady Avenida del Mediterraneo which sweeps down towards that vast blue expanse.

The land between the boulevard and the

sea was vacant until the 1990s. Today the impressive array of recent developments include a world-renowned paddle and tennis club that hosts international tournaments.

The beach's long golden strip stretches on towards Puerto Banus. Parallel to it, the Avenida del Mediterraneo fans out along the front, providing a catwalk for locals and tourists strolling arm in arm, or stopping off for a drink at one of the the waterfront chiringuitos.

The beachfront also reveals clues to the presence of less recent visitors - Roman baths, dating from the third century, which has withstood the ravages of time thanks to its compound structure of lime mortar, sand and pebbles. Next to them, a 16th century watchtower looks out towards the passing boats and water skiers.

Set back from the waterfront action, you'll also find relics of a 6th century Paleo-Christian burial site, the Vega del Mar, unearthed in the 1930s.

Walking along the beachfront, you can see why San Pedro's forefathers chose this spot as their final resting place. The Mediterranean laps against the shore, couples amble along the wide paseo and fishermen's cabins huddle next to boats that ferry fresh sardines to beachside restaurants.

As the shadows lengthen and the street lamps begin to twinkle, head to Calle Marques del Duero, the old town's main drag, where everyone meets up after work for drinks and tapas.

Those looking for more hearty sustenance are well-served by the burgeoning local restaurant scene. And with San Pedro's Feria the last one of the year on Spain's action-packed fiesta calendar, the town really does have the final word on fun.

STATUESQUE: In main square



SWEET: The old sugar mill



AMAZING PROJECT: Mayor Bernal with Olive Press interview



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While there are some fabulous vegan dishes, such as the remarkable raw Maki sushi (left), with cauliflower, carrots, avocado and wasabi, you can also count on delicious grass-fed Retinto beef from Cadiz and local free-range chicken.

The grilled prawns cooked in squid ink with black wheat were excellent, while the slow-cooked cod loin with rosemary, as well as grilled octopus with guacamole, 'micro greens' and a sweet pepper mousseline were enticing.

Run by capable Amanda Gedeon, who also owns the highly-rated Bellaria, in Marbella, the stylish restaurant is bound to do well.

Contact: 951480549

BUBBLING UP!

FOR the last decade Marbella has been the stand out location for foodies on the Costa del Sol.

But, little by little, there is a new kid on the block.

Coming into its own since the completion of the long remodeling of the centre, San Pedro is truly on fire in the food stakes these days.

An incredible number of quality restaurants have opened over the last year, each offering their own unique blend of cooking.

Focussing on - or around - the brand new boulevard, they range from the hyper-modern to the authentic health-kick style. In particular, **KMO** (see above), run by talented local girl Amanda Gedeon, **Urban**, run by a Russian-French couple, and **Ambrosia**, stylish in the extreme, epitomise this new revo-

San Pedro is becoming one of the key dining references on the Costa del Sol, writes Jon Clarke

lution. And then there is the new **Gym Junkie Cafe** (see below) and the cool new 'fusion' restaurant, **Benisty**, an offshoot of the town's long-time standout restaurant **Albert & Simon**. "Before the tunnel, everybody avoided San Pedro but now there are a lot of good restaurants and bars opening," explained Pascal van den Broek, of **Happy Days**, who once cooked for President Clinton. "It's definitely the new coming area for the whole Costa." The leading purveyors of this drive for haute cuisine must certainly be Albert & Simon, which has been serving up fine

French food for three decades. Counting on a splendid wine list, with hundreds of references from around the world, brothers Albert and Simon are more deserving of a Michelin star than most.

Just across the road you might want to check out the very elegant **L'impronta**, an upmarket Italian joint, run by capable Francisco Vacas, who actually heralds from Cordoba. Another great spot is **Vaca Loca**, right by the stylish new bridge. The brainchild of expat businessman Andrew Levene, the menu has a great mix of steaks, burgers and ribs, all cooked on the grill.

Stalwart

You should also check out **Hogan Stand**, a well established Irish pub named after the famous Gaelic football stand at Croke Park. Run by capable Ross, it has typical bar snacks in the pub, while serving up more formal fare at the restaurant next door.

Another long-term stalwart is Malcolm Spendlove, who has been at the helm of the ever popular **Passion Cafe** for the last 16 years, as well as the excellent **Mr Gourmet Burger**, which counts on 100% beef.

Last but not least, a great stop off is **Rincon de la Sala**, which sits in the heart of the town with a great pavement location.

Part of the popular La Sala group, the busy menu changes regularly and there is a daily 'menu del dia'... and if you are lucky you might just bump into a range of footballers, who part own the restaurant including David Bentley, Paul Robinson and David Pleat.

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The President's chef

THERE are not many people in Spain who have cooked for a US President.

But it was certainly a happy day for Happy Days co-owner Pascal Van den Broek when he had the honour of catering for none other than Bill Clinton.

It was 1996 and Pascal still remembers the VIP assignment.

His career as a chef took him from his native Holland to Russia's St Petersburg, where he spent 15 years cooking in high class restaurants.

And it was here, with the Cold War beginning to thaw in 1996, that he found himself cooking up a storm for Big Bill.

"I remember he had salmon," said Pascal.

"And there were a lot of American secret service guys in the kitchen checking what we were making."

"They told us to simply relax and just cook as normal."

Pascal now manages Happy Days, San Pedro's artificial ice rink, crazy golf site and American diner. He also owns Trattoria Italiana in Elviria.



Body beautiful at gym cafe

A NEW gym cafe is helping San Pedro body buffs fuel their addiction.

The Gym Junkie Cafe, Spain's first protein eatery, serves up vitamin-stacked meals - ideal before or after a workout.

The cafe's mouthwatering menu includes grass-fed beef, protein pancakes and an omelette bar - complete with seaweed, broccoli and tuna omelettes.

Owners Jamie and Deborah, from London, said: "We are gym junkies, but we noticed there was nowhere around to get food like this."

Jamie and girlfriend/ co-owner Deborah designed the menu with manager Ben Hayes and head chef Caffian Baldwin, using fresh local produce to make their sauces.

Contact: jamie@gymjunkiecafe.com or call 627 17 95 61



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ICE 'N' SLICE

Happy Days are here for Joe Duggan as he gets his skates on for the first time at new 'ice' rink

I'm clinging on for dear life to my new friend, a plastic polar bear, as I tentatively skate my way around Happy Days artificial ice rink, San Pedro boulevard's most recent family-fun venue.

I may be the butt of my colleagues jokes but the town's modernity and resurgence are encapsulated by this innovative outdoor eco-friendly rink, mini-golf site and American diner. Co-owner and former chef Pascal Van den Broek, who has cooked for Bill Clinton (See Page 23), threw in the dish towel to serve up San Pedro's residents a treat on Andalucía's only artificial rink.

Since Happy Days opened in August, many Andalusians are being introduced to this green version of ice-skating.

"It would be impossible to have real ice in Marbella with the weather. This rink is very eco-friendly as it uses no energy," explains Pascal.



FUN AND GAMES: On the rink



Strapping on a pair of skates in the evening air, budding Torvils and Deans take to the surface to show off their pirouettes.

The slick surface is an excellent approximation and the balmy Costa evenings mean you won't need woolly mittens.

The high-tech rink was designed in Sevilla, and Pascal and Scottish business partner Sean Henry's rinks is proving a hit with local youngsters.

"Around the weekends it's fantastic," says Pascal. "Kids birthday parties are really picking up. They can play mini golf and we have their favourite food - burgers."

As befitting an owner who has cooked for the world's most important man, the food at Happy Days is first-rate. The authentic airstream truck kitchen is the epitome of 60s retro cool. And burgers, hot dogs, buffalo wings and french fries are the perfect accompaniment to a night on the ice or swinging a putter.

Contact 0034 693 745 454
info@happydayscostadelsol.com
www.happydayscostadelsol.com

Wakeboarding isn't for wimps, as Joe Duggan discovers when he tries out the high-adrenalin sport

LEAN forward," Juan Carlos Nunez commands me. I'm crouched on a board at San Pedro's Wakeboard centre, hands clasped with grim determination around one end of a cable as I prepare to launch myself headlong off a pier.

I had just watched in admiration as a lad of about 10 leapt onto his board like a flying fish before performing a series of dexterous manoeuvres in a masterclass of this cable-propelled version of water-skiing. "Lean forward," Juan Carlos, the manager, repeats but I'm feeling like a fish out of water. He's suggested I start with a kneeboard rather than the upright version, a prudent decision given I have the balletic grace and poise of a newborn elephant.

"Lean forward." Easier said than done, when gripped with the overpowering fear that I may not have tied on my trunks tightly enough.

Too late! The pulley whips its way towards me, the cable tenses and San Pedro prepares for the most artless



FLUNG INTO ACTION: At the Wakeboard Centre and (top right)

demonstration in the history of wakeboarding.

Invented almost 50 years ago, the first commercial wakeboarding cable was built in Benidorm a few years afterwards. Riders are towed around a lake by a raised pulley and cable system, which propels

you through the water at breakneck speed.

San Pedro's centre is one of Europe's best and has hosted international and national tournaments since opening in 1993. The glorious Marbella weather means the public can visit from February to December.



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Wakey wakey!

(ht) a trick rider

Staff guide you through the basics. Kneeboards are available for beginners, with strap in ski-boards for the more skilled and wakeboards for experts, who perform tricks on the 2,690-foot course's ramps. "Cable ski was invented because water skiing is more expensive,"

explains Juan Carlos. "Skiing behind a boat is a good sport, I like it, but you can't get a lot of people here. The queue is very fast here, so you don't have to wait too long," he says. "This is for all kinds of people because you don't have to pay

too much to learn and to improve. It's very easy to improve." He's right. Although certainly, my first foray into wakeboarding's world couldn't have been any less illustrious. Five seconds after being ripped from dry land, I lose grip of the cable and plunge into the drink. Clambering ashore and readying myself to go again, I assume this is going to be way beyond my meagre powers of balance.

Adrenaline

But second time around I unexpectedly manage to hold on. To my delight I'm suddenly experiencing the exhilarating rush of hurtling around the lake as the Serrania de Ronda mountains flash by. At each of the cable's five pulleys, your body surges as it is hit by a mainline of energy and you are flung in a new direction. If you hold on, it's a thrilling adrenaline jolt. I finish three straight laps and want to go again. Between circuits, you can recharge your batteries on a sun lounger and top up with Dutch courage at the cocktail bar. The Wakeboard centre is another great reason to visit San Pedro. And if I can do it, anyone can!

Advertorial

Flying without wings



BOUNCE TIME: At CostaJump



THE sky really is the limit in San Pedro. Opened this month, a wall-to-wall bounce heaven is sending kids and adults skywards. Filled with 50 interconnecting trampolines, basketball hoops and a foam pit, CostaJump is the only indoor trampoline park on the Costa del Sol. The trampoline centre located between the I.T.V and Parque 3 Jardines has brought a new level of family fun to the area.

"It is an exciting time to be opening," the Dutch owner says. "Everyone loves to bounce, although it's just the kids who will admit it, adults love it just as much." With basketball 'slam dunk lanes' he says the centre also gives you the opportunity to 'dunk like a pro'. There are also regular games of dodgeball as well as fitness classes on the trampolines and the centre caters for birthdays and corporate events. And at just €10 an hour for kids and adults alike.

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Treasure trove

TWIST Boutique, ladies fashion and accessories boutique based in La Colonia, San Pedro, stocks brands such as Hudson Jeans (One of Kate Middleton's favourites). You can find everything from Onjenu dresses, Ams Barcelona, Beth & Tracie and Barbados to the contemporary range of Charli, to name but a few. And there is the added bonus of free parking. Owner Jane Clark opened her doors in 2007, with her keen eye for upcoming fashion. She stocks clothing to suit all ages and budgets. "My aim is to provide high quality clothing that complements the feminine figure," Jane explains. Pop down to Twist Boutique at La Colonia and see for yourself. The boutique is off the A7 next to Passion Café and McDonalds.



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26

All about San Pedro and Guadalmina

Advertorial

New kids on block

Exciting times are afoot at mortgage brokerage The Finance Bureau with its new HQ and insurance agency

WITH the Costa del Sol property market enjoying a comeback as great as Gary Barlow and Take That, there has been no better time over the last decade to buy. And with San Pedro breaking away and rising out of Marbella's glitzy shadow, many businesses are relocating to the area and neighbouring Guadalmina.

That is exactly what established mortgage broker The Finance Bureau has done. Based on the Costa del Sol for 11 years, boss Tancrede de Pola has moved operations to Guadalmina commercial centre, in the block between La Caixa Bank (formerly Barclays) and the Asador. And what's more, The Finance Bureau has launched a new



NEW HOME: For The Finance Bureau boss Tancrede

insurance agency, adding another string to its bow.

"It is a very exciting time for

us," Tancrede says. "While we are excited to be in Guadalmina, we are even more excited about launching the insurance agency."

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For mortgage information call 666 709 743 and for insurance needs call 951 203 540, or email tdp@thefinancebureau.com

Art of hospitality

A KALEIDOSCOPIC explosion of artistic colour greets visitors to Hostal Plaza San Pedro. Most of the rooms and communal areas have bespoke murals which present visitors with a bold sensory delight that elevates a stay high above the average hostel experience.

The project is the brainchild of the Wynn family - Gary, Karen and sons Richard and Michael, who moved to San Pedro from the UK four-and-a-half years ago.

"There are so many hostels in Spain we wanted something a bit different so we would be remembered," said Karen.

"We invite artists who are wanting to build their portfolio to come and paint at the hostel, we do this on an exchange basis, offering free food and accommodation and a chance to have a holiday in San

Pedro. We supply all the materials... they supply their talent."

The hostel at Calle Juan Ramon Jimenez has 18 ensuite rooms and a lovely roof terrace.

With three more artists due to arrive next month to add their personal touch and more making plans to join in the project, backpackers and holidaymakers alike planning a visit are in for a visual treat.

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