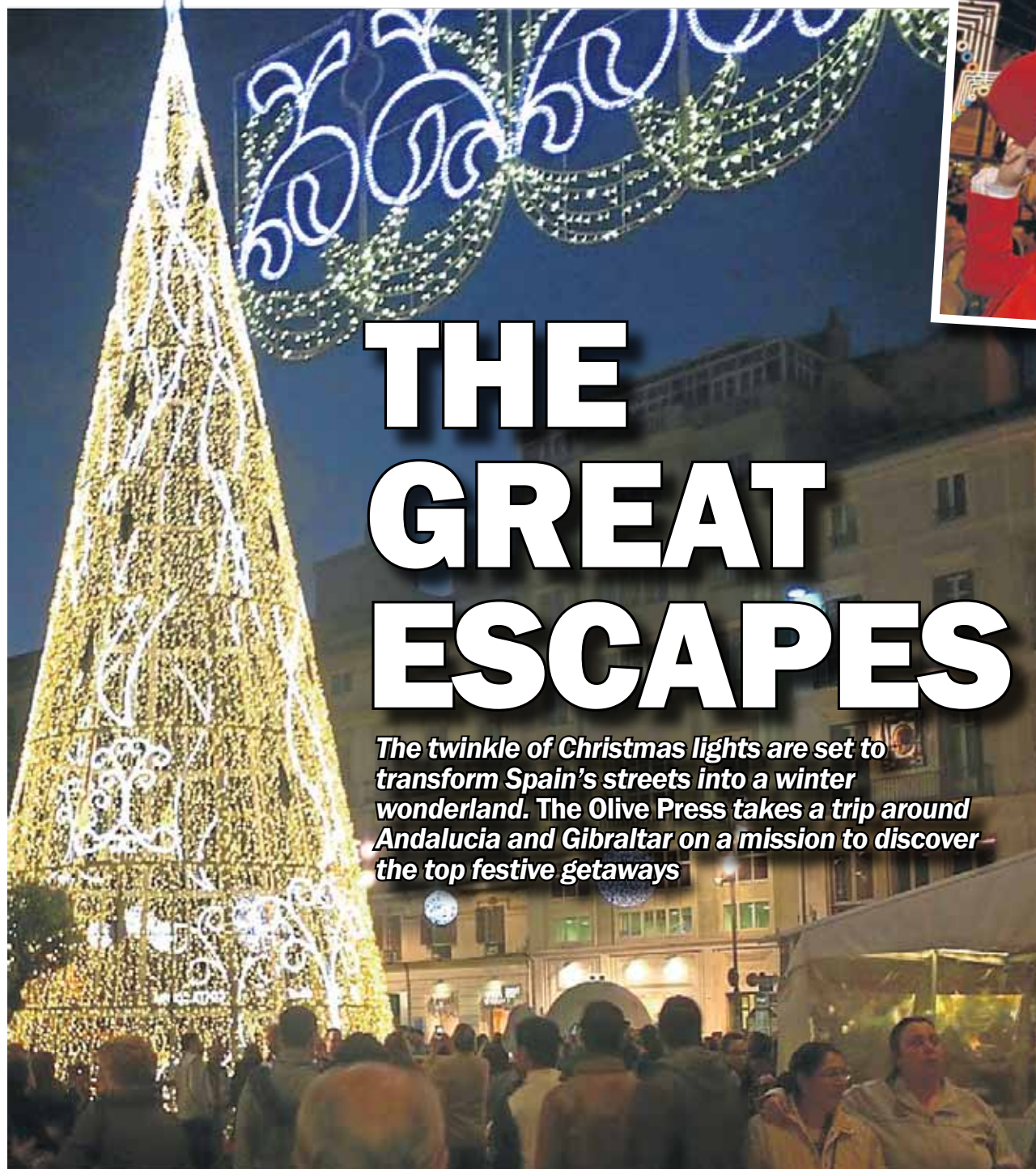


Festive countdown

19

Christmas and New Year in Andalucia

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THE GREAT ESCAPES

The twinkle of Christmas lights are set to transform Spain's streets into a winter wonderland. The Olive Press takes a trip around Andalucia and Gibraltar on a mission to discover the top festive getaways

MALAGA: Christmas lights are an annual attraction and among Europe's finest

WITH the jingle of Santa's sleigh just a few weeks away, now is the time to pull up your stockings and get ready for Christmas.

Rudolph and Dasher are getting ready for their yearly commute but old Saint Nick doesn't have to be the only one getting away over the festive season.

With many magical spots along the coast, inland and over in Gibraltar waiting to be explored, a much deserved winter break can be enjoyed by everyone... and Prancer and Dancer won't be needed to get you there.

Be it a day trip to Malaga to view some of Europe's top Christmas lights or a weekend break in Jerez where gypsy carols are belted out at the town's many *zambombas*, there is plenty to do and see this winter. And while Lapland may be the spiritual home of Christmas there is another white wonderland much closer to home.

With the mountains expected to be awash with snow and the slopes open for the season, the Sierra Nevada truly is magical at this time of year.

But if heading downhill at break-neck speeds isn't on your Christmas list then fear not as there are plenty of fairs and festivities to do while stood upright.

From Ronda to Calahonda and Casares to Cancelada it is fair to say Christmas is all around us!



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PHOTOS BY DAVID P ROJAS

IN SNOW: Ronda clings to a craggy outcrop in the high Serrania mountains

LIKE a three-bird
roast, Ronda has
many layers to
explore and goes
down a treat come
Christmas.
Ideal for couples looking
for a magical getaway or
for families to explore
the breathtaking scen-
ery, a trip up into the
mountains is an abso-
lute cracker.
From country walks in
the Serrania to a gentle
stroll around the roman-
tic old town, there is
plenty to be explored.
And with a chill in the
air - and the possibil-
ity of snow - the town's
landmark 400 foot
gorge is somehow more
emphatic at this time of
year.
Just as impressive are
the surrounding villag-

Into the hills

**Tucked up by the fire or bearing the elements
in the wilderness, Ronda's many layers offer up
scenes worthy of a Christmas card**



es and excellent local
walks.

For somewhere good to
stay, there is no beating
the comfy warmth of a
Molino del Puente room
gazing out at the magical
Ronda countryside.

With a wood-burning
stove in the top-notch
restaurant, La Cascada,
it is the perfect place to
beat the winter chill.

Just ten minutes from
Ronda, it is run by sea-
soned hoteliers and
restaurateurs Ian and
Elaine Love and is the
perfect base for walking,
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delicious food and ambi-
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Gourmet restaurants are blossoming like Christmas cacti from well-kept window boxes in Vejer, the gastronomic capital of the Costa de la Luz, writes Ellie Cormie

Frontier of gastronomy

ONCE upon a time, in Spain, you could tell a good place to eat by the number of prawn heads littering the bar floor. Not in Vejer de la Frontera, a best kept village where potted geraniums flower perennially and even the tiniest tapas bar sports a swanky designer makeover. But it's not just window dressing. The gourmet dishes being rustled up by local restaurateurs live up to the high expectations of visitors who makes it to the summit of this stunning white hilltop pueblo where the views are equally mouth watering. The lush landscape spreading out below this historic Moorish frontier town are behind Vejer's reputation as the gastronomic jewel in the Costa de la Luz crown. The abundance of organic homegrown produce is a source of inspiration to local chefs. For proof, count the number of restaurants in Calle de la Corredera – Vejer's 'foodie street' in the medieval quarter.

Flavours

My new restaurant **Corredera 55's**, beneath the castle walls, overlooks a landscape of rolling hills, Quixotic windmills and spectacular sunsets. The menu is a fusion of world flavours including bouillabaisse soup, swimming in local seafood. And don't miss the *carrillada* Iberica, (pigs cheeks) from butcher Antonio, braised for five hours in vino de Jerez and served with cinnamon-scented cauliflower puree. Sundays have a following for the shareable, whole-roasted spatchcock chicken and a lazy flick through the Sunday papers, accessorised with a pot of Moroccan tea and a blanket to keep out the autumnal chill. Designed by James Stuart, who opened Vejer's Hotel La Casa del Califa over two decades



CULINARY CENTRE: Vejer and a dish (right)

ago, this inviting spot houses works by his favourite local artists and his cookbook collection. Meander round to the Plazuela to find intimate **Valvaida** (meaning starfish), owned by Jesus Recio and partner Tamara Cansino. Creative home cooking with seasonal produce from the huertas of Conil and La Muela is their 'USP'. Starfish may not be on the menu – Tamara named the restaurant for her fisherman father who brought her back gifts of starfish from his trips – but you'll find many inventive dishes: prawns in *manzanilla* with Iberian pork and nuts and octopus in seaweed mayo are just two. Culinary creativity continues at family-owned **Casa Varo**, facing Divino Salvador church.



NEW BOY: Corredera

Bougainvillea canopies the terrace and owner Juan Varo will tell you everything you need to know about their speciality almadraba tuna – ecologically caught in trap nets, a method dating from Phoenician times.

Exquisite

Only the finest specimens are used in their signature dish, tuna carpaccio, the tataki and tuna tartar melt in the mouth quality. There are 70 wines, one to complement every dish. Of the restaurants that put Vejer on the gastro map is La Casa del Califa's award-winning **El Jardin del Califa**. Reached through the labyrinthine corridors of the 16th century hotel, the exquisite palm courtyard enclosed by ancient walls and lit with Moroccan lamps after dark radiates a 1001 Nights buzz.

If you aren't hypnotised by the scent of frangipani, jasmine and incense, wait until you try the menu, a heavenly harem of authentic flavours from north Africa and the Middle East: babaganoush, shish taouk, popular pastela filled with chicken, almonds and cinnamon and tempting tagines. The tagine Rif combines local organic beef with caramelised pumpkin and figs. The delicious homemade desserts and pastries taste even better with a pot of Moroccan mint tea.



VEJER VIEW: Hilltop heaven

Complementing the culinary repertoire, the bodega stocks over 80 wines – including Tunisian Sidi Brahim and Lebanese Ksara. The hotel and restaurant are open all year and there are no end of cosy corners to curl up on a pile of Moroccan cushions with a book and a

glass of warm spiced wine. A visit to Vejer isn't complete without tasting the vast range of libations at **Vina y Mar**. Ramon Fernandez offers over 40 sherries by the glass, ranging from a €2 manzanilla to a special reserve (VORS) at €6, plus over 200 wines, and there's an

open kitchen in case your hunger catches up with your thirst. Vejer's success story is a simple recipe: local knowledge, generous helpings of homegrown produce and a bunch of dynamic international restaurant owners who've added their own dash of creativity. Enjoy!



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Festive countdown

November 12th 25th 2015

Christmas spirit

 **T**HE one sure-fire way to bag a kiss under the mistletoe this winter is to combine a little Christmas spirit with a lot of flavour... in a glass, with a little umbrella perhaps. It's that time of year to delve into the liquor cupboard and drag out those spirits that sit unused for the other 11 months. Add a little zing with some seasonal Spanish flavour and you'll be in for a very 'merry' Christmas indeed... or a recipe for a new year hangover. Chin chin!

The red Rudolph

Pour 200ml of vodka and 200ml of Cointreau into a jug, add 600 ml of cranberry juice and 400ml of orange juice. Add the peel from two limes and serve over crushed ice.

Christmas cosmo

Mix 500ml vodka with an equal amount of ginger wine in a jug. Stir in a litre of cranberry juice, the juice of five limes and some sliced stem ginger. Serve garnished with



FESTIVE FUN: DIY eggnog is the way to a loved one's heart

lime zest.

Elfs' eggnog

Refrigerate all the liquids so they are very cold. Beat six eggs in a mixer until they are frothy. Gradually add 200g of sugar, ½ teaspoon of vanilla extract and ¼ teaspoon of ground nutmeg. Turn the mixer off and stir in 500ml whipping cream, the same of milk, 175ml brandy and 75ml rum. Chill before serving and garnish with sprinkled nutmeg

and a cinnamon stick.

Snowball

Pour 200ml of Advocaat into a large jug, add 100ml of lime cordial and 100ml of sherry. Mix and add 200ml of lemonade. Serve over ice in a tall glass.

Amaretto Amor

Mix 400ml Disaronno with 600ml orange juice and two 75cl bottles of sparkling wine



in a big jug. Serve up with a strip of orange peel in each glass.

Mulled over

Boil 100g of light muscovado sugar in a pan with one star anise, one cinnamon stick, four cloves and 150ml water. Simmer for two minutes, then pour into a large jug. Add a sliced lemon and two clementines, along with 150ml of Cointreau and 750ml of red wine. Serve warm.



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Weekend with Uncle Pepe

PHOTOS BY JON CLARKE



THE season of goodwill is the one time of year to drink copious amounts with distant relatives... so this year why not take the family on a trip to meet Spain's most famous uncle, Tio Pepe.

Jerez means sherry, and like a cantankerous old English aristocrat the town has grown large on the stuff.

In fact, the importance of the wine industry is obvious from the moment you set foot in the town... And that is never more apparent than at Christmas when the bars are packed with tipsy Jerezanos belting out gypsy carols, known as zambombas, throughout the night (see *Gypsy Kings*, Pages 24-25).

Arriving at Plaza Esteve in the heart of the old town on a Saturday lunchtime you could be forgiven for thinking that it is a town of drunks, with packed bars leaving customers sprawled outside onto the pavement and into the nearby market.

Tio Pepe, a flinty, white fino, is the town's most famous tipple and there is no escaping the logos, which stretch across the old town and down to its bodega... not to mention numerous roadside hoardings around the region, along with the famous bull of Osborne, from the nearby town of El Puerto de Santa Maria. If you follow the stream of tourists down from

An escape with sherry by the barrel, horses and flamenco to spice things up, winter in Jerez is a getaway to rival any other

the market, you will arrive in Plaza Arenal, a beautiful spot, originally used as a space to amass troops before battle.

Nowadays more laid back in atmosphere, bitter orange trees and date palms line up regimentally around the central fountain as a substitute for the soldiers, who would once have stood in the same spot, with more cafes, bars and restaurants springing up beyond.

All around the charming centre you will find an amazing catalogue of grand and sizeable mansions, the majority built out of profits from the sherry industry.

When sherry was first exported to England in the 13th century the drink took the name of Jerez, albeit by an anglicized version of 'sherry'.

The city's remarkable growth was kick-started by the arrival of large-scale wine produc-

tion in the 17th century, but sherry and wine have been produced in the area for well over 1,000 years.

Even the arrival of Islamic forces in 711 did not kill the wine industry, which was tolerated as a 'source of energy' for troops.

Today, after decades of being in decline, the industry is making a much-greeted comeback, thanks to a revival, in particular, in the UK.

The historic bodegas continue to get the highest rankings in Spain, in particular from Robert Parker and the huge wineries, often dubbed 'the new cathedrals' of Jerez, are a joy to have a look around.

The highlights are Lustau and Gonzales Byass, open every day, as well as Fundador, the producer of the famous Harvey's Bristol Cream.

On a midday tour, you not only end up with a fantastic tasting of the many varieties of sherry, but an excellent explanation of how they are made.

At Fundador you follow in the footsteps of Bo Derek, Plácido Domingo and Charlton Heston, and end up at the biggest wine bodega in Europe, La Mezquita, which houses a

ICONS: Sherry giant Pedro Domecq in front of his home and (inset) Cathedral figurine

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From Page 23

staggering 40,000 butts, as they are known.

If time allows, you must definitely visit the Alcazar castle with its arabic baths, gardens and *mezquita*, as well as the cathedral, with its incredible vaulted ceilings, wooden figurines and a painting by Zurbaran.

But simply wandering around the back streets of the old town, in particular up to the neighbourhoods of San Miguel and Santiago, is a joy.

The winding cobbled streets are full of decaying, genteel mansions, sleepy squares and thankfully plenty of 'tabancos', where you can dip in if it's raining, for a glass of 'sack' as Shakespeare once described sherry.

Reindeer may be more seasonal, but Andalusian horses are a symbol of Jerez and a good example of the way the town is trying to take advantage of its assets. Originally used as war horses,



JEREZ: Sherry bodega La Mezquita is Europe's biggest and (inset) the 'Nelson' vat



In Charlton's wake

and historically given as gifts to European kings, the Carthusian breed of the Andalusian Horse is now used for activities ranging from dressage to polo. Displays are regularly held at

The School of Equestrian Art, which promises a tightly choreographed 'equestrian ballet' though winter visitors should be aware that shows are less frequent prior to Christmas but will begin again in January.

But if horses don't take your fancy, there is only one must-see attraction in Jerez - flamenco, with the city boasting an annual festival in February and being credited as one of Spain's key centres for the musical genre. The club - Pena Flamenco Los Cernicalos - sits on a quiet backstreet, with only a small plaque on the door distinguishing it from the houses on every side and is far and away the best place to catch a show.

But tourists should be warned - the flamenco on show in Jerez is a million miles from the cruise-ship stuff of frilled shirts and

flamboyant costumes. This is serious stuff.

Jerez became a hub of flamenco partly because of its status as a haven for gypsy communities evicted from elsewhere, and the songs reflect the pain woven through their stories.

And in many ways, flamenco songs seem fitting in a place which is still stinging from the economic crisis. Indeed it is one of Spain's poorest cities, with a debt to the tune of over €1 billion and an unemployment level of 30%.

Lying behind the idyllic image of wineries and dancing horses, the songs make as much sense today as they did when they were written. And yet, wandering the streets on a cool winter's evening with uncle Pepe's coat staving off the chill is as perfect winter getaway as one could imagine.



STAR SIGNING: Placido Domingo at Fundedor



AT FUNDEDOR: Bo Derek (top) and Charlton Heston

It's a musical instrument, it's a riotous Spanish Christmas celebration and zambombas originated in Jerez, writes Joe Duggan

VISITORS taking a yuletide stroll through Jerez de la Frontera's cobbled streets are sure to stumble upon one of Andalusia's most joyous Christmas secrets: a *zambomba*.

An authentic Jerezano celebration, Christmas gatherings blend flamenco, erence, Catholicism and sherry in a taste of Andalus culture.

"This is our way to celebrate," says Alejandro Maraver, manager of La Fondador hotel.

Raucous

"I promise everyone can join the party everyone who comes always wants to turn."

Originating in the 18th century in Jerez, *zambombas* draw crowds to street corners, plazas and raucous throughout December to perform villancicos - flamenco Christmas carols.

All the way from Plaza de la Asuncion, up Calle Consistorio, in particular around restaurant Albores, you are bound to find any number of groups plying their trade.

Soulful gypsy voices are complemented by *zambombas*, the instrument the festival takes its name from - clay pots covered in leather, played by rubbing a wet stick against them. Further musical accompaniment is provided by tambourines, bells and makeshift *zambombas* - usually empty bottles of anis which

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ZAMBOMBA: Flamenco-flavoured Christmas carol and (right) the instrument

rubbed with spoons or forks to produce a crystalline sound. Onlookers fortify themselves with local sherry by the skinful and *pestinos*, a traditional Jerez Christmas pastry, while warming themselves around roaring bonfires. David Fraser-Luckie's authentic 'tabanco'

bar/restaurant Las Cuadras is one of the best spots to experience this Jerez tradition.

"I grew up with *zambombas*," says Jerez-born David, who is steeped in sherry history. "But there's been an explosion of them in recent years and there are *zambombas* everywhere, around every corner. Jerez people like to party."

Once the stables of the emblematic Countess of Casares' palace, Las Cuadras' whitewashed stone walls echo to *zambombas* every Friday and Saturday afternoon from November 20 onwards. Hundreds more *zambombas* bring visitors and Jerezanos together over Christmas as their popularity continues to swell.

The city's Semana Santa brotherhood and flamenco penas organise impressive performances and impromptu outdoor *zambombas* stretch long into the night.

Crowds swell into the hundreds, but the bawdy content of some *villancicos* probably wouldn't make it onto *Songs Of Praise*.

"In my square, the Hermandad del Mayor Dolor have had 1,000 people converging," says David. "Jerez folk know the songs by heart. Everyone sings along. 'In theory it's all praising the Virgin Mary and Jesus - very Catholic. But some songs are quite explicit and talk about putting hands where they shouldn't be.' And with Jerez Town Hall hoping to have *zambombas* recognised as part of Spain's national heritage, this vibrant Christmas celebration continues to grow."



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There is not much Gerry Rylance does not know about English... and the same could be said for food and wine, particularly sherry. Having worked as an English teacher in Jerez for three decades he is in an unrivalled position to explain the countless complexities of the industry, not to mention recommend a dish that is not only good but every decent 'tabanco' in the city. He certainly put his experience to good use in running one of Andalusia's top language academies, counting on leading compatriots and top UK schools, Eton and Harrow, as regular clients.

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As the gold-standard in language awards, it is also now on the of- ficial Institute list of leading centres in Spain.

To keep up with demand and will also be adding a library and more students," explains Rylance, 59, who is responsible for exam- ining 100 Cambridge English students a year in the Cadiz province.

One-of-three, luckily now counts on a reliable team, including his daughter, Carlota as his deputy, to help him keep things on track. The academy includes keeping big groups of UK students, from schools includ- ing Eton and Harrow, in check. "We get mostly the 14 to 15-year-olds and they have fun, but in a safe place to be," he says.

From many school groups, his academy has countless private classes, tailored to each individuals needs and level. The courses involve a week or two staying in the wonderful city, from as little as 310 euros a week.

Arrived in Jerez in 1980, Rylance quickly settled into the pace of the city's unique culture and history.

One of its famous sherries, two years ago for the academy's 30th anniversary he commissioned an Oloroso blended from ten different vine- yards in 1913.

A unique blend that could never be repeated again with the same ingredients.

Over a dozen bottles to Cambridge University and one will be in- cluded in the centenary time capsule."

He says: "We have long had a close relationship with the wineries and they do a special course focusing on the world of sherry, includ- ing the wineries."

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AUTHENTIC: Las Cuadras



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Jerez is one of the most interesting places in Southern Spain.
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Winter in Jerez

Sherry good

Jerez de la Frontera has finally got a range
of top class places to eat, writes Jon Clarke

Where to eat

LIKE a sleeping giant Jerez has finally developed a food culture that incorporates the best of Cadiz's celebrated ingredients.

Think local bluefin tuna, *retinto* beef and seasonal vegetables and mushrooms, all washed down with dozens of the city's top sherries by the glass.

Yes, in Jerez you have it all.

The epicentre is the so-called 'golden mile', centering on the Calle Consistorio/Plaza Plateros axis, where you find a great mix of tapas bars.

Starting with **Cruz Blanca**, the menu changes daily, particularly now that a father and son culinary team are both jostling in the kitchen.

There is a large range of tapas, with plenty of sherries by the glass. Top tip: try the beef tar-



Match made
in heaven

FOR the perfect introduction to Jerez and its sherries, the best way is via a *maridaje* or 'marriage' with food.

At Jerez's fantastic La Carbona - an atmospheric former bodega - this union has been taken to a new level, and the food is easily matched by service and atmosphere.

Two starters - one hot, one cold - followed by catch of the day (currently sea bass), then a Cantabrian steak are finished off with a cheesecake with raspberry coulis.

The wines graduate from pale yellow to deep cherry in colour and are selected especially to bring out the flavour of the dishes, or to 'potenciar' (strengthen) them.

The definite picks were the Palo Cortado with a sweet mackerel terrine, while the Oloroso went perfectly with a T-bone steak and a bone dry Fino was splendid with sea bass... and all for under €40 per person.

www.lacarbona.com



SLEEK: Reino de Leon

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Christmas reads

Steve Davies at the Sabinillas Bookshops recommends his pick of local authors' work to get your teeth into this festive period



TASTEFUL: Albores and Cruz Blanca's father-son team

tare washed down with trendy La Panesa fino.

Next up is **Albores**, run by talented Madrilenos Julian Olivas de las Heras, which has just doubled in size and is overflowing with punters at the main times of the day.

Albores means 'new beginnings' and it is founded on the seven principles of food... salt, potato, tomato, olives, grapes, cereals and coffee.

The beginning and end for me is the tuna tartare with caviar and wasabi sauce, not to mention chanterelle mushrooms with free range eggs, ham and mustard.

Even more stylish perhaps is **Reino de Leon**, an inspirational gastrobar run by two brothers in Calle Latorre. This wonderfully-designed spot has a regularly-changing menu, where you'd struggle to find a better dish than the seasonal Boletus mushrooms in garlic and olive oil.

Another fantastic spot, **Las Cuadras**, meaning 'stables', sits in an evocative building on Plaza de la Asuncion and has a regularly changing and tasty menu.

Run by friendly Englishman David Fraser Lucky, it counts on many original features, such

as bullfighting posters from the 1800s and iron bars that were installed when it was used as a prison in the 17th century. Food is great and the menu changes regularly.

Finally if you are looking for the best Italian food, then **Da Enrico** is a must.

Charming in the extreme, Enrico and his wife Katerina, from Turin and Venice, are busy most nights of the week. Their pizzas are fantastic, but equally their fresh pastas, including the original Pasta Martini, invented by Enrico, with speck ham, lemon, parsley, cream and Martini, is excellent.



ELEGANT: Da Enrico

Where to stay Fabulous Fonda



A FABULOUS place to stay is Fonda Baranco in the heart of the old town.

While peace personified you are just 400 paces from the Golden Mile of restaurants, not to mention the cathedral, alcazar and just about everything else. Run by friendly local Alejandro, the 19th century, former merchant's home, is becoming one of Andalucia's most stylish boutique hotels.

Colours are easy on the eye, furniture is mostly antique, while the beds are the very best in the business. Meanwhile customer care, not to mention breakfast, is very difficult to beat.

FOR a claw-biting tale of bravery and persistence, read the beautifully-illustrated **Landing on my Feet** by Sotogrande-based Adelaide Godwin. The first book from the expat is based around a real feral cat, Poohka, she found on a private estate in her neighbourhood. €9.95

Struggling to shake vampires and werewolves from your mind after Halloween? Then read **Vlad the Inhaler** by Sabinillas crime author and creative writing guru Lorraine Mace. The popular children's book follows the story of Vlad the asthmatic half-human, half vampire, who must escape his dangerous aunt and uncle with his friends' help. €9.95

The aesthetes among you will enjoy the intricately-illustrated **Monte Vivo**, written by Seamus Shortt who lives in Jaen. Acclaimed by University of Cambridge researchers as 'a prime example of literature and conservation collaborating', it is a lyrically-written portrait of natural Spain. €20

Delve into Andalucian history with Estepona expat Joan Fallon's **The Shining City**. The prolific author has written seven books and is a firm favourite among the Costa del Sol's lit loving crowd. It's an exotic, historical story of love, family and consequences. €14.95

Swapping fiction for the real world, nothing will inspire you

to get out there better than Gaucin expat Hugo Chittenden's **The Volunteer**. With a rousing foreword by Bear Grylls and an intro by David Cameron, the practical guide features celebrity tips from names as big as James Blunt (Help for Heroes) and Isabella and Sam Branson (Big Change). €14.95

For the stove enthusiasts among us, **Gaucin Gastronomía Popular** by Miguel Vazquez Gonzalez is a beautifully-presented bilingual cookbook. What the Gaucin-born author does not know about traditional cuisine is not worth knowing and the simple but handsome gift is perfect for anyone whose tastebuds are titillated by Spain. Try the autumnal rabbit casserole with green peppers. €15



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Festive countdown



Flying without wings

THE sky really is the limit in San Pedro this Christmas. Opened last 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.

Run by expat Donny, who also runs CostaWaterPark, the trampoline centre located between the I.T.V and Parque 3 Jardines has brought a new level of family fun to the area.

With basketball 'slam dunk lanes' Donny 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

For more information visit www.costajump.com or email info@costajump.com

Hemingway's hamper

FOR great food, great views, great entertainment and a warm friendly atmosphere, head down to Hemingway's this Christmas. The Duquesa Port establishment is laying on a festive feast for anyone eating out on Christmas Day with Chris Kalli singing yuletide favourites.

Crusted sesame seed tuna salad, turkey stuffed with ricotta and three cheeses and wrapped in Italian ham, crusty sea bass, and homemade tiramisu are all on the menu.

And with the bar open from 10am til 3am, you're assured a great day out.

Christmas Eve and Boxing Day entertainment comes from Lesley Harrison and karaoke. For information call 666792847

Campo of good tidings

Weekend fair in Los Barrios to bring yuletide cheer and help local causes

THE Los Barrios Christmas Fair at Hacienda Almoguera is always a festive hit, but organisers want this year's event to be a charitable occasion.

With 45 stands, a flamenco Christmas choir, ceramic painting and pony rides for children among many other attractions, there is lots to entertain visitors on November 28 and 29.

But as Christmas is a time to remember the less fortunate, Catherine and her family hope guests make a small donation to local charities.

"We would like to ask our guests to donate non perishable food items - rice, pasta or

canned foods for the local Food Bank, Banco de Alimentos de Campo de Gibraltar,"

"Any profit made from the €3 car parking fee goes to Cruz Blanca to help refugees and local families in need," says Catherine.

Stalls selling pottery, jewellery, children's clothes and festive favourites such as legs of jamon, minced pies, mulled wine and Christmas trees are sure to get your yuletide off to the perfect start.

The ninth annual fair starts at 11am, with live music in the evening.

For info call 660863437

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Jingle bell rock

Nowhere does Christmas like Gibraltar, writes Tom Powell

If, like George Michael, the heart you gave someone last year was binned on Boxing Day, it might be a good idea to head to Gibraltar and buy some proper presents this time around.

With classic shops such as Marks and Spencer's, BHS and Toys R Us combined with quirky independent stores, Gibraltar is the perfect place to find presents for all the family.

Plus, there's enough festive spirit going round the Rock to make visitors want to stay more than just another day. Festive shows, Santa's grotto and Christmas fairs are just a few of the treats on offer.



And for some of the best food

and wine (mistletoe optional) this side of Lapland, Gibraltar's the one thanks to its huge range of bars and restaurants.

There won't be snow falling all around us, but the whole place will be having fun when the Christmas lights are switched on during a party in John Mackintosh square.

Featuring songs and dance, the show will last from 5:30-8pm on November 20, so make sure you drive/cycle/walk home in time for it.

IN THE VILLAGE

CHRISTMAS is a magical time of year and what better place to spend the holidays than Ocean Village, Gibraltar? Santa will be bringing Christmas cheer when he appears at Ocean Village on November 30 for the Switching On Lights ceremony and children can see him in his grotto until December 2. The Grotto will be in aid of Kids Come First, a local charity established to raise funds for children in need.

It works closely with the Care Agency and takes referrals of children who need support - over the past years they have provided presents and hosted a Children's Christmas Party to help make Christmas a special time for every child.

There will also be an artisan market selling all sorts of festive goodies, a performance by Stylos Dance Academy, and the beautiful harmony of Christmas carols. The resort also offers a wide variety of delicious family dining experiences from around the world as well as the Sunborn hotel with two casinos and the recently opened La Sala bar and restaurant.

In addition to the great choice of cosy cafes and bars, Gibraltar's top nightclub, Dusk, will be topping off the festive party atmosphere with some unforgettable Christmas and New Year celebrations.

Santa's coming!

WHISPER it quietly, but Father Christmas is coming to Gibraltar a few days early this year.

Kings Bastion Leisure Centre will be transformed into a winter wonderland as the elves take over from December 7-23.

Plus, Santa will be inviting lucky kids to meet him in his grotto before heading back to his North Pole workshop for final preparations.

Entrance is £5 and includes a gift.

Santa's Grotto is open every weekday from 4:30pm-6:30pm.

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