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Lifestyle magazine and property portal

ISSUE 65
APRIL 2022
FREE

inside...

Buying in Spain

Choosing The Right
Location

Agent Towns

Zamora

**Most Iconic
hotels**

Hostal de La Gavina in Girona

**Wine
Article**

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 **VNBenny**

PAGE 18

insureSpain

PAGE 10

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by Piscinas Escribano

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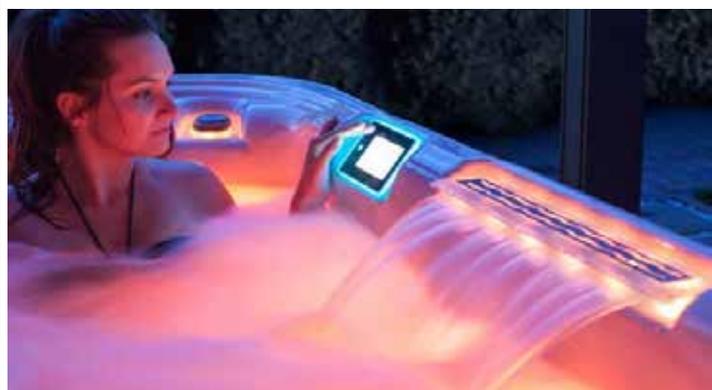
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Contents...

**Feel
Closer To
Home in
Orihuela
City**

10 & 14



Food & Drink



23-26



Wine Article:

**Let's
Talk
Wine**

36 & 37



Top 10 Attractions

El Escorial

40 & 41



Let's Learn Spanish



8

Wigan Pier to Andalucia



46-47

EMERGENCY TEL. NUMBERS

ALL EMERGENCIES	112
GUARDIA CIVIL	062
POLICIA NACIONAL	091
POLICIA LOCAL	092
FIRE BRIGADE	080
MEDICAL EMERGENCY	061
POLICE (IN ENGLISH)	902 102 112
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A Life in SPAIN

Welcome to the April edition of ALIS.

At least we survived the horrible storms that lashed Spain in early April. I hope you all stayed safe and warm and that you didn't have too much damage, or rather no damage at all.

Soon be Summer.....

So what's in this month?

Most Iconic Hotels focuses on hostel of La Gavina in Girona. This is a lovely hotel and well worth a few nights stay if you are ever in the area.

The agents town is also worth a read. This month it is about the city of Zamora. North of Salamanca, this medieval city is steeped in history.

Enjoy this month's magazine

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A woman in a black suit and white shirt, smiling and pointing towards the text.

Most Iconic hotels in Spain

Hostal de La Gavina in Girona



Large hotel buildings are synonymous with luxury. In a continuous flow of customers, they are usually among the best-known buildings in their cities, next to cathedrals, former colleges or old fortresses. It is no coincidence that the image that their guests receive depends to a large extent on their stay. They are also places where major festivals, events and celebrations are held. Resisting the passing of the decades or rising from the ashes, the most iconic hotels in Spain continue attending to those who can afford to pay for one of their rooms.

The hotel itself In the heart of the Costa Brava, near Sant Feliu de Guíxols, lies in a very luxurious resort: S'Agaró. Rafael Masó, an architect, was the main designer of the luxury development. The style chosen was known as noucentisme, associated with the avant-garde. Meanwhile, the money was provided by the Ensesa family. The project took shape during the 1920s.

Three successive renovations made it possible to go from two separate structures to the large hotel that has survived to the present day. Thanks to the peculiar result and the art deco interiors, it managed to differentiate itself and triumph among the Catalan high bourgeoisie. Subsequently, celebrities also fell for the charms of this hotel in the province of Girona, with such high-profile names as Robert de Niro and Elizabeth Taylor.

What were two independent chalets were transformed into the Gavina hostel. Although it was inaugurated in 1932, it had already been in use for three years as a luxury hotel.



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Let's Learn Spanish

Sports

Phrases

Do you show sport on TV here?	¿Aquí se puede ver el deporte en la tele?	Ackkeysaypwe day ver el dayportay en la tay lay
I like team sports	Me gustan los deportes en equipo	Meh goostan los dayportays en eekeypo
I prefer individual sports	Prefiero los deportes individuales	Pref eeyerroh los day portays in dee vid you al les
Is there a sports centre near here?	¿Hay un polideportivo cerca de aquí?	Eyeeon poly day por teavohther ka day ack key
Where can I hire a tennis court?	¿Dónde puedo alquilar una pista de tenis?	Don day pwehdohal key lahoonah pea star day tenniss
Where can I play indoor football?	¿Dónde puedo jugar a fútbol sala?	Don day pwehdoh who gararefootbolsahlah
Do I need to wear a hat in the pool?	¿Necesito llevar uno gorro de baño en la piscina?	Nay cessa see toe yeah varoo no gohro day banyohen la pea see nah
How much is an adult swim?	¿Cuánto cuesta nadar un adulto?	Kwan toe kwestahnadaroon add ult toe

Vocab

Go jogging	Hacer footing	Athairfoot ting
Go running	Ir a correr	Ear are korrare
Go for a walk	Dar un paseo	Daroon pass ehyoh
Go cycling	Hacer ciclismo	Athair see klismo
Go mountain-biking	Ir en bicicleta de montaña	Earen bee seeklet tar day mon tan yah
Go for a ride	Montar en bici	Montar en beesee
Go hiking	Hacer senderismo	Athairsend dare ismo
Go climbing	Ir a escalar	Ear are ess car lar
Go canoeing	Hacer el piragüismo	Athairel pearaguismo
Go sailing	Ir a navegar	Ear are nav eh gar
Go swimming	Hacer natación	Athairnattatheeyon
Go for a swim	Ir a nadar	Ear are nahdar

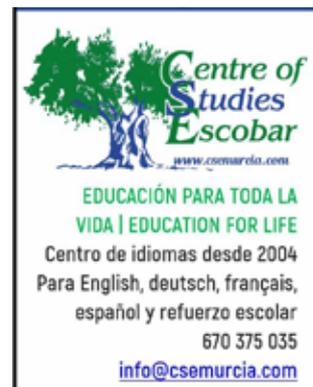


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X V L E K C R L G T A F E G R T
D P B E L I R A A I W S Z Y F A
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E Q Q A E H C G C G H H H D D F
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Orihuela City

Steeped in history and culture, Orihuela is one of the jewels of the Costa Blanca, and the perfect choice for anyone wishing to relocate to a traditional Spanish city.

By Heidi Wardman

Scenery

If you are dreaming of settling down in a charming Spanish city, which is well connected, and yet far enough away from the rat race to offer a calm and peaceful atmosphere, then Orihuela city is just the ticket. Orihuela spans nearly 400 km², and is known as the historical capital of the Vega Baja with a history dating back to September 1437, when it was declared the first city of Alicante Province. The district of Orihuela can be divided into three very distinctive areas with contrasting landscapes and industries, including the coast, known as Orihuela Costa, which has a thriving expat community and is an extremely popular tourist destination.

Then there is the countryside which takes in the beautiful Pedrera Reservoir and surrounding orchards. As one of the region's principal agricultural areas, the roads surrounding the city are lined with green fertile valley where acres of orange and lemon groves thrive. Finally we come to the city itself, which has expanded dramatically over the past decade, also due to the influx of foreign residents, but managed to retain its Spanish charm and character.

From a population of some 34,000 people, the vast majority of the city's residents are Spaniards, giving expats the perfect opportunity to adopt the culture, make new friends and learn the lingo. In fact, if it weren't for the cluster of shops, bars and restaurants, along with the multitude of historical buildings and places of interest, you might easily mistake this for a village, with a buzz of community spirit and locals bumbling around in no great hurry to be anywhere.



Climate

One of the first questions which expats tend to consider when deciding upon their new location is "What's the weather like?" After all, if the UK and Ireland could offer us 365 days of beautiful sunshine the chances are that we wouldn't be leaving! Although Orihuela cannot quite promise wall to wall sunshine all year round, it does give an average 315 days per year, with the average temperature touching 20 degrees and extremely low levels of rainfall.

July and August are generally the hottest months, with temperatures rising to about 42 degrees in the city, and falling to around 10 degrees in January and February. In that sense, you can quite comfortably take advantage of "outdoor living" throughout the year, and may even find that its warmer outside than in during the daytime, even in the winter!





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Closer To Nature

If you are a nature lover, you will be happy to learn that Orihuela city is bordered by a multitude of flora and fauna, and is even home to the second largest palmeral park in Europe! In this part of Spain a palmeral is a type of farming which was introduced by the Moors, who used to plant palm trees in between plots- a tradition that worked well and thus has survived over centuries.

Orihuela's palmeral is located on the borders of the historical centre, starting at the foot of the Sierra de Orihuela mountain range. The area has been declared a Cultural Heritage Site and provides the perfect location for nature spotting, picnicking, or a pleasant stroll.

A second natural park, "Pinar de Bonanza" is situated just outside of the city, and is also a popular route for natural trails, cycling and hiking. The River Segura runs through the heart of Orihuela, lending itself to a leisurely walk, which the locals will usually follow up with a glass of wine (or two) and a selection of authentic tapas at one of the bars en route. The majority of restaurants along the river walk also offer a "Menu del Dia", menu of the day, with a choice of regional specialties at extremely low prices- an affordable ritual that you will be happy to get used to!

Beaches

You will need to drive some 19 kilometres to Orihuela Costa to enjoy a day at the beach, but won't be disappointed when you get there, as there are five golden sandy stretches to choose from: La Zenia, Mil Palmeras, Cabo Roig, Punta Prima and Playa Flamenca. All of the beaches are accredited with a European standard "Blue Flag", and surrounded by a variety of amenities to guarantee a perfect family day out.

Orihuela Costa has now become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the region, so you may find that the beaches get rather busy during high season. However, as a local you will have the liberty of picking your times, and will find that you have the beach almost all to yourself during cooler months, which are still pleasant enough for bathing.

History and Culture

Orihuela certainly offers an education in history and culture, with a plethora of churches, galleries, museums, and monuments to explore. You will find that the locals are extremely proud of their heritage, and those of the older generation in particular will be more than happy to share some of the finer points with you as a newcomer. You will be encouraged to note that some of Europe's most influential composers, novelists, artists and poets hail from the city, including the likes of the great literary figure, Miguel Hernandez, whose legacy lives on through the "Casa Museo Miguel Hernandez", a house which he inhabited from 1914 to 1934.

Hernandez was born and raised in Orihuela, and worked as a farmhand and herdsman on his Father's land for many years. The solitary years in the fields led him to develop a special bond with nature; and a creativity that he began to express through writing poetry, and thus he became one of the greatest Spanish poets of all time. The Miguel Hernandez Museum retains the furniture which was typical of the last century, as well as a collection of original photographs and important aspects of his life.



Places of Interest

Orihuela is known for its deeply religious connections, which are reflected in its buildings, daily activities and annual fiestas. There are a number of churches and other religious monuments located within the city, including the Gothic and Baroque style “Santa Justa y Rufina” Church; the Santiago Parish Church; and Our Lady of Montserrat, which is a Baroque temple in the form of a cross. The Salesian Monastery also lies within the heart of the city, on the remains of a Jesuit College. Today it operates more like a museum, housing a fascinating collection of works by the Court Painter, Vicente Lopez. Then there is the city’s Cathedral “El Salvador y Santa Maria” which was built as a church on the grounds of an ancient mosque during the 12th Century, ascending in importance to become a cathedral in 1510.

The building has been renovated several times, with the addition of a very ornate entrance called “Door of Loreto” during the 15th Century, through which you will find a stunning Baroque style organ. The Cathedral also displays evidence of Catalan Gothic and Renaissance style architecture and is well worth a visit. Another monument which will interest culture vultures is The Palace of Rubalcalva, which was inhabited by a local family up until 1933, becoming property of the town in 1976. It is now open to the public as a stately home, and features a luxurious sweeping staircase, leading to the noble main salons. These comprise the red salon where family portraits and other memorabilia are displayed; the yellow salon, which is available to hire for weddings and other special occasions; and the French style dance hall or “hall of mirrors” as it is better known. The Casino Orcelitano with its beautiful tiled patio and the Teatro Circo concert hall are also popular haunts for local people, offering a variety of performances that will quickly make your daily soap opera fix a thing of the past!

Shopping

Orihuela city hosts a vast spectrum of shops, ranging from food superstores such as Mercadona and Lidl, to more specialist stores and clothing boutiques. The city centre is easy to navigate on foot, with cobbled winding streets and a traditional central plaza featuring fountains and plenty of shaded benches where you can sit and watch the world go by. The city has two very popular local markets, operating on Tuesdays and Fridays, with stalls selling everything from fresh fruit and vegetables to flowers and leather goods. You will also find a number of important government

buildings such as the main Social Security office, PROP Residents Office, Town Hall, Court Building and Tourist Information situated within the centre.

These locations are all worth noting as you are bound to need to visit most of them at some point, particularly during your first few months in Spain. Just outside of the centre you will find the “Ociopia” Centro Commercial, a modern open air mall which is home to a wide selection of high street clothing stores, children’s clothing stores, shoe shops, phone shops, jewellers, a DIY superstore and various eateries and cafes. The mall even has its own cinema, with ample free parking available to customers. Just a short car journey away in Orihuela Costa you will also find the shopper’s heaven, La Zenia Boulevard, which opened in September 2012 to become the largest shopping mall in the Costa Blanca and Costa Cálida region. The Boulevard is open late seven days per week, including bank holidays, and is home to some 150 stores and over 20 bars and restaurants, plus a secure children’s play area.

Fiestas

Finally, Spain would not be the same without its fiestas, and expats are always interested to know what is happening in their new home. With its rich culture and heritage, Orihuela will certainly not disappoint, with a fiesta of some description taking place almost every month! It is particularly famous for the grand processions that take place during Semana Santa, or Easter week, characterized by a group of “Cofradias” who are trained to carry hefty floats and monuments symbolizing the death and resurrection of Christ.

The events continue throughout the entire week, reconstructing the story as it unfolded each day. Another significant fiesta for Orihuela is that of the Moors and Christians, which takes place in July and virtually everyone living in the city becomes involved in some way! In fact, as the activities are incredibly loud and continue throughout the day and night, if you live locally you have little choice but to join the party! Otherwise known as the Reconquest fiestas, the celebration gives a dramatic interpretation of how Christian troops arrived during the 13th Century, and triumphed over the Saracens to claim back the land. Impressive costumes, ferocious battles and endless firework displays are all central to the fiestas. ¡Viva España!



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TOURIST INFO



Buying In Spain...Choosing The Right Location

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” -Mark Twain

By Heidi Wardman



Is Spain The Right place For Me?

You are probably frightfully aware that moving house is one of the top stressful events that will take place in your lifetime, and possibly more than once. Add to this the idea that you may be leaving behind the comforts of home and jetting off to another country, and I know for a fact that your head is reeling and tummy doing dramatic somersaults. To ease this anxiety ever so slightly, it is worth doing some research, and getting together a list of pro's and con's about living in Spain as opposed to staying put, so that you are sure in your own mind that you are doing the right thing. After all, it has to be said that Spain is not for everyone, and once the novelty of sun, sea and sand has worn off you may find that day-to-day life is not so appealing. Here are a few points to consider before you start packing your bags....

Spain is not the right choice for you if:

You are incredibly impatient and expect everything to be done yesterday. The bottom line is, it won't be! Spain is incredibly bureaucratic, and that coupled with the laid back "mañana" approach to life means that pretty much everything takes a lot longer to happen than what you might expect! It is frustrating, and it will annoy the hell out of you, if you let it. So the best thing to do is accept that

that's the way it is, and you are not going to change things.

Make an effort to appreciate the culture and have a stab at the lingo. Even if you get it wrong the locals will appreciate your attempts and respect you for it- you are in their country after all! Try to steer away from your old routine and traditions, and embrace the wealth of new experiences that await you in Spain. You won't be disappointed.

You are unable to cope with a little noise from time to time. Spaniards are generally a lot louder and more animated than us Brits, and people from other nations, so if you have Spanish neighbours you will know about it! They also have a tendency to receive visitors at a time which we might consider to be late at night, as they are never in a hurry to go to bed! Noise levels increase during fiesta times, which take place frequently throughout the year, and involve flamboyant street parties, lots of food and drink, and very little sleep. Your only option if you are to maintain any degree of sanity is to join in, lose track of time and enjoy!



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You love the sun and outdoor living. It's amazing how quickly we acclimatize - in a few years down the line you will think that the 20°C lows in January are rather chilly!

You like the idea of a slower pace of life- Spain is definitely the ideal escape from the rat race.

You want to become part of a vibrant, multicultural community, where there is ALWAYS time to chat.

You are more concerned with family values and having a better quality of life than material things. Health and happiness are priority in Spain and money comes into play once everything else is running smoothly.

What Do I Want From My Spanish Home?

If Spain is still ticking all of the right boxes, then it's time to start putting an action plan together and get some inspiration regarding your ideal location, as Spain is a pretty big place! The easiest way to do this is to determine what it is that you hope to gain from your new home. The Real Estate options are endless, ranging from ultra modern, new-build city dwellings to traditional, rustic farmhouses; with access to amenities also varying in accordance with the location.

It is probably too early for you to pinpoint the exact town or city where you would like to be, unless of course you have already been there and fallen in love with the place! For most, it makes more sense to make a list of things which you would want to have either within walking distance or a short drive away.



Are you hoping for 365 days of uninterrupted sunshine (we cannot promise this by the way!), or would you prefer to be able to distinguish between seasons? Consider then, that not all of Spain experiences scorching hot summers and warm winters, and the further north you go the wetter, and greener it is. Will you use it as a holiday home, investment property, or do you plan to relocate altogether? This factor is also going to have a huge impact on the location which you choose, as generally speaking your holidaying needs will revolve around attractions and leisure activities, whilst permanent residency might require a few more practical considerations such as employment availability.

Do you fancy a beachfront bungalow, penthouse apartment with views over the mountains or frontline golf course? Do you need to be close to an international airport, good rail links or on a bus route? Perhaps you have restricted mobility, or are a wheelchair user, meaning that a mountainous location might not be the best choice for you. You might have a leisure interest that you wish to pursue from your new home, such as scuba diving, golf, bowls, cycling, swimming, dancing, gym membership or even taking up Spanish lessons, the provision of which could influence your move.

Do you need to be quite central with a range of employment options at your fingers tips, or perhaps

you will set up your own business and work from home? Or better still, maybe you plan to retire so the more remote the better! On that note, the choice between a bustling city or secluded, countryside retreat is quite a tough one, and it is important to consider the consequences of each before you dive in with both feet. A rural setting will usually guarantee you peace and tranquility, but may also mean that you are entirely cut off from basic amenities, and in some cases mains electricity and water! On the other hand, city life is not everybody's cup of tea, and may contravene your reasons for choosing Spain. Therefore, newcomers are well advised to go for a modest sized town or village at least when they first arrive and are finding their feet, perhaps on an urbanization where they are likely to meet other expats in a similar situation. This should provide the best of both worlds- a strong community feel and range of amenities on your doorstep, without the fast pace and commotion of the city.

It may seem like there are too many factors at play here to allow you to satisfy all of them, or indeed make the right decision. But with the right information, budget and a bit of imagination, all of these dreams really can come true! So put pen to paper, and start designing your Spanish home today.

The advertisement features a close-up photograph of a young lioness with light brown fur and striking blue eyes, looking slightly to the left. The background is a soft-focus natural setting. To the right of the lioness, the text 'TERRA NATURA Murcia' is displayed in a stylized, red and white font. Below this, the logo of the Ayuntamiento de Murcia (City Council of Murcia) is shown, consisting of a crown above a stylized building. The text 'Ayuntamiento de Murcia' is written in a simple, black font. At the bottom of the advertisement, a wooden sign with a distressed, hand-painted appearance reads 'A FULL DAY OF FUN, FOR ALL THE FAMILY...' in bold, white and black capital letters.





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Food & Drink

Spanish cuisine is one of the best in the world due to the quality and variety of ingredients it uses, it is the pride of the country.

It is difficult to talk about the national cuisine of Spain as a whole. But the traditional food is made up of many regional cuisines. Each one influenced by the climate, history, and customs of that region. However, you can distinguish common characteristics in all Spanish cuisine. First of all Spanish food is, in fact, quite simple. The base is onion, garlic and peppers. Usually, it uses herbs, sage and olive oil. The simplicity and the quick preparation are also common in many regional recipes. Typical Iberian Peninsula cooking methods include stewing in wine, cooking with pecorino cheese, or grilling or roasting.

Modern Spanish cooking is very varied, unique and impossible to recreate. It was influenced by the Romans, Moors and Americans.



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- Homemade Steak Pie
- Duck Breast with Red Berry Red Wine Coulis
- Salmon Fillet with Lobster Sauce
- Wild Mushroom Risotto
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Extremadura, a land and cuisine of contrasts

The Extremaduran countryside never ceases to amaze the visitor, with its dry plains, luxuriant pastures, mountains, marshes, meadows and fields.... In each area there are different products, the crops and livestock influencing the local dishes. However, the cooking is almost always simple. One of its main influences over the centuries has been the convents, which surprised illustrious visitors seeking rest, peace and good food in the monasteries and abbeys with many culinary delights. Yuste, Guadalupe, Alcántara and other refuges gave hospitality to high-ranking noblemen, serving them delicacies which satisfied even the very demanding taste of the emperor Carlos V.

Extremadura, a land and cuisine of contrasts

According to Dionisio Pérez, when the convent of San Benito de Alcántara was sieged by the troops of Napoleon, the nuns used the parchment paper of books to make rifle cartridges. Somebody found out that on one of these manuscripts was written the recipes of the convent and sent it to General Junot, who later incorporated the recipes into the French cuisine. In this way, pheasant, woodcock and partridge were served “a la Alcántara” in Parisian palaces. The expert Escoffier, a staunch Gaul, said that this manuscript was “the best trophy, the only profitable thing that France got out of that war”.

Natural ingredients

Extremaduran cuisine is simple, tasty and very varied, because it knows how to use the top quality resources it has at its disposal and never tries to hide anything. This has resulted in authentic, natural and uncomplicated dishes. Christians, Muslims and Jews lived together in this region and each left its mark on Extremaduran cooking. The Arab “sinabi” is the precursor of the “caldereta” (meat stew), the Jewish “adefina” is the precursor of the “olla” and “puchero” (other typical stews) and “escabeche” - a pickling brine - was used to prepare food by both cultures and was very popular throughout the region.

Luxury: Iberian cured ham

The most important component of Extremaduran cuisine is the Iberian pig, which produces the best cured hams in the world; its meat is covered with a type of ground pepper known as paprika, which was brought to Spain by the Extremaduran conquistadors and is used to prepare delectable cold meats. True gastronomic delights are prepared with its fresh meat - “presa” (whole fresh leg), “secreto” (from the stomach), “carrillera” (from the face), “botones” (from the stomach) etc. Oven-roasted lamb, cooked as “caldereta” or in another type of stew known as “guiso de bodas”, represents Extremaduran cooking at its best. Game abounds in this region (partridge, pigeon, turtledove, rabbit, hare, wild boar, deer, etc) and is cooked and served with wild mushrooms, truffles, wild asparagus or the excellent thistle, resulting in a very creative and innovative style of

cooking which satisfies modern tastes. The tench is an excellent fish which when properly prepared is sublime. The Extremadurans either marinade it in a pickling brine or pickle, or fry it. This fish is in fierce competition with the trout, another favourite.

Torta del Casar

However, if the Iberian pig is considered exceptional, the “Torta del Casar” is surely the most sought-after cheese in Spain, which together with the other cheeses found in the region - La Serena, Ibores, Gata and Cabra del Tietar, can form part of a cheese board which is difficult to beat. Extremaduran honey is very sweet and varied due to the diversity of the flora found in this area. Thyme, heather, rosemary, lavender, lime and eucalyptus are used to prepare a great variety of desserts by mixing them with almonds, walnuts, pine nuts, eggs and flour and sometimes a glass of anise or other liqueur to make “rosquillas” (ring-shaped biscuits), “alfeñiques” (caramel dessert), “perrunillas” (small round cakes), “nuégados” (egg yolk and orange), buns, “técula-mécula” (cinnamon, almond and tea), etc. These desserts are almost unknown but they pleasantly surprise the sweet-toothed traveller when he passes through one of the many beautiful towns of the region. The fruit is extremely good, some such as the Jerte cherry truly delectable. The traveller will find sweet and firm melons, delicious early apples, large and aromatic peaches and figs, which are so juicy that at times a drop of “honey” spills out from the centre.

Wines

With regards wine, there is one Denomination of Origin: Ribera del Guadiana. Extremaduran wine is still not very well known, but the advances made with regards its quality are notable and at times they are found on the most select tables.

Christmas food in Extremadura

Platters of Iberian cured ham are the star of the table, above all Dehesa Iberian ham from Extremadura. The cheeses, particularly the Torta del Casar, cheese from La Serena and Ibores, never fail to make an appearance. Soups such as garlic soup (containing the famous Extremaduran Vera paprika) or fish broths are the most popular prelude to the main course. Which are the most popular? Apart from those that are customary throughout the country, the most popular are the recipes based on cod and prepared with typical local mushrooms, known as criadillas. To finish, why not try one of the tasty desserts made from Valle del Jerte cherries

Boditas



Ingredients:

Ingredients for 4 people:

Dried figs

Walnuts

Honey

Method:

Open the dried figs in the middle and put half a walnut inside.

Close and roll in honey.

Put on a sheet of aluminium paper on a baking tray and allow to caramelize

Lamb stew



Ingredients:

Ingredients for 5 people:

1½kg of lamb (if possible merino)
1 lamb's liver
2 large onions
1 morrón pepper
4 cloves of garlic
1 slice of bread
1 spoonful of hot or sweet paprika (according to taste)
½dl of olive oil
1 glass of dry white wine
thyme oregano salt

Method:

Chop the lamb and cook the pieces with the liver in a casserole dish.

Separately, in a frying pan, fry the peeled garlic cloves, the chopped onion, the bread and the chopped red pepper.

After five or ten minutes, when everything is golden (but not brown), add to the casserole dish.

Meanwhile mash the liver, two of the garlic cloves, a pinch of thyme and oregano, the wine, the paprika and a little water with a mortar and pestle or use a mixer.

Add everything, with the other fried ingredients and the lamb, to the casserole dish, together with enough water, or, better still, meat stock, to almost cover the lamb.

Cook the stew over a low heat for about three quarters of an hour until the liquid has reduced to make the sauce.

Add salt half way through cooking according to taste.

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The city of Zamora in Castilla-León, preserves in its old town an important legacy of Romanesque art, which has earned it the declaration of Historic-Artistic site. Set on the banks of the River Duero and right on the Via de la Plata (Silver Road) route, its medieval importance has left a mark in the shape of walls, palaces and churches. To get to know the history and art of the province better, there is nothing better

than looking round one of the towns on the Duero Route or the Via de la Plata. You can get to know it in more depth through its cuisine and traditions, like the celebration of Easter, declared to be of International Tourist Interest.

The Puente de Piedra (Stone Bridge) that crosses the Duero takes you into the city with a strong medieval imprint, known as the City of Romanesque. Its buildings effortlessly take you back to the Middle Ages, a period when the city withstood sieges and attacks. Known as "the Well Protected", because of its triple defensive ring, it preserves the first of these walls almost entirely. Among the stretches of wall, three gates - the Portillo de la Traición, the Puerta de Doña Urraca and the Puerta del Obispo - are outstanding.

Dominating the whole layout are the Castle and the Cathedral. Romanesque Jewel Surrounded by the Castle Park is this fortress of Arab origin which still preserves its Keep, gate and the moat. Beside it stands the tower and dome of the Cathedral of Zamora, which are undoubtedly its most characteristic elements. The gadroon dome and roof with flakes of stone, in Byzantine style, were built in the 12th century; while the Romanesque tower that accompanies them dates from the 13th. Inside the church, the wrought iron screens and pulpits, the bas-reliefs of the choir stalls and the Neoclassical cloister, which houses the Cathedral Museum, are the outstanding features.

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A Culinary Guide To Cartagena.

Like its people, Cartagena's traditional cuisine has evolved gradually over time, with settlers from all four corners of the globe contributing to the rich gastronomy enjoyed here today.

By Heidi Wardman.



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A Life in
SPAIN 31

Gastronomic Evolution

The Region of Murcia is famous for its rich, diverse and healthy diet, which is in part due to the nature of the fresh produce derived from the area. Many of the basic ingredients produced are unique to the region, such as the Calasparra rice, particular species of fish and seafood of the Mar Menor, or the fruits and vegetables of the Murcia territory or “huerta”.

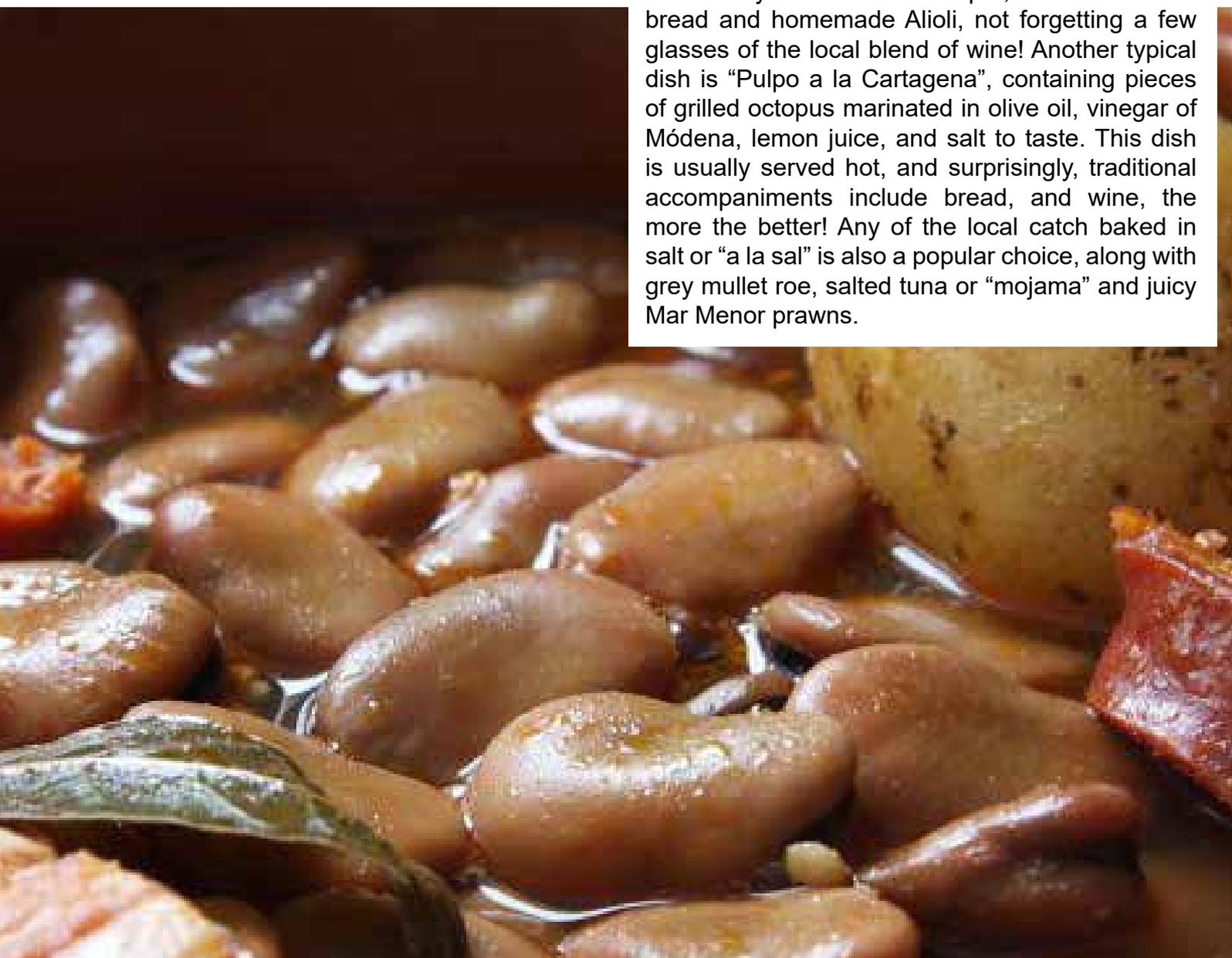
The range of foods enjoyed here, and the way in which they are prepared has been greatly influenced by the movement of people who have inhabited the land, with Roman settlers introducing the art of making preserves and salted fish. Meanwhile, the Arabs brought with them a wealth of cooking secrets and ingredients- predominantly rice and the best methods of growing and cooking it, together with spices, condiments and aromatic plants. The fertile valleys encouraged abundant growth of wheat, olives and grape vines, that are of course the principal ingredients of bread, oil and wine, which in turn form the basis of the super healthy Mediterranean Diet.

From The Sea

With its prime coastal location, it is no surprise that fish and seafood are the fare of choice in homes and restaurants throughout Cartagena. You cannot get much fresher than the regional catch from the Mediterranean Sea and Mar Menor, which includes gilthead sea bream, dusky grouper, dentex or mujol that is found in abundance off the Costa Calida. Local residents use a variety of cooking methods and accompanying ingredients to transform the basic products into a completely unique, tasty dish, with towns and villages throughout Murcia also adding their own twist to traditional recipes.

You can expect to enjoy your favourite fish served grilled, roasted, baked in salt, fried, or the most popular cooking method here, as a “caldero” or stew. Restaurants throughout the old quarter pride themselves on their “Caldero del Mar Menor”, combining rice cooked in chicken and fish broth, with a variety of fish such as grey mullet, monkfish, grouper or scorpion fish, tomatoes, garlic and saffron.

It is usually cooked in an iron pot, then served with bread and homemade Alioli, not forgetting a few glasses of the local blend of wine! Another typical dish is “Pulpo a la Cartagena”, containing pieces of grilled octopus marinated in olive oil, vinegar of Módena, lemon juice, and salt to taste. This dish is usually served hot, and surprisingly, traditional accompaniments include bread, and wine, the more the better! Any of the local catch baked in salt or “a la sal” is also a popular choice, along with grey mullet roe, salted tuna or “mojama” and juicy Mar Menor prawns.





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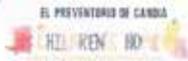
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From The Land

Aside from fruits of the sea, Cartagena relies on fresh produce from the land, “Campo de Cartagena”, with peas, known locally as “péssoles”; tomatoes, which are eaten raw; artichoke and broad beans being produced on a grand scale. These form the basis of a range of stew or broth style dishes, accompanied by a choice of meat or poultry, or as a satisfying vegetarian option. “Olla Gitana” is a hot, soupy mixture of chickpeas, pumpkin, pear, potatoes, saffron, sweet pepper, tomato, and onion. If your meal does not seem substantial enough without meat, why not try “caldo con pelotas” or turkey and meatballs.

A portion of the city’s famous “michirones” is also one of its cheap and cheerful signature dishes. Consisting of broad beans, ham chunks, lean bacon, spicy sausage, potatoes, and cayenne pepper, the flavoursome combination is served hot with bread and alioli; and if you had not guessed, best washed down with a few glasses of vino. Game, especially rabbit, hare, deer, partridge and quail, are one of the city’s preferred meat/ poultry choices and often baked in pies or found in dishes alongside of rice, beans and garlic; whilst pork also serves a significant part of the city’s staple diet. A wide variety of spiced sausages, morcón, spicy longanizas, morcilla black puddings and cured hams are among Cartagena’s gastronomic pork based delights, and can be served either as part of a main dish or as a simple snack with crusty bread.

Kid and suckling lamb are typically enjoyed in the home to mark a special occasion, with one of the most popular recipes being the unique “chuletas de cordero al ajo cabañil”, which combines suckling lamb chops served with a dressing made from chopped garlic, vinegar and a bay leaf.

Rice Cultivation

As in other parts of Spain, rice forms a significant part of the staple diet in homes throughout Cartagena, and even more so as it has been specially cultivated in Murcia for centuries. It was the Muslims who initially introduced this crop throughout the region; and by the fourteenth Century it was being heavily cultivated in the area of Calasparra, and prepared for export to Majorca and North Africa.

Today, Murcian rice, with the Denomination of Origin “Calasparra”, for example the exquisite rice known as “Bomba”, is famous across the globe and said to produce some of the finest “arroses” in the country.

Naturally, it has since become a vital component of Murcian cuisine. When cooked correctly, Bomba and Calasparra rice have the ability to absorb three times as much liquid as normal long grain rice, remaining extremely flavourful but beautifully al dente. Those living on the coast take advantage of the delicious range of seafood that they have at their fingertips, combining it in sumptuous rice dishes such as specialty rice with clawed lobster, rice with anchovies and the pride of Murcia, “arroz de caldero Murciano”. The latter has the appearance of paella, but the natives will happily educate you on the differences between this and the dish traditionally served in the neighbouring region of Valencia.

Just Desserts

Those with a sweet tooth will not be able to resist the syrupy flavour of the regional dessert, “Tocino de Cielo”. Similar to the creme caramel, this yellow coloured treat is made from caramelized yolk and sugar, which is then soaked in a syrup prepared with water, sugar, cinnamon, and lemon peel. It is refrigerated until it sets and feels firm to touch, then served chilled. “Cabello de Ángel” is a unique dish of pumpkin strands soaked in syrup; “bizcochos borrachos” consists of sponge soaked in wine and syrup; “tortada murciana” is a very sweet meringue; and “paparajotes”, is an aromatic dessert of Arab origin which is made with lime leaves wrapped in a fine sweet pastry and coated in sugar and cinnamon.

Other must-try sweet treats and pastries which are served locally include a wide selection of marzipans from Moratalla, nougat, Caravaca’s prized sugared egg yolks and macaroons. Fruit is often eaten as a dessert, with the selection varying in accordance with the time of year. Peaches in white wine, oranges with cinnamon, strawberries from Rincón de Seca, pears, apricots and every other type of Mediterranean fruit are readily nibbled after a meal. On that note, Cartagena boasts a thriving fruit preserve and honey industry, whose produce the local manufacturers will tell you holds a hint of the delicate aromas of the fields.

Spaniards of course love their cheese, which is often nibbled on its own in chunks; or served as a Tapa with bread, ham, and yes you guessed it, a few glasses of wine. Cartagena’s own cheeseboard delivers a range of high quality blends including goat’s cheeses, cottage and cured cheeses, with various herbs and spices added to flavour.

Wine Production

Murcia has cultivated grapevines and been recognized as one of the nation's main wine producing regions since Roman times, and Cartagena's port has historically proven useful in the export of its goods. As well as those from the Campo de Cartagena, you will also find a variety of excellent wines from Ricote, Abanilla, and the three "Denominaciones de Origen": Jumilla, Yecla and Bullas. Whilst red wine tends to be the firm favourite among Spaniards, Cartagena also produces a selection of whites and rosés with rich bouquets to suit every palate.

Moreish Liqueur

Although wine might seem to be a compulsory addition to every menu, it is not the only tippie to be supped by the locals in copious volumes. "Licor 43" or "Cuarenta y Tres" is a Spanish liqueur that has been wholly produced in Cartagena since 1924, and is now exported to more than 70 countries. As the name suggests, it combines forty-three wonderful flavours, with its principal ingredients being citrus and tangy fruit juices, flavoured with vanilla and a plethora of other aromatic herbs and spices. The presence of a rum-like kick makes the liqueur quite potent, and at 31%abv / 62 proof it is best drunk in moderation! "Asiático" is a popular after dinner drink which relies on the liqueur to give it a unique twist. Consisting of coffee with condensed milk, a splash of cognac, a few drops of the famous Licor 43, and cinnamon to taste, a dose of Asiático provides a very agreeable way to round off the evening and is certainly worth a try, but be warned that one glass is never enough!

Eating Out

As a thriving, cosmopolitan city, Cartagena offers a broad selection of places to eat and drink, from fine dining to bustling tapas bars, serving up a wealth of flavours from around the world. There is certainly something to suit every palate and budget, so whether you fancy eating Italian, French, German, Chinese, Thai, Indian, Mexican or a serving of traditional Spanish cuisine, you are guaranteed to find what you need to satisfy your craving. Whether you are planning to visit or make a more permanent move to Cartagena, there are an elite circle of restaurants that come highly recommended, and truly demonstrate the essence of the city's cuisine. Restaurant "Raimundo González", which was awarded with one sun by the "CAMPSA" Guide, has become an institution within the city as a result of its commendable use of local ingredients. Restaurant "El Chaleco" was a proud representative for the region at "Expo" in Seville; "Hispano", offers a different home-made stew every day; and "José María-Los Churrascos", promises to serve some of the freshest, finest fish and seafood which you will ever taste. ¡Buen Provecho!



Wine Regions - Extremadura

Extremadura is one of Spain's 17 administrative regions (officially 'autonomous communities'), and is located the southwest of the country, bordering Portugal. It is separated from Andalucía in the south by the Sierra Morena mountains, and from the central plateau and Castile by the Sierra de Gata range.

Extremadura is sparsely populated, but has plentiful wildlife such as deer, otters and even lynxes. Its wild black pigs, which feed on acorns, go on to become the famous jamón ibérico (Iberian ham). It is not, however as famous for its wine, despite the fact that viticulture here dates back many centuries.

The basic wines produced in the region have not traditionally attracted the attention of the outside world – not least because the local wineries have lacked modern technology. However, the Ribera del Guadiana DO title was established within the region in 1999 to represent the best that Extremadura has to offer. A push to export the local wine has also resulted in an increase in quality and in the modernization of wineries.



Tempranillo has traditionally been the favorite grape variety as it responds well to the regional terroir. More-adventurous winemakers are experimenting with other international varieties but these grapes have yet to make a mark on the overall quality of the region's wines. Extremadura's vineyards are also home to local white varieties such as Cayetana.

Some Extremadura vineyards are permitted to produce Cava, the sparkling white wine more often associated with north-eastern Spain. This is by far the most remote Cava-producing region, some 500 miles (800km) south-west of the Cava heartland in Catalonia.

Apart from the wines made under the Ribera del Guadiana DO designation, all others produced in Extremadura are permitted to use only the term *Vino de la Tierra Extremadura* (Extremadura VT). *Vino de la Tierra* is a lesser category than DO.

Whilst Extremadura's wines may not yet be world famous, its cork is certainly appreciated. This remains an important export of the region and *Quercus suber* (cork oak) trees are abundant, particularly near Cáceres.

The climate in Extremadura ranges from mild near the coast, with influences coming in from the Atlantic and the Mediterranean Oceans, to the more continental weather experienced in the inland, north-eastern areas close to the central plateau. The River Guadiana has a moderating influence on the hot summer temperatures, which can sometimes reach 104F (40C).



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Top 10 Attractions

El Escorial

Located in the heart of the Guadarrama Sierra (on one side of Mount Abantos), just 50 kilometres from Madrid, San Lorenzo de El Escorial is one of the municipalities of the greatest tourist and cultural interest in the region. Its main attraction is the San Lorenzo de El Escorial Monastery and Royal Site, which was declared to be a UNESCO Heritage Site in 1984.

Affected by the death of his father, Carlos V, in 1558 and in order to consolidate the House of Austria in Spain, it was Felipe II who ordered the construction of the Monastery, to ensure the eternal memory of his family, create a family Pantheon and offset the destruction of a church devoted to San Lorenzo during the battle of San Quintín, in France.

On 23rd April 1563, the first stone was laid under the orders of Juan Bautista de Toledo. On his death in 1567, Juan de Herrera was responsible for the work, marking his own architectural stamp in the "herreriano" style, characterised by the importance of the lines rather than the abuse of decorative elements that distract attention from the building.

With an area of 33,327 square metres, the Monastery of El Escorial is the monument that best sums up the ideological and cultural aspirations of the Spanish "Golden Age", expressed here through an original synthesis of Italian and Flemish artistic forms at the behest of Philip II.

Combining several functions in one building, San Lorenzo el Real was born as a monastery of the monks of the order of San Jerónimo, whose church served as a royal pantheon. It also has a palace to house the king and his entourage, a school and seminary to complete the religious function of the monastery and a library. This scheme is, to a certain extent, still in place today.



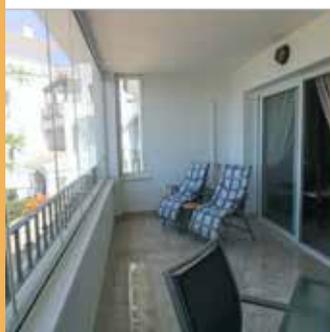
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Benalmadena

By Taquilla Tickets

Once again Taquilla Tickets is going "out and about". This time, on the 6th September until the 8th September, Taquilla Tickets will take you for a three day Mini Break to Benalmadena (in the beautiful historical region of Andalucia), and Gibraltar.

Benalmadena:

In the 7th century BC the Phoenicians arrived, followed by the Romans in the early part of the 8th century. However, the name Benalmadena came from the Moors who arrived in the late 8th century. The original name was Ben-Al-Madina which, in Arabic, means "Children of the mines". At the time there were Iron Ore and Ochre mines all around the area. The 14th century saw the population of the area diminish due to the many coastal attacks by the infamous Barbary pirates. These were Muslim pirates from North Africa and were based primarily in the ports of Sale, Rabat, Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli (Just a short sea journey really!!).

The town was known as Vigia de la Costa or "Lookout for the Coast". The town's coat of arms still portrays this today ! To this end, three watchtowers (or Torres) were built. The remains can still be seen. One is situated in Benalmadena Costa near the (now) beautiful Marina with it's Moorish style architecture. The others are in Torrequebrada and Torremuelle. In 1680 much of Benalmadena was destroyed by an Earthquake and the following tsunami. Below is a picture of the modern day Marina in Benalmadena:

Birds of prey exhibition with some really magnificent birds being flown. If you like the gorgeous "White Villages" of Andalucia, then a brilliant example of just one is Mijas Pueblo: You can get there by bus, your own car of course or taxi, and it takes around 25 minutes. Mijas Pueblo is one of the Jewels in the Crown of Whitewashed Villages in Andalucia. Narrow Streets, numerous gift shops and excellent restaurants abound, and perhaps a day is not long enough to see it all but, why not try ? You won't be disappointed and that's a fact !! If you don't fancy any of that then why not just spend the day around the magnificent Marina area?

Benalmadena Old Town

Mijas Pueblo

Mijas Pueblo

From lovely Benalmadena we take you down to Gibraltar: What a history this place has. A small peninsular on the Southern Iberian coast near the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea, dates back nearly 3,000 years. One historian has called this area "One of the most densely fortified and fought over places in Europe". Gibraltar's location is militarily important because it is said that whoever controls Gibraltar, controls the passage of ships into, or out of, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Seas. Following the collapse of the Roman Empire, Gibraltar became part of the Visigoth Kingdom of Hispania. In 711 AD it came under the rule of the Moors, and was named Jebel Tariq or "The mount of Tariq". This was later corrupted to Gibraltar. The Christian crown of Castile annexed it in 1309 and lost it again to the Moors in 1333 and finally regained it in 1462.

Things to do: Probably the best thing to do (and by far the easiest) to see Gibraltar, is to hop on to one of the small minibuses that take you up the rock itself. You cannot walk up there, so the bus is great. There are various old WW2 air raid shelters to discover, some of which are used by the "upper rock" residents for car parking ! Not many people know this one, but there used to be a steam railway (no, really) that went around the rock to Rosia Bay, on the way to Europa Point. There are around 30 miles of tunnels within the rock. Some had narrow gauge railways to move troops and supplies..True!! Gibraltar has always been a mix of cultures, whilst being staunchly independent, but with a strong allegiance to the UK. In 1969 General Franco closed the border between Gibraltar and Spain.

So, if you would like to come with us on this very special trip then please contact us on:

Sally: 0034 657346445 (WhatsApp is good too). You can also contact us on our email address which is: taquillaticketscondado@gmail.com

Nigel: can be found at Cat's Bar on Camposol A from Tuesday-Friday 10.15-13.30

OR

You can call in to our Condado de Alhama office from 10.00-13.30 Mon-Friday. We are situated within the office of "Sparkles" in the main square.



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Pros and Cons of Owning a Car in Spain

With the ever rising cost of car hire, we are seeing more and more holiday home owners opting for the car owner option.

AND YES YOU CAN OWN A CAR IF YOU HAVE A UK LICENCE

Pro: It makes your commute to work easier

Depending on where you live, you might not have many transport options, especially for people living in the suburbs or rural areas. Even if there is a train, metro, or bus nearby, the number of times you have to switch can really affect how easy or long your commute is. Having a car is a good option in this case, if you don't mind the traffic. In addition, having your own car means you won't be held back by public transport delays, closures, or overcrowding. I can tell you, the 8am rush on the Madrid metro is never fun. Plus, you'll also avoid the rain, wind, or worse weather on your walk to the nearest station.

Con: Parking Costs

If you live in a city, you'll probably need to rent a parking space near your work and near your home. And with little space available, city parking can be expensive. Renting a parking space in Madrid, for example, will set you back between 70 and 150 euros per month, with the downtown areas being more expensive. If you decide not to invest in a parking spot and want to pay for street parking, can you park within the blue lines for 2-4 hours at a rate of around €1 per 30 minutes or the more exclusive green lines for 1-2 hours for around €2 per 30 minutes. Parking garages tend to charge on a per minute-basis with rates as high as €0.05 a minute in some areas, while overnight parking can range from 25-50 euros. Parkopedia offers a handy app to find available parking.

Pro: It will help you get groceries, furniture, and when moving house

Everybody in Europe knows that the big stores and shopping centers are usually located on the outskirts of town. I can't tell you how many times we've hopped in the car to go to IKEA just to look around or to go grocery shopping at the "big Carrefour" in the suburbs. The little stores and bodegas in the city centre are so much more expensive - and cramped - so sometimes it's nice to go out to the giant shopping mall where you can browse tons of different stores and get everything all at once.

Not to mention that having a car makes it easier when transporting big items like furniture or when moving apartments. This is pretty much impossible to do via bus or metro. Of course, for massive items like your couch and bed you'll still have to hire movers, but I can tell you that we've saved hundreds of euros in moving costs by transporting our clothes, kitchenware, and other manageable items by car rather than counting on movers to do it.

Con: Maintenance, Taxes, and Regulations

In Spain, you're required to get a vehicle technical inspection at the ITV station occurring once a year for older vehicles and every two years for newer ones. Any repairs are up to you to fix - or you're off the road. The ITV tests include checking your documentation, the exterior condition of the vehicle, and the functionality of the brakes, lights, tyres, etc. Prices for the inspection typically range from 25-35 euros.

Don't forget about taxes!. The most common ones are the one-time registration tax in your municipality and the yearly road tax. If you buy a used car you will need to pay a transfer tax and if you import your car from abroad there will be import fees associated.

Finally, you should keep in mind the different regulations regarding vehicle emissions set by Spanish and European directives. This can severely affect your ability to use your car and limit where you can drive with your vehicle. For example, the Madrid Central zone prohibits non-residents and high-emission vehicles from accessing a specific area of downtown Madrid in order to reduce harmful emissions and combat the effects of climate change. If you live or work in an area like this, you need to find out what costs and regulations apply to you.

Pro: You can use it to reach a nearby city...or get out of the city

If you live in the countryside or a small town, you will probably want to take a trip to your closest big city every now and then. While living in the countryside gives you more living space and fresher air, cities tend to offer more cultural activities like museums and fine dining. When I lived in the suburbs of Madrid, the trains would stop running at 11pm, and since there was no metro line in our town, we would often drive into the city to be able to stay out as late as we wanted.

Supplied by InsureSpain

Rules are changing all the time since Brexit. Please make sure you check on an official website for the latest information.

Alternatively, if you're a city-dweller and you simply need to escape the hustle and bustle, a car is the best way to do so. Just two hours from where we live in Madrid are some of Spain's best vineyards and wineries, and reaching these rural spots is nearly impossible by train or bus. Having a car lets us get out of the city as often as we want, and it's a great way to explore the lesser known areas of Spain. Check out my recommendations for the ultimate Spanish road trip!

Pro: You'll be able to enjoy your favorite hobby
If you're an active person who participates in many sports or hobbies, you'll definitely need your own car. Let's just say, it's not exactly easy to take a bike or surfboard on public transport. Many areas that offer outdoor activities such as rock climbing, skiing, surfing, or hiking aren't easily accessible - or accessible at all - by public transportation. Thus renting a car, or having your own, is essential for outdoor enthusiasts.

All said, I do recommend having a car in Spain at your disposal, simply because it makes life easier when you really need to go somewhere. My husband and I like the freedom that having a car brings us when we want to take a spontaneous road trip or we need to jet over to the doctor or hospital for an appointment.

Keep in mind that you must have car insurance in order to be eligible to drive in Spain. Caser Expat Insurance offers everything from basic coverage to the highest level of coverage. If you're starting the process of driving in Spain, learn how to switch your license.



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FROM WIGAN PIER TO ANDALUCÍA

In our wandering life on four continents we have spent a lot of time in aeroplanes and almost as much waiting around in airports. In transit from Santiago to London via Rio de Janeiro, we were corralled with our teenage sons and a couple of hundred others in a dimly lit glass box with hard seating and no access to refreshments. I was just about to mutter '¡Jodido sea esto por un juego de soldados!' (Fuck this for a game of soldiers) when a voice rang through the room:

'Mr John Taylor!'

I acknowledged my existence with a weary lift of the hand.

'Come here.'

I raised an eyebrow, but declined to walk, so the speaker, a man twenty years younger than me and wearing a rather indeterminate blue uniform, was obliged to approach me. By this time, all conversation had ceased and our fellow prisoners were clearly waiting with interest to see what would happen next.

The uniformed man stared down at me with a slight curl of the lip.

'Where are your children?' he asked.

'I'm not sure, perhaps they've gone for a walk.' (They had craftily slipped out when a fresh batch of inmates was being committed to the tank).

'You mean to tell me that you don't KNOW where your children are?' (The contempt was palpable).

'That's right, I don't, but I'll bet you do so let's stop playing games.'

'Your children,' said the uniformed man portentously, 'have entered a prohibited area. They are being detained by one of my colleagues.'

'That sounds serious. So they have ignored a warning notice?'

'There was no notice.'

'So, they have disobeyed the instructions of an official. I regard that as even worse because it combines illegality with disrespect. They shall be punished. Severely.'

'There was no official involved.'

'Exactly what was this 'prohibited area?'

'A baggage hall.'

'A baggage hall, full of other people's property? I begin to understand your concern.'

'It was empty.'

'In the interest of clarity, let's summarize the situation: Ignoring an invisible notice, and disregarding the instructions of a non-existent official, my children entered an empty baggage hall and have now been kidnapped by your shadowy associate. What I am still

unsure about is your role in this scenario. Are you, for instance, an official of the Brazilian state or merely a member of some neo-Nazi Party?'

'I am a member of the ground staff of Varig Airlines.'

'So, by purchasing our tickets, my wife and I are actually paying you to persecute our children. However, I see that our sons have miraculously reappeared in the doorway, so just one final question if I may?'

'What is it?'

'How are you feeling at this moment?'

'I don't understand.'

'Then I'll explain. The moment you chose to address me in that peremptory manner, across twenty metres of parquet flooring, in a room full of spectators, you doomed yourself to this embarrassing confrontation which has given so much pleasure to this previously bored audience. And now, with your leave, or indeed without it, we shall proceed to our boarding gate.'

In contrast, I have almost invariably found ground staff pleasant, helpful and only occasionally as thick as a Wigan butty.

The girl on the BA counter in Singapore flashed me a charmingly orthodontic smile and said 'I'd like to give you the opportunity of flying tomorrow instead of today.'

'No, thank you,' I replied pleasantly.

'It really would be helpful, sir because there seems to be a problem with your onward booking from Bangkok.'

'There can't be.'

'Why not?'

'Because I haven't come from Bangkok.'

'Are you sure?'

'Why? Don't you think I might have noticed?'

'But it says here 'Taylor booked from Bangkok to London via Singapore.'

'Well, as my ticket clearly states, I have not come from Bangkok, and I am not travelling to London.'

To cut a lengthening story short, I was successively grilled by three more BA officials, in descending order of idiocy, who were all extremely sceptical of my repeated assertions that only once in my life had I visited Bangkok and it certainly hadn't been yesterday. And I was successively issued with four different boarding cards, the last one scribbled by a baffled young woman at the departure gate.

No sooner had I boarded the aircraft and strapped myself in (Why is the previous occupant of the seat

Part 13: Sic Transit

always less than half my girth?) than a lady loomed over me and said:

'Excuse me but I think you're in my seat.'

'Let me guess,' I replied, 'you are Ms Taylor en route to London from Bangkok.'

'How on earth do you know that?'

Sighing deeply, I pressed the button to summon a member of the cabin crew, though by now I utterly despaired of finding a British Airways employee with an IQ larger than that of a mentally deficient gerbil.

Moments later, a vision of loveliness, with golden hair down to her shoulders and sheer-clad legs up to her ears, appeared and cooed at me in the Sloanest of all possible Sloan accents.

'Good morning sir, and what seems to be the problem?'

In response my terse summary of the past three hours, she nodded sympathetically.

Then she took me by the hand and led me gently into a land flowing with free champagne and caviar. I felt the upgrade had been richly deserved.

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