

Málaga Province



Though best known for the urban excitements of the Costa del Sol resorts and Málaga city, this province is also endowed with tremendous natural beauty. It has rugged mountains and a gorgeous coastline in the east where cliffs drop to pretty coves and bays. Inland in winter almonds show their white blossoms and plump olives glisten with the morning dew. This wonderful landscape offers a range of activities from hiking and canoeing to abseiling and horse riding. It also has a stunning architectural heritage in the elegant old towns of Ronda and Antequera, and the picturesque white villages of the interior.

Bustling Málaga city, the second-biggest metropolis in Andalucía, has a rich cultural scene, recently much enhanced by the opening of its state-of-the-art Picasso Museum, and is also a great place to go out and have fun. It has many characterful late-night bars dotted around its atmospheric old centre.

Along the coasts stretch what can seem nothing more than an endless purgatory of concrete and noise. Yet if you want to party and have fun on the beach, or let your hair down at a theme park, the Costa del Sol is perhaps the best place in Andalucía to do it – and the same party spirit infuses the many colourful local fiestas throughout the province.

HIGHLIGHTS

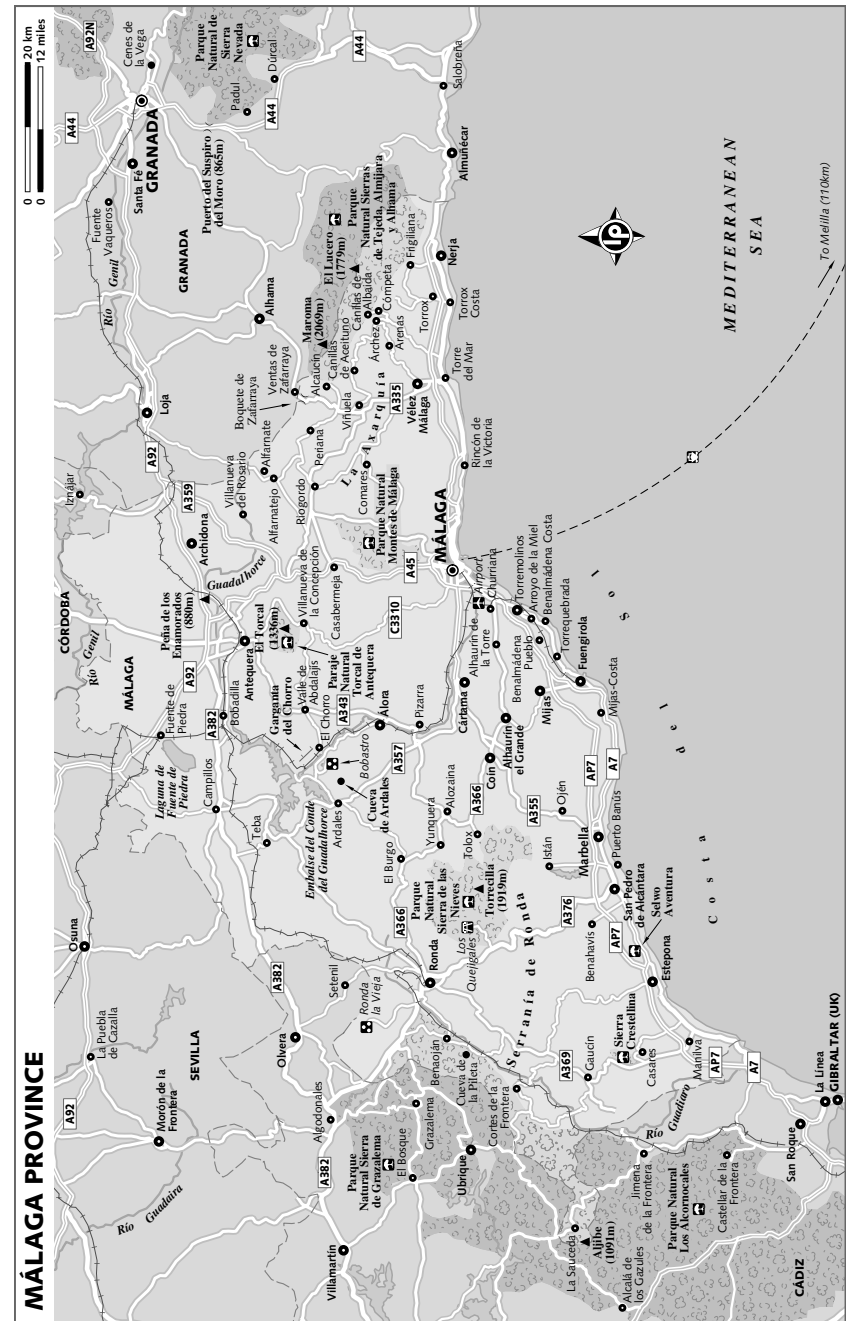
- Soak up the vibrant street life of Málaga and catch the coast's most ebullient festivals, the **Feria de Málaga** (p257), Marbella's **Feria de San Bernabé** (p273) and **Día de la Virgen del Carmen** (p268) in Fuengirola
- Get up close with the stunning Picasso collection at Málaga's **Museo Picasso** (p245) or step back in time at its **Castillo de Gibralfaro** (p245)
- Come to grips with the history of bullfighting, brought to life in the **Feria de Pedro Romero** (p281) at stunningly located Ronda
- Scale the spectacular limestone walls of **El Chorro gorge** (p287)
- Explore the spectacular back country around Ronda, especially the **Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves** (p285)



POPULATION: 1.45 MILLION

MÁLAGA AV DAILY HIGH:
JAN/AUG 13°C/26°C

ALTITUDE RANGE: 0M–2069M



MÁLAGA

pop 558,000

Compared with the adjoining Costa del Sol, Málaga is a world apart. It is a briskly modern yet historic city that still retains the atmosphere and swagger of a Mediterranean port. Forget the concrete and commonplace of the city's peripheries – its centre pulses with colourful life. With a backdrop of the blue Mediterranean, the city offers a pleasant mix of wide, leafy boulevards, a handful of impressive monuments and a charming historic centre. Take a look from the Gibralfaro hill and the city can't fail to impress.

Málaga is a late starter to the idea of sprucing itself up for tourists, but things are changing. It now has an attractive pedestrian centre with an increasing number of tall palm trees. A major new museum devoted to Málaga-born Pablo Picasso opened in 2003, as did a new museum of contemporary art. A new fine-arts museum is pending, to be housed in the impressive Aduana (Customs) building, and work is going on to modernise the port and develop it as a leisure zone. Scaffolding and building works litter the centre, too, as Málaga looks ahead to being the European City of Culture in 2016.

Malagueños (residents of Málaga) are open and sociable people and they like to party – as a result the city stays open very late, with some healthy nightlife kicking off at around midnight.

ORIENTATION

The eastern and western halves of the city are neatly separated from each other by the Río Guadalmedina. Málaga's central axis, running from west to east, comprises Avenida de Andalucía, the Alameda Principal and finally the landscaped Paseo del Parque (ending in the upmarket district of La Malagueta). From La Malagueta, Avenida Pries takes you, with several changes to its name, out to the eastern beaches of El Pedregalejo and El Palo.

Rising up above the eastern half of Paseo del Parque, the Alcazaba and Castillo de Gibralfaro dominate the city and overlook the *casco antiguo* (old town) with its narrow, winding streets. The main streets

leading north into the old town are Calle Marqués de Larios, ending at Plaza de la Constitución, and Calle Molina Lario.

The modern central shopping district stretches between Calles Marqués de Larios and Puerta del Mar.

The airport is 9km from the city centre – for details on getting to/from the airport, see p263.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Librería Luce (Map p246; Alameda Principal 16) One of Málaga's largest bookshops, stocking English- and French-language titles. It also has an excellent travel section.

Emergency

Policia Local (Local Police; Map p243; ☎ 952 12 65 00; Avenida de la Rosaleda 19)

Policia Nacional (National Police; ☎ 952 04 62 00; Plaza de Manuel Azaña) The main police station is 3km west of the centre.

Internet Access

Ciberquetzal (Map p246; Calle Carretera 67; per hr €1.20; ☎ 10.30am–10.30pm Mon–Fri, 5pm–10pm Sat & Sun)

Meeting Point (Map p246; Plaza de la Merced 20; per hr €1–2; ☎ 10am–1am Mon–Sat, 11am–11pm Sun) Plenty of computers, and friendly staff.

Left Luggage

There are baggage lockers at the main **bus station** (Map p243; Paseo de los Tilos) and the **train station** (Map p243; Explanada de la Estación), costing €2.40 to €4.50 per day.

Media

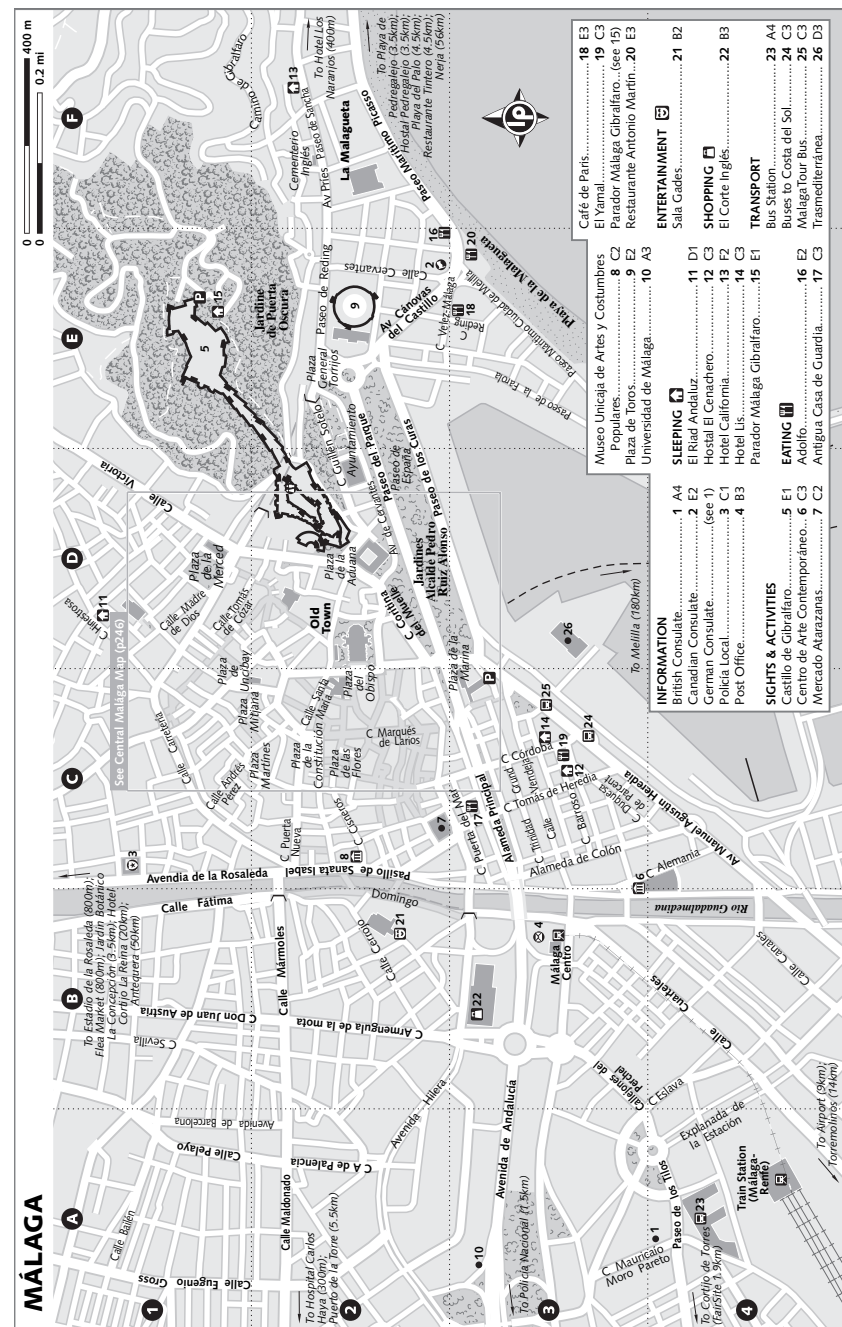
Costa del Sol is flooded with free English-language magazines loaded down with property ads. Generally more worthwhile is *Sur in English*, a free weekly English-language digest of Málaga's daily newspaper *Sur*.

Roam the FM wavelengths between about 97MHz and 105MHz in Málaga province and you'll come across half a dozen Costa-based English-language radio stations.

Medical Services

Farmacia Caffarena (Map p246; ☎ 952 21 28 58; Alameda Principal 2) A convenient 24-hour pharmacy.

Hospital Carlos Haya (☎ 951 03 01 00; Avenida de Carlos Haya) The main city hospital, 2km west of the city centre.



Money

There are plenty of banks with ATMs on Calle Puerta del Mar and Calle Marqués de Larios, as well as in the airport's arrivals' hall.

Post

Post office (Map p243; Avenida de Andalucía 1; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

Telephone

Telephone calls are easily made from phone booths dotted around the city, and cards can be purchased from cigarette shops and newsagents.

Tourist Information

Municipal tourist office (Map p246; ☎ 952 12 20 20; Plaza de la Marina; www.malagaturismo.com in Spanish; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun year-round) Offers a range of city maps and booklets, including the monthly *¿Qué Hacer?*, which gives day-by-day upcoming events in the province. It also operates another office in the **Casita del Jardinero** (Map p243; ☎ 952 13 47 31; Avenida de Cervantes 1; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri Apr-Oct, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun year-round) and information kiosks on Plaza de la Aduana, at the main bus station, on Plaza de la Merced, in front of the main post office and on the eastern beaches.

Regional tourist office (Map p246; ☎ 951 30 89 11; www.andalucia.org; Pasaje de Chinitas 4; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) On an alley off Plaza de la Constitución. Provides a range of information including maps of the regional cities. The staff speak numerous languages. It operates a second office at the airport.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Take care of your valuables at all times and watch bags, especially at the bus station and when you're seated at café *terrazas* (terraces; on Plaza de la Merced, in particular); there are some sharp teams of snatchers around. Night-time Málaga is generally safe, but it's best to avoid the darker and quieter side streets. The teenage craze for drinking in the plaza hits Málaga in locations such as Plaza de la Merced. The downside is more mess than mayhem. Remove all valuables and bags when leaving cars parked overnight, and be sure to use the guarded car parks around the city centre.

Scams

If you're driving away from Málaga airport, be aware of a scam whereby thieves surreptitiously puncture one of your tyres then follow you. When you stop to fix it, they stop too and while 'helping' you they also help themselves to contents from your car. If you should get a puncture soon after leaving the airport, you're advised to stay inside your car and call the emergency number ☎ 112. If you don't have a mobile phone, try to flag down a police car.

SIGHTS

Málaga's major cultural sights are clustered in or near the charming old town, which is situated beneath the Alcazaba and the Castillo de Gibralfaro. However, many visitors take an additional day or two to head out to the beaches on the eastern edge of the city.

Old Town

Essentially a Renaissance city with its wide boulevards and decorative façades, Málaga bears the stamp of Fernando and Isabel's ambitious transformation of Islamic Andalucía as they united Spain under a single rule in the 15th century.

CATHEDRAL

Málaga's **cathedral** (Map p246; ☎ 952 21 59 17; Calle Molino Lario; cathedral & museum admission €3.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, closed holidays) was begun in the 16th century and building continued for 200 years. From the start, the project was plagued by over-ambition, and the original proposal for a new cathedral had to be shelved. Instead, a series of architects (five in total) set about transforming the original mosque – of this, only the **Patio de los Naranjos** survives: a small courtyard of fragrant orange trees where the ablutions fountain used to be.

Inside, it is easy to see why the epic project took so long. The fabulous domed ceiling soars 40m into the air, while the vast colonnaded nave houses an enormous cedar-wood choir. Aisles give access to 15 chapels with gorgeous retables and a stash of 18th-century religious art. Such was the project's cost that by 1782 it was decided that work would stop. One of the two bell towers was left incomplete, hence the cathedral's well-worn nickname, *La Manquita*

(the one-armed lady). The cathedral entrance is on Calle Cister. The cathedral's museum displays a collection of religious items covering a period of 500 years. These include sacred paintings and sculptures, liturgical ornaments, and valuable pieces made of gold, silver and ivory.

PALACIO EPISCOPAL

In front of the cathedral spreads the sumptuous Plaza del Obispo, where the blood-red Bishop's Palace, the **Palacio Episcopal** (Map p246; admission free; ☎ 10am-2pm & 6-9pm Tue-Sun), now forms an exhibition space. The square provided an atmospheric set for Inquisition burnings in the filming of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, starring Robert de Niro.

HOMAGE TO PICASSO

From the cathedral a short walk up Calle San Agustín brings you to the new holy grail of Málaga's tourist scene, the **Museo Picasso** (Map p246; ☎ 902 44 33 77; www.museopicasso.malaga.org; Palacio de Buenavista, Calle San Agustín 8; permanent collection €6, temporary exhibition €4.50, combined ticket €8, 50% concession for youths 11-16yr with an adult, students under 26yr & senior citizens; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Thu & Sun, 10am-9pm Fri & Sat). It has an enviable collection of 204 works, 155 donated and 49 loaned to the museum by Christine Ruiz-Picasso (wife of Paul, Picasso's eldest son)

and Bernard Ruiz-Picasso (his grandson). Fascinating temporary exhibitions on Picasso themes fill out the collection.

The regional government of Andalucía invested €66 million in the restoration of the 16th-century Palacio de los Condes de Buenavista to house the museum, with fabulous results. Be sure not to miss the atmospherically preserved Phoenician, Roman, Islamic and Renaissance archaeological remains in the museum's basement, or the fantastic Café Museo Picasso (see p259). As expected, the museum seems to be fuelling a Málaga cultural and economic revival.

For a more intimate insight into the painter's childhood, head to the **Casa Natal de Picasso** (Map p246; ☎ 952 06 02 15; Plaza de la Merced 15; admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun, closed holidays), the house where Picasso was born in 1881, which now acts as a study foundation. The house has a replica 19th-century artist's studio. Personal memorabilia of Picasso and his family make up part of the display. Ironically, the Picasso family had to move from this house, which was too expensive, to the cheaper number 17.

Castle Complex

CASTILLO DE GIBRALFARO

One remnant of Málaga's Islamic past is the craggy ramparts of the **Castillo de Gibralfaro**

RETURN OF THE NATIVE

Perhaps it is the luminosity of Málaga's light or the severe, angular shapes of the region's dozens of *pueblos* (villages), but Picasso believed that 'to be a cubist one has to have been born in Málaga'. Banned from Spain by General Franco for his 'degenerate' art, Picasso lived much of his life in France, claiming he would never return to Spain as long as Franco was in power. But his passion for Málaga never faded. When the idea for a Picasso museum was first mooted in 1954, the town council asked him to send a few paintings from Paris. He declared: 'I will not send one or two examples. I will send lorry-loads of paintings.' And so some 50 years later with the spectacular opening of the Museo Picasso, some 200 paintings, drawings, sculptures, ceramics and engravings have finally been exhibited. They chart practically every phase of his career from cubism to modernism.

Picasso was surrounded and influenced by women all his life, from his mother, sisters, grandmother and aunts to a string of beautiful muses – most famously Olga Kokhlova, Dora Maar, Françoise Gilot and Jacqueline Roque – and women create the most obvious theme in the new museum. There are famous works such as *Olga Kokhlova with Mantilla* (1917), *Woman with Raised Arms* (1939) and *Jacqueline Sitting* (1954), with each woman evoking a different stylistic response from the artist.

As ever, there are also doves in the paintings. It is said that doves and pigeons reminded him of his early childhood, when they scratched on the windowsill of the house in the Plaza de la Merced in Málaga. For a wonderful account of Picasso's life, get hold of John Richardson's two-volume *A Life of Picasso*, which won the Whitbread Book of the Year award in 1991.

neo-Islamic **Mercado Atarazanas** (Map p243; Calle Atarazanas), entered through its huge horse-shoe-shaped arch. The daily market in here is pleasantly noisy and animated and there is a whole host of food on sale. You can choose from swaying legs of ham and rolls of sausages or cheese, fruit, fish and sweets. Nearby are plenty of cafés on pedestrianised Calle Herredería del Rey.

If you strike out south of the Alameda you will find the funky **Centro de Arte Contemporáneo** (Map p243; ☎ 952 12 00 55; Calle Alemania; admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm 25 Sep-19 Jun, 10am-2pm & 5-9pm 20 Jun-24 Sep, Tue-Sun), which is housed in a skilfully converted 1930s wholesale market on the river estuary. The bizarre triangular floor plan of the building has been retained, with its cubist lines and shapes displaying the modern art brilliantly. Painted entirely white, windows and all, the museum exhibits works from well-known 20th-century artists and collectors such as Roy Lichtenstein, Gerhard Richter and Miquel Barceló. For a good introduction to the museum, ask about the free half-hour guided tours.

La Malagueta & the Beaches

At the end of the Paseo del Parque lies the exclusive residential district of La Malagueta. Situated on a spit of land protruding into the sea, apartments here have frontline sea views, and some of Málaga's best restaurants are found near the local **Playa de la Malagueta** (the beach closest to the city centre). Take a walk along the beach before settling down to a full-on fish lunch at Adolfo (p260) or visiting the museum of the **Plaza de Toros** (bullring; Map p243; Paseo de Reding; admission €1.80; ☎ 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri), the busiest bullring on the coast (see p263). The museum is fine if you want to see some stuff on bullfighting, but the museum in Ronda (p280) is much better.

East of Playa de la Malagueta, sandy beaches continue to line most of the waterfront for several kilometres. Next along from Playa de la Malagueta are two man-made beaches, **Playa de Pedregalejo** and **Playa del Palo**. El Palo being the city's original, salt-of-the-earth fishing neighbourhood. This is a great place to bring children and an even better place to while away an afternoon with a cold beer and a plate of fantastic, sizzling

seafood. To top it off, the efforts of the city council have resulted in a huge clean-up of the beach and water. To reach either beach take bus 11 from Paseo del Parque.

Jardín Botánico La Concepción

Four kilometres north of the city centre is the large, tropical **Jardín Botánico La Concepción** (☎ 952 25 21 48; adult/child €3.10/1.60; ☎ 9.30am-8.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5.30pm Oct-Mar, closed Mon, 25 Dec & 1 Jan). Dating from the mid-19th century, the gardens are the brainchild of a local aristocratic couple, Amalia Heredia Livermore and Jorge Loring Oyarzabal. They decided to re-create a tropical forest near the shores of the Mediterranean. It is famous for its purple wisteria blooms in spring.

You can visit by 90-minute guided tour or solo, wending your way through some of the 5000 tropical plants, ponds, waterfalls and lakes.

By car, take the A45 Antequera road north from the Málaga ring road (A7) to Km 166 and follow the signs for the 'Jardín Botánico'. Alternatively, the MalagaTour bus (p257) makes a stop here.

ACTIVITIES

A most welcome activity in Málaga is the **Baños Árabes** (Arab Baths; Map p246; ☎ 952 21 23 27; www.elhammam.com; Calle Tomás de Cózar 13; bath with/without Turkish wash €32/23, massages €34-80; ☎ 10am-10pm), a perfect place to sit back and sweat it out amid the steamy semidarkness to the sound of soothing music. Unlike some Arabic baths in Andalucía, there are no pools to bathe in here. Book your visit in advance. Specialist massages, including Ayurvedic and aromatherapy treatments, are by appointment only.

COURSES

The **Universidad de Málaga** (Map p243; ☎ 952 27 82 11; www.uma.es/estudios/extranj/extranjeros.htm; Avenida de Andalucía 24, 29007 Málaga) runs very popular language courses for foreigners. Four-week intensive Spanish-language courses cost from €442. Check out the website then contact the Directorá de Cursos de Español para Extranjeros.

There are at least 16 private language schools in Málaga; the main tourist offices have contact lists.

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MÁLAGA FOR CHILDREN

Málaga for kids is not so different from Málaga for adults, but that is not to say that the city isn't child-friendly. It has an easily navigable, compact centre, lots of child-friendly eateries and kilometres of popular beaches.

Of the sights, children will particularly like the craggy ramparts of the Castillo de Gibralfaro (p245) – a good morning's entertainment.

The most suitable museum is the **Museo Unicaja de Artes y Costumbres Populares** (Map p243; ☎ 952 21 71 37; www.museoartespopulares.com; Pasillo de Santa Isabel 10; adult/child €2/free; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat), which focuses on everyday rural life with all the requisite farming and fishing regalia. Note the glass cabinets containing painted *barros* (clay figures) of characters from local folklore.

Cheaper than the Costa del Sol, Málaga is also a great base from which to enjoy many of the treats of the *costa* without the expense. A frequent and efficient bus service (see p263) links the city with the towns of the Costa del Sol enabling easy day trips to all the large adventure parks and aquariums (see p268).

TOURS

To pick up the child-friendly, open-topped **MalagaTour** (Map p243; ☎ 902 10 10 81; www.malaga-tour.com; adult/child €15/7.50; ☎ half-hourly 9.30am-7pm) bus ride, head for Avenida Manuel Agustín Heredia or the easternmost end of the Paseo del Parque. This hop-on-hop-off tour does a complete circuit of the city with stops at all the major points of interest. It is a great way to see the city – especially with small children – and tickets (valid for 24 hours) include an informative multilingual audio guide.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There are a whole host of festivals taking place throughout the year in Málaga province, and the booklet *¿Qué Hacer?*, available each month from the municipal tourist office, will give you a blow-by-blow account. The following are the city's main events: **Semana Santa** (Holy Week) Each night from Palm Sunday to Good Friday, six or seven *cofradías* (brotherhoods) bear their holy images for several hours through the city, watched by big crowds. A good place to watch is the Alameda Principal.

Feria de Málaga Málaga's nine-day *feria* (fair), launched by a huge fireworks display on the opening Friday in mid-August, is the most ebullient of Andalucía's summer *ferias*. During the day the city jumps with music and dancing: head for Plaza Uncibay, Plaza de la Constitución, Plaza Miñana or Calle Marqués de Larios to be in the thick of it. At night the fun switches to large fairgrounds and nightly rock and flamenco shows at Cortijo de Torres, 4km southwest of the city centre. Special buses run from all over the city.

Fiesta Mayor de Verdiales Thousands congregate for a grand gathering of *verdiales* folk groups at Puerto de la Torre on 28 December. They perform an exhilarating brand of music and dance unique to the Málaga area. Bus 21 from the Alameda Principal goes to Puerto de la Torre.

SLEEPING

There are some new options on the Málaga accommodation scene but little of interest in the budget range. Most top-end places have offers of some sort and some have considerably cheaper weekend rates.

Budget

Hotel Lis (Map p243; ☎ 952 22 73 00; www.costadelsol.es/hotel/hotelis; Calle Córdoba 7; s/d €34/43; ☎ P) If you don't mind the south side of the Alameda, this is a smart choice as the Lis offers very good value. The rooms are a steal for the facilities they offer, though standard doubles are not big. Décor throughout is upbeat and there's a bar-café. Apartments are also available.

Hostal El Cenachero (Map p243; ☎ 952 22 40 88; 3rd fl, Calle Barroso 5; s €32, d €47-55) This modest family-run *hostal* (simple guesthouse) is close to the harbour. It's named after Málaga's folkloric fishmonger character. Cheerful and friendly, the *hostal* has 14 pleasant rooms that are simply furnished and carpeted and come with showers.

Hostal Derby (Map p246; ☎ 952 22 13 01; 4th fl, Calle San Juan de Dios 1; s/d €36/48) This good-value *hostal* has spacious rooms and big windows, some of which overlook the harbour. Décor is quaint but the bathrooms have been modernised. The *hostal* shares a high-rise building with various offices.

Hostal Larios (Map p246; ☎ 952 22 54 90; www.hostallarios.com; Calle Marqués de Larios 9; s/d €40/50, with shared bathroom €32/42; ☎ P) This central *hostal* outclasses all others in the budget range. The 12 rooms are newly fitted out and sport cheerful apricot and blue paintwork. Only four rooms have private bathroom, and

these rooms have windows onto the main street.

Hostal Pedregalejo (☎ 952 29 32 18; www.hotel.esjihano.com; Calle Conde de las Navas 9; s/d €41/61; 🏠) Near the beach, about 4km east of the city centre, this *hostal* is family-run and has attractive rooms and a little coffee shop where you can buy breakfast. The only drawback is the hike into town.

Midrange

Hotel Carlos V (Map p246; ☎ 952 21 51 20; carlosv@spa.es; Calle Císter 10; s €32-50, d €67; 🏠) Hotel Carlos V has a steady trail of guests due to being tucked behind the cathedral in an atmospheric old street, and offering good prices. The wear and tear shows; however, the basic rooms are clean and functional and have good shower pressure. The place grows on you.

Hostal Victoria (Map p246; ☎ 952 22 42 24; hostal.victoria@hostalvictoria.net; Calle Sancha de Lara 3; s/d €52/75; 🏠) The Victoria is enduringly popular, due to its central location and friendly staff. The clean and comfortable rooms are a cut above most other *hostales* and have satellite TV, and a bath in the bathrooms. Book well in advance.

Hotel California (Map p243; ☎ 952 21 51 65; www.costadelsolspa.es/hotelcalifornia; Paseo de Sancha 17; s/d €53/80; 🏠) One kilometre east of the city centre, this place is close to the beach. A lovely flowery entrance is a good start to the 28 good-sized rooms. Breakfast is available.

El Riad Andaluz (Map p243 ☎ 952 21 36 40; www.eliadandaluz.com; Calle Hinestrosa 24; s/d 70/90; 🏠) At last, a characterful, slightly exotic place to stay in Málaga. This French-run guesthouse, near the Teatro Cervantes, has eight rooms set around the kind of atmospheric patio that's known as a *riad* in Morocco. The decoration is Moroccan but each room is different, including colourful tiled bathrooms. Breakfast is available.

Hotel Venecia (Map p246; ☎ 952 21 36 36; www.hotelveneciamalaga.com; Alameda Principal 9; s/d €70/90; 🏠) On the southern side of the Alameda, Hotel Venecia has 40 very comfortable, renovated rooms and helpful English-speaking staff. Décor combines old and new; there are funky turquoise lounge chairs at reception and attractive metal-work bed heads in the rooms.

Hotel Don Curro (Map p246; ☎ 952 22 72 00; www.hotelondoncurro.com; Calle Sancha de Lara 7; s/d €74/104;

🏠) The busy Don Curro is a favourite with businessmen and although it has a corporate air about it, the hotel is efficient, comfortable and centrally located. It's also conveniently positioned for getting in and out of town. The rooms are well appointed and spacious with speckled marble bathrooms.

Hotel Los Naranjos (☎ 952 22 43 16 17; www.hotel-losnaranjos.com; Paseo de Sancha 35; s/d €75/118; 🏠) East of the bullring on the way to the beaches and a little beyond Hotel California, this hotel has a garish orange exterior but modern rooms decorated, in contrast, in neutral tones. Front-facing rooms have small balconies, some of which catch glimpses of the sea.

Top End

AC Málaga Palacio (Map p246; ☎ 952 21 51 85; www.ac-hotels.com; Calle Cortina del Muelle 1; d €137; 🏠) This 15-storey, sleek hotel has sensational views over the busy seafront. Smart, modern design and excellent facilities also make it the best of Málaga's luxury options. It has a rooftop pool and fully fitted-out gym.

Hotel Cortijo La Reina (☎ 951 01 40 00; www.hotelcortijolareina.com; Carretera Málaga-Colmenar; s/d €116/150; 🏠) This Andalusian-style *cortijo* (country property) is 30 minutes' drive north of Málaga. At 800m it enjoys beautiful views over the valleys, and rooms are sumptuously decorated with four-poster beds and lots of swishy fabrics. A great base for exploring the Parque Natural Montes de Málaga.

Parador Málaga Gibralfaro (Map p243; ☎ 952 22 19 02; www.parador.es; s/d €128/162; 🏠) With an unbeatable location perched on the pine-forested Gibralfaro, Málaga's stone-built Parador is a real winner. Most rooms have spectacular views from their terraces, and you can dine at the excellent terrace restaurant (p260) even if you are not a guest at the hotel.

Hotel Larios (Map p246; ☎ 952 22 22 00; www.hotel-larios.com; Calle Marqués de Larios 2; d €192; 🏠) This quaint, boutique Art Deco hotel occupies a huge corner of Plaza de la Constitución. With all the deep purple, dark reds and browns the hotel certainly has a faded verve, but sometimes the service is rather high-handed. Check its website for offers.

EATING

A Málaga speciality is fish fried quickly in olive oil. *Fritura malagueña* consists of fried fish, anchovies and squid. Cold soups are popular in summer: as well as gazpacho (a chilled soup of blended tomatoes, peppers, cucumber, garlic, breadcrumbs, lemon and oil) and *sopa de ajo* (garlic soup), try *sopa de almendra con uvas* (almond soup with grapes). Ham is a requisite in most tapas combinations. Málaga's restaurants are well priced and maintain a good standard due to the largely local clientele.

Budget

Café Moka (Map p246; ☎ 952 21 40 02; Calle San Bernardo El Viejo 2; breakfast €3.50) Just off the main drag, tucked behind Hotel Don Curro, this busy little retro café caters to a mainly Spanish crowd. It is a great place for breakfast, but fills up quickly both for breakfast (around 10am) and late lunch (3pm).

La Teteria (Map p246; Calle San Agustín 9; speciality tea €2.50, breakfast €2.30-5; ☎ 9am-midnight) This place serves heaps of aromatic and classic teas, herbal infusions, coffees and juices, with teas ranging from peppermint to '*anti-depresivo*'. You can breakfast on fresh juices and *bocadillos* (filled rolls); there are only crepes from around 2pm. Sit outside and marvel at the beautiful church opposite or stay inside to enjoy the wafting incense and background music.

Café Lepanto (Map p246; Calle Marqués de Larios 7; ice cream €3.70-4.20) A noisy local favourite right on pedestrianised Calle Marqués de Larios, the Regent St of Málaga. As Málaga's poshest *confitería* (sweet shop), Lepanto serves up a whole host of delicious *pasteles* (pastries and cakes), ice creams, sweets, chocolates, coffees, teas and other drinks to manicured *malagueños*.

Comoloco (Map p246; Calle Denis Belgrano 17; salads & pittas €4.50-5; ☎ 1pm-1am) This place with huge windows onto the little street is packed out at lunch time. Good healthy food at a good price in a laid-back setting is the reason. You choose your own sauces and salad dressings.

Restaurante Tintero (☎ 607 607586; Carretera Almería 99, El Palo; plates €7; ☎ 12.30pm-1am) A long-standing, fun, seafood eatery where plates of seafood are brought out by the waiters and you call out for what you want. Shout if you want it sizzling hot.

Café Central (Map p246; Plaza de la Constitución; mains €5-11.50) This extremely popular café is located on the main pedestrianised square. A cold beer and plate of *rosada frita* (fried hake) is a lunch-time must. Choose your table carefully (somewhere in the middle) or you may well be plagued by various musical impresarios determined to serenade you, a feature of outdoor eating in the centre.

Midrange

El Vegetariano de la Alcazabilla (Map p246; ☎ 952 21 48 58; Calle Pozo del Rey 5; mains €9-10.50; ☎ 1.30-4pm & 9-11pm Mon-Sat; 🍴) Manages to juggle friendly service and good food, while keeping a laid-back vibe. Lacto-vegetarian and vegan meals are served in good-sized portions. Leave your mark: add to the graffiti on the yellow walls.

Café Museo Picasso (Map p246; ☎ 952 22 50 43; Palacio de Buenavista, Calle San Agustín 8; coffee €1.50, cakes €6, glass of wine €3-5, light meals €12) Simply excellent, serving the best rich, dark coffee in town. It was established by Málaga's most dynamic young chef, José Carlos García (of Café de Paris), though he no longer runs it. The beautiful, secluded little patio at the back of the museum is alone worth a trip here.

El Jardín (Map p246; ☎ 952 22 04 19; Calle Cañón 1; mains €12.50; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Thu, 9am-2pm & 5pm-midnight Fri & Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun) Next to the palm-filled gardens of the cathedral, this busy Viennese-style café fills up quickly on the weekends (due to live music acts). It features lots of mock-gold leaf and fancy furniture. The food is nothing special but the ambience inside and the cathedral and garden views outside are just great.

Clandestino (Map p246; ☎ 952 21 93 90; Calle Niño de Guevara 3; mains €9-17; ☎ 1pm-1am) This trendy backstreet joint serves up top meals (fusing northern European and Latin cuisines: crunchy salads, pastas, lasagne, meat dishes) to hip house beats. Hedonistic diners can choose from a long list of mouthwatering desserts.

Rojo (Map p246; ☎ 952 22 74 86; Calle Granada 44; mains €10-17, menú €13; ☎ 2-4pm Tue-Fri, 8.30pm-12.30am Tue-Sat) A relatively new contender on the Málaga restaurant scene, Rojo is slap bang in the middle of the old town. Red banquettes line the walls, contrasting sharply with white tablecloths. Rojo attracts

a youngish professional crowd with its simple but excellent menu.

El Yamal (Map p243; ☎ 952 21 20 46; Calle Blasco de Garay 7; mains €11-16; ☎ 1-5pm & 6pm-midnight, closed Sun) This restaurant serves tasty Moroccan food in traditional tagines (earthenware dishes with pointed lids). Choose from fish, chicken or couscous with vegetables and soak up the relaxed atmosphere. Finish with a mint tea with a drop of orange-flower essence (*azahar*).

Mesón El Chinitas (Map p246; ☎ 952 21 09 72; Calle Moreno Monroy 4-6; mains €7-17.50; ☎ 1-4pm & 8pm-midnight) This place appeals to diners who don't mind being eyeballed by cheesy portraits. Cuisine is *malagueño* and specialities are rice dishes and whole fish baked with salt.

Zenart (Map p246; ☎ 952 06 00 79; Calle Mundo Nuevo 4; salads & tempura €8-9, sushi €19; ☎ 9pm-midnight) Come here like the locals to enjoy the sensational views of the Alcazaba and the different flavours of Japanese cuisine. The food presentation lives up to the restaurant's name and the tempura is especially good.

THE TAPAS TRAIL

The pleasures of Málaga are essentially undemanding, easy to arrange and cheap. One of the best is a slow crawl around the city's numerous tapas bars and old bodegas (traditional wine bars). In summer these bars are open from late-morning to midnight, and beyond.

Antigua Casa de Guardia (Map p243; ☎ 952 21 46 80; Alameda Principal 18; raciones €4.50, wine by the glass €1) This venerable old tavern has been serving Málaga's sweet dessert wines since 1840. Try the dark-brown, sherry-like *seco* (dry) or the romantically named *Lágrima Trasañejo* (Very Old Tear), complemented by a plate of monster prawns, oysters or mussels.

Gorki (Map p246; ☎ 952 22 14 66; Calle Strachan 6; dishes €6-16) A popular upmarket tapas bar with pavement tables and an interior full of wine-barrel tables and stools. It serves an extensive list of Spanish wines, and tangy cheeses. Try the belly-warming *alubias con cordóniz* (white-bean stew with partridge).

La Rebana (Map p246; Calle Molina Lario 5; tapas €3, raciones €5-8.50) A great, noisy and central tapas bar. The dark wooden interior (with its wrought-iron gallery) creates an inviting ambience. Goat's cheese with cherries, foies and cured meats are among the offerings.

La Posada Antonio (Map p246; Calle Granada 33; tapas €1.80, mains €10-17) A very popular place with locals where you will be hard pressed to find a table after 11pm, despite its barnlike proportions. Great for greasy meat in tremendous proportions; the filling *paletilla cordero* (shoulder of lamb) will set you back €17.

Pepa y Pepe (Map p246; Calle Calderería; tapas €1.30-1.50, raciones €3.60-5.50) A snug tapas bar that brims with young diners chomping their way through *calamares fritos* (battered squid) and fried green peppers.

Lechuga (Map p246; Plaza de la Merced 1; tapas €2.50-3.60, raciones €8; ♡) Here vegetables reign supreme and the chef does wonderful things with them. The street is noisy outside but inside is a calm ambience created by warm orange walls, a row of Japanese lanterns, and studded rustic furniture. Choose from a plate of dips, a taco, enchilada, canapés and more.

Top End

Adolfo (Map p243; ☎ 952 60 19 14; Paseo Marítimo Picasso 12; starters €7-8, seafood extra, mains €12-22; ☎ 1.30-5pm & 8.30pm-1am Mon-Sat) A classy place in the well-heeled La Malagueta area, Adolfo does a range of imaginative Mediterranean dishes including vegetarian starters with goat's cheese, lobster salad, and kid with rosemary honey.

Restaurante Antonio Martín (Map p243; ☎ 952 22 73 98; Playa de la Malagueta; mains €13-24; ☎ 1-5pm & 9pm-12.30am, closed Sun Nov-Apr) Right on the beach with a large sea-view terrace, this place is one of Málaga's oldest restaurants. Antonio Martín rustles up some of the best fish in town and also does excellent desserts. Celebrities and matadors are rumoured to hang out here. Reservations are recommended.

Parador Málaga Gibralfaro (Map p243; ☎ 952 22 19 02; www.parador.es; menú €28) Nestled among pine trees and overlooking the Alcazaba and port, the terrace restaurant of the Parador is a fantastic dining experience and very romantic in the evenings. The menu is a tour-de-force of Andalusian gastronomy,

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Café de Paris (Map p243; ☎ 952 22 50 43; Calle Velez-Málaga 8; mains €12-36; ☎ 1.30-5pm & 8.30pm-12.30am Tue-Sat) An excellent, long-standing favourite in upmarket La Malagueta, presided over by Michelin-starred José Carlos García. The heavy *fin-de-siècle* Parisian décor encourages long, somnolent lunches. Flavours are sophisticated Andalusian. Creative concoctions include sardines marinated in angel-hair marmalade (made from quinces) and fried lobster with a creamy lettuce-and-garlic sauce. Reservations are required.

specialising in the popular *fritura de pescaditos a la malagueña* (small, fried fish of Málaga). The inside dining room is a formal affair of beamed ceilings, high-backed chairs and heavy tablecloths.

La Casa del Ángel (Map p246; ☎ 952 60 87 50; Calle Madre de Dios 29; starters €9-10, mains €14-23; ☎ 1.30-4pm & 8pm-late; closed Mon) An extraordinary restaurant filled with the owners' considerable art collection. The brainchild of Ángel Garó, the interior is a series of unusual features: Renaissance arches, beamed and frescoed ceilings, antique tiled floors and heart-warming orange and ochre paint washes. The cuisine is equally sumptuous: a combination of Andalusian, Arab and international tastes. The restaurant's intimate *Salón Cervantes*, with its heavy red curtains and double French windows overlooking the Teatro Cervantes, is the place to eat. Reservations necessary.

DRINKING

The best areas to look for bars are from Plaza de la Merced in the northeast to Calle Carretería in the northwest, plus Plaza Mitjana (officially called Plaza del Marqués Vado Maestre) and Plaza de Uncibay. Plaza Mitjana heaves after midnight on Friday and Saturday.

Tetería El Harén (Map p243; Calle Andrés Pérez 3; fresh juice €2.70; ☎ 4.30-late) A larger, newly established tea house that rambles over several floors with lots of private nooks and crannies. Come here for mint tea, a fresh juice or a *mojito*. Thursday to Saturday, there is often live music.

Bodegas El Pimpi (Map p246; ☎ 952 22 89 90; Calle Granada 62; ☎ 7pm-2am) A Málaga institution

with a warren of rooms and mini-patios. The huge wine casks are signed by stars (even Tony Blair!) and walls are lined with celebrity pictures and bullfighting posters. It attracts a fun-loving crowd with its sweet wine and thumping music.

Puerto Oscura (Map p246; Calle Molina Lario 5; cocktails €4; ☎ 6pm-late) An elegant and intimate cocktail lounge with plush velvet seats and secret alcoves, Puerto Oscura is a great way to start an evening. It stays open until 5am on busy summer nights and sometimes puts on live music. Relatively smart clothes are the order of the day. Nonsmokers beware!

Calle de Bruselas (Map p246; ☎ 952 60 39 48; Plaza de la Merced 16; ☎ 9am-2am) A retro, Belgian bar appealing to a bohemian crowd. During the day it caters to the coffee scene with pavement tables out in the plaza, then at night the dark little bar comes to life.

O'Neill's (Map p246; ☎ 952 60 14 60; Calle Luis de Velázquez 3; ☎ noon-late) A spit-and-sawdust bar that likes to prove how Irish it is by playing nonstop U2. Very busy with a noisy mixed crowd of Spaniards, expats and tourists, and friendly bar staff.

Sala Tantra Buddha Bar (Map p246; Calle Molina Lario 7; ☎ 9pm-late) This place is worth taking a peep at even if you don't hang about. It's decorated with all the little details associated with Buddha – statues, silk screens etc. This type of décor replicates the Parisian prototype and is a fad in Spain at present – an odd theme for a drinking den! There's a small dance floor too.

La Botellita (Map p246; Calle Álamos 36; ☎ 11pm-4am Thu-Sat) Just off Plaza de la Merced, Botellita is chock-a-block with miniature bottles of spirits. Spanish music attracts a young and invariably tipsy crowd.

ENTERTAINMENT

Party-seeking holidaymakers tend to ignore Málaga and head along the coast, which means the bars and clubs in Málaga are left for discerning locals. The back pages of *Sur* newspaper, and its Friday entertainment section, are useful for what's-on information, as is monthly *¿Qué Hacer?* (free from tourist offices). Bi-monthly *Youthing* reveals what's on at the trendiest places.

Nightclubs

On nonfreezing weekends, the web of narrow old streets that lie north of Plaza de

COSTA GAY *Joy Lucas*

The laid-back lifestyle combined with the constant coming and going of international visitors make the Costa del Sol an ideal meeting point for gay and 'gay-friendly' people. The idea of exclusively gay restaurants, nightlife or accommodation is fast becoming an anachronism.

Whether you want to 'chill and chat' or 'drink and dance', there are plenty of places to choose from in the centre of Málaga and around Plaza de la Merced that build up a fairly mixed crowd. Calle de Bruselas (p261) and **Flor de Lis** (Map p243; Plaza de la Merced; 11am-late) are ideal for tapas, afternoon coffee or the first drink of the evening. Late loafers can club crawl to Warhol (below) or unwind to the soothing sounds of lounge in **Mondo Tiki** (Map p246; Calle Méndez Núñez 3).

If it's a louder ambience you're looking for, you'll find the pink party at the mega clubs and gay bars in Torremolinos (p267). That's right, the 'in crowd' goes to Torremolinos for fun!! What had turned into a decayed symbol of a better past is now making a comeback. New bars, restaurants and clubs are opening and the area is becoming one of the major gay holiday destinations in Spain. La Nogalera (close to Torremolinos train station) is the centre of BLGT – bi, lesbian, gay and transgendered – tourism in the province. Here, the variety of bars, pubs, clubs and discos guarantees a good time. Check out the new and trendy **El Gato Lounge** (La Nogalera; ☎ 4pm-late), where cool cats chill over a beer and a bite, or **Ánfora** (La Nogalera 522; ☎ 6pm-dawn), primarily a girls' bar with local clientele and loud pop music.

The weekend is for partying at **Passion** (Avenida Palma de Mallorca 18; admission & 1 drink €16; ☎ 11pm-6am) and/or **Palladium** (Avenida Palma de Mallorca 36; admission & 1 drink €16; ☎ 11pm-6am), two of Torremolinos' hottest clubs which both boast of having two floors, three different atmospheres (depending on your mood), international DJs, live performances, swimming pool, go-go dancers and singers...

In early August, don't miss the Costa del Sol's Freedom Festival, considered the most important gay festival in southern Europe. Check out the programme of electronic music, dance and performances at www.freedom-spain.com.

If none of the above sounds glamorous, or pricey, enough, you could flock with the fashionistas to Dreamers (p276) at Puerto Banús, the *costa's* cathedral of house music with top international DJs like Roger Sánchez to get you giddy! Or catch the celebrities at Glam (p276), also in Puerto Banús.

la Constitución comes alive; midweek, the place is dead.

Asúcar (Map p246; cnr Calle Convalecientes & Calle Lazcano; ☎ 9pm-late) Salsa fans need go no further. You can even join the lines of folk learning salsa steps from 11pm Wednesdays to Saturdays. Salsa, merengue etc are sweeping the nation.

Liceo (Map p246; Calle Beatas 21; ☎ 7pm-3am Thu-Sat) A grand old mansion turned young music bar, Liceo buzzes with a student crowd after midnight. Go up the winding staircase and you'll find more rooms to duck into.

Warhol (Map p246; Calle Niño de Guevara; ☎ 11pm-late Thu-Sat) A stylish haunt for choosy gay clubbers who want funky house beats mixed by dreadlocked DJs.

White (Map p246; Niño de Guevara; ☎ 11.30pm-late) This place is a favourite dance haunt (hip-hop, funk) of northern European language students.

Onda Pasadena (Map p246; Calle Gómez Pallete 5), with jazz on Tuesday and flamenco on Thursday, and **ZZ-Pub** (Map p246; Calle Tejón y Rodríguez 6), with rock on Thursday, are two central places which have regular live music, mainly rock, but not exclusively.

Theatre

Teatro Cervantes (Map p246; ☎ 952 22 41 00; www.teatrocervantes.com; Calle Ramos Marín s/n) Housed in a palatial building, the beautiful Cervantes has a good programme of music, dance and theatre. Several other theatres have busy schedules, including the dance conservatory's Sala Gades (Map p243), on Calle Cerrojo.

Cinemas

Posters and the *Sur* newspaper list the current movies at Málaga's cinemas.

Albéniz Multicines (Map p246; ☎ 952 21 58 98; Calle Alcazabilla 4) The home of the large Cin-

emateca Municipal (Municipal Cinema), showing international films with Spanish subtitles at 10pm most nights.

Bullfights

The main season at Málaga's bullring (p248) takes place during the Feria de Málaga in August. The festival has an 11-day programme of fights, the longest of its kind in the province. Tickets for the fights, depending on where you sit, can cost from €14 to €112.

SHOPPING

Central Calle Marqués de Larios and nearby streets have glitzy boutiques and shoe shops in handsomely restored old buildings.

El Corte Inglés (Map p243; Avenida de Andalucía) Málaga's branch of this department store is chock-full of goodies ranging from chocolate spread to tailored suits.

For hand-crafted Andalusian ceramics try **Alfajar** (Map p246; Calle Cister 3), and for some tasty *malagueño* treats (and late-night desperation shopping) look no further than the deli **Ultramarinos Zoillo** (Map p246; Calle Granada 65). There is a Sunday morning **flea market** (Map p243; Paseo de los Martiricos) near the Estadio de la Rosaleda. **Flamenka** (p246; ☎ 952 22 59 65; www.flamenka.com; Galerías Goya, Calle Calderería 6) is a one-stop shop for flamenco-related goods and music.

For camping essentials, **El Yeti** (Map p246; Calle Carretera 66) and **Deportes La Trucha** (Map p246; Calle Carretera 100) have a wide range of general and specialist camping and climbing equipment.

GETTING THERE & AWAY**Air**

Málaga's busy **airport** (☎ 952 04 88 38), the main international gateway to Andalucía, is 9km southwest of the city centre and host to a rash of budget airlines. Most airline offices are at the airport.

See p441 for information on flights.

Boat

Trasmediterránea (Map p243; ☎ 952 06 12 18, 902 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.com; Estación Marítima, Local E1) operates a fast ferry (€55, four hours) and a slower ferry (€36, 7½ hours) daily year-round to/from Melilla (€139 per car on both boats).

Bus

The **bus station** (Map p243; ☎ 952 35 00 61; Paseo de los Tilos) is 1km southwest of the city centre. Destinations include the following:

Destination Cost Duration Daily Frequency

Destination	Cost	Duration	Daily Frequency
Antequera	€5	50min	9 or more
Cádiz	€20	4hr	3
Córdoba	€12	2½hr	5
Granada	€9	1½hr	17
Ronda	€7.50-9.50	2½hr	9 or more
Seville	€14.50	2½hr	10-12

Destinations beyond Andalucía include Madrid (€20, six hours, nine daily), Barcelona, France, Germany, Portugal and Morocco. The station has a rather spartan café, and an internet cabin.

For the Costa del Sol, regular buses leave Avenida Manuel Agustín Heredia (Map p243) for Torremolinos (€1.20, 30 minutes), Benalmádena Costa (€1.60) and Fuengirola (€2.50, one hour).

Car

Numerous international (including Avis and Hertz) and local agencies have desks at the airport. You'll find them down a ramp in the luggage-carousel hall, and beside the arrivals hall.

Train

The **Málaga-Renfe train station** (Map p243; ☎ 952 36 02 02; www.renfe.es; Explanada de la Estación) is around the corner from the bus station. Regular trains run daily to/from Córdoba (€16 to €21, 2¼ hours, 10 daily) and Seville (€16, 2½ hours, five daily). For Granada (€19, 2½ hours) there are no direct trains, but you can get there with a change at Bobadilla. For Ronda (€8.20, 1½ to two hours), too, you usually change at Bobadilla.

Fast Talgo 200s go to/from Madrid (€52 to €87, 4½ hours, six daily), and there's also a slower, cheaper Intercity train leaving in the late morning (€35, 6½ hours). There are also trains for Valencia (€48, 8½ to 9½ hours, two daily) and Barcelona (€54 to €141, 13 hours, two daily).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

A taxi from the airport to the city centre costs €15 to €16.

Bus 19 to the city centre (€1.10, 20 minutes) leaves from the 'City Bus' stop outside the arrivals hall, every 20 or 30 minutes from 6.35am to 11.45pm, stopping at Málaga's main train and bus stations en route. Going out to the airport, you can catch the bus at the western end of Paseo del Parque, and from outside the stations, about every half-hour from 6.30am to 11.30pm.

The Aeropuerto train station, located on the Málaga-Fuengirola line, is a five-minute walk from the airport terminal: follow signs from the departures hall. Trains run about every half-hour from 7am to 11.45pm to the Málaga-Renfe station (€1.20, 11 minutes) and the Málaga-Centro station beside the Río Guadalmedina. Departures from the city to the airport and beyond are about every half-hour from 5.45am to 10.30pm.

Bus

Useful buses around town (€1.10 for all trips around the centre) include bus 11 to El Palo, bus 34 to El Pedregalejo and El Palo and bus 35 to Castillo de Gibralfaro, all departing from Avenida de Cervantes (see Map p246). The MalagaTour (p257) bus is also a useful option.

Car

Convenient car parks such as on Plaza de la Marina (Map p243) tend to be expensive (per hour/24 hours €1.50/24). Side-street parking, off the south side of Alameda Principal, for example, is metered (€1.60 per 90 minutes). Vacant lots are much cheaper (pay €1 to the attendant).

Taxi

Taxi fares typically cost around €3 to €4 per 2km to 3km. Fares within the city centre, including to the train and bus stations and the Castillo de Gibralfaro, usually cost around €6.

COSTA DEL SOL

The Costa del Sol stretches along the Málaga seaboard like a wall of wedding cakes several kilometres thick. Its recipe for success is the certainty (more or less) of sunshine, convenient beaches, warm sea, cheap package deals and plenty of nightlife and entertainment.

Until the 1950s the resorts were fishing villages but there's little to show for that now. Launched as a Francoist development drive for impoverished Andalucía, the Costa del Sol is an eye-stinging example of how to fill all open spaces with concrete buildings and paying customers. And with over 40 golf clubs, several busy marinas, numerous riding schools, a host of beaches offering every imaginable water sport, and a riotous international nightlife, the *costa* attracts an ever-increasing following of pleasure seekers who continue to swell the boom year in, year out.

Getting There & Around

A convenient train service links Málaga and its airport with Torremolinos, Arroyo de la Miel and Fuengirola, and plenty of buses run to the coastal towns from Málaga.

The AP7 Autopista del Sol, bypassing Fuengirola, Marbella, San Pedro de Alcántara and Estepona, makes moving along the Costa del Sol a lot easier for those willing to pay its tolls (Málaga–Marbella June to September costs €5.50 October to May €3.40; Marbella–Estepona June to September €6.50, October to May €3.90).

The toll-free alternative, running parallel to the AP7, is the A7/N340, which runs nearer the coast and almost entirely through built-up areas. Many places along this road use Km numbers to pinpoint their location. These numbers rise from west to east: Estepona is at Km 155 and central Marbella at Km 181. Km markers aside, undoubtedly the most useful sign on the A7/N340 is 'Cambio de Sentido', indicating that you can change direction to get back to a turning you might have missed. Don't let impatient drivers behind push you into going too fast for comfort on this road – and watch out for footloose drunks!

Bargain rental cars (€130 to €150 a week, all-inclusive) are available from local firms in all the resorts.

TORREMOLINOS & BENALMÁDENAS

Britain's Blackpool would kill for what the *costa* capitals have, as far as sunshine goes. This concrete high-rise jungle, beginning 5km southwest of Málaga airport, is designed to squeeze as many paying customers as possible into the smallest available space. Even in winter, pedestrian traffic

blocks the narrow lanes behind the main beaches, with holidaymakers scouring endless souvenir shops and real-estate agents.

After leading the Costa del Sol's mass tourist boom of the 1950s and '60s, Torremolinos (Torrie) lost ground to other resorts but is trying hard to spruce itself up. A pleasant seafront walk, the Paseo Marítimo, extends for nearly 7km and gives a degree of cohesion and character to the resort.

Adjoining Torremolinos to its southwest is the tamer Benalmádena, split into three distinctive areas: Benalmádena Costa at sea level, Benalmádena Pueblo up the hill, and Arroyo de la Miel, a lively suburb of restaurants and shops.

A clear few grades above Torremolinos, Benalmádena Pueblo still retains an attractive historic centre of cobbled alleys and flower-filled balconies around its central square, Plaza de España. It affords great views and is usually a touch cooler in summer. Down in Benalmádena Costa, the Puerto Deportivo, with some classy restaurants and bars, is one of the liveliest nightspots in the area.

Orientation

The main road through Torremolinos from the northeast (the direction of the airport and Málaga) is called Calle Hoyo, becoming Avenida Palma de Mallorca after it passes through Plaza Costa del Sol. Calle San Miguel is the main pedestrian artery, running most of the 500m from Plaza Costa del Sol down to Playa del Bajondillo. The bus station is on Calle Hoyo and the train station is on Avenida Jesús Santos Rein, a pedestrianised street intersecting Calle San Miguel 200m down from Plaza Costa del Sol. Southwest of Playa del Bajondillo, around a small point, is Playa de la Carrihuela, once the fishing quarter, backed by generally lower-rise buildings.

The southwestern end of Torremolinos merges with Benalmádena Costa, the seafront area of Benalmádena. About 2km uphill from here is the part of Benalmádena called Arroyo de la Miel, with Benalmádena Pueblo some 4km to its west.

Information BOOKSHOPS

Secondhand Bookshop (Calle San Miguel 26, Torremolinos) Plenty of used paperbacks – great if you're not working off that hangover on the beach.

EMERGENCY

Policía Local (☎ 952 38 14 22; Calle Rafael Quintana 28, Torremolinos)

Policía Nacional (☎ 952 38 99 95; Calle Skal 12, Torremolinos) The main police station.

INTERNET ACCESS

Cyber Café (Avenida Los Manantiales 4, Torremolinos; per hr €2; ☎ 9am–10pm)

Miramar (☎ 952 57 75 75; Avenida del Puerto, Benalmádena Costa; per hr €2; ☎ 11am–11pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Red Cross Emergencies (☎ 952 37 37 27; Calle María Barrabino 16, Torremolinos)

Sanatorio Marítimo (☎ 951 03 20 00; Calle del Sanatorio 5, Torremolinos) The main hospital.

MONEY

All the resorts have plenty of banks with ATMs, concentrated on the main pedestrianised shopping streets.

POST

Post office Benalmádena (Avenida Antonio Machado 20; ☎ 8.30am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–2pm Sat); Torremolinos (Avenida Palma de Mallorca 23; ☎ 8.30am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–1pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Benalmádena tourist office (☎ 952 44 24 94; www.benalmadena.com in Spanish; Avenida Antonio Machado 10, Torremolinos; ☎ 9am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4.30pm Sat) On the main road from Torremolinos. There are branches on the seafront in Benalmádena Costa, and on the Benalmádena exit road from the AP7.

Torremolinos tourist office (☎ 952 37 95 12; www.ayto-torremolinos.org; Plaza Pablo Picasso; ☎ 9am–1.30pm Mon–Fri) In the town hall. There are also offices on Playa Bajondillo (☎ 952 37 19 09) and Playa Carrihuela (☎ 952 37 29 56) with the same hours as the town hall. Pick up information leaflets on the surrounding amusement parks and news of monthly events.

Sights & Activities

Bars and beaches – that says it all. 'Torrie' is still a good-time resort where people come to party hard on the neon-lit **Calle San Miguel** and soak up the sun on the wide, sandy beaches. With the exception of the lonely **Torre de los Molinos** (Tower of the Mills), a 14th-century Arab watchtower, there is precious little to see. Torrie is a 'doing', not a 'seeing', place, and along with the rest of the Costa del Sol specialises in **theme**

parks (see p268), **water sports** and a host of largely free music and dance **festivals** that run throughout the summer months (the tourist offices have details).

However, people never seem to tire of the good old seafront promenade, which in the case of Torremolinos runs several kilometres west from **Playa de Bajondillo**. It extends to the more-upmarket **La Carihuela**, the original fishing village that used to serve Málaga and that preserves something of its humble past, not least in a good selection of fish restaurants. Drivers note: there is no road along the seafront connecting the two beaches.

Further west and uphill, the prettier and less garish Benalmádena Pueblo, with its geranium-filled balconies and narrow streets, is a welcome relief from the unremitting party atmosphere along the coast. A municipal museum, the **Museo Benalmádena** (☎ 952 44 85 93; Avenida Juan Peralta 49; admission free; ☹ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri), has two sections, one exhibiting local archaeological finds, the other, curiously, exhibiting a fantastic collection of Mexican and Central and South American artefacts. There is a magnificent view of the coast from the tiny **church** at the top of the village.

At Benalmádena Costa there is a **cable car** (☎ 952 19 04 82; www.teleferico.com in Spanish; Esplanade Tivoli s/n; adult/child return-trip €12/8.50; ☹ 10.30am-late Apr-Oct) that transports you up into the hills from where you can walk down two marked pathways. The cable car belongs to the Selwo organisation, which has organised activities once you're up the top. You can ride a donkey, watch bird-of-prey exhibitions and horse-riding displays or ramble along the walking trails up there. **Boat cruises** to Fuengirola (€12, three or four daily, two hours return) leave from the Puerto Deportivo at Benalmádena. To reserve a ticket contact **Costasol Cruceros** (☎ 952 44 48 81; www.costasolcruceros.com), which also does dolphin-spotting trips (adult/child €20/10, four daily, two hours return).

Festivals & Events

Torremolinos hosts an exhaustive list of festivals, including the **Championship Ballroom Dance Contest**, **Carnival**, the **Verdiales** (folk-dancing) festival, **Holy Week**, **Crosses of May** and the **Day of the Tourist** (!). But the most important event is the **Romería de San Miguel**

(29 September), when a colourful parade of *gitano* (Roma) caravans, Andalusian horses and flamenco dancers wends its way through the streets of Torremolinos to the forest behind the town for a night of barbecues, drinking and dancing.

Sleeping

There are huge numbers of rooms at almost every price. However, to avoid a weary trudge from one *completo* (full) sign to another, you are strongly advised to book ahead during July, August and, in some places, September. Outside these peak months, room rates often drop sharply. The area has several camping grounds (ask at the tourist offices for details).

Hostal Flor Blanco (☎ 952 38 20 71; Pasaje de la Carihuela 4, Torremolinos; d €44) Just metres from Playa de la Carihuela (about 1.5km south-west of central Torremolinos), the small and friendly Flor Blanco has sea-view rooms with little balconies. As it has only 12 rooms you should book in advance.

Hotel Miami (☎ 952 38 52 55; www.residencia-miami.com; Calle Aladino 14, Torremolinos; s/d €38/59; ☹ ☹) A lovely Andalusian-style villa built in the 1950s by Manolo Blascos (Picasso's cousin) for flamenco dancer Lola Medina. Only 100m from La Carihuela beach, this small hotel has tastefully decorated rooms and is set in the midst of a tropical garden with a wonderful pool.

Hotel El Pozo (☎ 952 38 06 22; www.world-traveler.com/spain/pozo/htm; Calle Casablanca 2, Torremolinos; s/d €34/65; ☹ ☹) Made famous in a 2002 edition of the TV show *Eastenders*, Hotel El Pozo has 28 spacious rooms and is just off pedestrianised Calle San Miguel in the thick of the action in Torremolinos.

Red Parrot (☎ 952 37 54 45; www.theredparrot.net; Avenida Los Manantiales 4, Torremolinos; s/d €60/65; ☹ ☹) Refurbished a couple of years back and centrally located, the Red Parrot offers comfortable balconied rooms around an internal patio. The pool area is inviting.

Hotel Tarik (☎ 952 38 23 00; www.hoteltarik.com; Paseo Marítimo 49, Torremolinos; s/d €60/91; ☹ ☹ ☹) This large, Andalusian-style hotel is located right on the seafront behind a swath of sandy beach. Communal areas are attractively decorated with Moroccan *zellij* tilework and there is a large secluded pool. Bedrooms have less character but are extremely comfortable, with all modern facilities.

La Fonda Benalmádena (☎ /fax 952 56 82 73; www.123casa.com/hotels/benalmadendahotellafonda.htm; Calle Santo Domingo 7, Benalmádena Pueblo; s/d incl breakfast €60/86; ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹) La Fonda is a charming place with large rooms built around Islamic-style patios (which feature fountains). The owners have another hotel and many apartments in the village.

Eating

British pit stops pop up everywhere, but plenty of seafood eateries are strewn along palm-lined Playa del Bajondillo in Torremolinos. The best fish restaurants and beach cocktail bars are on Playa de la Carihuela and in Benalmádena Costa.

Bodega Quitapeñas (Cuesta del Tajo, Torremolinos; raciones €4.50-9) Tucked away at the top of the steps down from Calle San Miguel to the beach, this busy tapas bar has a small terrace, and is popular with Spaniards for its delicious range of seafood tapas and *raciones* (meal-sized servings of tapas).

Bar Mesal Pepe (☎ 952 56 86 14; Calle Santo Domingo 2, Benalmádena Pueblo; mains €7-8) With outdoor tables by the church on the plaza, this place is full of bursting most nights, mainly with locals. No wonder, with good, filling meals at such a good price. Stick with the fish dishes – the *brocheta de pescado* (fish kebab) is just great!

La Paella (☎ 952 37 50 55; Paseo Marítimo, Torremolinos; paella for 2 €16, whole fish for 2 per kg €29) This excellent seafood eatery on Playa Bajondillo has many varieties of fish and seafood but also serves meat dishes.

Casa Juan (☎ 952 38 41 06; Calle San Gine's 20, Torremolinos; mains €8-18, whole fish & fancy seafood extra) One of a string of first-rate seafood eateries in La Carihuela, this place does fantastic fish and seafood, *malagueño*-style. Share an avocado and prawn salad then crack apart a plump lobster. Casa Juan doesn't have sea views and it extends over several premises.

Restaurant La Fonda (☎ /fax 952 56 82 73; www.123casa.com/hotels/benalmadendahotellafonda.htm; Calle Santo Domingo 7, Benalmádena Pueblo; mains €10-17) The excellent restaurant at La Fonda has a fantastic terrace for barbecues and summer dining. At other times you can choose from the streetfront restaurant or an interior room draped with fabric and full of Moroccan lamps. The baked-fish dishes are splendid.

Restaurant El Roqueo (☎ 952 38 49 46; Calle Carmen 35, Torremolinos; mains €13-20) With its wide terrace, El Roqueo has the atmosphere of a beachside diner, but it's much classier than that. It's bustling and friendly and you can't beat the simple but delicious *dorada a la plancha* (grilled bream).

Drinking & Entertainment

Torremolinos' clubs are back in vogue, despite stiff competition from Benalmádena Costa's Puerto Deportivo area, where there are some classy (and touristy) bars. Torrie has some big venues as well as a thriving gay scene (see p262).

Playa Miguel (www.playa-miguel.com; Playa de la Carihuela) This substantial beach bar has good music and cocktails. Sit on a comfy cane chair and join in the fun.

Atrévete (Avenida Salvador Allende, La Carihuela; ☹ 8pm-5am) A sexy salsa club with two cosy dance floors on which the clientele can strut their stuff.

Fun Beach (☎ 952 05 23 97; Avenida Palma de Mallorca 7, Torremolinos; ☹ 8pm-6am) Reputedly the largest club in Europe, Fun Beach has several huge, packed dance floors in which to lose yourself. Expect to hear pop, house and garage.

Palladium (☎ 952 38 42 89; Avenida Palma de Mallorca 36, Torremolinos; admission €8; ☹ 10pm-7am mid-Mar-mid-Oct) A huge, frenetic club with a fancy swimming pool and two dance floors spinning out some thumping tunes.

Disco Kiu (Plaza Sol y Mar, Benalmádena Costa; ☹ 11pm-4am Thu-Sat) Another popular giant, which has foam parties for added excitement. Dress codes aren't strict but men generally wear collared shirts.

Getting There & Away

From the Torremolinos **bus station** (☎ 952 38 24 19; Calle Hoyo), Portillo buses run to Benalmádena Costa (€1.10, 15 minutes, every 15 minutes), Málaga (€1.20, 30 minutes, every 15 minutes), Benalmádena Pueblo (€1.10, 40 minutes, every 30 minutes) and Fuengirola (€1.20, 30 minutes, every 30 minutes). Buses to Ronda, Estepona, Algeciras, Tarifa, Cádiz and Granada also leave from the bus station. Buses for Marbella (€3.60, one hour, 14 daily) go from a stop on Avenida Palma de Mallorca, near the post office.

Trains run to Torremolinos about every half-hour from 5.30am to 10.30pm from

KIDS' COSTA

A growing number of attractions along the coast cater for children of all ages. The oldest and biggest amusement park is **Tivoli World** (☎ 952 57 70 16; www.tivolicostadelsol.com; Avenida de Tivoli, Arroyo de la Miel; admission €6; 🕒 noon-8pm Sun Oct-Apr, 1-9pm May, 4-11pm Jun, 6pm-2am Jul-Sep). As well as various rides and slides (for which you pay extra to the admission price), it stages daily dance, musical and children's events. It's five minutes' walk from Benalmádena-Arroyo de la Miel train station. For children, consider the good-value 'Supertivolino' ticket for €10, which covers admission and unlimited use on more than 30 rides.

Alternatively, just off the A7 in Torremolinos is the ever-popular **Aquapark** (☎ 952 38 88 88; Calle Cuba 10; adult/child €19/14; 🕒 10am-6pm May, Jun & Sep, 10am-7pm Jul & Aug), with its chutes and slides, and the similar but cheaper **Parque Acuático Mijas** (☎ 952 46 04 04; www.aquamijas.com; adult/child €15/10; 🕒 10.30am-5.30pm May, 10am-6pm Jun & Sep, 10am-7pm Jul & Aug), beside the A7 Fuengirola bypass, which also has a separate minipark for toddlers.

Another watery hit is Benalmádena's well-organised **SeaLife** (☎ 952 56 01 50; www.sealifeeurope.com in Spanish; Puerto Deportivo; adult/child €10.85/9.25; 🕒 10am-10pm Jun, 10am-midnight Jul-Sep, 10am-6pm May), with minigolf, organised games and shark-feeding of Europe's largest shark collection. There's a new Amazon section and a display of sea snakes. Giving SeaLife stiff competition is the newer **Selwo Marina** (☎ 902 19 04 82; www.selwomarina.com; Parque de la Paloma, Benalmádena; 🕒 10am-6pm, or 8pm, 9pm or midnight, depending on its own peculiar timetable, closed for most of Nov-Feb; adult/child €15/11, swim with sea lions €49), a relative of Selwo Aventura in Estepona. It has a dolphinarium and ice-penguinarium, an Amazonian aviary and the awesome option of swimming with sea lions. Selwo offers discounted packages for visits to the two Selvos and the Benalmádena cable car.

A good cloudy-day option is the **Crocodile Park** (☎ 952 05 17 82; www.crocodile-park.com; Calle Cuba 14, Torremolinos; 🕒 10am-6pm; 🕒 10am-6pm; adult/child €9/6.50), where experienced guides handle and give details about various types of crocodile.

Málaga city (€1.30, 20 minutes) and the airport (€1.10, 10 minutes). These continue on to Benalmádena-Arroyo de la Miel and Fuengirola (€1.30, 20 minutes).

FUENGIROLA

pop 63,000

Fuengirola, a beach resort 18km down the coast from Torremolinos, the two separated by Benalmádena Costa and Torrequebrada, has more of a family-holiday scene but is even more densely packed than Torremolinos. Its somewhat drab buildings rather overpower the waterfront and beaches, though the beaches are surprisingly pleasant.

Orientation & Information

The narrow streets in the few blocks between the beach and Avenida Matías Sáenz de Tejada (the street on which the bus station is located) constitute what's left of the old town, with Plaza de la Constitución at its heart. The train station is a block inland from the bus station, on Avenida Jesús Santos Rein.

The **tourist office** (☎ 952 46 74 57; Avenida Jesús Santos Rein 6; 🕒 9.30am-2pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) is just along from the train station.

Sights & Activities

One great evening to be had is at the **Hipódromo Costa del Sol** (☎ 952 59 27 00; www.carreraentertainment.com; admission race days €7, otherwise free; 🕒 10pm-2am Sat Jul-Sep, 11.30am-4pm Sun Oct-Jun), which is Andalucía's leading horse-race track. You'll find it at Urbanización El Chaparral, off the A7 at the southwestern end of Fuengirola. Another worthwhile day out is at Fuengirola's **street market** (Avenida Jesús Santos Rein), held in the fairground. It takes place every Tuesday and is the biggest on the Costa. There's a *rastro* (flea market) in the same place on Saturday, and a Sunday market in the port.

Festivals & Events

The biggest festival in Fuengirola is the **Día de la Virgen del Carmen** (16 July), in which 120 bearers carry a heavy platform (which supports a lavish effigy of the Virgin) in a two-hour procession from Los Boliches church into the sea. From July to September music and dance performances are held in the Arabic **Castillo Sohail**, which is also the venue for a medieval market in August.

Sleeping

While there are simply dozens of hotels in Fuengirola, the following are a few of the most appealing.

Hostal Italia (☎ 952 47 41 93; fax 952 46 19 09; Calle de la Cruz 1; s/d €40/64; 🕒) A good, friendly economical option in the heart of things, a couple of blocks from the beach. Calle de la Cruz is a pedestrianised street. The rooms are all clean and comfortable.

Las Islas (☎ 952 47 55 98; Calle Canela 12, Torrelblanca del Sol; d incl breakfast €67; 🕒) Just east of Fuengirola, Las Islas is a haven of taste and calm run by the exceptionally friendly Ghislaine and Hardy Honig. Twelve comfortable guest rooms are spread throughout lush tropical gardens and there is an excellent restaurant serving international and vegetarian food.

Hotel El Puerto (☎ 952 47 01 00; www.hotel-elpuerto.com; s incl breakfast €75-104, d incl breakfast €88-134; Calle Marbella 34; 🕒) A towering three-star hotel on Fuengirola's beach. Balconies have great sea views and there's an amazing oval-shaped rooftop pool.

Eating

Calle Moncayo and Calle de la Cruz, a block back from the Paseo Marítimo, are awash with mediocre international eateries. The Paseo Marítimo itself and the Puerto Deportivo have further strings of bargain eateries.

Cafetería Costa del Sol (☎ 952 47 17 09; Calle Marbella 3; rosquillas €3.60) Cheerful breakfast spot with a bright, striped awning. It turns out hot, tasty ham-and-cheese *rosquillas* (toasted bagels) and lovely fresh juices (€2.60).

Lizzaran (☎ 952 47 38 29; Avenida Jesús Santos Rein 1; raciones €4.50-11.50, lunch mains €6) A welcome Spanish relief from the overwhelming number of Chinese and Italian eateries in Fuengirola. Tuck into salty sardine or ham *pinxos* (bread with toppings).

Mo Mo (☎ 952 19 73 21; Calle Marbella 8; mains €8-9.50; 🕒 closed Sun & dinner Mon; 🕒) Mo Mo is an art gallery-cum-vegetarian restaurant offering yummy dishes like moussaka, tofu brochettes and spinach pastries.

Restaurante Portofino (☎ 952 47 06 43; Paseo Marítimo 29; mains €12-17; 🕒 closed Mon) One of Fuengirola's better offerings, this restaurant has an international menu featuring a host of classic fish dishes. Specialities

include all manner of fried fish, sole with a wine and cream sauce and some excellent shellfish.

Taberna del Pintxo (Calle Hermsnos Pinzón 2; pintxos €2) This is a glossy new place specialising in *pintxos* (Basque for tapas).

Drinking & Entertainment

Plenty of tacky disco-pubs line Paseo Marítimo, and a cluster of music bars and discos can be found opposite the Puerto Deportivo. A few hip bars also dot the town.

Habana Club (Avenida Condes San Isidro 9) A Spanish and *Latino* music bar. Salsa dance classes happen at 10pm Sunday and Friday.

Irish Times (🕒 noon-midnight) and **Cafetería La Plaza** (9am-midnight) are bars at opposite ends of Plaza de la Constitución. Both fill up with lively, mainly Spanish crowds in the evening. The Irish Times' patio is great on a hot night. Rock fans can head for **Sal's Paradise** (Paseo Marítimo, Parque Doña Sofía) for live music on at least Saturday night.

Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (☎ 902 14 31 44), frequent bus services travel to Torremolinos (€1.50, 30 minutes), Málaga (€2.50, one hour), Marbella (€2.44, one hour) and Mijas (€1, 25 minutes).

Fuengirola is served by the same trains as Torremolinos, costing €2.30 from Málaga and the airport.

MIJAS

pop 57,000 / elevation 428m

The story of Mijas encapsulates the story of the Costa del Sol. Originally a humble pueblo, it is now the richest town in the province. Since finding favour with discerning bohemian artists and writers in the 1950s and '60s, Mijas has sprawled across the surrounding hills and down to the coast yet managed to retain the original pueblo's picturesque charm. Much like Capri, the effect is somewhat spoiled by the hordes of day-tripping package tourists that pile into the town in summer, but in winter it is blissfully quiet. Actually, wander the back streets at any time and you'll appreciate its charm. Mijas has a foreign population of at least 40% and the municipality includes Mijas Costa, on the coast west of Fuengirola. Golf courses abound.

Information

For information on sights, activities and events in and around Mijas, stop by the helpful **tourist office** (☎ 958 58 90 34; www.mijas.es; Plaza Virgen de la Peña s/n; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar, 9am-8pm Mon-Fri Apr-Sep, 10am-3pm Sat year-round).

Sights & Activities

Mijas is home to the most interesting 'folk' museum on the *costa*, the **Casa Museo de Mijas** (☎ 952 59 03 80; Calle Málaga; admission free; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7pm Sep-Mar, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Apr-Jun, 10am-2pm & 6-9pm Jul-Aug). It was created and is still run by Carmen Escalona, who specialises in crafting folk-themed models. The small models are dotted around the museum, and in light of the explanations and artefacts, show perfectly the style and mode of living of some 40 years ago. There are no explanations in English. It is a great place for children, who will particularly like the donkey made from esparto grass. The museum is just uphill from Plaza de la Constitución, Mijas' second main plaza.

Mijas has an unusual square-shaped **Plaza de Toros** (☎ 952 48 52 48; fights €45-85; ☎ 10am-8pm). It also has an interesting grotto of the **Virgen de la Peña**, where the Virgin is said to have appeared to two shepherds in 1586. On the cliff edge in an ornamental garden, the spot has wonderful views and is the start of a **panoramic pathway** that wends its way around the vertical edges of the town. During the annual village procession, 8 September, the effigy of the Virgin is carried 2km up to the **Ermита del Calvario**, a tiny chapel built by Carmelite brothers. Black-iron crosses mark a short walking trail that leads through the forest up to the hermitage. Alternatively, you can take one of the donkey taxis from the town centre for €8.

Mijas is a noted area for **rock climbing** (particularly in winter), with around 100 grade V-7 climbs.

Sleeping

Hostal La Posada (☎ 952 48 53 10; Calle Coin 47; s/d €25/35, apt d €45; 🍷) Budget travellers should try this friendly place with tidy and spacious rooms and apartments set around a flower-filled garden-patio.

Casa El Escudo de Mijas (☎ 952 59 11 00; www.el-escudo.com; Calle Trocha de los Pescadores 7; s/d €70/80) A tidy midrange option with pretty colour-

washes, wrought-iron furnishings and tiled bathrooms.

TRH Mijas/Hotel Mijas (☎ 952 48 58 00; www.trhoteles.com; Plaza de la Constitución; s/d €102/25; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This sumptuous, Andalucian-style hotel has excellent facilities including horse riding, tennis and hydromassage.

There are two excellent B&Bs, **Casa Kay** (☎ /fax 952 48 57 91; www.anit.es/casa kay; Urbanización Las Lomas de Mijas; s/d €35/70; 🍷 🍷) and **Finca Blake** (☎ /fax 952 59 04 01; www.fincablake.com; Carretera de Mijas Km 2; d €78-90). For details of how to reach them, see the websites. Another quality top-end hotel is the slick **Beach House** (☎ /fax 952 49 45 40; www.beachhouse.nu; Urbanización El Chaparral, Mijas Costa; s/d €125/140, d with sea view €175; 🍷 🍷 🍷).

Eating

El Mirlo Blanco (☎ 952 48 57 00; Paseo Marítimo 29, Mijas Costa; mains €16-35; ☎ closed Tue Sep-Jun) The Basque-style El Mirlo Blanco is one Mijas' best restaurants. The menu varies seasonally but roast lamb and hake in a green sauce are good choices. Finish with a Grand Marnier soufflé.

El Padrastró (☎ 952 48 50 00; Paseo del Compás; mains €12-27; 🍷) The *haute*-Med Padastro is perched on a cliff above the Plaza Virgen de la Peña, with suitably spectacular views. You don't have to climb the stairs as there is a lift. Delicious fare includes a leek-filled pastry, rice with seafood, and plenty of fish dishes.

For tapas and local specialities, find the lively **El Alarcón** (☎ 952 48 52 45; Calle Lasta 1). **The Lemon Tree** (☎ 952 48 64 74; Plaza Virgen de la Peña; lunches €4.50; ☎ closed Sat), an English café decked out fully in yellow, serves tasty food.

Getting There & Away

Frequent buses run from Fuengirola (€1, 25 minutes).

MARBELLA

pop 124,000

Marbella is justly renowned both as the *costa*'s honey pot of glamour and wealth and as its capital of corruption and crime, and its two reputations of course go hand in hand. With so much *dinero* sloshing around here, it would be a surprise if some people *didn't* break rules to get their hands on it. See p34 for some of the dirt on Marbella, which fortunately won't interfere with the fun of

ordinary innocent travellers who are just here to enjoy themselves.

Even though Marbella's most celebrated holiday-home owner, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, died in 2005 and won't be making any more multimillion-euro visits to his private palace here, the money in Marbella is still very real. Just witness the parade of very expensive cars rolling down to the marina at nearby Puerto Banús of an evening.

Marbella is not just crowded Marbella town with its mix of glamorous boutiques, pretty plazas, down-to-earth bars, good and bad restaurants and moderate beaches. It's also the Milla de Oro (Golden Mile; actually about 5km long), west of town between Marbella and Puerto Banús, which is lined with luxury hotels and turn-offs towards the tree-girt mansions inhabited by the really rich. And it's a baffling sprawl of outlying concrete urbanisations sporting names like Costa Azalea and Brisa del Golf, full of the villas and apartments thrown up by the runaway construction juggernaut that has made the Costa del Sol what it is.

All of which actually adds up to a recipe for a lot of fun, and that's what Marbella's huge crowd of international visitors are here for. Though prices here are among the highest in Andalucía, moderate budgets can still make for good times, on the beaches and in the bars, restaurants, shops and clubs. As for the Marbella 'glamour', most of the celebrities here are B-list at best, but everyone enjoys playing the game of ostentation. If you can forget the dirty deeds in the background, come and join the party.

Orientation

The A7/N340 through town goes by the names Avenida Ramón y Cajal and, further west, Avenida Ricardo Soriano. The old town, with its narrow, crooked lanes, is centred on Plaza de los Naranjos, north of Avenida Ramón y Cajal. The bus station is on the northern side of the Marbella bypass, 1.2km north of Plaza de los Naranjos.

Information

There are plenty of banks with ATMs in the central area.

Centro de Salud Leganitos (☎ 952 77 21 84; Plaza Leganitos 5; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) For emergency medical attention.

Cibercafé (☎ 952 86 42 62; Travesía Carlos Mackintosh; internet per hr €3.50; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) A real internet café, between the centre and the beach.

Farmacia Mingorance (☎ 952 77 50 86; Avenida Ricardo Soriano 44) Large, 24-hour pharmacy.

Hospital Costa del Sol (☎ 952 82 82 50; Carretera N340 Km 187) Big public hospital 6km east of the centre.

Municipal tourist office (www.marbella.es;

☎ 9.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Fontanilla

(☎ 952 77 14 42; Glorieta de la Fontanilla) Naranjos

(☎ 952 82 35 50; Plaza de los Naranjos 1) The Fontanilla branch is the main information office.

Policía Nacional (National Police; ☎ 952 76 26 00; Avenida Arias de Velasco) The main police station, in the north of town.

Post office (Calle de Jacinto Benavente 14)

Sights & Activities

The picturesque **Casco Antiguo** (Old Town) is chocolate-box perfect, with pristine white houses, narrow, mostly traffic-free streets and geranium-filled balconies. You can easily spend an enjoyable morning or evening exploring these delightful alleyways crammed with cafés, restaurants, bars, designer boutiques and antique and crafts shops. At the heart of its pleasant web is pretty **Plaza de los Naranjos**, the focal point of the old town, dating back to 1485. The 16th-century **ayuntamiento** (town hall), scene of so many political shenanigans, is on the plaza's northern side and the **fontain** opposite was put in place in 1504 by Marbella's first Christian mayor. Nearby is the stout **Iglesia de la Encarnación** (Plaza de la Iglesia; ☎ hours of service 8.30am, 8pm & 9pm Mon-Sat, 8am, 10am, 11am, 12.30pm, 8.30pm & 10pm Sun), begun in the 16th century and later remodelled in baroque style. On the north side of Plaza de la Iglesia, and along streets such as Calle Arte and Calle Portada, are stretches of Marbella's old **Islamic walls**.

A little east of the church, the **Museo del Grabado Español Contemporáneo** (Museum of Contemporary Spanish Prints; ☎ 952 76 57 41; Calle Hospital Bazán s/n; admission €2.50; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5.30-8.30pm Tue-Sat mid-Sep-mid-Jun, 10am-2pm & 7-9pm Tue-Sat mid-Jun-mid-Sep) exhibits works by Picasso, Joan Miró and Salvador Dalí, among other artists.

Cross Avenida Ramón y Cajal to the Plaza de la Alameda and a marble walkway, **Avenida del Mar**, strung with crazed sculptures by Dalí, leads you down to the

in major demand, so advance bookings are highly recommended.

TOP END

Town House (☎ 952 90 17 91; www.townhouse.nu; Calle Alderete 7; s/d incl breakfast €115/130; ♿) A superb, intimate, small hotel in a traditional town house, with its nine all-nonsmoking rooms arranged over four floors. Design is chic and uncluttered, and there's a fabulous roof terrace to chill out on. Book early, for style at what for Marbella is a pretty good price.

Princesa Playa Hotel (☎ 952 82 09 44; www.princesaplaya.com; Avenida Duque de Ahumada s/n; s €113-129, d €132-150; P ♿ ♿) With great sea views, this modern apartment hotel represents great value for money on the seafloor.

Hotel El Fuerte (☎ 952 86 15 00; www.hotel-elfuerte.es; Avenida El Fuerte s/n; s/d from €136/198; P ♿ ♿ ♿) A huge 263-room complex right on the Paseo Marítimo with a host of facilities including gym, heated pool, gardens and spa. Many of the rooms have sea views, for which you will pay a premium price.

Marbella Club Hotel (☎ 952 82 22 11; www.marbellclub.com; Carretera de Cádiz 178; s/d €425/450; P ♿ ♿ ♿ ♿) Created in the 1950s by Austrian-Mexican aristocrat Alfonso von Hohenlohe, this was the original super-deluxe, super-discreet hotel that launched Marbella as a luxury tourism venue. Set in its own gorgeous, semitropical, beachfront gardens 2km along the 'Golden Mile', the hotel has every conceivable luxe facility, plus its own beautifully landscaped golf course a 20-minute drive away.

Eating

Dining in Marbella doesn't necessarily mean chichi interiors and bikini-size portions at whale-sized prices. There are some authentic tapas bars and a few trendy restaurants that do delicious, good-value cuisine. The seafloor Paseo Marítimo is lined with restaurants and bars. Playa de Venus also has a clutch of eateries on the sand.

El Gallo (☎ 952 82 79 98; Calle Lobatos 44; mains €4.50-9; ♿ closed Thu) In the upper part of the old town, neat and economical El Gallo serves well-prepared, home-style Andalusian food. Fish dishes are delicious.

La Taberna de Santiago (☎ 952 77 00 78; Avenida del Mar 20; tapas €1.50-2, raciones €5-14; ♿ closed Nov) Blue tiles adorn this refined tapas bar, and

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

La Comedia (☎ 952 77 64 78; Calle San Lázaro; mains €15-25; ♿ 7pm-1am Tue-Sun) This creative upstairs restaurant is run by a dedicated Swedish duo who put together some terrific international taste combinations – hope the mussels in white-wine sauce are on the menu, and follow them with duck breast in fruit compote, sweet chicken curry or a vegetarian couscous crepe. It's candlelit yet animated, with interesting art on the walls and some tables on a balcony overlooking little Plaza Victoria.

the blue sea is in view from its *terrace*, as are the curious sculptures on pedestrianised Avenida del Mar. Go for cockles, fried sardines, *jamón serrano* (mountain-cured ham) or even snails in thyme sauce.

El Balcón de la Virgen (☎ 952 77 60 52; Calle Virgen de los Dolores; mains €8-16; ♿ closed Sun) One of the nicest restaurants in the Plaza de los Naranjos vicinity, this place has a lovely summer *terrace* overlooked by a 300-year-old grieving Virgin and the biggest bougainvillea you've ever set eyes on. The fare is a respectable combination of meat, seafood and salads.

Gaspar (☎ 952 77 00 78; Calle Notario Luis Oliver 19; mains €20; ♿ closed dinner Sun) This good-value, family-run restaurant is just off the seafloor. Food ranges from *raciones* to full-blown meals. The restaurant also has a quaint small library and a comprehensive wine list.

Restaurante Santiago (☎ 952 77 00 78; Paseo Marítimo 5; mains €18-25; ♿ closed Nov) One of Marbella's finest restaurants, Santiago is right on the seafloor, offering top-class seafood in elegant surrounds. Sit on the terrace and survey the palms on Playa de Venus.

Restaurante Skina (☎ 952 76 52 77; Calle Aduar 12; mains €20-27; ♿ 7-11.30pm Mon-Sat) A good bet for an imaginative meal, tiny Skina is great for outdoor dining on summer evenings. Try sole with lime and ginger or suckling pig with caramelised tomatoes.

Restaurante Ruperto de Nola (☎ 952 76 55 50; Avenida Antonio Belón 3; mains €24-30; ♿ closed mid-Jan–mid-Feb) This classy establishment serves up gourmet meat and seafood with a creative touch in classical surroundings.

If you can cope with its skinny bronzed bodies then head for **Palms** (Playa de Venus; salads,

fish & seafood €6-12; ♿ lunch). **Café Bar El Estrecho** (☎ 952 77 00 04; Calle San Lázaro; tapas €1.20) and **Bar Bartolo** (☎ 952 82 69 50; Calle San Lázaro; tapas €1.80) are good old-town spots for varied tapas and strong coffee. If they're busy, just elbow your way in.

Drinking

Marbella's once-notorious Puerto Deportivo has been cleaned up, renovated and reopened and now provides an entertaining after-dark scene without the sleaze.

Colonial Café (☎ 649 08 41 72; ♿ 6pm-3am or later) A hip disco-pub playing funky-house or reggae-dub, with a *terrace* facing the harbour.

Locos (☎ 1.30pm-4am or later) This alternative place at the back of the Puerto Deportivo has a wild atmosphere, and diverse live bands some nights.

Bambina (Calle Pasaje 5) In the old town, there are cocktails and more house at this stylishly designed bar.

Calle Pantaleón has a string of popular *cervecerías* (beer bars). Posier drinkers head west to Calle Camilo José Cela and nearby streets, where you'll find the fashionable, lounge-style **Havana Bar** (☎ 952 86 36 41; Calle Pablo Casals 17), with live Latin music some nights. Gay male drinkers can head to neighbours **Boccaccio** (Calle Puerto del Mar 7) and **Ojo** (Calle Puerto del Mar 9), both open from 10 or 11pm to around 6am.

Entertainment

The serious big-name clubs cluster around the Golden Mile and the vanity fair of Puerto Banús.

Flamenco Ana María (☎ 952 77 11 17; Plaza Santo Cristo 5; admission incl 1 drink €20; ♿ shows 11.30pm Wed-Sat) As far as flamenco goes on the Costa del Sol, Ana María's is a relatively good-value, authentic show. Reservations are essential.

Shopping

The winding streets of the old town are full of glittering, designer-label boutiques, enticing craft shops and fancy antique showrooms. There's another area with many upmarket boutiques south of Avenida Ramón y Cajal and west of Avenida Miguel Cano. A lively street market takes place on Monday mornings in the **Recinto Ferial** (Avenida Albarizas), east of the old town.

Getting There & Away

Buses to Fuengirola (€2.50, one hour), Puerto Banús (€1, 20 minutes) and Estepona (€2.40, one hour) leave about every 30 minutes from Avenida Ricardo Soriano. Services to and from the **bus station** (☎ 952 76 44 00; Avenida Trapiche) include the following destinations:

Destination	Cost	Duration	Daily Frequency
Algeciras	€6	1½hr	20
Cádiz	€16	2½hr	3
Córdoba	€16	5hr	1 or 2
Granada	€14	2¾hr	7
Málaga	€4.70	1¼hr	up to 27
Málaga airport	€4	1hr	10 or more
Ojén	€1	30min	9 (Mon-Sat)
Ronda	€4.70	1½hr	7
Seville	€15	3¾hr	2 or 3

Getting Around

From the bus station, bus 7 (€1) runs every 20 minutes (6.30am to 11.10pm) to the Fuengirola/Estepona bus stop on Avenida Ricardo Soriano, near the town centre. Returning from the centre to the bus station, take bus 2 from Avenida Ramón y Cajal (at the corner of Calle Huerta Chica). To walk from the bus station to the centre, cross the bridge over the bypass and carry straight on down Avenida Trapiche.

Marbella's streets are notoriously traffic-clogged and the one-way system may add to drivers' frustrations. Fortunately there's a reasonable number of pay car parks located throughout the town where you can hole up on arrival; they typically charge €1 to €1.20 per hour, with a daily maximum of €10 to €12.

AROUND MARBELLA Ojén & Around

The hills of the Sierra Blanca towering behind Marbella provide an escape from the coastal mayhem, and the village of Ojén, among eucalyptus and citrus groves 9km north of town, is a good place to start exploring. At Ojén's **Museo del Vino Málaga** (☎ 952 88 14 53; Calle Carrera 39; admission free; ♿ 11am-3pm & 6-10pm Jul-Oct, 11am-8pm Nov-Jun), you can taste and buy some of Málaga's finest wine in its oldest distillery. Ojén's **Castillo de Cante** flamenco festival, on the night of the first or second Saturday of

August, always features some of the big flamenco names.

Ojén has a couple of straightforward village restaurants, and a further 7km up the hill is the smarter country-house hotel **Refugio de Juanar** (☎ 952 88 10 00; www.juanar.com; Sierra Blanca s/n; s/d €79/102; 📍 🚗 🚲), with a restaurant specialising in game. The Refugio de Juanar is the starting point of some good, well-marked walking trails, for which the hotel can provide you with a map. A gentle 2km hike will take you to the **mirador**, a lookout point with views over the coast and, on a clear day, as far as Africa. Even better views are to be had from the Cruz de Juanar, a hilltop cross a half-kilometre up to the west of the *mirador*. Keen hikers can follow trails back down to Ojén or Marbella, or west to the village of Istán.

Puerto Banús

pop 15,000

Six kilometres along the coast west of Marbella you'll find Puerto Banús, Spain's original village-style port development and today the flashiest marina on the Costa del Sol. Some truly enormous floating palaces are tied up near the control tower at the western end of the harbour. Marbella's 'spend, be seen, have fun' ethos is at its purest here, with the constant parade of the glamorous, the would-be glamorous and the normal in front of the luscious boutiques and bustling restaurants strung along the waterfront. A couple of narrow lanes immediately behind here contain the busiest nightlife zone in the whole Marbella area, and further back are a couple of enormous shopping malls. Either side of the marina, good broad sandy beaches stretch east and west.

It's definitely a fun place to visit, and a fun way to arrive is with **Cruceros Turísticos Marbella** (☎ 676 000099), whose boats leave Marbella's Puerto Deportivo hourly from 10am to 6pm for the half-hour sail to Banús (one-way/return €5/8).

Time to refuel? Choose from the Greek **Red Pepper** (☎ 952 81 21 48; mains €17-25), Italian **Don Leone** (☎ 952 81 17 16; pizza & pasta €9-12) and **Picasso** (☎ 952 81 36 69; pizza & pasta €9-10), or American **Jacks** (☎ 952 81 36 25; burgers €10-16), all along the waterfront Calle de Ribera.

Popular meeting-place bars include **Salduba Pub** (☎ 952 81 10 92; 🕒 noon-2am) and Sinatra Bar, both towards the west end

DANCING QUEEN

Olivia Valere (☎ 952 82 88 61; www.oliviavale.com; Carretera de Istán Km 0.8; admission Sep-Jul €20-30, Aug €50; 🕒 midnight-6am Thu-Sat, nightly in Aug) If there's one nightclub that epitomises the extravagant image of Marbella, it's Olivia Valere, less than 1km up the Istán road off the Golden Mile. Modelled on Granada's Alhambra, the interior is an *Arabian Nights* fantasy of interlinking courtyard dance floors, splashing fountains, gold columns and darkly beautiful bars. Its exclusive restaurant Babilonia (open 8.30pm to 3am) serves an exquisite international menu (mains €18 to €30). It is hard to overrate the extravagant experience and it should be on everyone's Marbella itinerary.

of Calle de Ribera. **Taco Loco** (☎ 952 81 14 38; 🕒 noon-2am), to their east, develops quite a party atmosphere. Many other busy bars, including several Irish pubs, are found along the parallel street behind here, generally known as the *segunda línea* (second line).

Come 1am or later, it's time to dance.

Top spots along the *segunda línea*:

Comedia (🕒 11pm-dawn) Fashionable spot with mainstream dance music.

Heaven Café (☎ 952 90 85 29; 🕒 9pm-4am) Resident house DJs.

Terra Blues (☎ 686 908016; 🕒 11pm-dawn Wed-Sat) Depending on the night, DJs spin almost everything from funk and acid jazz to hip-hop and rock, and there are even reggae nights.

Over by the roundabout at the western entrance to the marina, you might spot a celebrity at glamorous **Glam** (☎ 952 81 78 20; Edificio Gray d'Albion; 🕒 from midnight Fri & Sat), while **Dreamer's** (☎ 952 81 20 80; www.dreamers-disco.com; N340 Km 175, Río Verde; admission incl 1 drink €20; 🕒 12.30am-6am Mon-Sat), on the eastern outskirts of Puerto Banús, brings house and garage music lovers a taste of paradise. With an ever-changing menu of DJs, a calendar of parties and room for 1400 clubbers you'll be pushed to find somewhere better to let your hair down.

Estepona

pop 55,000

Lower-key and lower-rise than the resorts to its east, Estepona remains a pleasant

town with a long seafront promenade overlooking the wide, sandy **Playa de la Rada**. The huge, safe beach, clean water and relaxed atmosphere make this an excellent base for families and there is a great play area on the beach almost opposite the end of Avenida San Lorenzo, where the **tourist office** (☎ 952 80 20 02; www.estepona.es; Avenida San Lorenzo 1; 🕒 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat) is to be found. The beaches around Estepona are also popular surf spots for beginners.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The popular safari park, **Selwo Aventura** (☎ 902 19 04 82; www.selwo.es; Carretera A7 Km 162.5; adult/under 8yr €22/€15; 🕒 10am-6pm Sep-Jun, 10am-8pm Jul & Aug, closed early Dec-early Feb), located 6km east of Estepona, has over 200 exotic animal species. You can tour the park by 4WD or on foot and enjoy various adventure activities. A direct bus runs to Selwo from Málaga via Torremolinos, Fuengirola and Marbella (phone Selwo for information), but to get there from Estepona, a taxi (€10) is best.

For adult adventure, the **Happy Divers Club** (☎ 952 88 90 00; www.happy-divers-marbella.com; Atalaya Park Hotel, Carretera de Cádiz Km 168.5), based 11km east of Estepona, organises a wide range of diving courses and trips.

Away from the beach, Estepona's focal point is **Plaza de las Flores**, a pretty square at the heart of a small area of narrow old streets reminiscent of Marbella's *casco antiguo*.

A sizable fishing fleet and a large marina share the port beyond the lighthouse at the western end of town, and a lively **fish market** takes place every morning, although it's pretty much over by 7am.

SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation in Estepona town is limited, and all in the budget or midrange, but a dozen four- and five-star hotels are dotted along the coast to the east.

Hostal La Malagueña (☎ 952 80 00 11; www.hlmeestepona.com; Calle Castillo 1; s/d €25/49; 📍) Just off the central Plaza de las Flores, La Malagueña offers plain but adequately comfortable rooms, with fans.

Hostal El Pilar (☎ 952 80 00 18; www.telefonica.net/web2/hostalelpilar; Plaza de las Flores 10; s/d €28/50; 📍) An old-fashioned but well-kept and friendly *hostal*, in a 250-year-old house nicely positioned on leafy Plaza de las Flores.

Hotel Aguamarina (☎ 952 80 61 55; www.hotelaguamarina.com; Avenida San Lorenzo 32, s/d incl breakfast €58/82; 📍) The Aguamarina has comfortable, up-to-date rooms, some with balconies from which you can see the sea, and a handy ground-floor café-restaurant.

Plaza de las Flores is a student hang-out that's home to a few tapas bars and restaurants. Eating out focuses on the Puerto Deportivo: try the well-patronised **Maharajah's** (☎ 952 80 14 52; dishes €7-10; 🕒 7-11.30pm) for biryani, Punjabi or Goan dishes, or you can enjoy an excellent candlelit Italian meal at **Ristorante Rosatti** (☎ 952 79 66 06; mains €12-20, menú €26; 🕒 7pm-midnight). Also here is a flush of popular late-night bars.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The **bus station** (☎ 952 80 02 49; Avenida de España) is 400m west of the tourist office along the seafront. Buses run every half-hour, from 6.40am to 10.40pm, to Marbella (€2.40, one hour), and 10 times daily to Málaga (€7, two hours). There are also services to La Línea de la Concepción (€3.50, one hour, eight daily), Algeciras (€3.60, one hour, nine daily) and Cádiz (€13, 3½ hours, two daily).

THE INTERIOR

The mountainous interior of Málaga province is an area of raw beauty and romantic *pueblos blancos* (white villages) sprinkled across craggy landscapes. Beyond the mountains, the verdant countryside opens out into a wide chequerboard of floodplains. It's all a far cry from the tourist-clogged coast.

RONDA

pop 36,000 / elevation 744m

Perched on an inland plateau riven by the 100m fissure of El Tajo gorge, Ronda has the most dramatic location of all the *pueblos blancos*. It owes its name, which means 'surrounded by mountains', to the encircling Serranía de Ronda. Established in the 9th century BC, Ronda is also one of Spain's oldest towns. Its existing old town, La Ciudad (the City), largely dates back to Islamic times, when it was an important cultural centre filled with mosques and palaces. Its wealth as a trading depot made it an attractive prospect for bandits and profiteers and

the town has a colourful and romantic past in Spanish folklore.

Ronda was a favourite with the Romantics of the late 19th century, and has attracted an array of international artists and writers, such as David Wilkie, Alexandre Dumas, Rainer Maria Rilke, Ernest Hemingway and Orson Welles, who flocked to admire it. Nowadays, Ronda has a lot to live up to, and at just an hour inland from the Costa del Sol it attracts a weight of day-trippers, who nearly double its population in summer. The best time to enjoy the town with some ease is in the honeyed light of evening, or in the early spring and late autumn when the tourist season has lost its sting.

Orientation

La Ciudad stands on the southern side of El Tajo gorge. Following the Reconquista (Christian reconquest) in 1485, new taxes imposed on La Ciudad forced the residents to set up the newer town, El Mercadillo (the Market), to the north. Three bridges cross the gorge, the main one being the Puente Nuevo linking Plaza de España with Calle de Armiñán. Both parts of town come to an abrupt end on their western sides with cliffs plunging away to the valley of the Rio Guadalevin far below. Places of interest are mainly concentrated in La Ciudad while most places to stay and eat, along with the bus and train stations, are in El Mercadillo.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Comansur (☎ 952 87 86 67; www.comansur.com; Calle Lauria 33) Sells 1:50,000 SGE maps.

EMERGENCY

Policia Local (☎ 952 87 13 69; Plaza Duquesa de Parcent s/n) In the *ayuntamiento*.

Policia Nacional (☎ 952 87 10 01; Avenida de Madrid s/n)

INTERNET ACCESS

Central Corner Cybercafé (☎ 952 87 98 39; Calle Los Remedios 26; per hr €2.70; ☎ 4pm-late) A popular drinking bar and internet café with fast computers.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital General Básico (☎ 952 87 15 41; El Burgo Rd) One kilometre from the town centre.

MONEY

Banks and ATMs are mainly on Calle Virgen de la Paz (opposite the bullring) and Plaza Carmen Abela.

POST

Post office (Calle Virgen de la Paz 18-20; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Municipal tourist office (☎ 952 18 71 19; www.turismoderonda.es; Paseo de Blas Infante; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.15am-2pm & 3.30-6.30pm Sat, Sun & holidays) Helpful and friendly staff with a wealth of information on the town and region.

Regional tourist office (☎ 952 87 12 72; www.andalucia.org; Plaza de España 1; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat)

Sights

LA CIUDAD

Straddling the dramatic gorge and the Río Guadalevin (Deep River) is Ronda's most recognisable sight, the towering **Puente Nuevo**, best viewed from the Camino de los Molinos, which runs along the bottom of the gorge. The bridge separates the old and new towns. The former is surrounded by massive fortress walls pierced by two ancient gates: the Islamic **Puerta de Almocábar**, which in the 13th century was the main gateway to the castle; and the 16th-century **Puerta de Carlos V**. Inside, the Islamic layout remains intact, and its maze of narrow streets now takes its character from the Renaissance mansions of powerful families whose predecessors accompanied Fernando el Católico in the taking of the city in 1485.

Nearly all of the mansions still bear the crest of each family, including the **Palacio de Mondragón** (☎ 952 87 84 50; Plaza Mondragón; adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat, Sun & holidays). Built for Abomelic, ruler of Ronda in 1314, the palace retains its internal courtyards and fountains, the most impressive of these being the Patio Mudéjar, from which a horseshoe arch leads into a cliff-top garden with splendid views. It houses the city museum, which has artefacts and information especially related to both Roman and Islamic funerary systems.

A minute's walk southeast from the Palacio de Mondragón is the city's original mosque, now the ornate **Iglesia de Santa María La Mayor** (☎ 952 87 22 46; Plaza Duquesa de

RONDA

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Parent; admission €3; ☎ 10am-6pm Nov-Mar, 10am-7pm Apr-Oct). Just inside the church entrance is an arch covered with Arabic inscriptions, which was part of the mosque's mihrab (prayer niche indicating the direction of Mecca). The church has been declared a national monument, and its interior is an orgy of decorative styles and ornamentation. A huge central cedar choirstall divides the church into two sections: aristocrats to the front, everyone else at the back.

Just opposite the church, the amusing **Museo del Bandidero** (☎ 952 87 77 85; Calle de Armiñán 65; admission €3; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Oct-Mar, 10.30am-7pm Apr-Sep) is dedicated to the banditry for which central Andalucía was once renowned. Old prints reflect that when the youthful *bandoleros* (bandits) were not being shot, hanged or garrotted by the authorities they were stabbing each other in the back, literally as much as figuratively.

Taking the narrow Calle Marqués de Salvatierra will bring you to the small **Puente Viejo** (Old Bridge), with views down onto the river as it rushes into the gorge. Just before you reach it you will pass the **Palacio del Marqués de Salvatierra**, a huge mansion that required the demolition of 42 houses for it to be built. Owned by the descendants of the Marqués de Moctezuma, the Governor of South America, the palace is decorated on its portal with carvings of native American Indians. The palace and all its antiques are sometimes open to the public.

For a more dramatic view of the river and gorge, leave Puente Viejo and head back along Calle Marqués de Salvatierra, turning right up Calle Santo Domingo to the **Casa del Rey Moro** (☎ 952 18 72 00; Calle Santo Domingo 17; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 10am-7pm). Here, terraced gardens give access to **La Mina**, an Islamic stairway of over 300 steps that are cut into the rock all the way down to the river at the bottom of the gorge. These steps enabled Ronda to maintain water supplies when it was under attack. It was also the point where Christian troops forced entry in 1485. The steps are not well lit and are steep and wet in places. Care should be taken, even by the fit and able. Also backing on to the river are the almost intact, atmospheric 13th- and 14th-century **Baños Árabes** (Arab Baths; ☎ 656 950937; Hoyo San Miguel; admission €2, Sun free; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun).

To walk down into the gorge (a good morning's walk), take the path from Plaza María Auxiliadora. It is steep and long but is well worth the effort, and in springtime the valley below is carpeted in flowers. Further afield is the lovely chapel **Ermita de la Virgen de la Cabeza**.

EL MERCADILLO

Directly across the Puente Nuevo is the main square, **Plaza de España**, made famous by Hemingway in his novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Chapter 10 tells how early in the civil war the 'fascists' of a small town were rounded up in the *ayuntamiento*, clubbed and made to walk the gauntlet between two lines of townspeople before being thrown off the cliff. The episode is based on events that took place here in Plaza de España. What was the *ayuntamiento* is now Ronda's parador.

Nearby, Ronda's elegant **Plaza de Toros** (☎ 952 87 41 32; Calle Virgen de la Paz s/n; admission €5; ☎ 10am-6pm Oct-Mar, 10am-8pm Apr-Sep) is a mecca for bullfighting aficionados. In existence for more than 200 years, it is one of the oldest and most revered bullrings in Spain. It has also been the site of some of the most important events in bullfighting history (see the boxed text, opposite). Built by Martín Aldehuela, the bullring is universally admired for its soft sandstone hues and galleried arches. At 66m in diameter it is also the largest and, therefore, most dangerous bullring, yet it only seats 5000 spectators – a tiny number compared with the huge 50,000-seater bullring in Mexico City. In July the ring is used for a series of fabulous concerts, and opera.

The on-site **Museo Taurino** is crammed with memorabilia such as blood-spattered costumes worn by Pedro Romero and 1990s star Jesulín de Ubrique. It also includes photos of famous fans such as Orson Welles and Ernest Hemingway, whose novel *Death in the Afternoon* provides in-depth insight into the fear and tension of the bullring.

Behind the Plaza de Toros, spectacular cliff-top views open out from **Paseo de Blas Infante** and the leafy **Alameda del Tajo** park nearby. The park has a good play area for younger children.

BARRIO DE SAN FRANCISCO

Outside La Ciudad's city walls is the **Barrio de San Francisco**, the original Muslim cem-

etry of the city. A small market was established here in the 15th century, when traders refused to enter the city in order to avoid paying hefty taxes. Some inns and taverns were built and thus began a new quarter. The barrio still has a reputation for down-to-earth tapas bars.

Activities

Ronda is a hub for outdoor activities, and many villa rentals offer a host of on-site activities (see the boxed text, p285). In Ronda itself, the activity company **Pangea Active Nature** (☎ 952 87 34 96; www.pangeacentral.com; Calle Dolores Ibarri 4) offers a range of activities from one-day caving (per person €69) to longer hiking or biking trips.

For guided horse treks contact **Hotel El Espejo** (☎ 952 11 40 11; www.serraniaderonda.org in Spanish; Camino del Cuco), located off the Arriate road, about 3km from Ronda. Cost is €15 per hour with a minimum price of €60, ie one person for four hours or two people for two hours.

Ronda has traditionally been a haven for artists and that is no less true today than it was in the past. Check out www.artgaucin.com for information about the local art scene.

Tours

For a lively and engaging guided tour of Ronda, contact the bubbly **Teresa Montero Verdú** (☎ 952 87 21 02, 609 879406), locally born and full of enthusiastically delivered information.

Festivals & Events

Corpus Cristi On the Thursday after Trinity there are bullfights and festivities after the 900kg Station of the Cross is carried 6km through the town.

Feria de Pedro Romero An orgy of partying during the first two weeks of September, including the important flamenco Festival de Cante Grande. Culminates in the *Corridos Goyesca* (bullfights in honour of legendary bullfighter Pedro Romero – see below).

Sleeping

Ronda's accommodation can be tight, even on weekends outside of the summer high season. In the first half of May and from July to September, you definitely need to book ahead.

BUDGET

Ronda has some of the best character-filled and best-value accommodation in Málaga province.

RONDA'S FIGHTING ROMEROS

Ronda can bullishly claim to be the home of bullfighting – and it does. It proudly boasts the Real Maestranza de Ronda equestrian school, founded in 1572 for the Spanish aristocracy to learn to ride and fight. They did this by challenging bulls in an arena, and thus was born the first bullfight.

Legend has it that one of these fights went awry when a nobleman fell from his horse and risked being gored to death. Without hesitation local hero Francisco Romero (b 1698) leapt into the ring and distracted the bull by waving his hat. By the next generation Francisco's son, Juan, had added the *cuadrilla* (the matador's supporting team), consisting of two to three *banderilleros* (who work on foot) and two to three *picadors* (men on horseback with pike poles). This married both the habits of the aristocracy (who previously conducted fights on horseback) and the common, dangerous bullfights which took place during fiestas in the main square of each town.

Juan's son Pedro Romero (1754–1839), whose distinguished career saw the death of over 5000 bulls, invented the rules and graceful balletlike movements of the modern bullfight, introducing the *muleta* (a variation on his grandfather's hat), a red cape used to attract the bull's attention.

In 1932 Ronda also gave birth to one of Spain's greatest 20th-century bullfighters, the charismatic Antonio Ordóñez, who was immortalised by Hemingway in *The Dangerous Summer*.

It was the Ordóñez family that inaugurated Ronda's *Corridos Goyesca*, held each year in early September in honour of Pedro Romero, and which attracts Spain's best matadors. During the bullfights the matadors wear the stiff, ornate 19th-century costume that Goya depicted in his paintings of Romero. Out of the three days of fights the most popular is on Saturday, for which you will need to book tickets at least two months in advance. Tickets cost from around €65 in the *sol* (sun) to €110 in *sombra* (shadow). Buy tickets at the bullring in Ronda from 1 July, or phone **Tazdevil** (☎ 954 50 37 94, 607 909345).

Hotel Morales (☎ 952 87 15 38; fax 952 18 70 24; Calle de Sevilla 51; s/d €25/42; 🏠) A friendly, small hotel with 18 pleasant rooms. Its walls are decked with maps of the area, it has a room for bicycles, and the staff are full of information on the town and nearby natural parks.

Hotel Arunda II (☎ 952 87 25 19; www.hotelesarunda.com; Calle José María Castelló Madrid 10; s/d incl breakfast €27/44; 🏠 🚗) Convenient for both the bus and the train station, the Arunda offers good rooms and the bonus of parking in its own garage.

Hotel Colón (☎ 952 87 02 18; hotelcolon@ronda.net; Calle Pozo; s/d €27/44; 🏠) A good budget option with 10 spick-and-span rooms. Ask for a room with a roof terrace – these overlook the 16th-century Iglesia de la Merced.

Hotel San Francisco (☎ 952 87 32 99; www.hotel-sanfranciscoronda.com; Calle María Cabrera 18; s/d incl breakfast €38/59; 🏠 🚗) Possibly the best budget option in Ronda, this hotel offers a warm welcome. The *hostal* has recently been refurbished and upgraded to a hotel with facilities to match. Eye-catching floral fabrics and yellow paintwork are cheering.

MIDRANGE

Hotel San Cayetano (☎ 952 16 16 72; www.hotel-sancayetano.com; Calle de Sevilla 16; s/€35, d 55-80) Run by an astute, young businesswoman who has completely reformed and decorated an old town house. Rooms are attractive and comfortable and there's a communal lounge room with TV.

Alavera de los Baños (☎ 952 87 91 43; www.andalucia.com/alavera; Hoyo San Miguel s/n; s/d incl breakfast €50/85; 🏠 🚗) Taking its cue from the Arab baths next door, the Alavera de los Baños

continues the Hispano-Islamic theme throughout, with oriental décor and tasty North African-inspired cuisine (much of it excellent vegetarian food). Ask for a room on the terrace, as they open out onto a small, lush garden.

Jardín de la Muralla (☎ 952 87 27 64; www.jardindelmuralla.com; Calle Espíritu Santo 13; d incl breakfast €87; 🏠 🚗) This newish Ronda hotel has stepped gardens which merge into the countryside yet it is only five minutes' walk from the centre and is in a zone chock-full of historic buildings. Such is Ronda! Décor is elegant, olde-worlde with fancy mirrors and vases of fresh flowers.

Hotel Polo (☎ 952 87 24 47; www.hotelpolo.net; Calle Mariano Soubirón 8; s/d incl breakfast 74/92; 🏠 🚗) This is a charming hotel in a graceful 19th-century building. Inside all is light and airy, with elegant, high-ceilinged rooms, many with balconied French windows, and attractively furnished communal areas such as the colonial-style lounge. The parking is a bonus.

Hotel San Gabriel (☎ 952 19 03 92; www.hotel-sangabriel.com; Calle José M Holgado 19; s/d 73/96; 🏠) This charming, historic hotel is filled with antiques and photographs that offer an insight into Ronda's history – bullfighting, celebrities and all. Ferns hang down the huge mahogany staircase, there is a billiard room, a cosy living room stacked with books and a super cinema with 10 velvet-covered seats rescued from Ronda's theatre.

TOP END

Hotel Montelirio (☎ 952 87 38 55; www.hotelmontelirio.com; Calle Tenorio 8; s/d €100/150; 🏠 🚗) Hugging El Tajo gorge, the new Montelirio has magical views. The converted *palacio* has been sensitively refurbished, with sumptuous suites. The lounge retains its gorgeous Mudejar ceiling and opens out onto a terrace complete with plunge pool. There is also a fantastic restaurant (see opposite).

Parador de Ronda (☎ 952 87 75 00; www.parador.es; Plaza de España s/n; s/d €129/161; 🏠 🚗) Also on the gorge, although set back behind a wide terrace, the Ronda Parador is another luxurious option with well-appointed rooms and excellent services.

If you like ultra-modern places, try the new **Hotel Acinopo** (☎ 952 16 10 02; www.acinopo.com; Calle José Aparicio 7; r from €104).

Eating

Typical Ronda food is hearty mountain fare, with an emphasis on stews (called *cocido*, *estofado* or *cazuela*), *trucha* (trout), and game such as *conejo* (rabbit), *perdiz* (partridge), *codorniz* (quail) and *toro* (ox-tail). But, as elsewhere, inspired chefs are trying out new ideas.

Chocolat (Calle de Sevilla 18; breakfast from €2.20) A sophisticated café next door to Hotel San Cayetano. Choose from a long list of teas, coffees and breakfasts and a boggling array of cakes and pastries. The mellow background music is easy to take.

El Molino (☎ 952 87 52 49; Calle Molino 6; pizza €7, menú €9) Popular for its pizzas, good prices, and its position on Plaza del Socorro, the food here is a little perfunctory but perfectly adequate. A dinner of pizza and salad will keep you happy for hours.

Casa Mateo (☎ 952 87 46 42; Calle Jerez 6; raciones €10) Recognise this new, slick place, near Iglesia de la Merced, by its Arab-style brickwork. It has good meat and fish *raciones* and interesting salads using local products.

Tréz (☎ 952 87 72 07; Calle Los Remedios 27; mains €6-10.50; 🕒 1-4pm & 7pm-midnight Tue-Sat; 🍷) Previously called Relax, this place is now run by a young Dutch couple who are continuing with many of the vegetarian dishes and the general café theme of the place while putting their own stamp on it. While there are a couple of meat and fish options, vegetarians will find favourites like spinach and feta pies, mushroom pies and vegetarian lasagne.

Bar Restaurant Almocábar (☎ 952 87 59 77; Calle Ruedo Alameda 5; tapas €1.50, mains €10-14; 🕒 1.30-5pm & 8pm-1am Wed-Mon) In the Barrio San Francisco, Almocábar is an excellent authentic tapas bar, little touched by the tourist hordes at the top of town. In the evening you'll be hard pressed to get into the tapas bar, so delicious are its tapas. At least you can reserve for the restaurant section.

Restaurante Pedro Romero (☎ 952 87 11 10; Calle Virgen de la Paz 18; menú €16, mains €15-18) Opposite the bullring, this celebrated eatery dedicated to bullfighting turns out classic *rondeño* dishes (dishes from Ronda). This is a good place to try the *rabo de toro* (oxtail stew). Vegetarians will enjoy the fried goat's cheese starter served with apple sauce.

Restaurante Albacara (☎ 952 16 11 84; Calle Tenorio 8; mains €14.50-19) One of Ronda's best

restaurants, the Albacara is in the old stables of the Montelirio palace and teeters on the edge of the gorge. It serves up creative meals and has an extensive wine list. Try the codfish with a spicy leek sauce.

Restaurante del Escudero (☎ 952 87 13 67; Paseo de Blas Infante 1; menú €17, mains €17-21; 🕒 1.30-3.30pm Tue-Sun, 8-10.30pm Tue-Sat) This is a sister restaurant to Tragabuches, situated in an attractive garden near the Plaza de Toros, with a good set menu and more reasonable prices than Tragabuches. The garden makes it popular in the summer.

Casa Santa Pola (☎ 952 87 92 08; Calle Santo Domingo 3; starters €10-12, mains €17-22) This is an atmospheric restaurant spread over three floors of an old aristocratic house. At night each of the small dining rooms is intimate and candlelit and during the day there are good views over El Tajo. The roast lamb cutlets or the roast pork are a must.

Casa María (☎ 952 87 62 12; Calle Ruedo Alameda 27; 2-course meal €20-25; 🕒 1-5pm & 7.30pm-1am Thu-Mon) Although it doesn't draw the crowds in quite the same way as the nearby Almocábar, Casa María is still worth the trip to the Barrio de San Francisco. The fresh seafood is great value and when things get going there is a wonderfully unpretentious atmosphere. The owner-chef has an impressive wine stash and orders good cuts of meat from around the country.

Restaurante Tragabuches (☎ 952 19 02 91; Calle José Aparicio 1; mains €26-29; 🕒 1.30-3.30pm & 8-10.30pm Tue-Sat) A complete change from the ubiquitous 'rustic' restaurant, Tragabuches is modern and sleek with an innovative menu to match. Michelin-starred in 1998, chef Daniel García continues to send out *cocina creativa*.

Drinking

Tetería Al Zahra (Calle Las Tiendas 17; 🕒 4.30pm-midnight) Come here and try a pot of herbal, Moroccan, Pakistani or a host of other teas, all served in pretty Moroccan ceramic teapots and cups and saucers.

El Choque Ideal (☎ 952 16 19 18; www.elchoqueideal.com; Espíritu Santo 9; 🕒 9.30am-3am Feb-Oct, 1pm-1am Nov-Jan) A great café with fantastic views, lots of mosaic work and a basement recording studio. It puts on a host of events from films out on the terrace to live bands.

A modest nightlife zone centres on Calle Los Remedios, with the ever-popular tapas

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

EnFrente Arte (☎ 952 87 90 88; www.enfrentearte.com; Calle Real 40; r incl breakfast & drinks €82-106; 🏠 🚗) On a historic cobblestoned street, Belgian-owned EnFrente offers a huge range of facilities and funky modern/oriental décor. It has a bar, recreation room, pool, flowery patio with black bamboo, sauna, film room and fantastic views out to the Sierra de la Nieves. What's more, the room price includes all drinks, to which you help yourself, and a sumptuous buffet breakfast, overseen by two cooks.

bars of **Taberna del Antonio** (Calle Los Remedios 22; ☎ 11am-midnight), serving more than 60 kinds of tapas, and **Lechuguita** (Calle Los Remedios 25; ☎ 11am-midnight). Down in the Barrio San Francisco try the heaving **Bodega San Francisco** (Calle Ruedo Alameda; ☎ 11am-midnight) – if you can squeeze in the door.

Entertainment

For flamenco performances seek out the **Círculo de Artistas** (Plaza del Socorro; ☎ Mon-Wed) and **Museo Lara** (Calle de Armiñán 29; ☎ Thu-Sat), both from 10pm and costing €23. Salsa and merengue fans can dance at **Sabor Latino** (Calle Mariano Soubirón; ☎ from 9pm).

Getting There & Away

BUS

The bus station is at Plaza Concepción García Redondo 2. **Comes** (☎ 952 87 1992) has buses to Arcos de la Frontera (€7.50, two hours), Jerez de la Frontera (€10, three hours) and Cádiz (€13, two hours) up to four times daily; and Gaucín, Jimena de la Frontera and Algeciras (€8, 1½ hours, one daily Monday to Friday). **Los Amarillos** (☎ 952 18 70 61) goes to Seville (€10, 2½ hours, three to six daily) via Algodonales; Grazalema (€2.30, 35 minutes, two daily); and Málaga (€8.50, two hours, four to 10 daily) via Ardales. **Portillo** (☎ 952 87 22 62) runs to Málaga (€9.50, 1½ hours, at least three daily) via San Pedro de Alcántara and Marbella.

TRAIN

Ronda's **train station** (☎ 952 87 16 73; Avenida de Andalucía) is on the scenic line between Bobadilla and Algeciras. Trains run to Algeciras (€6.50 to €16, 1¾ hours, six daily) via Gaucín and Jimena de la Frontera. This train ride is incredibly scenic and worth taking just for the views. Other trains depart for Granada (€11.50, 2½ hours, three daily) via Antequera; Málaga (€5.50, 1½ to two hours, one daily Monday to Saturday); Córdoba (€18 to €22, 2½ hours, two daily); and Madrid (by day €53, 4½ hours; overnight €34, nine hours). For Seville change at Bobadilla or Antequera.

Getting Around

BICYCLE

Bicicletas Jesús Rosado (☎/fax 95 287 02 21, 637 457756; jrosado@ronda.net; 87 Plaza del Ahorro 1; 1 day €10) rents out well-equipped mountain bikes.

BUS

It's less than 1km from the train station to most accommodation. Supposedly every 30 minutes, town minibuses run to Plaza de España from Avenida Martínez Astein (across the road from the train station), but they're not very reliable. It's not too far to walk to the town centre but, with luggage, you'll need a taxi (€4).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Parking in Ronda is, inevitably, difficult. There are a number of underground car parks and some hotels have parking deals for guests. Parking charges are about €2.50 per hour, €14 for 14 to 24 hours. Taxis are found in Plaza Carmen Abela.

AROUND RONDA

Serranía de Ronda

Curving around the south and southeast of the town, the **Serranía de Ronda** may not be the highest or most dramatic mountain range in Andalucía, but it's certainly among the prettiest. Any of the roads through it between Ronda and southern Cádiz province, Gibraltar or the Costa del Sol, makes a picturesque route. **Cortés de la Frontera**, overlooking the Guadiaro Valley, and **Gaucín**, looking across the Genal Valley to the Sierra Crestellina, are among the most beautiful spots to stop.

To the west and southwest of Ronda stretch the wilder Sierra de Grazalema (p203) and Los Alcornocales (p223) natural parks. There are plenty of walking and cycling possibilities and Ronda's tourist office can provide details of these as well as maps.

Ronda la Vieja

To the north of Ronda, off the A376, is the relatively undisturbed Roman site of **Acinipo** at **Ronda la Vieja** (☎ 630 429949; admission free; ☎ 9am-3pm Tue-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun), with its partially reconstructed theatre. Although completely ruinous, with the exception of the theatre, it is a wonderfully wild site with fantastic views of the surrounding countryside and you can happily while away a few hours wandering through the fallen stones trying to guess the location of various baths and forums.

Cueva de la Pileta

Twenty kilometres southwest of Ronda la Vieja are some of Andalucía's most ancient

RURAL RONDA

The beautiful countryside surrounding Ronda has attracted a large number of enterprising individuals who have converted traditional houses into gorgeous rural accommodation. If you have your own car it is most certainly worth staying in one of these *cortijos* (country properties) that often offer a host of extras such as guided walks and both traditional fare and *haute cuisine*. For information on rural accommodation, try Ronda's municipal tourist office, the regional website www.serraniaronda.org, or www.rusticblue.com. We recommend the following places:

First up, the **Condé Nast Traveller** favourite, **Hotel Fuente de la Higuera** (☎ 952 11 43 55; www.hotellafuente.com; Partido de los Frontones, Ronda; d/deluxe ste €135/260; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎), a chic colonial villa, with a contemporary interior, that overlooks vast olive groves.

Walking enthusiasts can't do any better than **El Tejar** (☎ 952 18 40 53; eltejar@mercuriy.es; Calle Nacimiento 38, Montecorto; Oct-mid-May d €65, mid-May-Sep whole house per week €1000; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎). Here, experienced walker Guy Hunter-Watts, author of *Walking in Andalucía*, can expertly guide you through the surrounding countryside. During summer you have to book the whole place.

For sheer indulgence, cosmopolitan atmosphere and out-of-this-world views, opt for **El Nobo** (☎ 952 15 13 03; www.elnobo.co.uk; Apartado 46, Gaucín; d €125, 4-person villa per week €1150-1700; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) or **Hotel Casablanca** (☎ 952 15 10 19; fax 952 15 14 05; Calle Llana 12, Gaucín; r incl breakfast €140-200; ☎ closed Nov-Mar; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎).

A truly gourmet indulgence can be found at the welcoming and convivial **La Almuña Cottage** (☎ 952 15 12 00; www.i-escape.com; Apartado 20, Gaucín; d €91, cottage for 4 per week €710; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎), which serves up local, home-grown produce (dinner €44).

caves, the **Cueva de la Pileta** (☎ 952 16 73 43; adult/child/student €6.50/2.50/3; ☎ hourly tours 10am-1pm & 4-6pm, call for details). The guided tour by candlelight into the dark belly of the cave reveals Palaeolithic paintings of horses, goats and fish from 20,000 to 25,000 years ago. Beautiful stalactites and stalagmites add to the effect. The guided tour is given by a member of the Bullón family, who discovered the paintings in 1905 and who speak some English. The maximum group size is 25, so if you come on a busy day you may have to wait for a place.

Benaoján village is the nearest that you can get to the Cueva de la Pileta by public transport. Here you can stay at the beautiful converted water mill of **Molino del Santo** (☎ 952 16 71 51; www.molindelsanto.com; Barriada Estación s/n; d B&B/half-board €67/90; ☎ mid-Feb-mid-Nov), which also puts on a fantastic lunch menu.

The caves are 4km south of Benaoján, about 250m off the Benaoján-Cortes de la Frontera road – there is no transport to the caves, only a bus to Benaoján, so you will need your own car to get here. The turn-off is signposted. Benaoján is served by two Los Amarillos buses (from Monday to Friday) and up to four daily trains to/from Ronda. Walking trails link Benaoján with Ronda and villages in the Guadiaro Valley.

Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves



Southeast of Ronda lies the 180-sq-km **Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves**, noted for its rare Spanish fir, the *pinsapo*, and fauna including some 1000 ibex and various species of eagle. The *nieve* (snow) after which the mountains are named usually falls between January and March. **El Burgo**, a remote but attractive village 10km north of **Yunquera** on the A366, makes a good base for visiting the east and northeast of the park. Information is available from Yunquera's **tourist office** (☎ 952 48 28 01; Calle del Pozo 17; ☎ 8am-3pm Tue-Fri), or the **ayuntamiento** (☎ 952 16 00 02) in El Burgo.


Camping Conejeras (☎ 619 180012; bungalow €48, camping per adult/tent/car €2.50/2.50/2.40; ☎ Oct-Jun), 800m off the A376 on the road to Los Quejigales, and **Camping Pinsapo Azul** (☎ 952 48 27 54; Yunquera; adult/tent/car €4/4/3.50; ☎ daily 15 May-15 Oct, weekends only 16 Oct-14 May) at Yunquera are both pleasant sites. In El Burgo, the charming **Hotel La Casa Grande** (☎ 952 16 02 32; www.hotel-lacasagranda.com; Calle Mesones 1; d €66; ☎ ☎) has spacious, well-furnished rooms, a cosy sitting room, and a restaurant.

To tap into the new wave of spiritual tourism in beautiful surroundings, check into the extraordinary converted mill of **Molino del Rey** (☎ 952 48 00 09; www.molindelrey.com; Valle de Jorox, Alozaina; 1-week course per person

DETOUR: TORRECILLA

The most rewarding walk in the Sierra de las Nieves is the ascent of **Torrecilla** (1919m), the highest peak in western Andalucía. Start at the Área Recreativa Los Quejigales, which is 10km east by unpaved road from the A376 Ronda–San Pedro de Alcántara road. The turn-off, 12km from Ronda, is marked by 'Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves' signs. From Los Quejigales you have a steepish 470m ascent by the **Cañada de los Cuernos gully**, with its tranquil Spanish-fir woods, to the high pass of **Puerto de los Pilones**. After a fairly level section, the final steep 230m to the summit rewards you with marvellous views. The walk takes five to six hours round-trip. The IGN/Junta de Andalucía *Parque Natural Sierra de las Nieves* map (1:50,000) shows the relevant path and other hikes.

from €710;  ), with teachers including one of the owners and from abroad. London's popular Triyoga centre brings their groups for hatha and ashtanga yoga. The mill overlooks the Sierra de las Nieves and features a yoga room, meditation caves and a good vegetarian restaurant.

Buses between Málaga and Ronda (€8.50, 2½ hours, two daily) through Yunquera and El Burgo are run by **Sierra de las Nieves** ( 952 87 54 35).

ARDALES & EL CHORRO



Fifty kilometres northwest of Málaga, the Río Guadalhorce carves its way through the awesome Garganta del Chorro (El Chorro gorge). Also called the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes, the gorge is about 4km long, as much as 400m deep, and sometimes just 10m wide. Its sometimes sheer walls, and other rock faces nearby, are the biggest magnet for rock climbers in Andalucía, with hundreds of bolted climbs snaking their way up the limestone cliffs.

Along the gorge runs the main railway into Málaga (with the aid of 12 tunnels and six bridges) and a path called the Camino (or Caminito) del Rey (King's Path), so named because Alfonso XIII walked on it when he opened the Guadalhorce hydro-electric dam in 1921. For long stretches the path becomes a concrete catwalk 100m above the river, clinging to the gorge walls. It has been officially closed since 1992 and has gaping holes in its concrete floor, making it impassable for all but skilled rock climbers. You *can* view much of the gorge and the path by walking along the railway.


The pleasant, quiet town of Ardales is the main centre of the area and is a good base for exploring further afield. However, most people aim for the climbing mecca of

El Chorro, a tiny settlement in the midst of a spectacular and surreal landscape of soaring limestone crags.


Sights & Activities

At the entrance to Ardales is the **Museo de Ardales** ( 952 45 80 46; Avenida de Málaga 1; admission €1;  10am–2pm & 4–6pm Mon–Sat, 10am–2pm Sun mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 9am–2pm & 4–6pm Tue–Sat, 9am–2pm Sun mid-Sep–mid Jun), a new ethnographic and archaeological museum largely concerned with the **Cueva de Ardales**, a Palaeolithic cave complex similar to the Cueva de la Pileta. For two-hour guided visits to the Cueva de Ardales itself (4km from the museum; Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday year-round; €5), contact the museum two to three weeks in advance. The caves contain 60 Palaeolithic paintings and carvings of animals, done between about 18,000 and 14,000 BC, and traces of later occupation and burials from about 8000 BC to after 3000 BC. The museum has copies of the prehistoric rock paintings and carvings and an exhibit of Roman and Islamic artefacts and more.




Six kilometres from Ardales is the picturesque **Embalse del Conde del Guadalhorce** – a huge reservoir that dominates the landscape and is noted for its carp fishing.


Most of the activity in the area centres on the thriving hamlet of El Chorro, amid spectacular scenery. **Tienda Aventura El Chorro** ( 649 249444), near the train station, can organise guided activities – hiking, climbing, cycling (bring your own bike) – at all levels of difficulty. The best place for organised activities, and great company, is the **Finca La Campana** (see the boxed text, opposite).


Nine kilometres east of El Chorro is Valle de Abdalajís, Andalucía's paragliding capital. Tuition is offered by the **Club-Escuela de**


Parapente ( 952 48 91 80; Calle Sevilla 4, Valle de Abdalajís).

Sleeping & Eating

Albergue-Camping El Chorro ( /fax 952 49 52 44; www.alberguecampingelchorro.com; camping per adult/tent/car €4/4/free, hostel per person €10, bungalow for 2/4/6 €42/58/70;  ). Set among eucalyptus trees 350m towards the gorge from El Chorro village, the camp site has room for 150 people and there are also bungalows – you need to bring sleeping bags and towels. The *albergue* (hostel) has clean and smart rooms with beds for 60 people. A bar and supermarket are on-site.

Pensión Estación ( 952 49 50 04; r with shared bath €25) Found at El Chorro station, this guesthouse has great novelty value and two simple clean rooms. Its Bar Isabel, a renowned climbers' gathering spot, serves *platos combinados* (combined plates) for around €5.

Hostal El Cruce ( 952 45 90 12; www.elcruceardales.com; Carretera Alora–Campillos, Ardales; s/d €20/38) At the foot of Ardales, this *hostal* has adequate rooms and a lunch *menú* for €15.

La Posada del Conde ( 952 11 24 11; Pantano del Chorro 16–18; s/d €45/68, superior d €78, ste €118) Across the dam from Ardales, La Posada has lovely rooms overlooking the reservoir. It also has a very good restaurant offering delicious grilled meats for €15. Specialities are shoulder of lamb and suckling pig.

Apartamentos La Garganta ( 952 49 50 00; www.lagarganta.com; 2-/4-person apt €60/90;                

DETOUR: BOBASTRO

Back in the 9th century, the rugged El Chorro area was the redoubt of a kind of Andalusian Robin Hood, Omar ibn Hafsun, who resisted the armies of Córdoba for nearly 40 years from the hill fortress of **Bobastro**. At one stage he controlled territory all the way from Cartagena to the Strait of Gibraltar.

Legend has it that Ibn Hafsun converted to Christianity (thus becoming a Mozarab) and built Bobastro's **Iglesia Mozárabe**, where he was then buried in AD 917. When Bobastro was finally conquered by Córdoba in 927, Ibn Hafsun's remains were taken away for posthumous crucifixion outside Córdoba's *mezquita* (mosque).

Although the small church is now only a ruin, the drive and walk to get to it are delightful. From El Chorro follow the road up the valley from the western side of the dam, and after 3km take the signposted Bobastro turn-off. Nearly 3km up, an 'Iglesia Mozárabe' sign indicates the 500m footpath to the remains of the church. The views are magnificent.

stop at Ardales but there's no bus service to El Chorro.

Trains run to El Chorro from Málaga (€3.40, 45 minutes, two daily), except on Sundays and holidays. You can also reach El Chorro from Ronda (€5.50, 70 minutes, one daily except Sundays and holidays) or Seville (€13.50, two hours, one daily).

To reach El Chorro, drivers from Málaga can branch off the A357 Málaga–Ardales road onto the A343 Antequera road near Pizarra. About 4km north of Pizarra, turn left for Álora and El Chorro. The road passes narrowly between houses, and you eventually hit a potholed road to El Chorro. Another approach from Málaga is to continue on the A357 to the Ardales junction. Turn right here along the MA444 with the reservoir on your left, then in about 5km turn off right, signed to El Chorro. Also from Ardales, a partly unpaved road leads 20km southwest along the remote Turón Valley to El Burgo.

ANTEQUERA

pop 43,000 / elevation 577m

The sleepy provincial town of Antequera, a mass of red-tiled roofs punctuated by some 30 church spires, hides one of the richest historical legacies in Andalucía. In addition to the tall churches, there are numerous chapels dotted around the town.

The area's Neolithic and Bronze Age inhabitants erected some of Europe's largest and oldest dolmens (burial chambers built with huge slabs of rock) around 2500 BC to 1800 BC. Since then, Antequera has had a long and illustrious history spanning the three major influences in the region – Roman, Islamic and Spanish – due to its

strategic location. The scattered remains of each of these civilisations are dotted around the town in a rich tapestry of architectural gems, whose highlight is the opulent Spanish baroque style that gives the town its character. The commercial momentum that contributed to Antequera's importance also led to the town's cultural 'golden age' during the 16th and 17th centuries, when it became a centre for the Spanish humanist movement. Nowadays the civic authorities are working hard to restore and maintain the town's unique historic character.

Orientation

The substantial remains of a hilltop Muslim-built castle, the Alcazaba, dominate Antequera's centre. Down to the northwest is Plaza de San Sebastián, from which the main street, Calle Infante Don Fernando, runs northwest.

Information

There are plenty of banks and ATMs along Calle Infante Don Fernando.

Cyber-Locutorio Las Americas (Calle Encarnación 15; per hr €2; ☎ 10.30am–2pm & 4.30pm–11pm Mon–Fri, 11am–3pm & 4.30–11pm Sat, 4.30–11pm Sun) Internet access and cheap phone calls.

Hospital Comarcal de Antequera (☎ 952 84 62 63)
Municipal tourist office (☎ 952 70 25 05; www.antequera.es; Plaza de San Sebastián 7; ☎ 11am–2pm & 5–8pm Mon–Sat Jun–15 Oct, 10.30am–1.30pm & 4–7pm Mon–Sat 16 Oct–May, 11am–2pm Sun year-round) Friendly staff with plenty of information.

Policia Local (☎ 952 70 81 04; Avenida la Legión s/n)

Policia Nacional (☎ 952 84 34 94; Calle Carrera 14)

Post office (Calle Nájera 26; ☎ 9am–8pm Mon–Fri, 9am–2pm Sat)

Sights

Favoured by the Granada emirs of Islamic times, Antequera's hilltop **Alcazaba** gives the best views of the town. The main approach to the hilltop is from Plaza de San Sebastián, up the stepped Cuesta de San Judas and then through an impressive archway, the **Arco de los Gigantes**, built in 1585 and incorporating stones with Roman inscriptions. Not a huge amount remains of the Alcazaba itself, but it has been turned into a pine-scented, terraced garden and you can normally visit its **Torre del Homenaje** (Keep; admission free), though this was closed at the time of writing, so ask the tourist office for details of reopening. There are great views from this high ground, especially towards the northeast and the **Peña de los Enamorados** (Rock of the Lovers), about which there are many legends.

Just below the Alcazaba is the large 16th-century **Colegiata de Santa María la Mayor** (Plaza Santa María; admission free; ☎ 10am–2pm & 4.30–8pm Tue–Fri, 10.30am–2pm Sat, 11.30am–2pm & 4.30–6.30pm Sun Sep–mid-Jun, 10.30am–2pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat plus 8–10.30pm Wed & Fri, 11.30am–2pm Sun mid-Jun–Sep). This church-cum-college played an important part in Andalucía's 16th-century humanist movement, and boasts a beautiful Renaissance façade, lovely fluted stone columns inside, and a Mudejar *artesonado* (a ceiling of interlaced beams with decorative insertions). It also plays host to some excellent musical events and exhibitions.

In the town below, the pride of the **Museo Municipal** (Plaza del Coso Viejo; hourly tours €3; ☎ 10am–1.30pm & 4.30–6.30pm Tue–Fri, 10am–1.30pm Sat, 11am–1.30pm Sun Oct–mid-Jun, 8–10.30pm Wed & Fri mid-Jun–Sep) is the elegant and athletic 1.4m bronze statue of a boy, *Ejebó*. Discovered on a local farm in the 1950s, it is possibly the finest example of Roman sculpture found in Spain. The museum also displays some pieces from a Roman villa in Antequera, where a superb group of mosaics was discovered in 1998. There's also a treasure-trove of religious items, containing so much silver that you can only visit by guided tour on the half-hour.

The **Museo Conventual de las Descalzas** (Plaza de las Descalzas; compulsory guided tour €3; ☎ 10.30am–1.30pm & 5–6.30pm Tue–Fri, 10am–noon & 5–6.30pm Sat, 10am–noon Sun), in the 17th-century convent of the Carmelitas Descalzas (Barefoot Carmelites), approximately 150m east of the

Museo Municipal, displays highlights of Antequera's rich religious-art heritage. Outstanding works include a painting by Lucas Giordano of St Teresa of Ávila (the 16th-century founder of the Carmelitas Descalzas), a bust of the Dolorosa by Pedro de Mena and a *Virgen de Belén* sculpture by La Roldana.

Only the most jaded would fail to be impressed by the **Iglesia del Carmen** (Plaza del Carmen; admission €1.50; ☎ 10am–2pm) and its marvellous 18th-century Churrigüeresque retable. Carved in red pine (unpainted) by Antequera's own Antonio Primo, it's spangled with statues of angels by Diego Márquez y Vega, and saints, popes and bishops by José de Medina.

The **Dolmen de Menga** and **Dolmen de Viera** (Avenida Málaga 1; admission free; ☎ 9am–6pm Tue–Sat, 9.30am–2.30pm Sun), both dating from around 2500 BC, are 1km from the town centre in a small, wooded park beside the road that leads northeast to the A45. Head down Calle Encarnación from the central Plaza de San Sebastián and follow the signs. Prehistoric people of the Copper Age transported dozens of huge slabs from the nearby hills to construct these burial chambers. The stone frames were covered with mounds of earth. The engineering implications for the time are astonishing. Menga, the larger, is 25m long, 4m high and composed of 32 slabs, the largest of which weighs 180 tonnes. In midsummer the sun rising behind the Peña de los Enamorados hill to the northeast shines directly into the chamber mouth. An information centre is being constructed here.

A third chamber, the **Dolmen del Romeral** (Cerro Romeral; admission free; ☎ 9am–6pm Tue–Sat, 9.30am–2.30pm Sun), is further out of town. It is of later construction (around 1800 BC) and features much use of small stones for its walls. To get there, continue 2.5km past Menga and Viera through an industrial estate, then turn left following 'Córdoba, Seville' signs. After 500m, turn left at a roundabout and follow 'Dólmen del Romeral' signs for 200m.

Festivals & Events

Semana Santa (Holy Week) One of the most traditional celebrations in Andalucía, held from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday; items from the town's treasure-trove are actually used in the religious processions.

Real Feria de Agosto Held in mid-August, this festival celebrates the harvest with bullfights, dancing and street parades.

Sleeping

Antequera hotel prices are refreshingly moderate.

Hospedería Coso San Francisco (☎ 952 84 00 14; Calle Calzada 27-29; s/d €22/35; 📞 📺 📺) A friendly place 400m northeast of Plaza de San Sebastián, this 17th-century town house has been completely renovated and refurbished. The 10 rooms are plainly decorated but retain some interesting features from the original building. It has a good restaurant – see right.

Hotel Colón (☎ 952 84 00 10; www.castelcolon.com; Calle Infante Don Fernando 29; s/d €25/40; 📞 📺 📺 📺) A rambling place, Hotel Colón has excellent old-fashioned-style rooms arranged around a flowery inner courtyard. Prices rise a little in August, at Easter and at Christmas. Parking is €7.

Hotel Castilla (☎ 952 84 30 90; www.castillahotel.com in Spanish; Calle Infante Don Fernando 40; s/d €31/42; 📞 📺 📺) This place has adequate, clean rooms with TV. The hotel has enthusiastic management and a very lively bar-restaurant downstairs.

Hotel San Sebastián (☎ /fax 952 84 42 39; Plaza de San Sebastián 5; s/d €27/43; 📞) Smartly refurbished, this hotel even has a few funky murals, and you can't get much more central. San Sebastián has rather a schizophrenic bar-restaurant downstairs (rustic Spain with game machines and constant pop music) that serves up good fish dishes and local specialities.

Hotel Coso Viejo (☎ 952 70 50 45; Calle Encarnación 9; www.hotelcosoviejo.es; s/d incl breakfast €47/70; 📞 📺) A converted 17th-century neoclassical palace right in the heart of Antequera, opposite Plaza Coso Viejo where the superb town museum is found. The comfortable and stylish rooms are set around a handsome patio with a fountain and there's a cafeteria and restaurant. This hotel has the same owners as the Hotel Castilla.

Parador de Antequera (☎ 952 84 02 61; www.parador.es; Paseo García del Olmo s/n; s/d €95/118; 📞 📺 📺) The Parador is in a quiet area of parkland north of the bullring and near the bus station. It's comfortably furnished and set in pleasant gardens with wonderful views, especially at sunset. However, its

exterior is looking a bit jaded and there are plans to remodel.

La Posada del Torcal (☎ 952 03 11 77; www.laposadadeltorcal.com; Villanueva de la Concepción; r €180; 📞 📺 📺 📺) Outside Antequera, close to El Torcal, this fantastic hilltop *cortijo* is surrounded by wonderful panoramic views. It offers luxurious rooms and facilities including tennis courts, riding treks and a pool with a view.

Eating

Local specialities you'll encounter on almost every Antequera menu include *porra antequerana*, a cold dip that's similar to gazpacho (before the water is added); *bienmesabe* (literally 'tastes good to me'), a sponge dessert; and *angelorum*, a dessert incorporating meringue, sponge and egg yolk. Antequera is also one of the world capitals of the breakfast *mollete* (soft bread roll).

Taberna de Santa María (Calle Encarción 8; tapas €1, raciones €4, salads €5-6) A few doors along from the tourist office, this new bar attracts Antequera's young in-crowd with its creative cookery.

Bar Castilla (☎ 952 84 30 90; Calle Infante Don Fernando 40; platos combinados €8-9) A very busy and popular 100-year-old bar-restaurant serving good-value tapas and meals. Generous helpings of chicken or pork come with chips.

Restaurante Coso San Francisco (☎ 952 84 00 14; Calle Calzada 27-29; mains €7-13) The *simpática* owner of this *hostal*-restaurant has her own vegetable plot which provides fresh ingredients for her dishes. Meat, fish, Antequeran specialities, traditional Spanish egg dishes and crisp salads await you. On Thursday and Friday evenings classical musicians provide entertainment.

Restaurante La Espuela (☎ 952 70 30 31; Calle San Agustín 1; 📞 1-4pm & 8-11pm Tue-Sun; mains €12-18) Found in a gorgeous cul-de-sac off Calle Infante Don Fernando, elegant La Espuela plays background jazz, and offers a fine selection of Antequeran specialities along with some international fare including pasta dishes. Good smells emanate from the kitchen.

Restaurante Plaza de Toros (☎ 952 84 46 62; Paseo María Cristina s/n; mains €12-22; 📞 closed Sun evening) A long-established Antequera favourite in the bullring at the northwestern

end of Calle Infante Don Fernando. It offers traditional Andalusian food with some modern twists, and quirky local dishes.

Getting There & Around

The **bus station** (Paseo García de Olmo s/n) is found 1km north of the centre. **Automóviles Casado** (☎ 952 84 19 57) runs buses to Málaga (€6, 50 minutes, nine to 12 daily). **Alsina Graells** (☎ 952 84 13 65) runs buses to Seville (Prado de San Sebastián; €10.50, two hours, five daily), Granada (€7, 1½ hours, four daily), Córdoba (€8, 1½ hours, two daily), Almería (€18, 4½ hours, two daily) and Málaga (€6, 50 minutes, three daily).

The **train station** (☎ 952 84 32 26; Avenida de la Estación) is 1.5km north of the centre. Two to four trains a day run to/from Granada (€6.50 to €7.50, 1½ hours, six daily), Seville (€12, 1¼ hours, four daily) and Ronda (€5.50, 80 minutes, three daily). For Málaga or Córdoba, change at Bobadilla (€1.50, 15 minutes, three daily).

Antequera can be a traffic nightmare and a team of formidable traffic wardens keeps a tight grip on things. Buy tickets from them at street-side parking spots (per hour €1). There is underground parking on Calle Diego Ponce north of Plaza de San Sebastián (per hour €1, 12 to 24 hours €12). Taxis (€3 to €4 per 2km to 3km) wait halfway along Calle Infante Don Fernando, or you can call ☎ 952 84 55 30.

AROUND ANTEQUERA

Paraje Natural Torcal de Antequera

South of Antequera are the weird and wonderful rock formations of the **Paraje Natural Torcal de Antequera**. A 12-sq-km area of gnarled, serrated and pillared limestone, it formed as a sea bed 150 million years ago and now rises to 1336m (El Torcal). It's otherworldly out here and the air is pure and fresh. A huge new information centre was being built at the time of research. Two marked walking trails, the 1.5km 'Ruta Verde' (green route) and the 3km 'Ruta Amarilla' (yellow route) start and end near the information centre. More-dramatic views are along the restricted 'Ruta Rojo' (red route) for which guided tours should resume once the information centre is completed. For current details, contact Antequera's tourist office. Wear shoes with good tread as the trails are rocky.

To get to El Torcal, you will need your own car or a taxi. By car, leave central Antequera along Calle Picadero which soon joins the Zalea road. After 1km or so you'll see signs on the left to Villanueva de la Concepción. Take this road and, after about 11km, a turn uphill to the right leads 4km to the new information centre. A return taxi costs €29, with one hour at El Torcal. The tourist office will arrange a taxi for you.

Laguna de Fuente de Piedra

About 20km northwest of Antequera, just off the A92 *autovía* (toll-free dual carriageway), is the **Laguna de Fuente de Piedra**. When it's not dried up by drought, this is Andalucía's biggest natural lake and one of Europe's two main breeding grounds for the greater flamingo (the other is in the Camargue region of southwest France). After a wet winter as many as 20,000 pairs of flamingos will breed at the lake. The birds arrive in January or February, with the chicks hatching in April and May. The flamingos stay till about August, when the lake, which is rarely more than 1m deep, no longer contains enough water to support them. They share the lake with thousands of other birds of some 170 species.

The **Centro de Información Fuente de Piedra** (☎ 952 11 17 15; 📞 10am-2pm & 4-6pm) is at the lakeside. It gives advice on the best spots for bird-watching. It also sells a range of good maps and hires binoculars (an essential).

Nearby, the well-regarded **Caserío de San Benito** (☎ 952 11 11 03; Carretera Córdoba-Málaga Km 108; menú €15; 📞 noon-5pm & 8pm-midnight Tue-Sun) is a good place to stop for a quality lunch. A beautifully converted farmhouse, San Benito is stuffed with antiques and serves up exquisitely prepared traditional dishes.

Buses run between Antequera and Fuente de Piedra village (€1, three to six daily).

EAST OF MÁLAGA

The coast east of Málaga, sometimes described as the Costa del Sol Oriental, is less developed than the coast to the west. The suburban sprawl of Málaga extends east into a series of unmemorable and unremarkable seaside towns – Rincón de la Victoria, Torre del Mar, Torrox Costa – which pass in a blur amid huge plastic

greenhouses before culminating in the more attractive Nerja, which has a large population of British and Scandinavians.

The area's main redeeming feature is the rugged region of La Axarquía, an interior of mountain villages on the slopes leading up to the border of Granada province. The area is full of great walks, which are less 'discovered' than those in the northwest of the province around Ronda. A 406-sq-km area of these mountains was declared the Parque Natural Sierras de Tejeda, Almijara y Alhama in 1999.

LA AXARQUÍA

The Axarquía region is riven by deep valleys lined with terraces and irrigation channels that date back to Islamic times – nearly all the villages dotted around the olive-, almond- and vine-planted hillsides date from this era. The wild, inaccessible landscapes, especially around the Sierra de Tejeda, made it a stronghold of *bandoleros* who roamed the mountains without fear or favour. Nowadays, its chief attractions include fantastic scenery; pretty white villages; strong, sweet, local wine made from sun-dried grapes; and good walking in spring and autumn.

The 'capital' of La Axarquía, **Vélez Málaga**, 4km north of Torre del Mar, is a busy but unimpressive town, although its restored hilltop castle is worth a look. From Vélez the A335 heads north past the turquoise Embalse de la Viñuela reservoir and up through the **Boquete de Zafarraya** (a dramatic cleft in the mountains) towards Granada. One bus a day makes its way over this road between Torre del Mar and Granada. The highest mountains in Málaga province stretch east from the Boquete de Zafarraya. Around the Embalse de la Viñuela you'll see white houses all over the place. Most are occupied by foreigners, especially British. (One outcome of this foreign concentration has been the creation of a good Tuesday **farmers market** where organic food and handicrafts are sold, at Puente de Don Manuel on the Vélez-Boquete de Zafarraya road.)

Some of the most dramatic La Axarquía scenery is up around the highest villages, **Alfarnate** (925m) and **Alfarnatejo** (858m), with towering, rugged crags such as Tajo de Gomer and Tajo de Doña Ana rising to their south.

To sample one of Andalucía's oldest inns, dating from 1690, head north from Alfarnate along the Loja road. Just outside town you will find **Venta de Alfarnate** (☎ 952 75 93 88; Antigua Carretera de Málaga-Granada; mains €8-16; ☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Thu & Sun, 11am-midnight Fri & Sat). It displays mementos of past visitors including some of the bandits who used to roam these hills. Foodwise, it's renowned for *huevos a la bestia*, a kind of hill-country mixed grill of fried eggs and assorted pork products (€11).

You can pick up information on La Axarquía at the tourist offices in Málaga, Nerja, Torre del Mar or Cómpeta. Prospective walkers should ask for the leaflet on walks in the Parque Natural Sierras de Tejeda, Almijara y Alhama. Rural Andaluz and Rustic Blue (see p426) are among agencies renting self-catering houses and apartments here, covering all budgets.

Good maps for walkers are *Mapa Topográfico de Sierra Tejeda* and *Mapa Topográfico de Sierra Almijara* by Miguel Ángel Torres Delgado, both at 1:25,000. Useful guides include *Walk! Axarquía* published by **Discovery Walking Guides** (www.walking.demon.co.uk).

Comares

pop 1500 / 685m

Comares sits like a snowdrift atop its lofty hill. The adventure really is in getting there. You see it for kilometre after kilometre before a final twist in an endlessly winding road lands you below the hanging garden of its cliff. From a little car park you can climb steep, winding steps to the village. Look for ceramic footprints underfoot and simply follow them through a web of narrow, twisting lanes past the Iglesia de la Encarnación and eventually to the ruins of Comares' castle and a remarkable summit cemetery. The village has a history of rebellion, having been a stronghold of Omar ibn Hafsun (see p288), but today there is a tangible sense of contented isolation, enjoyed by locals and many newcomers. The views across the Axarquía are stunning.

For accommodation your best bet is **El Molino de los Abuelos** (☎ 952 50 93 09; d incl breakfast from €55) on the main plaza beside the look-out, a converted olive mill with four double rooms and two apartments. Its restaurant (mains €6 to €14, *menú* €8) has stupendous

views and recommended food, especially the lamb.

Other options are on the approach road, just below the village and near the public swimming pool. **Mirador de la Axarquía** (☎ 952 50 92 09; Calle Encinillas s/n; s/d €20/40) has good-value, studio-style rooms and a friendly bar-restaurant that serves up tasty grills (€7 to €10) on a terrace with gorgeous views. Just below is **Hotel Atalaya** (☎ 952 50 92 08; Calle Encinillas 4; s/d €24/42) with adequate rooms and a restaurant that serves mainly meat dishes (mains €5 to €10).

There are a couple of friendly bars at the heart of the village.

On weekdays only, a bus leaves Málaga for Comares at 6pm and starts back at 7am the next morning (€2.20).

Cómpeta

pop 3400 / elevation 625m

The village of Cómpeta is a good base for a stay in La Axarquía. It has some of the area's best local wine, and the popular **Noche del Vino** (Night of the Wine) on 15 August features a programme of flamenco and *sevillana* music and dance in the central and pretty Plaza Almijara, and limitless free wine. It has by and large friendly folk including a large mixed foreign population that contributes to an active cultural scene.

By the bus stop at the foot of the village is a **tourist office** (☎ 952 55 36 85; turismo@competa.es; Avenida de la Constitución; ☎ 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Wed-Sun mid-Sep-Jun, 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sat Jul-mid-Sep). There's a car park up the hill from the tourist office. **Marco Polo** (Calle José Antonio 3), just off Plaza Almijara, sells books in English and several other languages as well as a good selection of maps and Spanish walking guides. **Todo Papel** (Avenida de la Constitución

31) sells newspapers and books in English, including guidebooks.

The tourist office has varied information on activities in the area, including horse riding at **Los Caballos del Mosquín** (☎ 608 658108; www.horsedirig-andalucia.com), which is 2km from Cómpeta, just above the nearby village of Canillas de Albaída. There are also Spanish classes to be had at **Santa Clara Academia de Idiomas** (☎ 952 55 36 66; www.santa-clara-idiomas.com; Calle Andalucía 6). For good art courses, run by the warm Christa Hillekamp, consult www.artworkshop.eu.

Rooms and houses are available to rent through **Cómpeta Direct** (www.competairect.com) or you could try the delightful **Las Tres Abejas** (☎ 952 55 33 75; www.lastresabejas.com; Calle Panaderos 43; s/d incl breakfast €35/45), about 150m uphill from Plaza Almijara. The main, three-star hotel in Cómpeta is **Hotel Balcón de Cómpeta** (☎ 952 55 35 35; www.hotel-competa.com; Calle San Antonio 75; s/d €49/67; P ♻️ ♿ 🚰), which has comfortable rooms with balconies and great views, a good restaurant, a bar and a large pool and tennis court.

For tasty international lunches (week-ends only) and dinners, don't miss **El Piñón** (☎ 952 55 35 12; Calle Loberinto; mains €10-15) or the **Museo del Vino** (Avenida Constitución; raciones €8-15), which serves excellent ham, cheese and sausage *raciones* and wine from the barrel. It's also something of an Aladdin's Cave of regional crafts and produce and Moroccan bits and pieces. Another excellent restaurant, with views to the distant sea, is **Cortijo Paco** (☎ 952 55 36 47; Avenida Canillas 6; mains €10-15; ☎ closed Mon). Funky **Taberna de Oscar** (☎ 952 51 66 31; Plaza Pantaleón Romero 1; media-raciones €3.50-5.50; ♿) turns out unusual and delicious food. There's something for everyone but vegetarians will appreciate the spinach dish.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Restaurante Almijara (☎ 952 55 78 31; Calle Estación 19B, Canillas de Albaída; mains €10-15; ♿) Tucked away in a corner of this picturesque village 2km northwest of Cómpeta is this little gem, the creation of a Scottish woman, Kritz Al-Tayeb, who has lived and worked in Saudi Arabia as well as Spain and Britain and who speaks Arabic (she had a restaurant in the Saudi desert and has plenty of interesting tales).

Her restaurant is decorated in Moroccan style and she prepares largely Arab-based dishes which she describes as Moorish cuisine. Diners can enjoy the relaxed atmosphere and the subtle flavours of falafels, vegetable and meat tagines, and spicy sauces. Kritz supplies the restaurant with fresh produce from her garden so her salads are especially good.

DETOUR: EL LUCERO

Perhaps the most exhilarating walk in La Axarquía region is up the dramatically peaked **El Lucero** (1779m). From its summit on a clear day there are stupendous views as far as Granada in one direction and Morocco in the other. This is a full, demanding day's walking, with an ascent of 1150m from Cómpeta: start by climbing left along the track above Cómpeta football pitch. About 1½ hours from Cómpeta you pass below and west of a fire observation hut on La Mina hill. Four hundred metres past the turning to the hut, turn right through a gap in the rock (not signed, but fairly obvious). This path leads in about one hour to **Puerto Blanquillo** (1200m), from which a path climbs 200m to **Puerto de Cómpeta**.

One kilometre down from the latter pass, past a quarry, the summit path (1½ hours) diverges to the right across a stream bed, marked by a sign board and map. El Lucero is topped by the ruins of a Guardia Civil post that was built after the civil war to watch for anti-Franco rebels.

It's possible to drive as far up as Puerto Blanquillo on a rough mountain track from Canillas de Albaida, a village 2km northwest of Cómpeta.

Cómpeta has a thriving music scene; live-music fans will find something on most Saturday nights at **Bar La Roca** (Avenida de la Constitución) and Sunday afternoons at Taberna de Oscar.

Three buses travel daily from Málaga to Cómpeta (€3.20, 1½ hours), stopping via Torre del Mar.

NERJA

pop 19,000

Fifty-six kilometres east of Málaga with the Sierra Almirante rising behind it, Nerja is older and more charming than the other east-coast towns. At its heart is the perennially beautiful Balcón de Europa, a palm-lined lookout and promenade, from which there are glorious mountain and sea views, and a tangle of old streets nearby. Little coves and attractive town beaches make it a good option for visitors without a car.

The town is increasingly popular with package and independent holidaymakers and 'residential tourists', which has pushed it far beyond its old confines. There are sizeable urbanisations, especially to the east. The holiday atmosphere, and sea-water contamination, can be overwhelming from July to September but the place is more 'tranquilo' and the water cleaner the rest of the year. Made famous in Spain during the '80s by the TV series *Verano Azul* (Blue Summer), a kind of Spanish *Neighbours*, Nerja attracts both national and international visitors.

Orientation

Buses stop on the main road, the N340, at the northern edge of the town centre. Just

to the southeast of the bus stop is Plaza Cantarero. From here it is little more than 500m to the Balcón de Europa and the tourist office – just head straight down Calle Pintada.

Information

There are plenty of ATMs dotted around the town.

DiGi Ibérica (Calle San Miguel 24; per 30min €1;

☎ 10am-2pm & 5-10pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat) Internet access.

Europ@web Cafe (Calle Málaga; per 15min €0.90; ☎ 9am-midnight) Internet access and phone calls.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 952 52 15 31; www.nerja.org; Puerta del Mar; ☎ 10am-2pm & 6-10pm Jul-mid-Sep, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm mid-Sep-Jun) Has plenty of useful leaflets.

Nerja Book Centre (☎ 952 52 09 08; Calle Granada 30-32) Secondhand books in English, Spanish and other languages.

Policía Local (☎ 952 52 15 45; Calle Carmen 1) In the *ayuntamiento*.

Post office (Calle Almirante Ferrandiz; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

Smiffs (www.booksaboutspain.com; Calle Almirante Ferrandiz) Well-stocked bookshop specialising in books on Spain, in a small arcade along from the post office.

Sights & Activities

The town centres on the delightful **Balcón de Europa**, built on the base of an old fort, which juts out over the deep, blue water. From the Balcón you can walk east to **Playa Burriana**, Nerja's biggest and best beach, via picturesque Calle Carabeo then down the steps to the beach and along to Burriana.

There are no real sights within Nerja, but there is a lively **market** on Tuesday in town on Calle Almirante Ferrandiz and a Sunday-morning **rastro** north of town in Urbanización Flamingo. There is also a host of activities on offer from outlets such as **Club Nautique Nerja** (☎ 952 52 46 54; www.diving-in-spain.com; Avenida Castilla Pérez 2), which runs diving courses; guided dive/open-water PADI course €40/390), rents out mountain bikes (per one day/week €15/75) and scooters (per one day/week €30/175), and also arranges horse treks (two hours €40) and guided walks. For diving you could also try **Buceo Costa Nerja** (☎ 952 52 86 10; www.nerjading.com; Playa Burriana), which organises a 2½-hour taster course for €60 and a PADI open-water course for €450. It also operates snorkelling trips (€30).

Festivals & Events

Nerja celebrates the sea-related festivals – the **Noche de San Juan** (23 June) and the **Virgen del Carmen** (16 July) – with appropriate verve. The annual **feria** is in the second week of October.

Since 2004 Nerja has also hosted a highly successful **Healing Arts Festival** (www.healingartsinternational.com) in early September.

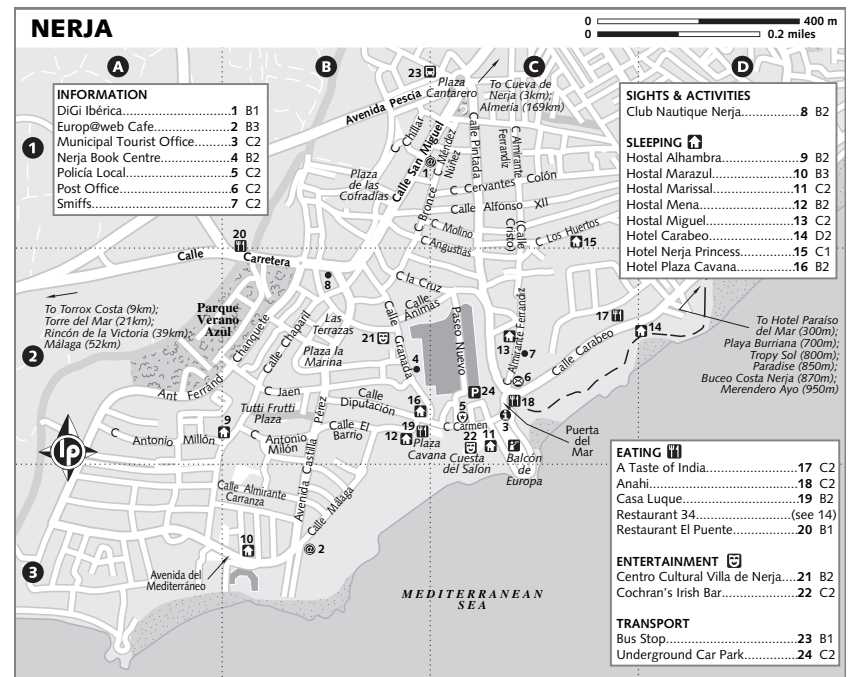
Sleeping

Nerja has a huge range of accommodation, but for the summer period rooms in the better hotels tend to be booked at least two months in advance. Nerja also has many apartments to let; inquire at the tourist office.

Hostal Mena (☎ 952 52 05 41; hostalmena@hotmail.com; Calle El Barrio 15; s/d €26/39) A short distance west of the tourist office, this friendly *hostal* has immaculate rooms (some with sea views) and a pleasant garden. You pay €5 extra for a terrace.

Hostal Miguel (☎ 952 52 15 23; www.hostalmiguel.com; Calle Almirante Ferrandiz 31; s/d €36/49) Straddled between two streets in the old town, this friendly English-run place is full of youthful vigour. Good rooms with a Moroccan theme occupy several levels of a renovated town house, and there's a roof terrace to enjoy too.

Hostal Marissal (☎ 952 52 01 99; www.hostalmarissal.com; Balcón de Europa; s/d €45/60; ☎ ☎) With



sea views and looking out over the Balcón de Europa, this lovely *hostal* offers great value, comfortable rooms and a reasonable restaurant, ideal for a drink and a snack.

Hotel Nerja Princess (☎ 952 52 89 86; www.hotelnpr.com; Calle Los Huertos 46; s/d €61/90; (P) ♿) Right in the heart of the old town is this excellent small hotel, with the fabulous bonus of a big pool. Balconied rooms look out over the picturesque streets and are equipped with all mod cons and comfortable furnishings.

Hotel Carabeo (☎ 952 52 54 44; www.hotelcarabeo.com; Calle Carabeo 34; d/stc incl breakfast €91/198; (P) ♿) Full of stylish antiques, this small, family-run, seafront hotel is set above manicured terraced gardens. There's also a good restaurant and the pool is on a terrace overlooking the sea.

Hotel Plaza Cavana (☎/fax 952 52 40 00; www.hotelplazacavana.com; Plaza Cavana 10; s/d €77/107; (P) ♿) With a *Love Boat* interior of mint greens and peach this is probably the smartest hotel in the centre of town, with excellent facilities and much-needed parking space.

Hotel Paraíso del Mar (☎ 952 52 16 21; www.hotelparaisodelmar.com; Calle Prolongación de Carabeo; s/d €104/120; (P) ♿) To the east of the centre above one of Nerja's better beaches, Playa Carabeo, the Paraíso del Mar has great sea views and private access to the beach. The hotel also has a range of spa facilities.

In summer, when things get very busy, budget travellers could also try the pleasant **Hostal Alhambra** (☎ 95 252 21 74; Calle Antonio Millón 12; s/d €32/45), with spacious and charming fan-cooled rooms, or **Hostal Marazul** (☎ 952 52 41 91; hmarazul@wanadoo.es; Avenida del Mediterráneo; r €48; ♿).

Eating

A huge number of restaurants are sprinkled all over town, many with good beach views, but a lot of these are ordinary. Playa Burriana, Nerja's best beach, is backed by a strip of restaurants, coffee and ice-cream shops and bars.

Anahi (☎ 952 52 14 57; Puerta del Mar 6; sandwiches €2.50) A display case of tempting fresh pastries and cakes and a sparkling red-topped bar greet you in this tiny place near the tourist office. Its small terrace is the big attraction as it has one of the best Nerja views. It serves food all day but is best for breakfast and snacks.

A Taste of India (☎ 952 52 00 43; Calle Carabeo 51; mains €8-13) Maybe not the most obvious Spanish choice, but this is a fantastic Goan-style Indian restaurant that serves delicious coconut curry, biryanis, tandooris and a host of other spicy meals cooked on the spot. The hospitable owners are from a former Portuguese colony in Gujarat.

Merendero Ayo (☎ 952 52 12 53; Playa Burriana; mains €9-13) At this open-air place at Playa Burriana you can enjoy a plate of paella cooked on the spot in great sizzling pans over an open fire – and you can go back for a free second helping. It's run by Ayo, the man famed for the discovery of the Cueva de Nerja cave complex and a delightful local character.

Restaurant El Puente (☎ 952 52 58 19; Calle Carretera 4; mains €8-16) A great place despite being awkwardly placed on the west side of town where the old Málaga road crosses a bridge over the Río Chillar. The food makes up for the location, with tapas for €1 and big helpings of everything.

Casa Luque (☎ 952 52 10 04; Plaza Cavana 2; mains €15-19) The attractive and slightly pretentious Casa Luque is on picturesque Plaza Cavana, though it no longer has any tables out there. Instead, for outdoor dining, it has a wonderful panoramic terrace facing the sea. Casa Luque offers an elegant *haute-Med* menu including a long list of excellent tapas. This place has a lot more character than most Nerja eateries.

Restaurante 34 (☎ 952 52 54 44; www.hotelcarabeo.com; Hotel Carabeo, Calle Carabeo 34; mains €15-24) A truly gorgeous setting both indoors and outside in the garden, which is gently stepped to its furthest section overlooking the sea. Delicious and exotic food combinations are served but the portions are a bit *nouvelle*.

Drinking

Tropy Sol (☎ 10am-10pm) is Playa Burriana's top place for coffee and ice cream. Nerja also has its own Granada-style *tetería* (tea room) on Calle Carabeo where you can even smoke tobacco in a hookah.

Entertainment

The **Centro Cultural Villa de Nerja** (☎ 952 52 38 63; Calle Granada 45) runs an ambitious annual programme of classical music, theatre, jazz and flamenco, featuring international artists.

Nightlife is focused on the aptly named Tutti-Frutti Plaza, which is Nerja's disco central, and the adjoining Calle Antonio Millón. Things hot up after midnight. **Cochran's Irish Bar** (Paseo Balcón de Europa 6) has live music on weekends and a beautifully sited outdoor bar with great sea views and a tropical-island feel. Over at Playa Burriana a number of places, like **Paradise** (☎ 10am-10pm), serve delicious cocktails and have wide-screen TVs for the football fans.

Getting There & Around

Alsina Graells (☎ 952 52 15 04; Avenida Pescía) runs buses to/from Málaga (€3.50, one hour, at least 18 daily), Almuñécar (€2.30, 30 minutes, up to 13 daily), Almería (€11, 2½ hours, nine daily) and Granada (€8.50, 1½ hours, two to three daily). Nerja's streets are very narrow – for drivers who end up in the heart of the town, there is an underground car park (one/24 hours €1/16) off Calle La Cruz and free parking behind Calle Carabeo in the vacant block where the *feria* is held.

AROUND NERJA

East of Nerja the coast becomes more rugged and with your own wheels you can head out to some great beaches reached by tracks down from the A7/N340. **Playa de Cantarriján**, just over the border in Granada province, and **Playa del Cañuelo**, immediately

before the border, are two of the best, with a couple of summer-only restaurants.

Nerja's really big tourist attraction, the **Cueva de Nerja** (☎ 952 52 95 20; www.cuevadenerja.es; adult/child €7/3.50; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-6.30pm, later in Jul & Aug), lies 3km east of town, just off the A7, and is extremely busy in summer. The enormous 4km-long cave complex, hollowed out by water around five million years ago and once inhabited by Stone Age hunters, is full of spooky stalactites and stalagmites. Don't miss the huge central column in 'Cataclysm Hall'. Every July, Spanish and international ballet and music stars perform in the cave as part of the **Festival Cueva de Nerja**. Nerja tourist office has programme details.

Seven kilometres north of Nerja and linked to it by several buses daily (except Sunday) is **Frigiliana**, some say the prettiest village in La Axarquía. The **tourist office** (☎ 952 53 42 61; www.frigiliana.org; Plaza del Ingenio; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat & Sun) is helpful. El Fuerte, the hill that climbs above the village, was the scene of the final bloody defeat of the Moriscos of La Axarquía in their 1569 rebellion, and where they reputedly plunged to their death rather than be killed or captured by the Spanish. You can walk up here if you follow the streets to the top of the town and then continue along the dusty track. Frigiliana has loads of bars, restaurants and tourist shops.

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