

All about Ronda

October 2010

A 16-page Olive Press insiders guide

Step back in time

THERE are over 300 steps to the bottom of the old siege tunnel of the Casa del Rey Moro (House of the Moorish King) in the historic core of Ronda. But this didn't deter America's First Lady Michelle Obama from witnessing first-hand how the Arabic defenders used to collect water during the regular sieges of the town during the dark days of the 14th and 15th centuries. On a cultural break to explore the history of the Nasrid dynasty in Andalusia, she and her daughter perhaps inevitably spent a day in Ronda.

Michelle was really getting to appreciate the rich history of the town

Having wandered around the old town, visited the bull ring and the charming Palacio Mondragon, she decided to take a spot of proper exercise.

By taking the steep staircase - *la Mina* - down to the bottom of the gorge (which incredibly the vast majority of tourists do not do) she was really getting to appreciate the rich history of the mountain town. Restored in 1911, it was originally dug by Christian slaves to get water during times of siege from the River Guadelevin during

Turn to Page 2

Jon Clarke follows in the footsteps of Michelle Obama... and the Moors and the Romans through historic Ronda



SNAPSHOTS: (From top) Michelle Obama at 'la Mina', days gone by, old town church and matadors



MAJESTIC: View into the old town

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From Page 1

the reign of Ronda's Moorish king, Abomelik. While it had been intended as a secret, it clearly didn't stay that way, as Christians around Spain used the refrain that "in Ronda you die carrying water skins."

It was certainly a well known and by the time of the collapse of the Arabic rule in 1485, Ronda had been receiving foreign visitors for some 1500 years.

Established in 9BC, it is one of Spain's oldest towns and in Roman times was completely independent with a thriving wine industry and its own coinage, fittingly with a tendril of grapes on its flip-side.

A bustling military bastion known as *Arunda* - which means 'surrounded by mountains' - renovate any old building in the area and you are bound to find something of interest.

Take the recent discovery at the 12 hectare finca of Morosanto, near Arriate, just outside Ronda.

Here, on a lovely wide open slope, archaeologists have found a 'lagar' or grape-treading floor and pipes through which wine was



A Roman holiday

MOORISH: Ronda's most defining feature is the famous gorge

transported to vats. The discovery - as well as a series of columns, statues and a 21-metre Roman swimming pool and sauna - now means that historians can link the

production of wine in Ronda to 3AD. Nearby, in Ronda la Vieja, Dutchman Aart van Kruisbergen found an upturned plinth in his back garden that

had once stood the weight of the region's former Roman governor. It was being used as a garden seat and was painted white and turned on its side. "It was only when we were re-organising the garden that we turned it over - using a tractor as it was so heavy - and found this inscription to the governor of the time," explains Aart.

Fast track to progress

DESPITE being only 20 miles from Marbella and with much improved road access, these days it is still a slow 45-minute climb to get to the *Ciudad Soñada* (or City of Dreams), as it was christened by celebrated Czech poet Rilke.

Add to that a distinctly harsher climate (it is a good five degrees lower than the coast in winter, and five degrees more in summer) and a lot of people are put off.

Much of this is to do with its formidable mountain boundaries, which for decades have served as the perfect barrier against the type of development - and thankfully people! - that have ravaged the nearby Costa del Sol.

Bandits

Everywhere you look are mountains, and the city is flanked by the national parks of the Sierra de las Nieves and Grazalema, as well as the formidable Serranía de Ronda to the south.

So cut off was the town that it became famous for its bandits in the 18th and 19th centuries, when these outlaws frequently ruled the roost. Thankfully communications for the town are looking rosy, with plans to bring the AVE fast track railway to Ronda fast developing.

"The fast train will be great and improving the road links to the coast would boost the area massively," says local estate agent Thom Pearson. "While we don't need a damaging new toll motorway, that has been mooted, we need to improve the existing road."

Goyesca NIGHTCLUB

C/ Mariano Soubiron, 4, Ronda
In front of Alameda del Tajo

You can certainly feel the weight of the Romans just wandering around the old town

"It even had the holes where the feet of the statue used to fit."

But you can certainly feel the weight of the Romans just wandering around the old parts of the town, which are full of stunning corners, arches and doorways.

One of its three main bridges across the Tajo (or Ronda's famous gorge) is often called the 'Roman bridge', although it is actually Moorish in origin.

Look west from any vantage point along the top of the Tajo and try and spot the flattened out hilltop where the Romans built their formidable fortified town of Acinipo. A 20-minute drive from the town, Acinipo is an incredibly haunting place, particularly during stormy weather, when you really feel you are on top of the world.

Take a wander around the site, where they keep finding new buildings every year, and marvel at the amazing amphitheatre.

But before you take the drive there you should start any walking tour of the town at the oldest, most interesting part of Ronda, down at its ancient Arabic baths. Said to be the best preserved

Ronda special



HISTORIC: From Ronda's Arabic baths to Roman Acinipo (right)

example in Spain, the baths have little changed since Arabic Ronda - then on the extreme Western flank of the beleaguered Kingdom of Granada - fell to Christian monarchs Isabel and Fernando after a long struggle. An atmospheric place built mostly in the 13th century, a virtual reality film takes visitors back to when the Moors knew it as *Runda*.

In both English and Spanish, ten minutes apart, it is about as good an introduction as you are going to get to any town in Andalucía.

From here it is an easy walk up into the Casco Histórico, which is a wonderful place to while away a morning or afternoon. A new initiative now



SPLENDOUR: Palacio del Marques de Salvatierra

keeps most buildings and museums open until midnight on Fridays and Saturdays, with the town trying to encourage more tourists to spend the night here. Keep your eyes peeled for the splendid Renaissance mansion known as the Palacio del Marques de Salvatierra.

A few paces up the hill and you arrive at the aforementioned Casa del Rey Moro, the house of which is actually an 18th century mansion, which was once rented by *Withnail and I* actor, Paul McGann.

Keep on going and you will finally get to the famous Tajo bridge and its breathtaking views, as well as the bull

ring, which is one of Andalucía's top visitor attractions. It is particularly worthwhile for its Goya etchings and the perfect proportions of its soft sandstone arches.

One of the oldest in the world it was here that Michelle Obama ended her tour, before taking a bite of lunch at a nearby restaurant.

Best of all, as she left for the winding 45-minute drive back to her hotel on the coast, the world's most powerful woman is said to have told local dignitaries she would "definitely be back,"... and next time with her husband!

Now that would be another fabulous step in the history of one of Spain's most evocative towns.



Capturing 225 years of history

THEY asked for the most imaginative photos of Ronda's bull ring, which turned 225 years this year. And this month's winner of the RMR prize is **Diego Richarte**, a student from Arcos, with this snap 'Bullfighting isn't child's play'

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A cook's tour of Ronda



PUKKA: Jamie Oliver cooks up a paella

WHEN Jamie Oliver looked for the perfect place to film a documentary on Spanish food, one would have expected him to have chosen a city like Bilbao, or perhaps Barcelona.

But the celebrity chef plumped for somewhere altogether different; Ronda, in the heart of Andalucía. While at first this might seem a strange choice, for someone who has lived in the town for six years it makes perfect sense.

Ronda, quite simply, has been on the up for the last few years. The third most visited place in all of Spain after Madrid and Barcelona, the town though is no longer just a destination for day-trippers from the Costa del Sol.

Over the last few years it has become increasingly popular for lovers of good food and stylish hotels, as well as nature, walking and outdoor pursuits.

Much of this is to do with the excellent range of superb fresh ingredients that come from its nearby sierras. In particular the hams and chorizos from nearby Montejaque and Arriate are famed, while the superb goats and sheep cheeses from nearby Grazalema (Payoyo) and Cuevas del Becerro (Rey Cabra) are served in the top restaurants in Madrid and even in the UK.

Food was one of the main reasons why British Prime Minister, David Cameron chose Ronda as a holiday destination last year.

He also spent his time hiking, canoeing and horse riding. It is also why Fatboy Slim and Zoe Ball came for a week of R&R, why Janet Street Porter comes walking here and why the sister of Trinny Woodall, from TV programme *What Not to Wear*, owns a house

here. On top of this, Piers Morgan came to the town to film part of a documentary, arriving just days after racing drivers Michael Schumacher and Damon Hill had been testing cars at the nearby Ascari race track.

The *Britain's Got Talent* host noted in particular his surprise at the area's "striking beauty".

Piers Morgan noted in particular his surprise at the area's striking beauty

But it is the quality of food and wines in the area that has really been of note in recent years.

Celebrity chef Jean Christophe Novelli regularly comes to Ronda and

has bought and sold at least two houses in the town. The former *Hell's Kitchen* star, 47, told the *Olive Press* that he was looking to acquire one of the old town houses right on the Tajo.

"I want to buy something with a view of the famous bridge," he said. "I want to wake up and look out at the gorge and the amazing view. One day I am going to live in Ronda."

He continued; "I have fallen in love with the town. It is not just the location. The cooking is amazing. Let's face it, all the proper tomatoes, wild herbs growing all around you, the olive oil and wine are incredible - as well as the wonderful local people. Even the water is unique!"



FAN: Novelli has bought property in Ronda

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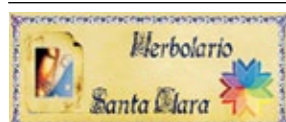
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4 Ronda special

A wine time

With around 20 vineyards now planted in Ronda, in the words of one wine writer 'the dream has really taken hold'. By Jon Clarke

There are not many shops in Spain where you can buy over three dozen different brands of Champagne and a 2005 Grand Cru Riesling from Germany. But somehow it seems appropriate that one of Andalusia's best wine shops Placer ego should have recently opened in Ronda. The city - that during Roman times featured a tendril of grapes on its own coinage - now boasts the most exciting wine region in southern Spain.

There are nearly 20 different vineyards dotted around

the nearby Serrania. Some even sit in the famous Tajo gorge below the town, while others, such as the award-winning Enkvist are based in nearby Gaucin. They include organic wines, such as those of Los Frutales and Federico Schatz, and vineyards owned by Austrians, Germans and even Argentinians. There are wines, such as Chinchilla, Ramos Paul and Conrad, already for sale in Japan and New York and others that merely serve the tables of the local restaurants in Ronda. Either way, it is not difficult to



HARVEST: Picking at Ramos Paul, at 1000 metres, and (inset) Angulo from Placer ego

see that this is a region that is very much on the up. Celebrated wine writer John Radford wrote in the Olive Press that the "dream has taken hold" and the Ronda wine industry has huge potential. At a wine conference two years ago Jancis Robinson, sat alongside some of the world's best winemakers, such as American Paul Draper and Spain's enfant terrible Alvaro Palacios, to spread the message.

These days the grape variety regulations are generous in scope

So well has the industry progressed that in 2000 the area got its own particular subzone as part of the Sierras de Malaga appellation. This was in recognition that there was potential for non-fortified wines in highland areas where the daytime tem-

peratures during the ripening season are consistently high, while at night it can be very cold. This is perfect as it gives a 'rest' to the vine and allows acidity and complexity to develop within the grape. It has been something of a comeback since the wine industry was wiped out by phylloxera in the 19th century. It began in 1982 when German flower seller Federico Schatz started planting various strains as an experiment. He was soon joined by Prince Alfonso Hohenlohe (the man who invented Marbella) at Cortijo las Monjas near Arriate.

These days the grape variety regulations are generous in scope, but expect to find mostly Shiraz/Syrah, Petit-Verdot, Tempranillo and Cabernet-Sauvignon and also the local Romé thriving in vineyards at between 750 and 1,000 metres altitude. While initially the wines were expensive, some at up to 40 euros a bottle, the prices have now come down a fair bit and it is possible to buy

various Ronda wines for less than ten euros a bottle. To really try them out there is a unique new wine bar Entre Vinos, near the centre, that is offering over a dozen different Ronda wines by glass. Set up by the son of one of the vineyard owners, from just two euros you can sample a range of the best Ronda wines, with a tapa alongside it from just a euro! Meanwhile, Fernando Angulo, who runs wine shop Placer ego, which has over a thousand of the best wines from around the world, certainly sees the potential. Coming from a family who used to own the area's biggest cheese factory, he has food and drink in his veins. "My family have eight hectares of vines here and one day I hope we can make great wine," he says. "The potential is certainly there to really prove itself, but I don't doubt Ronda will get there in the end."

For information on vineyard visits please contact the tourist office.

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EXCURSIONS:
The real beauty of Ronda is 'outside town'



Completely encircled by mountains Ronda is fast becoming a top destination for hiking, cycling and mountain excursions. It is good news for the town as there is a huge boom in the number of people coming to Spain for activity and green tourism. Tourism experts estimate that 10 to 15 percent of the 60-plus million people who visited Spain in 2008 spent 4.26 billion euros on ecotourism.

Rarely a weekend goes past when Ronda does not have some sort of cycle, walking or running event taking place and there are numerous clubs and associations. Traditionally, in May, the local army regiment 'La Legion' (or Foreign Legion) puts on its infamous 101-km race that snakes around the nearby hills. A true feat of grit and determination, some 7000-odd cyclists, walkers and runners have up to 24 hours to complete the race.

If this all sounds a bit too stressful you might try some of the gentler guided cycling routes offered by local company Cycle Ronda. According to its boss Dutchman Ferry Staleman: "Ronda is a lovely city, but the real beauty of Ronda is outside town. I am sometimes overwhelmed by the choices." With Staleman's help, excursions head out to the neighbouring towns like Arriate, Setenil, Ronda de la Vieja, El Gaster and Grazalema. You can hire bikes at his

Ronda is now one of the main outward bound hubs in Andalusia, writes Doug Wills



COMPETITIVE: Events such as the '101' are hotly contested

shop, or nearby at the shop of former Tour de France pro Jesus Rosado. If walking is more your thing, then there are a series of excellent sign-marked walks heading off from the town in all directions.

This development led to an almighty battle with local ecologists and nature lovers

A number head through the famous Tajo gorge, while others head off to 'secret' spots, such as the incredible fan-shaped cave, Cueva de Abanico, in a stunning nearby valley. The famous GR-7, or 'gran

recorrido', which heads from Tarifa to Athens, also goes through the town, but it has been somewhat controversially cut off by developers a few miles north of Ronda to build a golf course. It was this very development, known as Los Merinos, that led to an almighty battle with local ecologists and nature lovers a few years ago. Interestingly, its opponents included one Alastair Boyd - aka Lord Kilmarnock - who was sometimes credited with planting the seed for Ronda's outdoor renaissance. Moving to the area in the 1950s to indulge his passion of horse riding and to write, Boyd wrote two books about his travels through the nearby sierras. "Every man should have his own sierra," Boyd wrote in

his first book, *The Road from Ronda*, in 1967. Curiously, it was his horseback travels that would later become a catalyst for Spanish conservationists in the late 1990s. When real estate developers threatened to over-run the mountain area around Ronda in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Boyd, a retired member of the English House of Lords, argued for development restraint and environment protection. While the golf course scheme is still in the balance, the dispute weakened Boyd's health and he died at 81 in March 2009.

For information on walks head to the tourist offices in town, or try and get hold of a number of good local books that give detailed walking info.



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WHERE TO EAT

TIMELESS: Bar Maestro (left), Taberna de Antonio (right) and El Porton (below)

By Jon Clarke

OVER a dozen years ago as I struggled to write a novel, a clichéd tome geared around a British drug smuggling gang on the Costa del Sol, I holed up in Ronda for a fortnight. Sitting frustratedly on the terrace of my room at the Reina Victoria hotel - my laptop groaning under the weight of the tedious prose - the only thing that kept me going were my evening forays into the town's eateries.

There is literally so much on offer and a tapas tour should certainly take in other spots

There was one small joint, in particular, that I visited time and time again. A place, which took me hours to relocate when I moved to Ronda four years ago. A tiny spot, always rammed, and where a husband and wife team banged out tasty tapas until the early hours.



PALS: Owners from trio of tapas bars by the bus station



A tapas tour and more

She, only occasionally glimpsed through a tiny hatch at the far corner of the bar. Thank god La Taberna de Antonio is still there - little changed - and run by the same jolly man Antonio, a true prankster, and serving

some fabulous tapas, including the Ronda classic of a quails egg on a slice of jamon and toast. Back then there were far fewer spots, but I'm pleased to report that the best of them are still around, in particular the charming El Porton - run by the same old friends for the last 38 years - and Bodega Socorro just off Plaza Socorro in the centre of the town, as well as Tragatapas and Bar El Faustino nearby. Another fabulous spot, extremely popular with the locals, is Bar Maestro on the main tourist drag Calle la Bola, where you will get a great avocado tapa stuffed with prawns. There is literally so much on offer and a tapas tour should



certainly take in other spots, including the healthier Siete de Copas, near the Parador, as well Entre Vinos - which serves just Ronda wines by the glass - in Calle Pozo. Further up Calle Molino, in Calle San Jose is a simple place called Bar Antonio, which also has numerous tapas and small bocadillos for just one euro each. Interestingly Jamie Oliver partly filmed a recent documentary here. Even better, just up by the bus station is a new concentration of tapas bars, which are really doing a great job. Run by three friends - Falele, at El Empujon, Miguel Angel at La Sacristia and Antonio at 0 Grados - their street Pasaje el Cante is a real alternative to the centre. All three are slap bang next to each other, and each has a mixed and varied spread of good value tapas. Even better, you will be among the local Spaniards, be-

TOP NOSH: Casa Quino



Ronda special

WHERE TO DINE

Food capital of Andalusia

RONDA is, without a doubt, one of the food capitals of Andalusia. While Malaga has its fair share of good places to eat, and Marbella is spoilt for choice, Ronda offers an in-



ENTICING: Terrace at Picadero and below, dining room at charming Pedro Romero



credible range from Michelin-star dining, to some of the best value restaurants in Spain. No less than eight out of the 70 restaurants listed in my book *Dining Secrets of Andalusia* are in Ronda or nearby.

From Tragabuches, which was Andalusia's first Michelin-starred restaurant, to its antithesis, the soulful, unpretentious Almocobar, there is plenty on offer. Perhaps the best established and, without a doubt, most reliable is Pedro Romero, opposite the bullring, which has been serving up its fabulous traditional fare for four decades. It is full of fabulous photos and posters, serves up a mean rabo de toro and has probably the best wine list in Ronda.

One of the most atmospheric must be El Picadero in Calle Nueva, where you can also eat rabo de toro or Ronda-style venison. Set in a 400 year old townhouse, it has an amazing collection of bullfighting posters and memorabilia, including - best of all - a set of 'banderillas' used by celebrated Ronda bullfighter Pedro Romero some 200 years ago. Practically next door is the equally charming Casa Quino, a family-run joint, where its big boss Joaquin does a fabulous job in the kitchen, producing a range of classic local dishes. It has a great outdoor terrace and, best of all, some of the



CHARACTER: Fast Show Antonio from Almocobar

most evocative photos of Ronda from days gone by. If you are looking for a great value Italian La Vita e Bella in the same street is a good bet, while Ronda even has a good Chinese restaurant Hoi! On the subject of International food, just up the road is the excellent Buenos Aires, run by a characteristic Argentinian Omar, who has a great eye for detail and serves up excellent authentic Argentinian dishes all day. Why not head out of town for a day out, perhaps nearby to Venta Polverilla in Llano de la Cruz, or slightly further away to charming, award-winning Molino del Santo, in Benaojan Estacion. Then, of course, there is the delightful spot of Al Lago, overlooking the lake in Zahara de la Sierra, where American chef Stefan Crites regularly produces some of the best food in the Serrania. And, for the very best of what Ronda town has to offer, head down to Barrio San Francisco, where you will find one of Andalusia's best restaurants Almocobar beside the famous Arabic gate of the same name. It is a classic example of soul food, cooked by Monolo and his wife and family in a tiny kitchen in the back, while outside Antonio - who is straight out of the *Fast Show* - serves up with great humour. It pains me to even send you here, it being so small and hard to book at times, but the truth is, it is worth it.

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Traditional old Ronda restaurant serving typical local dishes, this plate for just 10€

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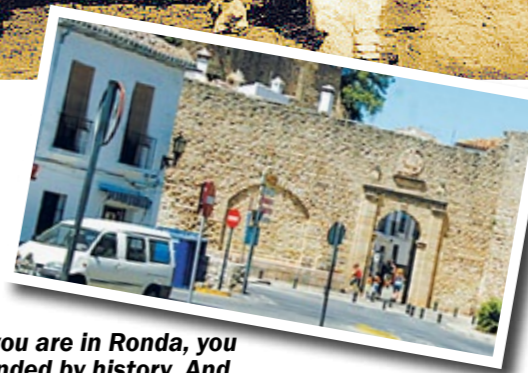


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How times HAVEN'T changed

Wherever you are in Ronda, you are surrounded by history. And, remarkably little has changed for the last few centuries. From above, (clockwise) Almocobar gate, main entrance to the bull ring, the old town hall, now a Parador, church of Padre Dios and shopping in Calle la Bola



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Ronda special

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PROPERTY

My perfect home

If you want to get away from the rat-race and you like spectacular scenery and unspoilt mountain towns, then Ronda could be for you. Since moving here a few years ago, I have really got into the huge range of things to do, as well as the superb food. On top of this, people are more friendly and welcoming than any other place I have visited in Spain.

Perched high on a ridge surrounded by some of the most spectacular scenery in Spain, Ronda has a magical charm and a rich and diverse history. The city is 739m above sea level and has a population of approx. 40,000 inhabitants known as Ronderos.

It is a setting which has inspired poets and writers for years, notably Ernest Hemingway and Orson Welles. They both fell in love with the town as they immersed themselves in the art of bullfighting, and Hemingway based part of his famous book *For Whom the Bell Tolls* here.

The city - and I call it a city, as that is what the local Spaniards call it - is perhaps most famous for its amazing bridge *El Puente Nuevo* (the new Bridge). It is the soul of the city and spans the breathtaking 100m deep gorge and river. The gorge divides the city into two parts; the older, Moorish quarter and the newer section of the town.

Wander the streets at your own pace and take in the magnificent architecture,

Estate agent Irene Ortiz on why she and husband Thorwald moved from the UK to Ronda



HAPPY: Irene and Thorwald by the gorge

sit for a while in one of the many delightful little squares and just breathe in the atmosphere.

You might take a horse-drawn carriage and clip clop around the main tourist sights or if you are feeling a little more energetic take a guided walking tour. Nearby, there is a huge variety of activities available, including bird watching, ballooning, climbing, horse-riding, paragliding and a host of other country pursuits. The lifestyle in Ronda is, what I would call, traditional, but with the cost of living and property prices much lower than on the Costas.

The city has all the amenities but is not so big as to lose its charm and personality. Join the local Ronderos and visit historic Calle la Bola where everyone goes shopping. A pedestrianised street,

here you will find everything from antiques to clothes. While the weather is slightly cooler in winter and the nights can be cold, it still has a much better temperature than in northern Spain. Average temperatures range from 13 degrees in December to 31 degrees in August.

Best of all, if you are thinking of making the move to Ronda, right now property prices are very competitive - it's a buyers' market!

There are many bargains to be had. Country houses and fincas have seen some huge reductions in price and scattered around the nearby Serrania are a number of 'palaces' or 'palacios', which would make wonderful Bed and Breakfast-style hotels or great family homes.

Ronda has a diverse culture and foreign residents from many different parts of the world have made it their home. You have to speak Spanish and enjoy a different sort of culture to the coast, but the rewards are many.

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WHERE TO SHOP

A sierra spree

By Luke Stewart

FOR a small mountain town in inland Andalusia, Ronda has a surprisingly good range of shops and boutiques.

While not exactly at the cutting edge of fashion, it is well served for food shops and cafes, and it has a good line in children's clothes and shoe shops.

Its main shopping drag Calle Espinel (often known as La Bola) is the place to head for, as well as be seen. Pedestrianised in its entire 400 metre length, it is where Ronda society takes its morning coffee and its evening paseo.

Take a walk along it popping into some of the ancient family-owned emporiums, which are still selling 1980s kettles and thousands of sharp knives.

One of the best knife shops, Chuchilleria la Navaja, is actually just around the corner in Calle Las Tiendas.

La Bola also has an excellent range of small eateries and cafes, including Daver, which has been serving Ronda since the 1930s and Cafe Bar Buenos Aires, with its excellent outdoor terrace.

While there is no Zara (which upsets the missus), there is a Mango, Benetton and Oysho, and around the corner an Adolfo Dominguez in Calle Nueva.

Also in Calle Nuevo is perhaps one of the most excit-

Antique kettles, organic soaps and surfboards. Ronda has a lot better shopping than you might expect

ing new shops to open in the town. Primarily for women, Utopia is full of stylish brands and elegant evening wear. Make sure to take a detour onto Calle Sevilla for the aromatic Andalusia Soap Company, to buy a range of fabulous hand made soaps and beauty products made from a range of ingredients, including olive oil. There is also a good range of jewellery, gifts and paintings.

Head to Casa de Jamon to visit where Jamie Oliver learnt how to cut Jamon Iberico

On the subject of lovely smells, you should certainly visit the charming Olor a Rosa in Calle Mariano Soubiron for incense and candles, while close by is a good herbolaria and newspaper shop selling all the international press.

Back on Calle la Bola you'll find music shop Royal Music as well as Intersport over three floors and across the road a cool surf/snowboard/skateboard shop K-RY with a great range of trendy rags.

Now you've bought your gladrags you will no doubt be looking for the best meats and cheeses. Well, head up the hill to



STYLE: At Utopia

Jamoneria Berrocal, also on La Bola, which can either serve you the best Jamon Iberico by the slice or by the leg, or visit the Boutique de Jamon y Queso opposite the Parador.

Another great alternative is to visit the historic Casa de Jamon, just below the Reina Victoria hotel, where Jamie Oliver was taught how to cut ham. It's owner (and his son) coincidentally have both won the national cutting championships.

Naturally there is a pet shop Mis Mascotas in Calle Marcos de Obradon and no less than two bike shops nearby. Finally, if wine is your thing, well make sure not to miss Fernando Angulo's incredible wine shop Placer ego, which has - without a doubt - the best selection of international wines in Andalusia, with stylish décor to boot.

And if that is not enough, there is always your man, who sells all range of revolutionary organs and badges in the park beside the bullring most afternoons.

Need to know

RONDA sits 113km from Malaga city, situated in the Serrania de Ronda at an altitude of 739 metres above sea level. The town is home to an official population of 37,087 Rondeños.

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FACTFILE: THE PICKS OF THE NEARBY SERRANIA

RONDA is surrounded by two national parks, the Sierra de las Nieves to the East and the Sierra de Grazalema to the West. Both are full of wonderful walks and pretty towns. Here are a few suggestions for excursions out of Ronda.



1 RONDA LA VIEJA (ACINIPO)
A 15-minute drive from Ronda at the top of one of the highest hills in the area the Roman's built their ancient city. It still has much evidence of their ingenious race, with a large part of its amphitheatre intact and a lot more to look at, not to mention the views. The visitor centre is only open for the morning, but one can always climb up to the amphitheatre out of hours.

2 ARRIATE
The nearest village to Ronda is Arriate, a thriving, bustling place, known for its hams and open, friendly locals. Just a ten minute drive, it's a great place for a wander, to take a coffee or to enjoy the tapas at the local bars that include El Almacen, one of the finest in the whole Serrania. Independent from Ronda, since the 16th century it has been staunchly communist since the death of dictator Franco and has some excellent local fiestas, including *Dia de la Vieja* in the Spring and *Fiesta en el Aire*, an Inside Out festival with excellent music in October.

3 SETENIL DE LAS BODEGAS
Only 20 minutes drive away, the historic Roman town of Setenil is a real eye opener and amazing for photography. Nestled in the rolling landscape north of Ronda, it was built on a series of caves, which served to keep the wines of the Romans cool in summer, hence its name. It is best to leave your car outside the town, wander up to the old fortress before heading down to the famous overhanging cave for a fine tapas lunch. Next door are a couple of shops



selling local olive oil based shampoos and soaps.

4 GRAZALEMA AND ZAHARA DE LA SIERRA
Grazales and Zahara are two of the most evocative towns around Ronda. Both set in spectacular scenery and with some lovely sites, Zahara has a towering castle above it and a great restaurant Al Lago, while Grazales (a beautifully conserved gem) was once the centre of the wool industry and you can still buy delightful rugs and bedspreads.

5 VALLE DE GENAL
Just 20 minutes away, between Ronda and the Costa del Sol, is a fabulous valley full of delightful former Arabic villages, with some lovely walks and a number of good restaurants, particularly in Benalauria and Alpendaire. See *The Olive Press' separate 'All About Valle de Genal Insiders Guide' for more info.*

6 BENAOLAN AND MONTAJAQUE
If it is wonderful mountain scenery you are after and a couple of towns famous for their bandits then this pair are worth a visit. Montajaque has a cave with the oldest cave paintings in Spain, while Benaolan was once the centre of the ham and sausage industry. There is a fabulous walk from Benaolan Estacion down the river to Jimera de Liber, from where you can get the train back. At each end is a great lunch spot, with Quercus and Molino del Santo. The whole walk, among many others, is written about in Guy Hunter Watts' book *Walking in Andalusia*. See *The Olive Press' 'All About Guadiaro Valley' guide for more info.*

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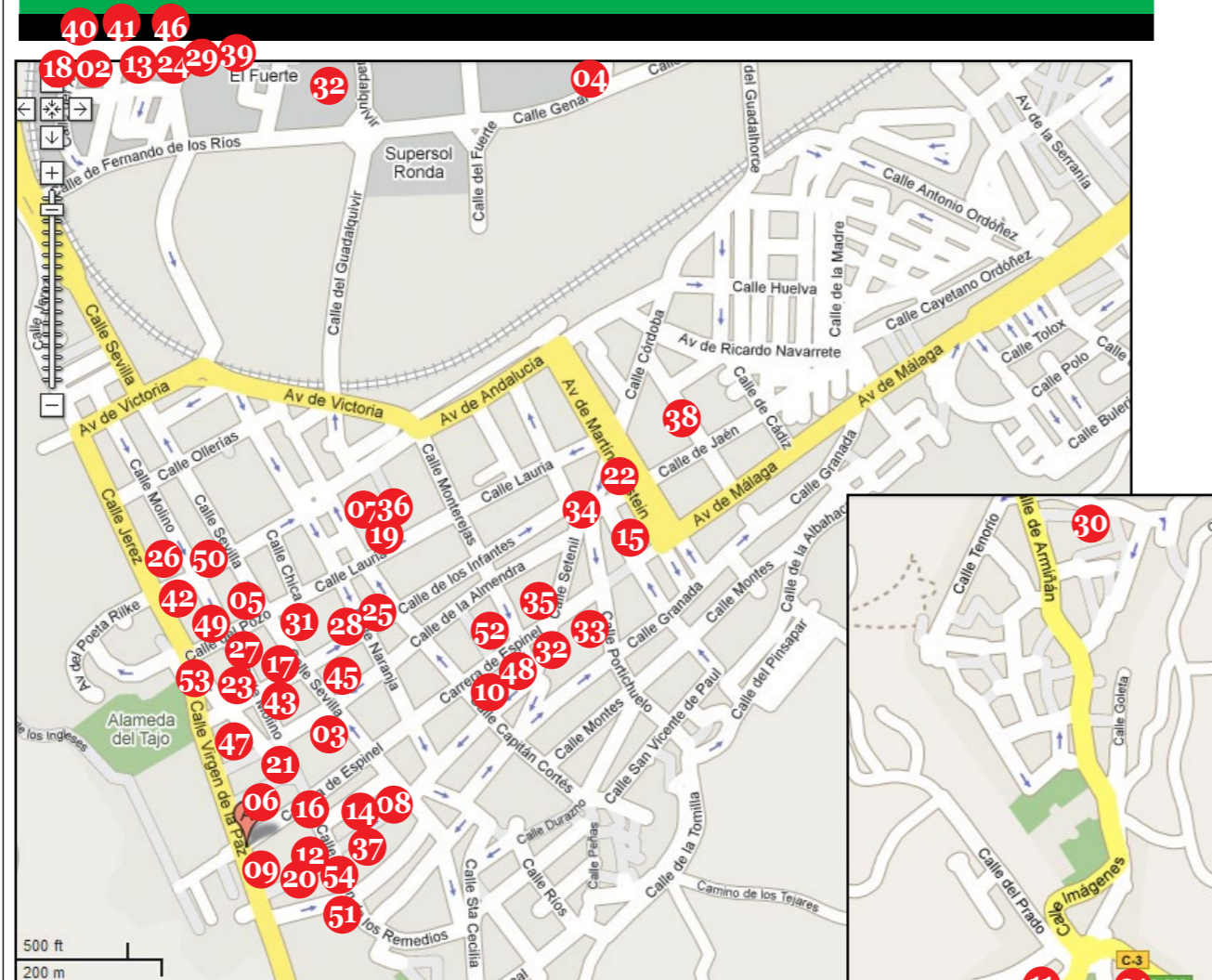
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WHERE TO STAY

Dreaming in the 'City of Dreams'

APPROPRIATELY dubbed the 'City of Dreams' by Czech poet Rilke there are plenty of excellent places to stay in the Ronda area. But what really takes one by surprise is the sheer number of stylish boutique hotels that are dotted around the town and in the nearby countryside. One of the finest - indeed one of the most stylish in Andalucia - is Molino del Arco, which is a joy to visit, even if just to see its amazing landscaped gardens. The family home of local landowner Juan Clavero, who has a splendid eye for detail, it sits in a privileged position in the heart of Llano de la Cruz valley. If countryside options are for you, you might also consider hip Fuente de la Higuera, where British prime minister David Cameron and actor Adrian Brody have stayed, as well as popular local haunt Molino del Puente, run by friendly English couple Ian and Elaine Love. In the same valley is the more modern Hotel Don Benito, which has excellent rates, while a little further away is Molino del Santo, a classic rural retreat, and one of the first of its kind in Andalucia. Run by English couple Pauline and Andy, the hotel has the knack of keeping guests happy with just the right mix of comfort, good food and character.

Whether you prefer countryside or city, you will be spoilt for romantic and hip places to stay around Ronda

Nearby, in the charming mountain village of Montejaque you will find Casitas de la Sierra, a great collection of authentic cottages. For something completely different, why not take the advice of just about every national newspaper in the UK, and stay at the Hoopie Yurt hotel, in nearby Cortes de la Frontera. A classic example of 'glamping' in Andalucia, its hosts are well versed in the art of pampering guests. If you would prefer to be in the heart of Ronda, you are again spoilt for choice, in particular with the trendy En Frente Arte and Hotel San Gabriel, a charming townhouse, with its own cinema and where Bob Hoskins once stayed. Of course, there is the centrally-sited Parador right above the gorge, while another sweet and particularly good budget hotel is Hotel Ronda, just opposite the Casa del Rey Moro in the historic quarter. Finally, you might want to have a look at Alavera de los Banos, in a unique location near the Arabic Baths, and Hotel Polo near Plaza Socorro.

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