

All about Arriate

September 2011

An eight-page Olive Press special supplement

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Ayuntamiento de Arriate

An island of fun



The scenic mountain village of Arriate has a distinctly different feel to its 'snobby' near neighbour Ronda, writes local resident Jon Clarke

THE queue in Pedro Montesino's greengrocer is almost out of the door. Snaking around the shop, it is as good a snapshot of life in my Andalusian village as I can possibly conjure up. I've been back twice, but his faithful customers are patiently waiting their turn, catching up on gossip and baracking Pedro, who is never short of a bit of banter himself. A hard-working man, he is up with the lark to locate his wonderful selection of produce and spends much of his afternoon delivering it around the

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Arriate special

A worldly village

From Page 1

nearby area. "And as long as the locals keep supporting our local shops and demanding good quality produce then I will continue sourcing them," he says. Pedro is typical of the Arriate stock. A staunch supporter of old fashioned village life, he spends most weekends with his wife Ani enjoying the local countryside, when not looking after his ageing parents. A keen hiker, he is forever in training for this or that, the highlight of his year usually being the annual 101km walk organised by nearby Ronda's famous Foreign Legion. "It is the best thing about living in a country village like this," he explains. "And Arriate really is one of the best."

It is little surprise that Arriate - after Ronda - is one of the only inland Malaga towns to continue to grow dramatically over the last decade. A buzzing place of nearly 5,000 people, the 'island' in the heart of the Serrania de Ronda, offers a great quality of life, well away from the usual tourist drag. It is not an island in the classic sense of the word, but comes thanks to its independently spirited locals having wrestled control from near neighbour Ronda over four centuries ago. Fiercely independent of its *pico*, or 'snobbish', neighbours (who many Arriatenos say, lord it over the whole Serrania) the eight-and-a-half kilometre square district - which is the smallest in Malaga province - has been staunchly left wing since the death of dictator Franco in 1975. "It is certainly far more open and friendly than Ronda," ex-



TRADITION: The highly anticipated processions during Semana Santa are a highlight

plains local businesswoman Carmeli Gamarro, whose family firm Melgar has been curing meat for centuries. "The Arriatenos are worldly people, who have travelled the globe in order to work," she continues. This was certainly the case as many of them had to emigrate to Switzerland, France and Germany to work in the tough impoverished years of the 1960s and 1970s. These days, many of them are back and you can't help but notice the number of happy-looking pensioners hanging around watching the day go by. One place, Bar La Albarra, is so famous for these old boys that one Dutch photographer

The brotherhoods hold lotteries for the right to carry the floats of Jesus and Mary

put together an exhibition based entirely around its clientele. Either standing on the small terrace watching the world go by, or sitting down to play cards or dominoes over an 80-centime brandy, they certainly look content. Much of this must be down to Arriate's reputation for being a party town. Despite being ruled by the IU (or Communist party) for well over a decade (the socialist PSOE party finally took over in May), there is more interest in having fun than the teachings of Chairman Mao. This might perhaps explain, why - despite its apparent hard left leanings - the town has some of the best known Easter parades in the whole of the province. Indeed, such is the clamour to be involved, the brotherhoods even hold lotteries for the right to carry the floats (or *tronos*) of Jesus and Mary. "It has always seemed a real contradiction to me," says Jose Antonio Coca, a local fitness instructor and masseur, who grew up in the town. "The processions are taken very seriously and they are very moving, but it is a simple fact that most of those involved hardly ever go to church and so it is really just down to the tradition." Aside from the 400 years of tradition that brings thou-



QUALITY: Greengrocer Pedro in his busy shop

Arriate special

ish National Geographic Society recorded them for an album on Spanish cultural music. A capacity for music is all too obvious with a visit to the incredible Los Caireles bar on the high street. There are few surprises in the Serrania de Ronda as pleasant as walking through the anonymous colourful frosted glass doors on a concert night in winter, when it will be full of hundreds of music fans of all ages. Much to do with the brothers Roberto and Monolo Rivera, who have a popular drumming troop *Arriadh Cumcum da*, the surprise is more the better, if you can persuade



BEATING HEART: View of Arriate (above) while (right) Monolo in his Los Caireles bar and (inset) a photo of his father in the same bar, then a cinema in the 1950s. (Far right) poster for this year's Fiesta en el Aire

them to take you out back. If so, you will soon realise that the bar you are standing in is just one small corner of what was once - since the 1940s - Arriate's Cine Ideal. And what a gem it is. Its main screen and stage still

survive as well as 350 original wood and leather seats bought from Malaga in the 1950s. Best of all though, are the stunning brightly-coloured hydraulic tiles that line the entrance. "Our father was a real film

fanatic," says Monolo. "This was one of the most popular cinemas in the Serrania. "People came from miles around despite the movies being heavily censored by the local priest and mayor, who would watch the films first de-

manding cuts." Running until 1988, when due to dwindling audiences part of it had to be converted into a flamenco venue, the brothers have kept it intact despite numerous offers from developers to turn it into a



BACK TO MOORISH TIMES

By Irene Ortiz

THE town got its name from the Arabic word *Arriadh*, which means gardens or orchards. It was during the Moorish control of Andalusia from the 7th to 15th century that the area became a supply zone for the key Arabic town of Ronda, then known as *Arunda*. Once celebrated for its fruits, in particular apples and pears, in the area known as the '*Huerta de abajo*', 57 neighbours still use the same ancient Arabic water course, or *acequia*, to take water to their crops. The settlement of *Arriadh* was first mentioned in documents from 1407 during the Arabic Kingdom of Granada, when a key skirmish took place in the valley below between Arabic and Christian forces, who were coming in on a *recy* visit from nearby Canete la Real. After the expulsion of the Arabs from Spain, it came under the administration of Ronda, until in 1661 on February 14 the town achieved its total independence, hence the patron saint of the village being San Valentin. It was around this time that most of the land in the whole valley and the town was owned by the Mocr-

ezuma family, one of Ronda's key aristocratic families. Awarded land by the Reyes Catolicos for their bravery in fighting the Aztecs in Mexico, they lived in Ronda, but had a big hunting estate around Arriate. Hunting everything from boar to lynxes they needed a big staff to run the estate. It is for this reason that a lot of families are said to have been brought in from the north of Spain to work hence the foundations of the town being laid. "How else can you explain how so many of the names are alien to this region and so many people here have blue eyes and blonde hair," asks one local. "Bercerra, Conde, Marin, these are names from Galicia and the Basque country. And it is this that to this day makes for a better, healthier mix than those pure breed stiffs up in Ronda." The town has a variety of interesting shops and small businesses such as Muebles Serrano, a traditional carpentry workshop that makes and sells handmade furniture. It has been in the same family for 230 years and counts clients from all over Spain. "We also supplied the furniture to Prince Alfonso Hohenlohe and Ordenez, the famous bullfighter," explains owner Francisco Serrano. "It is a pleasure



ARRIADH: First mentioned in 1407

People came from miles despite the movies being heavily censored by the local priest

For the time being, they are busy organising a festival called the *Fiesta en el Aire*, which was modelled on an idea that came from their father in the 1950s. Taking place each October, the festival is an 'open air' celebration of the town's artists, musicians and creativity in general," explains Roberto, who is himself a photographer. The three day bash on October 14-16 will see the whole town coming out onto the streets for a range of concerts, food and general fun. It is, after all, what Arriate is about.

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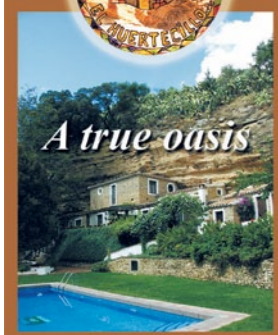
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Happy Arriate



They call it the 'Island of fun' and there are certainly as many festivals and fun things to do in Arriate as its near neighbour Ronda. (Clockwise from far left) One of the famous Semana Santa Easter parades through the streets, dressed up for an outing with the Romeria, the village church St Juan de Letran, a game of cards in Bar Albarra and the former Glorieta de San Jose convent, now converted into an old people's home



A PLACE WITH TRUE SOUL

Dale Nottingham on the village where he made his home



LIFE OF LEISURE: A few old boys (and a couple of youngsters) watch the world go by

AM holed up in Arriate, a weathered, crusty town as old as the rolling hills in which it nestles, and dwarfed by the imposing shadow of its more glamorous and bejeweled sister, Ronda. Ronda's polished attractions and pedestrianised walkways lure shoppers and sightseers from far and wide, while, unnoticed and undisturbed, Arriate carries on its sleepy existence to the cadence of church bells and the passing of the seasons. As Ronda sports the shiny patent leather shoes of gentility, so gritty little Arriate wears the mud-encrusted boots of a farmer walking in from the fields or a soldier returning home from battle. The town itself is arranged like a stack of dominoes scooped up and piled in the middle of a table. Narrow, serpentine streets twist chaotically between clumps of odd-shaped houses and family-run shops. It is as if God had cupped Arriate in his giant palms and gently squeezed it together like pieces of old soap, before

laying it onto an Andalusian hillside. But beneath its wizened, weather-beaten facade beats the true heart of Andalusia, pulsing with homespun warmth and unquestioning hospitality. By chance – or perhaps by design – Arriate is neither on the way to anywhere nor is it the kind of place you would happen upon. It boasts no celebrated tourist attractions or architectural gems with which to dazzle camera-toting day-trippers. As the locals appreciate only too well, Arriate offers up precious little to the tourist but harbours rich bounty for the traveler. For Arriate has soul: as real and solid and warming as the oak logs that spark and crackle in the hearths of the town's shuttered houses. To find yourself in Arriate is to have chosen Arriate. And so it was that this first test in my quest for acceptance in this most Spanish of Spanish places had been unwittingly negotiated and I was welcomed into this cloistered community, deep in the heartland of Andalusia.

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6 Arriate special

IT is certainly fitting that the new mayor of Arriate has a degree in agricultural engineering. For the village's name comes from the Arabic word *Arriadh*, meaning vegetable garden. Now, Melchor Conde Marin, 33, who was voted in power in May, is planning to launch an exciting new co-operative of local farmers, with an emphasis on organic farming. He hopes the new association will bring together farmers from all around the Serania de Ronda and Setenil and form part of a wider campaign to transform Arriate into a green village. "We are in difficult times, but there is a great variety of produce in the area including olive oil, cheese, goats, lamb, and 'vegetables,'" explains Conde, a keen cyclist, who studied in Sevilla.

Back to its roots



New mayor Melchor Conde Marin (pictured left) is taking Arriate back to its origins as a vegetable garden serving Arabic Ronda

By Wendy Williams

"This cooperative will help the local produce become better known further afield. It is also really important to

respect the environment, not so much for our generation, but for later generations," he added.



TRADITION: Shepherds head into the nearby hills

Much of this conveniently links back to the village's origins, when it formed to supply food to the key Arabic settlement of Ronda. There is certainly no shortage of good farmland still being used in the area and one concrete link back to the village's ancient past is a working *acequia* (or water

course) from Moorish times, which still serves 57 different neighbours. On top of this, the village also boasts a 'green garden' or allotment, which is exclusively given over to organic farming. The land is tended by volunteers, particularly among the elderly and the unemployed,

giving them an active pastime and promoting healthy eating. But this is just a starting point for Conde's eco-friendly vision. In addition to a new cooperative, the mayor has made it a priority to clean up the local river, the Guadalcobacín and in particular is pushing for a sewage plant. "One of the main environmental issues is still water treatment and we are currently in discussions with the Junta to resolve this," Conde said. In fact Francisco Fernandez the Minister of the Environment paid a visit to Arriate just last month to discuss the issue. "We showed him the deplorable state of the Guadalcobacín River which is having damaging consequences on the fauna, flora, and locals who must live with the smell," explains Conde. He is also particularly keen to promote the area for hiking. "There are beautiful walks around here with fantastic fauna that includes ancient plants such as ferns which have been in the area since the dinosaurs," he says.

Where to stay and eat

Fresh, tasty and local

PERFECTLY suited for a tapas crawl, there are nearly a dozen great places to have a bite to eat within a two minute stroll of each other. Taberna Monolo is great for the friendly service and charming back room, which is only open during feria time, as well as La Laguna just down the road, which always has some incredibly fresh tapas. Up on Calle Jose Montes, another great spot is Bar El Apero, which proudly serves up a great range of typical dishes such as snails and pigs trotters. On the main square on Calle Ronda, don't miss Bar la Bodeguita, open seven days a week, and a great place to sit out for lunch or supper. Another nice place for a great menu del dia and to watch the world go by is El Chozo, which has a big terrace

and is always busy. For more formal dining, one of the most exciting additions to the town is the recent arrival of German/Basque couple Raynold and Teresa, who recently moved from New York to open El Muelle de Arriate. With a superb track record in the States, where they were said to run the 'best Spanish restaurants outside of Spain', it is clear they are very much at home in Arriate. Delightfully fresh and simple cuisine, they offer the perfect lesson to the vast majority of *ventas* and restaurants around Andalucia who have forgotten how to cook its best local favourites. Hence the croquettes are light and fluffy and the grilled squid was lightly seared with fresh garlic vinaigrette. The fabulous 'Patatas Bravas' come from Teresa's Basque repertoire. "We are the opposite of Nouvelle Cuisine and sometimes you can test the quality of a restaurant by trying the simplest thing," explains former banker Raynold, who comes from Hamburg. "We are trying to mix dishes from the Basque country and Andalucia, but above all keep prices down." In the words of one local hotelier, it 'completes the picture for Arriate'.



VISTAS: From Arriadh (left) and Fuente (right)

From PMs to bullfighters

ARRIATE is ringed by fine rural retreats, including stylish Dutch-owned Fuente de la Higuera, one of Andalucia's most popular hideouts, where the likes of bullfighters, actors and recently British Prime Minister David Cameron have all stayed. Closer, and easier on the pocket, you will find the equally well-sited Hotel El Arriadh, which has some of the most amazing views in Spain. The hotel, run by friendly Peruvian Eduardo, has a relaxing feel and comfortable bedrooms. Alternatively check out Alcantarilla, a historic farmhouse, which is one of the most authentically Andalucian places to stay around. The well appointed villa and cottage are extremely good value and can be rented for a minimum of three nights off season. Finally in the village, you must consider the authentic Huentecillo Hotel, which sits in its own green valley. The stone houses are beautifully carved out of the rock with entirely organic, inert materials. The cheapest option is El Chozo, where you can get a room from around 20 euros a night, although it is often full.

The village may be small but it is great for nature lovers and offers fantastic views

To showcase the beauty of the area and attract tourists, the town hall is launching a 'green route' that takes walkers on a two hour stroll from the village along the river bank. He continues: "The village may be small but it is great for nature lovers and offers fantastic views towards Grazelema and the Sierra de las Nieves. "We want more people to come here and enjoy it," adds Conde.

7 Arriate special

Go take a hike!

The militiaman's escape

n DISTANCE: 2 to 10 kms
n TIME REQUIRED: 1 to 3 hours n RATING: Easy



Avoid the heat of the day - by banking on the Ruta del Molino Canto, or enjoying a fabulous walk up Arriate's river valley

SHADY: The route follows the river and is largely in dense woods

MOST walkers curse when they find themselves walking under the glare of the midday sun. Well, help is at hand with what must be one of Andalucia's most beautiful river walks. Park your car in the heart of Arriate and take a five minute hike uphill until you find the entrance to this shady oasis of cool, which is the Ventilla gorge, now a protected space. You can walk as far as you like (up to an hour each way if you fancy it) or simply flop down beside the river with a book in the shade of a poplar or willow tree.

Even better, in the hot months from June to October there are numerous good spots to take a dip, with plunge pools created by local residents damming the river. So make sure you bring a towel and your swimmers. Sometimes known as the 'militiaman's escape', it was during the civil war when this wooded walk served as the perfect escape from the rapidly advancing armies of General Franco. Heading straight out of the still staunchly 'rojo' village of Arriate, the Guadalcobacín river cuts a deep gully from its source on the edge of the Sierra de las Nieves national park.

Through it the brave militiamen could escape towards El Burgo in the heart of the mountains and eventually Malaga, where the Republicans held out for a few extra months.

This wooded walk served as the perfect escape from the armies of General Franco

A shady paradise full of wild-life and nature, the river rushes down from the mountains creating an impressive steep-sided gorge.

Walking gently uphill, crossing the river on a couple of occasions, the walk eventually arrives at the source of the river beside the Puente del Ventilla, a popular picnic spot for people from Ronda and Arriate.

The banks are lined with ash, eucalyptus, olive and oak trees and there is no sign of human life, apart from a couple of ancient ruined mills, one known as the Molino del Canto.

Bring a picnic, but best of all, if you fancy something to do to while away the midday hours, 'borrow' the pack of cards, which someone has kindly left beside a natural wooden table and chairs knocked together by some villagers earlier this summer.

The Route

IT is a little tricky to find the beginning of the walk. Head into Arriate from Ronda and take the first right off the small square up Calle Marbella. At the top take a left up a narrow street and then a right and you are in Calle Malaga. When the road opens out into the feria ground, park your car and carry on walking uphill along Calle Malaga. After about 400 metres, after going past a smelly chicken factory you will find a sign that reads 'Coto deportivo de Caza' and a yellow sign painted on a wall. Go left here and follow the path up to the edge of the gorge where it then drops dramatically down towards the river. You are soon in the trees and the temperature drops dramatically. You will pass a little spring on your right and eventually come down to a picnic spot with a wooden table and chairs. From here you can head up the river keeping an eye out for the white and yellow signs as far as you fancy, and then walk back when you are ready.

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