

A TOWN OF TWO HALVES

KNOWN FOR ITS POOL PARTIES AND 'TOWIE' BLING, OK! UNCOVERS MARBELLA'S MORE REFINED SIDE



Above: OK! soaked up the sun at the Amare Marbella Beach Hotel. Right: Eva Longoria Bastón was in Marbella recently

Sitting on Spain's southern coastline, Marbella has long been a celebrity hotspot. Facing the Mediterranean Sea and backed by the Sierra Blanca mountain range, Marbella is renowned for its glitz and glamour, with the yacht-packed marina in Puerto Banus the summer epicentre for WAGs and reality TV stars alike. If, however, you want a more authentic slice of Spain, you'll discover enchanting cobbled streets, whitewashed houses and pretty piazzas in Marbella's picturesque Old Town. OK!'s Alex Hurst flew out and discovered that Marbella is definitely a town of two halves...

WHICH STARS WILL I SEE?

Last month, Eva Longoria Bastón was in Marbella to attend the Global Gift Gala at the Gran Meliá Don Pepe resort. She rubbed shoulders with the likes of Vogue Williams and Spencer Matthews at the party and was spotted soaking up the sun on the beach with her husband Jose Antonio Bastón. Gwyneth Paltrow is another Hollywood star who's been in Marbella recently. She was seen strolling around town with her son Moses during a family break. Craig David has just performed in Marbella and will be back for another gig on August 25 at Aqwa Mist, while The Pretenders, Anastacia and the Gipsy Kings will all be performing at the Starlite Festival Marbella that runs until August 26.

WHERE CAN I STAY?

If you want to dip into both sides of Marbella, check into the Amare Marbella Beach Hotel.

OK! loved the all-white hotel, dotted with splashes of turquoise



perfectly located on the beach front, just a short stroll from the Old Town and less than 10km from Puerto Banus. Reopening this year after an extensive facelift, the adult-only hotel sees stylish new guest rooms and a revitalised spa and beach club. Taking inspiration from the sea, you'll find turquoise splashes running throughout the all-white hotel – from the bedroom cushions to the hotel bikes. The 236-room hotel has a contemporary design, with funky light fixtures and floor-to-ceiling windows in the lobby taking full advantage of the ocean views. There are five room categories, with OK! staying in a top-rated Oh Là Là The One room, an airy space with a cool geometric white-wood headboard, Nespresso machine and a sea-facing balcony. An added bonus of booking this room type is access to the exclusive The One service, which includes unlimited drinks and snacks in a private lounge and use of the spa's hydrotherapy circuit.

WHAT CAN I DO?

During the day, guests can recover from the night before on the double sun loungers next to the palm tree-shaded pool or on the beach in front of the boho-chic beach club, listening to themed music sessions from the resident DJs. If you've overdone the sun, head indoors to the hotel's Spa By Germaine de Capuccini, a calming space with muted colours and flickering fragrant candles. OK! signed up for the Kirel Sublime, a relaxing Japanese-inspired facial, and then made use of the spa's hydrotherapy circuit. For an early evening aperitif, watch the sun set at the hotel's Belvue Rooftop Bar, a

glitz terrace bar with an outdoor terrace. During our stay, OK! tried a few cocktails but our favourite was the Marbella, a delicious concoction of rum, caramel vodka, Malibu, coconut and mango, which smelt as good as it tasted!

WHERE CAN I EAT?

Freshly-cooked pancakes or eggs Benedict, cooked to order at the hotel's Mare Nostrum restaurant, was the perfect way for OK! to start the day. The hotel has an array of restaurants, with the Michelin-starred Messina at the top end. Here, OK! enjoyed grilled sardines, a succulent steak and the Spanish speciality bizcochos borrachos, a sponge cake soaked in local sweet dessert wine. For a laid-back vibe, dine at the hotel's funky Amare Lounge, a restaurant that spills out on the pool area, and take in one of the nightly shows. While we ate our Caesar salad, exquisitely laid out in a flower shape, we listened to the Il Divo tribute band. Just a pleasant stroll from the hotel takes you to the newly revamped Soleo Marbella Beach Club, located in the grounds of the Hotel Fuerte Marbella (www.soleomarbella.com). Take a pew on one of the red and white striped banquettes on the sea-facing terrace and order a portion of crispy seafood served in a newspaper cone. Menu highlights include the grilled fish on skewers and El Fuerte's paella, which OK! enjoyed with a couple of glasses of sangria.

WHERE CAN I SHOP?

With Puerto Banus offering all the designer names and the stores in Marbella's Old Town selling hand-crafted leather goods, ceramics and jewellery, you'll be spoilt for choice. If you prefer to shop under one roof, make a beeline to El Cortes Ingles in Puerto Banus, a six-storey fashion emporium where you'll find more designer labels, as well as a food hall and champagne bar. If you have limited time, sign up for their personal shopper experience (we were told that Antonio Banderas has). We received top tips on how to judge what style and colours suit our complexion and body shape and were advised that top Spanish brands Designo, Introlpa and Birmba y Lola would be ideal. If only we had a celebrity budget to match!

WHICH SIGNETS MUST I SEE?

Marbella's enchanting Old Town is a must visit. Lose yourself in the maze of cobbled streets that radiate off the main Plaza de los Naranjos,

Head to the Old Town's Plaza de los Naranjos for people watching



named after the square's fragrant orange blossom trees. Stop at one of the outdoor cafés and sip a coffee, try a churro dipped in chocolate or some early evening tapas while listening to the trickling waters of the fountain. Hop on one of the hotel bikes and cycle along the pedestrianised seafront promenade to Puerto Banus, stopping off at the cafés or shops along the way. With blue skies, golden beaches and sea views, it's the perfect way to enjoy the scenery and people watch. Just watch out for the constant parade of joggers, dog walkers and rollerbladers!



HOW DO I GET THERE?

Monarch (www.monarch.co.uk) flies to Malaga from Birmingham, London Gatwick, Luton, Leeds Bradford and Manchester with fares, including taxes, starting from £42 one way.

Room rates at the Amare Marbella Beach Hotel (www.amarehotels.com), staying in an Oh Là Là The One room on a B&B basis, start from £280 in low season and £443 in the summer. Price includes use of the Technogym and Wifi. The hotel is closed for winter from mid-November till the end of February. **OK!**

FOR MORE ON MARBELLA, VISIT WWW.TURISMO.MARBELLA.ES/EN.

REPORT BY ALEX HURST. EDITED BY ANNABEL MACKIE. OK! TRAVEL EDITOR TRAVELLER'S TALES BY MANCY BROWN PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY, GETTY IMAGES

SUN PROTECTION FROM MINEHEAD TO MARBELLA

Hoping to catch a few rays this summer? If so, the LloydsPharmacy Solero range should be your new go-to sunscreen range.

The simple, fragrance-free formulation has been designed to cause the least possible skin irritation. So whether you're going to Minehead or Marbella, the Solero range can help protect the whole family.



Baby Sun Lotion SPF 30+ 200ml, £7 Kids Sun Spray SPF 30 200ml, £7 Ultra Sensitive Sun Lotion SPF 50 200ml, £7

VISIT WWW.LLOYDSPHARMACY.COM/SOLERO TO BROWSE THE LATEST PROMOTIONAL OFFERS, INCLUDING TWO FOR £8 ON 200ML BOTTLES OF THREE FOR TWO ON 50ML MINIS.

LloydsPharmacy

TRAVELLER'S TALK

LARRY LAM

THE ACTOR ON TRIPS WITH HIS SON AND CRUISING THE MED...

You're just back from a Thomson Cruises trip around the Med – how was it?

Lovely – I thoroughly enjoyed it. The real joy of it for me was visiting all these extraordinary spots when the ship was docked. We stopped off in Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, Ibiza, Almeria and we finished up in Ceuta, a Spanish city on the north coast of Africa. In Barcelona we went round the big market, talking to people and buying little bits of food, then I went to watch some flamenco and finished up getting involved.

Who's your favourite holiday companion? I've got two – my son George and my partner Marie [Victorine]. My son and I have done a lot of stuff

together. H the Himala Nepal for n on a ten-d stayed in li Marie and I together, s slightly rep

Where's the you've been?

There's no in Italy. I st there ye TV seri to pick say Ven t



alv see TO CE OF TH THOM TEAM AS HE I MIX OF CRUISE HIS JOU CRUISE