

ANDREW FORBES



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Take a fresh look at the Andalusian resort; enjoy contemporary trends in hospitality and relax with a September 'staycation'

It's no secret that I like to travel, to live a slightly nomadic lifestyle. Yet each time I board an aircraft to return home, it's always with a feeling of excitement to be coming back to Andalucía. Even after countless trips, each time the plane descends, flying over the lakes at El Chorro, heading towards Malaga, I'm captivated by the view. Despite all the clichés and misrepresentation, the reality is that the Costa del Sol is a wonderful place to live.

Yet, it's all too easy to take our part of southern Spain for granted; to complain about the summer traffic, the inflated tourist prices, and yes, the heat. So as the summer holiday season draws to a close, we're offered a



The resort's renewal come as a result of increased investment in the hospitality sector. :: SUR

welcome respite. With the departure of the high season summer visitors it's maybe the time to take a September 'staycation' and fall back in love with the province.

Unprecedented numbers of visitor to Spain over the past few years has meant that not only has the traditional holiday season become extended, meaning that cultural events,

popular summer beach clubs, and pop-up restaurants continue for longer; but also, that the coast has seen an increase in investment in the hospitality sector.

For decades Marbella suffered with an identity crisis, fuelled by low-cost tourism and the competition from trendier, smarter international destinations. Yet now the tide has most

definitely begun to turn with the coastal resort town once again attracting more discerning tourism. For example, iconic properties such as the Puente Romano Beach Resort & Spa; and neighbouring Marbella Club have been reimagined as 21st-century luxury resorts with world-class dining, international-standard spas and interior design that sets the tone for a

memorable experience.

### Urban beach resort

The focus on a quality guest experience for both locals and visitors has extended to properties across the coast. I recently caught up with Marcos Rodríguez, a hospitality expert and consultant for Hotel Amàre, the adult-only urban beach resort



in Marbella. Many will remember this family-friendly spa hotel when it was a classic Fuerte Hotels property – comfortable, but not particularly inspiring.

Now it is the first of a new brand of Amàre Hotels, a new concept from Fuerte that is designed to appeal to Generation X - adult professionals, that still feel young at heart. “We’ve created an urban beach resort,” Marcos explains. “Everything is focused towards the Mediterranean yet the hotel is also in Marbella, sharing its cosmopolitan, international flavour.”

The traditional Costa del Sol package holiday ambience has gone - in its place is a sleek, contemporary hotel, at its heart the vibrant Amàre Beach Club open to both locals and hotel guests. It includes the trendy pool terrace, beach club restaurant and the stylish Amàre lounge for late night cocktails, entertainment, and live music that often brings in a younger crowd at weekends. It gives the flavour of what one might expect in bigger cities like Barcelona.

### **Eat, drink, dance**

“The style is vanguardista: very modern and eclectic,” continues Marcos. “All the elements combine to create a new sophisticated feel - from the fragrance in the hotel, the staff uniforms and training, to the design, and of course the music.”

Although the hotel has repositioned itself from being a family spa resort into an adult-only property, that doesn’t mean it’s become a party hotel for youngsters. The market is moving away from that sector; in-



Hotel Amàre’s concept is targeted at adult professionals. :: SUR



The manicured La Quinta Golf Resort. :: SUR

stead Amàre has created an on-trend environment where the services and facilities are aligned to more discerning couples and groups of friends that enjoy classic house music, live DJ shows, and seasonal events. Healthy Mediterranean food, a Germaine de Capuccini spa, and experienced mixologists at the bar are all elements that reflect a new direction for Amàre, and also for Costa del Sol tourism. For residents, it’s a bonus too, as we have a full-service spa, beach restaurant and club available for ‘staycation’ days out.

### **Play well, eat well**

The wave of renewal continues with other familiar properties. I recently visited the Westin La Quinta Golf Resort and Spa, to the west of Marbella’s golf valley, near Benahavis. In recent years it seemed to have lost its direction. Under the former hotel management, it faltered. Yet now it has recently rejoined Westin, as it originally was when it was built.

Westin is an established family brand within the Marriot hotel group. In my mind, it’s good to see international, world-class hotel brands investing on the Costa del Sol. At the Westin La Quinta Golf Resort and Spa one sees how that global perspective can transform a resort from having a provincial, slightly out-of-date feel, to one that showcases modern family resort style. The Westin ‘Heavenly’ brand values are now seen across the property, from guest room amenities to the spa, while the resort has a recurring theme of nature and the Mediterranean. This is reflected in its de-

sign colour palette of white, neutrals and natural tones as well as features such as the new vertical garden in the lobby.

Although a popular venue for weddings, La Quinta’s spa and the golf course are of course the biggest draws for locals. Both facilities are well-established and during off-season one can find offers. Weekends can be enjoyed on the fairway; or being pampered in the Westin Heavenly Spa - a wellness and fitness area that covers some 1,500 square metres and includes a Mediterranean sauna, aromatic steam bath, hammam, hydro-massage and aqua-therapy. Both are a relaxing way to build an appetite for a healthy meal in the club house or the new resort restaurant.

### **Contemporary Mediterranean**

Again, design has been a driver for change here, with the UK’s acclaimed hotel designer Anita Rosato Interior Design commissioned to create the stunning Sunsa restaurant. The new dining space has a contemporary, sophisticated style of brilliant white walls, modern lighting, blond woods and natural elements that convey a fresh, Mediterranean flavour. The menu has been transformed by Westin, offering balanced healthy dishes, considering modern requirements for gluten-free, vegetarian and low-fat options.

Let’s embrace the cooler, quieter more mellow weeks ahead and make the most of late summer. Remember that our What to Do section is the place to look for the latest listings of events on the coast.



## THE INSIDER GUIDE

## Marbella 'staycation'



The Marbella old town.

## BY ANDREW FORBES

The summer may be drawing to a close for many, yet for residents of southern Spain, the Mediterranean sun continues to shine, making it the perfect time to enjoy all the pleasures of the coast, yet without the high-season crowds. Here's some inspiration.

## STAY:

Westin La Quinta Golf Resort and Spa - Benahavis

The La Quinta Golf Resort and Spa is now back as a Westin property, and it has never looked better. This family-friendly resort has been upgraded, with newly-designed guest rooms, smart lobby with vertical garden, and a stylish new 'Sams' restaurant, with striking design and a menu of healthy Mediterranean dishes.

The golf course, designed by three-time World Champion and Ryder Cup champion Manuel Piñero, is worth rediscovering this season. In October, there's even a chance to play alongside golf professional, Thomas Bjørn. The seasonal offer includes a cocktail reception, dinner attended by the 21-time professional winner, and then the next day a golf clinic as well as an 18-hole round of golf.

If golf is not your thing, then maybe the resort's 'Heavenly Spa Sprunch' would be appealing. Enjoy the spa's thermal circuit and relaxing environment, followed by a superfoods brunch at the clubhouse.

There's an award-winning kids' club too, if you fancy a night away with the all the family.

## WestinLaQuinta.com/en

## Villa Romana - Benahavis

Why not live the life of Marbella's super-rich, if only for a few days? The exclusive enclaves of La Zagaleta and El Madroñal are where one finds some of Europe's most luxurious homes - many of which are available for short-term holiday rentals. Villa Romana is a unique 'wellness villa' in the hills above Marbella - a traditional-style Andalusian hacienda with its own private spa, including sauna, Turkish bath, treatment rooms, indoor and outdoor pools and tranquil gardens. It's an original choice for a wellness break with visiting friends or family, offering all the comforts of a boutique hotel yet with the privacy of a private home.

## RopleVillas.es

## EAT:

Amare Club - Marbella  
The Amare in Marbella represents a fresh style of adult-only hotel, where visitors and locals can enjoy a unique club, with luxe, eclectic design, all-day dining, upscale bar and cool music.

At the heart of the property's offering is the Amare Club, a Marbella beach club with three zones: Amare beach, where you can expect sunbeds with waiter service, as well as the beach club restaurant with al fresco dining of summer flavours in sun or shade,

Amare Pool, with Bali-style day beds, waiter service and refreshing pool; and finally, the Amare Lounge, a contemporary, designer space for drinks, Mediterranean cuisine, and live entertainment. For extra pampering, visit the Germaine de Capuccini spa, on the lower ground floor, and choose the 'Aromas of Andalusia' massage.

For a cool, urban 'AfterWork' vibe, go up to the Belvue Rooftop Bar, a glass space on the ninth floor, surrounded by terraces with exceptional, 360 views, that take in Marbella's old town, La Concha mountain, the Sierra Blanca, and, of course, the Mediterranean.

## AmareHotels.com

## Mesina Restaurant - Marbella

Undoubtedly one of the best restaurants on the coast, the Michelin-starred Mesina is the choice for innovative, culinary creativity. Chef Mauticio, his wife Pa, the maitre d' and sommelier, together with their highly professional team assure a memorable experience.

## RestaurantMesina.com

## The Plaza - Marbella

This gastro courtyard, at the Puente Romano Beach Resort & Spa has evolved into one of the most exciting dining destinations on the coast. New innovations include 'El Chisguite', the stylish, rustic-luxe beach house restaurant and Niobu, the internationally-renowned contemporary Japanese restaurant and bar - the first in Spain.

## PuenteRomano.com

## DO:

## Charter a yacht

Arrive at the end-of-season closing parties at Nikki Beach or Ocean Club in style aboard your own yacht; head out to the strait to watch dolphins and whales; sail to Morocco for lunch; or head to Gibraltar for a VIP-style shopping trip - it's all possible when you charter a motor yacht or sailing boat for the day or just a few hours.

## MarbellaBoatCharter.com

## Take a hike - Sierra Blanca

The iconic La Concha mountain is what contributes to Marbella's privileged microclimate, offering a dramatic backdrop to the resort town. It also makes for a fun day out. Take the road up to Refugio de Juanar where you can park and join the hiking trails. There are family-friendly walking routes through the Sierra Blanca that take you to a mirror viewpoint over the coast; or for the more adventurous and fit, take the trail to the summit of La Concha. It takes about three hours each way, so wear hiking gear and pack your backpack accordingly.

## Dance the night away - Marbella

Throughout September there are

'AfterWork' drinks and tunes at the Belvue Rooftop Bar at the Amare, as well as themed nights at the Amare Lounge including a Cuban night (1 September); DJ and saxophone (2nd and 9th), DJ and electric guitar (1st and 8th), beach flamenco (8th) and an 'Acrobatic Night' (15th). All dates are provisional - check the website for details.

## AmareHotels.com

## Get on your bike - San Pedro

An early morning bike ride along the 'paseo marítimo' coastal promenade from Marbella to Puerto Banús and on towards San Pedro is a real pleasure off-season. There is a good choice of well-reviewed push bike rental stores in Marbella and San Pedro that can offer half and full-day bike rental, including helmets. Enjoy breakfast along the way or a rewarding cold beer in a chiringuito.

Rediscover the old town Marbella's historic 'casco antiguo' is often a place to avoid during high season, but once the crowds go it again regains its charm, a place of characteristic narrow streets lined with bougainvillea and garden squares with fountains. Its home to some charming boutique hotels and B&Bs, and some excellent restaurants (including the award-winning Skina), tapas bars and indie-style boutiques. It's the Andalusian village of Marbella that's often over-looked.

## TurismoMarbella.es

## Canyoning

Gain unprecedented access to gorges and canyons of the area by joining a Team Xtreme canyoning group, led by an experienced and qualified guide. Families and beginners can enjoy the beauty of the river gorge of Benahavis while those with even more appetite for abseils, climbs, jumps and swimming can take a tour to the famous Rio Verde, only accessible with a guide.

## TeamXtreme.es



Amare hotel.



Nobu restaurant.



A chartered boat on the Mediterranean.