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# Marbella isn't the raucous place I remember from wild youthful days in the sun – it's stylish, classy and perfect for a break away from the kids

The Spanish resort has a great deal it has to be proud of — as my wife Kate and I were to find out over the next few days of our well-earned break away

REVIEW

By Richard Bogie

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THE last time I was in 'Marbs' was in my youth when it was THE place to go for fun in the sun without the tacky hats and lager-filled streets.

Returning some decades later I couldn't wait to see how things had changed from the wild and raucous place that was so embedded in my memory.

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Child-free environment called AdultCool - we called it paradise

I quickly found some things had not changed at all, like the bold — some might say brash — MARBELLA sign in 12ft high capitals over the entrance to the town. This truly is a place that is not afraid to announce itself at every opportunity.

But then it has a great deal it has to be proud of — as my wife Kate and I were to find out over the next few days of our well-earned break away without the kids.

Our luxurious base was the four-star Hotel Amare Marbella, which has recently been refurbished to what I would say was five-star standard.

The hotel is part of the family-owned Fuerte group and they have lavished every care and attention to detail on the child-free environment — they call it AdultCool, we called it paradise.



NOT KNOWN, CLEAR WITH PICTURE DESK

Hotel Amare Marbella

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Mare nostrum sun deck with elevated views across the promenade to the beach and the sea.

It was a quick trip one level down to the Amare beach club, with its three areas — lounge, pool and beach. Each zone has a different feel; the lounge is indoors, relaxed and comfortable, the pool being outside, decked and very buzzy with music and waiters attending to your every whim.

And finally, our favourite, the beach club with huge sun loungers, discreet waiter service and a superb “beach shack”- style restaurant.

This wasn't like the 24-hour party place I remembered from my last visit and was all the better for it. We could feel the stresses and strains of work/home/school runs and family life begin to float away and it wasn't even twelve hours since we had landed.



Richard and Kate soaking up the sun

After a blissful day of lounging around, reading, chatting and indulging in a little late afternoon sangria (mine red, Kate's white, both lovely and refreshing) we decided to ride the coastal promenade path to Puerto Banus.

We rented our bikes from hotel reception and before you knew it we were flying along the coastline, heading west into the gently falling sun whilst weaving in and out of promenading families, young (and some not so young) lovers as they enjoyed the end of the day.

The views were stunning as the path gently rose and fell. Puerto Banus is one of Marbella's three ports and is by far the most famous. A playground for the rich and famous, packed with stunning super yachts, glitzy bars, high priced restaurants and all the global high fashion labels.

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Sports cars and super yachts are a common sight

This is one part of Marbella that has not changed at all. Brash, bold, gaudy and loads of fun. It's worth a visit but if you stay there for long you won't have much in the pocket afterwards.

At just shy of a 10-mile round trip from our base, a bike ride to Puerto Banus for a walk around and a small beer in the famous Sinatra's Bar, before heading back to our hotel was just the ticket.

That night we headed to the Amare sky bar, Marbella's highest roof top hang out.

A chic glass cube sits atop the hotel serving a stunning array of cocktails (a Negroni for me and a Mojito for Kate) and cool mellow tunes.

## GO: MARBELLA

**GETTING THERE:** Direct flights to Malaga are available from Glasgow with easyjet and Jet2; Edinburgh; with Ryanair and Jet2 and Aberdeen with Ryanair.

**STAYING THERE:** The 4H Hotel Amare Marbella,

right, has 236 rooms which cost from approx £175 a night B&B. Half-board is also available. Check out [amarehotels.com](http://amarehotels.com)

**MORE INFO:** Book massage treatments and other spa services online. For more on visiting Marbella see [turismo.marbella.es.en](http://turismo.marbella.es.en)

The views are to die for, stretching all the way down the coast and across the sea to the now twinkling lights of the African coast.

Suitably refreshed and restored we dined on a terrace looking out over the promenade and enjoyed an exotic fusion of Cuban. Mexican



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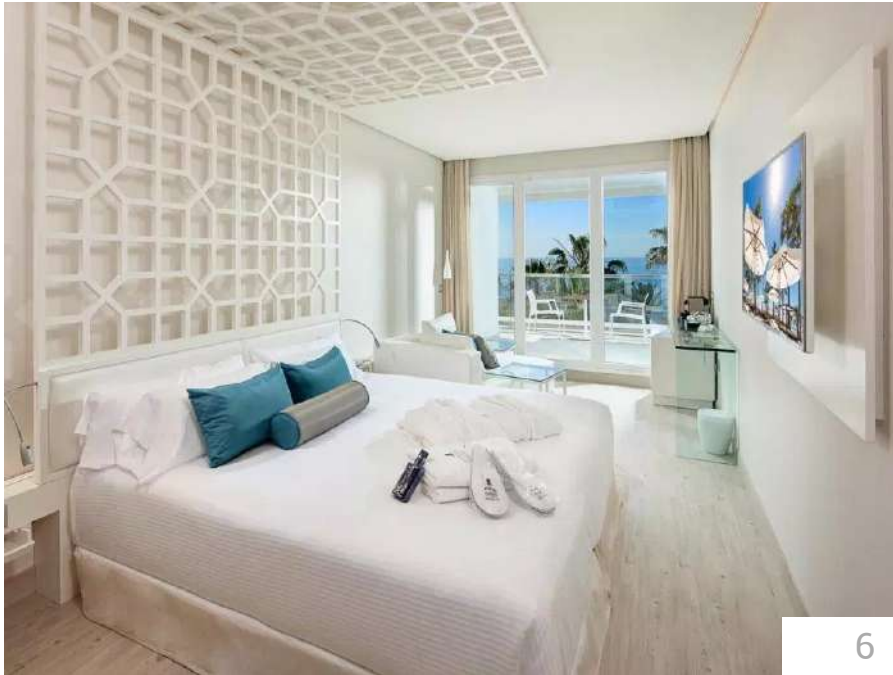


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brigt and breezy on Sunday we headed for a tour of the old town.



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### Den of tranquility

Marbella's original centre is a 50m walk across the busy two lane coastal highway, but it felt like a million miles as we were instantly transported to a maze of beautiful cobbled alleyways, criss crossing between white washed traditional Spanish houses, occasionally giving way to verdant green squares with bustling cafes and restaurants.

Among the oranges trees and tumbling bougainvillia we found the real Marbella. This was a scene scarcely changed for centuries, except for eagle-eyed tourists browsing the chic boutiques with affordable fashions, footwear, leather and lace, not to mention the wonderful local produce from Malaga province.

Right in the middle of the old town is the beautiful Iglesia de la Encarnación — a 16th Century church built on the site of a former mosque, which boasts a bell tower and some incredibly ornate altars, icons and stained glass. Well worth a visit, if only to escape the heat!



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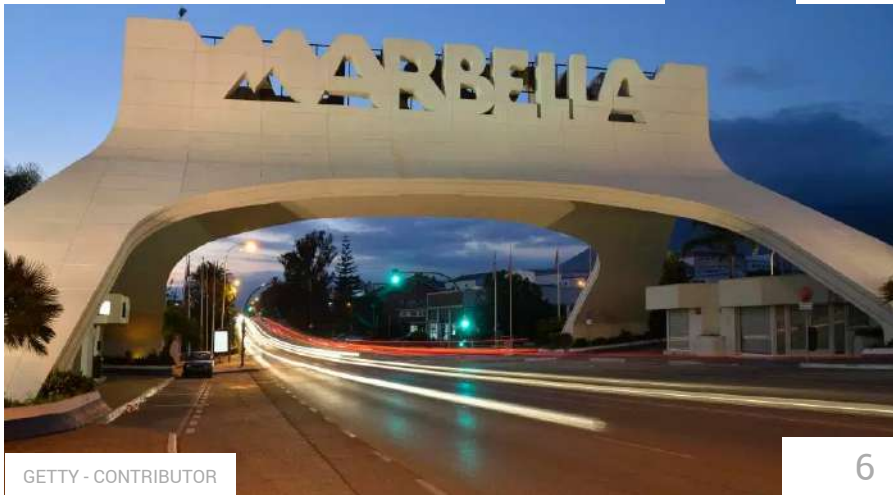
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Marbs has changed - and it's chic, modern and stylish

Our guide Monica showed us around the many historic sights in the old town explaining how the region had been colonised by Pheonicians, Romans and latterly Moors.

The Spanish took back land gradually from the Moors and Marbella returned to Spanish rule on June 11, 1485 — a date that is celebrated every year at the Fer de Marbella.

By now our brains were buzzing and our feet aching. What better way to unwind than head back for a visit to the Spa for a restorative massage and a visit to the hydrotherapy centre.

I love a good massage and this one did not disappoint; relaxing, invigorating and just what was needed to stretch out tired muscles and joints.

I was a bit more sceptical about the hydrotherapy idea though. But after an hour of steam room, sauna, cold showers, plunge pools and massage fountains I was hooked.

There was a slight saltiness to the water, which gives the skin an amazing tingle and tautness.

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Has Marbella changed? Yes, and no. It's definitely no longer the hiding hole for ne'erdo wells of old. It's chic, modern, stylish and classy.

But the gorgeous and reliable weather, the stunning backdrop of the mountains, the winding streets and picturesque squares of the old town delight as they have done for many years.

The bella in Marbella is there for all to see.

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