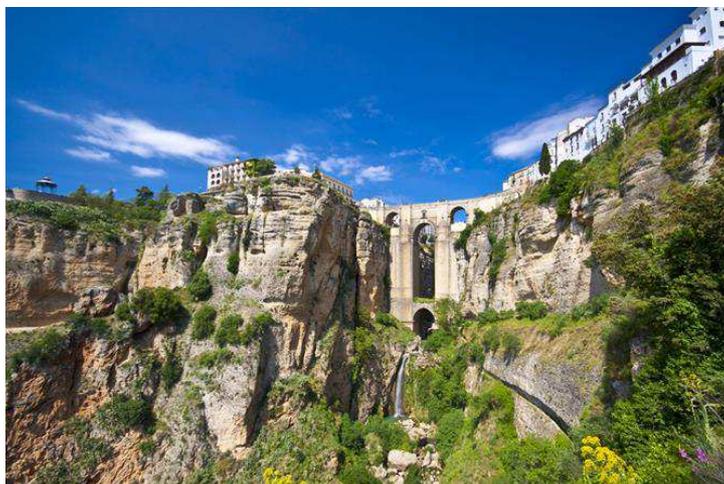


Costa Del Sol, Spain - Information

This document contains general information about the Costa Del Sol, mainly plagiarised from Wikipedia, Lonely Planet and other internet sites. Additional information may be added from time to time, based on personal experiences during my two months long stay in the area.



Ronda

General Information:

The Costa del Sol ("Coast of the Sun" or "Sun Coast") is a region in the south of Spain, in the autonomous community of Andalusia, comprising the coastal towns and communities along the coastline of the Province of Málaga. The Costa del Sol was formerly made up only of a series of small fishing settlements - today the region is a world renowned tourist destination. The Costa del Sol includes the city of Málaga and also the towns of Torremolinos, Benalmádena, Fuengirola, Mijas, Marbella, San Pedro de Alcántara, Estepona, Manilva, Casares, Rincón de la Victoria, Vélez-Málaga, Nerja, Frigiliana and Torrox.

Fuengirola (Visited on Tuesday 11th October 2016) :

It is a major tourist resort, with more than 8 km of beaches and a mediaeval Moorish fortress. In common with much of this coast, it has been the subject of considerable urban development. Fuengirola has a number of historical sites and open parks. The old port is still used by the local Spanish fisherman. The Arab castle of Suhayl, or Suhail, remained an abandoned ruin until renovations began in 1995. In 2000 the interior of the castle was completely renovated and the Suhail castle begun to host festivals and concerts throughout the summer. Additional landscaping was completed in 2002.

Fuengirola was founded by the Phoenicians under the name of 'Suel'. They established a fish salting factory in the area, which soon became a major trading spot in the Mediterranean. Under Emperor Augustus, the Romans turned it into a municipality annexed to the conventus of Gades. Evidence of the worship of god Neptune has been found, as well as elements that point at the existence of a powerful nobility. On the slopes of the mount where the Sohail Castle sits, archaeologists found remains of the Suel Iberian-Phoenician settlement then colonised by the Romans: the plinth of a statue, a funerary altar, and so on. The ruins of the Torreblanca baths and the Finca del Secretario site attest to the Roman presence. The so-called 'Venus de Fuengirola' was unearthed here. When the Arabs came to the Iberian Peninsula, Suel became 'Suhayl'. The fortress was expanded under Abd-ar-Rahman III. It was here that King Henry II of Castile and Yusuf I, Sultan of Granada signed the 1340 truce that led to the revival of trade and commerce. According to scholar Juan Temboury, Suhayl was an educated town, the birthplace of illustrious writers like the poet As-Suhaylí, who dedicated a poem to his hometown after the fire. Like many other towns in Andalusia, Suhayl fell to the Christian troops in 1485. By then, it had changed its name to 'Font-jirola'. After the Reconquista, the town was repopulated with old Christians, but they did not stay for long: in 1511, chronicles registered the village as 'depopulated'; it was only a defensive spot, used for coastal surveillance. This led to the lands allocated to Fuengirola during the Repartimientos (land allocation plan) ending up in Mijas. In February 1841, a group of residents in Fuengirola sent a petition for independence from Mijas. They got the autonomy

three months later, and Antonio García Cortés was elected as the first town mayor. The newly elected authorities embarked on an expansion of the town's boundaries, a fruitless endeavour that went on until the early decades of the twentieth century. The local economy was badly affected by phylloxera in the nineteenth century, since most fields were vineyards. The first signs of recovery came with the arrival of the railroad in 1916, followed by the supply of drinking water 20 years later. As early as 1935, the provincial weekly *La Provincia* referred to Fuengirola as a holiday resort. The first (small) hotels were built in the 1950s. They were the seed of the world-class infrastructure that this town in Western Costa del Sol has to offer today.

Despite the glowing words in previous paragraphs copied from the Internet, I was not at all impressed by Fuengirola. In my opinion it is not an attractive town, has very little to offer in the way of sightseeing, and has insignificant culture! It does not cast the slightest shadow over the magnificence of Málaga!

Mijas Pueblo (Visited 18th November 2016) :

The attractive and typically Andalusian white-washed village of Mijas Pueblo is located on the mountainside about 430 metres above sea level, and is situated not far inland from Fuengirola - there are stunning views across the Costa del Sol, Gibraltar, the Atlas Mountains and over to the African coastline. Mijas Pueblo is also the place to head to take a look at the traditional bull ring or to take a donkey trip on a short tour around the area. The economy of Mijas is primarily based on tourism, featuring local historical museums and many souvenir shops. Despite mass tourism, Mijas has managed to retain much of its "white village" charm, with cobbled, narrow winding streets, dazzling whitewashed walls and breathtaking views. The Bullring – was opened in 1900 and is oval! It is still used for bullfights and horse displays.

The bus dropped me off at Mijas Pueblo, which is the whitewashed mishmash of buildings and narrow cobbled streets built on the hillside 428 metres above sea level. My first stop was at the Tourist Information Centre, only a couple of minutes walk from the bus stop. There I picked up a map of the village to help me find my way around, but really it wasn't necessary because this was a small place. Of course, being so close to the densely populated interlinked coastal towns of Benalmádena, Torremolinos, Fuengirola and Marbella, Mijas was going to be very busy, and so it was, spectacularly so! As my readers know, I'm not in my comfort zone when in crowds of tourists, so never really felt comfortable in this highly popular destination. I did however find some quiet streets off the beaten track that the throngs of visitors had miraculously missed, and a few places to pause and wonder at the fabulous views over the coastline and across the Straits of Gibraltar. But generally I didn't gel in this popular tourist destination - it was far too congested for my liking, and to add to my distaste, most of the narrow streets had not been pedestrianised! So when I should have been wandering around enjoying the relative peace and beauty of the place, I was forever dodging traffic, delivery trucks, private motorists, scooters, and ghetto blasters from many of the cars! I had planned to sit and enjoy a glass of wine in some Plaza whilst watching the world go by, but that was impossible in this manic place! And what about the architecture? I'm not sure from whence it originates - Wikipedia cleverly avoids putting dates to their description of Mijas, except to tell the reader that in the 1950s an asbestos factory was built to reduce unemployment and the first small hotel was built because of the growing fame of the Costa del Sol. But despite references to ancient history and the existence of some relics, nowhere can I discover when the village, as it is now, was constructed? Actually most buildings appear relatively recent, but I may be wrong! The average visitor is of course not interested in any of this - it is indeed an attractive place, has the obligatory narrow cobbled streets, whitewashed buildings, plenty of tapas bars, cafés and restaurants and souvenir shops around every corner, and that seems to be what the modern day tourist wants, me not included!

Ronda (Visited Tuesday 8th November 2016):

Ronda is a mountaintop city in Andalusia that is set dramatically above a deep gorge. This gorge (El Tajo) separates the city's circa 15th-century new town from its old town, dating to Moorish rule. Puente Nuevo, a stone bridge spanning the gorge, has a lookout offering views. The New town's Plaza de Toros, a legendary 18th-century bullring, is one of the city's most recognizable landmarks. Despite mass tourism Ronda still retains much of its historic charm, particularly its old town. It is famous worldwide for its dramatic escarpments and views, and for the deep El Tajo gorge that carries the rio Guadalevín through its centre. Visitors make a beeline for the 18th-century Puente Nuevo 'new' bridge, which straddles the 100m chasm below, for its unparalleled views out over the Serranía de Ronda mountains. Across the bridge, where an elegant cloistered 16th-century convent is now an art museum, old Ronda, La Ciudad, sidwinds off into cobbled streets hemmed by handsome town mansions, some still occupied by Ronda's titled families. The Casa de Don Bosco is one such, its interior patio long ago roofed in glass against Ronda's harsh winters. Its small, almost folly-like gardens

lose out, however, to the true star, a few minutes' walk to the furthest end of the Ciudad, the Palacio Mondragón. Clumsily modernized in parts during the 1960s, this still has working vestiges of the exquisite miniature water gardens dating from its time as a Moorish palace during Ronda's brief reign as a minor Caliphate under Córdoba in the 12th century.

The views of the gorge, the Puente Nuevo and the surrounding countryside are spectacular. The viewpoint has been named in honour of the architect José Martín de Aldehuela. The same architect who built the bullring, the Puente Nuevo and finished Málaga's cathedral amongst other projects. The Balcón del Coño viewpoint is another that should not be missed.

Plaza Duquesa de Parcent in Ronda is most picturesque square and one that is brimming with monuments. The Santa María del Mayor church is the highlight, a church which took over 200 years to build and is a mixture of gothic and Renaissance styles. Other squares are the Plaza del Socorro, the squares in front of the Almocabar Gate and around Calle Nuevo.

The cobbled alley to the Mondragón leads naturally on to Ronda's loveliest public space, the leafy Plaza Duquesa de Parcent, which boasts a convent, two churches, including the toy-town bell-tower of the Iglesia Santa María de Mayor, and the handsome arched ayuntamiento (council) building. Nearby calle Armiñan leads down to the spacious plaza of the traditional workers' barrio, San Francisco, with excellent bars and restaurants. Back from the Mondragón, the Plaza del Campillo overlooks steps that zigzag down to a dramatic eye-level through the Puente Nuevo. The town's pedestrianised 'high street', calle Espinel, opposite the bullring, is nicknamed 'La Bola' and is where Rondeños go for virtually everything. Ronda is also famous as the birthplace of modern bullfighting, today glimpsed once a year at the spectacular Feria Goyesca.

The Palacio del Rey Moro y La Mina (Palace of the Moorish King and the Water Mine) - Legend has it that this was the residence of the Moorish King, Almonated, who is said to have drunk wine from the skulls of his enemies, although more recent evidence seems to indicate that the King never actually lived in the building. Today's structure was completed in the 18th century and completely remodeled in 1920 by the Duchess of Parcent. The gardens were designed by the same French architect who designed the María Luisa Park in Seville, Jean Claude Forestier. The gardens give access to La Mina (the mine), an Islamic staircase of 231 steps which have been carefully cut into the rock and lead down the river. For centuries La Mina was the only source of water into the city, with slaves chained to the steps to pass water bags upwards. This water supply was a lifeline to the Moors during the various Christian sieges. These steps played a vital part in Ronda's history, it was at this point that Christian troops forced entry in 1485.

The Arabic walls and city gates - Throughout history, Ronda has been one of Andalusia's most impregnable cities. Mainly owing to its geographical position, but also to a series of city walls and gates, which were built by the Moors throughout the Islamic era. These walls and gates were continually being added to as the city grew. Today, they provide a unique glimpse into Ronda's past. Visitors in Moorish times to Ronda would have entered the city via the Puente Árabe, eventually entering the city centre by going through the now decrepit Puerte de la Cijara. The largest and most protected city gate was the Almocabar one. It took its name from the Arabic cemetery (al-maqabir) which stood in this section of the town. The Almocabar gate faces Gibraltar and the sea and would have been a main point of entry for most people. The Murallas del Carmen is particularly picturesque and has recently been reformed. It sets the scene numerous cultural events and has the Iglesia del Espíritu Santo, the Church of the Holy Spirit standing just next to it.

El Chorro Gorge:

The Caminito is a narrow cliffside path hanging 100m above the waters of the river Guadalhorce. The path runs from the Embalse de Guadalhorce reservoir, through the famous El Chorro gorge, to El Chorro village. The train passes through the other side of the gorge to the path and the path is clearly visible - I suffer vertigo and never in a million years could I walk that path! The Caminito del Rey (King's Little Path) is built onto the side of the limestone rock face, and passes through the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes (Gaitanes Gorge) also known as Garganta del Chorro (litterally throat of Chorro) after the nearby village and offers spectacular, heart-stopping views down a sheer drop to the churning waters. Originally built around 1905 and improved around 1921 it fell into disrepair and over the past decades, the path became known as 'the most dangerous path in the world' or even the 'walk of death'. Mountaineers from all over were attracted to risk the path in its pre-restoration state. The 'new' Caminito del Rey was re-constructed and reopened to the public on 28 March 2015, with the route and design of the path keeping as closely as possible to the old one. The famous boardwalk section is 2.9 km long and is constructed with a wooded slatted boardwalk and simple 1.2m-high three-wire guard rail. In places it is only one metre wide, hanging

to the cliff face. The 'old' path can be seen just below. A highlight is the steel suspension bridge across the gorge, just next to the emblematic aqueduct bridge. The walk can now only be undertaken in a southerly direction and takes three to five hours depending on whether you are marching or taking it easy with plenty of photo stops. The railway station has been renamed El Chorro - Caminito del Red, and I stopped there on my train - the train half emptied as hikers headed off for this amazing adventure, which is obviously proving to be a very popular tourist attraction. It's definitely unique in Europe and has apparently started to be called 'the scariest path in the world'.

Benalmadena:

Covering an area of almost 30Km², and with an official 30,000 inhabitants, Benalmadena is just 19 kilometers from Malaga Airport. It's easy to reach from both Malaga capital and International Airport by road, train or bus and its privileged position looking out onto the Mediterranean Sea, it is little wonder that it has grown so rapidly in size over the last 20 years and become so popular - especially with the British. It is always lively, but the busiest time of year is during the hot summer months, when holidaymakers swell the population by more than triple - up to 100,000 people. Despite the influx of foreigners, Benalmádena Pueblo (The old village) has managed to maintain a certain degree of decorum in the midst of the massive amounts of building works and construction developments that now surround it, where not so long ago it was rough countryside. Benalmádena is rich in attractive beaches and interesting places like the Colomares Castle, the 33 meter tall Buddhist Benalmádena Stupa (the largest Buddhist stupa in Europe), and the Benalmádena Marina.

The Benalmadena Cable Car:

The Benalmadena Cable Car was opened in 2003 and has fast become one of the main tourist attractions on the Costa del Sol. The modern Teleférico takes you on an amazing 15-minute journey in a four-person cable car right up to the highest point on the Málaga coast at an altitude of almost 800m above sea level. From this superb vantage point, you not only have the most magnificent views of the Costa del Sol, but also awesome panoramic vistas of the Sierra Nevada mountains, the Guadalhorce Valley and on a clear day Gibraltar and the coast of Africa including the Rif Mountains. Once at the top, there are clearly marked signs leading to specific viewpoints: Cima Calamorro (the Calamorro Mountain Peak) and Sur (south) and Oeste (west). At the summit, you can take a donkey ride through the beautiful natural surroundings. The donkeys are ready and waiting for cable car passengers. As well as a donkey ride, included in the price you can also see an exhibition of fine Spanish dressage horses. You can also see a demonstration on how the birds of prey live alongside humans and watch the speed and feeding habits of a peregrine falcon or the majestic flight of the eagle. So successful is the bird of prey sanctuary on the Calamorro Mountaintop that four rare Royal Owl chicks were successfully bred there. There are more than sixty birds of different species, including vultures, royal eagles, peregrine falcons and white-headed vultures as well as the Royal Owls.

Torremolinos (Visited Tuesday 22nd November 2016):

Torremolinos has thankfully long outgrown its Monty Python spam and chips image and, over recent years, has evolved as an attractive and appealing resort noted for its clean sandy beaches, wide choice of hotels and restaurants and unparalleled variety of entertainment, activities and nightlife available. Torremolinos is located 7km west of Málaga airport and was the first Costa del Sol resort to be developed back in the early sixties when it was little more than a sleepy village - still today the town reflects its heritage with several of the original fresh fish bars located right in the shopping centre, incongruously flanked by exclusive boutiques and gift shops. In general, however, the wave of tourists who descended on the town in the fifties and sixties changed the face of Torremolinos for ever. At the height of summer, the resort has a great appeal for the younger set, with a reputation for its hectic nightlife. Out of season, however, it takes on a different character. Now practically a suburb of Málaga, the atmosphere is much more Spanish, especially at weekends, with an air of friendliness and welcome. In November when I walked around, it was pleasant and full of middle to older aged people from northern Europe, enjoying the sunshine that has deserted their homelands. It's a cultural wilderness, but the people who spend their vacations here probably don't care, and if they do, 20 minutes in the train will get them to the Old Town in Malaga!

Marbella:

Marbella is known as a glamorous resort town and is a favourite location with the rich and famous, boosted by foreign residents who are seduced by the lifestyle. But there's also plenty for ordinary folk to see and enjoy in southern Spain's answer to St Tropez. Marbella is famous throughout the world for its glitzy image and glamorous night life. The most exclusive and classy venues are located in Puerto Banus and on the Golden Mile, which is also home to many super-rich celebrities and members of the Saudi royal family. Visitors who come to this stylish resort come to party, and there is no shortage of late night bars, clubs and restaurants to keep them entertained. It is one of the most important tourist cities of the Costa del Sol and

throughout most of the year is an international tourist attraction, due mainly to its climate and tourist infrastructure.

The old town of Marbella includes the ancient city walls and the two historical suburbs of the city, the Barrio Alto, which extends north, and the Barrio Nuevo, located to the east. The ancient walled city retains nearly the same layout as in the 16th century. Around the town square are arranged three remarkable buildings - the town hall built in 1568, the Mayor's house and the 15th century Chapel of Santiago, the oldest religious building in the city. Other buildings of interest are the Church of Santa María de la Encarnación, built in 1618, the Casa del Roque, and the remains of the Arabic castle and defensive walls.

Puerto Banús:

Puerto Banús is a marina located in the area of Nueva Andalucía, to the southwest of Marbella on the Costa del Sol. It was built in 1970 by José Banús, a local property developer as a luxury marina and shopping complex. It has since become one of the largest entertainment centres in the Costa del Sol, with 5 million annual visitors, and is popular with international celebrities. Developed around a coastal village in the Mediterranean architectural style, Puerto Banús contains expensive shopping malls, restaurants and bars around the marina. It is also scene to many exotic cars that are owned by international celebrities and wealthy owners, most of whom also own large yachts. Luxury cars like Rolls Royces and high end sports cars like Ferraris, Lamborghinis and Mercedes Benz are a common sight in the summer months around Marbella and Puerto Banus.

The lavish opening of the complex in May 1970 was attended by, amongst others, the Aga Khan, film director Roman Polanski, Playboy founder Hugh Hefner, Dr. Christiaan Barnard (pioneer of the heart transplant), and Prince Rainier and Princess Grace of Monaco. A young Julio Iglesias was hired to sing for the guests and 300 waiters from Seville served 22 kilos of beluga caviar to 1700 guests.