



The Osborne bull, formerly an advert for a sherry company, is now the unofficial national symbol of Spain. At 14m high, it perches on a number of hills lining Spain's main roads

Find out more about the Osborne bull at [www.osborne.es](http://www.osborne.es)

## PEOPLE LIKE US

### WHERE? CAMPING ALMAFRA

Partida de Cabut, 25, 03503 Benidorm, Alicante

Tel +34 965 889 075 Web [www.campingalmafra.es](http://www.campingalmafra.es)

See our site review in Tour Essentials, p38



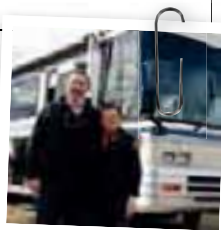
**We say...** "We've been open for three years," said head of reception Jorge Alvarez. "People come for the beach and the sun. We also offer discounts for Camping Cheque and ACSI members, and we're the only site in Benidorm with pitches capable of accommodating US RVs. Dogs are included in the price, too. In our first year there were no dogs, but we definitely get more people now that they're welcome."

### WHO? Jim & Frances Hamlin

'Van Winnebago Vectra 35

"We've been motorcaravanning for four years, and now we're retired, winter abroad is simply great value for money. We booked our crossing and sites with the C&CC, and came out on January 2. We'll return mid-March. The crossing and all site fees will cost us around £1200, which is good value for us. From here we'll head to the La Manga site at Cartagena – we really enjoyed it there last year.

"Our advice to anyone thinking of doing this: don't put it off, do it now! I can see some might think the journey daunting, but my advice is to do it early in retirement."



### David Clements

From near Ashford

'Van Auto-Trail Cheyenne 630SE

"We were caravanners for 25 years, but when we retired two years ago we converted to motorhomes. We came to Spain last year for a month, and this year we're rallying with the Club. We left home in November, and we've planned for a six-month trip. We're here for the winter sun but also to build a diary of wild-camping sites. We're also going on the guided tour of Morocco, which is the first time the Club has run the trip. The best site we've stayed on in Spain is this one: the facilities are just brilliant, and the location is great. The bike ride along the beachfront here is beautiful."



Edging through narrow streets in Mijas – not to be recommended!

**"We found ourselves on cobbled roads with tight turns that continued to narrow. We soon had a line of cars banked up behind us"**

away hours here exploring and marvelling at the spectacular scenery.

Both Ernest Hemingway and Orson Welles loved the place, famed for its bullfighting traditions and home to the Romero family who did so much to shape the art of bullfighting. There are plenty of portraits of Hemingway in bull rings talking with matadors in the old town. A famous scene from *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, which describes Nationalists being thrown to their deaths in the Spanish Civil War, was reportedly based on true events here. Welles had his ashes scattered in a Ronda bull ring after his death in 1985.

On to Mijas, back down nearer the coast, and some half a dozen miles from Fuengirola. Again, it's difficult to park a big rig here, and on our first attempt we took a wrong turn before entering the town centre; we forked off right towards Calle Malaga, somehow missing the red-ringed bus sign. We soon found ourselves on cobbled roads with tight turns that continued to narrow. Before long, we had half a dozen cars banked up behind us as we pulled in both wing mirrors to squeeze through gaps with inches to spare on either side of the 'van. People popped their heads out of doors and overhanging



The Costa del Sol is also known as the Costa del Golf for the number and quality of its courses, including Calanova (pictured)

For more information go to [www.andalucia.com/golf](http://www.andalucia.com/golf)



A white-washed church hidden away on a hillside near Mijas

windows to watch the stupid British tourists, albeit with a smile rather than annoyance on their faces. The road finally spat us out on the other side of town, so we rounded the area again and this time found a long roadside parking bay.

The town was in full festival mode, preparing for the Feast of the Epiphany, when the Three Kings arrived in Bethlehem. It's a bigger affair than Christmas in many towns, and is marked by huge processions along thronged streets, where the Kings parade on huge floats and throw sweets to the children lining the streets. We wandered around, petted the donkeys at the town square, walked up to admire Mijas' tiny bull ring, and thoroughly enjoyed this

picture-perfect example of the gorgeous white towns that dot the Andalusian countryside. You can see why Irish singer Val Doonican has visited the town every summer for the last 25 years and calls it 'his Mediterranean heaven on Earth'.

On the way back to the 'van, we saw a Hymer A-class take the same road as we took, and despite waving desperately they didn't see us. I hope it's not still stuck there.

#### WILD IN SPAIN

We'd noticed a few 'vans camped up on beaches along the Costa del Sol. There seem to be opposing views to the subject of wild camping in Spain. The official line is: they don't want it, so don't do it, and we heard that often from rally wardens and site owners.

However, there's evidence of it all over, and particularly so during the winter months, we're told. Near Mijas we pulled off the main Costa del Sol road to a parking area by a restaurant called El Fogon that doubled as a market square every Wednesday. Here, we saw a dozen or so motorhomes ☺

**“We thoroughly enjoyed Mijas, a picture-perfect example of the gorgeous white towns that dot the Andalusian countryside”**



The Autoquest coped manfully with a full compliment of three adults and an infant

## PEOPLE LIKE US

### WHERE? CAMPING PLAYA TROPICANA

La Tropicana Beach, Playa Tropicana s/n, 12579 Alcossebre, Castellón Tel +34 9644 1246

Web [www.playatropicana.com](http://www.playatropicana.com). Open All year

Cost (low season) €20 pitch + two adults, €4.50 hook-up (20 per cent discount for 21+ nights stay)



**We say...** The site of a C&CC rally from January until mid-April, with access to a heated function room and bar for the duration of the stay. Activities are hosted by the ever-friendly rally stewards Barbara and Nelson Lacey, who're on their sixth year rallying at Tropicana. There's a limited bus service from outside the site into Alcossebre (see our site review in *Tour Essentials*, p38).

### WHO? Barbara & Nelson Lacey

#### From Basingstoke

"We're here from December 20 to June 3, and have only just returned from stewarding at the Club's South Africa tour. We motorcaravanned for nine years, but have just changed to a tourer. We always have great fun on the rallies, and do it for the love of it."

"After the rally, we've gone on to El Raco in Benidorm for the last two years. It's a great site for those who like walking. Portugal's great for *aires* and informal camping - we've come across some informal sites where people have been camped for six weeks or more. However, they don't really like wild camping in Spain."



### Derek & Sheila Booth

#### From Dover

#### Van Rapido A-class

"This is our seventh year at this rally. We'll spend four months in Spain this time. In previous years we've visited several sites, but Tropicana is our favourite, and Nelson and Barbara are the best stewards we've met! The warmth of the sun here keeps bringing us back year after year - this year the weather's a bit odd, but normally we'd be sat outside in our shorts and T-shirts."

"Our advice to anyone over-wintering in Spain is to make sure you've left your home insurance up to date, your car is taxed, insured and has its MoT, and you've got medical and breakdown insurance to cover you abroad."





**Donkey taxis provide a fabulous splash of colour in Mijas Pueblo. For €7 you can trot through the narrow streets, or travel in a carriage for €14**

Visit Mijas Town Hall's website at [www.mijas-digital.es](http://www.mijas-digital.es)

of all nationalities parked up for the night.

"There's fresh water and chemical disposal points here, installed for the market traders. I've been full-timing here in Spain for three years now," said one British camper, a jobbing plasterer by trade.

"The Spanish seem to be very easy-going about wild camping – I parked every night on the beach just up the road near here, and I wasn't moved on for eight months. Providing you don't make a mess, it's not a problem."

#### **SPAIN'S EASTERN MED COAST**

From a pre-trip chat with one of the Club's site executives, I learned that British campers are in general favouring the Mediterranean coast rather than the southern Andalusian coast. Part of the trouble, it seems, is pressure on



**Enjoying the view from a terrace just off the town square in Mijas**

campsites facing buyouts from developers or big agricultural businesses.

Following a suggestion, we decided to wind our way home along the eastern Mediterranean coast, visiting a number of the Club's winter-sun sites and rallies en route. We enjoyed some fabulous

coastal scenery as we stopped at Castillo de Baños, Cabo de Gata, Almafra and Playa Tropicana, meeting some wonderful and enthusiastic motorcaravanners along the way. Check out our profiles for their stories and advice for anyone thinking of doing the same thing next year.

Sadly, in the blink of an eye, it was time to start wending our way back to Le Havre for our return ferry crossing.

Back home, the wintery weather began in mid-December, disrupting road and air transport in the run-up to Christmas, but it wasn't until we were sunning ourselves in southern Spain that the serious Arctic conditions really kicked in back in the UK. By veteran rallier accounts it wasn't a vintage season on the Costa del Sol or Alicante either, with rains the region hadn't seen in more than 40 years, but the promise of January golf in a T-shirt, or a glass of good Rioja sat in the sun outside your 'van on site, is a siren call to my ears, whether it's for a fortnight or four months. My family and I are now officially winter-sun converts. ©

**“Winding our way home, we enjoyed some fabulous coastal scenery as we stopped at Castillo de Baños, Cabo de Gata, Almafra and Playa Tropicana”**



**Dramatic views of the Mediterranean abound on the coastline between Marbella and Fuengirola**



## Rob's star Spanish sites...



### ① Camping Almafra

Partida de Cabut, 25,  
03503 Benidorm, Alicante  
**Tel** +34 965 889 075

**Web** [www.campingalmafra.es](http://www.campingalmafra.es)

**Open** All year

A huge site that offers facilities more usually found in hotels, including indoor and outdoor swimming pools, jacuzzi, gym and steam room, all included in the pitch fee. It's a C&CC rally site for 2010, with up to 50 Club members from December to the end of February. There are 400 pitches, with 10A hook-up, water, TV connections and drainage, and large pitches for US RVs.

**Cost** (low season) €5.35 per adult, pitch €20.44-€29.29, electric €4.30-€5.25 (6A-16A) + electric hook-up (65 per cent discount for stays of 180+ days)



### ② Camping Playa Tropicana

La Tropicana Beach, Playa Tropicana s/n,  
12579 Alcossebre, Castellón  
**Tel** +34 9644 1246

**Web** [www.playatropicana.com](http://www.playatropicana.com)

**Open** All year

This site has a palm tree-lined boulevard and scores of 'Romanesque' alabaster statues. It's run by Vera Sepassipour whose husband Richard, a former acrobat now in his 80s (*both pictured, above*), is famous for standing on a bottle on one finger atop the Empire State Building! Tropicana has around 300 pitches, all with 6A electric.

There are three toilet blocks, a swimming pool, supermarket and restaurant. No dogs.  
**Cost** (low season) €20 pitch + 2 adults, €4.50 hook-up (20 per cent discount for 21+ nights stay)



### ③ Camping Castillo de Baños

CN 340 - Km 360, Castillo de Baños,  
La Mamola, E18750 Granada

**Tel** +34 958 82 95 28

**Web** [www.campingcastillo.com](http://www.campingcastillo.com)

**Open** All year

This is a small, simple site, which hosts around 100 C&CC members from January to March, and was undergoing development work during our visit. All pitches are grass or compact earth, with 5A hook-up, and there's a single, large toilet and washblock. There's also a shop and restaurant, and buses stop outside. A massive 70 per cent discount applies to those staying for more than 30 days in low season.

**Cost** €5.80 per adult, €11.90 per pitch, €4 electric hook-up

## ↑ Way to go

If driving long distances isn't for you, catch the Portsmouth-Bilbao ferry, or Plymouth-Santander, both of which take between 24-36 hours. We took the Portsmouth-Le Havre route with Brittany Ferries, and used autoroutes via Rennes, Nantes, Bordeaux, then autopistas via Irún, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Madrid, Granada and Malaga.

Our pick of the *aires* en route has to be Cavignac (*pictured*), near Bordeaux. It's in a large car park just off the high street; there's no fee for fresh water, and there's a public urinal and chemical-disposal point.

Carefree, the C&CC's international travel service, arranged our ferry crossing and insurance, which included roadside assistance in association with Europ Assistance. We also made great use of Carefree's Winter Sun Camping 2009/10 guide on all aspects of Winter Sun sites and travel, at a cost of £10. Tel 0845 130 7701.



## 🍴 Food and drink

Andalucia is the birthplace of tapas, and Andalusians eat late; later even than locals in other parts of Spain. We're told it's not unusual to have lunch at 4pm and dinner at midnight. Take a stroll along a beachfront in any of the Costa del Sol's major tourist towns and you'll come across freshly caught sardines cooking over an open fire.

## 📖 Find out more

- **Camping card ACSI:** enjoy site discounts at almost 2000 sites in 19 countries (card and site book costs around £12 from the C&CC, tel 0131 208 3333, or retailers including Vicarious Books; [www.vicariousbooks.co.uk](http://www.vicariousbooks.co.uk); tel 0131 208 3333)

- **Carefree** is the Camping and Caravanning Club's international travel service. We found the Carefree's Winter Sun Camping 2009/10 guide very helpful, at a cost of £10. Tel 0845 130 7701

- **Formula Camper Andalusia**, a special 'overnight' offer for motorcaravanners at selected sites, allows use of electrics, drainage and fresh water (but not toilet blocks), between the hours of 18.00 and 10.00 in winter (20.00 and 10.00 in summer). Fee is €13. Visit [www.formulacamperandalucia.com](http://www.formulacamperandalucia.com)

- **All the Aires:** English-language guide books to France (£14.99) and Spain and Portugal (£11.99) are available from Vicarious Books

## 🚐 The motorhome

### Elddis Autoquest 180

For our full motorhome review, go to page 106



## 📅 Dates for your diary

- **The Feast of the Epiphany (Jan 6)** celebrates the arrival of the Three Kings in Bethlehem. It falls 12 days after Christmas, and is treated as the larger festival in Spain.
- **The Fallas Festival (March 15-19)** Valencia's annual festival is a celebration of Saint Joseph, and is famed for its intricately carved giant wooden monuments (*falla*).

## £ The costs

Ferry cost .....	£380
Fuel cost .....	£549.50
(Distance 3250m, economy 24.2mpg)	
Toll fees .....	£189
Site fees .....	£189.40
Food .....	£210
<b>TOTAL TOUR COST .....</b>	<b>£1517.90</b>