

Costa del Golf



Golf gathers momentum on the Costa del Sol

The sport is undergoing a revolution as clubs are being renovated, tourists are flooding in, and multimillion-euro projects are under way [P2]



EUROPEAN TOUR

“Valderrama is a very special course”

Sergio García, winner in Augusta this year, is ready to host the Andalucía Masters [P4]



LPGA

Guadalmina prepares for the Open de España

Holder Azahara Muñoz and Carlota Ciganda have confirmed their place for the event [P7]

Huelva is now a golfing hotspot

In July, the province registered a 17% increase in foreign visitors as well as the longest average stay by tourists [P6]

Golf regains its importance on the Costa del Sol with new investment

Recovery from the economic crisis and increased tourism figures have led many golf clubs to embark on major improvement and construction projects

ALBERTO
GÓMEZ

The Spanish subsidiary of the British developer Taylor Wimpey Plc and the Irish hotel chain FBD Hotels and Resorts have signed a strategic alliance to build more than 600 homes in Mijas in the next ten years, with an expected investment of over 125 million euros. As a result, La Cala Resort will be consolidated as a destination par excellence for golf and relaxation, with three 18-hole courses, an exclusive 107-room four-star hotel and a 1,300-square-metre spa. This investment reinforces the Costa del Sol as the European leader in golf infrastructure, and confirms that the sector is recovering.

In fact, at present the golf sector is experiencing one of the best periods of recent years. After nearly a decade affected by the economic crisis and the increase in IVA sales tax, the clubs in Malaga are now starting to carry out improvements and take on more staff. The excellent tourism figures and new professional and amateur tournaments have given a boost and confirmed the recovery of the sector, which on the Costa del Sol creates around 900 million euros a year in direct and indirect income.

Malaga province, which has more than 70 courses, is one of the principal golf destinations in Europe, and this sport is especially attractive for the economy because of the high spending power of its users.

The growth of the sector, which last year increased by about four per cent, according to figures from the Malaga provincial government, unblocked a situation which forced several clubs to close during the worst years of the crisis, from 2012 to 2014.

At that time, the delicate economic situation was made worse by the aforementioned rise in IVA, which came as a shock to the golf courses because the rate increased from eight to 21 per cent. Despite pressure from the Junta de Andalucía and the Royal Spanish Golf Federation, and also some leading politicians close to the government, such as Esperanza Aguirre and José Manuel Soria, the Ministry of Finance refused to consider golf as a tourist activity, which would have



Guadalmina will host the Open de España for the first time. :: SUR



Azahara Muñoz won at Aloha last year. :: SUR

The return of professional tournaments to Spain has encouraged many courses on the Costa del Sol to carry out improvements

entitled it to apply the lower rate of IVA. This meant that Spanish clubs were competing at a disadvantage against other destinations in which the tax rate was lower.

Most of the clubs decided to cover the increase themselves without putting their prices up, but this decision had serious effects on their profitability and the management

of their courses. A decline in the number of sponsors, the principal financial support for the amateur tournaments which are organised on the Costa del Sol each year, was another problem faced by the sector during the crisis. The increase in tourists from other parts of Spain and from abroad is a key factor to understanding the present situation for clubs in Malaga province, especially on the western coast: visitors attracted by this sport spend an average of 130 euros a day, which is much more than other tourists, and they stay for around 11 days.

Professional tournaments

The return of professional tournaments to Spain has encouraged numerous golf courses in Andalucía to carry out improvements in recent months. The European Circuit has decided to return to this destination



The recovery of the sector has now been confirmed. :: SUR

again, and the clubs want to make the most of the opportunity, aware of the publicity provided by this type of championship.

The Real Club de Golf Valderrama, which will be hosting the first Andalucía Masters since the crisis brought it to a halt in 2011 (see page 4), has invested around four million euros on remodelling its course. After five years with no international golfing events, the Junta de Andalucía is now committed to this sector and will spend nearly one million euros on organising the Masters, which will bring the best players in Europe to San Roque. It is calculated that this tournament in Cadiz province will have an indirect financial impact of about 50 million euros, and a direct impact of some 4.5 million.

It has been essential for institutions to work together to attract tournaments such as the women's Open de España, which took place at the Aloha Club last year and was won by Malaga golfer Azahara Muñoz. This year (see page 7) it will be held at Guadalmina, following the agreement between the Junta de Andalucía, the Malaga provincial government and the Mancomunidad de Municipios

of the western Costa del Sol.

Among the main objectives is the Ryder Cup, the most important golfing competition of all and one of the events which is most followed all around the world. This took place at Valderrama in 1997 and so far that is the only time it has ever been held in Spain. At the moment, the amount of investment which is needed to organise the Ryder Cup and the lack of private support means that it is not possible, although the administrations are working on it for the future.

At a regional level, Andalucía has made agreements, among others, with the International Golf Tour Operators Association to organise joint activities to promote the area to international markets.

Golf tourists have an important multiplying effect on the Andalusian economy, because income from food, drink and shopping covers around 70 per cent of the budget. For years, the region has been consolidated as the benchmark golf destination in Europe, although the courses in Andalucía still have the capacity to grow further and attract up to 700,000 more tourists a year, bearing in mind their facilities.



Andalucía Costa del Sol
Open de España



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Sergio García will be the one to look out for at the Andalucía Masters; he will tackle the Valderrama course in October. :: SUR

"It's a great pleasure to host the Andalucía Masters"

Sergio García. Professional golfer. Winner of the US Masters and world number eight, hosts the Andalucía Masters in October with his foundation

The Royal Valderrama Golf Club is preparing to host the third edition of the Andalucía Masters from 19 to 22 October. The tournament marks the end of the European tour before players leave the continent and head to China, South Africa and Dubai to round off the 2017 professional tours. This year, the event will be hosted in partnership with the Sergio García Foundation and the regional government, and will welcome the Spaniard and US Masters winner himself, to the fairways.

The 37-year-old player from Castellón declared his love for the Valderrama course: "It's a very special place to play golf and it's among my favourite clubs to play at. It is one of the best courses in the world and I always feel comfortable playing there. I have some great memories from there, especially the win I had in 2011."

ALBERTO GÓMEZ

García is pleased to be returning to Valderrama, this time as a player and patron for the tournament, having rounded off an already successful year with wins at Augusta in The Masters and at the Omega Dubai Desert Classic. "I was very pleased when I found out that the Andalucía Masters was returning: it is a great pleasure to be hosting the event alongside my foundation. I am sure that it will be a great tournament and, as an ambassador of the event, I encourage all those that come to enjoy the weekend. It will be great to see all the Spanish golfers, playing together in such a special place."

García also had words of praise for the organisers of the event and the maintenance of the course: "The fairways are always in excellent condition and the greens are always quick and well-kept. Last year, when we played in the Spanish Open, we noticed the difference. The high level of maintenance made for a great round of golf free from obstacles."

Speaking further about Valderrama, García said: "Every hole is excellent, each with its own appeal. It's a demanding course that does not leave room for error. It makes you think, and puts your concentration to the test from the first tee-off to the final putt. It demands patience, you know you will make mistakes, you just have to minimise their impact. All of us play there with a lot of respect for the course."

Despite his comments, García often stands up to the challenge of Valderrama, as his excellent results

show. Among other notable performances, he came seventh in the American Express World Golf Championship in 1999, and fifth the following year. In the opening year of the Andalucía Masters he finished eleventh and then went on to win in 2011. More recently, García finished third in the Spanish Open in 2016. "Last year at the Spanish Open, I had the opportunity to return to winning ways. Even though I didn't win, I was pleased with how I played and I persevered right until the end. I gave it my all," said García.

The Sergio García Foundation managed to raise 65,480 euros for the Spanish Cancer association (AECC) during the Spanish Open. "Seeing the foundation's emblem around the course made me feel very proud. A lot of people came, many of whom went to our stand. I want to thank everyone who donated; the money that we raised will be used to support

WHAT HE SAID

"Valderrama is a special place and one of my favourite courses. I always feel very comfortable there"

"Last year at the Spanish Open, I had a chance to return to winning ways, I didn't, but I gave it my all"

"Seeing my foundation's emblem around the course made me very proud"

"If my victory in Augusta doesn't promote golf in Spain, I don't know what will"

the families of those that are affected by cancer."

Sergio García established the foundation in 2002 with the support of his family. It was created with one clear goal in mind: to support social integration of young people who are economically disadvantaged. They aim to achieve this through benefit schemes and by promoting sport as a free-time activity. Since its inception, the foundation has collaborated with multiple organisations and charities which support those with special needs.

In 2003, the foundation created the Golf Adaptado en España initiative in collaboration with the Royal Spanish Golf Federation and other autonomous golf organisations. The project aims to make the sport more available to those with physical or mental disabilities, and at the same time, helping them to integrate within society, through playing the game.

A tourist attraction

Speaking on whether his victory in Augusta this year would promote the development of golf in Spain, García said: "If that doesn't help, I don't know what will. We know that, above all, golf in Spain is a tourist attraction. We need to keep fighting to promote the sport because other countries are getting better and better. I hope that the government and the Golf Federation both get involved too."

The Andalucía Masters will be the only European tour date to be played on Spanish fairways this year, due to the cancellation of the Spanish Open this year. "It's unfortunate that it will not be played this year. We will continue to support golf through the Andalucía Masters, but it is an issue that falls under the remit of the Golf Federation, who are the owners of the Spanish Open."



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Huelva has become a tourist destination all year round

In July the province registered the longest average stay by tourists and there was a 17 per cent increase in foreign visitors

ALEJANDRO
DÍAZ

Last year, 2016, it was 100 years since the miners in Riotinto, in Huelva province, set up the basis for what would become Andalucía's first golf course. At that time, the Huelva Golf Club was created on land ceded by the English-run Minas de Riotinto company. It was situated close to the Royal Pigeon Shooting Club, in the Paseo de los Pinzones. However, the sports complex and new golf facility with the name Club de Golf Bellavista officially opened on 25 October 1976, and is the oldest course in Andalucía.

Today, the city of Huelva and the province bear little resemblance to the way they were in those days. The productive and economic sector has been modernised, along with the infrastructure, and its natural landscapes have been so well preserved that every year this area attracts thousands of tourists who are keen to play golf surrounded by nature.

Quality tourism brings positive results: proof of this is that in July this year Huelva province registered the longest average stay by tourists in the whole of Andalucía, according to information from the National Institute of Statistics which was published in August. The visitors who came to Huelva stayed for an average of 4.6 days, nearly one day longer than the rest of the region. Foreign tourism grew by about 17 per cent compared to last year, and seven new hotels have opened.

Although summer is high season for most of Huelva province, the climate is inviting at all times of year. That is why, every year, the authorities work together with private companies to promote the attractions of a destination in which golf can be combined with gastronomy, nature, beaches and history.

They are working on promoting Huelva as a destination in eastern European countries, through agreements with tour operators such as Itaka (Poland) and Travel Group Fischer (Czech Republic), and this is consolidating the province as a holiday destination in these emerging markets. Thanks to these agreements, 4,000 visitors have booked holidays from these two countries



In the far west of Andalucía, El Rompido golf course forms part of the Río Piedras marshes. :: SUR

The Riotinto miners created what would eventually become the first official golf course in Andalucía, 100 years ago

Isla Canela, in Ayamonte, has beautiful beaches which are perfect for practising or learning a variety of water sports

this year.

Focusing specifically on golf, the Huelva brand also had a presence recently at the St Andrews golf tournament in Scotland, which is considered the birthplace of this sport and boasts some of the oldest courses in the world.

In Huelva province there are around a dozen golf courses, such as the Isla Canela golf club in the municipality of Ayamonte, at the extreme west of the Costa de la Luz, very close to the Guadiana river and the Portuguese Algarve. Its 18-hole course has several natural obstacles and is situated right beside the beach.

Unique beaches

Ayamonte has some beautiful beaches, and they attract thousands of visitors every year. In fact, Isla Canela is one of the best known. It is

the most westerly beach in Huelva province and Andalucía, because it is situated beside the Guadiana river estuary, facing neighbouring Portugal. Isla Canela can easily be reached from Ayamonte, entering the town from the A-49 or N-431 and, after passing through the centre, heading for the H-9021. A long line of palm trees leads down to the beach, which is on the right-hand side of the course.

The Isla Canela beach is 5,500 metres long, and is actually three adjoining beaches. To the east is the Playa de los Jaraganes, the central stretch is Isla Canela itself, and in the direction of the Guadiana river, the San Bruno beach lies next to extensive marshes and dunes.

The fine, cinnamon-coloured sand (which gives the beach its name), the tranquil waters for swimming and many excellent hotels and restaurants, make it obvious why this part of the Huelva coastline is so popular. Every summer it is visited by thousands of people. However, for the rest of the year, thanks to the lovely climate, there are also many hours of sunshine to be enjoyed.

This area has also become well-known for water sports such as kite-surfing, windsurfing and paddle surfing, and there are several schools on the quiet San Bruno beach for visitors who are tempted to learn.

The proximity of Isla Canela to Portugal is another of the advantages of this beach, which doesn't only receive tourists from Spain. It is quite common to meet people from the Algarve, who cross the river to spend some time here.

Also, although this is the favourite spot for local people as well as the hundreds of visitors from other parts of Spain, an increasing number of international visitors are coming here now, especially British, Dutch and Germans who have homes in the municipality or in the nearby area.

There is a wide range of services and numerous bars, restaurants and ice-cream parlours along the seafront, as well as several 'chiringuito' beach bar-restaurants, hotels and shops.

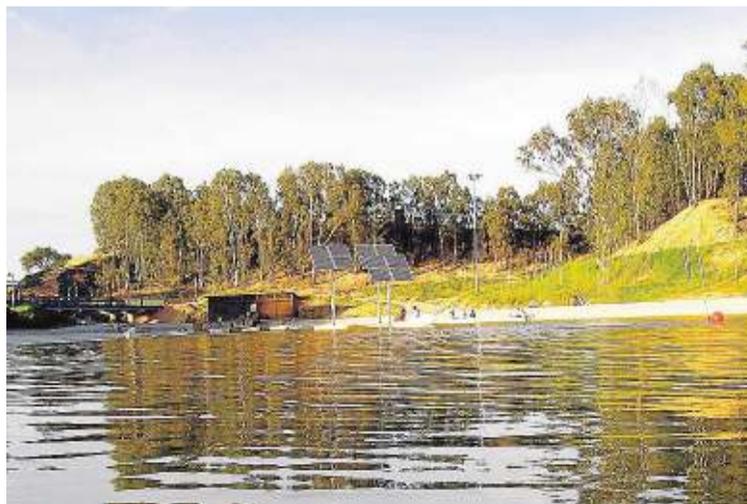
Variety of courses

The Club Bellavista and Isla Canela are just two examples; Huelva province has numerous other courses, including the Corta Atalaya, near the Sierra de Huelva, with lovely mountain views, and the Corta Minera de las Minas de Riotinto. There is also El Rompido Golf Club, next to the Río Piedra marshes, with fantastic views of the Atlantic Ocean.

This is definitely the perfect destination for anybody who wants to enjoy playing golf in an area which offers all the facilities they need. It is now consolidated as a hotspot for golfers, especially as its courses can be enjoyed at any time of the year.



Salt extracted from the Odiel marshes. :: SUR



Parque Moret, in the town of Ayamonte. :: SUR

Guadalmina prepares to welcome its first women's Open de España

Holder Azahara Muñoz and Carlota Ciganda, the best-placed Spaniard, have confirmed their places for the tournament

ALBERTO GÓMEZ

Real Club de Golf Guadalmina, in San Pedro de Alcántara, designated host of the women's Andalucía Costa del Sol Open de España this year, has gone back to its roots. With the aim of improving the spectacle for the competition, which is part of the European Tour, the essence of the plans of legendary designer Javier Arana has been recovered.

A number of modifications have been made in anticipation of the tournament which takes place from 21 to 24 September. For example, the usual 18th hole will be the first, leaving hole 17, par five, as the last to increase the chances of a grandstand finish.

On the other side, in the area closest to the sea, the order will revert to the one initially designed by Javier Arana with what is usually the 10th hole, the par three which runs parallel to the sea and

without the most emblematic of the course, will now be the 11th.

The course is also in much better shape generally after investment on the part of members to remodel the bunkers, an improvement from which they are able to benefit "even before the professionals", says Ignacio de Cuvillo, managing director of RCG Guadalmina.

The Open de España is the fourteenth date on the Ladies European Tour calendar and will unite big names from across the sport. The biggest Spanish players have already confirmed their participation; Carlota Ciganda, one of the best European golfers at the moment, as demonstrated by her Solheim Cup performance, will be in attendance while San Pedro-born Azahara Muñoz, will be looking to defend her title.

It will be the fourth time that the Costa del Sol welcomes the



Azahara Muñoz, last year at Aloha, where she picked up the title she will be hoping to defend this year at Guadalmina. **:: SUR**

tournament, after Los Flamingos in 2010, La Quinta in 2011 and Aloha Golf in 2016. On the first occasion, the legendary Laura Davies took the honours, while it was her compatriot Melissa Reid who triumphed in 2011. Last year it was the turn of local star Azahara Muñoz to shine as she came out on top in a spectacular duel with American Beth Allen to become the first Spaniard to win the competition.

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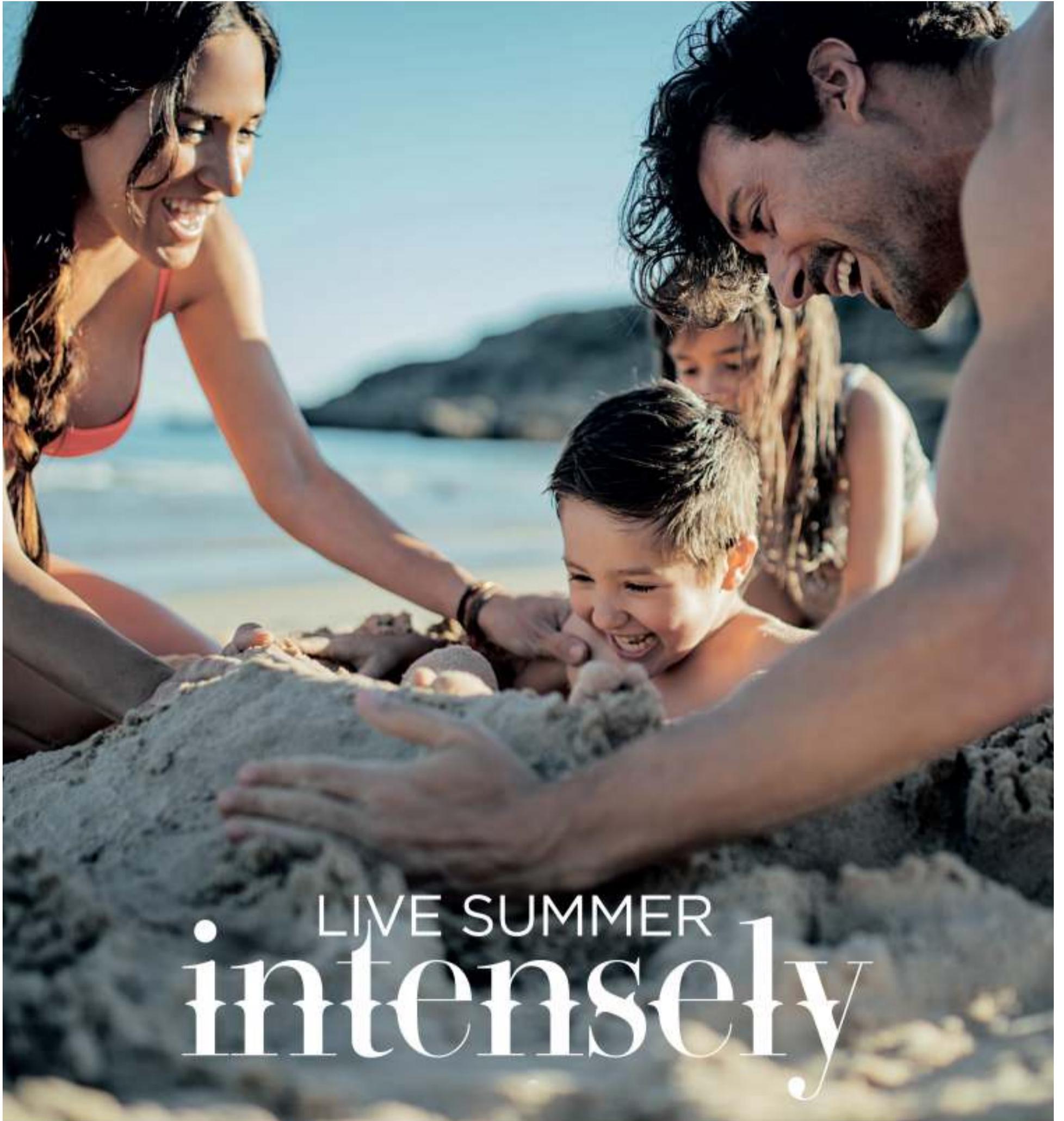
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