

Costa del Golf



A victory splash

Azahara Muñoz overcomes a difficult year, riddled with injuries and technical issues, to take the crown in the Open de España for the second year running [P4&5]



TOURISM

Andalucía breaks its golf tourist record

The region received more than half a million visitors who came to play golf last year [P2]



EUROPEAN TOUR

Golfing's best prepare to meet up at Valderrama

Sergio García and Jon Rahm have confirmed they will be taking part in the Andalucía Masters [P3]

Jaén aims to promote sustainable tourism

The province, famous for its natural beauty and biodiversity, aims to make golf tourism more sustainable [P6]

Golf has brought over half a million visitors to Andalucía for the first time

The Costa del Sol boasts 67% of the golf courses in the region and the sector expects at least 5% more visitors this year, which would be a new record

ALBERTO
GÓMEZ

Last year 530,000 tourists came to Andalucía to play golf, and this figure was 10.4 per cent higher than the previous year. This was the largest number of visitors of this type ever, and the first time that over half a million people stayed in Andalucía specifically because of its golfing facilities.

These figures were announced this week by the regional government's minister for Tourism and Sport, Francisco Javier Fernández, at the official presentation of the Andalucía Valderrama Masters, in San Roque (Cadiz province). This competition is part of the European Circuit, and it will be held at Valderrama from 19 to 22 October. Many top players will be competing, including Sergio García, and on this occasion there will be an added attraction because Jon Rahm, ranked fifth in the world, will be making his professional debut here.

Fernández explained that the results of the golf segment in Andalucía are very positive, as there has been an accumulated growth of 25 per cent over the past five years. He also pointed out the many attractions of this region: for example, it has the highest concentration of golf courses in the whole of continental Europe and 20 per cent of the total in Spain: of its 102 courses, approximately half are in Malaga province and just over 20 per cent in Cadiz.

Forty per cent of golf tourists who came to this region in 2016 were from the UK, followed by Spanish (15 per cent) and German (12 per cent). The minister also explained the importance of this type of visitor for year-round tourism, because they mainly come out of season and spend a large part of their budget on eating out and other activities.

In fact, in 2016 these visitors spent about 117.5 euros each per day, almost double the amount spent by tourists in general, which is about 65 euros; they also stayed for an average of 10.8 days, two days longer than other types of tourists. They gave the destination a score of 9.2 out of 10, which is the highest registered so far.

Francisco Javier Fernández said that that golf "is experiencing one of its best times ever" in the region, not only because of those figures but also because it has become a leader in terms of events, for exam-



A moment during a game at Hotel Villa Padierna, between Marbella and Estepona. :: SUR

ple, the forthcoming Valderrama Masters, and also the Spanish Women's Open which was held in Marbella last month, and in which Azahara Muñoz succeeded in holding on to her title.

The minister stressed that the Junta de Andalucía is committed to supporting the golf sector because of its importance to tourism and sport, and announced that in the near future his department is planning to put together an enhanced sales team to contact travel agents and tour op-

erators in different countries and provide them with information about the facilities in the region.

The Andalucía Valderrama Masters, which is supported by Spanish golfer Sergio García and his foundation, could reach a potential audience of over 400 million homes on five continents thanks to the European Tour being televised. There will be 15 hours of live broadcasts in such important markets as the UK, France and the USA, among others.

Support for tournaments

Finally, Fernández explained that the support for this competition on the European circuit forms part of his department's promotional strategy. Organising major events which have wide coverage abroad is a very good way to showcase the golf courses in Andalucía, he said, and they provide a positive return in terms of income and job creation.

The golfing infrastructure and the level of service are the two most highly valued concepts among tour-

The fame of the Costa del Sol as a destination and the climate are among the reasons that golfers choose to come to Andalucía

ists who come to Andalucía. According to the results of the regional government's surveys, on a scale of one to ten the visitors gave 8.6 points to the golf courses, slightly higher than the 8.5 points scored by the region's cultural attractions.

This type of visitor is interesting for any tourist destination because of the length of time they stay and the amount they spend, but according to the surveys 69 per cent of these tourists say they chose Andalucía specifically in order to play golf.

Despite the positive figures, experts have detected some weaknesses in the sector in Andalucía, such as the increase in IVA (VAT). This went up from eight to 21 per cent at the end of 2012, because golf courses began to be treated as sports facilities instead of tourist facilities. In addition to this problem, which the Junta and some members of the Spanish government warned about at the time, professionals we consulted were also critical of the prices charged by some courses or complementary services.

In terms of strengths, the experts include the fact that the destination is famous (the Costa del Sol is an internationally renowned brand), in addition to the climate, the extensive number of golf courses and complementary facilities, and the proximity of the main source markets, thanks to good communications.

The Andalusian strategy changed direction once the economic crisis began. The Junta stopped hosting professional tournaments on the European Tour, because it would have been too expensive in times of recession, and started to maintain a presence in golf fairs and other events in the sector instead. It promoted the region on amateur circuits, small competitions where the message can be put across directly. Andalucía has forged alliances with, in addition to others in the segment, the International Association of Golf Tour Operators, with the aim of carrying out joint promotional activities in international markets.



Francisco Javier Fernández, centre, with some of the organisers of the tournament. :: SUR

Valderrama prepares to welcome some of the world's top golfers

Jon Rahm and Sergio García are among the players who will be at the Andalucía Valderrama Masters, which is part of the European Tour

Only a few days to go, and everything is almost ready. The Real Club Valderrama is putting the finishing touches to the preparations for the 13th edition of the Andalucía Valderrama Masters - Fundación Sergio García, which takes place from 19 to 22 October. Several world-famous golfing stars will be taking part in this tournament, which is sponsored by the Junta de Andalucía's ministry for Tourism and Sport, including the top Spanish names of the moment, Jon Rahm and Sergio García, who are both currently in the top ten of the world ranking.

There is great excitement among golf fans at this chance to see them play, and a record 40,000 spectators are expected to attend the event, which will also be broadcast on TV to 400 million homes. A total of 126 players will be taking part.

"Sergio and Jon Rahm are the most important up-and-coming golfers in the world at the moment, and having them here is the best way to start the Andalucía Valderrama Masters," said the CEO of the club, Javier Reviriego, at the official presentation of the event last month.

There is no doubt at all that Rahm will be one of the stars of this tour-

nament. "The first time I played on this course was five years ago, when I came with the Spanish team to the Sotogrande Cup. It didn't feel the same then. At that time I was a different player to the one I am now," says this 22-year-old from Vizcaya who, during his first season as a professional, has already chalked up a win on the PGA Tour, the Farmers Insurance Open in San Diego, and, on the European Tour, the Dubai Duty Free Open in Ireland.

With regard to Sergio García, little can be said that hasn't been written already. He plays a leading role in the foundation which bears his name and he loves Valderrama. He is delighted to be coming back as host in a season during which he has won his first Grande, the Masters in Augusta, and his victory in the Omega Dubai Desert Classic.

"I was delighted when they told me this tournament was being held at Valderrama again and they wanted my foundation to take part. I'm sure it is going to be a great event and I would encourage all fans to come and enjoy it, because it is going to be fantastic to see all the Spanish players in such a special setting," he told the press.

Other important names in Span-

ish golf will also be there, such as Álvaro Quirós, who said he really wanted to win this tournament. "Valderrama isn't a course for hitters, like me, because it makes you think about the second stroke you'll need in order to put the ball in the right place. I really enjoy training here, although that doesn't mean I don't suffer - on the contrary, it pushes me to the limit and makes me work really hard to maintain concentration and be patient. Valderrama is something to be proud of, it is a fantastic course," he enthused.

20 YEARS SINCE A MAGICAL RYDER CUP

On 28 September Valderrama celebrated the 20th anniversary of the time when the European team, captained by Seve Ballesteros, beat the Americans and won the Ryder Cup at this course. It was the first time the most important competition in golf had taken place outside the USA and

Showcase to the world

The regional government's minister for Tourism and Sport, Francisco Javier Fernández, was also at the presentation, and he stressed the importance of golf tourism for Andalucía.

"When I talk about sponsorship in golf, I like to give figures: in 2016, 530,000 golf tourists came to Andalucía. They spent an average of 10.2 days in the region and spent 117 euros each per day, compared with the 67 euros spent by tourists in general. When asked in a survey about their level of satisfaction,

Britain. For a week, the course in San Roque was in the headlines all over the world, as the host of the third biggest sports event after only the Olympic Games and football World Cup. Despite a strong European start, the Americans almost caught them on the final day. But in the end Europe secured a memorable win. "Seve showed us all the passion he put into everything he did, and he was a great captain. We have many very good memories of him," said José María Olazábal.

they gave their experience a score of 9.2 out of 10," he said. "I also want to stress the value of golf as a sport in natural surroundings: the way it can help disabled people's psychomotricity, for example. These things explain why we are interested in golf and why we consider it to be a good investment."

The strong level of competition which is expected at the Andalucía Valderrama Masters was emphasised by the tournament director of the European Tour, José María Zamora: "This tournament is very attractive; we are at the end of the season and there is a lot to play for. We have also decided to move the commercial area and the tented village to the right of hole 7, and I think people will appreciate that," he said. He also announced that the players at Valderrama will include 60 tournament winners and winners of 'Grandes' such as José María Olazábal.

The president of the Royal Spanish Golf Federation, Gonzalo Escarriaza, stressed that Spanish players have been enjoying a very good season. "This is an incredible year for Spanish golf, Valderrama is synonymous with success and I have no doubt that this tournament will be successful," he said.

Tickets can be purchased from the website (www.andaluciavalderramamasters.com). They cost 15 euros for the Wednesday, 20 euros for Thursday and Friday and 30 euros on Saturday and Sunday. A season ticket for 65 euros, and a VIP package, are also available.

Azahara Muñoz returns to make history at the Open de España

The San Pedro-born golfer was victorious for the second consecutive year in Guadalmina, the club where her career began

ALBERTO GÓMEZ

It seemed impossible, but she returned, and she did it again. Last month, Azahara Muñoz was named winner of the Open de España for the second consecutive year. After her 69-stroke round on the final day, Muñoz finished the tournament with a total of 269 strokes, an excellent 19 below par. The 29-year-old went into the final day of the tournament neck-and-neck with fellow Spaniard Carlota Ciganda. But a fantastic five birdie performance was enough to put Muñoz in front and enabled her to walk away with the sixth major of her career.

After two difficult seasons which were littered with injuries, technical modifications and even a change of trainer, Muñoz looked as though she was back to her best form, a form that has previously put her in the top 15 of the worlds rankings in previous years.

Significantly, the victory came on



Muñoz, fully focused during the final day of the Open de España.

JOSELE-LANZA

"It hasn't been an easy season"

The Spaniard overcame an array of technical issues and injuries to regain her confidence

ALBERTO GÓMEZ

MARBELLA. Just before the Open de España drew to an end, hundreds of fans flocked around the 18th hole to watch Muñoz's final play - the stroke that would secure her victory. She parred the hole, then slightly raised her right hand to acknowledge the cheers from the crowd. Through her composure, she managed a smile, but she maintained the same level of concentration that she had throughout the entire day. Muñoz then hugged her competitor, and childhood friend Ciganda. She had won for the second consecutive year. After the awards ceremony, Azahara threw herself into the Guadalmina clubs' swimming pool. It was her club and she had every right to finally let out the emotion that she had so professionally kept under wraps all weekend. Few golfers have the chance to win a major title, let alone on home soil. But for Muñoz, who has now lifted the trophy on two consecutive occasions, it is becoming something of a habit.

The Open de España trophy was not the only thing that Muñoz took from her return to the Costa del Sol,

though. During her acceptance speech, the 29-year-old gave special thanks to her trainer, Marcelo Prieto, to whom she dedicated the victory. Prieto and Muñoz brought their professional relationship to an end at

the start of the year, but they began training together again several months ago in an attempt to introduce technical changes to her game. Their reintroduction could not have come in a better way, though, and

home soil, at the Marbella-based course Guadalmina, where Muñoz grew as a golf player and discovered her talent before moving first to Barcelona at the age of fourteen, then later on to the USA.

Muñoz maintained the lead during almost all of the final day. It was only when she bogeyed hole three that she allowed Ciganda to creep ahead, but the Navarra-born competitor's temporary lead was short-lived. She went on to double bogey hole four, giving Muñoz an opportunity to regain the lead, and she did just that. Muñoz, who was a favourite among the home crowd, shot three incredible birdies in a row, leaving Ciganda's title hopes virtually dead and buried.

Like Ciganda, the reaction of the South African Lee-Anne Pace, who scored the second lowest in the day, was unable to trouble Muñoz's lead. Hole after hole, the 29-year-old maintained an advantage which extinguished any of her rivals' efforts and kept her safely at the top of the leaderboard. Not even the British talent Georgia Hall, who was one of the favourites to leave the competition victorious, managed to threaten

Muñoz knew this, "It has been a pleasure to have him here this weekend."

The Spaniard reflected on some of the problems that she has faced over recent months: "It's been a hard year, I haven't been in good physical form, however over the last few months in the build-up to the Open I have been feeling better. Returning to winning ways, in front of everyone at the club and my family, is something that I can't describe. Seeing my parents so happy is amazing, it still gives me more thrill winning for them. Everyone at the club has seen me grow as a professional, so winning here is something truly special."

Muñoz said that after creating a three shot advantage on second-placed Ciganda, she tried to "play well and avoid getting into problems". The Spaniard was aware of the perseverance of her challengers, "I knew that Lee-Anne Pace was going to give a lot of fight, but I also knew that it was mine to lose. I only saw myself as the winner after I saw my final drive land on the fairway. I did get a bit worried about rounding it off, but I knew that five strokes

Muñoz's title. The victory reinforces her stance in the golfing world. Having recently been left out of the Solheim cup team, in which she has played on three previous occasions, the victory at Guadalmina sends out a serious message to others, and puts out on the table what she is capable of, proving that she can still compete at the pinnacle of the sport. Muñoz, alongside other golfing greats like Sergio García and Jon Rahm, still forms part of one of Spain's greatest ever generations of golfers.

Doing all of this just a stone's throw from her child home, under the watching eyes of her family and friends and at such a special course where many great players have played, has to have added to Muñoz's sense of victory. She may have played with the advantage of knowing the course, but this did not make winning an easy task, nor would it remove pressure and expectations, it was a deserving performance that won in the end.

Thanks to the victory, Muñoz moves up ten places in the European

LEADERBOARD OPEN DE ESPAÑA

| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| 1. Azahara Muñoz | -19 |
| 2. Lee-Anne Pace | -17 |
| +. Carlota Ciganda | -17 |
| 4. Georgia Hall | -16 |
| 5. Natalia Escuriola | -13 |

would have been enough."

What is clear is that Muñoz managed her "best week of golf in the whole year", and now, she hopes to carry on this form for the remainder of the season.

Her life in Florida

Muñoz is a player built in the USA. There, universities offer better golfing facilities than they do in Europe. Universities in the USA organise alternative dates for exams that coincide with tournaments, they have more complex courses and they regularly organise events for local clubs, all of which are factors that Muñoz had to take into consideration when choosing between moving to USA or continuing her career in Spain. As well as her Open title, the 29-year-old has accumulated six others in her successful career, among them is the highly sought after Sybase Match Championship, which awards the winner in the region of 400,000 dollars.

As well the trophy, Muñoz leaves Spain reunited with her trainer Prieto, with whom she has had six previous years of success.

The trophy was not the only thing that Muñoz left with; she has returned with her life-long trainer after an informal meet up.

"It's been a difficult year, I have not been in good physical form", said the Marbella-born golfer who returned to her best at Guadalmina last month

rankings and now sits in 7th place. Surprisingly, Muñoz is the only Spanish player to have won the Open de España. She is also the first golfer ever to have won the tournament on consecutive years, it has been won on two separate occasions though, with legends Laura Davies (1986 and 2010) and Marie Laure de Lorenzi (1988 and 1994) both managing this achievement. All this aside, the win at a special course like Guadalmina shows Muñoz's capabilities and will certainly be one of the most important memories of her career.

Carlota Ciganda and Lee-Anne Pace shared second place after both grabbed an eagle on the final hole, and Georgia Hall had to settle for third.

Golf shakes off stereotypes

Malaga continues to host women's tournaments which aim to breakdown stereotypes and reduce the gender wage gap

ALBERTO GÓMEZ

MALAGA. Although prize money in golf is still far from being gender equal, the sport is taking giant steps towards improving the promotion, grandeur and media coverage of women's tournaments. Spain, and particularly Andalucía, is playing a small, but important part in this process of eliminating gender inequalities in the sport. With the Open de España, the Costa del Sol has become an important part of the women's European tour, forming an alliance with the sport that looks to last. A local golfer, Azahara Muñoz, winning the event helps not only to prove Spain's significance in the sport, but also to inspire women from all over the country to get involved in golf.

Jon Rahm and Sergio García have also begun campaigning to break down stereotypes and clichés surrounding the sport and aim to promote golf in Spain which they believe is being overshadowed by ten-



Natalia Escuriola (left) and Spain number one ranked player Carlota Ciganda. :: FELIPE PÉREZ

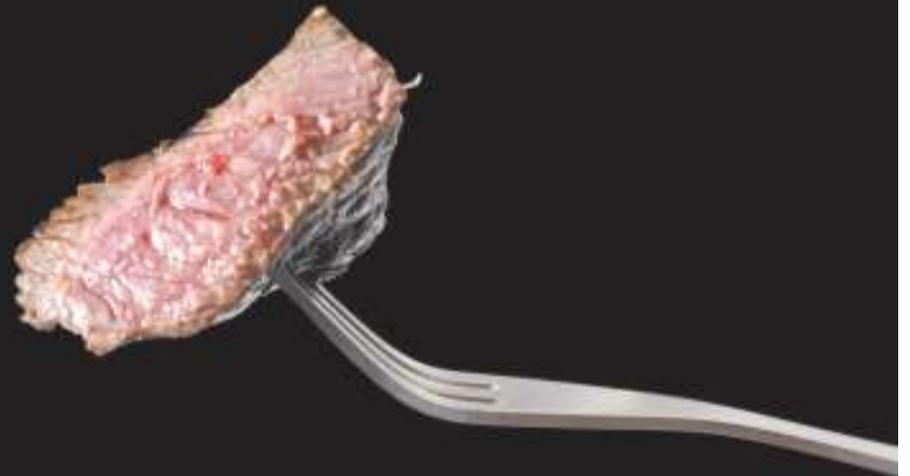
nis. Many see golf as an elitist sport, available only to the exclusive minority, but these two extraordinary

golfers are trying to show the contrary. The men's Open de España returns to Spain this month at the

Valderrama Golf Club, hosted in partnership with the Sergio García Foundation.

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The Linares golf course, which is owned by the Junta de Andalucía, has recently been redesigned and modernised. :: SUR

Jaén combines nature with golf to attract sustainable tourism

The province, which is famous for its environmental importance and biodiversity, also now looks to this sport to bring in more visitors

ALEJANDRO
DÍAZ

Jaén, the city and the province, has become one of the favourite destinations for people who love nature and outdoor sports. Its landscape is a combination of seemingly endless olive groves and environmentally valuable areas such as the Natural Park of Cazorla, las Villas y Segura.

It is in this countryside that the Guadalquivir river has its source, and the walk up to that is now one of the most popular in Andalucía. Because of that, some walkers may prefer to do this route on days which are not public holidays if possible, but if not, it is still well worth a visit.

Golf also plays a part in this area thanks to the course called La Garza, which is located in a sports park in the town of Linares and is owned by the Junta de Andalucía. It has recently been completely modernised. It was originally a five-hole course but Pepe Gancedo has now designed a new nine-hole version, upon the same terrain.

The fairways are bordered by



Olive oil is the emblem of Jaén province. :: SUR

different types of oak trees, pines and cypresses. There are trees within the greens and also in the centre of eight of the nine fairways.

The idea of creating a golf course on this spot was first suggested over 40 years ago, and some of the fairways were even planned, but the idea didn't come to fruition until 1994, when five holes were built.

The course is perfectly inte-

La Garza golf course is perfectly integrated into its surroundings, with a variety of trees on and around the greens

grated into its natural surroundings, and is a reflection of Jaén's commitment to rural tourism.

That commitment was plain to see on 27 September, World Tourism Day, which this year was dedicated specifically to the sustainability of a sector which is the economic motor for many regions, Andalucía among them.

The Terra Oleum Active Museum of Olive Oil and Sustainability, in the Geolit Science and Technology Park in Mengíbar, hosted a conference at which the regional delegate for Tourism, Culture and Sport in Jaén, Pilar Salazar, stressed the importance of linking the ethnographic aspects of olive trees and olive oil with cultural and tourist activities.

She emphasised that the museum has been designed "as a benchmark for an exhibition space in the olive oil tourism sector, and it forms part of a growing and increasingly attractive offer for tourists in the province of Jaén."

To commemorate World Tourism Day, the Jaén provincial government also organised professional conferences and 'blog trips' to boost sustainable tourism. It organised activities for owners of companies and professionals who work in tourism within the region's natural parks, and also for bloggers, as a way of involving them in the sector and raising awareness of the destination with a view to it being promoted to the ecotourism and sustainable tourism markets in southern Spain.

In addition, more than a dozen tourism bloggers were able to ex-

plore the natural parks on three excursions organised by the provincial government, to the Sierras de Cazorla, Segura y las Villas, the Sierra Mágina and the Sierra de Andújar y Despeñaperros.

Benchmark in Europe

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Natural Areas (CETS) is an initiative by the EUROPARC Federation which aims to promote sustainable tourism in protected areas in Europe. It is a practical management tool which enables protected areas to develop tourism sustainably. CETS encourages companies and individuals to voluntarily apply the principles of sustainable tourism, offering guidance to managers of protected natural areas and helping companies to define their strategies.

A few days before World Tourism Day, the Cazorla, Segura y Las Villas natural park officially became the one in Spain with the highest number of companies adhered to the European Charter of Sustainable Tourism. Eleven new companies have joined the scheme this year, bringing the total to 37.

The Junta de Andalucía's Ministry of Environment and Land Regulation says that these 11 companies which are new to the scheme were awarded prizes last month at the Sustainable Tourism Fair of Cazorla, Segura y Las Villas, which took place for the second year.

As well as being at the heart of the natural park which is the biggest in Spain and the second biggest in Europe, in 1983 Cazorla, Segura y Las Villas was classified as a Unesco Biosphere Reserve. As a result of this level of protection, not only has its beauty and biodiversity been preserved but municipalities within its boundaries have been able to develop in terms of ecotourism.

During the presentation of the awards, José Fiscal, the regional minister for the Environment and Land Regulation, thanked all those who had won prizes for their work in promoting and protecting the values of the biggest natural park in Spain. He also pointed out that its nearly 210,000 hectares have become an example of how protecting and defending a natural heritage can go hand in hand with sustainable development, when it is able to involve the people who live in these natural areas and encourage them to have a say in what happens there.

As well as its immense ecological importance, Jaén province has a wide range of attractions for visitors. It is the first source of Iberian art on the peninsula and there are many extremely valuable historic monuments. Visitors who are interested in history should be sure to visit the twin towns of Úbeda and Baeza, and Jaén city shows off to perfection its Renaissance cathedral and its Arab baths, which have been restored in recent years and are considered the loveliest in Spain.

To sum up, Jaén is one of the best places in Andalucía to visit in early autumn: it is a time when its surroundings and attractions can be enjoyed in all their glory.

THE MONTH IN PHOTOS



▲ **Seve's nephew.** Manu Ballesteros, part of the legendary golfing family, won his first important national tournament at the Spanish PGA championships, near the city of Burgos. :: **SUR**



▲ **Miguel Ángel's support.** Malaga professional golfer Miguel Ángel Jiménez helped raise money at the British Masters for the Graham Wylie NE England charity foundation. :: **PGA**



▲ **Sobrón triumphs.** Luna Sobrón won her second Santander Golf Tour event, played at the Real Golf de Pedraña course in Cantabria. The next round is in Seville. :: **SUR**



▲ **Thomas's best year.** American golfer, Justin Thomas has capped off his most successful season to date by heading the leader board of the FedEx Cup last month. The world number four took away over eight million euros in prize money after finishing second in the final event of the tour, behind Xander Schauffele. :: **SUR**



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Please send any golfing news from your clubs to surinenglish.su@diariosur.es

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2017/8 CLUB CALENDER

13 October
Marbella
McDonald Trophy
Open

20 October
Marbella
Captain's Day
Open

22 October
Guadalmina
Pequecircuito for kids
Open

28 October
Guadalmina
Puerta del Hierro National Cup
Open

11 November
Guadalhorce
Junior circuit
Open

13 November
Marbella
Torneo Ryder Cup
Open

15 November
Marbella
Torneo Ryder Cup
Open

24 November
Marbella
Thanksgiving tournament
Open

25 November
Añoreta Golf
Courseless Clubs Championship
Open

8 December
Marbella
Turkey Trot
Open

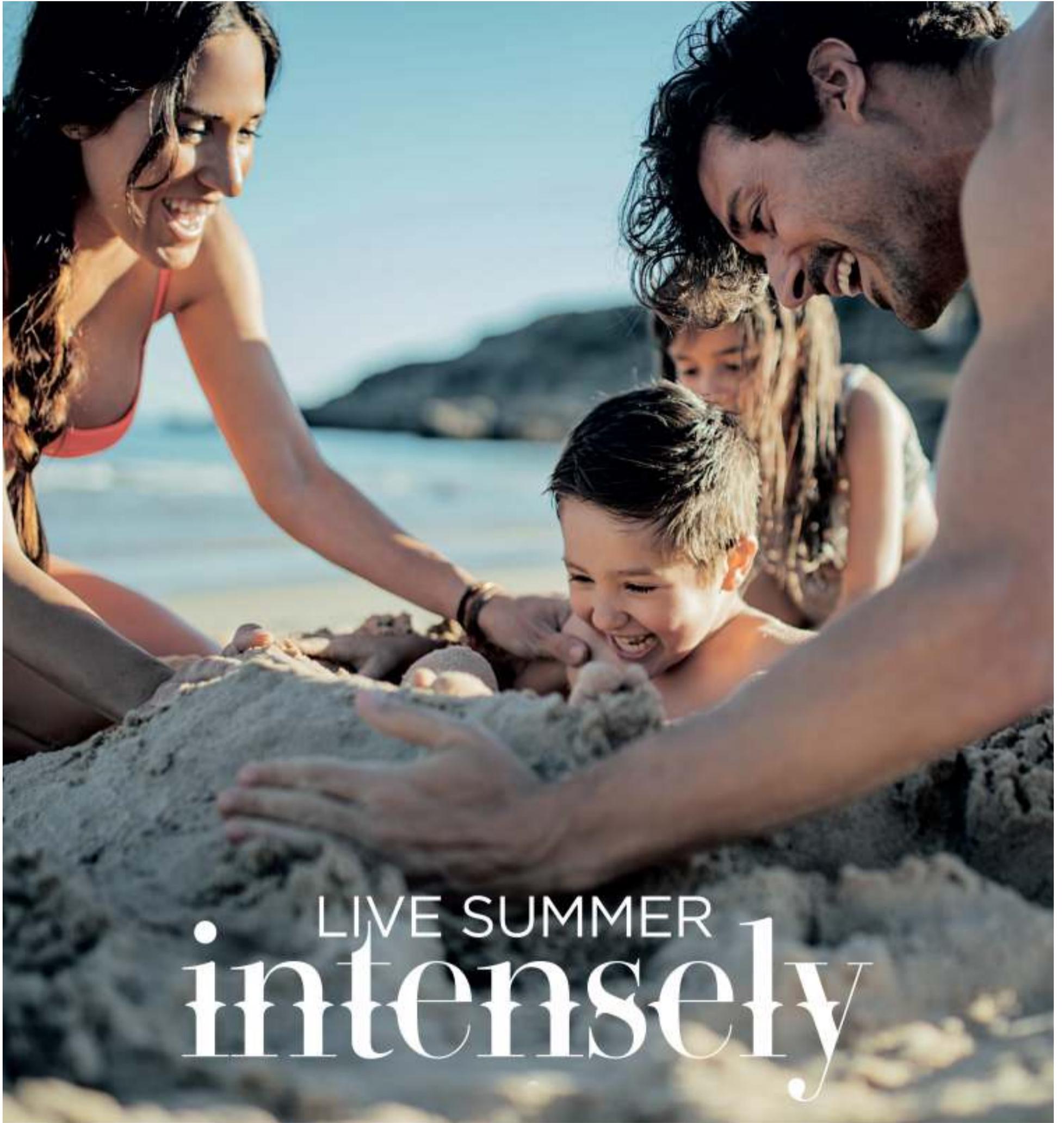
9 December
Lauro
Final - Pequecircuito kids event
Open

Marbella
Marbella International Cup
Open

16 February
Costa Ballena
Women's 'Quadrangular'
Open

6 March
Marbella
Women's Seniors
Open

20 April
Baviera
Women's Seniors
Open



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