

# Andalucía Costa del GOLF

## The renaissance of golf in Spain

The success of the 'Armada', the opening of new golf schools and the fading of old stereotypes have created a new wave of interest [P2&3]



### OPEN DE ESPAÑA

Jon Rahm lives up to his reputation

The Spaniard showed just why he was the firm favourite on the return of the Open de España [P4]



### EUROPEAN TOUR

Álvaro Quirós, on the comeback trail

The Cadiz golfer's second-place finish in Rabat sees him rise 200 places in the rankings [P4]

### Enjoying spring on Cordoba's courses

The city brings in plenty of tourists for its cultural heritage, but more and more visitors are heading out to the greens [P6]

# Golf is attracting more tourists, fans, players and spectators in Spain

The success of golfers like Jon Rahm, the opening of municipal schools and a record number of fans at the Open reflect a growing interest in the sport

ALBERTO GÓMEZ

**G**olf is beginning to overcome the cliché of being an elitist and minority sport in Spain. This is partly due to the opening of municipal golf schools, where children can learn and play at reasonable prices (no more expensive than any football or basketball school), and also to the successes of Sergio García, Azahara Muñoz, Carlota Ciganda, Rafa Cabrera-Bello and, especially, Jon Rahm.

Rahm, from Vizcaya, was the winner and absolute star of the recent Open de España. He is following in the footsteps of Tiger Woods and in less than two years as a professional is already one of the five best players in the world ranking and a favourite at all the major tournaments.

With a record such as Jon Rahm's, the authorities are being forced to take notice of the importance of golf. That is why the rise in the rate of IVA (value added tax) imposed by the Spanish government is so incomprehensible; it has had a serious negative effect on hundreds of clubs all over the country, and some have been forced to close.

The presence of the Minister of Sport, Íñigo Méndez de Vigo, at the prizegiving ceremony at the Spanish Open was a clear sign of the authorities' renewed interest in this sport. In response to those who consider that golf is still a minority sport, we only have to quote one statistic: 47,218 people attended the four-day tournament in Madrid last month, which was a landmark in professional cham-



A record number of people went to watch the Spanish Open. :: RFEG

pionships in this country.

Rahm's success takes us back to the golden age of golf, in the heyday of Severiano Ballesteros, José María Olazábal and Miguel Ángel Jiménez, and it is also serving to attract more young people to golf, inspired by Rahm's age, rebellious attitude and ambition.

Sources at the Royal Spanish Golf Federation (RFEG) point out that golf tourism generates two billion euros a year for the State.

"People still tend to think of this as an elitist sport, even though golf can be played for eight or ten euros. The administrations have not treated us well, but they are be-

ginning to realise that this sport generates wealth and thousands of jobs," explained the president of the RFEG, Gonzaga Escauriza.

The federation has also come under criticism. Although the success of the Open is generally recognised, some discordant voices point out that the tournament did

not take place at all last year and this year's competition was only possible thanks to assistance from the European Tour.

Among the fiercest critics is Miguel Ángel Jiménez, who is still a very active player at the age of 54. "The tournament was organised because the European Tour provided a million euros for it. The federation provided 250,000 euros. That is ridiculous, when a million are already guaranteed," he told *El País* newspaper a few weeks ago.

In the same interview, he said that his sport "is stagnant" in Spain: "The federation does nothing. Despite the players we have had, we are still stuck in the past. People still think we're elitist. They need to do something about that. If the ones who are there now can't find a solution to the stigmatisation of this sport, they should go and others should take over. We're not moving forward," he said.

Jiménez isn't just an experienced golfer; he has paid money so that some professional tournaments have been able to take place in the past, opened a golf school in Torremolinos and supported tours and competitions to encourage children to take up the sport.

## Fewer licences

After seven consecutive years when the number of federated golfers dropped in Spain - by as much as six per cent in 2014 - there has been a turning point in recent months. Not only did the successful men's Open de España encourage people to take up golf, but there have also been the Andalucía Masters at Valderrama and the women's Open de España, the last two editions of which have taken place in Malaga province.

The Andalucía Masters and the



  
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women's tournament which has been won twice by Azahara Muñoz were made possible by the contribution from the Junta de Andalucía's Tourism Department, the Malaga provincial government and the Mancomunidad de Municipios of the Western Costa del Sol.

In southern Spain golf is not only a sport, but a strategy for tourism. Last year it attracted over half a million visitors to Andalucía. On the Costa del Sol, with its 70 courses, the golf culture is more established than in other areas, because of its economic impact on tourism.

Television viewers are also showing more interest. According to Movistar, which has its own golf channel, so far this year the average daily audience has risen by 19 per cent, compared with the same period in 2017.

Although few private companies in Spain sponsor golf, there are now more than 30 agreements in force. El Corte Inglés and Movistar have their own tour and Banco Santander supports the Ladies Tour. Others such as Air Europa, Osborne, Solán de Cabras, Halcón, Ilunion and Segura Viudas collaborate with different tournaments, although to a lesser extent.

More surprising is the sponsorship of players. No Spanish player, not even Rahm, García or Muñoz, has an agreement with a Spanish company. All their sponsors are foreign, such as Adidas, Lacoste, Nike or Ping. However, it is probably just a matter of time, now that people are starting to realise how profitable it could be to promote this sport in Spain.

# Jon Rahm delights fans once again as he wins the Open de España

The world number four lived up to his reputation as firm favourite at this tournament on the European Tour

## ■ A. GÓMEZ

In April Spanish golfer Jon Rahm, number four in the world, won the Open de España, part of the European Tour, which took place at the National Golf Centre in Madrid. With a total card of 268 strokes, 20 under par, the young player won his fifth title since becoming professional in 2016. In addition to his success at the Farmers Insurance Open (2017) and Career Builder Challenge (2018) on the PGA Tour, and the DP World Tour Championship of Dubai (2017) and the Irish Open (2017), on the European Tour, Rahm has added the title of the Open de España champion. This was a great way to close his circle of wins in his own country since he became



Rahm with RFEF president Gonzaga Escauriza and the Minister of Sport, Íñigo Méndez de Vigo. ■ RFEF

champion of Spain in the cadet category (2009), junior (2010 and 2012), under-18 (2010 y 2012) and senior (2014 and 2015). Rahm then returned to Madrid to complete part of his training as a golfer before setting off for Arizona, USA.

At the press conference after his win, Rahm showed off the trophy which accredited his victory after an exciting recovery on the final

day. He started at a disadvantage of one and two shots respectively to fellow Spanish player Nacho Elvira and Irishman Paul Dunne, but in the last 18 holes he had no rivals. He presented a final card of 67 strokes, five under par, for a total of -20. Six birdies, at holes 1, 2, 7, 10, 13 and 18, enabled him to push Paul Dunne (270) and Nacho Elvira (271) into second and third place.

Four days previously, Jon Rahm had predicted that he would have to achieve -20 to be the winner. That result made him the sixth Spaniard to win the Open de España after Antonio Garrido (1972), Severiano Ballesteros (1981, 1985 and 1995), Sergio García (2002), Álvaro Quirós (2010) and Miguel Ángel Jiménez (2014). One of the curiosities of this sport: Jon Rahm's victory occurred on the same day, 15 April, as that of Garrido in 1972, when he became the first Spanish player on the European Tour to win the Open de España at the Pals Golf Club. That was the first tournament to be held in Spain within the structure of the European Tour.

Rahm reached the 18th hole, surrounded by the public, where he achieved his famous birdie. The crowd went mad, and there was lengthy applause to mark the final point of an absolutely magical Spanish Open 2018.

Rahm was the indisputable hero of the tournament, but special mention should also be given to amateur Víctor Pastor, who finished with a praiseworthy 67 (-5) and a total of -13.

# Quirós makes his comeback

The Spanish player came second in Morocco and rose 200 places in the ranking

## ■ ALEJANDRO DÍAZ

**MALAGA.** Álvaro Quirós came close to victory in Morocco. The player from Cadiz began as sole leader of the final round of the Hassan II Trophy, a tournament on the European Golf Tour which took place at Royal Golf Dar es Salam in Rabat, after successfully defending his first position on the third day.

Quirós, who topped the classifica-

tion from the first day of the competition, was hoping for his eighth title on the European Tour and the second since 2011, when he began a dry period which lasted six years, until he won the Rocco Forte Open in Sicily.

However, it was French player Alexander Levy who won in Rabat. This was his fifth title on the European Tour, with a total of 280 strokes (8



Álvaro Quirós came close to victory in Rabat. ■ SUR

under par). Levy, who signed a card of 70 strokes (2 under par) on the last day, began his final round at a one-shot disadvantage to Quirós, but was soon heading for first position by carding three birdies in the first eight holes of the round.

Halfway through the day Levy, by then eight below in the total, achieved a two-shot gain over a group of seven followers. None of them was able to close the gap with the French player, who performed well and committed hardly any errors.

## Bogey at the 2nd

Quirós had played a bogey almost at the start, at the 2nd hole, and although halfway around the course he was two strokes away from Levy, two more bogeys in the bunkers at the 10th and 13th made it even more difficult for him to compete. Only Levy's bogey at the 16th momentarily in-

creased the excitement on this final day, but he then played a brilliant birdie at the next hole and placed himself out of reach of his closest rivals.

Quirós carded two birdies at the two final holes, a belated reaction which did at least enable him to complete the round at par for the course (72) and earn second place, his best result on the tour since winning the Rocco Forte Open in Sicily in May 2017. Behind Levy and Quirós, with 282 strokes (six below) came Italian player Andrea Pavan, Mikko Ilonen, from Finland, and Joakim Lagregren and Alexander Björk, from Sweden. Levy, 27, began the week at number 66 on the world classification, and rose to ninth position in this year's Race to Dubai. This title is in addition to his two wins at the Chinese Open (2014 and 2017), the Portuguese Masters in 2014 and the European Open in 2016.

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# The Costa del Golf Tour is back

Registration is now open for this amateur competition, which will be played at Alcaidesa, Cabopino, El Paraíso and Guadalmina

## ALBERTO GÓMEZ

**MALAGA.** The Costa del Golf Tour, now considered among the main tours in Andalucía, is about to take place. The first leg of this tour, which includes some of the best courses in the country, will be at Alcaidesa on 25 May. It will be played under Stableford individual rules, where each hole is scored in relation to its par strokes (one point for a bogey, two for the par, three for a birdie and four for an eagle). Reaching the final will depend on the results across the three days of competition, although the players can register for one, two or all three legs, with the chance of playing in the final in each case.

The second leg will be at Cabopino on 30 June, and the third will take place on 7 July at El Paraíso. The grand final will be at Guadalmina, on 28 July.

The course at Alcaidesa Links Golf Resort, which is in fantastic surroundings, is close to the Sotogrande and Valderrama courses, both of which have hosted top level international competitions such as the Andalucía Masters. The complex has two courses of its own, Alcaidesa Links (the only 'links' style course in southern Europe, with no trees and undulating terrain, similar to St Andrews in Scotland) and Alcaidesa Heathland, with a total of 36 professional holes and spectacular views of the sea, Gibraltar and Africa.

The second leg of the tour will be at Cabopino, on the eastern side of Marbella, opposite the marina of the same name. It has 18 holes, is more than 5,000 square metres in size and was designed by architect Juan Ligués Creus. The course at Cabopino has stunning views of the Mediterranean.



The Costa del Golf Tour is considered one of the best for fans in Andalucía. :: SUR

The third leg will be held at El Paraíso, with its wide fairways surrounded by palms, pines, oleanders and olive trees, with streams and two magnificent lakes. The par 71

course extends for 6,131 metres from its magnificent tees.

## Grand Final

The Grand Final of the Costa del Golf

Tour will take place at the Real Club de Golf Guadalmina, which last year hosted the women's Open de España, part of the European Tour.

Guadalmina has two courses, the north and the south, with 45 holes in total, and it was inaugurated in 1959, which makes it one of the oldest clubs on the Costa del Sol. The fairways, wide and with almost no rough, wind their way between well-established trees, making it very attractive for the players who take part in the championship. The course was remodelled in 2002.

Registration is now open for this tour, which is being organised by the newspaper SUR and this specialist publication Costa del Golf. Offerplan has a special offer which means that people can enjoy the competition, green fee, with buggy included, on all three courses for 149 euros, or pay a discounted price of 65 euros to play one of the legs, at Alcaidesa, Cabopino or El Paraíso (the normal cost would be 120 euros).

The Grand Final will be played by the best-classified golfers in the different categories.

The Costa del Golf Tour is sponsored by Acosol, Marcos 1942, Da Bruno restaurant and the Junta de Andalucía. In addition to the four courses hosting the events, other collaborators are Andalucía Golf Select, Copyrap, Golfriends and FC&CO.

In previous years the tour, which has been taking place for five years, has attracted nearly 1,000 amateur players, competing in men's and women's categories.

# The Andalucía Masters is aiming high

The tournament will be considered an event of exceptional public interest and therefore receive state funding

## ALEJANDRO DÍAZ

**MALAGA.** The Andalucía Valderrama Masters golf tournament is set to receive state funding after being included in the provisional budget for this year. This comes after the tournament was classified as an event of exceptional public interest, fol-

lowing its successful return to the European Tour last year.

The support programme is due to start on 1 July and run until 31 December 2020 and will help towards operating costs and the creation of other parallel activities.

It is seen as a major boost to the

tournament and a strong indication that it will be around for many years to come, after having left such a big gap in the international calendar between 2012 and 2016.

Defending champion, Sergio García, said at the presentation for this year's tournament, to take place in October, that his victory last year was the "cherry on top" of a fine season on his part, having also won the Masters at Augusta and the Omega Dubai Desert Classic.

Thousands of fans turned out last time out and according to García,

"Winning at Valderrama was very special. The truth is that it was incredible to do it in Spain, on one of my favourite courses in front of so many fans and, above all, close to my family."

He added, "It was a very nice week. I played well but the most important thing was that I was in the right state of mind. There were moments that tested me but I was able to react."

"Valderrama is a very demanding course and requires a lot of patience." Tickets to see the Andalucía Val-

derrama Masters are already available and prices vary between eight and 20 euros. Tickets for the Pro-Am day (17 October) cost eight euros; on Thursday 18 and Friday 19, when the first and second rounds are played, they cost 12 euros; while on Saturday 20 and Sunday 21, tickets cost 20 euros each day. Under 14s, if accompanied by an adult, go free.

## A unique setting

Real Club Valderrama is located just a couple of kilometres from Gibraltar and little more than an hour from Malaga Airport.

Valderrama is a private members' club which allows visitors at certain times of day. Since 1988, it has been considered one of the top clubs in Europe and has been included in the majority of the top-100 rankings ever published. The course has a par of 71 and measures 6,390 metres.

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# Cordoba combines all the very best of Andalucía in the spring

The city, which is a favourite destination because of its history and culture, also has some interesting options for golf

In Andalucía the month of May can be summed up in just one special word: Cordoba. At this time of year the 'city of the three cultures' celebrates several festivals, each with its own traditions, making it a favourite destination for a getaway. Golf also has a role to play in making this an ideal place to visit in spring, as we will see later in this article.

In fact, the May celebrations begin early in Cordoba. The 'Cruces de Mayo de Cordoba', which has just finished, began on 27 April and this year there were 48 beautiful floral crosses on display. Every year a competition is held to decide which cross is the loveliest.

For those who are not aware of the 'Cruces de Mayo', these are large crosses erected in the patios and public squares of the city, and decorated with flowers and lace shawls.

As is usual in Andalucía, no festival would be complete without a party atmosphere, and in Cordoba local residents' associations and clubs set up temporary bars in the streets of the different districts so those visiting the crosses can refresh themselves with typical tapas and drinks. There is music and dancing, and the entertainment continues until late in the evening. A stroll through the San Basilio, San Andrés and San Agustín districts during this festival will provide visitors with an everlasting memory of Cordoba in May.

Until 13 May, around 40 of Cordoba's patios are open to visitors during the day, and in the evening, amid the fragrance of jasmine and orange blossom, people gather together to listen to flamenco music and chat with friends: another unique and atmospheric experience for visitors to enjoy.

In the liveliest areas of the city, especially San Basilio and Alcázar Viejo, there are outdoor bars and music. The Friends of the Patios Association, which restores old houses in Cordoba, also opens those patios to the public during this festival.

The 'Patios de Cordoba' festival was declared an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by Unesco in 2012 and it is a representation of the traditional Cordoban way of life, in houses with flower-filled patios, terraces and balconies. The participants open their patios to the public free of charge at certain times of day which are



Cordoba's Mosque-Cathedral is probably its most famous monument. :: SUR



Pozoblanco Golf Club. :: SUR

agreed in advance with the organisers.

The festival comes to an end with a street party in the San Basilio district, beside the Caballerizas Reales. The local residents' association sets up a bar next to the Belén Tower, and the cafe-bars in Calle San Basilio play music and also sell drinks. The Patios Festival lasts for two weeks, and

throughout that time there are numerous music and dance performances and a wide range of other activities.

To bring this month of festivals to an end there is the Cordoba Fair, which is held in honour of Nuestra Señora de la Salud, the patron saint of the city. The celebrations are centred around El Arenal fairground, where people dress in tra-

ditional costume, ride horses, and party in the numerous bars (called 'casetas'). These are open to the public, and everyone is welcome to join in the fun.

## In May visitors can discover the magic of the patios, which are opened to the public, and the charms of this ancient city

ditional costume, ride horses, and party in the numerous bars (called 'casetas'). These are open to the public, and everyone is welcome to join in the fun.

The dancing, the sherry, the tapas, the costumes, the atmosphere: all these combine to make this fair a rival to those in any other Andalusian city. For those who enjoy bullfights, several take place at Los Califas bullring during the fair, including some very famous 'toreros'.

## Unique heritage

The key to Cordoba's success as a tourist destination lies in its history and culture. The city was classified as a World Heritage Site in 1994, and art and history ooze from every corner.

Cordoba is mainly known for its Mosque, a unique monument which shows the splendour of the

## Golf courses

Caliphate and also, amazingly, contains a Christian cathedral in the interior. Other attractions include the Alcázar de los Reyes Cristianos, which was the fortress and palace of the Christian monarchs, the Roman bridge and Albolafia water wheel, the Calahorra tower, the Jewish quarter, the patios, the Plaza del Potro and numerous other enchanting places in this, one of the most beautiful cities in Spain.

For golf lovers, Cordoba also has some interesting options and this segment of tourism is becoming more popular in the area nowadays. Perhaps the best-known facility is the Club de Campo y Deportivo de Cordoba, a sports and leisure centre which opened in the 1970s thanks to the initiative of a group of golfing enthusiasts who decided to focus their efforts on promoting their favourite sport.

The club is situated in the Sierra Morena, with panoramic views over beautiful countryside. It covers 70 hectares, including woodlands of pine and oak trees. The course has very well-protected greens and although they are easy to read they always demand full concentration. The fairways are wide and surrounded by Mediterranean woodland. This is a technical course where players need to think hard if they are to complete it in as few strokes as possible.

Another option is the Pozoblanco Golf Club. Federated in 1982, the vegetation is predominantly oak trees. The nine-hole Cabeza Oliva golf course at Pozoblanco is easy to walk because it is mainly flat, so you can enjoy a day of golf without getting too tired. This course has enormous potential; it has been greatly improved and is set on one of the biggest grasslands in Europe.

Golf, then, is another reason to spend a few days in Cordoba. In May, those planning to play a few rounds will find this a unique destination in Andalucía, a city which brings together all the best of the region throughout the month. There is plenty of accommodation available, much of it in the heart of the historic city centre.

And to make this the perfect getaway, don't forget to sample the Cordoban gastronomy: Montilla-Moriles wines, 'salmorejo' soup, Serrano ham and an endless range of delicious recipes made with the finest local products, to delight any palate.

In the city centre, visitors can find everything from the most traditional dishes to the most avant-garde and fusion cuisine. To sum up, then, Cordoba is the ideal destination for travellers who are in love with Andalucía.

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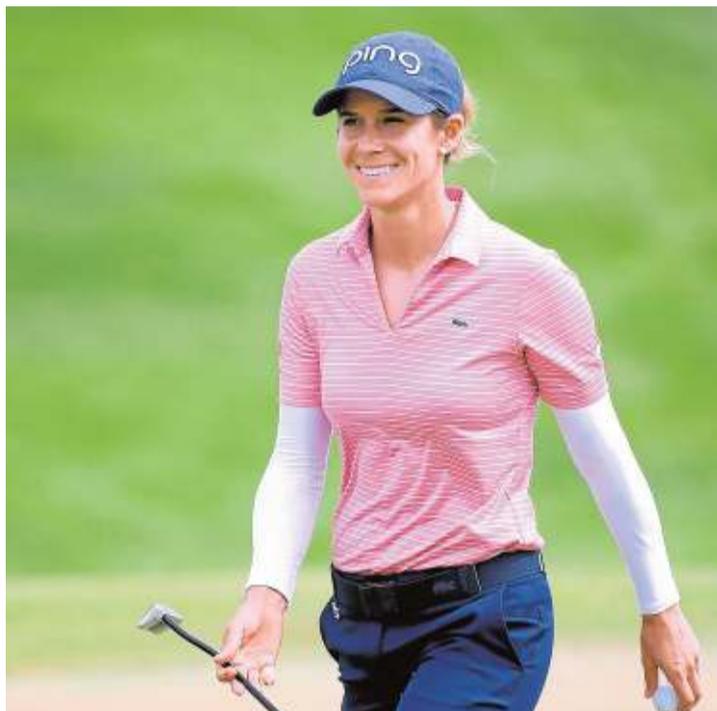


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## THE MONTH IN PHOTOS



▲ **Lotte Championship.** San Pedro golfer Azahara Muñoz showed a glimpse of her best form as she came second in Hawaii - her best result on the LPGA in months. She finished four off eventual winner Brooke Henderson. :: **SUR**



◀ **Spanish Tour.** The spirit of Seve Ballesteros remains strong. The Spanish PGA Tour, this time named in his honour, gets under way at the end of the month, taking in six destinations across Spain, including in Andalucía. Both women and men will compete this year. :: **SUR**

► **Prize.** Pablo Larrazábal, one of the more reliable members of the 'Armada' was rewarded for his career performances so far before his attempt at claiming the Open de España. He was awarded the bronze medal of the Royal Order of Sporting Merit from the National Sports Council. "It makes it all worth it when your efforts are recognised," he said. :: **EFE**



▲ **El Ingenio Women's Open.** Carmen López (31 points) was the first category winner of the inaugural Open Femenino Centro Comercial El Ingenio, held at Baviera Golf - an attempt to promote the sport among women on the eastern Costa del Sol. Local players Rosa María Ruiz (39 points) and Eli Fernández (30 points) won the second and third categories, respectively. :: **SUR**

### 2018 AGENDA

**25 May**

**Alcaidesa**  
Costa del Golf Tour  
Open tournament

**1 June**

**Lauro**  
Camp. España. 3ª Cat.  
Open tournament

**2 June**

**Mijas**  
Gran Premio AFA Fuengirola  
Open tournament

**2 June**

**La Cala**  
Cudeca Golf Cup  
Open tournament

**14 June**

**Mijas**  
ASGA  
Open tournament

**23 June**

**Mijas**  
Gran Premio Solidarios  
Open tournament

**25 June**

**Cabopino**  
Costa del Golf Tour  
Open tournament

**7 July**

**El Paraíso**  
Costa del Golf Tour  
Open tournament

**7 July**

**Mijas**  
Memorial Blas Fernández  
Open tournament

**14 July**

**Mijas**  
Maderas Gómez  
Open tournament

**21 July**

**Mijas**  
Gran Premio Electrónica  
Open tournament

**28 July**

**Guadalmina**  
Costa del Golf Tour Final  
Qualification through early rounds

**28 July**

**Mijas**  
Premio Lucha Contra el Cáncer  
Open tournament

**10 August**

**Mijas**  
Memorial Felipe Pérez  
Open tournament

**18 August**

**Mijas**  
Gran Premio Sanitubo  
Open tournament

**25 August**

**Mijas**  
Asociación Tamisuel  
Open tournament

**30 August**

**Lauro**  
Campeonato Infantil Reale  
Open tournament

**2 September**

**Mijas**  
Clubes de Golf de Andalucía  
Open tournament

**25 November**

**Mijas**  
Clubes de Golf de Andalucía  
Open tournament

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