

# Andalucía Costa del GOLF



## Muñoz aims high for 2019

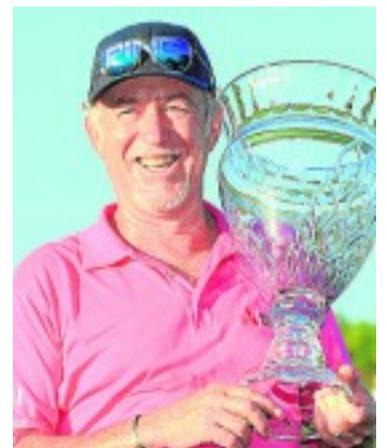
The Malaga player finished third in Singapore to seal the best start to a season of her career so far [P4]



### GOLF SECTOR

Malaga's clubs put the crisis behind them

More than ten years after the financial slump, the sector is showing positive signs of recovery [P2&3]



### CHAMPIONS TOUR

Jiménez wins again on the seniors' tour

'El Pisha' came out on top in Florida, picking up the first win for Spanish golf this year [P7]

### Golf tourism on the rise in inland Malaga

The reopening of the Caminito del Rey and Unesco status for the dolmens has also boosted interest in the sector [P6]

# Clubs are recovering from the crisis and improving their courses

Malaga, the province with the third-highest number of licences after Madrid and Barcelona, has nearly 43 per cent of the federated members in Andalucía

ALBERTO GÓMEZ

**M**alaga began this year with 18,494 federated golfers, which is 497 more than in January 2018, nearly 43 per cent of all licences in Andalucía and about seven per cent of the total in Spain. Only Madrid and Barcelona are ahead of Malaga province, which still holds a leading position in the sector despite more than a decade of fiscal challenges, staff cuts and a reduced budget for maintaining the courses.

With more than 70 courses, Malaga is one of the top golf destinations in Europe, and this sport is especially beneficial for the local economy because these tourists have such high purchasing power. However, four years after the financial crisis began in 2008, the clubs faced a further unexpected setback when they were forced to charge 21 per cent IVA instead of the previous eight per cent. Most decided to assume this additional cost themselves instead of putting their prices up, but that decision had a negative effect on their profitability and the management of the courses. The fall in income meant that personnel had to be restructured and jobs were lost at several clubs, something which is only just beginning to change.

The reduction in sponsors, who are the principal backers for the hundreds of amateur tournaments on the Costa del Sol each year, also posed a problem during the crisis. For clubs with a low membership, where the number of players rarely varies, the lack of private financing was an additional blow, although in recent months there has been renewed interest in promoting golf, thanks to the decision by the Andalusian authorities three years ago to sponsor major professional tournaments such as the Andalucía Masters and the Women's Open de España, which have brought players such as Sergio García, Jon Rahm and Azahara Muñoz to the region.

Many clubs and courses in Malaga province such as Baviera, Añoreta, El Paraíso, Doña Julia, Río Real, Guadalmina, Magna Marbella, Atalaya, La Cala Resort and Los Arqueros have carried out improvements in recent years. Most of these involved complying with new regulations about accessibility, renewing the fleets of



Golf tourists spend more per day than other types of visitors. :: SUR

## HIGH SCORES FOR STAFF AND CLEANLINESS

As a destination, the Costa del Sol receives some of the highest scores from satisfied tourists, and the figures relating to last summer show an average mark of 8.37 out of ten, according to a survey carried out by Turismo Costa del Sol on hotel prices and client

satisfaction in eight rival destinations in Spain and abroad.

The results of the survey highlight the aspects of the Costa del Sol which are most highly valued by visitors, and show its position on the ranking in terms of hotel prices and quality.

The Costa del Sol received a higher score than the other destinations for staff (8.76), cleanliness (8.72), comfort (8.25), facilities (8.13) and price-quality ratio (8.1).

With regard to location, the destination was given a high

score of 8.59 points out of ten.

To carry out this study, the Tourist Board analysed the Costa del Sol, Costa de la Luz, Costa de Almería, Costa Blanca, Costa Brava, the Canary Islands and the Balearics, and also the international destinations of the Algarve (Portugal) and Antalya (Turkey).

Last year, the Costa del Sol was designated the best European golf destination by the International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO), after surveying different destinations and resorts.

buggies, creating tees and drainage lines, improving the greens and restoring the holes.

"The tourism produced by golf is something absolutely extraordinary. It is a sport which directly and indirectly produces an economic impact of 1.2 billion euros a year, and it is calculated that a further 800 billion are spent by these visitors in the area, on items such as car hire, cinema, restaurants, drinks and all the things that tourists do when they spend a week somewhere. These are extraordinary figures for a sport," says the president of the Spanish Royal Federation of Golf (RFEG), Gonzaga Escarriaza, who explains that golf tourism and beach tourism, which make destinations such as Malaga so popular, complement each other.

"The peak season for beach tourism is from May to October, while for golf it is November to April, so the two types of tourism fit together perfectly. In the past, many hotels on the coast would close in October and not open again until Easter, but now those with their own golf facilities, or close to them, mainly stay open. This is something that Andalucía understands very well and believes is very important. It is committed to hosting an Open, a Masters, a Challenge... I am very grateful to Andalucía. The other regions of Spain are now starting to follow suit," he says.

## Economic impact

Javier Reviriego, the former director of the Finca Cortesin golf club and currently the director of Valderrama, recently became the first European to join the advisory board of the Club Leaders Forum, which is made up of 16 CEOs who have reached 'platinum' status throughout their careers and manage some of the most prestigious private clubs on the planet. He is clear about the sector's recommendations for the new regional government in Andalucía: "If we think Costa del Sol, we automatically think Costa del Golf. Golf tourism has a huge impact on our economy and I don't mean just occasional tourism, but residential tourism as well. You only have to look at the large numbers of foreign golfers who are members of Andalusian clubs. I would ask the new Junta de Andalucía to continue its commitment to golf as a means of promotion. It is a very profitable investment, and has been proven effective time and time again," he explains.

The increase in income has enabled many clubs to modernise their facilities, and in an infrastructure as

**The European Tour has included the destination on its calendar again and the courses want to make the most of the opportunity**

complex as a golf course that definitely doesn't come cheap. Remodelling just one fairway can cost more than 30,000 euros. However, the return of professional tournaments to Andalucía in the past three years has led to dozens of improvements being carried out. The European Tour has once again included the destination on its calendar and the courses want to make the most of that opportunity, aware of the positive publicity these championships bring with them. The improved facilities seem to have paid off.

Professionals in the sector also point out that golf courses are able to turn deteriorated land into areas with high environmental value and return lost dignity to rubbish dumps and slag heaps, and they stress that for some years now it has been obligatory to use recycled water for irrigating the courses. The golf sector is finally teeing off again, more than ten years after the crisis began.



The courses have carried out improvements in recent years. :: SUR



Golf tourism brings 500,000 visitors a year to Andalucía. :: SUR



Tourists soak up the sun by a golf course. :: SUR

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Azahara Muñoz shines once more in an LPGA Tour tournament. :: SUR



Muñoz, playing a shot in Australia. :: EFE



Hyun Park was the winner in Singapore. :: GETTY IMAGES

# Muñoz seals best ever season start

There was a podium finish for the Malaga player at the HSBC Women's World Championship - her third top ten finish so far

## :: ALEJANDRO DÍAZ

**MÁLAGA.** This was always going to be an important season for Azahara Muñoz. In recent years, health problems had deprived her of the ability to play with the consistency to which her fans had become accustomed.

Muñoz made some important changes last season, such as bringing in coach Marcelo Prieto. This has led to the best start to her career, which was accomplished on Sunday 3 March in Singapore with her third top ten finish from her four tournaments so far.

At the turn of the month, Muñoz took part in the HSBC Women's World Championship, won by Sung Hyun Park. The Korean, with a sensational final round, came from behind to snatch the title from the players fighting at the top of the standings at the start of the day. Among them was Muñoz, who played her best game of the season and finished third, just three points from victory.

This year Azahara Muñoz celebrates a decade competing at the highest level, on the LPGA Tour.

At just 31 years of age, with every stroke the player from San Pedro is edging closer to her very best and this season the goal is already to fight for the biggest prizes, even if she has adopted the maxim of Atlético de Madrid football coach Diego Simeone of taking it "game by game".

Muñoz's improvement is unde-

niable and is now being sustained over time. Nothing coincidental or sudden. Just last November, when Muñoz took to La Quinta Golf in Marbella for the Open de España, the last tournament of the season, she showed her best form. She led the tournament on a number of occasions and only the forcefulness of Dutch player Anne van Dam

could deny her the title. Even though for a born winner like Muñoz this was little consolation, the truth is that the Open de España was a turning point in her game.

During those days, with the support of her local crowd, Muñoz re-

gained confidence, concentration and all the virtues that characterise her. Let's not also forget the ambition, as demonstrated in the final holes, when almost everything was lost and but she decided to go for it anyway.

At the time she told this publication that she was starting to feel in good shape once more and was desperate to start the next season. In that vein, she has marched into the new campaign and is racking up high finishes in the tournaments in which she is competing.

This was also demonstrated at the beginning of February. Muñoz started her tenth season as a professional in Australia and celebrated in style. It didn't start well, but a brilliant final round helped her to climb up the standings.

That day she delivered a fabulous 66-stroke card, with six 'birdies' and not a single 'bogey'. Her long game was brilliant again, so was her putting. In the final round, Muñoz climbed no fewer than 30 positions, showing once again that she never throws in the towel. This was despite the fact that the previous day she was about to miss the cut, tied on 35. Not only did she make it, she went on to clinch her first top five finish of the year. Muñoz is back to her best.

## CARLOTA CIGANDA MISSES OUT ON THE TOP TEN

It wasn't a good day for the rest of the Spanish Armada, especially Carlota Ciganda, who didn't make it to the top ten in the HSBC Championship.

The player from Navarre had a difficult final day, but she was at least able to minimise the damage in the final part. The Spaniard finished with three

'birdies' and four 'bogeys' for a total of -3 that left her in fifteenth place, three strokes from the coveted top ten.

For her part, New Zealand's Lydia Ko was eleventh on -5 after not being able to progress in the final day (two 'birdies' and two 'bogeys').

Overall, Hyun Park took the win with a total of -15. Nine 'birdies' and a single 'bogey' earned her a two-stroke win over Australia's Minjee Lee, who, along with Muñoz, completed the podium.



Carlota Ciganda. :: SUR



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The refurbishment and reopening of the Caminito del Rey has been a major driving force in attracting tourists inland. :: sur

# The popularity of golf tourism is growing in rural Malaga

The World Heritage Site of the Antequera Dolmens and the Caminito del Rey are proving to be major attractions for golfers

ALEJANDRO  
DÍAZ

**T**he name 'Costa del Golf' is already known all over the world, and since 2015 another of the province's most popular attractions has also become famous: the Caminito del Rey, or King's Path, which is situated between Álora, Antequera, Ardales and Valle de Abdalajís.

Originally inaugurated in 1921, the 'Caminito', as it is known, was fully restored in 2014 and now, with its narrow walkways at a height of 100 metres above a gorge, it has justifiably been described as "one of the most impressive paths in the world". Since opening, it has been visited by hundreds of thousands of visitors, and has featured in the media all over the world.

In addition to the opening of the Caminito, there was a further boost to rural tourism when the Dolmens of Antequera, which are not far away, were designated a World Heritage Site. It includes not only the three megalithic burial sites but also El Torcal and the Peña de los Enamorados

(Lovers' Rock).

Although there are not as many golf courses inland as there are on the coast, the towns and villages which do have facilities to practise this sport are becoming very popular. It means that tourists who stay there can visit the Caminito del Rey and the Antequera Dolmens site and still have plenty of time to enjoy their golf, without having to travel to the Malaga coast to do so.

Antequera is the most extensive municipality in the province, mostly covering a flat area of very fertile land where olive trees and cereal crops predominate, surrounded by the El Torcal and Arco Calizo Central mountain ranges. The Peña de los Enamorados, which is the subject of many legends, rises majestically above the plain.

The official declaration of the Antequera Dolmens as a World Heritage Site explains that it includes the three megalithic monuments of Menga, Viera and El Romeral and also the Peña de los Enamorados, the huge rock with a human profile which stands out as you approach Antequera, and the natural beauty spot of El Torcal de Antequera, with its peculiar rock formations.

The Dólmenes de Antequera site is at the entrance to the town from Malaga and Granada, so it can't be

missed. However, El Torcal is about 20 kilometres away, on the road to Villanueva de la Concepción.

The best way to get to El Torcal after visiting the dolmens is to return to the industrial estate and the first

roundabout, turn left onto the bypass, follow it as far as the roundabout called La Verónica, where there is a Galp petrol station and a small chapel, head towards Antequera and then follow the signs for

## AN APP TO LEARN ABOUT THE COSTA DEL SOL

The new version of the 'Costa del Sol Malaga' tourism app, which is available in four languages, includes initiatives from the provincial government such as the Great Trail of Malaga, the Caminito del Rey, the Coastal Path and the Copper Woods. This latest version, which replaces the 2013 one, provides more than 2,000 georeferenced points and information about the tourist facilities in Malaga province, says the provincial minister for the Environment and Regional Promotion, Marina Bravo.

There are also support tools such as videos, audioguides, history and integration with the social media sites Twitter and Facebook, so information about the Costa del Sol can be shared in real time. The app provides information about beaches, marinas, waterparks and theme parks, as well as urban and natural viewing points and many other attractions.

There is also a section with information about basic services such as health and safety, which includes points of reference such as health centres, hospitals, clinics, emergency services, and the locations of police stations.



Ronda Intermedia, Avenida de Capuchinos and Avenida de la Legión, which is where the road towards El Torcal begins. It is well worth a visit.

Unsurprisingly, as golf is one of the attractions of this area, the Antequera Golf group is based here. There can be few people who have not heard of Antequera Golf. This course, set in the geographic centre of Andalucía, has become a benchmark. It has excellent communications with other provinces in Andalucía: it is half an hour from Malaga, less than an hour from Cordoba and only an hour and a half from Seville, thanks to its railway station, which also connects with the high-speed service. From the northern side of the course, there are views over the plain of La Vega, and from the south you can see the mountains which precede El Torcal.

The Antequera Golf group also runs three fantastic hotels. One is the five-star Hotel Convento La Magdalena, which was a 16th-century convent and has 21 rooms. There is also the four-star Hotel Antequera Golf, with 180 spacious and perfectly-equipped rooms and, in the historic town centre, the three-star Hotel Coso Vejo, which has 42 rooms.

There are also outstanding rural golf courses in the Guadalhorce Valley. For example, Alhaurín Golf, which is just outside the town of Alhaurín el Grande, is known for its undulating terrain and long fairways. Alhaurín is popular among tourists who enjoy being close to nature. The main part of the town is on the north face of the Sierra de Mijas, 239 metres above sea level, so the green and leafy mountain rises behind it. There are some interesting historic churches and chapels, such as the Cristo de la Agonía, San Antón and Santa Vera-Cruz, with its neo-Gothic façade.

The neighbouring town of Alhaurín de la Torre is the classic example of a quiet, typically Andalusian and agrarian place, which has modernised in a sustainable and balanced fashion. One place of interest for walkers is La Cordillera de Jarapalos, which runs between the Guadalhorce Valley and the Costa del Sol, including part of

Alhaurín de la Torre, Alhaurín el Grande, Fuengirola, Benalmádena and Mijas. The area has a

warm and pleasant microclimate, with an average temperature of 17.4°C and 2,920 hours of sunshine a year.

It has been replanted with different varieties of pines, but there are also many typical Mediterranean woodland species, such as cork oaks, carobs and olives.

### An integrated course

This is also home to Lauro Golf, a course which is beautifully integrated into the surrounding countryside: rabbits, ducks, partridges, herons and even eagles can often be seen by players here because they have decided to become 'neighbours' and also enjoy the microclimate created by the trees and the 14 lakes on one of the best golf courses in the province.

# Jiménez wins in Florida and seals first victory for Spanish golf in 2019

'El Pisha' has now won a tournament on the Champions Tour for a sixth consecutive year, coming out on top in the Chubb Classic after a fantastic final-day fightback

## ALBERTO GÓMEZ

**C**harismatic Malaga golfer Miguel Ángel Jiménez extended his run on the Champions Tour by winning for a sixth successive year, claiming the Chubb Classic trophy on 17 February.

Jiménez finished top of the pile on The Classic course at Lely Resort in Naples (Florida), 13 under par with scores of 68, 66 and 66 across the three rounds.

The golfer from Churriana climbed fourteen positions in a memorable final round to share top spot with old foe Bernhard Langer and Olin Browne, forcing a play-off.

Jiménez showed precision on the final hole, finishing in four, while Langer and Browne did it in five.

His friend José María Olazábal, who also took part in the tournament, was the second-best Spanish player, finishing in 25th place on seven under.

"I'm working hard, training and going to the gym... as well as smoking and drinking," explained Jiménez when asked what was his recipe for success at the age of 55. "That is what I love to do. I love playing golf; competing is my life. I will go to any tournament and try to win. This is what we work for."



Jiménez poses with the trophy after a spectacular final-day fightback. :: SUR

## CHUBB CLASSIC STANDINGS

1. Miguel Ángel Jiménez
2. Olin Browne
3. Bernhard Langer
4. Woody Austin
5. Kevin Sutherland

## CHAMPIONS TOUR WINNERS

1. Bernhard Langer
2. Tom Lehman
3. David Toms
4. Miguel Ángel Jiménez
5. Marco Dawson

This was just Jiménez's third tournament of the season and the golfer admits that an early win "gives energy and confidence".

Victory was his seventh on the PGA Tour and is in addition to his two major wins last year in the Regions Tradition and the Seniors Open. It is also the first victory for a Spanish golfer this season.



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## AGENDA 2019

### 11 May Aloha

Torneo Benéfico Concordia  
Open tournament

### 8 June Aloha

Torneo Benéfico Niños Mariposa  
Open tournament

### 17 June Lauro

Interautonómico Absoluto Femenino 2019  
Open tournament

### 24 June Antequera Golf

Campeonato de Europa Universitario 2019

Open tournament

### 13 July Aloha

Torneo Benéfico Horizonte  
Open tournament

### 20 July Aloha

Torneo infantil  
Open tournament

### 3 August Aloha

Valle del Golf Aloha - Brisas  
Open tournament

### 10 August Aloha

Memorial Ibarrodo

Open tournament

### 13 August Aloha

Torneo Junior  
Open tournament

### 17 August Aloha

Torneo padre e hijos  
Open tournament

### 22 August Bil Bil Golf

Campeonato de España Sub 16 y Benjamín de Pitch & Putt 2019  
Open tournament

### 29 August Lauro

Campeonato de España Interclubes Infantil 2019  
Open tournament

### 28 September Torrequebrada golf

Campeonato de España Dobles Senior Femenino 2019  
Open tournament

### 5 October Aloha

Trofeo Benéfico ASPANDEM  
Open tournament

### 5 October Aloha

'Pitch and Putt' Nacional  
Open tournament

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