



Andalucía

Costa del

Golf

A destination with global appeal

The International Association of Golf Tour Operators has placed the Costa del Sol among its 15 best places to play [P2&3]



LADIES EUROPEAN TOUR

Anne Van Dam retains the Open de España

Azahara Muñoz, the best-ranked Spaniard, came fourth, four off the leader [P4]



EUROPEAN TOUR

Jon Rahm follows in Seve's footsteps

The Basque came out on top in the DP World Tour Championship to lead the Race to Dubai [P4]

The Costa gears up for its busiest period

The province's golf courses are in great shape ahead of the winter when the sector experiences its high season [P6]

The Costa del Sol, named as one of the 15 best places in the world to play golf

The International Association of Golf Tour Operators has recognised that it attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors every year and has a huge financial impact

ALBERTO
GÓMEZ

For decades now the Costa del Sol has been nurturing its golf facilities and reaping the benefits in the shape of hundreds of thousands of visitors and millions of euros in direct and indirect income. Now, however, it is also receiving awards from the most important entities in the sector.

The International Association of Golf Tour Operators has just included the area in the 15 best places to practise this sport in 2020. This is a major show of support from this organisation. It has 700 specialist members in more than 60 countries, which makes it the principal benchmark in the sector.

Last year the association also named the Costa del Sol as the best European golf destination, but this time the designation is the result of votes from its members, raising recognition to world level.

Only one other Spanish destination, Tenerife, is among the 15 places chosen by the association; the others are Abu Dhabi, the Algarve, South Carolina, the Côte d'Azur and Provence, Fife, Lisbon, Marrakech, Monterrey, New Zealand, the Dominican Republic, Southwest Ireland, Vietnam and Western Cape.

The choice of the 15 best places in the world to play golf was announced at the latest International Golf Travel Market, the sector's biggest professional fair, which took place in Morocco recently.

During the past few months the Costa del Sol, which has around 70 golf courses in Cadiz, and especially Malaga province, has embarked upon around 20 activities aimed at promoting the destination. The final months of the year are high season for this tourism segment which is why they are so important and strategic for the areas with the most golf courses.

For example, in November there was the tenth National Congress of the Spanish Golf Managers Association, which took place at the Parador Malaga Golf.

Margarita del Cid, the CEO of Turismo Costa del Sol, attended a lunch organised by this association and said the congress was "an excellent opportunity for all eyes to be on Malaga once again, especially



Beth Allen, in a file photo at the Open de España, which has taken place four consecutive times in Malaga province. :: SUR

as we have the chance to show in situ the excellent facilities and locations in this province for playing golf”.

She firmly believes that the Costa del Sol's potential in terms of golf is indisputable. “Golf is still one of our best ambassadors for the destination at a national and international level, and our facilities include around 70 courses all along the Costa del Sol,” she pointed out.

“Every year golf provides us with magnificent statistics and those assist us tremendously in attracting tourism throughout the year. It should also be noted that people who come here to play golf give us an average score of 9.24 out of ten, which is exceptional. Our greatest guarantees are safety, excellent service and the price-quality ratio. More than 98 per cent of our visitors recommend the destination after coming here,” she said.

“Our main objective is to consolidate the Costa del Sol as a high-standard destination, strengthening its image and prestige, and to continue to attract even more year-round tourism.”

Also in November there was the ‘pro-am’ prior to the Andalucía Costa del Sol Open de España. Around 20 Spanish journalists covered this event and the main attraction was the competition, which took place in Aloha Golf.

This was the fourth consecutive year that the Costa del Sol has hosted this international event, and it has done so six times in total, as part of an agreement between the Junta de Andalucía, Diputación de Málaga and Mancomunidad de Municipios de la Costa del Sol Occidental with the European Tour and the



The Costa hosts numerous women's golf tournaments. :: SUR



Margarita del Cid at the Golf Managers' Congress. :: SUR

Royal Spanish Golf Federation.

The tournament is part of the Ladies European Tour, which takes place on five continents. It consists of 23 tournaments in 18 countries and in all it brings together 325 professionals of 42 different nationalities.

Coverage of this event reaches over 500 million homes, according to figures provided by the tour organisers. This tour is a very important feature for the golf sector in the run-up to the end of the year.

Of the approximately 20 activities which have been organised to promote the destination, most - and the most important - are aimed at the golf segment. “We want to maintain the Costa del Sol's position as the epicentre of this sport and show off all its strengths and great potential,” explained Margarita del Cid.

Besides the numbers of visitors

and range of accommodation, the Costa del Sol can boast the key to success in tourism, which is diversity. In just one province visitors can enjoy sunshine and beaches, excellent culture and leisure facilities with Malaga city as a benchmark, and an option for rural tourism with major attractions such as the Caminito del Rey. However, the Costa also stands out above the rest for its golf and conference facilities. Malaga province has more golf courses than any other in the country and has the third-highest number of licences after Madrid and Barcelona. The Costa del Sol is home to 67 per cent of all the golf courses in Andalucía.

Sources at Turismo Costa del Sol stress that “this segment has an economic impact of 1.4 billion euros”, and these figures explain its fame as one of the best golfing destinations in the entire world.

WARNING ABOUT OVER-CONFIDENCE REGARDING BREXIT

Golf continues to be one of the most important attractions of the Costa del Sol. The region was well represented at the World Travel Market in November, one of the world's biggest tourism fairs, which takes place in London. It showcased its golf infrastructure, leisure facilities and gastronomy.

The withdrawal of the UK from the European Union cast a shadow over this year's WTM, although the president of Turismo Costa del Sol, Francisco Salado, said there is no indication that Brexit will affect the number of British visitors to the destination. However, he also warned that the sector should beware of being over-confident.

An unprecedented number of representatives from the Costa attended the event this year to reassure the market that it can remain confident about the region despite the present political and economic

situation in the UK.

The Costa del Sol had its own 200-square-metre stand as well as space on the Turismo Andaluz area. Its participation this year cost around 300,000 euros, 80,000 more than last year. With the slogan ‘Costa del Sol, now more than ever’, the tourism authorities wanted to highlight the close links between the area and the UK. Salado also referred to the “umbilical cord” that joins the United Kingdom and the Costa del Sol, and said that from an electoral perspective in that country, “a new stage is about to begin”.



Salado and Moreno Bonilla at the World Travel Market. :: SUR

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Van Dam retains Open de España crown

Azahara Muñoz, from San Pedro, was the highest-ranked Spaniard in the tournament, securing fourth place in the event held on home soil at Aloha Golf

**ALEJANDRO
DÍAZ**

Dutch golfer Anne Van Dam left it late but ultimately came out on top in this year's Open de España, hosted by Aloha Golf in Marbella, winning in a tournament in which the Malaga-born Azahara Muñoz came fourth, earlier this month.

Van Dam won the tournament last year, but looked like she may have scuppered her chances of repeating her victory going into the last day of the Open after an 18th hole to forget the day before. This had left the Dane Nanna Madsen and the Swede Julia Engstrom three clear of Van Dam.

It was the Indian Aditi Ashok who burst into action first on the final Sunday, leapfrogging Madsen with three birdies between the second and fourth holes. Madsen, who had led going into the penultimate day of the tournament and throughout much of Saturday, hit a double bogey on the third hole.



Anne Van Dam poses with the trophy. :: RFEG / FELIPE PÉREZ

WOMEN'S OPEN DE ESPAÑA RESULT

1. Anne Van Dam (NED)	-13
2. Aditi Ashok (IND)	-12
+. Nanna Koerstz Madsen (DEN)	-12
4. Azahara Muñoz (SPA)	-9
+. Olivia Cowan (GER)	-9
+. Julia Engstrom (SWE)	-9
7. Cheyenne Woods (USA)	-8
+. Christina Kim (USA)	-8
+. Marianne Skarpnord (NOR)	-8
10. Nuria Iturrioz (SPA)	-6

She fought back, however, with a birdie on the seventh hole and a spectacular eagle on the ninth, which boosted her back into top spot. Van Dam did everything she could to keep up with the Dane, but Madsen still had an advantage of two over her rival going into

the last nine holes.

She blew her lead, however, with an unexpected double bogey on the 13th hole. This meant she was level with Van Dam going into the 18th, where the Dutchwoman finally secured victory.

Azahara Muñoz finished in fourth place, making her the highest-ranked Spaniard at this tournament. She managed to finish every day below the par, but this was not enough for her to emerge victorious in a tournament which she has won twice before, in 2016 and 2017.



Azahara Muñoz, on the last day of the tournament. :: EFE

Fellow Spaniard Nuria Iturrioz finished in 10th place on -6, while Beatriz Recari and Luna Sobrón both finished in 20th place.

Jon Rahm wins in Dubai and follows in Seve's footsteps

The Basque golfer won the DP World Tour Championship last month and with it top spot in the Race to Dubai

:: EFE

Spanish golfer Jon Rahm secured a major double at the end of last month as he won the DP World Tour Championship and with it top spot in the Race to Dubai.

Rahm became only the second Spaniard to register this achievement, following in the footsteps of the legendary Severiano Ballesteros. 'Seve' won the competition on six occasions between 1976 and 1991, albeit when the competition was branded under a different name.

After a voluntary break of six weeks, the golfer from Barrika came back with a bang. He picked up exactly where he left off, following up his win in the Open de

España with victory at Jumeirah Golf Estates in Dubai.

Rahm had previously won here in 2017 and it shows up once again on his honours list now after a card of 269 strokes across the four rounds (66, 69, 66 and 68). This left him on 19 under par overall, ahead of Brit Tommy Fleetwood, with 270, and Frenchman Mike Lorenzo-Vera, with 271.

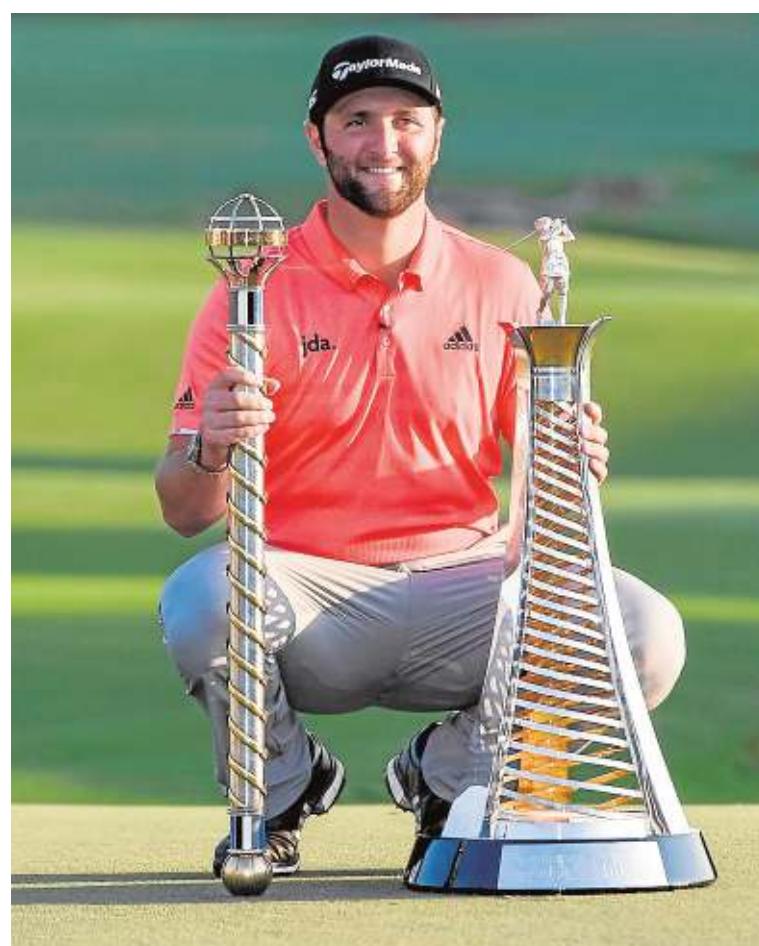
This second victory for Rahm in Dubai allows him to lead 'the race' for the first time in his career, making him, in the eyes of the world, the best player this year on the European Tour.

Rahm sealed this honour after a day of "ups and downs", with four bogeys and eight birdies. The last

was on hole 18. "How many times in your career do you find yourself in this situation? I needed a birdie to win the tournament and I said to myself that I needed to make the most of the opportunity. Luckily, I did it well; I made the putt," he said after the final day's play.

A "big year"

With his fourth win on the Rolex Series, Jon Rahm brings the curtain down on "a big year". "I knew it was a risk taking a six-week holiday before coming to Dubai but I needed it. Rest is also important. Let's hope I have a good 2020," said Spain's top golfer after picking up the double prize of trophy winner and the leader's baton.



Jon Rahm with the trophy and leader's baton. :: EFE

Golf relaxes its stance on wearing shorts

The European Tour breached etiquette for the first time during a tournament in South Africa

■ ALBERTO GÓMEZ

Neither etiquette nor tradition counts when the temperature is over 40°C. Golf, one of the sports which hangs on most to its own history, is gradually taking steps to liberate players' attire from the regulations of the past. In the Alfred Dunhill Championship in South Africa, the golfers were allowed to compete in shorts for the first time. They had already been allowed to train bare-legged, but until this point a player not wearing long trousers had never been seen in a competition.

So far this relaxation of the rules has proven the exception and the European Tour and PGA Tour are not

planning to apply it in the rest of the tournaments, but defenders of progress in golf are already rubbing their hands in expectation.

"I can't see anything wrong with it, it's common sense when it's so hot," Gonzalo Fernández Castaño, who took part on the first day of the tournament, told El País. "I played in long trousers because I got sunburned legs wearing shorts in the practise round, but it's a good idea. This is the 21st century and we have to adapt and modernise. And if it helps to make golf more popular, better still."

Britain's Tommy Fleetwood, one of the top golfers in the world, even



Ernie Els, playing in shorts in the Alfred Dunhill in South Africa. ■ GETTY IMAGES

suggested it would be a good idea to be able to play in a track suit or sports trousers so that golf, which has always been seen as an elitist sport, can become more accessible for children. Others, however, seem more reluctant, like Miguel Ángel Jiménez. "It's not elitism, it's our style. If we allow ourselves to be led by fashion it will take away the essence of our sport," he says.

Marta Figueras-Dotti, president of the Ladies European Tour, isn't keen on the idea of shorts either. "Etiquette is important. People don't wear a cap when they play basketball, do they? So the same should apply to golf. Those are the rules," she says.

The European Tour was the first to take a step in this respect. It did so three years ago, when it removed the ban on shorts in practise rounds. The

American PGA, promotor of the PGA Championship, had to go down the same road shortly afterwards, under pressure from its players.

At the beginning of this year the PGA Tour announced that it was open to players wearing shorts on the six professional tours it organises, but only in the practise rounds and the pro-ams. Time will tell what happens with the tournaments.



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Malaga is feeling positive about this year's peak golfing season

Tens of thousands of tourists come to the province during the winter months, attracted by the mild weather and excellent facilities

■ **ALEJANDRO DÍAZ**

When the days of hot weather and beach holidays are over (which is later than many might expect in a place whose name means Coast of the Sun because of the number of hours of sunshine it enjoys every year), business owners and institutions draw a line under the 'summer' and start planning for what is known as the 'low season'.

In fact, this is starting to be something of a misnomer, because in recent years the tourism authorities have been working hard and with increasing success to attract visitors to the area all through the year, and not just between June and September.

One of the main attractions for year-round tourism is the golf sector, and paradoxically the onset of autumn marks the start of this sport's high season.

The Costa del Sol has some of the most numerous and finest golf facilities in Europe and one major advantage: its lovely climate. Winter is hard in most other countries in Europe and the low temperatures at home mean that many golf fans are tempted by the idea of going somewhere warmer for a break and to play their favourite sport. That is where the Costa del Sol comes in to its own, as a preferred destination for visitors from all over the continent.

Spend more, stay longer

The statistics regarding golf tourism are impressive and it is not surprising that the authorities are keen to attract this type of visitor.

Tourists who come to the Costa del Sol to play golf spend nearly twice as much as other visitors while they are here, and they stay on average two days longer.

Considering the ability of this sector to attract a constant flow of visitors throughout the whole year, the public administrations and private companies have spared no efforts in recent years in investing in a sector which has become an important tool to combat the problem of seasonal tourism across Malaga.

The province of Malaga has everything to make it a benchmark in the world of golf: a lovely climate, wide range of hotels, excellent leisure facilities, plenty of culture and history, fantastic sports facilities and famous tournaments such as the women's Open de Es-



Hotels are well located and offer every facility. ■ **SUR**



The area has hosted tournaments such as the Open de España. ■ **SUR**

paña, which took place earlier this year at La Quinta Golf, in the municipality of Benahavís.

Tournaments of this type make the Costa del Sol a showcase for the world at a key time of the year: during the months before the high season for golf begins.

There can be no doubts about the importance of tourism in driving the local economy - it accounts for about 13 per cent of GDP in Andalucía and golf tourism represents five per cent of that, according to figures from the regional government.

Golf also brings jobs and wealth to the Costa del Sol area in particular. Statistics from the provincial government, the Diputación de Málaga, show that golf has a very significant impact on the province in financial terms: 1.41 billion euros in direct and indirect production, with golfers who stay for an average of 12.3 days and spend an average of 1,800 euros.

This year, the golf segment in Malaga province has started its peak season with very positive results and with the objective of being a prime destination for fans of

The average spending by the visitors who come to the area to play golf is double that of other types of tourist

this sport who come from other parts of Europe.

According to the Tourist Board for this area, Turismo Costa del Sol, the attractions of the province are well-known abroad and it is already seen as a place to play golf "in a privileged location with mild temperatures, very different to the cold winters in central and northern Europe".

With this in mind, the different clubs and courses on the Costa del Golf often organise special offers for long stays, designed especially for this type of specialised tourist, who might be considering the destination for a golfing trip.

From near and far

Now, more than ever, is the time of year when this area can boast about its lovely climate, and it is having an effect. Tourism figures show that golf plays a key role in attracting year-round tourism, precisely because it is so popular with visitors from other parts of Europe outside the summer months.

However, as can be seen from the offers and promotions for the golf segment, the high season for golf in Malaga province does not just attract tourists from abroad but also from elsewhere in Spain, and this is also important as their numbers are increasing.

Not only that, but it is also extremely popular with local residents and those who have second homes here. There are many golf enthusiasts in Malaga province and they contribute to the continual success throughout the year of different amateur tournaments organised by clubs on the eastern and western Costa del Sol.

Nor should we fail to mention the existence of clubs situated in the inland part of the province, such as Antequera Golf, as these also help to make Malaga a unique golfing destination in the world all year round.

The introduction of new professional and amateur tournaments in recent years has been key to consolidating golf as one of the most

A HIGH-SCORING DESTINATION

The Costa del Sol receives very positive reviews from tourists, as the figures for the past summer corroborate.

The area was given an average of 8.37 marks out of ten, according to a survey which was carried out by Turismo Costa del Sol regarding quality, services and prices of hotels in eight rival destinations in Spain and abroad.

After their holiday on the Costa del Sol, tourists gave the area a higher score than any of its rival destinations in terms of Staff (8.6), Cleanliness (8.72), Comfort (8.25), Facilities (8.13) and Price-Quality Ratio (8.10).

In terms of location for a holiday, the destination was given a high score of 8.59 points out of ten.

For the purposes of this survey, Turismo Costa del Sol analysed the Costa del Sol, Costa de la Luz, Costa de Almería, Costa Blanca, Costa Brava, the Canary Islands, the Balearic Islands and the international destinations of the Algarve (Portugal) and Antalya (Turkey).

important tourism sectors for the Costa del Sol, where there are more than 70 golf courses, which is almost 70 per cent of all those in the region of Andalucía.

In the summer season, the golf sector continues to be a complement for quality tourism and efforts are made to promote the sport among people who live in the province. Different initiatives on offer include reduced prices for families, so that children can also learn and enjoy playing.

The Costa del Sol also has one of the most exclusive areas in which to stay and enjoy a golf-based holiday. Marbella has the greatest concentration of golf courses in the province and plenty of others nearby. These include some of the most luxurious hotels and resorts such as Villa Padierna, with its spas, swimming pools, private apartments, a hotel and, of course, several top-quality golf courses.

The Costa del Sol is a real opportunity for travellers who want a warm Mediterranean climate in winter and a destination where golf, although extremely important, is not the only attraction during their stay.

A long-term boost for women's golf

The two principal ladies' tours, the LPGA and LET, have signed an agreement in Malaga which aims to attract sponsors and further the careers of female golfers

ALBERTO GÓMEZ

MALAGA. More than four decades ago the American tennis player Billie Jean King accepted a challenge from her colleague Bobby Riggs who, despite being 56 years old, was sure he could beat any women. His certainty was not only due to his well-known misogyny, but also the fact that months earlier he had beaten Australian player Margaret Court, the world number one. King, however, soon set him straight with a 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 win in an exhibition match watched by 90 million TV viewers.

That was more than a tennis match. It sent the strong message that sportswomen should be considered professionals and as able to meet the demands of competition as men. King's victory was fundamental in understanding why nowadays tennis is the only sport with equal earnings for men and women in its most important tournaments, including the four Grand Slam trials.

Golf is still far from having equal prizes in its championships, but the reach of the female tours, especially the American Tour, has increased extraordinarily in recent years, in a similar way that tennis did in the 1990s. Now the two principal tours, the American LPGA and the European LET, have agreed to create a company to boost women's golf in Europe in the long term. They hope this will attract more support from sponsors and thereby increase the opportunities for growth for women golfers.

The experience and associations on the LET and the strength and global reach of the LPGA are the basic ingredients for a union which is laden with advantages. At least, that was the opinion of the women who voted to support the agreement at the LET's Annual Meeting of Women Players which took place in Malaga, coinciding with the Open de España.

"The coming together of these two powers around a common pro-



Mike Whan and Marta Figueras-Dotti, after announcing the agreement made in Malaga. :: LADIES EUROPEAN TOUR

positional will create opportunities which we honestly could not have achieved alone," says Marta Figueras-Dotti, president of the LET. "This alliance aims to create opportunities so our members can pursue their passion and develop their careers as professional sportswomen. In the 60 days that we have been working together in this company we have already seen an important impact on our LET Tour Programme, and it is an impact that will be positive for our members."

The agreement is seen as "an exciting step" towards providing more opportunities for women golfers. In the past ten years, the LPGA has seen

excellent results from its associations with other agents, such as the USGA, the PGA Tour, the European Tour, R&A and the PGA of America.

"We are delighted to strengthen our relationship with the LET and, in this way, help the tour in Europe to grow," said LPGA commissioner Michael Whan. "We have seen an incredible growth in women's golf in the United States, and this is an extraordinary opportunity to accelerate and expand the game in Europe as well. I'm excited about this association."

The company will be run jointly for the two tours and, through combined resources, will seek to amplify

the calendar of the European Tour which currently has 20 official events in 13 different countries, eight of them in Europe.

Although specific details have not yet been published, such as how the association is expected to develop in the future, it is also hoped that it will establish a structure so the best female players on the European Tour can access the Q Series of the American Tour.

The rising popularity of this sport is clear to see in the USA and some countries in Asia where the economic and media impact of the women's tournaments increases every year. The growth is much more discreet

in southern Europe although in some countries, such as France, where one of the five majors takes place each year, the women players attract thousands of fans to the courses.

The women's Open de España, which took place in Marbella last month, is an example of the media and financial impact generated by these championships, although it is still far from the figures on the men's tours. However, they are becoming increasingly popular with sponsors and the public.

It will be interesting to see how much the agreement which has recently been signed will contribute to the success of women's golf.



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THE MONTH IN PICTURES



▲ **Epic win.** Pablo Larrazábal overcame injury to secure victory at the Alfred Dunhill Championship earlier this month. Battling muscular issues, he won the first event on this year's European Tour after overturning a +6 from the first nine holes on the final day. :: EFE



◀ **European Tour return.** Malaga golfer Santiago Cañizares has put this turbulent year, punctuated by injuries and his wife's health scare, behind him by securing a second-place finish at Lumine to regain his place on the European Tour. :: SUR



▲ **Million-dollar prize.** Carlota Ciganda has been named the first winner of the AON Challenge, an LGPA Tour initiative which rewards the most daring players on selected holes. With the highest average score, Ciganda secured the million-dollar prize. :: AFP



◀ **A brush with success.** Miguel Ángel Jiménez, from Churriana, Malaga, almost ended the season in the best way possible but ultimately came up short in the Charles Schwab Cup Championship, the grand final of the Champions Tour for veterans. Jiménez finished in fourth place on 16 under par, five behind Retief Goosen and Jeff Maggert, with the latter winning the play-off tie-breaker. :: SUR



▲ **Spanish champion.** Asturian golfer Alfredo García-Heredia was proclaimed champion of Spain for the third time last month after his victories in 2011 and 2014. He led the national championship from start to finish at La Grajera in Logroño. :: EFE

2020 CALENDAR

9 January Atalaya Park: Copa de Andalucía Femenina Qualification required Guadalmina: Copa de Andalucía Masculina Open tournament 25 January Playa Serena: Circuito Senior Open tournament 6 June Mijas Golf: Premio AFA	Open tournament 13 June Mijas Golf: Memorial Blas Fernández Open tournament 27 June Mijas Golf: Cofradía Virgen de la Cruz Open tournament 4 July Mijas Golf: Grupo Juma Open tournament	11 July Mijas Golf: Copa San Miguel Open tournament 25 July Mijas Golf: Premio Club Tamisuel Open tournament 1 August Mijas Golf: Premio en favor de la AECC Open tournament 7 August Mijas Golf:	Memorial Felipe Pérez Open tournament 7 August Lauro Golf: Interclubs infantil Open tournament 28 August Benalmádena Golf: Senior 'pitch and putt' Open tournament 11 November Lauro Golf: 'Stroke play' femenino Open tournament
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