

Andalucía Costa del GOLF



With sights set on the Solheim Cup

The Costa del Sol is close to being confirmed as the tournament's host in 2023 and has increased its golf spending accordingly [P28-31]



TOKYO 2020

Going all out for Olympics qualification

Jon Rahm, Carlota Ciganda, Azahara Muñoz and Sergio García could be heading to Tokyo [P4]



LADIES EUROPEAN TOUR

The Spaniard who rules European golf

Marta Figueras-Dotti presides over the second most important tour in the world [P6]

Tourist destination: Huelva

This Andalusian province brings together a varied offering that includes the possibility of playing golf by the sea [P7]

The Costa doubles its golf budget with all eyes on the Solheim Cup

The area, closer than ever to hosting the famous biennial competition in 2023, is increasing its spending in the sector to 800,000 euros

COSTA DEL GOLF

The Fitur international tourism fair which took place in Madrid in January proved to be a clear demonstration of the authorities' growing commitment to golf, especially in destinations where the infrastructure for this sport already exists. The Costa del Sol is a good example, because golf is key to attracting visitors to the area all year round and this type of tourist has high spending power.

The Costa has one of the highest concentrations of golf infrastructure in southern Europe, and Turismo Costa del Sol has announced that it plans to invest more than 800,000 euros on promoting it this year.

The funds will be used for specific activities including travel fairs, conferences, professional forums, commercial alliances, promotional campaigns and organising activities within the region and elsewhere.

The CEO of Turismo Costa del Sol, Margarita del Cid, said the tourist board "will continue, as it has done in recent years, to show its strong commitment to the golf sector, which is of vital importance for Malaga province and essential in the battle to attract tourism to the area all year round and not just in peak season".

Del Cid explained that the money is to be allocated under a special Action Plan. About 490,000 euros will be spent on promotion



Azahara Muñoz during the Solheim Cup, which the Costa del Sol might host in 2023. :: HUESEYIN YERLIKAYA

and communication for the Ladies' European Tour, preparing for the Race To Costa del Sol and the Costa del Sol Open de España, but also the Solheim Cup. These are competitions for which the tourist board has decided to invest one of the largest sums of the year.

It will be spending 54,000 euros on participation in different international specialist golf fairs and in women's and men's tournaments throughout the year.

Representatives from the tourist board will also be attending the Costa del Sol Ladies Trophy, which will take place in different countries, with a special focus on the Scandinavian market. 25,000 euros has been set aside for this purpose.

"The recognition of the Costa del Sol as Best Golf Destination 2019 by the International Association of Golf Tour Operators, and as the official exclusive golf destination in continental Europe by the PGA of Germany, have strengthened the Costa del Sol's position in the golf sector and also in the German market, which is one of the priorities for the destination. Turismo Costa del Sol has increased its links with the German PGA now," said Margarita del Cid.

She also stressed the importance of this sector, with more than 70 golf courses, nearly 70 per cent of the total in Andalucía, generating an economic benefit of 1.41 billion euros a year.

In 2019 the tourist board spent nearly 500,000 euros on golf, so this year the budget has increased by nearly 300,000.

Officials at Turismo Costa del Sol have reached commercial agree-

ANDALUCÍA, A STATE-OF-THE- ART DESTINATION

With impressive technology on display, giant screens, the means to connect the more than 160,000 visitors who were expected and new areas designated for start-ups, Andalucía intended to demonstrate at Fitur that it is a destination which has the ability to provide travellers with everything they could possibly

need, and at all times of the year.

The vice-president of the Junta and Minister for Tourism, Juan Marín, explained that his department planned to consolidate the region as the favourite destination for Spanish tourists to spend their holidays and this was supported by the most recent figures. Marín said that in 2019 Andalucía had broken its record in terms of Spanish visitors, with more than 20.1 million tourists from other parts of the country. "This is our principal market and for us Fitur is more than just a great event which we always look forward to," he said.

The Andalucía stand was the biggest at the fair, which has now been taking place for 40 years. It covered 5,300 square metres, of which more than 200 contained audiovisual content to provide maximum information to the visitors to the event, of whom 57 per cent were professionals from the tourism industry. The amount of space designated for companies to promote and generate business was also expanded this year, and around 5,000 contacts were made.

The stand was divided into eight different areas and an innovation hub with 15 start-ups.



Marín, during the presentation for Andalucía. :: FRANCIS SILVA

Turismo Costa del Sol will spend 300,000 euros more on the promotion of the sector than it did in 2019

ments which have enabled them “to raise awareness of the destination to an objective public who are interested in golf, develop the reserves of Spanish golfers and generate greater demand for golf in the summer season, by participating in tournaments in the destination and associating the Costa del Sol brand with others which are internationally recognised”.

With regard to the activities carried out last year, in January the tourist board attended the Matka fair in Helsinki, which is considered the biggest tourism event in northern Europe and the Baltic region. In February it collaborated with MeinPep Touristik Aktuell and organised a familiarisation trip for a dozen German travel agents and journalists with a professional interest in golf and spa products.

In March, Turismo Costa del Sol promoted its star attraction at the ITB in Berlin and took part in the annual PGA meeting in Germany. About 250 pros took part in this event, which was part of the collaboration agreement with the PGA as Pool Partner and Exclusive Destination for the German PGA in continental Europe.

In May it attended Expovaciones Bilbao, to showcase the wide-ranging facilities associated with golf in Malaga province and the Costa del Sol.

In the same month Turismo Costa del Sol promoted golf to the Spanish market with a presence at the third Torneo de Golf Influencers, in which it participated to-



American golfer Michelle Wie, during the Solheim Cup. :: AFP

gether with El Corte Inglés, Movistar Estudiantes, Crédito y Caución and Palladium Hotel Group.

The event took place at Golf Santander, a course designed by Rees Jones and situated in the Ciudad Grupo Santander de Boadilla del Monte, in Madrid.

In the summer, the Costa del

Sol reinforced its position in the golf sector by participating in the IAGTO Spain Trophy.

This is a professional event organised of the International Association of Golf Tour Operators, and its fifth edition in Tenerife brought together 250 representatives of tour operators, golf courses and



Carlota Ciganda with her caddie and the Solheim Cup. :: AFP



Del Cid, at the presentation of the Open de España. :: SUR

hotels.

In June, Turismo Costa del Sol also took part in the second Foro Internacional de Turismo de Golf, which took place in Estepona.

This is one of the most important promotional events for golf, attended by around 70 international specialist tour operators,

and Turismo Costa del Sol was there alongside Turismo Andaluz and with the support of Turespaña.

From September to December the tourist board also demonstrated the strength of the golfing sector with ten important actions, focusing on its candidature to host the Solheim Cup in 2023.



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The race to the Olympics hots up

Jon Rahm, Carlota Ciganda and Azahara Muñoz have their spots practically guaranteed but it will be a nervy few months for Sergio García as he holds on to the final place

ALBERTO GÓMEZ

MÁLAGA. There are less than six months left until the Olympic Games. The countdown has already begun and the players are preparing their schedule for the next few months with their eyes on Tokyo - though places are far from guaranteed.

The latest update of the world rankings gives the so-called 'Olympic passport' to Carlota Ciganda and Azahara Muñoz in the women's category with it practically impossible for any other Spanish player to catch them.

Among the men it's a different story. At the moment, Jon Rahm and Sergio García are in the driving seat, but the latter has Rafa Cabrera Bello breathing down his neck, waiting for any dip in form in the coming months.

Each country can enter four men and four women at the Games, as long as they are among the top fifteen in the world. Otherwise, as in the case of Spain, the country's two best golfers per category will qualify.

The men's second place seems like it will be contested until the last moment. So far, first-placed Rahm seems unstoppable in the classification, even aspiring to be world number one, so his path to Tokyo is practically guaranteed. Sergio García, second in Spain at the moment, is currently in 41st spot in the world ranking.

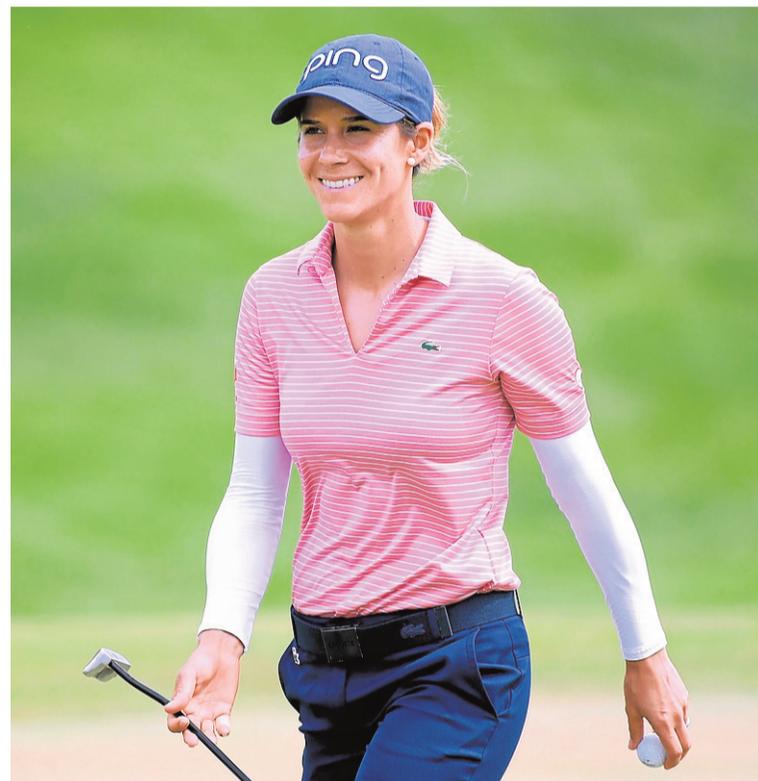
Up to sixty golfers per category can qualify for the Olympics in total, with the next player in the ranking on stand-by as a replacement. If García manages to keep in second place, Cabrera Bello would become Spain's Olympic stand-by. The Canarian, however, could still push García into the substitute's position.

So far, only two countries meet the requirement of having four players among the top fifteen: the United States in the male category and South Korea in the female category. Former world number one Tiger Woods is the currently second substitute for his country, with Brooks Koepka (number two), Justin Thomas (fourth), Dustin Johnson (fifth), Patrick Cantlay (sixth) and Webb Simpson (seventh) ahead of him in the rankings.

The final list of participants for the Games will be known on 22 June 2020 for men and 29 June for women. The Olympic classification rules also involve some corrective factors; for example there must be at least one representative from each continent and another from the country organising the competition. These requirements complicate access to the Olympics, which for golfers, due to its short history, is not as attractive as it is for athletes from



Jon Rahm is aiming to be world number one. :: SUR



Azahara Muñoz's place is practically in the bag. :: SUR



Carlota Ciganda, the current Spanish number one. :: SUR



Sergio García's place is currently under threat. :: SUR

other disciplines.

There will be other surprises in Tokyo, beyond the possible absence of Woods. Rory McIlroy has already confirmed in an interview with Golf Channel that he intends to represent Ireland (the Northern Irishman had the choice of representing either Ireland or Great Britain).

In 2016 he pulled out of the Games due to the risk of contract-

Rafa Cabrera Bello is keeping the pressure on Sergio García, ready to pounce on any dip in form

ing the Zika virus. Before making this decision he had already commented that if he went to Rio he would do so under the Irish flag. Now he stands firm on this position: "Even though the Olympic Games allowed me the choice, there really wasn't a choice because all I've done in my life is play golf for Ireland, so why change? That was my decision. I don't want my final

decision to go for Ireland to ruin my chances of being an Olympian or to prejudice anyone; I think I've decided for the best."

McIlroy will be one of the big favourites in Tokyo, having claimed four majors and been in the running to be the world's number one.

McIlroy's is unlikely to be the only Olympic controversy. The race to the Games has just begun.

A good start to the season for Jon Rahm

The Spaniard has three top ten finishes to his name and is third in the latest world rankings released on Monday

■ ALEJANDRO DÍAZ

MÁLAGA. Jon Rahm's strong start to the season continues. The Spaniard recorded yet another top-ten finish in the WM Phoenix Open last weekend after coming second at the Farmers Insurance Open in California.

It was here that he came closest to getting his first win of the year in a tournament he led by the end of the third day. His result was better than the one achieved by Adrià Arnaus at the Omega Dubai Desert Classic on the European Tour, where the Catalan golfer finished third, setting the two best results for Spanish golfers on the professional circuits.

After two rounds of 68 and 71 strokes, Rahm dazzled with a splendid third round completed with only 65 strokes, a combination of results that took him top with a two-stroke advantage over Rory McIlroy.

The momentum of the Basque golfer, who previously won this tournament in 2017, his first professional victory, was however broken on the first holes of the final round. Two bogeys on holes one and five and, above all, a double bogey on hole three, made it an uphill struggle, though he did manage to get a birdie on hole six.

The first nine holes were completed with three shots over par, forcing Rahm to push back hard.

Though the first push came perhaps a little late with an extraordinary eagle on the 13th hole, followed by a birdie on the 14th hole.

On the 15th, he signed an untimely bogey but still wouldn't throw in the towel. Birdies on holes 16 and 17 made for an exciting and agonising end.

The leader, Australian Marc Leishman, already at the clubhouse,



Jon Rahm has started the new year in good shape. ■ AFP

Despite eventually coming third at the Farmers Insurance Open, the Basque player fought for the win until the very end

was anxiously following events, with Rahm needing an eagle on the last hole to force a playoff. In the end, though, he had to settle for a bogey, finally finishing in third place.

Just a week earlier, Rahm had sneaked into the top ten of the first tournament of the American tour.

Rahm, with a card of 72 strokes on the final day of the Sentry Tournament of Champions, missed out on the play-off but finished in tenth.

The Basque player retained his third place in the world rankings published on Monday. Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy was the new number one, with 9.1870 points, displacing American Brooks Koepka, now second with 9.1555.



Jiménez is still competitive on the Champions Tour. ■ REUTERS

Miguel Ángel Jiménez wins for the second time in Hawaii

The Malaga-born player continues to combine regular championships with events on the Champions Tour for seniors

■ COSTA DEL GOLF

A memorable putt of about four or five metres gifted Miguel Ángel Jiménez, 56, the final victory on 19 January in the Mitsubishi Electric Championship, a tournament belonging to the PGA's veterans tour, adding his ninth victory in this circuit.

Jiménez always performs well at the Hualalai course in Hawaii (United States), where he previously claimed first place in this tournament in 2015. On this occasion he won after a play-off with two other legendary players, South Africa's Ernie Els and the American Fred Couples.

Jiménez presented a final card with 67 strokes, with six birdies and a bogey, for a total of 202 strokes - matched by Couples and Els.

In the first round of the play-off, Couples signed a bogey and was eliminated, while Jiménez and Els met the par. On the second hole it was the Malaga player who got a birdie that the South African couldn't match, making

Jiménez the first Spanish golfer to win a trophy in 2020.

"I told my caddy that the winning result this time would be 15, so we had to get our act together and hurry up to make birdies," Jiménez told Ten Golf.

"It's always a pleasure to come here. Besides always playing well, it's very nice to have two victories already in this tournament," he added.

The illustrious line-up in Hawaii that weekend included Tom Lehman, who was defending his title, Davis Love III, John Daly, Bernhard Langer, Vijay Singh, Kenny Perry, Tom Watson and Retief Goosen.

The Mitsubishi Electric Championship is one of the most special tournaments for the Malaga native. His victory in 2015 came just days after the death of his mother, to whom he dedicated that title.

This year his victory comes without that bittersweet taste, only with the joy of continuing to lift trophies.

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The Spaniard who runs the LET

Marta Figueras-Dotti, a pioneer in Spanish golf and a great defender of equality in sport, has been president of the Ladies European Tour since 2018

ALBERTO GÓMEZ

MALAGA. She is not only an icon of Spanish golf, but also the woman who holds the reins of the Ladies European Tour (LET). Marta Figueras-Dotti was the first female golfer in the country to move to the USA with a sports scholarship, compete on the American Tour and win a tournament among the world elite. She was also captain of the Spanish women's team in the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro and vice-captain of the European team in the Solheim Cup. Now, aged 62 and battling colon cancer, she is at the helm of the LET, the second most important professional tour in the world. She was appointed its president in 2018.

Marta began to play when she was seven and her father, president of the Spanish Golf Federation for eight years, used to take her to tournaments as his caddie. She studied Medicine at the Complutense University of Madrid for three years before travelling to the USA to register at the University of Southern California with a scholarship.

Marta graduated with honours in Humanities and Social Sciences and became a professional golfer in 1982. She was a member of the American and European Tours until 2001, when she retired with the satisfaction of four big victories to her name: three on the LET and one on the LPGA.

She turned to teaching and the national golf teams - and contributed as trainer to their triumph in the Women's Team Championship in 2013 - and in recent years she has been sharing her extensive technical knowledge and impressive personality with players of recognised quality such as Azahara Muñoz, Carlota Ciganda, Belén Mozo, Tania

Marta was the first female Spanish player in the 1980s to emigrate to the USA with a sports scholarship

She captained the Spanish women's team at the Olympic Games in Rio and was vice-captain of the European team in the Solheim Cup

Elósegui, María Hernández, Marta Prieto and Elisa Serramiá.

Born in 1957, Marta Figueras-Dotti accumulated numerous wins as an amateur, with special mention for the Spanish and Junior Championships of 1979 and gold medals in the European Junior Team championships in 1975 and 1977, before spending over two decades in America.

During that time she forged an outstanding golfing career, especially her win while still an amateur at the Women's British Open in 1982. She then turned professional and became the first Spanish female golfer to win on the LPGA Tour, specifically the Hawaii Open and the JC Penney Classic in 1994.

Increase in women's golf

Figueras-Dotti is a great defender of equality between men and women in sport. Golf is still far from paying equal prizes in its championships but the growth of the women's tours in recent years has been quite extraordinary, similar to the way tennis increased in popularity in the 1990s.

Now the two main tours, the American (LPGA) and European (LET), have reached an agreement to create a company in the long term to boost women's golf in Europe. This alliance aims to attract more sponsors and thereby increase the opportunities available for women golfers.

Experience and relations at a European level with the European Tour and the strength and global exposure of the American Tour are the basic ingredients of a union which is filled with possibilities, something that was appreciated by the players who seconded the agreement with their vote at the Annual Meeting of LET Players, which took place in Malaga last year, coinciding with the Open de España.

"The joining of these two powers with a common purpose will create opportunities which, honestly, we would not have been able to achieve alone," says Marta. "By creating this alliance we can look for opportunities which will enable our members to pursue their passion and develop their careers as professional sportswomen. During the time we have been working on this joint company, we have already seen an important impact on our LET Tour Programme, and it is an impact which will be positive for our associates."

The agreement is "an exciting step" towards attaining the objective of providing more opportunities for women in this sport, and for Marta, the lady who holds the reins of European golf, that is very important indeed.



Figueras-Dotti achieved four major wins as a professional and is now president of the LET. :: SUR



With Carlota Ciganda, the current highest-ranked Spanish player. :: SUR

Huelva: the birthplace of Spanish golf has plenty to offer all year round

This province of Andalucía provides golfers with the opportunity to play their favourite sport in unique settings close to the sea

ALEJANDRO
DÍAZ

Huelva can justifiably call itself a unique destination, not just in Andalucía but in the whole of Europe. It has many remarkable features, such as its climate, its beautiful beaches and its protected natural areas, but even with these advantages it still faces the problem of seasonal tourism. However, thanks to industries such as golf, this is gradually being overcome and one sign of this is the fact that hotels which normally close in the winter months are now reopening earlier each year.

It was with this in mind that Huelva province had a presence at the Feria Internacional de Turismo in Madrid last month, where the mayor of Huelva city, Gabriel Cruz, presented

a new tourist guide, published by the council to market the city as a destination which can boast traditions, gastronomy, history, light and numerous attractions, especially events organised around Easter, a time of year with huge potential for tourism.

The guide, which is called 'Huelva, Descubre La Pasión' was presented at an event at the ME Madrid Reina Victoria hotel, where the mayor was accompanied by the president of the board of Religious Brotherhoods and Confraternities, Antonio González, and representatives of other such boards in Andalucía. Also present were Huelva's deputy mayor with responsibility for Culture, Daniel Mantero, and the councillor for Tourism, Promotion of Huelva Abroad and University, Francisco Baluffo. Representatives of different institutions also attended the presentation, including the president of the Huelva provincial government, Ignacio Caraballo, and the Junta de Anda-

lucía's delegate for Tourism in Huelva, María Ángeles Muriel.

As the mayor explained, "With this new publication we aim to raise more awareness and generate further interest among tourists in Easter week in Huelva." The city hall has published 500 copies of the guide, which is being distributed to travel agencies, tourist offices and tour operators.

The booklet provides information about the history of Holy Week in the city and explains the rituals of the religious brotherhoods, the historical items associated with them, information and recommendations about the local gastronomy and tourist routes to complement the Easter processions.

The beginnings of golf

Huelva was the birthplace of Span-

ish golf. A great deal of time has passed since the British miners who worked in the Riotinto Mines created the first golf course in Andalucía, Bellavista, in 1916. It was a pioneer for the whole peninsula. The opportunity to practise this exciting sport at any time of year in unique surroundings meant that golf in Huelva developed at an extraordinary speed.

Over one hundred years later, numerous golf courses now await visitors to Huelva and in a variety of settings such as the Sierra de Huelva mountains or along the coast, in links courses beside natural sand dunes, or amid an infinity of pine trees which can influence play.

Walking across hectares of beautifully cared-for grass is such a special sensation that it can only be compared with the relaxing strolls

which visitors nearly always like to take, barefoot on Huelva's endless beaches at low tide. Many tourists and golf enthusiasts take a golf club with them to practise their 'bunker' strokes, as these are the obstacles most feared by players. At low tide the beach becomes a golf course of fine compressed sand between the dunes and the sea, an extraordinary environment in which to organise beach-golf tournaments.

The Corta Atalaya Golf Club, situated where the Sierra de Huelva mountain range begins, has fantastic views and proximity to the Riotinto Mines. It is a nine-hole course with three par-threes, five par-fours and one par-five. Half of the course is quite flat, but two of the fairways are on noticeable slopes.

The most recent golf course in Huelva province, El Rompido, is located beside the beauty spot of Las Marismas del Río Piedra and Flecha de El Rompido, providing magnificent views over the Atlantic Ocean.

In the municipality of Ayamonte, Costa Esuri Golf Club H2O is set in a privileged area beside the Guadiana river, with a spectacular view across to Portugal and the river estuary, surrounded by marshes and natural lagoons. There are excellent communications with both Seville and Faro airports, and it is just two kilometres from the Seville-Portugal motorway.

The Doñana Golf course deserves a special mention: it is situated in Matalascañas, beside the Doñana National Park, just metres from the Atlantic. The 18-hole course is easy to walk, and has been designed in harmony with the surrounding area. The first nine holes (the Doñana round), apart from providing high-quality golf, involve a walk through incomparable natural surroundings. The second nine holes (Atlantic round) offer players the chance to use all their creativity with their golf clubs.

In addition, the 18 holes of the Golf Novo Portil course lead on to Mediterranean pine woods at El Portil, a coastal town with a very benign climate. The course is gentle, with trees and shrubs bordering the bermuda grass fairways at a prudent distance from the game.

The Isla Canela course is situated near Ayamonte and close to the sea. It is an easy course to walk, although the slopes caused by the sand dunes are considerable. The vegetation is predominantly broom, but there are also orange, olive and eucalyptus trees, sometimes strategically situated on the fairways to make the game more difficult.

Huelva, to summarise, is light, beaches which just have to be enjoyed and golf facilities which do a great deal to attract visitors to the area all through the year.



Huelva's Atlantic beaches are spectacular. :: SUR



Playing golf beside the Atlantic is a unique experience. :: SUR



Huelva has some of the best golf courses in the region. :: SUR

THE MONTH IN PICTURES



▲ **Tribute.** The first round of the WM Phoenix Open, which took place in Arizona, was filled with tributes to the late Kobe Bryant, the basketball star who died in a helicopter accident with seven others (including his daughter) days earlier. :: GETTY



▲ **A local winner.** Ana Peláez was last month crowned winner of the Copa de Andalucía, the first amateur tournament of 2020. The local golfer took advantage of her knowledge of the terrain at Atalaya Golf & Country Club to edge in front of Marta López who finished second. :: SUR



◀ **In his father's footsteps.** Miguel Ángel Jiménez Bravo (left), son of the famous Malaga golfer of the same name (right), has won the right to play on the Mena Tour. The tour, established in the Middle East and North Africa, features 11 events during the year and has a prize pot of over 600,000 euros. :: SUR



▲ **More sponsorship.** The prize money for the women's Open de España will double to 600,000 euros as the Junta de Andalucía regional government steps up its backing. The Andalucía Costa del Sol Open will also become the final event on the European tour, which will, therefore, gain the moniker Race to Costa del Sol. :: SUR

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Golf

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2020 SCHEDULE

14 February
Costa Ballena:
Match Internacional Cuadrangular Open tournament

2 April
Sherry:
Campeonato de España sub-18 Open tournament

15 April
Sotogrande:
Copa RCG Sotogrande 2020 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

8 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