

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# BENALMÁDENA

**Melting pot.** Benalmádena boasts a diverse international community that makes everybody feel at home **P4**

**Interview.** Mayor Víctor Navas speaks of the importance of integration without losing national identities **P5**

**Talk of the town.** Five Benalmádena residents reveal what they love about the municipality, and what could be improved **P6**

## Where everyone finds what they're looking for

Benalmádena offers the complete package: a seaside resort, a mountain village and modern facilities, all in one





## Benalmádena. The complete package

**A town for all seasons.** Beyond its ten kilometres of popular coastline, Benalmádena boasts sprawling parks, pretty plazas, a well-equipped marina and attractions and modern facilities enjoyed by residents and visitors

TONY BRYANT



**R**ich in attractive beaches, landscaped gardens, theme parks and a stunning marina, Benalmádena is one of the most popular tourist resorts on the Costa del Sol. The town covers an area of almost 30 square kilometres and extends from the Sierra de Mijas down to the coastline of the Mediterranean. The population, which includes a large international community, is concentrated in three main centres: Benalmádena Pueblo, Arroyo de la Miel and Benalmádena Costa.

Benalmádena Pueblo is the old town, an attractive, sleepy white village perched in the mountains with panoramic views of the coast. Closer to the coast, Arroyo de la Miel is the bustling heart of Benalmádena, offering a combination of the postcard image of Spain and 21st century facilities. Benalmádena Costa, which is where most of the town's hotels and nightlife can be found, has almost 10 kilometres of beautiful beaches, from secluded coves and nudist areas, to the family focused beaches with plenty of activities.

### The old town

Benalmádena Pueblo is a maze of narrow, cobbled streets, with white-washed houses adorned with displays of coloured geraniums spilling out of wall-mounted plant pots. Traditional cuisine, local crafts and the remnants of several cultures, not to mention the stunning views and mysterious architecture, are just some of the attractions this small mountainside town offers.

Evidence found in three local caves (Cuerva del Toro, Cuerva del Botijo and Cuerva de la Zorrera) indicates that the area was first populated around 20,000 years ago. The Phoenicians profited from the mining in the area (the name

of Benalmádena is thought to relate to the mines) and the Romans replaced them as traders, benefiting from the wealth of the Mediterranean. Among the Roman ruins to be found in Benalmádena is the Benal-Roma salting factory, located on the coast. The wine culture also had great importance during the Roman era, but it was to be the Muslims who would greatly develop the area.

In the 11th century, the Moors erected a fortress and built a wall around the village. They developed agriculture and introduced sugar cane, figs, and mulberries, which were used in the textile industry.

Ibn al-Baytar, considered one of the greatest scientists of al-Andalus and the most celebrated botanists of the Islamic golden age, was

born in Benalmádena at the end of the 12th century. He systematically recorded the discoveries he made during the Middle Ages and he created the first encyclopaedia of Islamic medicine.

The town and the fortress were destroyed by the Christian armies in the 15th century and the villagers took refuge in Mijas. Benalmádena remained deserted for many years and, following an earthquake in the 17th century, it became uninhabitable.

The area began to thrive again in the 18th century with the development of Arroyo de la Miel, and it grew further in the 19th century, due to the abundance of the muscatel grape that thrived in the area.

The Pueblo began redevelopment during the 1950s with the

birth of the tourist industry.

The Plaza de España is the central point of the old village and it is also the home of the Niña de Benalmádena (the little girl of Benalmádena). The sculpture of a young girl holding out a large seashell was created by local artist Jaime Pimentel.

Today, the tranquil village life in Benalmádena Pueblo goes hand in hand with the tourism industry and the town offers something for everyone. Culturally inclined visitors can enjoy differing architecture on mammoth scales, like the spectacular Buddhist Stupa, or the intriguing Castillo Colomares, a fairy-tale like castle built as a tribute to Columbus in the 1980s that rises from the pine forests that separate the Pueblo from the coast.

The village's Santo Domingo de Guzmán Church was built in the 17th century and it is the oldest church in Benalmádena. Thought to have been built on the foundations of a previous temple - close to where the old defensive wall was located - the church is situated in Plaza Santo Domingo, the original nucleus of the town.

The village's old bullring, although defunct, is worth visiting, as is the spectacular butterfly park, which boasts 1,500 exotic species flying freely among tropical gardens and waterfalls.

### Arroyo de la Miel

The town of Arroyo de la Miel is full of winding back streets and pretty plazas that adhere to the old village way of life. One of the most popular areas is the secluded Plaza de la Tribuna, a delightfully tranquil square that is entered through the 18th century Portal de San Carlos, which bears the coat of arms of the town's founder, Felix Solesio. The Italian impresario purchased a small farm in 1784 to build six paper factories to supply the Royal Factory of Playing Cards

in Macharaviaya. The only building to survive this era is the recently restored Tribuna building (known among the locals as El Corralón - the barn), which is located between Plaza de la Tribuna and Avenida de Andalucía. A monument to Solesio is situated in front of the building.

Arroyo de la Miel began to expand due to the exploitation of muscatel grapes used for the region's popular fortified wines, but a plague of phylloxera destroyed the crops in the 19th century.

The area's population boom began in the 1950s with the birth and development of mass tourism on the Costa del Sol.

Arroyo de la Miel boasts several tourist attractions, most of them currently closed due to the pandemic. These include the cable car, a fifteen-minute trip to the peak of Mount Calamorro and the ice rink in the town.

A more relaxing time is to be had in the splendid La Paloma park, where visitors can wander through tropical gardens while admiring the numerous forms of wildlife that live on the man-made lake.

Alongside the park is the Selwo dolphinarium, which offers daily shows. However, once again, the pandemic has forced the closure of the centre until further notice.

Arroyo de la Miel is also home to the iconic theme park Tivoli World, which, despite financial difficulties hopes to open again when tourism returns.

### Benalmádena Costa

With a large and varied expatriate population, Benalmádena Costa is one of the most cosmopolitan areas on the coast. Famed for an abundance of British bars and restaurants, Benalmádena Costa stretches for almost ten kilometres - from the Plaza Sol y Mar (also known as 24 hour square) to the



The marina, well known for its architecture, bars and restaurants. **SUR**



Parque de la Paloma links Arroyo de la Miel with the Costa. **SUR**

**BENALMÁDENA FACTS AND FIGURES**



**Total area:** 27.2 km<sup>2</sup>  
**Height above sea level:** 200m  
**Length of coastline:** 10km  
**Population:** 69,144 (2020)  
**Foreign population:** 16,807 (2020)

**Postcode:** 29630  
**Mayor:** Víctor Navas (PSOE)  
**Patron:** St John the Baptist  
**Feast day:** 24 June

**PLACES OF INTEREST**

**Parque de la Paloma Benalmádena Costa.** La Paloma Park is located in the centre of Benalmádena and is an ideal natural enclave for enjoying contact with nature. The park covers an area of over 200,000 square metres and boasts a large artificial lake surrounded by beautifully landscaped gardens. Visitors will encounter peacocks, chickens, ducks, swans, turtles and rabbits wandering freely

among a wide variety of tree species. These include eucalyptus and cypresses. The park also houses a permanent collection of over 90 species of palm tree and one of the best collections of bamboo, cacti and other succulents in Europe.

**Puerto Marina Benalmádena Costa.** Several times winner of the 'Best Marina in the World' award, the port of Benalmádena has moorings for more than 1,000 boats up to six

metres in length. The location and architectural design make it one of the most attractive ports of its kind. It offers many shops, restaurants and bars, along with a vast range of water sport activity. Of its most popular attractions is the Sea Life aquarium and its Jurassic Tunnel, where visitors can see sharks swimming above and around them. Currently open at weekends.

**Castillo de Colomares Benalmádena Pueblo** The Castillo de Colomares is a monument dedicated to Christopher Columbus and the discovery of the New World. The best view of this fairy-tale-like castle can be seen from the 17th century St Domingo de Guzmán Church. It was built between 1987 and 1994 and is an architectural fantasy that mixes influences of different styles, such as Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic and Mudejar.

**Plaza de la Tribuna Arroyo de la Miel.** Once the central nucleus of Arroyo de la Miel, Plaza de la Tribuna is a delightful square that is entered through the 18th century Portal de San Carlos. On the right, as one passes through the archway, a tiled wall offers information and images of the square's history.

tranquil beaches of Torremuelle. A landmark building on the seafront is Bil-Bil castle, built in the 1930s in the Moorish revival style. The castle is normally used for cultural events and weddings.

At the heart of the resort is the extensively equipped Benalmádena Marina - one of the

biggest and most delightful in Andalucía. Here restaurants and bars serve food from all corners of the world commingled with some of the best fish and seafood restaurants on the Costa del Sol.

The marina is also a shopper's paradise with artisan boutiques and gift shops.

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# International. A diverse community that makes everyone feel at home

Benalmádena has numerous social and charitable organisations that are run by expat volunteers

TONY BRYANT

**B**enalmádena has long been a popular town for foreign retirees and families looking for a better life in the sun, so it is no surprise that it offers a range of volunteer-run English-speaking associations to cater for their needs. Because of the pandemic, many of these charities and organisations have been forced to switch much of their activity to social media, while others endeavour to offer a minimum service to those most in need.

The ageing international population is supported by the Age Concern and Age Care organisations which have drop-in centres in Benalmádena. Both charities favour integration with the Spanish way of life as befits foreigners living in a host country and offer a variety of services. These include a lifeline for lonely or isolated people, a professional welfare team, care equipment that can be borrowed on a short-term basis and social activities that bring people together.

Other services aimed at the English-speaking community include a weekly Catholic mass in the Inmaculada Concepción church in Arroyo de la Miel. The service is led by Father Daly, a Catholic priest who is deeply rooted in the foreign community, organising the annual Burns Night and St Patrick's Day celebrations in Benalmádena.

The British community in Benalmádena has been well catered for and the town also has three international clubs that offer social activity, services and advice.

## The Irish Association

The Irish Association of Spain was founded in Benalmádena in 1997 and it gives assistance to Irish nationals who have chosen the Costa del Sol as their adopted home.

The organisation facilitates social contact between the Irish people living in Spain and its grand St Patrick's Day party in Arroyo de la Miel is one of the most attended in the area.

However, the Irish association does much more than arrange



A file photograph of a previous year's traditional St Patrick's parade. SUR



The Welsh Society is based in Benalmádena. SUR

the annual shindig in memory of the Apostle of Ireland, as it also offers help with problems tourists might encounter, like lost or stolen passports. The association's committee members can liaise with the consulate and the police, and assist with complicated paperwork like insurance claims and theft reports.

## The British Society

The British Society, which was founded in 1967, was one of the first expat clubs to appear on the Costa del Sol.

The idea was to open a social club where British residents could make lasting friendships, help each other and share information, while also enjoying organised social and sporting activities.

The British Consulate gave the

project considerable encouragement and membership soon began to grow: by 1978, the British Society had more than 400 members, but over the years membership numbers have dwindled.

The society, which celebrated its golden anniversary in 2017, is based in a property known as Villa Luisa in Benalmádena Pueblo and, when possible, organises events like themed lunches with guest speakers and a range of social activities designed for the British community.

## Welsh Society

The Welsh Society - Costa del Sol was started by a small group of expat musicians and entertainers who came together after continuously being asked to perform at other countries' international days.

The group decided that there was a need for a St David's Day celebration in Benalmádena, so a society was formed with the goal of raising funds for local and international charities, while also promoting the Welsh identity. Since its formation in 2011, the Welsh Society has organised a St David's Day celebration, which has become the biggest annual gathering of Welsh people in the province of Malaga.

Run by several Benalmádena residents, the Welsh Society has raised thousands of euros for local organisations and worthy causes, like Positively Pink and Cudeca, to name just two.

## Cudeca

Cudeca Cancer Care was founded in 1992 by a local resident whose husband had died of cancer. What began in the spare room of Joan Hunt's house in 1992 has turned into the only cancer hospice in Spain. The grounds on which the hospice now stands were donated by Benalmádena town hall in 1995. The first stone of the hospice was laid in 1997 and the building was finally completed in 2003. Now a foundation, Cudeca has helped thousands of patients in need of palliative care, offering a variety of services, including seven home-care teams comprising a doctor, nurse, psychologist and social worker who are specialists in palliative care. The home care teams look after an average of 250 patients a year in their homes.

Cudeca has grown beyond all expectations and it now has 23 shops and outlets. It will soon have a palliative care study and research institute, currently under construction on a site next to the hospice. The institute aims to train future professionals in palliative healthcare through teaching and research.

## CLUBS AND ORGANISATIONS BASED IN BENALMÁDENA

### The Irish Association

**Activity:** Assistance for Irish nationals.

**Telephone:** 618 68 01 48.

**E-mail:** info@irishassociationspain.com

**Website:** www.irishassociationspain.com

### The British Society

**Activity:** Social club.

**Telephone:** 623 23 12 30.

**Website:**

www.britishsocietyspain.com

**E-mail:**

britishsocietybenaladena@gmail.com

### The Welsh Society

**Activity:** Charitable and social group.

**Telephone:** 617 61 23 61.

**Facebook:** The Welsh Society Costa del Sol.

**E-mail:**

debhenham2@hotmail.com

### Cudeca Hospice

**Activity:** The organisation offering palliative care around the province was born in Benalmádena, and is run from its hospice in Arroyo de la Miel.

**Telephone:** 952564910

**Website:** www.cudeca.org

**E-mail:** cudeca@cudeca.org

**TONY BRYANT.** Foreign residents make up almost 30 per cent of the population of Benalmádena and the town has acquired a unique identity because of the vast mixture of cultures that are found there.

Because of the diversity residents living in Benalmádena, the town hall established its Foreign Residents Department (FRD) in order to offer assistance and help in numerous different languages.

The town's mayor, Víctor Navas (PSOE), who is also the councillor directly responsible for Foreign Residents affairs, has worked closely with the international community because he is aware of the important role they play in the town.

SUR in English spoke with the mayor about the significance of the expat population and his efforts to integrate them into the local community.



Mayor of Benalmádena  
Víctor Navas. SUR

**How many different foreign nationalities live in Benalmádena?** Benalmádena's foreign community consists of 125 nationalities.

**Which is the biggest foreign community in Benalmádena?** The largest foreign community in Benalmádena are British citizens, with 4,608 registered in the municipal 'padrón' census. These are followed by Italians (1,892), Moroccans (1,754), French (709) and Danes (700).

**Why is this foreign community important to Benalmádena?** This melting pot of nationalities gives us a cosmopolitan identity as a town: it is a mixture of cultures that enriches the population, economic growth and diversity in our commercial and leisure industries.

**Do you encourage integration?** Yes, of course. We want to bring foreign residents closer to our culture so that they can be a part of it. We hope they will become involved in our fiestas and traditions, while at the same time,

## 'We want to bring foreign residents closer to our culture'

**Víctor Navas** Mayor of Benalmádena and councillor for Foreign Residents

promoting their own identities. **Do you foresee any problems caused by Brexit?** Perhaps not problems, but there will be resounding changes. The British will have to adapt to the new rules after Brexit: people who have a second residence in Benalmádena but who are not

residents of Spain will be able to spend only three months out of six in Spain. They will no longer be able to come and go as they used to. British driver's licences must also be changed to Spanish.

**Has Brexit reduced the number of British expats living in**

**Benalmádena?**

No, on the contrary. In February 2019 there were 4,134 British citizens registered in Benalmádena, and now in February 2021, there are 4,838. It is true that in 2016 we had 8,874 British citizens, but this drop in the number of registrations is

"This melting pot of nationalities gives us a cosmopolitan identity as a town; it enriches the population, economic growth and diversity"

due to changes made by the national statistics office: all foreigners had to confirm their registration and if they did not the system automatically deleted them.

**What do you think about the volunteer-run associations that help and serve the local expat community?**

I believe that these associations are very important in the lives of foreign citizens, especially those who live alone: this is where they meet with their friends, make excursions or play bingo. There are associations like Age Care or Age Concern, which help older people emotionally and even materially.

**Does the town hall offer assistance to these associations?**

The Department of Foreign Residents is in contact with all Benalmádena-based foreign associations and visits them several times a year. We organise information meetings in English for association members on various topics of interest.

**What services does the department in Benalmádena offer to expat residents?**

The FRD helps solve problems that foreign residents who do not speak Spanish may have, like translating emails and letters from different languages. The department organises events like information days, trips, cultural visits and sporting events. It also brings foreign residents closer to our culture and shows the inhabitants of our municipality the different cultures that coexist in Benalmádena.



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## TALK OF THE TOWN

**"Benalmádena is good because everything you need is on your doorstep"**



**Dean Bradshaw**

**Stock trader.** Dean likes the upbeat ambience of the marina and its varied choice of bars.

**"We like to support the local restaurants and businesses"**



**Sandra Hayes**

**Retired.** Sandra loves the sun and enjoys having a picnic in La Paloma park.

**"We need more live music, especially during the low season"**



**Matt Torkington**

**Waiter.** Matt works as a waiter, so he finds the August heat a little unbearable.

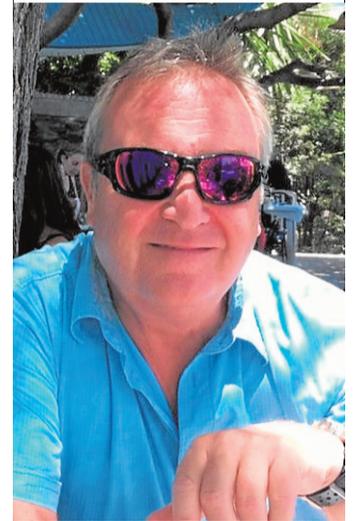
**"We could do with a shopping centre on the scale of Miramar"**



**Julie Brunt**

**Retired.** Julie likes the weather and loves to take long walks along the promenade.

**"Arroyo has good shops interspersed with wine bars and cafes"**



**Steve McGann**

**Financial consultant.** Steve loves the paseo, but believes electric scooters should be banned.

**How long have you lived in Benalmádena?**

We have lived here for three years.

**What do you like best about Benalmádena?**

Everything you need is on your doorstep.

**What do you like least?**

There is a severe lack of traditional pie, mash and liquor.

**Favourite beach?**

I like Maracas beach. This is mainly because there's a decent bar there.

**A place to eat.**

Our favourite is El Muro Restaurant in Benalmádena Pueblo.

**A place to drink.**

Cocos Sports Bar on the seafront. It's family friendly and has a great atmosphere.

**A place to shop.**

I usually shop outside of the town, but if not, it would be Arroyo de la Miel.

**A place to relax.**

We like Parque de la Paloma. It has beautiful scenery and a couple of nice family-friendly bars.

**Where do you take visitors?**

We would usually go to Puerto Marina. It's a bit more upbeat and offers lots of choice and great views of the boats.

**How could Benalmádena be improved?**

I think that some areas are a little bit dated and run-down. These areas are in need of modernisation, but without taking away the traditional Spanish feel.

**How long have you lived in Benalmádena?**

We have owned our apartment in Benalmádena Costa for 33 years.

**What do you like best about Benalmádena?**

The sun, and the fact that there is a variety of different things to do and places to visit.

**What do you like least?**

It is too busy during summer months, and there are no up-market restaurants with entertainment.

**Favourite beach?**

Santa Ana. It's lovely.

**A place to eat.**

We love variety, so we tend to use a few, but in particular, Capricho, La Bodeguita and La Barca.

**A place to drink.**

South Beach in Las Gaviotas for its beautiful views. We also love Blue Kiwi mini golf and Weatherspains, because all three offer excellent service and are very friendly and welcoming.

**A place to shop.**

We like to support local businesses, so we shop in Arroyo de la Miel.

**A place to relax.**

La Paloma park with a picnic.

**Where do you take visitors?**

It would either be La Paloma park or Benalmádena Pueblo.

**How could Benalmádena be improved?**

It badly needs an upmarket dinner-dance restaurant where people can have a boogie. It is a niche to be filled.

**How long have you lived in Benalmádena?**

I will have lived here for six years in April.

**What do you like best about Benalmádena?**

I suppose the climate and the beaches are the main attractions.

**What do you like least?**

I am a waiter, so working in the heat during August is not particularly nice.

**Favourite beach?**

I like to go to Playa Bonita in Torremuelle.

**A place to eat.**

I particularly like the Lime and Lemon restaurant. The food and the service are always excellent.

**A place to drink.**

There are several, but among my favourites are Sam's Bar, Maracas and Summers Bar.

**A place to shop**

I would usually head to the Puerto Marina to shop, because it offers a variety of different shops and boutiques.

**A place to relax.**

Parque de la Paloma is a favourite, especially seeing as it is close to where I live.

**Where do you take visitors?**

Either for a ride up the mountains in the cable cars, or for a trip into Benalmádena Pueblo.

**How could Benalmádena be improved?**

I think we need a lot more live music venues and entertainment on the coast, especially during the low season.

**How long have you lived in Benalmádena?**

We have lived on the seafront in Benalmádena for two and a half years.

**What do you like best about Benalmádena?**

We love the all-year-round weather, and it is great for taking nice walks in the sun.

**What do you like least?**

The biggest problem is that there is a lack of good shopping areas.

**Favourite beach?**

We are not beach people I am afraid, so we don't have a favourite.

**A place to eat.**

We like to use different places to support local businesses. Our favourites include The Sportsman and Little KC's.

**A place to drink.**

It's much the same as above, although we often enjoy a few drinks in The Wheel Tapas and Woodies.

**A place to shop**

We find everything we need in Mercadona.

**A place to relax.**

We love to just sit out on our terrace and chill out while looking out to sea.

**Where do you take visitors?**

We often go to the marina, or Arroyo de la Miel, especially fountain square (Plaza de la Tribuna).

**How could Benalmádena be improved?**

We could do with a shopping centre on the scale of Miramar or Plaza Mayor.

**How long have you lived in Benalmádena?**

Fifteen years now, but I have travelled a lot during that time.

**What do you like best about Benalmádena?**

It is by the sea and the weather is fabulous (mostly).

**What do you like least?**

Not all dog owners bother to clean up after their dog(s).

**Favourite beach?**

Playa Santa Ana and Playa St Tropez.

**A place to eat.**

Calamar fish restaurant in Avenida de Salvador Vicente.

**A place to drink.**

Palm 5 beach bar in Las Gaviotas. It has great sea views; great staff and the prices are very reasonable.

**A place to shop**

Centre of Arroyo de la Miel. There are good shops interspersed with wine bars and cafes.

**A place to relax.**

If I am out, then the paseo marítimo Virgen del Carmen; if not, I relax on my terrace.

**Where do you take visitors?**

Definitely to Malaga. It's a lovely city and very easy access by train or bus. Locally, then it's Parque de la Paloma.

**How could Benalmádena be improved?**

Improve traffic calming. Avenida de Tivoli and Avenida de Antonio Machado are like race tracks. We could maybe follow Malaga city and ban electric scooters from the pavements as well.

## READERS' PHOTOS

### Benalmádena, a photographer's treasure trove

Given the task of going out to photograph the municipality of Benalmádena, it's hard to know where to start. Do you kick off with a beautiful sea view and then move on to the marina, the park, the pretty

village and the mountains? Or start at the top and head down?

Whatever the order you can be sure of diversity in your images at the end of the day.

And diversity is what we found in the selection of photographs sent in to SUR in English by readers to help illustrate this supplement. Here are four selected by SUR head photographer, Salvador Salas.



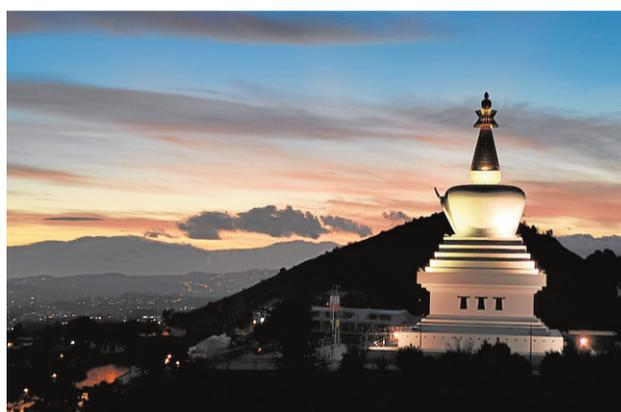
### Where technology meets nature

Reader Eliezer Arias sent in three photographs taken around the municipality of Benalmádena and this one was selected by SUR photographer Salvador Salas as the best contribution to this supplement. The "spectacular" image does not show the typical attractions, but instead the repeater aerials on the mountain behind the town, sharing the sky with a full moon.



**Puerto Marina**

Berni Hickey also sent in three views; this one of the port was selected for publication.



**The Buddhist stupa**

This view of Benalmádena's Buddhist temple was sent in by reader Rafael Cobacho.



**A pretty street**

This view was taken by reader Estrella Cobacho Mesa.

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