

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# LA AXARQUÍA

**Coastline.** The seaside towns east of Malaga are home to spectacular beaches and coves as well as an important fishing industry **P2-3**

**Inland beauty.** The pretty villages of the Axarquía district are a paradise for nature-lovers, artists and outdoor sports enthusiasts **P4-5**

**Talk of the town.** Some of the Axarquía's many international residents tell us what they love about living east of Malaga **P6**



The quieter  
east side  
of the Costa



The rugged coastline of Nerja. **SUR**



## Malaga's east side. Unspoilt beaches and rural life

**T**he Axarquía is the area of Malaga province which stretches east from Rincón de la Victoria to Maro. It borders Granada province from the cliffs of Cerro Gordo to the mountain range of the Sierra Alhama, Tejeda and includes Malaga province's highest mountain, La Maroma, which dominates the area's skyline, at 2,064 metres above sea level.

It is an area of contrasts, rich in history and culture, dating back to Neolithic times, evidenced by the discovery of Neanderthal Man high up in the mountains of Zafarraya, near Alcaucín and the world-famous Nerja Cave.

Phoenician settlements have been found near the coast and church towers still remain which were built on mosques after the collapse of Spain's Islamic period of Al Andalus. From the coast to the mountain villages, there are reminders of the rich history that has left a strong mark on the Axarquía.

Fishing and agriculture have

**Fishing and tradition.** The Axarquía's coastline not only offers dramatic scenery and hidden coves, but also a history dating back to Phoenician times and important agricultural and fishing industries

JENNIE RHODES



always played a vital role in the economy of the Axarquía and are no less important today, from Caleta de Vélez harbour, one of Andalucía's most important fishing ports, to the endless fields of mango and avocado trees that surround the villages.

Much of the Axarquía's coastline, which includes the popular seaside resort of Nerja, along to Torrox, Torre del Mar, Benajárfate and Rincón de la Victoria, is home to some of the province's most untouched beaches.

### Rincón de la Victoria

Now largely a commuter town to the east of Malaga city, Rincón de la Victoria was an important strategic settlement during the Islamic period and the town was known as Bezmiliana.

The Casa Fuerte Bezmiliana, which is on the main road to the east of the town, is an eighteenth century watchtower and today it is regularly used as exhibition space often hosting shows by foreign artists.

The two key industries were agriculture and fishing and by the end of the nineteenth cen-

ture the town was firmly established as a fishing village.

The town is also famous for its Fiesta del Boquerón (anchovy) in September, celebrating one of Malaga's most important fish.

### Vélez-Málaga

Vélez-Málaga is known as the capital of the Axarquía region, with the area's main administrative buildings based there. A number of other towns and villages, including Torre del Mar, Caleta de Vélez, Benajárfate, Chilches, Triana and Almayate belong to the municipality of Vélez-Málaga.

The town's history dominates the skyline and one of its most iconic sights is the fifth-century fort (la Fortaleza), an important stronghold during Spain's Islamic period.

Vélez-Málaga also boasts the province's biggest Holy Week (Semana Santa) processions outside of Malaga city.

In Torre del Mar, the iconic blue and white striped lighthouse is situated on the town's long 'paseo' or promenade, which claims to be one of the longest

#Torrox #ElMorche #CostaDelSol

# TORROX

## A toast to the Sun

*The best climate in Europe*



Benjarafe beach,  
 part of Vélez-Málaga. **SUR**

tower.

The original castle was built to warn the town of pirate ships approaching land and was used during invasions in subsequent wars against other European countries,

On the same site as the lighthouse, a museum and visitor's centre - the Conjunto Arqueológico - El Faro - Centro de Interpretación Mansio Clavicum - exhibits remains and earlier evidence of Torrox as an important fishing town during Roman times.

**Nerja**

Nerja is undoubtedly the Axarquía's best-known town, particularly among foreign residents and visitors and the town hall has one of Malaga province's longest serving foreign residents' departments.

The most well-known historical site is the Nerja Cave, discovered in 1960 by a group of boys who were playing in the area.

In the early 1980s the huge success of the Spanish television series Verano Azul, put Nerja on the map as it was filmed there. There are a number of reminders of the programme, such as streets named after characters, a statue of 'Chanquete' the fisherman in the tourist office and the Verano Azul park which is home to Chanquete's boat.

Another iconic site is the Balcón de Europa, which is on the site of a former military castle. During a visit from Spain's King Alfonso on 20 January 1885, following the terrible earthquake which destroyed much of the Axarquía, he declared that he was standing "on the balcony of Europe" thus giving the viewing point its name. A bronze statue of the king can be found on the left-hand side of the Balcón.

Maro, which is Malaga province's easternmost coastal village, shares the protected Cerro-Gordo cliffs with neighbouring La Herradura in Granada province and is home to native species of corals.

in Spain.

Caleta de Vélez is primarily a fishing village and fishing boats come in and out of the harbour with their catch on a daily basis. The village has grown in recent years and has become a popular place to live, particularly among European expats.

**Algarrobo Costa**

Algarrobo Costa stretches along the N340 coastal road between two roundabouts (Algarrobo and Mezquitilla) and is home to two watchtowers; the seventeenth century Torre Ladeada, meaning the leaning tower (giving it the unofficial title of the Axarquía's leaning tower of Pisa) and the eighteenth century Torre Derecha (right tower),

The Río Algarrobo has the remains of a Phoenician settle-

ments and tombs of Trayamar, which were discovered in the mid 1960s. The burial site and funerary objects, dating from the seventh century, were uncovered while work was being done to a finca in the area.

**Torrox Costa**

Torrox Costa claims to have the best climate in Europe – this is not just an invention by the town hall - UK weather forecasting company, Meteogroup, carried out scientific research in 2008, which demonstrated that Torrox has an average year-round temperature of 18 degrees centigrade.

The most well-known landmark on the promenade is the lighthouse. It was built in 1865 on the site of a small castle which had been used as a lookout

**AXARQUÍA COASTLINE**



**VÉLEZ-MÁLAGA**

**Facts and figures**

**Total area:** 157.8 km2  
**Height above sea level:** 65m.  
**Population:** 82,365 (2020)  
**Post code:** 29700  
**Mayor:** Antonio Moreno Ferrer (PSOE)  
**Patron:** San Miguel  
**Feast day:** 1 October

**NERJA**

**Facts and figures**

**Total area:** 85.07 km2  
**Height above sea level:** 22m.  
**Population:** 21,144 (2020)  
**Post code:** 29780  
**Mayor:** José Alberto Armijo (PP)  
**Patron:** San Miguel / San Isidro  
**Feast day:** 1 October / 15 May

**ALGARROBO**

**Facts and figures**

**Total area:** 9.73 km2  
**Height above sea level:** 65m.  
**Population:** 6,556 (2020)  
**Post code:** 29750  
**Mayor:** Alberto Pérez Gil (PSOE)

**Patron:** San Sebastian  
**Feast day:** 20 January

**RINCÓN DE LA VICTORIA**

**Facts and figures**

**Total area:** 28.46 km2  
**Height above sea level:** 3 m.  
**Population:** 48,768 (2020)  
**Post Code:** 29730  
**Mayor:** Francisco Salado (PP)  
**Patrons:** Virgen del Carmen  
**Feast day:** 16 July

**TORROX**

**Facts and figures**

**Total area:** 50.02 km2  
**Height above sea level:** 149 m (Torrox Pueblo).  
**Population:** 17,943 (2020)  
**Post code:** 29770/29793  
**Mayor:** Óscar Medina (PP)  
**Patron:** Virgen de las Nieves / San Roque  
**Feast day:** 5 August

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# Centuries-old agriculture. Natural parks and pretty villages

At 2,063 metres above sea level, Malaga province's highest mountain La Maroma overlooks the inland villages of the Axarquía; a paradise for nature-lovers, artists and outdoor sports enthusiasts

JENNIE RHODES



The villa of La Viñuela calls itself 'The oasis of the Axarquía.' J. RHODES

The inland area of the Axarquía winds up the A356 road north of Vélez-Málaga and gently climbs past La Viñuela reservoir, heading towards La Maroma mountain and eventually to the border with

Granada province both north at Zafarraya and to the east along the Tejeda, Almirajara and Alhama mountain range.

In the Axarquía agriculture is a way of life, with many villages maintaining the centuries-old

traditions of cultivating muscatel raisins and making sweet Malaga wine. In 2017, the raisin and its cultivation was added to the United Nation's Agricultural Heritage List.

Olive-picking season is in full swing in autumn and winter when olive farmers can be seen carrying their harvest to the local olive oil cooperatives of Periana, Riogordo, Torrox or Puente don Manuel. It's also the time to harvest mangoes, which are just one of the subtropical fruit crops; an industry which is booming in the area.

In January and February the almond blossom covers the mountainsides with its beautiful tiny white and pink blossom as a sure sign that spring is on its way.

## Inland tourism

Keen to attract tourism to the rural inland part of the Axarquía, many of the villages have started to promote their offers of hiking and adventure sports, nature and gastronomy.

In 2020, El Saltillo; a 50-metre suspension bridge with spectacular views over the River Almanchares opened and was christened the 'Caminito del Rey of the Axarquía'. The bridge forms part of an eight-kilometre round trip starting and finishing in Canillas de Aceituno.

Each of the villages has something to offer visitors, from fascinating tales like the discovery of a 500-year-old version of the

The lost village of Acebuchal, which sits between Frigiliana and Cómpeeta, hides secrets from Spain's bloody civil war

While traditional Axarquía crops include almonds, raisins and olives, much of the land is now used to cultivate subtropical fruit like mangoes

Quran, which was found in the walls of a house in Cútar during a house renovation to the informative honey museum of Colmenar, which means bee hive in Spanish.

The mountain top village of Comares houses the ruins of one of the watchtowers used by Islamic forces before the Spanish Reconquista, as does the village of Arenas where the Bentomiz fort can be found.

The lost village of Acebuchal, nestled in a valley between Frigiliana and Cómpeeta, was abandoned for decades after Spain's bloody Civil War. It is now home to a successful restaurant and second home owners have

bought up property there.

The Axarquía has become popular with foreigners wanting to get a real sense of Spanish culture and traditions and a quieter, more traditional way of life.

## Frigiliana

Nestled in the hills north of Nerja, Frigiliana has been voted most beautiful town in Spain on several occasions, since first winning the prestigious title in 1967.

Roughly one third of Frigiliana's population of 3,000 is foreign and the Brits make up the majority of that third.

Nuestra Señora del Carmen factory, or ingenio, as it's known in Spanish, stands proudly at the entrance to Frigiliana.

Although the area stopped producing sugar cane several years ago, Frigiliana's ingenio has outlived its neighbours in Torre del Mar, Nerja and Maro, by importing the raw product from the Caribbean and in particular Cuba.

The final product can be bought not just in souvenir shops in Frigiliana, but in major supermarkets across Spain too and the dark, treacle-like liquid is used as an accompaniment to deep fried aubergines (berenjenas fritas); a local delicacy.

## Cómpeeta

High up in the mountains of the Axarquía lies the village of Cómpeeta. With a population of just under 4,000, of whom almost half are foreigners, this hilly en-

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Acebuchal hides Civil War secrets. **J. RHODES**



Calle Zacatin, Frigiliana. **SUR**

clave has attracted artists and nature lovers from all over the world for decades.

It is one of the gateways to the Tejeda, Almirajara and Alhama mountain range and natural park, providing excellent hiking.

The village also hosts an annual art trail and has some of the best sweet wine in the area, as celebrated during the wine festival, which traditionally takes place on 15 August as the grape harvest gets under way.

**La Viñuela**

With the same name as the reservoir which provides water for much of the Axarquía, the village of La Viñuela calls itself ‘The Oasis of the Axarquía’.

It is a relatively modern village and grew from La Viña inn, which provided respite for travellers on the old Camino Real (royal road) from Vélez-Málaga to Granada. The inn, which still serves as a restaurant, La Antigua Venta de la Viña, dates from the 16th century. However, it wasn't until 1764 that La Viñuela was officially recognised as a village.

La Viñuela also comprises the smaller hamlet of Los Romanes, on the other side of the reservoir as well as los Gómez.

Just under half of the current population is made up of Brits and other Europeans who call the area home.

**INLAND AXARQUÍA**



**FRIGILIANA**

**Facts and figures**

**Total area:** 40.49 km2  
**Height above sea level:** 318m.  
**Population:** 3,062 (2020)  
**Post code:** 29758  
**Mayor:** Alejandro Herrero Plata (PSOE)  
**Patron:** San Antonio  
**Feast day:** 13 June

**CÓMPETA**

**Facts and figures**

**Total area:** 54.2 km2  
**Height above sea level:** 637m.  
**Population:** 3,967 (2020)

**Post code:** 29754

**Mayor:** Obdulio Pérez (PP)  
**Patron:** La Virgen de los dolores  
**Feast day:** 9 September

**LA VIÑUELA**

**Facts and figures**

**Total area:** 27.2 km2  
**Height above sea level:** 162 m.  
**Population:** 2,055 (2020)  
**Post code:** 29712  
**Mayor:** José Juan Jiménez López (PSOE)  
**Patron:** San José / La Virgen de las Angustias  
**Feast day:** 31 May

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## TALK OF THE TOWN

**'I love the beauty of the landscape, the views and the authenticity'**



**Helen Sijlsing - Cútar**

**Chair, Arts Society Nerja.** Helen is a flamenco aficionada and likes to show visitors the Axarquía's Islamic heritage.

**'The best things about Riogordo are the friendly people and the river walk'**



**Robert Lawson - Riogordo**

**Musician.** Robert and his wife Leila are very involved in village life and in particular with events such as the Easter Passion Play

**'Benjarafe is peaceful. The beaches are blue flag and are very good'**



**Erica Russell-Watson - Benjarafe**

**The English voice of the Malaga metro.** Erica enjoys the peace and quiet of Benjarafe and the good choice of chiringuitos

**'Nerja retains the ambiance of a coastal village with facilities of a small city'**



**Colin Smith - El Capistrano, Nerja**

**Executive committee member, El Capistrano.** Colin enjoys local beauty spots like the Chillar river and el Playazo beach

**'The residents are friendly and there are many lovely places to visit in the area'**



**Joan Fallon Cook - Benjarafe**

**Author.** The author, who has written many novels set in Andalucía, says her favourite festival is the Virgen del Carmen

**–How long have you lived in Cútar?**

–For 21 years.

**–What do you like best about the village?**

–The beauty of the landscape, the mountains, the views of the white villages, the authenticity.

**–What do you like least?**

–I am a bit worried about the scarcity of water and the numbers of mango and avocado trees planted.

**–Favourite beauty spot.**

–The top of the hill where I live: La Peña, with a view of la Maroma, Comares and the sea.

**–A place to eat and drink.**

–Bere Bere and Bahia Beach in Torre del Mar.

**–Favourite beach.**

–Torre del Mar.

**–Favourite annual cultural event.**

– I love the Zambomba, the flamenco Christmas party in Vélez-Málaga, the summer flamenco performances in the Alhambra and Semana Santa.

**–A place to relax.**

–My terrace with a view of Comares and Los Gómez, the mountains behind Riogordo.

**–Where do you take visitors?**

–I do a tour of historic Vélez, the Arab route through the Axarquía and go to see the amazing views above Alcaucín.

**–How could it be improved?**

–The old town of Vélez could be better maintained and cleaned and made more attractive to visitors.

**–How long have you lived in Riogordo?**

–We've lived here for 19 years.

**–What do you like best about the village?**

–The best thing about Riogordo is the friendly people.

**–What do you like least?**

–The worst thing is the lack of parking places near the centre.

**–Favourite beauty spot.**

–The walkway down to the river in Riogordo.

**–Favourite beach.**

–Torre del Mar

**–A place to eat.**

–Bar Molinos in Riogordo is good for tasty, inexpensive food.

**–A place to drink.**

–Bar Eusebios is friendly and has a nice terrace in the village.

**–Favourite annual cultural event?**

– Riogordo's El Paso - the annual Easter Week Passion Play.

**–A place to relax.**

–Riogordo's village square (plaza) because there is a nice bar with outdoor seating nearby.

**–Where do you take visitors?**

–La Viñuela reservoir as it's great for the views, the restaurants nearby and the hiking.

**–How could it be improved?**

–There could be more cultural activities.

**–How long have you lived in Benjarafe?**

–For 15 years.

**–What do you like best about the village?**

–The people are friendly and it's typically Spanish.

**–What do you like least?**

–The bus service could be improved.

**–Favourite beauty spot.**

–Watching the sunsets from the Torre del Chilches, a lovely viewpoint originally used as a lookout for pirates.

**–A place to eat.**

–Benjarafe has so many excellent places to eat; I like El Balandro and Chiringuito Pedro.

**–A place to drink.**

–Any of the chiringuitos are fantastic but Heladería Mirró is a nice spot.

**–Favourite annual cultural event.**

– San Juan and the Virgen del Carmen.

**–A place to relax.**

–Punta Arena - a beautiful wooden chiringuito by the sea.

**–Favourite beach?**

–Cantarriján in Granada, although the Benjarafe beaches are blue flag and very good too.

**–Where do you take visitors?**

–To my favourite places in Benjarafe. Tapas bars in Malaga are also on my list!

**–How could it be improved?**

–It's a lovely peaceful place but it could do with some more care and attention. Most of the funds are spent on Torre and Vélez.

**–How long have you lived in Nerja?**

–We have lived in el Capistrano Village for 21 years.

**–What do you like best about the town?**

–Nerja retains the ambiance of a beautiful coastal village between sea and mountains with all the essential facilities like health care, banking, shopping etc that are provided by a small city.

**–What do you like least?**

–The influx of summer visitors does create certain problems, such as parking, increased strain on the health centre and occasional bad behaviour.

**–Favourite beauty spot.**

–The walk through the river Chillar valley.

**–A place to eat.**

–We're spoilt for choice, but Miguel la Manga (restaurant on el Playazo beach) has always been a favourite.

**–A place to drink.**

–We enjoy entertaining so drinking with friends at our home.

**–Favourite annual cultural event?**

– San Isidro.

**–A place to relax.**

–The patio of our villa.

**–Where do you take visitors?**

–Locally the Nerja caves, Marina del Este and Frigiliana and further afield Granada and Cordoba

**–How could it be improved?**

–With very great difficulty.

**–How long have you lived in Benjarafe?**

–For 16 years.

**–What do you like best about the village?**

–The friendliness of the residents.

**–What do you like least?**

–The lack of parking, especially at weekends.

**–Favourite beauty spot.**

–There are so many lovely places in the Axarquía, but maybe the view of La Viñuela reservoir with mountains above it.

**–A place to eat.**

–La Parada restaurant in Caleta de Vélez

**–A place to drink.**

–On the beach at the La Plata restaurant in Benjarafe.

**–Favourite annual cultural event.**

– The Virgen del Carmen festival in Rincón de la Victoria in July.

**–A place to relax.**

–On the beach in Torre del Benagalbón.

**–A favourite beach.**

–The beach and rocky coastline from Maro heading eastwards.

**–Where do you take visitors?**

–To local places in the Axarquía such as La Viñuela reservoir, Nerja, Riogordo, Moclínejo and Comares.

**–How could it be improved?**

–The coastal footpath is badly neglected and in places it is dangerous.

# Expatriate life in the Axarquía

**A large foreign community.** There are dozens of groups and associations in the area's many towns and villages

J. RHODES

The Axarquía has long been a popular place for expats, with the coastal towns of Nerja and Torrox being, for many years, the focal point of clubs and societies formed by foreign communities.

However, in recent years, the inland villages have also started to attract Brits, Scandinavians, Germans, Americans and other nationalities who have fallen in love with the quiet pace of life and stunning scenery.

According to the latest Andalusian government (Junta de Andalucía) statistics, over 25,000 foreign residents are registered on the town hall registers (Padrón) of the coastal towns and bigger inland villages in the Axarquía. (Nerja 5,501), Torrox (6,191), Vélez-Málaga (7,979), Frigiliana (919) and Cómputa (1,096).

In some villages, the foreign community accounts for almost half of the overall population, with Brits making up the main foreign communities in Nerja, Torrox, Frigiliana and Cómputa.

The Axarquía hospital in Torre del Mar runs a volunteer interpreter service, while the Red Cross in Vélez-Málaga offers services to non-Spanish speaking expats.



Members of Nerja's 41 Club at the town's Residents' Day in 2018. J. RHODES

Lux Mundi Ecumenical centre in Torre del Mar also provides assistance and support to the foreign community and is often a lifeline for older and vulnerable

people. Nerja town hall has held an annual residents day since 1999, where each of the foreign-run clubs and societies and indeed

some local Spanish associations have a stall to promote their activities and fundraising efforts. The day generally takes place in spring. Of course it has not gone

ahead since 2019 due to the pandemic.

Groups based in Nerja and beyond include the Lions Club, Royal British Legion, the Arts Society, the 41 Club (ex Round Table members), the Golf Club in Nerja (GINS), the American Club, the Danish Association of Torre del Mar and the U3A (University of the third age).

Helen Sijssling, Chair of the Arts Society Nerja says of the importance of such groups, "You get to know people with the same interests, gain new friends, enjoy other people's company during dinners, trips and other activities and you contribute to charity projects."

An international choir, Coraxalia, meets in Vélez-Málaga every Thursday and has members representing many different nationalities. They perform across the Axarquía and further afield throughout the year.

A lot of information is shared about the clubs and other events being held in expat-run and Spanish bars and restaurants, on social network sites including the Axarquía Local Info and Digame Torrox Facebook sites, which can provide a lifeline for the foreign community.

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The land used for the agricultural experiments belonged to the Marquis of Larios.  
SUR



## A pioneering agricultural laboratory

**Origin.** Torrox was home to a test centre for sugar cane, vineyards, abocado, blue agave, sweet potato, potato and olives from 1921 until 1970

EUGENIO CABEZAS



**Today.** The area is now home to sports facilities. JOSELE- LANZA



**Crops.** The vines planted to trial varieties resilient to phylloxera. SUR

The two centres for Research, Agricultural, Fishing, Food and Ecological Production Training (IFAPA) in Malaga, located in Churriana and Campanillas, together with the experimental Station La Mayora, in Algarrobo, are the three mainstays of agricultural research in the province.

The oldest of the three is Churriana, which first opened in 1929. La Mayora opened its doors in 1961, while Campanillas started seven years later, in 1968.

However, the province already had what was then called “an agricultural demonstration field” in Torrox.

Inaugurated in 1921, it was located in what is today the complex that includes the football pitch, covered sports pavilion and municipal swimming pool. A huge aqueduct that was used to transport water from one part of the estate

to another can still be seen in area.

According to the researcher Francisco José Rodríguez, in his work ‘The agricultural experiment as support to industrial activity: the agricultural stations of Motril, Torrox and Churriana’, published in 2012, “Torrox’s special agricultural conditions had not gone unnoticed, and already in 1764, Miguel de Gijón, in addition to bringing a cast iron sugar mill from England, which caused a sensation, undertook agricultural experiments.”

### Marquis de Larios

However, it was not until 1919 that the tests resumed in the then called “Torrox demonstration field”.

The trials bore fruit when in 1921 landowner, the Marquis of Larios, gave a farm located in the Planos ravine to the centre and the ‘Torrox agricultural experi-

mentation field’, popularly known as La Granja, was created.

The farm had 18 sections of wetland and seven areas of dry land on which terraces, paths and irrigation ditches were built. “The initial zinc channel that brought water from the other side of the ra-

vine was replaced by an aqueduct of brick and iron girders, made by La Granja’s foremen, Sebastián Villena, and Juan Lahoz,” he said.

On the entrance gate to the estate there was an inscription that said land had been given free of charge by the Marquis of Larios

“in gratitude for the electoral support that the people had given to his candidate for MP, Juan Antonio Pérez Urruti, but the truth is that the powerful Larios family also benefited from the results of the experiments,” Rodríguez’s work goes on to say.

The centre was directed by the engineer Luis Liró until 1927 and then by Antonio de la Huerta. It began by testing American grape species resistant to phylloxera, a disease that attacked vineyards which was still ravaging the province.

The centre later turned to growing sugar cane and a mill was built on the land.

The farm also experimented with olives, sweet potatoes, potatoes, cucumbers, oranges, avocados and blue agave, among many other plant species.

Considered ahead of its time, the centre included a weather station and a series of five postcards of its facilities were published in the 1920s.

As new scientific approaches came about in the 1950s, the other three Malaga centres were promoted and the Torrox centre went into decline, eventually closing for good around 1970.

The land went back into the hands of the Larios family and in 1985 it was handed over to the town hall after signing an urban planning agreement.