

COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS

Festive cities

Malaga's lights attract visitors from around Spain and abroad. Does it have a rival for the title of Spain's Christmas capital? **P2&3**



MIGUE FERNÁNDEZ

Nativity scenes. The Spanish Belén is a common sight in southern Spain, but some are out of the ordinary **P4**

Festive fare. Turrón, roscos, mantecados... the most traditional places to buy homemade goodies on the Costa this Christmas **P6&7**

Gadget gifts. Different ideas for those who like a techie toy to play with during the Christmas holidays **P8**



Switching on ceremonies: Left on 20 November in Vigo and right, on 26 November in Malaga's Calle Larios. EFE / NITO SALAS

In recent years the Galician city-port of Vigo has become a rival to Malaga by racing to be considered the ultimate colourful Christmas destination. We went to see whether Vigo can really claim to be Spain's Christmas capital.

This century, Spain has gained two epicentres of Christmas celebrations - Malaga and Vigo. Both cities are vying to boast the world's largest lights display and thereby earn the title of Spain's Christmas Capital.

Vigo has indeed had the world talking about, with some describing it as the ultimate Christmas destination, putting even Lapland's capital into the shade.

The town of Rovaniemi is (still!) considered the official hometown of Santa Claus, but in Vigo there lives yet another man who devotes himself passionately to Christmas and actively engages with this colourful holiday. His name is Abel Caballero. He is the city mayor and he is the one who makes the "magic".

It never snows in Vigo but (with the help of 50 snow canons) every winter snowflakes fall on people's faces as well as on the snowball and snowman - gigantic installations in the city.

By the never freezing ocean, an ice rink for skating and a mount for skis and toboggans are set up.

Moreover, Lapland's reindeer can be found "running" in Vigo, on one of the main streets.

As for auroras, the Northern

A tale of two rival Christmas cities

Malaga v Vigo. The Galician city claims to be the place "where Christmas lives" while Malaga's lights attract visitors from around Spain and abroad

ALEKK M. SAANDERS

Lights are recreated in Vigo with help of millions of illuminations. This year, 11 million (one million more than usual) LED lights don some 360 streets (about 25 more than last year), and almost a thousand trees with 3,000 theme decorations light up the city.

The city hall, with its enthusiastic mayor, has done its best to make visitors believe that Christmas indeed 'lives' in Vigo.

It is 'loudly' announced with the ambitious logo 'Vigo, la ciudad donde vive la Navidad' (Vigo, the city where Christmas lives) which is placed in the main shopping street, Calle Urzáiz, and has become a popular spot for taking selfies.

Comparisons

To estimate which of the cities, Malaga or Vigo, is more de'lightful' is not easy. However, you can easily believe that lots of money is really spent to over-decorate main streets and squares of the cities.

Vigo used to spend some 800,000 (later 825,000) euros on its illuminations and Malaga used to have around the same budget for its lights.

This year, however, Vigo's budget was increased to exactly 929,052.52 euros and Malaga city hall also has invested an additional 200,000 euros for its light shows.

So it looks like the leader in this financial "contest", with one million euros, is Malaga.

How long the cities actually in-

dulge in this Christmas atmosphere could be another of the criteria to define Spain's Christmas capital.

The lights of Vigo, for example, were switched on 20 November at 8.30pm and will remain on until 10 January. Malaga lit its lights on 26 November at 6.30pm, and they will be switched off at midnight on 6 January.

Incidentally, the works for preparing for Christmas start earlier in Vigo as well. While Malaga began to install the lights on 27 September, in Vigo the works had already started in August. So, although Vigo is ahead in timing and duration, Malaga is a step ahead in budget. It seems two cities have drawn.

Inspired by London

It appears the cities are aware about this competitive "equality". In this case, originality is important. From the very beginning Vigo headed into the 'heights'; the city came into the limelight after placing the highest (over 32m) Christmas tree - bigger than the one in Rockefeller Center (22m) and the tree in the Vatican (25m). Additionally, Vigo is quite unique in Spain, by decorating its natural araucaria tree on its Alameda.

Due to this real Christmas tree, Vigo might be even compared to London, where traditionally a pine tree flown-in from Norway is prominently displayed in Trafalgar Square.

Additionally, a 60-metre-high Ferris wheel looks somewhat like



Snowy Characters in Vigo. A. M. S.



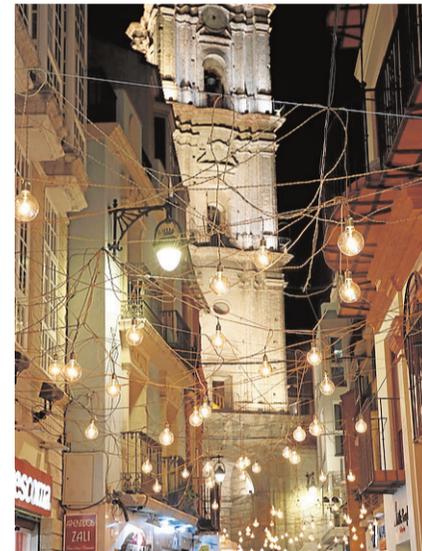
Strings of light in the Alameda in Malaga city centre. NITO SALAS



Reindeer form part of the displays in the Galician city. A. M. S.



The big wheel in Vigo. A. M. S.



A street near Malaga Cathedral. N. SALAS

the London Eye. Actually, the mayor himself mentioned this resemblance by stressing that he wanted a Ferris wheel for Christmas and he was not ruling out a permanent one to compete with the London Eye.

London has been mentioned by the mayor a few more times. Once Abel Caballero said: "Let the mayors of New York, London, Tokyo, Paris and Berlin know that they were (we are) going to be simply the best!"

By the way, besides the pine-tree and the giant wheel, Britain is noticeable in Vigo through the this year's official theme music, John Lennon's Happy Xmas, and huge posters that "promote" the merits of drinking Scottish whisky during these cooler winter days.

Andalucía wins

So, which of these cities might be christened Spain's Capital of Christmas... Perhaps we should have Vigo as a capital in the north, and Malaga, in the south. Like two polar circles at opposite ends of the globe. What I actually discovered (after I saw in the Vigo centre the LED-lit chandelier that I had admired in Larios street several years ago), was that both cities use the same creative provider - Iluminaciones Ximénez S.A., an Andalusian company from Puente Genil (Cordoba). So it means that Andalucía wins anyway.

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Unique **crib scenes,** tradition with a twist

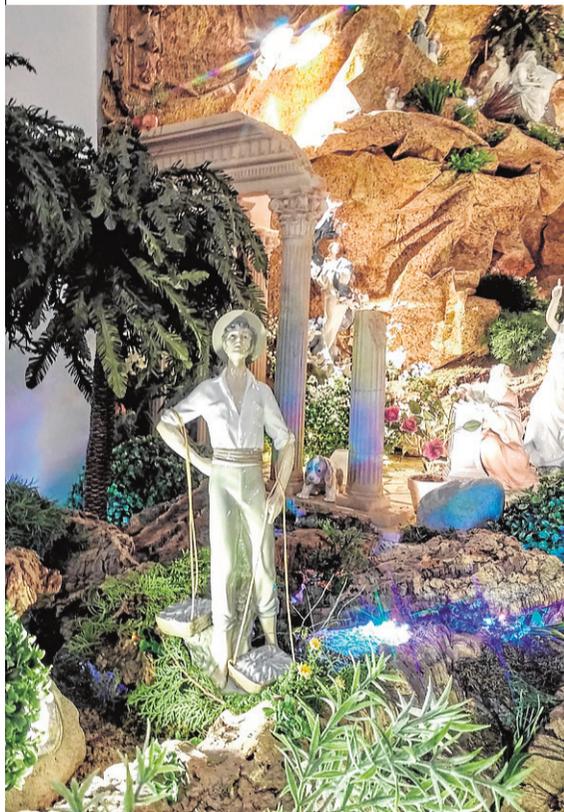
Belenes. All cities, towns, villages and many private homes and businesses in southern Spain set up a nativity scene for Christmas, but some are more imaginative than others

ALEKK M. SAANDERS

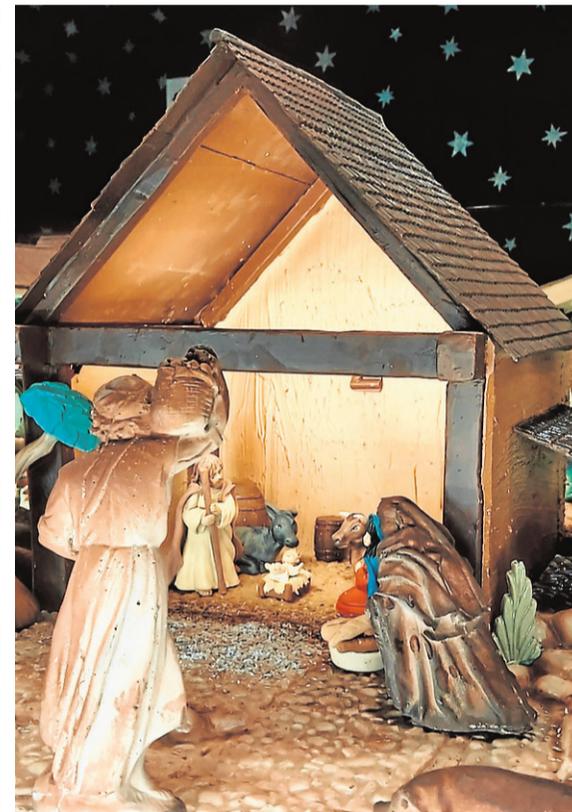
Setting up a nativity scene, or a Belén (Spanish for Bethlehem), is one of the many traditions embedded in Christian culture since at least the mid-thirteenth century. During the Christmas season, a nativity scene is displayed in every town and village in Spain. Over recent years, attempts have been made to install unusual and unique Belenes, in order to create more interest and appeal to more tourists.

Belén 1. Artistic

The term 'nativity scene' is used for any representation of the birth of Jesus in art. In Malaga there is a Belén that is a collector's dream. In 2009, the owner of the Museo de Vidrio in Malaga, Gonzalo Fernández-Prieto, installed a Belén with Lladró porcelain figurines. The Lladró factory is known for producing unique religious figures depicting Mary, Joseph, and the Baby Jesus, together with the Three Kings, angels, and many assorted animals. Most Lladró pieces are no longer manufactured, making them even more valuable to collectors. The hundred Lladró pieces from Fernández-Prieto's private museum collection make up different scenes. Even Lladró's Cenachero (fish vendor), a typical and traditional figure of Malaga, forms part of the nativity scene.



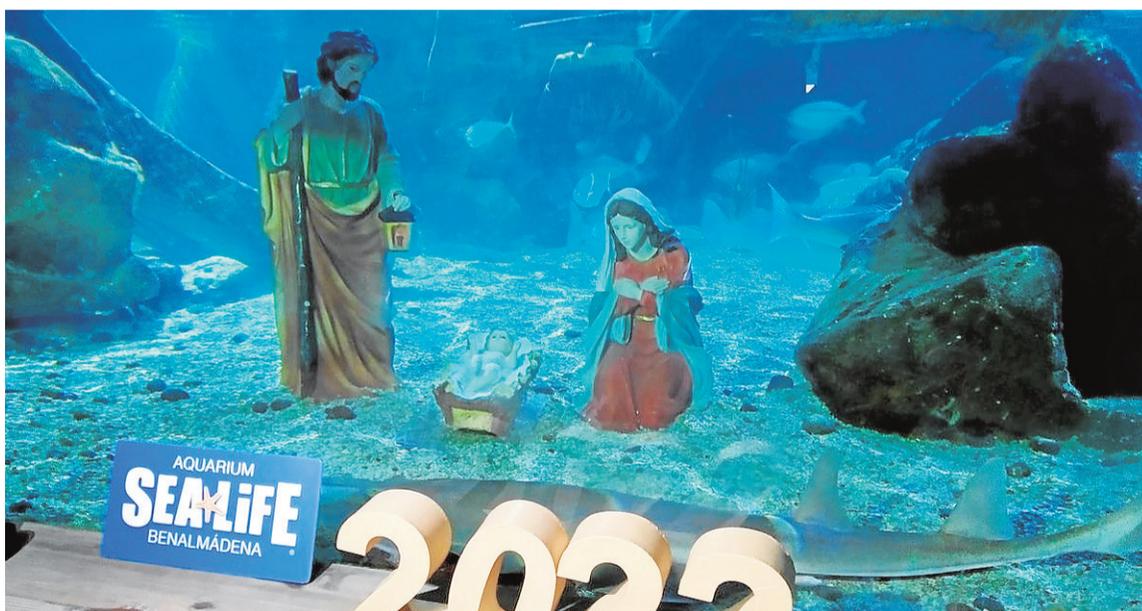
Lladró figurines at the Museo de Vidrio. SUR



Rute nativity scene. GALLERAS ARTESANOS

Belén 2. Underwater

On the Costa del Sol, Christmas also reaches the bottom of the ocean. This peculiarity was possible in Benalmádena thanks to Sea Life. In this local aquarium and research centre you can find a traditional nativity scene in an unique environment. The nativity scene is underwater and accompanied by the resident sharks and other extraordinary creatures such as seahorses and rays.



The underwater nativity scene at Sea Life. SUR

Belén 3. Sweetest

This Belén is located in one of the sweetest locations, literally. The town of Rute in Cordoba province, is known for its anis and chocolate production by the family firm Galleros Artesanos. Unsurprisingly, the local nativity scene there is made of chocolate.

It took seven chocolatiers working eight hours a day, during four months, to make it. This year's edition covers 66 square metres and contains more than 1,400 kg of white and dark chocolate. There are 170 chocolate figures accompanied by

some marzipan figures.

Rute's Belén is considered the largest chocolate nativity scene in Spain.

Belén 4. Scandalous

An English tradition many years ago was to make mince pies with a minced meat mixture, sweetened with spices and fruit, to represent the gifts of the Wise

Innovative, realistic and sometimes controversial nativity scenes can be found across Spain

Men.

This mixture was wrapped in a pastry crust in the shape of a manger. In Andalucía there doesn't seem to be anything similar. However, this year a baker in Seville has set up a baked, but also erotic, nativity scene. The cake shop La Verguería, decided to decorate its shop window with the nativity

scene made up of waffles in the form of genitals.

This unusual nativity scene not only has sparked controversy in Seville but has brought the bakers serious trouble. A court in Seville has apparently opened an investigation to determine whether the cake-shop has committed a crime against religious feelings.

Belén 5. Plasticine

In the neighbouring region of Extremadura, there is a monumental nativity scene made of plasticine. For the third time, Cáceres is exhibiting 220 handmade figures created from about 40 kilograms of plasticine. The figures are supported by an interior metal frame. The Belén occupies 40 square metres and in addition to the traditional nativity scene, it depicts the daily routines of local people.

Belén 6. Living nativity

Arcos de la Frontera in Cadiz province, is known as Andalucía's pioneer of the Belén Viviente (living nativity scene). In December, the historic Plaza del Cabildo, is decorated with palm leaves and transformed into a theatre.

Hundreds of people flock to watch local residents playing their roles. About 30 different scenes tracing the nativity story, from the Visitation to the Birth are staged. The atmosphere of the city of Bethlehem is created by costumes and staging made by hand. However, this year, because of the Covid-situation, Arcos de la Frontera as well as the neighbouring town of Medina Sidonia (that also arranges live performances), have decided to postpone the celebration of the living nativity scene until next year.

Belén 7. Life-sized

For somebody visiting the Christmas lights display in the Galician city of Vigo, they might come across the small town of Viveiro, the capital of A Mariña Occidental region.

One of the largest nativity scenes in the country is installed there, around the church of Santa María. Being surrounded by the life-sized statues it is easy to lose orientation in time and find yourself travelling back to ancient times.

The Belén serves as an open-air, ethnographic museum where the life of local people is depicted by technological installations. Surprisingly it is not well known outside Galicia.



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The El Cid company in La Trinidad in Malaga has been producing roscos de vino for 90 years. SUR.



Traditional roscos de vino for Christmas

Local speciality. One of the most popular varieties, El Cid, is produced by the Angulo family in Malaga

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Roscas de vino, or wine rings, are a typical sweet eaten during Christmas all over Spain, yet the most authentic are said to be those of La Mancha and Malaga.

Their name is derived from the wine in which they are cooked, and their shape.

These types of Spanish Christmas pastries have been a staple of Andalusian cuisine for centuries, although it is difficult to determine the exact place and time of origin.

As with many of the traditional sweets and pastries found in Andalucía, roscos de vino probably have their origins in Moorish culinary traditions.

Festive delicacies

The roscos de vino are usually made with flour, lard and sugar, and flavoured with anise, cinnamon and sesame seeds.

They are cooked in sweet wine, usually muscatel, and coated in icing sugar. However, the ingredients and methods used to cook them vary greatly. Some confectioners toast the flour and some do not. There are those who use only lard as fat,

or only olive oil, or a mixture of both.

These festive delicacies fill the shelves of supermarkets during the Christmas period, along with other typical sweets such as polvorones and mantecados, but roscos de vino are distinguished by their donut shape and by being firmer and less sandy in texture.

Family business

One of the most popular varieties, which is known throughout the world, is produced by a family from Malaga.

The Angulo family business began in 1931, the year of the proclamation of the second Spanish Republic, when Don Angulo, a confectioner from Lora del Rio, Seville, was transferred to Malaga for stomach surgery.

Once recovered, Angulo decided to remain in Malaga, setting up a confectionery business in the district of La Trinidad. The business is now 90 years old and run by a third generation.

El Cid

Their products, which carry the

El Cid trade mark, are among the most artisan in Andalucía and are far superior - seeing as around 80 per cent of the process is executed by hand - than the manufactured style of sweet found on supermarket shelves this time of year.

The family's products are not only sold in shops during December, but also distributed among the poor and needy, a charitable offering that began during the Civil War and the years of hunger that followed.

Don Angulo managed to carve out a niche in the world of confectionery, and following his death in 1974, his children took over the business.

In addition to being the creators of the city's most popular festive sweets, the Angulo family consider themselves as the first importers of sunflower seeds to Malaga.

Over the years, there have been many changes in the confectionery workshop, but the recipe remains the same.

The company now exports to countries such as France, England, Germany, Belgium and Morocco.

Handmade turrón (and where to buy it)

Alongside the more classic flavours, in recent years original creations have started to appear

JAVIER
ALMELLONES



Daver in Ronda sells assortment boxes of turrón. **SUR**

Turrón, along with mantecados, polvorones and roscos de vino are synonymous with Christmas in Spain,

much like mince pies and Christmas pudding is in the UK. Along the Costa del Sol and inland in Malaga province there are some

go-to places where locals flock to buy these festive treats.

There are currently several establishments in Malaga that make

these typical Christmas delicacies using traditional methods. Alongside the more classic flavours, in recent years original creations have started to appear, many of which are made using local products. Here are some of the options for buying 'turrón' made in Malaga.

Daver Ronda

Daver has been producing tempting sweets since 1942. It has a wide range of turrón, from the classic to the more innovative. Conventional bars include chocolate with almonds, hazelnuts or cream, but there is also praline with salted peanuts, truffle, chocolate with orange, praline with macadamia nuts, marzipan with cream and nuts, praline with almonds and praline with pistachios. They also offer lactose and sugar-free options. Daver's shop is on the corner of Carrera Vicente Espinel and they also sell online.

Ramos, la Caleta de Vélez

Pastelería Ramos has become especially well known in the last decade for its original turrón creations. Among its flavours there is tarta de Algarrobo, Malaga wine and sultanas, lime and avocado, Zumbral sweet wine and jasmine, pistachio and raspberry, salted caramel and pine nuts and mango. As well as the well known classics. They

have a shop on the main road in La Caleta de Vélez, and are also online.

Mira, Malaga

The name Mira in Malaga is associated not only with handmade ice cream, but also with the its turrón. The family has been producing its popular delicacies since 1890, when Severino Mira arrived from Jijona. Among the flavours that can be bought (by weight) are Jijona, Alicante, toasted egg yolk, guirlache, fruit, coconut and pan de Cadiz, among others. They are all handmade using natural ingredients. Establishments include Dimas Mira e Hijos in Calle Larios and Calle Cister in the city centre, Fernando Mira in Calle Compás de la Victoria, Calle Marqués de Valdecañas and Calle Andrés Pérez.

Almensur, Cártama

Almensur's turrón is made with Malaga almonds and the company offers the classic flavours of Jijona, Alicante and chocolate. Although they are not made in the province, the main raw material, almonds, is from Malaga. The turrón is available in various establishments in the province as well as the company's own shop in Estación de Cártama. The shop also sells Christmas products from other Malaga-based companies.

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What **gadgets** can we get them this year?

Techie gifts. Just a few ideas for presents for those who like a technological toy to play with during the festive holidays and beyond



SARA BORONDO

Techie gadgets have established themselves on our annual Christmas lists. A new mobile phone, computer, a tablet or a device for the youngest ones. Are there more? Yes, there are more. There is a plethora of solutions to choose from, ranging from different ways to feed pets, air purifiers or gadgets so we don't lose the photos on our phones.

Photostick

Since digital cameras appeared, the habit of printing photographs has disappeared. Now they are stored on mobile phones, hard drives, tablets... But memories end up being lost among so many devices and folders, and it can be hard to find a specific photo.

Photosticks are USB keys that include software specialised in

Film cameras are trendy again and are in fashion. They can be bought from 35 euros.

finding media files.

You only have to plug it into a computer and run the programme, which will find the media and will classify it accordingly, and even avoids duplicating any files. There are USBs of up to 128GB and some come with adaptors to connect them to mobile phones.

Robot vacuum

It's one of those gadgets which you think aren't worth the money, but whoever does won't regret it. It's especially suitable for people who have spacious homes and with little furniture, given that when it detects an obstacle it moves back. There are even those that also mop the floor and other models have HEPA filters for people with allergies.

Subscription to a video platform

Nowadays, many people are subscribed to a video streaming platform, but there are too many to pay for all of them. A subscription of one or several months for those who like a particular type of film, series or programmes is a very good gift. In that time, the subscriber can get an idea of whether they're interested in the platform after the subscription ends.

Record player

Vinyl went through a rough patch with the rise of digital music services, but they never disappeared

entirely. In the last few years they've experienced a rebirth because some people prefer the way they sound.

Now there are record players of all shapes and sizes, ranging from 100 to 1,000 euros, for the more demanding of users.

Wireless charging stations

This gadget recharges the battery of eligible devices without the need for cables. You only need to place them on the base of the charger for it to come into contact with the electromagnetic field.

Programmable plugs

Bearing in mind the rise of electricity prices, any measure that saves on energy consumption will be welcome. With programmable plugs, standby power consumption can be reduced if the devices are unplugged during the hours of non-use. This way there is no need to remember plugging and unplugging devices on a daily basis.

Air purifier

The concern for air quality that is breathed in homes has increased in the last few years, especially since the importance of home ventilation has been a topic of discussion. Therefore, air purifiers are now

Programmable food bowls for pets

Cats and dogs are part of families and with the return to workers to their offices, pets are now more alone than ever, which can hinder the feeding schedule which they had recently been accustomed to. There are food bowls with timers that dish out the exact amount of food at the established time.

Film cameras

Digital cameras put an end to film cameras as swiftly as digital succumbed to the superior quality of lenses found on mobile phones. Similarly to what is happening to vinyl, analogue cameras are making a comeback with newer models that use the same rolls of film. Maybe it's not a gift for everyone, but it will certainly charm those lovers of retro tech or those who wish to experience the emotion of seeing how the photo turns out after being developed and not instantaneously. From 35 euros.

LED lights

As an original gift idea, very few will be able to beat this one. LED lights are sold in strips and provide a warm atmosphere to television screens or computer monitors, among other spots where they can be placed. They have an adhesive to stick them on a flat surface and they are controlled via Wi-Fi or even by voice command.

