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December 24th to 30th 2021
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Masks back on outdoors as Spain braces to fight Omicron variant

The government has urged people to be "cautious" this Christmas as case figures are highest since January

In a bid to fight the latest wave of Covid-19 cases and the surge in the Omicron variant, Spain has toughened its mask-wearing rule

to include outdoor as well as indoor spaces. The measure was announced after PM Pedro Sánchez's meeting with regional presidents on Wednesday. While further restrictions have been ruled out for now, the government has announced a range of measures to tackle the new wave. These include reinforcing the health service and speeding up vaccination. **P2**



Celebrations outside the lottery office in San Pedro Alcántara. **JOSELE**

Lottery millions fall on San Pedro

Christmas lottery fifth prize tickets sold at a local office are now worth a total of 10.3m

The top prize - El Gordo - travelled around the country after being sold at a Madrid train station **P4**

Margarita del Cid (PP) takes over as mayor of Torremolinos after vote of no confidence ousts Socialist Ortiz **P3**

Coronavirus uncertainty accelerates winter closure of Costa del Sol hotels **P10**

Christmas party at Villa Tiberio raises 21,500 euros for Cudeca's One in a Million campaign **P8**

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Bars and restaurants adapt to Covid passport rule in force in Andalucía

Customers must now show proof of Covid vaccination, a recent negative test or positive diagnosis in the last six months to enter establishments

Á. ESCALERA / M. STUBER

MALAGA. Covid passports became mandatory on Monday for customers over the age of 12 wanting to go inside bars, restaurants and nightclubs in Andalucía.

Since then staff have had the extra job of checking that customers have the documents - either on paper or digitally - to prove one of the three circumstances: that they have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19; that they have had a negative test within the last 72 hours if it is a PCR or 48 hours in the case of an antigen test; or that they have recovered from Covid-19 in the last six months - proved with a positive PCR test dated more than 11 days previously.

The requirement, which will remain in place until, initially, 15 January, was confirmed in the order published in the Junta's Official Gazette (BOJA), late on Sunday evening, after the measure finally got the green light from the Andalusian Superior Court of Justice (TSJA) on Friday.

Customers must also be able to show staff an ID card, passport or driving licence to prove their identity, along with the certificate.

There was no reference to terraces or outdoor spaces of establishments in the order published by the regional authority on Sunday. The regional health minister, Jesús Aguirre, recommended that staff ask customers sitting outside for Covid certificates too, as these "form part" of the establishment.

"People go inside to the toilet," he pointed out.

The first day of the require-

ment ran relatively smoothly in most areas.

"So far only one customer has left because he couldn't, or didn't want, to show a certificate," said Carlos Muñoz, a waiter at Malaga's central Bar Plaza at 1.30pm on Monday.

Nicolás Moreno and Julia Torres, stopped off at Malaga's well known La Farola de Orellana for a lunchtime drink.

"We feel safer knowing that

The Covid passport is seen by many in the hospitality industry as a lesser evil, preferable to restrictions on opening hours or numbers



A waiter checks a customer's Covid certificate at the entrance to Malaga bar. SALVADOR SALAS

everyone in here is fully vaccinated," they said.

"It wouldn't be logical to put more restrictions on the hospitality industry after all they've been through in the last two years," they added.

In fact the measure is seen by many in the hospitality sector as a lesser evil and preferable to the imposition of opening hours or capacity restrictions.

The Covid passport requirement brings Andalucía in line with other regions and European countries such as Italy, Germany and Holland. In all these countries the case figures have rocketed.

Dutch tourists Evelyn and Daniel, having a drink in Malaga's Muelle Uno port development, expressed their doubts about the requirement.

"We've had [the passport] for months and the country has gone back into lockdown today," they pointed out.

There were some hiccups at the beginning of the week with the application the authority provided businesses so that they could scan customers' certificates.

The president of the Malaga Hospitality Association (Mahos), Javier Frutos, said that customers and establishments were frustrated by issues with the Junta's health service app, which crashed at different times of the day.

In order to guarantee maximum privacy, it is specified that the Covid certificate can only be requested for the purpose of verification.

In addition, establishments must display a public information poster, stating the mandatory requirement to show a Covid certificate and ID to access the premises, as well as details of how they will not store health and personal data shown to them.

Face masks go back to being mandatory outdoors in Spain

The measure was announced by PM Pedro Sánchez on Wednesday after a meeting with regional presidents

SUR

MALAGA. Wearing a face mask outside as well inside becomes obligatory again from today, Friday 24 December. The prime minister Pedro Sánchez, announced the measure as part of an action plan against the Omicron variant on Wednesday, after a meeting with regional presidents.

There are just two exceptions

to the rule: when doing 'individual sports' and when outside in a natural environment, for example the countryside or the beach, and only if the 1.5 metre distance rule can be guaranteed.

Although large crowds of people are more likely in cities, people in smaller towns and villages are also obliged to follow the new ruling and wear a mask, even in the town square.

Minister for Health Carolina Darias has insisted that this decision is "supported by scientists" and that despite the current high incidence of new cases, the situation is not as it was during the previous Christ-

mas season due to the wide "vaccination coverage", although she stressed that it is important "not to lower our guard".

The previous obligation to wear a mask outdoors was lifted in June.

The country is battling its sixth wave of Covid-19, which is already producing record numbers of infections, with more than 60,000 cases in just 24 hours recorded yesterday, Thursday.

Sánchez did not say how long the outdoor mask rule would be in place, but that it would be lifted "as soon as possible."

Besides the return of face

masks outdoors, Sánchez flatly refused to impose additional restrictions at a national level, which he could have ordered by decree, for example, setting new capacity limits or curfews

In an effort not to impose extreme restrictions before Christmas, Sánchez opted for operational measures, to "intensify and accelerate" the vaccination process and reduce pressure on primary care.

He has also promised to reinforce vaccination teams with the help of the Armed Forces, as well as making the military hospitals in Madrid and Zaragoza available to speed up the programme and help achieve millions of vaccinations before 19 April.

i For the latest information on COVID 19 developments in Spain: www.surinenglish.com/

Andalucía registers highest new daily case figure since January

SUR

MALAGA. Andalucía region has registered the highest number of Covid-19 infections in a day since 31 January with 7,210 new cases of coronavirus on Thursday. In addition, 14 deaths from the virus have been reported, seven more than the day before.

The 14-day cumulative incidence rate has risen by 70.9 in just one day to reach a total of 572.9 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, some 319.1 more than one week ago.

On Tuesday figures showed that the Omicron variant represented around half of the Covid-19 cases in Spain.

Margarita del Cid installed as new mayor of Torremolinos

Socialist José Ortiz was ousted from local government this week after PP's Del Cid won support for a vote of no confidence

IVÁN GELIBTER

TORREMOLINOS. Margarita del Cid of the Partido Popular is the new mayor of Torremolinos after a majority of town councillors (13 to 12) voted in a motion of no confidence in former mayor José Ortiz (PSOE) - who described it as "an attack on democracy".

As expected Del Cid maintained the support of those who signed the motion of no confidence on 2 December. The nine PP councillors were joined by Antonio Sevilla (Vox) and David Obadía (Ciudadanos). The other two votes were from councillors unattached to political parties: Avelina González (formerly of Por Mi Pueblo); and Nicolás de Miguel (formerly of Ciudadanos). Margarita del Cid was harsh

with the outgoing local government. "Today the citizens of Torremolinos dismiss the municipal government for being incompetent," said the new mayor, who, after listing Ortiz's faults managing the local authority, accused him of being a "money collection machine".

After announcing that she will be the one who will manage the areas of Equality and everything related to Pride and LGBT policies - Del Cid promised to stop "bleeding" the people of Torremolinos.

Back to the past

The now ex-mayor Ortiz did not mention Del Cid at all in his speech to the council chamber, and said that the no confidence vote was a "return to the past".

He said, "A step backwards in rights and freedoms will be the price to pay. That is the goal of the right and the far right, and those who support it will be complicit in this goal. They were not up to the task years ago and they are not now."



Margarita del Cid with the mayoral staff after the successful vote of no confidence on Monday. FRANCIS SILVA



Ousted mayor, José Ortiz. F. S.

Plans include scrapping blue zone parking and cutting taxes

Two days after being sworn in Margarita del Cid laid out some of the new policies that she'll be bringing to Torremolinos. During a press conference on Wednesday, when she announced who would be part

of her local government team, Del Cid said that she would be scrapping the blue zone meter parking places as well as cutting local taxes. "Families need their town hall's help to face the socioeconomic recovery after the pandemic," she said. She will also look to suppress the town's "unnecessary and political" spending, without affecting residents.

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MARBELLA - FUENGIROLA - MANILVA

Christmas lottery rains 10.3 million on San Pedro

While much of the first prize - El Gordo - was sold in Madrid, one of the fifth prizes was shared out among residents of the Costa del Sol town

ANTONIO M. ROMERO

MALAGA. Spain's special Christmas lottery on Wednesday caused the usual excitement across the country as the winning numbers were sung out throughout the morning.

Ticket holders had to wait until 12.12pm for the first prize, El Gordo, to come out of the enormous drum into the hands of the

children from the San Ildefonso school: 86148 was the number, sharing out 400,000 euros for each 'décimo' ticket (sold for 20 euros).

Many of those tickets travelled around the country as the winning number was sold by the lottery office in Madrid's Atocha railway station. One lucky punter who bought a ticket on his travels to the capital was Malaga business owner Francisco Rodríguez, who celebrated his windfall on Wednesday.

"I haven't stopped shouting and crying since the number came out," he said on Wednesday. He and a friend had bought four 'décimo' tickets, bringing in 1.6 million euros for the two families.



Francisco Rodríguez of Malaga celebrates with the Gordo ticket he bought in Madrid. FRANCIS SILVA

Locally on the Costa del Sol, San Pedro Alcántara was the scene of celebrations thanks to the number 69457, which won one of the eight fifth prizes. One local lottery office sold all of the tickets with

that number, sharing out 10.3 million euros among locals and regular visitors.

This was the biggest prize to land on Wednesday in Malaga province, where lottery ticket sales had broken records, with people spending 90.55 million euros.

According to official figures tickets sold in the province have won a total of 10.56 million euros.

As well as the windfall in San Pedro, parts of other main prizes were sold in Benalmádena, Torre del Mar and Malaga city.

MAIN PRIZES

- ▶ **El Gordo.** 86148.
- ▶ **Second prize.** 72119.
- ▶ **Third prize.** 19517.
- ▶ **Fourth prizes.** 42833, 91179.
- ▶ **Fifth prizes.** 92052, 70316, 26711, 24198, 69457, 89053, 34345, 89109.

"Prize money has gone to poor people, those who need it most"

Seven hundred 'décimos' of one of the fifth prizes were sold in San Pedro by the charity Cáritas

JOAQUINA DUEÑAS

MARBELLA. Calle Marqués del Duero in San Pedro Alcántara was one big party on Wednesday, especially outside the lottery office number 3 that sold the fifth prize-winning number 69457. The 10.3 million euros will be well shared out among the local community. Belén Agüera, who runs the office, explained that they sell that same number every year. "We had 172 tickets, that's 1,720 'décimos' shared out," she said.

Seventy of those tickets (700 dé-

cimos) were sold by the charity Cáritas. "We know that the association helps a lot of people and those most in need," she added.

"A lot of poor people who most need it have won something," added Luz González, who heard the news on her way to work. This cleaner, carer and housewife has been buying the same number for 14 years.

Others have taken a share of the prize thanks to the Acevedo family who run the 'minimarket' and the Acemar hostel close to the lottery office.

"My grandfather opened the shop in 1965 and we've been buying that number since then," said Daniel Acevedo. They sold 150 'décimos' to customers as well as buying some themselves.



Celebrations outside the lottery office in San Pedro. JOSELE

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At least 4,000 homes in Marbella are not connected to mains sewage system

MARBELLA

Next year work will begin to remove the septic tanks at El Rosario, Hacienda Las Chapas and Costabella

JOAQUINA DUEÑAS

Last week's agreement between Marbella town hall, the public water company Acosol and the residents of El Rosario to connect properties to the mains sewage network, is just the first of several. Acosol has identified eight residential developments within the municipality of Marbella which also lack this basic infrastructure.

As well as El Rosario, Costabella, Panorama, Loma Las Palmas, Los Pinos, Ricmar, Hacienda Las Chapas, Pinos Verdes and part of Marbesa are all affected. In total, about 4,000 properties have septic tanks. Under the agreement, the council will pay 50 per cent, Acosol will pay 25 per cent and the owners will pay the other 25 per



Costabella, one of the developments with no mains drainage system. JOSELE

cent of the cost of connection to the mains network.

It is not known how long all the works will take as it will depend on the administration's ability to fund them, given that the estimated general cost is between 20 and 30 million euros. However, next year the works can begin in El Rosario, Costabella and Hacienda Las Chapas.

Carlos Cañavate, the CEO of Acosol, hopes the contract for El Ro-

sario can be put to tender soon. With the exception of Costabella, "all these are residential areas with large villas with swimming pools, and as soon as these works are completed those properties will increase in value, so for the owners this is a good investment," he said.

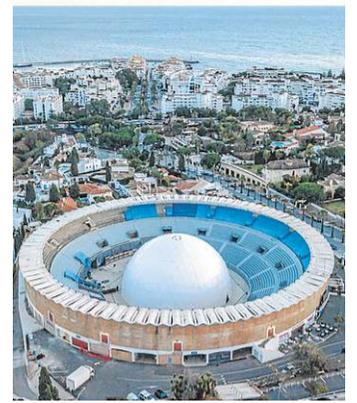
There has been some criticism of public money being used for projects which will increase property values, but Acosol says it has

no choice but to take action. "When there is an irregular form of sewage disposal we have to do something about it. And also, every time there is a leak or spillage, we are the ones who have to deal with it," said Cañavate.

Acosol does the work and then the town hall and the owners pay the company. "It is not always clear whose legal responsibility it is because it might be the developer who built the development 40 years ago and whose whereabouts are unknown, or it could be the person who enjoys the use of the house. Nowadays though, anyone who buys their home in these conditions cannot be asked to carry these works out," he said.

The problem with septic tanks is that the sewage isn't filtered and detergents and chemicals can't be used, so what is released is pure waste.

"Some deposits have also had to be closed down because the water they contain, which would normally be suitable for domestic consumption, has been badly contaminated by septic tanks in the area," Cañavate said.



The new dome. SUR

A new cultural and corporate venue inside Marbella Arena

JOAQUINA DUEÑAS

MARBELLA. Completed in just two weeks, Marbella can now boast having the largest dome in Europe. The half sphere-shaped structure is inside the old Puerto Banús bullring, now the Marbella Arena.

It measures 37 metres in diameter and is 18 metres high, covering 2,100 square metres and will be the venue for all types of cultural and corporate activities including concerts, opera, theatre, congresses, sporting events etc.

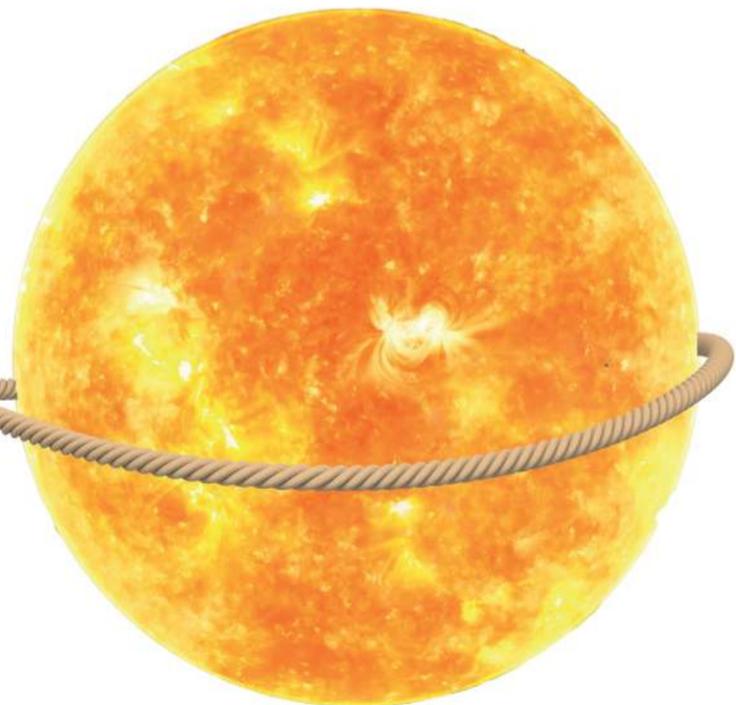
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Explosive device found off Burriana beach

It took Spanish Navy specialists two hours and three controlled blasts in the sand to destroy the device

E. CABEZAS

NERJA. Emergency services were put on standby and a police cordon was put in place at Nerja's famous Burriana beach after two local fishermen found a US military explosive device floating in the water on Monday.

Three members of a Spanish Navy specialist team were sent

from Cadiz to deal with the military flare that was found by fishermen Francisco Pastor and José Cabello.

The two men had taken the device out of the water on Friday and left it on the sand. "We thought it was a fire extinguisher from a boat or something, so we left it for the cleaning services to take care of," they told SUR, adding, "It was two foreigners that swim every morning at the beach who eventually told us it was dangerous and to call the police."

An ambulance crew was on standby and Guardia Civil officers



The scene on Nerja's Burriana beach. E. CABEZAS

kept onlookers at a safe distance.

It took three controlled explosions to cause the complete combustion of the material which generated a huge column

of smoke and a small fire.

At around 5pm, more than two hours after starting, the Navy team ended the operation with no personal or material damage.

Three accused hitmen face possible 52-year sentence for Costa bomb attacks

IRENE QUIRANTE

MARBELLA. Three Swedish nationals are facing a possible 52-year sentence for placing two explosive devices at a home in Benahavís and business in San Pedro Alcántara. Both properties belong to the same person, who survived the attacks.

The public prosecutor's office is also investigating the trio for belonging to a hitmen squad, known as Los suecos (the Swedes); as well as the possession of explosives, attempted murder, identity fraud and on-going damages.

The events took place on 9 October, 2018. In the court documents, the prosecutor said the trio "drew up an intricate plan" to make an attempt on the victim's life and his property. The accused used a BMW car, which had been stolen in Belgium in 2014, to transport the bombs and they later torched the vehicle.



The accused in court. i. a.

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ÑITO SALAS

Tivoli workers take to the streets once again

Tivoli theme park staff, who still don't know what their short-term future is, took to the Benalmádena streets to protest. Employees demanded that the park's owner, Tremón, come to an agreement with them and reopen Tivoli as it came to light that the park is still viable, according to the administrators.

HERE AND THERE



Officers free the animal. SUR

FRIGILIANA

Young ibex freed from illegal poaching snare

E. C. Officers successfully freed a young mountain goat on Tuesday, in what is the second case of its kind in just over a year in Frigiliana. On both occasions the animals became trapped in an illegal wire snare believed to have been laid by poachers in the Sierra Almijara mountains. Ranger Julio Fernández and an officer from the Guardia Civil's Nature Protection Service (Seprona) intervened, saving the life of the male goat, which was around a year old.

RINCÓN DE LA VICTORIA

Pet owners alerted to needles in sausages

E. C. A Rincón de la Victoria resident has alerted other pet owners to the presence of sausages pierced with needles on a residential development in the town. The dog owner took to social media to raise the alarm about the dangerous bait for animals in Torre de Benagalbón, and also reported the discovery to police officers. The dog owner and police officers have since found several of the potentially lethal sausages left for animals.

TORROX

Investigation opens following car park blaze

E. C. A total of 18 vehicles suffered extensive damage after a fire broke out in a Torrox municipal car park on Sunday night, according to emergency services. The 112 Andalucía control centre said the blaze broke out at 10.53pm in the town's Concordia car park and the flames quickly spread among parked vehicles. Six cars were completely gutted, although despite the extensive damage, no personal injuries were reported.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT



Cudeca representative Esther Ráez, Farida Hamied, Sandro Morelli and Dr Yusuf Hamied. **SUR**

Christmas party raises 21,500 for Cudeca

MARBELLA

The guests enjoyed a champagne reception, a firework display and a night of entertainment supplied by some of the Costa's top performers

TONY BRYANT

MARBELLA. A charity Christmas party held at the Villa Tiberio restaurant in Marbella last week raised 21,500 euros to help the Cudeca Foundation convert the house of founder Joan Hunt, who died in June, into the first children's palliative care unit in Andalucía.

Organised by restaurateur Sandro Morelli, the guests enjoyed a champagne reception, a firework display, and a night of entertainment supplied by some of the Costa's top performers.

A charity raffle was held to boost the fund and offered prizes donated by local businesses and individuals. These included a seven-day break at the Puente Romano Hotel and Beach Resort, an England foot-

ball shirt signed by Geoff Hurst, and a handmade dolls house by local designer Kathy Sala.

Among the guests were Cudeca's Vice President Susan Hannam, Medical Director Marisa Martín, and benefactor Dr Yusuf Hamied and his wife, Farida.

Sandro Morelli, who has supported the cancer charity for more than ten years, told SUR in English that he was "delighted" by the generosity of the guests.

"I feel extremely happy that this event has raised this amount of money, because it makes me so upset to hear of children dying. It is so nice to be able to offer Cudeca this help, especially at Christmas. I am so proud to be associated with this wonderful organisation," he said.

Marisa Martín added, "Sandro's help is one of the most important assets for our hospice since he involves so many others in his quest to help the ones that need it. Sandro has been helping Cudeca for more than 10 years and we are very proud and honoured to have him with us."

Burpee Challenge raises thousands for charity

SOTOGRADE

ASH MAER. A group of fundraisers have helped raise 5,000 euros for charity by taking part in a "Christmas Burpee Challenge" in Sotograde.

More than 50 people joined in the festive fundraiser by doing burpees (a push up followed by a leap in the air) across a 1,200-metre distance at the Pueblo Nuevo Rugby Ground on Thursday last week.

The money will now be used by the expat-run Saint George's charity to feed underprivileged families between Manilva and Estepona over Christmas.

British expat Jo-Jo France, 51, who organised the event, told SUR in English: "It was absolutely brilliant. The weather



Jo-Jo during the event. **SUR**

was atrocious but we did it and everyone had a lot of fun. The fastest team completed the challenge in 36 minutes, but we allowed up to three hours and we had everyone from three years of age to 66 taking part."

The personal trainer added that together with a pub quiz at the Hairy Lemon, a Half Marathon in Malaga and a fundraiser involving police officers from the Royal Gibraltar Police, organisers have almost reached their 12,000-euro target.

Jo-Jo continued: "The 12,000 euros will help us feed 150 families over Christmas - and we are just a few hundred euros short now. We hope to raise the rest with a swim on Boxing Day."

A Polar Swim is being organised from the Bunker Bar in Sotograde on Boxing Day from 11am - where people are encouraged to bring any spare change to help organisers reach their target.

Donations to the Saint George Charity Christmas Campaign can be made here:

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/StGeorgeXmas2021>

Bollywood-themed charity gala raises over 12,000 euros for a school in India

MARBELLA

SUR IN ENGLISH. The Marbella-Guadalmina Rotary Club organised a unique Bollywood charity gala evening on Saturday 4 December at the Tikitano restaurant. With the support of many generous guests and main sponsor Sunil Wadhvani of the Fugaro Men's Boutiques, they were able to raise over 12,000 euros.

The event, which was attended by 170 guests, was full of colour and joy, reminiscent of an Indian wedding, with help from Dyana, of Optimum Weddings.



Dancers from the Devi Diosa Dance School. **SUR IN ENGLISH**

Indian food was served, accompanied by entertainment from DJ Saeed, who also played the sitar.

Dancers from the Devi Diosa Dance School provided a Bollywood atmosphere at the event, encouraging guests to dance.

A silent auction and raffle

took place, with the raised funds going towards Rotary Club Mumbai Sobo, who are currently helping to re-open a school in India.

The evening was completed with a performance by Biddu, an award winning songwriter and producer, and Nicole King, from Marbella Now TV.

HERE AND THERE

MIJAS

New secondary school closer to becoming reality

T. BRYANT. Mijas town hall laid the cornerstone of the new secondary school in Las Lagunas last Friday, 17 December, in a ceremony attended by the president of the Junta de Andalucía Juanma Moreno, with other members

of local and regional governments, and members of the school's parent's association.

Located next to the Indira Gandhi primary school, it will comprise 24 multipurpose classrooms, some adapted for children with special needs.

It will have places for 720 students and will be finished in 18 months, with an investment of 5.5 million euros.



Authorities in Mijas last week. **SUR**

BENALMÁDENA

Butterfly park voted best attraction in Spain

T. B. The Mariposario in Benalmádena, the largest butterfly park in Europe, has been voted the best attraction in Spain in the fifth Remarkable Venue Awards. Organised by the Tiqets platform, the award honours attractions, such as theme parks and zoos, that stand out for their appeal, based on more than 850,000 customer reviews.

ISTÁN

Istán road improvements to cost nearly 5 million

J.D. A five-million euro contract has been put out to tender for the widening and improvement of a two-kilometre stretch of the Istán-Marbella road, which is used by 2,000 vehicles daily. The project aims to improve road safety by improving the road and installing proper lighting for drivers and pedestrians.



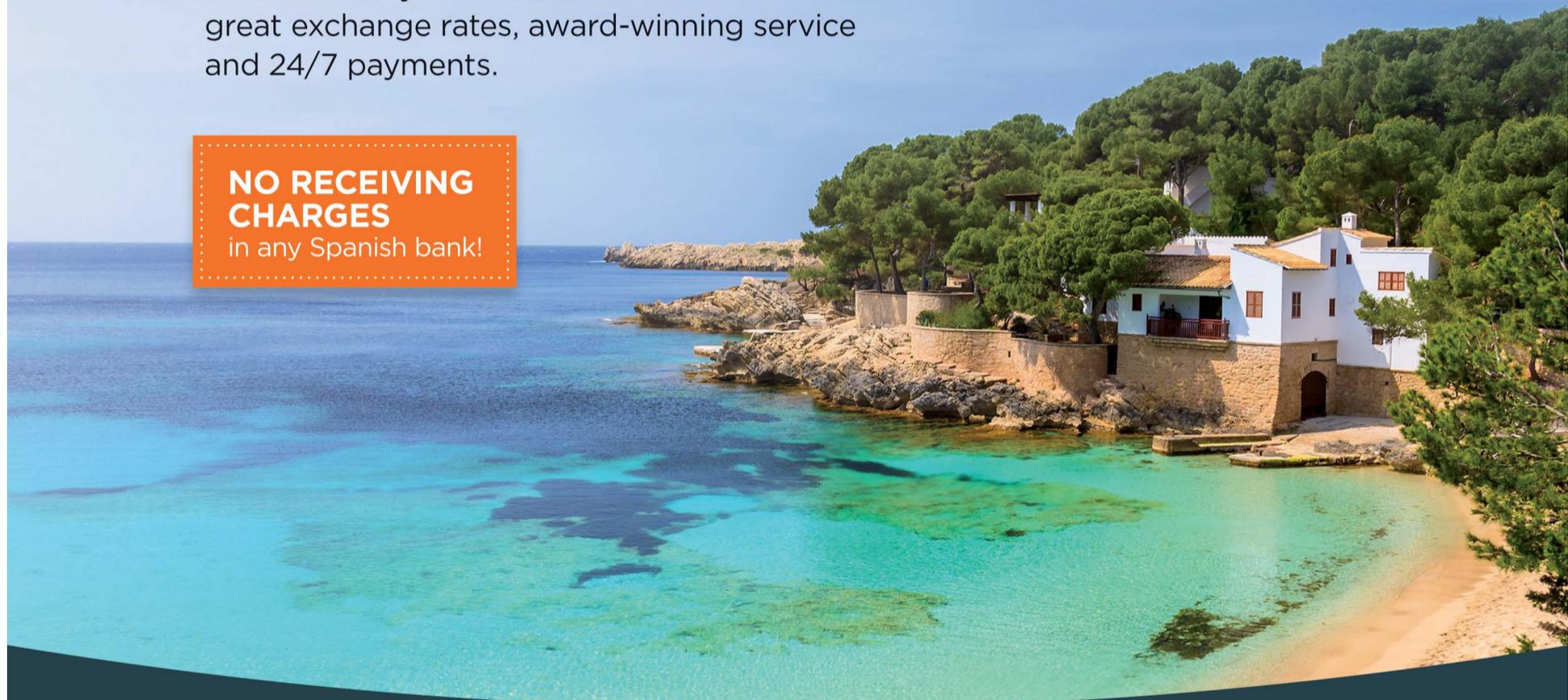
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A closed hotel on the Costa del Sol in a photo taken earlier this year. SALVADOR SALAS

Coronavirus uncertainty accelerates winter closure of Costa de Sol hotels

COSTA DEL SOL

Guests booking hotel accommodation with meals are now required to produce a Covid passport at check-in

PILAR MARTÍNEZ

MALAGA. Worldwide uncertainty about the coronavirus pandemic, in the middle of the Christmas season, has hit hotel bookings hard on the Costa del Sol and accelerated the closure of premises for the winter.

The hoteliers association on the Costa, Aehcos, has pointed out that the Covid-19 restrictions in Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands are already having an

effect, slowing down the arrival of international tourists and leading to the cancellation of reservations. In fact, the association points out that there are hotels that did not plan to stop operating in winter and that are now considering closing.

Aehcos points out that there are 69 hotels that have already closed their doors, which represents 20.9% of the total, adding up to almost 30,000 beds, that is, some 35.8% of the total offer.

Dinner cancellations

Hoteliers are also being hit hard by Christmas and New Year Eve party cancellations as businesses and individuals become nervous about the spread of infections, following some well publicised cases. In November Aehcos pointed

to the high demand for Christmas lunches and New Year's Eve dinners, which some establishments are now considering cancelling, after these had been hailed as a saviour following a difficult year.

Covid passport

Also, from Monday, 20 December, hotels in Andalucía were obliged, by the Junta, to request a Covid passport from guests at check-in if they had booked meals as part of their stay.

The latest Covid-19 passport order in the Official Gazette of the Junta de Andalucía (BOJA) includes all hotel establishments with restaurant services when the guest has booked breakfast, half or full board. In the case of Malaga city, almost 70% of customers book accommodation with breakfast.

Intrum debt management firm is recruiting staff for a new centre in Malaga city

MALAGA

A.J. LÓPEZ The Swedish debt management firm Intrum is planning to open a centre of technological excellence in Malaga city early next year and is recruiting approximately 200 staff who are specialists in IT development and Data Science. This will be the multinational's second centre after the one it opened in Mijas last summer, which has 250 employees. Intrum is present in 25 countries and employs more than 10,000 people.

Next Generation funds allocated for four sustainable tourism projects in the province

COSTA DEL SOL

PILAR MARTÍNEZ. Marbella, Vélez-Málaga, Estepona and the Sierra de las Nieves are to benefit from Next Generation funding for tourism. This will enable Marbella council to create the river walk and renovate the conference centre, while Vélez will be able to improve digital strategies. Estepona's funds will be used to maintain its sustainability and the Sierra de las Nieves will move towards a sustainable tourism destination.



EasyJet at Malaga Airport. ñ. s.

EasyJet reinforces its Malaga base with three new UK routes for summer 2022

MALAGA

EUROPA PRESS. The British airline easyJet has announced plans to strengthen its route network in Spain for the summer of 2022. In line with its sustained growth strategy in Malaga, the company will offer three new routes to the UK and, during the summer period next year, it will have two new planes based on the Costa del Sol, making a total of five.

The three new routes for easyJet's base in Malaga, which only opened last June, will link the city of Malaga with London Southend, Birmingham and Edinburgh airports, increasing the total number of routes from Malaga to 17. Operating from the start of May, the London Southend connection will operate six times a week, Birmingham four and Edinburgh three times a week.

THE BIGGER PICTURE JEREMY BLATCH

The forgotten art of investment counsel

✉ jbl@ehh.gi



Current markets are crazier than the dot com boom of 1995 says Charlie Munger, longtime friend and lieutenant to Warren Buffet. Buffet reminds us of the tulip mania of 1636, when people sold houses to buy tulip bulbs, and, almost a century later, the South Sea Bubble of 1726. In both these historic events, most speculators lost all their capital.

Howard Marks, a Wall Street veteran, writes about the distressed debt market in his classic *Mastering the Market Cycle*.

He warns against being aggressive when prices are at all-time highs, commenting that "trees do not grow to the sky". He also counsels decreased aggressiveness when a market cycle is closer to the top than the bottom, which is where we are now. However, current investors are increasingly aggressive, in spite of all-time high market prices and a crypto blast. The fear of missing out is real for many managers and individuals alike. Because markets are not made up of machines, but of people driven by the human emotion

of fear and greed, they can stay irrational longer than we can remain insolvent.

As investors, it is time to step back and look carefully at what we own and why.

Failure to do this will render us vulnerable to panic-selling. Given that you have a well-thought-out investment strategy, not staying the course in the face of sharply declining market prices is a poor recipe to achieve successful investment outcomes.

Personal preferences, circumstances and abilities unique to a family or individual profoundly affect portfolio construction. Risk preferences must influence portfolio choices, if we are to avoid panic-selling during violent markets. Sensible portfolios reflect individual preferences. Prudent investors consider the size and character of non-financial assets exposu-

re when allocating capital to an investment strategy. Personal residences, investment real estate and privately held business constitute important non-financial assets held on many personal domestic balance sheets. Where non-financial assets share similar characteristics with financial assets, then financial assets should be tempered to avoid excessive exposure to a common risk factor.

Home ownership insulates the owner from escalating rents and reduces the need for exposure to hedge inflation. The equity-like nature of a privately held business argues for a lower equity exposure in the investor's financial holdings. In a season of all-time-high prices and emotional craziness, sensible investors will use the time wisely to ensure that they have properly thought through what they own. Personalising finan-

cial investment portfolios by taking into account other non-financial assets making up our overall net worth helps us avoid serious emotional errors.

Adjustment of portfolio allocations for personal preferences positions you to maintain a disciplined approach to difficult market conditions and financial crises. A custom-tailored portfolio promises to deliver successful investor outcomes rather than a one-size-fits-all mindset.

The author is a member of the Society of Trustees and Estate Practitioners and an investment counsellor. The comments and observations by the author are a reflection of his opinion and do not constitute an offer to buy and hold securities, nor does he receive any remuneration of any kind from names referred to.

As inflation rises, how can you protect your savings and retirement income?

Inflation is back in the news in both Spain and the UK, with consumer prices accelerating at their fastest rate in over a decade. As the cost of living rises, your spending power erodes over time and with bank interest so low, you could be earning negative rates of return.

Talk to our local advisers for advice on protecting your savings. Blevins Franks has 40 years' experience providing financial planning advice to British expatriates. We take the time to get to know our clients, so our investment advice is based on your specific situation, objectives and risk profile. We then provide an ongoing service, with regular reviews to give you peace of mind.

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Juan Carlos I shows his face at Abu Dhabi tennis match

Spain's emeritus king, Juan Carlos I, appeared in public for the first time in months last weekend at an exhibition tennis match with Rafa Nadal in Abu Dhabi. The father of King Felipe left the country for the UAE in August 2020, following investigations into dubious financial affairs. PM Pedro Sánchez said last week that Juan Carlos "owed the people of Spain an explanation" even if the inquiry ends up being shelved.

THE EURO ZONE
MARK NAYLER

Popularity contest



As 2021 comes to an end, Yolanda Díaz, the coalition government's second deputy prime minister and labour minister, tops the charts as Spain's most popular politician. In the most recent poll she scored 4.76 out of 10, putting her just above her boss - suave but lightweight Socialist leader and prime minister Pedro Sánchez. There's now speculation about whether, either next year or in 2023, when the current government's term expires, Spain might have its first ever female prime minister. Might the country also see, within the same time-frame, its first female leader of the opposition?

An employment lawyer from a family of prominent Galician trade unionists, Díaz has a reputation among colleagues as a collaborator with a flair for cross-party negotiation. Her reforms to Spain's company-biased labour market, due to be rolled out before the end of the year, could well be the coalition's most durable legacy.

Díaz might also become a problem for Sánchez. Her popularity and independence highlight tensions within the coalition as a whole, as well as among its most radical ranks: a nominal member of Spain's Communist party and the leader of a new collective of female politicians called *Otras Políticas*, she has distanced herself from *Podemos*, a once-unstoppable leftist force that's lost much of its momentum over the last couple of years.

Speaking of the government, has anyone else noticed

something odd about the Congreso of late? There's no opposition. None. Just a roaring silence, a passive timidity, where there should be criticism and debate. Vox leader Santiago Abascal occasionally makes headlines, true, but you rarely hear anything from Popular Party (PP) boss Pablo Casado or from Inés Arrimadas, the new-ish figurehead of zombie centrists *Ciudadanos* (Arrimadas nevertheless beat Casado and Abascal to fourth place in the popularity poll).

One wonders if these politicians share the attitude of the UK's shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves, who declared in a TV interview this week that it was "not the job of the opposition" to specify what it would do differently in any given situation. Although in fairness, after that somewhat flustered response, she did give an example of something she thought Labour could do better than Boris Johnson's Conservatives in handling the latest wave of Covid.

Madrid's gutsy president, PP member Isabel Díaz Ayuso, provides the only other example of a high-profile politician in Spain who stands for something - namely, a certain cautious libertarianism, as manifested in her resistance to the central government's early pandemic policies, which can be summed up in two words: shut everything.

You sense that the headless PP would have a much louder voice on the national stage if it were led by Ayuso rather than Casado - and possibly that she'd be more evenly matched by Díaz, rather than the latter's Socialist boss.

La Palma volcanic eruption could soon be officially over

EP

MADRID. Experts monitoring the activity of the Cumbre Vieja volcano on the Canary island of La Palma say they could soon be in a position to declare the end of the eruption.

There has been an eerie silence on the island since the middle of last week when the earthquake activity subsided and the flow of lava

practically stopped.

On Wednesday the spokesperson for the Pevolca scientific committee, Carmen López, said that if the volcano's statistics remained level for three more days, the end of the eruption could be declared.

This would come after three months of volcanic activity, with the lava flow damaging or destroying more than 3,000 homes as well as crops and livestock.



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No further Covid restrictions anticipated in Gibraltar at present

The news came as a relief to those who feared they would not be able to spend Christmas with their families, and is thanks to the high vaccine and booster take-up

DEBBIE BARTLETT

GIBRALTAR. No further restrictions are being announced at the moment in Gibraltar, despite community transmission of the Omicron variant of the Covid-19 virus, which is now believed to be dominant.

Chief minister Fabian Picardo gave a televised address yesterday afternoon, following a meeting of the relevant health authorities. He said there were 488 current cases of Covid-19 in Gibraltar, three of whom are in hospital.

One of those is a baby in whom Covid was detected after being admitted for a different condition, one is in the hospital Covid ward and is steadily improving and another is in the Critical Care unit and had been ventilated but was now

off the ventilator and improving.

The reason there are now fewer hospitalisations, said Picardo, is Gibraltar's high vaccine take-up and booster campaign. Because of this "lifeline provided by the UK," he said, "I fully expect we will now be able to enjoy Christmas with loved ones, and no further restrictions".

He did, however, urge people who have not yet been vaccinated or had their booster jab to do so as soon as possible.

The chief minister also reassured people in Gibraltar that efforts are being made to have the Covid pass accepted in the EU as soon as possible, and he said the app has now been modified so the certificate can be downloaded.

Like the UK, Gibraltar has also now cancelled its list of 'red countries' for travel, on the grounds that Omicron is now already in the community. However, anyone arriving in Gibraltar by air is now legally obliged to take a rapid lateral flow test at the airport and must isolate until a negative result is received.



The chief minister (centre) with the captain's sons and the flag. D.B.

A moving event, the Red Ship and Red Tape book launch

D.BARTLETT The launch of the book 'Red Ship and Red Tape' took place at the John Mackintosh Hall in Gibraltar on Friday 17 December. The book is about a Republican ship which was attacked and holed by vessels loyal to Franco in the Strait of Gibraltar during the Spanish Civil War as she tried to pass through unnoticed, disguised as a British destroyer. The ship took refuge in Gibraltar, which caused a massive dilemma for the authorities there and in the UK because Britain was party to the Non-Intervention Agreement.

The event was very well atten-

ded and the organisers were delighted that Xavier and Luis Castro, the sons of the ship's captain, had travelled down from France especially to take part, and that Gibraltar's chief minister, Fabian Picardo, was also present. He said afterwards that he had found it very moving, as the ship's last flag had been loaned for the occasion by the Gibraltar National Museum: it had been sewn by his grandmother and the emblem designed by his grandfather, and this was the first time he had seen it outside a display case.

The book is available from the Gibraltar Heritage Trust.

IN BRIEF

CULTURE

New Year concert postponed

D.B. The Gibraltar Philharmonic Society New Year Concert which was due to take place on 4 January in the John Mackintosh Hall has been postponed as a precautionary measure due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Ministry of Culture says it hopes it will be able to take place later in the year, as part of an extensive programme of cultural events planned for the Rock in 2022.

NEWS

Man arrested for drink-driving after crash

D.B. A local man has been arrested on suspicion of drink-driving and causing a serious accident in Sir Herbert Miles Road on Wednesday evening. The 42-year-old's motorcycle was in a collision with another motorbike near what used to be La Mamela restaurant at Catalan Bay. This was the fifth arrest for drink driving in Gibraltar in five days.

Good things must
come to an end,
so we moved
the end.

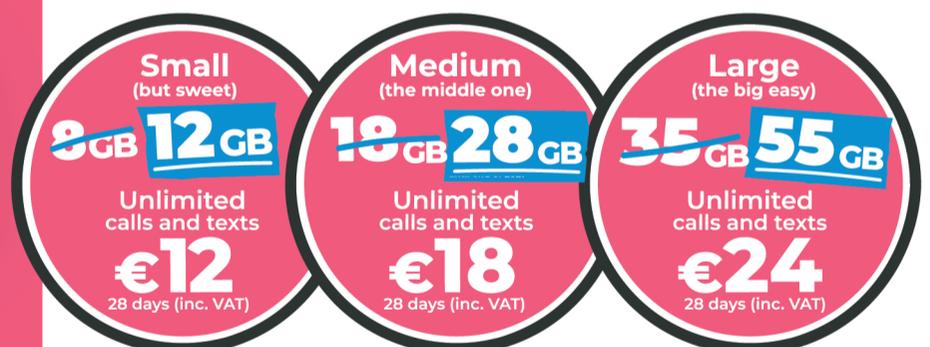


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LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

Feline thanks

The President, members and supporters of AGYA (Amigos y Gatos) would like to thank everyone, especially Mercadona, Carrefour and Del Y Mar Restaurant in Estepona port. We also thank those who have helped us financially. Without your help, there would be no AGYA.

We are pleased and proud to report that since January 2021 we have neutered over 3,000 cats and rehomed 600 cats/kittens.

We would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Love them or hate them, we need to keep the cat population under control.

We can be contacted via our Facebook page. **SHEILA WILKINS**

About that Covid
passport

So the Covid passport is now an essential document that we all have to carry around in our pockets- whether in the physical or digital form- to get into bars, restaurants or nightclubs. I found myself in awe at the outburst of polarising opinion. You were fiercely for it or totally against it.

In all honesty, I welcome the decision with open arms, and I find myself gobsmeaked

at how little my freedom and rights have been affected - as some passport naysayers have uttered in their petulant, online diatribe.

I guess the reason for their anger is that most aren't vaccinated, ergo they feel oppressed. I wonder if they felt the same when asked for ID at a nightclub, or accepted having their location tracked when using Google maps...

Here's to safer wining and dining.

REECE JACOBSON

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THE MUSIC MAKER
PETER EDGERTON
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Family misfortunes

Merry Christmaaas!! If it's possible for a bloke to yell and rasp at the same time, that's surely what Noddy Holder did on Slade's perennial megahit Merry Xmas Everybody. Just like, say, Hotel California, it sounded alright when it first came out in 1974 or whenever it was, but such is its ubiquity at this time of year, one is rather tempted to tear out one's own ear drums with a pair of rusty pliers at the first hint of those all-too-familiar opening chords.

Anyway, Noddy was correct in his somewhat over-zealous assertion - it is, indeed, Christmas. This, of course, is a marvellous thing although, if you're spending the festive period with family, there are a few pitfalls you might like to keep an eye out for.

First, don't fall into the trap of thinking that your parents now see you as a grown up. When you go to the pub on Christmas Eve and your mother asks you what time you'll

be back, the correct response is not "Mother, I'm fifty three years old," rather "If I don't stop at Mr Granger's for some penny chews on the way home, about three, I think." She may or may not ruffle your hair on the way out (if you still have any).

Next, as a general rule, avoid all uncles - especially if they're those weird ones who aren't related by blood but have still received the title for reasons unknown. They're made easy to spot by their 'wacky' Christmas jumpers and their having drunk slightly too much while everyone else is still in pyjamas. Uncles' favourite activities include wearing a tie around the head, telling jokes not fit for a family occasion and doing the Twist to any random song that may be playing, including, the best Christmas song ever, Joni Mitchell's River.

A really important danger at family gatherings that we must look out for is The Simmering Feud. This will involve two family members who, un-

beknownst to everyone else, have fallen out during the previous twelve months over an unreturned lawnmower/not getting a round in/mentioning somebody's wife had put on a few pounds in a sotto voice. It's a good idea to spend the first few hours simply observing proceedings, taking note of contemptuous glances, huffy backturning, hissed replies to innocuous questions and the like. Once you've identified the suspects, do your best to avoid both parties until the inevitable release of tension during Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. This is likely to involve upturned tins of Quality Street and flying mince pies. Hide the chocolate oranges early doors - they're a lethal weapon in the wrong hands.

Following these simple guidelines is guaranteed to minimise unnecessary dramas and maximise festive fun and frolics for all the family.

Merry Christmas, one and all.

IDÍGORAS



● **Correction** : In last week's SUR in English we erroneously stated that James Blunt was performing at the Cala Mijas music festival, when it should have been James Blake. Apologies for any inconvenience caused.

SUR in English

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THE BOTTOM LINE
IGNACIO LILLO

Hope at Christmas

Imagine you're in a supermarket, your average Mercadona in your average neighbourhood, where an elderly lady, let's call her Esperanza, does her shopping regularly. She leaves her flat, walks to the shops and then gets a taxi home to avoid having to carry her heavy bags. Despite her age, she is mentally sound and copes perfectly well on her own, without help.

She makes her way around the store slowly, filling up her trolley with what she needs for her day-to-day life. When she

has everything she waits her turn in the queue and then puts her items on the belt.

"Beep, beep, beep," the assistant passes the products one by one through the till. "That's mine up to there," she says and the assistant announces the total: nearly 60 euros. The customer takes out her card to pay. "Can you key in your Pin please?" asks the assistant.

But Esperanza has gone blank. She can't remember the combination of numbers, although it normally comes to her easily.

She tries once: error. She tries a second time: still not right. She tries to locate one of her children but he doesn't pick up the phone. She gets nervous. She's barely noticed that while she was trying to get her son on the phone she has moved away from the till. She goes back and asks the assistant to take off the most expensive items so that she can take home what she can with the little cash she has on her.

And then it happens: "Madam, you don't have to; that guy over there has paid the whole bill," says the assistant. Almost 60 euros. She has barely time to turn around and catch a glimpse of a tall young man walking out the door.

Esperanza is flummoxed and grateful; she thinks it might have been a friend of one of her children, who heard her trying to call and recognised her... Although if that had been the case, surely he would

have introduced himself and offered his help directly. Instead her generous benefactor had preferred to remain anonymous...

So now, when you're in a hurry and you get stuck behind an elderly person struggling at the cashpoint machine, think of the cognitive problems and the digital barrier they have to face, and that maybe with your help they would finish sooner. And whenever you go to an administration office, think of the trouble an elderly person might have with the machine that gives them a number so they know when it's their turn.

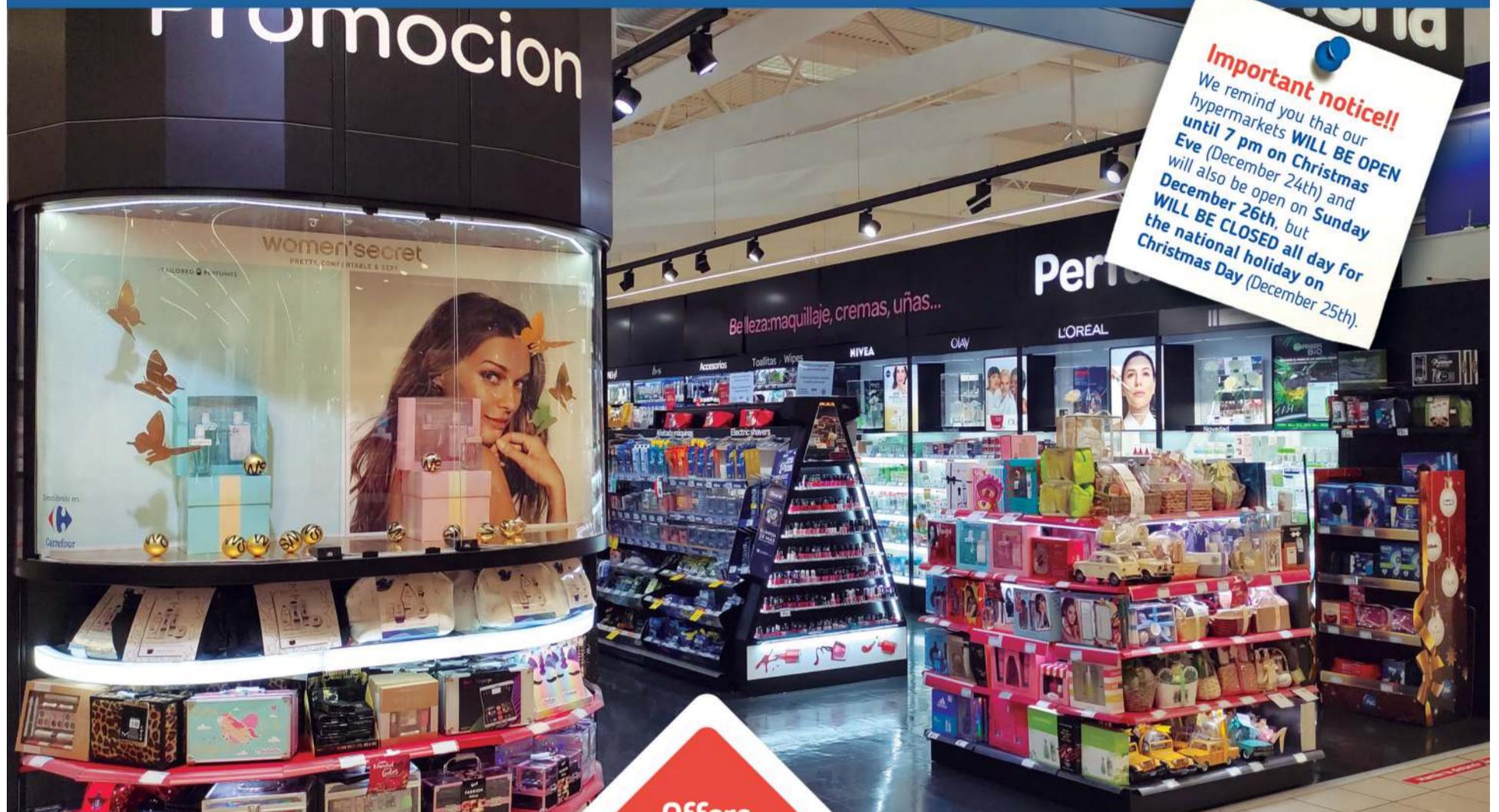
I hope you remember this story and think that it could be your mother who, on the other side of town, came across a kind person who paid her supermarket bill because she couldn't remember her Pin number...

Happy Christmas everyone.

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IN THE FRAME

Embracing new challenges in Cortes de la Frontera

Marcus Myers. The 59-year-old musician had toured the world and enjoyed life in the fast lane, before setting up home in the Serranía de Ronda

TONY BRYANT



Marcus Myers performing at the Allioli Music Festival in Jímera de Líbar in 2019. **KARL SMALLMAN**

Performing and recording with some of the UK's top bands of the 1970s and '80s, working as a session musician with artists such as Belinda Carlisle and Maria Naylor, starring in a movie, along with appearing on primetime television shows like *Top of the Pops* and *Live and Kicking*, are just a few of the things that Marcus Myers has achieved during a career that has spanned more than 40 years.

The 59-year-old musician, who first made his mark on the punk rock and indie music scene in London, had enjoyed life in the fast lane, touring the world and living the rock star life style, before setting up home in the Serranía de Ronda.

"In 1999, my wife told me that I had had an offer of a job in a hotel for six months. At that time, I was disillusioned with the music business, so I thought, yes.

"We went back to the UK after this, but shortly after, we were offered another job and we decided to come back for two years, however, we stayed and have been here ever since," the die-hard rocker ex-

plains to SUR in English.

Born in Brighton in 1962, Marcus Myers began singing and playing guitar at the age of 17. His first break came when his band, *Midnight and the Lemonboys*, supported U2 during their first tour of the UK.

Shortly afterwards, he headed to London and auditioned for *Killing Joke*, a post-punk band who achieved mainstream success in the early '80s.

At the time, *Killing Joke* were experiencing internal problems, so Marcus ended up forming another group with the band's bassist.

Aptly named *Brilliant*, the group enjoyed relative success, releasing several singles and touring the world with other top bands of the time, including *Bauhaus* and *New Order*, although he left the group to concentrate on new projects.

One of these was the formation of a band called *Hard Rain*, a group he would reform many years later in Spain after their record, *Diamonds*, which, unbeknown to Marcus, had been a huge hit on the Barcelona music scene of the

1990s.

After a short stint with *Then Jerico*, a pop band that enjoyed four top 40 hits in the UK during the late 1980s, he joined *Commanche Park*, and later, *Alisha's Attic*.

Becoming somewhat disheartened with the bureaucracy of the music business, he began working as a session musician, recording and touring with numerous named performers.

"I won't do an across-the-board attack on the music business, but for me, personally, having spent many years in different bands with the wrong management companies, it kind of knocked it out of me a little. I started to forget why I first found it exciting and I began to lose sight. That's why I began working as a session musician," he explains.

Marcus says that appearing on *Top of the Pops* with *Alisha's Attic* is a proud moment, but one that stirs emotions,

"The first time I did Top of the Pops, my dad phoned and said, 'well done son, you've finally made it,' which, of course, I hadn't"

although not because he had finally made it on to the world's longest-running music show.

"The first time I did *Top of the Pops*, my dad phoned me afterwards and said, 'well done son, you've finally made it,' which, of course, I hadn't. Sadly, he died the day after, but at least he saw me on the TV," he says.

Stress-free life

After a visit to the *Costa del Sol* for a change of career, Marcus and his wife, Carmen, who

have just celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary, decided to settle in Spain in search of a different life and some new challenges away from the stresses and strains of the London music business.

The couple set up home in Cortes de la Frontera in 2000, where today Marcus is enjoying performing at music venues in the Serranía de Ronda, and along the coast.

He recently played guitar on the new recording of fellow expat musician Neil Armstrong; and he is currently working on some new material, which he hopes to record next year.

In the meantime, Marcus says that he enjoys growing vegetables and generally enjoying life out of the fast lane.

"It was a bit of a shock at first, and I don't really know how we ended up in this town. We occasionally think that it might be time to move on, but we like it here and enjoy having a bit of space," he says.

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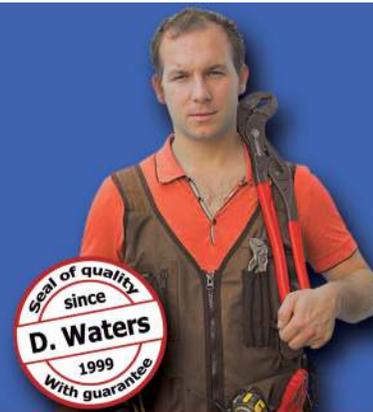
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TELLING TALES

PETER EDGERTON

Santa's house

Reginald Bainbridge placed the large, brown cardboard box on the kitchen table and carefully removed the lid. This was the day of the year he most looked forward to. For over two decades on the last day of November, he'd performed exactly the same ritual: bringing the box down from the loft and, one by one, taking out its contents. From the wire-rimmed glasses through to the shiny black boots, every item was treated with equal respect, all laid out in order on the staircase ready for a thorough inspection, in case any last minute repairs might be needed. This year, though, everything was just perfect. The only work required would be to clean up his fluffy white beard, polish the buckle on his belt and iron his red jacket and trousers. Santa Claus was once again ready to begin work at Daley's department store.

That night Reginald found it difficult to sleep, such was his excitement. At sixty-nine years old, he still felt the same butterflies he had when he had taken over the job of Father Christmas from his dad, Alfie, all those

years ago.

Drawing back the curtains the following morning, Reginald found himself gasping in delight at what he saw - a light covering of snow had fallen during the night so that the street and the winding lane opposite looked quite magical. He rubbed his chubby hands together in a state of unbridled glee and padded downstairs to make breakfast - two lightly boiled eggs, a piece of hot buttered toast and a steaming mug of tea. As he took his first bite, Reginald heard the familiar flop of the morning mail on the doormat. Toast in teeth, he shuffled out to collect it, returning to the kitchen with six or seven envelopes in his hand - bill, bill, advertising, bill.. oh, what was this? - an official envelope from Daley's. How odd.

Dear Mr. Bainbridge,

We regret to inform you that we will no longer be requiring your services at Daley's Stores since we feel that, in the current climate, some parents may not be comfortable with our traditional Santa Claus grotto.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your

many years of loyalty and to wish you well with your future plans.

Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year
Yours sincerely
Josh Daley

Reginald felt a soft sting of sadness in his eyes as he sat down at the table, staring for an inordinate length of time at the letter, as if simply looking at it might change its contents.

The following morning, as he came downstairs and passed his uniform, lying there just as he had left it, Reginald was overcome by an uncontrollable urge to put it on and, soon enough, Santa Claus was dressed and checking all was in order in the hall mirror. Satisfied that indeed it was - he looked immaculate - he walked through to the living room, put on his favourite Frank Sinatra Christmas album, sank back into his armchair and closed his eyes.

Some time later Reginald was awoken by a loud knock at the door. He knew it. It was only a question of time - Daley's had realised their mistake and had come to ask him back. He

straightened his glasses, smoothed his beard and headed for the door, only to be faced with a short, bald chap who was very, very red in the face indeed.

"Turn down that dreadful music or I'll call the police! You're deafening the whole neighbourhood!"

Reginald, ever the gentleman, hid his profound disappointment, smiled meekly, closed the door and returned to the living room to lower the volume.

Every day for the next three weeks, he followed precisely the same routine, putting on his uniform in the morning, making his breakfast and listening to Frank Sinatra, each morning truly believing that, surely, Daley's must be regretting their decision by now. Then, on Christmas day of all days, the neighbour came knocking again but this time Reginald wasn't in the mood for nonsense. He leapt up, strode angrily to the door and yanked it open.

"It's Christmas day. The music isn't even I..."

But it wasn't the neighbour at all, it was a small girl with tousled blond hair.

"My Mummy said that this is where you live, Santa. Can I come in?"

The girl's father who was standing by the gate at the end of the path, nodded conspiratorially.

"Er, yes, yes, of course you can, my love. Come in, come in!"

They walked through to the

living room.

"I don't have any presents, I'm afraid. Oh dear, oh dear. Let me see if I can at least find some sweets. Oh dear."

"This is for you, Santa."

Reginald turned around to see the girl holding out a small gift. He hesitated for a second before taking it from her and removing its silver wrapping paper. Inside was a black and white photograph of his father, Alfie, working in the grotto at Daley's, a young boy sitting on his lap.

"That's my daddy!" The girl pointed excitedly at the boy in the photograph.

Reginald was quite overcome. Oh, what a lovely gesture! He thanked her profusely and walked her out in order to thank her father too. Opening the front door and ushering the child out into the softly falling snow, he was stopped dead in his tracks by the sight that greeted him.

The girl's father was still standing by the gate but now the entire panorama had changed. As far as the eye could see, along the winding lane and over the hill, there was an endless queue of parents waiting patiently with their children, each of the little ones clutching a small gift in their gloved hands.

The girl's father opened the gate for his daughter, while the first group of three or four families passed through in the opposite direction, stepping brightly up the snow-covered path to Santa's house.

ANDALUSIAN BIRD WATCH
PETER JONES

A common winter visitor

The Andalucía Bird Society recommends looking out for the *Meadow Pipit* this month

The Meadow Pipit is one of our most common winter visitors and becomes widespread throughout the region during November onwards. Most of western European populations are resident and only make local movements descending to lowland areas for the winter. Many of our winter visitors will have arrived from North and Eastern populations, including some from as far away as Greenland and Iceland. A number will pass through the region to winter in North Africa, but the majority arriving here will spend winter with us.

Most of the winter population spend their time in lowland areas, but some will also inhabit high altitude pastures in tem-



Meadow Pipit. PETER JONES

perate times. They are omnivores and whilst showing a preference for insects, they will readily take seeds. We can encounter large numbers concentrated in open areas, some flocks numbering in the hundreds, although most commonly they are in flocks of a few dozen. I often find

them together with White Wagtails as they feed on high pastures and in the river valleys in the Serranía de Ronda.

Recently, I have noted a decline in numbers in my local area, but this might relate to altitudinal issues or low winter temperatures. In the last ten or so years the European breeding population has declined by 25-30% and since the European population represents 90% of the global range of this bird, then this decline is significant. The latest conservation status for the Meadow Pipit has now been revised to Near Threatened at a regional level in Europe.

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WHAT HAPPENED TODAY?

24 DECEMBER 1734

The Real Alcázar in Madrid burns down

A drunken error leads to a death, the loss of over a thousand priceless works of art and the destruction of the royal residence in the capital city

NEVE MATTHEWS

On Christmas Eve 1734 a fire broke out at the Real Alcázar in Madrid. The blaze, which continued into Christmas Day and beyond, completely destroyed the fortress located on the site of today's Palacio Real.

The Real Alcázar, in addition to being the home of the court and official residence of the Spanish royal family, King Felipe V being on the throne at that time, housed a large collection of works of art, including some 2,000 paintings by prominent painters.

While there was only one human casualty in the fire, more

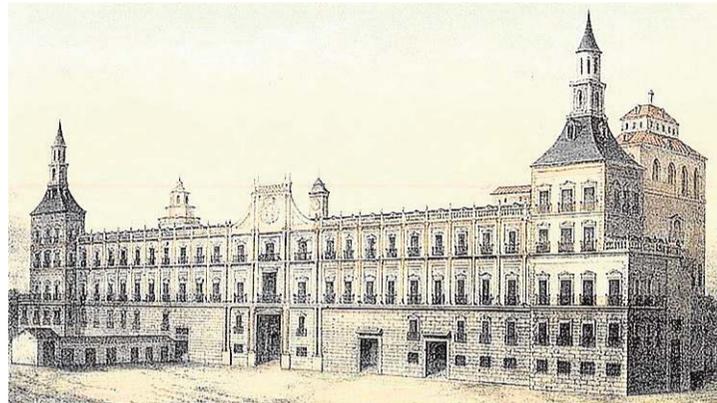
than 500 precious artworks were lost, along with numerous official documents, countless statues and sculptures made of wood, marble and bronze, and the entire collection of sacred music in the Royal Chapel.

Other important losses included numerous frescoes by masters such as Angelo Michele Colonna and Agostino Mitelli.

Thankfully, the famous painting Las Meninas by Velázquez was saved by being removed from its frame (which was mounted on the wall) and thrown from the window, along with 1,038 other works of art.

The most emblematic crown jewels, such as the Peregrina pearl and El Estanque diamond, were also saved.

The fire is thought to have originated in the apartments of the court painter Jean Ranc, where palace grooms had been drinking to celebrate the Christmas holiday, neglecting a fireplace of burning logs.



The Real Alcázar in a painting dating back to around 1710. SUR

The fire was detected at around midnight, when a guard saw flames.

The ringing of the bells to warn people of the fire was confused with the call for midnight mass, complicating the evacuation of the building.

The fire lasted for four days and was so intense that it melted some silver objects.

By the time the fire was extinguished, the building had been reduced to rubble.

In 1738, four years after the fire, Felipe V ordered the construction of the current Palacio Real of Madrid. The work spanned three decades and was inspired by one of Bernini's designs for the Louvre Palace in Paris.

The Palacio Real is the largest functioning royal palace in Europe.

The original structure of the Alcázar was built in the second half of the ninth century by the

muslims, then extended and enlarged over the centuries, particularly after 1560.

The fortress was then converted into a royal palace, and Madrid became the capital of the Spanish Empire.

Despite being a palace, the great building kept its original Arabic title of Alcázar.

LANGUAGE FOOTNOTE

Cuadro	Painting
Fuego	Fire
Joyas	Jewels
Borracho	Drunk
Esculturas	Sculptures
Chimenea	Fireplace
Palacio	Palace
Escombros	Rubble
Nochebuena	Christmas Eve
Arte	Art
Misa	Mass
Llamas	Flames
Estatuas	Statues
Real	Royal
Troncos	Logs
Madera	Wood
Mármol	Marble
Bronce	Bronze
Plata	Silver

Bilingual crossword inside back page

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DENISE BUSH



GARDENING

Pittosporum crassifolium

Native to New Zealand, this species of what is commonly called cheesewood is surprisingly robust and will withstand heat and drought once established.

It will form a large shrub or small tree up to five metres tall once mature but can be clipped regularly and used as hedging.

Pittosporum crassifolium, known as Karo in New Zealand, has oblong, leathery leaves which have a pale greyish fuzz underneath. The new shoots are also covered with this same woolly down. In its native habitat, it can be found growing in dune forests and scrub and is resistant to salt spray and

strong winds.

In the spring, terminal clusters of sweetly scented, burgundy flowers appear. The fragrance from the flowers becomes stronger at night and the high nectar content attracts lots of pollinating insects especially bees and butterflies. After flowering, hard green fuzzy seed capsules form which split into three once ripe, revealing sticky black seeds and yellow pith.

It is fast growing and needs a location in full sun or partial shade. Once it is fully established it will survive short periods of drought but will be much healthier if watered frequently during hot, dry spells. It is not very frost hardy and the tips may die back in winter. Mulching around the base will help to protect the roots in the winter and conserve moisture in the summer.

The best time to prune *Pittosporum crassifolium* is in the late summer or autumn although it can be clipped back earlier in the year to keep it compact or look for the hybrid that needs less pruning, *P. crassifolium compacta*.

Propagation can be carried out by seeds which will germinate quickly. The propensity to self seed (the seed is deposited by birds in their droppings) has made it a threat to the environment in some parts of Australia. It can also be grown from cuttings of semi-ripe wood taken in late summer.

The Maori used the seeds to produce a blue dye and the wood, which is very hard, is sometimes used for inlays.



Pittosporum crassifolium and flowers (inset). Wikimedia/Flickr

READERS' PHOTOS



CAROLINE SELLERS

A Christmas feast for birds

This photo was sent in by reader Caroline Sellers who says, "I have attached some pics of the beautiful flame-coloured shrub *Pyracantha* spotted in a country lane near Marbella. Such an amazing display of berries the birds will have a Christmas feast!"



ALISON GARCÍA

Bi-coloured Camellia

This sort of strange colouring is often caused by a mutation but plants like this are usually sought after by growers. Alison García says, "This Camellia has always had these beautiful bi-coloured flowers and it flowers all through the winter."

PHOTOS

Calling all gardeners

We know many of our readers have lovely gardens, or enjoy growing plants on their terraces or balconies and some like to take photos of plants they see when out and about. Why not share them with others? Email

your photos to english@diariosur.es or send them to SUR in English, Avda Dr Marañón 48, 29009 Málaga, with a caption and a few words of explanation. Alternatively, you can send them to us via Facebook ([@surenglish](https://www.facebook.com/surenglish)) or Twitter ([@SUR_English](https://twitter.com/SUR_English)).



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Five important reasons to visit Jaén

Spain's "green lung". Jaén boasts the most square kilometres metres of natural, protected areas in Spain; with four natural parks. The Sierras de Cazorla, Segura y Las Villas Natural Park is the second biggest natural park in Europe. The longest circular hiking-track in southern Europe is located in the largest forest in southern Europe. GR 247 has 478 kilometres of marked tracks that discover the Sierras de Cazorla, Segura y Las Villas National Park; an adventure

and nature tourism paradise. The pathways run through the Park's 21 main areas; its eleven detours to spots of interest; and its three alternative routes that help to adapt the walk to your interests, where you want to join the track and how much time you have. These trails will take you to the source of the Guadalquivir and Segura Rivers and to the varied landscapes of these mountain ranges: mountain peaks, castles, forests, rivers and waterfalls, ancestral ways, high plateaus, inhabited villages and hamlets, historical buildings, olive trees and orchards. An invigorating hike to see the bearded vultures soar, the crystalline lakes and river, the traditional yearly herding of livestock and the picturesque mountain villages. You can find more information at: www.sierrasdecazorlaseguraylasvillas.es.

Úbeda & Baeza are some of the finest examples of the Renaissance Period in southern Europe. The two world-heritage cities are at the centre of Spain's Renaissance; as is the Jaén City Cathedral, one of the many works of Andrés de Vandelvira that populate the province of Jaén. Úbeda and Baeza maintain their medieval essence and architecture; they are both surrounded by olive groves and have the Guadalquivir River



Baeza Cathedral. Diputación de Jaén

Oleoturismo (Olive Oil Tourism), offers unique experiences related to the production of olive oil. Jaén's unique landscape, with its man-made forests of more than 60 million olive trees, is the world's leading producer of top-quality olive oil

passing by their doorsteps. Úbeda represents private architecture and civil power; Baeza represents public architecture and the power of the Catholic Church. In nearby Sabiote, the castle has to be visited, as well as the previously mentioned Jaén City Cathedral. More information at: www.renacimiento-todelsur.com.

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cover everything to do with olive oil. At www.oleoturismojaen.es you can find all the information you need about olive trees and olive oil: museums, olive presses that you can visit, specialised restaurants, rural hotels & accommodation, olive tree plantations, festivals, tasting, spas, etc. The possibility of discovering the very essence of olive oil production; this can only be fully enjoyed in Jaén. An unforgettable experience in the province that produces some of the best olive oils in the world.

The historical significance of Jaén. The province of Jaén has been witness to three battles (Baécula, Navas de Tolosa & Bailén) that have changed Spain and Europe's history. Jaén was also the main settlement for the Iberians - a mythical, ancient culture who lived on the Iberian Peninsula. Jaén also boasts 18 historical sites and world-heritage cave-paintings. In the area with the most castles in Europe; you can witness re-enactments and dramatised tours that bring to life moments that forged Spain's history. At www.castillosybatallas.com you will be able to discover the Jaén Castle and Battle Route. You can also travel back in time with www.viajeltiempodelosiberos.com and discover the seven places in the Province which help us understand the extraordinary archaeological heritage left by the Iberians in Jaén, something unique in the world.

"Haute Cuisine" born from traditional recipes and home-grown produces. The exquisite, Jaén-produced, extra-virgin olive oil brings unique flavour to local dishes, based around the Mediterranean diet, and has been recognised as World Intangible Cultural Heritage. The local products and dishes have been the starting point for a new generation of chefs, who have converted the Jaén Province into a gourmet tourism destination. Two restaurants in Jaén City have been awarded Michelin Stars.

Something for everyone

Jaén is a top-end, sophisticated and "joie-de-vivre" tourist destination. The province offers experiences that immerse visitors, of all ages, into its varied rural life: from pottery to farming, herding to mining or cake-making to Spanish history. Jaén is well communicated and is "near to everything", just two hours from the Costa del Sol and close to Granada and Córdoba.

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HOME TIP



How to pack away your Christmas

Putting up Christmas decorations is fun and rewarding but taking them down again is another matter

SUR IN ENGLISH

Christmas is a wonderful time of the year but who hasn't regretted, just a little bit, putting up all those sparkling strings of lights, the swags of greenery, delicate baubles and glass and that huge, luxurious tree? When it comes to packing it all away again, and faced with a tangle of lights and a tree that refuses to fit back in its box, it's perhaps time to rethink the whole process.

Preparation

The key to make the whole laborious task easier is preparation. Make sure you have plenty of packing materials for the delicate items, boxes (preferably stacking) to pack them in and tape to seal boxes. Stuffing everything into a carrier bag and throwing in the back of the cupboard gets the job done in half the time but you could end up with broken ornaments, tangled tinsel and a trussed tree, an ab-

solute nightmare to sort out the following year.

Sort the ornaments into groups of colour or style. Wrap the fragile ones individually in bubble wrap or tissue and place in a box, use a cardboard divider to separate groups. Writing the contents on the outside also makes it easier to identify what's what next year. Finally, tape the box shut.

The lights need to be untangled and it doesn't matter how careful you are trying to fold them by hand, they are going to be a knotty mess by next year. Invest in a Christmas lights storage reel (a version of the sort of thing used for fishing line or hosepipe) which you can find online. This will keep them tangle free and easier to put up again the next year.

The tree is usually the focal point for Christmas and although real fir trees look fantastic and smell gorgeous, unless you can get a rooted one to plant in the garden afterwards, it is a bit of a waste. Artificial trees can look just like the real thing and, with care, will last year after year. However they are notoriously difficult to get back in the box they were purchased in. The solution is to buy a Tree Storage Bag online; with a zipper and handles, it couldn't be easier!

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EXHIBITIONS

Fernando Calvillo

LA CALA DE MIJAS. Until 7 January. Centro Cultural de La Cala.

Metamorfosis, an exhibit of a selection of work by self-taught painter, Fernando Calvillo. The paintings are presented in different formats, such as treated paper, metal sheets and acrylic, and different styles such as abstraction and realism.

Juan Manuel Parra Párramo

MIJAS. Until 7 January. Casa Museo. The exhibition consists of pencil drawings as well as paintings, in a variety of styles.

Javier Peinado

ESTEPONA. Until 12 January. Casa de Las Tejerinas. Cuaderno de Viajes is the title of this



Javier Peinado, Estepona.

exhibition by Javier Peinado.

My Secret Garden

PUERTO BANÚS. Until 16 January, 2022.

Belgian artist Arne Quinze is exhibiting a collection of his aluminium sculptures, inspired by nature, around the streets and port of Puerto Banús.

Brigitte Bardot

TORREMOLINOS. Until 7 January, 2022. First floor of the Town Hall.

The exhibition entitled, Mito y Clíché en Málaga, includes a series of photographs that record Brigitte Bardot's first visit to Torremolinos during filming in 1957.

Introverso

MALAGA. Until 17 January. Sala Alfajar, C/Cister 1.

The exhibit Introverso will display ceramic art by Mónica Rivas Lee. www.alfajar.es

Piña de las Tentaciones

MALAGA. Until 10 January. La Casa Amarilla, C/Santos.

Ania Sáenz de Buruaga is the new artist showcased at La Casa Amarilla which is featuring collections by many well known artists including Pigsy, Eryl Pall, Misskafeina among others.

Art For Change

MALAGA. Until 23 January, 2022.

Sala de Exposiciones, Jardín Botánico La Concepción

The exhibition aims to make the viewer reflect on the sustainability of the planet by providing a complete overview of visual arts from Malaga in the second decade of the 21st century.

100 Years of the Foreign Legion

MALAGA. Until 15 February. Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País, Plaza de la Constitución.

The exhibition is organised by the Ministry of Defence with the support of the Museo del Ejército, the Asociación de Legionarios de Honor, the Fundación Tercios de Extranjeros and the Asociación Bernardo de Gálvez. The exhibition consists of photos and documents that cover the 100 years history of the Spanish Foreign Legion.

Photography exhibition

MALAGA. Until 27 February. Museo de Patrimonio Municipal (MUPAM).

An exhibition by El Colectivo de Fotógrafas Artistas Malagueñas (FAMA). Around 24 artists are exhibiting 40 photographs in different formats. MUPAM which is open 10am - 6pm. Free entry.

Mamones vs Human

MALAGA. Until 25 February. El Centro de Fotografía y Artes Visuales, C/Victoria.

An exhibition by Jorge Rueda of surreal and sometimes amusing photographs which question societies hypocritical values, sex, religion and politics.

Solana y Romero de Torres

MALAGA. Until 19 March. Centro Cultural Fundación Unicaja, Plaza del Obispo.

The new exhibition is entitled Solana y Romero de Torres, una Historia de Arte Español en Negro. The works of both artists are linked by the use of black in their paintings. Over 100 paintings are in the exhibition including some by other artists such as Murillo, Goya and Sorolla. <https://www.fundacionunicaja.com/>

Poster collection

RINCÓN DE LA VICTORIA. Until 9 January. Casa Fuerte Bexmiliiana.

Twenty posters advertising films by Luis García Berlanga, one hundred years after his birth.

ANA Winter

ALPUJARRA. Until January. La Fábrica.

The ANA Winter group exhibition will take up the whole space at La Fábrica with a wide range of work on display.

MUSIC AND DANCE**La Cochera Cabaret**

MALAGA. Avda de los Guindos.

27 December, 8pm. Volvemos Con Swing. Swing music and dance. Info: malagaswing@gmail.com.

30 December, 9pm. Mad Dogs, Jo Crocker tribute band.

3 January, 9pm. The Free Soul Band. info@lacocheraentradas.com

Clarence Jazz Club

FAMA exhibition, MUPAM Malaga

TORREMOLINOS. Calle Danza Invisible, 8.

25 December, 10pm. Rachel Malka and the Christmas Time Band play traditional Christmas songs such as White Christmas, Jingle Bells, Santa Claus is Coming to Town, Have Yourself a Very Merry Christmas, Let it Snow, Let it Snow etc.

30 December, 10pm. Jazz jam session. info@clarencejazzclub.com

Jau

MALAGA. 28 December, La Polivalente, C/Lagunillas.

Malaga band Jau, made up of Eduardo Retamero (vocals, guitar); Miguel Olmedo (guitar); Juanma Amador (percussion) and SUR's own Ángel Idígoras (comic, singer and musician) will be performing.



Brassai (1899-1984). Lovers at a café, Place d'Italie, Paris, c. 1932. Gelatine silver print (modern copy), 47,8 × 37,9 cm. Estate Brassai Succession, Paris. Inv. Pl. 78. © Estate Brassai Succession-Philippe Ribeyrolles

THE PARIS OF BRASSAI PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE CITY PICASSO LOVED

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SPONSORED BY



The Malaga Philharmonic Orchestra

MALAGA. Various venues.
3 January, 8pm. Teatro Cervantes.
New Year's Concert.
More information: www.orquestafilarmonicademalaga.com Twitter: @filarmonimalaga or Facebook: www.facebook.com/FilarmonicaMalaga.

La Posada

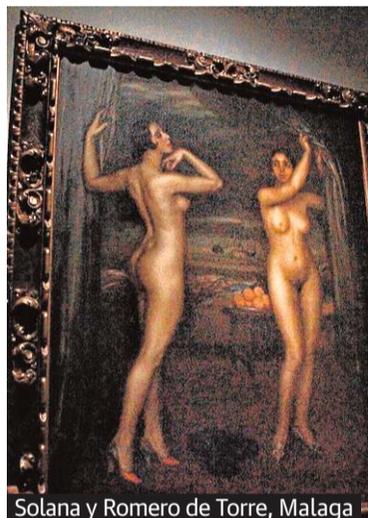
MALAGA. Vincci Posada del Patio, Pasillo de Sta Isabel.
30 December, 8pm. Iris Nieto.
www.tallerblues.es

The Nutcracker ballet

MALAGA. 30 December, 5 and 8pm. Teatro Cervantes.
Tchaikovsky's ballet, The Nutcracker, comes to Cervantes Theatre with the Russian National Ballet. Tickets: <https://www.unientradas.es/>

The Rob Sas Band

ESTEPONA. Louie Louie Bar, Estepona Port.
1 January, 10pm, Benavista. The Rob Sas band will be playing in the Melòdia bar and restaurant.



Solana y Romero de Torre, Malaga

New Year Concert

LA HERRADURA. 2 January, 8pm. Centro Cívico.
The Banda Municipal Almuñécar will play a special New Year's concert.

New Year Concert date change

GIBRALTAR. John Mackintosh Hall.
The Gibraltar Philharmonic Orchestra are postponing the concert in view of the evolution of the pandemic.

FLAMENCO

Zambomba Flamenca

Karma Guen's Tibetan art on display in the CAC in Vélez-Málaga

The collection consists of art and sculpture from the first, sixth, eighth and ninth centuries, including a piece from the Ming dynasty

EUGENIO CABEZAS

TORREMOLINOS. The Karma Guen Buddhist Centre in Vélez-Málaga has been a reference point for Buddhism in southern Europe since 1987. Now the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo (CAC) Francisco Hernández in Vélez-Málaga is hosting the exhibition 'Tibetan Buddhist Art'. Among the collection of 84 pieces are sculptures from the first, sixth, eighth and ninth centuries, Tibetan paintings, a piece from the Ming dynasty and the sculpture that the stupa houses in its dome. There will also be activities related to the exhibition, which can be visited until 6 February.

Inaugurating the exhibition last week, Vélez-Málaga's councillor for culture Cynthia García highlighted that the initiative "is part of the agreement the town hall has with the Karma

Guen centre to collaborate in activities related to culture." Director of the Buddhist Centre, Pedro Gómez, explained that "it is a collection of objects, paintings and sculptures dating from the first century to the present day, including a painting from the Ming dynasty, all on display to the public so that people can learn about the heritage they have in the Axarquía." He went on to say, "The centre is not only a place of meditation, we also try to make people aware of the Buddhist and the rich traditional Tibetan cultures that speak a lot about thought and knowledge but also science."

The exhibition is part of the collection housed in the Buddhist centre, which is possibly one of the most important of its kind in the world. It is made up of more than a thousand pieces, including sculptures that are more than two thousand years old and Thangkas; Tibetan paintings used by Buddhists to meditate, as well as incunabula – an early printed book - in Tibetan and Sanskrit.

The Karma Guen Buddhist Centre has been in Aldea Alta in Vélez-Málaga for 34 years, during which time more than

www.dorsalchip.es or between 10 and 11.30am on the morning of the run. 3€ per person.

Boxing Day Swim

SABINILLAS. 26 December, registration 12.30pm. Paseo Marítimo.
Hundreds of people are expected to take the plunge for the annual Duquesa Charitable Society of Saint George Boxing Day Swim this Sunday in Sabinillas. The dip will take place at 1 pm in front of Bar La Luna on the Paseo Marítimo in Sabinillas. Registration 5€ (includes bacon sandwich), all monies raised will go to The Duquesa Charitable Society of St George Food Bank.

LA HERRADURA. 28 December, 8.30pm. Plaza Centro Cívico.
Traditional Spanish zambomba with the Cuadro de Diana Fernández.

El Turri Flamenco Christmas

LA HERRADURA. 29 December, 8pm. Plaza Centro Cívico.
Traditional Spanish carols and songs

CHARITY

Charity run

RINCÓN DE LA VICTORIA. 26 December, 12pm. Paseo Marítimo.
The IX San Silvestre y Kilómetro Solidario is in aid of the Asociación Rincón Contigo. To register:



Karma Guen director Pedro Gómez and Cynthia García. SUR

150,000 people have visited it. The Kalachakra stupa, inaugurated in 1994, was built under the direction of the great Lama Lopon Tsechu Rinpoche and is the first of its kind in the West. One of the attractions of the exhibition is that visitors will be able to see the sculptures that it houses.

In May this year, Vélez-Málaga town hall signed an agreement with the University of Málaga (UMA) and the Karma Guen Centre for Tibetan Stu-

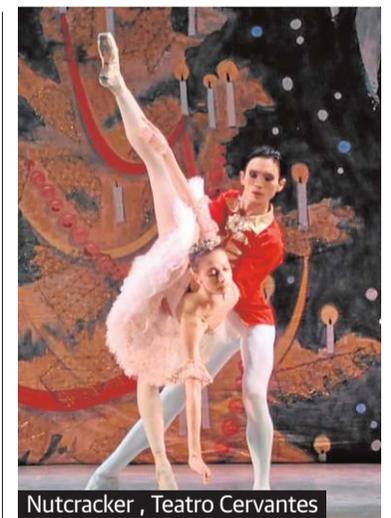
dies, with the aim of jointly developing research, development and innovation activities to promote cooperation and the dissemination of Tibetan art and culture, as well as offering training linked to Buddhist culture and the heritage of Karma Guen.

The exhibition will run until 6 February. It is open from Tuesday to Saturday 10am - 2pm and 5 - 8pm and on Sundays and public holidays 10am - 2pm.

CHRISTMAS MARKETS/EVENTS

St Andrews Christmas Services

COSTA DEL SOL. Various venues along the Costa del Sol
24 December, 4pm. Cemetery Chapel, Alhaurín el Grande. Family communion.
24 December, 7pm. Iglesia de San Miguel, Calahonda. Family communion.
25 December, 11.30am. Avenida Nuestro Padre Jesus Cautivo 44, Los Boliches. Christmas communion.
26 December, 11.30am. Cemetery Chapel, Alhaurín el Grande. Joint chaplaincy service.



Nutcracker, Teatro Cervantes

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CHRISTMAS MARKETS/EVENTS

Spanish carols

LA HERRADURA. 30 December, 8pm. Plaza Centro Cívico. The Esencia Herradura choir will be performing traditional Spanish carols.

Mercado Navideño

ESTEPONA. Until 6 January. 6-11pm Mon-Thurs, 12pm-midnight weekends and bank holidays. Gardens of the Parque Botánico-Orquideario. Crafts, books and typical food items.

Concerts and Dance in the Park

ESTEPONA. Gardens of the Parque Botánico-Orquideario. 30 December. Spanish carols with the Agrupación Musical Jesús Cautivo and the Christmas music Show with the Escuela de Artes Escénicas U-Talent!

NATIVITY SCENES

Malaga City Nativity Scenes

BAILÉN MIRAFLORES. Until 5 January. Salón de Actos, Centro Social. A classical nativity with biblical scenes covering around 25 square metres and with over 800 figures. The montage includes olive groves, houses, castles, rivers and fields as well as the birth of the baby Jesus. **MALAGA TOWN HALL.** Until 6 January. The Nativity Scene is set up in the patio of the town hall and can be seen 10am-2pm and 5pm-9pm weekdays.

Diocese of Malaga Living Nativity Scene Postponed.

MALAGA. 14th in the afternoon, 15 January all day. Casa Diocesana Málaga. Students from diocesan schools will interpret different passages from the Gospels telling the story of Jesus'

infancy. There will also be a bouncy castle, Royal Post Box, Christmas crafts and workshops as well as live music. Every year the organisers, with the help of the Children's Oncology Volunteers (AVOI) collect toys and gifts for disadvantaged children.

Thyssen Museum Neapolitan Nativity

MALAGA. Until January. Patio de las Columnas, Museo Carmen Thyssen Málaga. Archicofradía de los Dolores de San Juan have installed the traditional 'Belén Napolitano' which is free to visit during the opening hours of the museum.

Christmas Nativity Scenes

RINCÓN DE LA VICTORIA. Until January. La Sala Mare Nostrum de La Cala del Moral. The municipal nativity scene made by Agustín Gómez Fuentes. **VÉLEZ-MÁLAGA.** Until 7 January. Visit the nativity scenes in the Palacio del Marqués de Beniel, the Museo de Vélez-Málaga and the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Francisco Hernández.

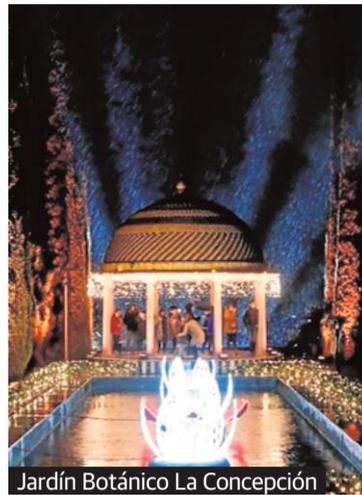
MORE IDEAS

Ice rink

MALAGA. Until 27 December. Caseta Municipal, Puerto de la Torre. The 120 square-metre rink will be open 11am -2pm and 4-7pm.

International Magic Festival

GRANADA. Teatro Isabel La Católica 26 December, 8pm. Magic Gala. 27 December, 12pm. Family Magic gala. 28, 29 December, Tues 8pm, Wed 6 and 9pm. International Christmas Magic. 30 December, 8pm. Concert for piano and playing card magic.



Jardín Botánico La Concepción

Tickets: www.redentradas.com
www.festivalhocuspocus.com

New Year's Eve Countdown from home

GIBRALTAR. 31 December. On Tv or Facebook. The New Year's Eve countdown will be presented by James Neish. The variety show style evening will include performances by Andrea Simpson and the GAMPAs cast of Legally Blonde the Musical and Back to the 90's. There will also be music from local band Eclipse and The Adrian Pisarello Band Universe plus more. This programme can be viewed live on Friday 31 December on GBC TV and the GCS Facebook page from 11:15pm

Las Luces del Botánico, Christmas Garden

MALAGA. Until 9 January 2022, 6.30 - 9.30pm. Gates close at 11pm. Malaga Jardín Botánico La Concepción. A two kilometre route around the gardens will be lit by over two million

lights and accompanied by music. Some of the lights will be in the form of some of the fauna present in the garden such as owls and squirrels and some flora such as a huge 'biznaga' lighting up one of the lakes. There will also be illuminated silhouettes of king Alfonso XIII, Sissi Emperatriz and Queen Isabella II.

Lux Mundi

TORRE DEL MAR. Mon and Wed 10am-1pm, Fridays, 11am - 1pm. Lux Mundi Ecumenical Centre, Avda Moscatel.

Catholic Mass in English. Every Saturday, 5pm at the Ecumenical Centre.

New Year celebration. 31 December, 12pm. Toasting to the New Year and grapes.

O. V. FILMS

SUR in English advises calling cinemas to check for any last-minute time changes. Lunchtime and late night screenings weekends only.

Yelmo Cines, Plaza Mayor

MALAGA. Centro de Ocio, Plaza Mayor, Avda Alfonso Ponce León. Tel: 902902103. www.yelmocines.es.

Matrix Resurrections: 12.40 (Sun); 16.05 (Sat); 17.45, 20.55 (Sat-Tues); 20.30 (Wed, Thurs).

Spiderman No Way Home: 12.00 (Sun); 16.15 (Wed, Thurs); 16.30 (Fri); 17.30 (Sat-Thurs); 20.30 (Sat-Tues).

West Side Story: 12.35 (Sun); 20.30 (Sat-Tues).

Yelmo Cines, Rincón

RINCÓN DE LA VICTORIA. C/ Arroyo Totalán. Tel: 902220922. www.yelmocines.es

House of Gucci: 21.50 (Tues).

Matrix Resurrections: 19.55 (Tues). **Spider Man No Way Home:** 19.15 (Tues). **West Side Story:** 19.30 (Tues).

Yelmo Cines, Vialia

MALAGA. Centro Comercial Vialia. Tel: 902220922

House of Gucci: 19.05 (Tues).

Matrix Resurrections: 12.45 (Sun); 18.00, 21.00 (Sat-Tues); 21.15 (Wed, Thurs).

Spider man No Way Home: 12.50 (Sun); 22.10 (Sat-Tues).

Westside Story: 12.35 (Sun); 20.40 (Sat-Tues), 21.25 (Wed, Thurs).

Cinesur Miramar

FUENGIROLA. Avda de la Encarnación. Tel: 952198600.

Sing 2: 12.20 (Fri, Sun-Tues); 15.45 (Fri); 16.30 (Sat-Tues).

Spider man No Way Home: 12.15 (Fri, Sun-Tues); 18.00, 21.00 (Sat-Tues).

Westside Story: 12.00 (Fri, Sun-Tues); 18.30, 21.40 (Sat-Tues).

Matrix Resurrections: 12.15 (Fri, Sun, -Tues); 16.00 (Fri); 19.00, 22.00 (Sat-Tues).

Cinesur Ingenio

VÉLEZ-MÁLAGA. Avda Juan Carlos, 1. Tel: 667773187.

Spider man No Way Home: 12.10 (Fri, Sun-Tues).

Sing 2: 11.50 (Fri, Sun-Tues).

Westside Story: 19.15, 22.25 (Mon, Tues).

Matrix Resurrections: 22.00 (Fri-Tues).

Cine Albéniz

MALAGA. C/ Alcazaba, 4. Tel: 902360295. www.cinealbeniz.com. Until 28 December.

Silent Night: 16.30, 20.20, 22.15.

Manarchy's metallic art

The American photographer, Dennis Manarchy presents his new exhibition at La Térmica

CLAUDIA SAN MARTÍN / SUR IN ENGLISH

MALAGA. If there is something that art always achieves it is to create emotions; no matter if negative or positive, and perhaps that is the objective of American photographer and artist, Dennis Manarchy.

His new exhibition at La Térmica, 'Metal', runs until 15 January and consists of photographs of naked bodies totally covered with silver or gold paint, resembling robots. They are 'dressed' with strange metal gadgets, some of which are medical rarities and others industrial artifacts.

He started the project more than a decade ago when the crazy objects crea-



The exhibition manarchy at La Térmica. FRANCIS SILVA

ted and collected by his friend Steve Erenberg, also known as Radio Guy, caught his attention.

The images, in large format and scattered throughout the room, make a great impact on the viewer as many of them are on aluminum plates. The artist's idea was also to reflect

famous works of art, such as Michelangelo's Pieta, which Manarchy has adapted for his photos, with similar poses and gestures.

The free exhibition is open until 15 January, Tuesday to Friday, 3-8.30pm and Saturdays and Sundays, 11am - 2pm and 5-8.30pm

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**Covid-19
Regular Updates**

'Music helps us to understand the brain and to diagnose and treat illnesses'

Jesús Romero Imbroda President of the Andalusian Neurology Society

"We need to do something about the situation because most regional hospitals are in need of more neurologists"

ÁNGEL ESCALERA



MALAGA. Jesús Romero Imbroda was born in Melilla, studied Medicine in Granada and has been living in Malaga for many years. After nearly 20 years in the health service (he works at the Regional hospital), this neurologist requested a sabbatical in April and is currently the head of neurology at the Quirónsalud Hospital in Malaga. On 1 October this year he was appointed as the president of the Andalusian Neurology Society and in this interview he says more neurologists are needed in hospitals because Andalucía is lagging behind other regions in this respect. One of Dr Romero Imbroda's hobbies is playing the guitar; he was taught by his uncle Javier Imbroda, who is the Junta de Andalucía's Minister for Education and Sport and has a close association with basketball. He says music helps us to understand how the brain works, and to diagnose and treat illnesses.

–What objectives have you set for yourself as president of the Andalusian neurologists?

–For the past two years, because of the pandemic, we have been in flight mode, unable to carry out any scientific activities unless they were online. So one of my objectives is to make up for that. One of the first things we did was to arrange for fourth year residents in neurology in all the hospitals in Andalucía, whose training has been affected somewhat by Covid, to receive a grant of 1,000 euros so they can gain work experience in a different province or outside Spain. We are also planning to organise a Masters course of our own, in collaboration with the universities.

–How many members are there in your society?

–Around 400.

–What is the neurology situation like in Andalucía?
–Neurology in Andalucía is lagging behind in comparison with the other regions of Spain because most hospitals here do not have their own team of neurologists.



Dr Romero Imbroda is a keen guitarist. SALVADOR SALAS

HIS VIEW

CORONAVIRUS

"In neurological patients who have Covid, their illness gets worse"

BRAIN ACTIVITY

"I would recommend playing a musical instrument to the same level as learning a second language"

We consider that that is a situation which needs to be improved. Even if we tried to provide neurologists to all the regional hospitals, which is something we have been calling for for ages, we would find there were not enough to do so. We need to reflect deeply on how many neurologists will have to be trained, if we are to be able to provide them to large regional hospitals. We need to ensure that there are no differences between a patient who lives in La Axarquía and someone who lives in the centre of Malaga city, for example.
–Is the solution to increase the number of resident posts in neurology?

–I have been on the national committee for this speciality and there are several questions involved. First, the hospitals have to want to receive more neurologists for training. When I trained at the old Carlos Haya hospital, there was one resident in neurology per year, and now there are three. Second, when a decision is made to increase the number of residency places, it takes four years for it to be implemented, while those residents finish studying their speciality. We are going to ask the Andalusian Health Service to let us know how many neurologists are of retirement age and what plans they have to cover those posts.

–At present, as you are on sabbatical from the Andalusian Health Service, you only work in the private sector.

–I prefer to call it non-publicly-managed medicine. I think that is a better term than private medicine.

–What are the most common neurological illnesses?

–On one hand there are pathologies that involve seizures, such as stroke, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis and migraine, and on the other there are neurodegenerative illnesses associated with age, like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. The most common reason people are referred for a consultation in neurology is headache, and the most common reason for being admitted to hospital is stroke.

–How does Covid-19 affect patients from a neurological point of view?

–In neurological patients who have Covid their illness gets worse, although they can recover. SARS-Cov-2 is a very neuro-invasive virus.

Cognitive stimulation

–How does music help patients with neurological conditions?

–Music is a top class activity for the brain. I would always recommend playing an instrument to

the same level you learn a second language. We learn how the brain works in health by understanding how sound is processed in the mind, and the emotions and aversions it provokes. There are some degenerative illnesses where the patient can't speak, he or she is aphasic, but they can sing. That helps them to communicate.

–So what you are saying is that listening to music is as beneficial an activity as learning a foreign language?

–From my point of view, yes. At the Quirónsalud Hospital in Malaga we have presented a work to the Andalusian Neurology Society about a short diagnostic test based on music, to explore patients and see how their memory and their apraxia (how skilful they are with their hands) are. Music helps us to understand the brain, to treat some illnesses as a non-pharmacological type of therapy and even as an aid to diagnosis.

–How do you see the current scenario and the future of your speciality in Malaga?

–I believe neuroscience and neurology in Malaga are well represented. The population of Malaga can be proud. We have two fantastic neurology departments in the public health hospitals, and in the non-publicly-managed sector the standard is very high. The standard of my team at the Quirón is amazing; we look after patients from all over the world. The future of neurology is hopeful; great things are coming to treat rare neurological illnesses through gene therapies, and Malaga is going to be at the forefront.

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Catching a chill

ANDREW J. LINN



A topic that gets discussed in any warm climate, particularly in summer months is whether to chill red wine, or at what temperature do we prefer to drink it?

Personal preferences override most other considerations, and actor Michael

Caine's demand in restaurants for the red wine to be chilled and the white served at room temperature always provokes the obvious reaction, "Surely, Sir, you mean the other way around?"

"No. I mean exactly what I say," would answer the non-conformist thespian. Oh, that

life were so simple.

We regularly see people adding ice to white wine or even to their red wine - or complaining that the white wine is too cold. You cannot please all the people all the time.

Received wisdom is that whites, rosés and sparkling wines should be served chilled, and reds at cellar temperature.

'Room temperature' used to be the rule at a time when houses had no central-heating, and the fireplace was a dining room's only creature comfort. 'Cellar temperature' makes more sense, even

though few of us have cellars these days.

Cooling a red too much will deaden the flavour-producing esters that are responsible for taste and smell - the main characteristics of any wine.

How much to chill also depends on the grape. We drink Beaujolais cold because Gamay, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon/Franc, and Syrah simply taste fruitier that way. But heavier reds with pronounced tannins can be spoilt.

Put more simply, an over-chilled red wine can warm up in the glass, but for an over-warm red there is little salvation once it's been poured.

WINE OF THE WEEK

Monte Real Garnacha
Another excellent well-priced wine from Bodegas Riojanas, interestingly and unusually made from the Garnacha grape variety, somewhat novel for this region. Old vines grown at 700 metres do the rest. At a mere 15 this is an excellent investment.



Honey from Cuevas del Becerro is voted best 'milflores' in Andalucía

The town, with almost half the hives in the Ronda area, has a strong beekeeping tradition

VANESSA MELGAR

RONDA. For the second time, a honey from Cuevas del Becerro has won an award as the best multifloral honey in Andalucía. The producers of the product are Joaquín Becerra and Paola Escudero - and of course their bees. The award has come from Expomiel, an event promoted by the Diputación de Córdoba and is a showcase for beekeeping in Andalucía.

Expomiel was cancelled last year because of the pandemic but this year, Becerra and Escudero have achieved the prize that they also won in 2019.

The award, which Becerra dedicated to his mother who passed away recently, helps to strengthen the beekeeping tradition in the

town which is in the Guadalteba district and itself is a part of the agricultural area of Ronda. According to data from the Regional Agricultural Office (OCA) of Ronda, almost half of the hives in the Ronda area are in Cuevas, with 5,931 out of a total of 12,637.

In the case of Cuevas, all the hives are transhumant, in other words, they can be moved around.

The area that produces the Expomiel award-winning honey houses just over a hundred hives and is to the north of Ronda,

"It is a flower honey, from the mountains. The only difference, with respect to the honey that won in 2019, is that this year there has been less broom," explained Becerra, while insisting that the only secret to making good honey is that the beekeeper does not interfere: "It is the bees that make the honey."

"It depends on the flowers that are around; although the vegetation is the same, the blooms are



The producers Joaquín Becerra and Paola Escudero with the award-winning honey. J. B.

different. The bees collect what is there. Milflores is a mountain honey. The flowers that the bees have visited and that are reflected in the honey, are eucalyptus, some thyme, lavender and anise," he said.

The award-winning honey is "light amber in colour, with very low humidity, which makes it very dense and spicy," he added.

In total this year, they have produced about 1,500 kilos of this honey which can be purchased

Miraflores is a mountain honey, the bees have visited eucalyptus, thyme, lavender and anise

from several places in Cuevas del Becerro and directly from the farm.

"We also sell direct to the customer," Becerra stressed. He recalled that in the Ronda area, especially in the Genal Valley, there once was a great beekeeping tradition, but most of the hives disappeared due to a disease.

Beekeeping is making a comeback although mainly for own consumption. "Apandeire also has a large beekeeping tradition," he added.

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Versos 1891, touted as the world's most expensive sherry

This year marks the 200th anniversary of a prestigious sherry brand with a poetic name and its timeless rare wine from Sanlúcar de Barrameda

ALEKK M. SAANDERS

SANLÚCAR DE BARRAMEDA. Poet Manuel Barbadillo was born into the family of the famous winery, Barbadillo. His birth year and his verses are immortalised in the sherry brand - Versos 1891 - one of the most expensive wines in the world.

The story starts 200 years ago, in 1821, when Don Benigno Barbadillo, after returning from 20-year stay in Mexico, purchased a bodega in the centre of Sanlúcar de Barrameda. In 1827 their first sherry was exported to Philadelphia and eventually to the island of Jersey.

The new Barbadillo winery era started in 1891 when the grand-



The sherry is offered in a hand blown, lead crystal bottle and engraved by hand. SUR

son of the company's founder, Manuel, was born. According to custom, as a christening present, Manuel Barbadillo and his four brothers were given one each from a set of five barrels known as 'Las Botas de los Niños'. Manuel's cask was a very old Amontillado that almost two centuries later became Versos 1891

- one of the most expensive wines in the world.

The jewel in the crown

Manuel's birthdate has been commemorated all these years with the line Versos 1891. The 125th anniversary was special. That unforgettable tribute to Manuel Barbadillo was celebrated in Lon-

don. In 2016, the Barbadillo group displayed the jewel in their crown at N° 1, Great George Street, a central London venue. A hundred bottles were displayed in very special presentation cases.

The high quality cases were produced by expert masters from Ubrique, in Cadiz province, who

also make the most important luxury brands in the world.

The pure, lead crystal bottle is also a hand-blown masterpiece that was melted at 1,100°C by Portuguese specialists Atlantis. They engraved all the details by hand, and made inscriptions using the sand engraving technique.

The word 'Versos' was made with gold letters. The neck of the bottle and the edge of the cap were hand-painted with platinum, and the inside of the neck was polished with a diamond bit. The cork was individually designed for every bottle

There are legends about the flavour of Versos 1891. It is said to have a complex aroma and great intensity. The extraordinary quality is caused by ageing for more than a century in the peace and darkness of the cellars of the Barbadillo winery.

A spectacular price

They say that as some of the wine has been drunk over time, the barrel was occasionally replenished with other suitable aged wine, right up until the 1980s.

Nevertheless, Versos 1891 still attracts massive attention. The rich and nutty wine has an exclusive and spectacular cost.

With the price of around 10,000 euros a bottle (about 8,000 pounds), it is apparently the world's most expensive sherry.



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An unenthusiastic Malaga end 2021 in disappointment

The Blue and Whites lost 0-2 to a slick Leganés side, with the future of head coach José Alberto being called into question

SHAY CONAGHAN

MÁLAGA. Malaga went into their last game of 2021 last Saturday with the need to win as it would have kept their promotion hopes alive going into the new year. But Leganés put on a brilliant display of football, calmly defeating their hosts 0-2.

Head coach José Alberto, opted for a 4-5-1, leaving strikers Sekou and Roberto on the bench, with Brandon at the front of the attack as a false 9. Dani Lorenzo also kept his place in midfield, as the 18-year-old continued to impress.

The hosts started off by pressing high not leaving Leganés players with any time on the ball, but the visitors quickly took charge of the game.

They had a few shots on target, as well as what would have been a disastrous error by Escassi, who gifted an opposing player the ball

on the edge of the box.

Malaga struggled to find the control they so often have at La Rosaleda. The hosts did eventually wake up, with possession now bouncing back and forth between the sides, but with no end product to show for.

The Blue and Whites had a good chance to open the scoring before half-time, but always fell short of putting the ball in the back of the net. Also, Leganés failed to put a foot wrong, which did little to help Malaga's spirit, despite the fans' every effort to lift them.

Second half

José Alberto made no changes at the break, with his players showing more signs of aggression than in the opening half.

But the visitors struck first. Within the initial five minutes of the second half, Leganés defender Omeruo calmly slotted home a perfectly placed cross, unmarked by any of the Malaga players.

The Blue and Whites continued their efforts for the next few minutes, but their opponents were doing a good job of thwarting any of their attempts and they even had a couple of chances of doubling their lead.



Malaga players after conceding against Leganés. MAVALPHOTO

Roberto, who came on with Hicham with half an hour left, showed a lot of heart and was very active during the minutes he was given, linking up well with others, finding spaces that were non-existent in the first half and constantly chasing down the visitors' defenders.

The Blue and Whites dominated the game after conceding, but still couldn't find an equaliser against a more than comfortable Leganés side, who were still

pushing for a second goal.

And the visitors got their wish. With 12 minutes left, Leganés took advantage of a counterattack that had left Malaga goalkeeper Dani Martín to fend for himself, as Juan Muñoz easily put the ball past him.

That was enough for the visitors to seal the deal. Malaga showed very little for the rest of the game, despite introducing the powerhouse that is Sekou up front. The match ended 0-2, a

SECOND DIVISION

Results of Matchday 21

Girona - Burgos	3 - 1
Ibiza - Sporting	0 - 2
Málaga - Leganés	0 - 2
Las Palmas - Eibar	0 - 1
Fuenlabrada - Real Oviedo	0 - 0
Ponferradina - Amorebieta	1 - 1
Zaragoza - Tenerife	0 - 2
Cartagena - Mirandés	3 - 0
Huesca - Alcorcón	0 - 0
Real Sociedad B - Valladolid	0 - 2
Lugo - Almería	Postp.

Table

Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	PT
1. Almería	20	14	3	3	37	13	45
2. Eibar	21	11	6	4	31	24	39
3. Tenerife	21	11	5	5	28	16	38
4. Ponferradina	21	10	7	4	28	18	37
5. Valladolid	21	11	4	6	33	24	37
6. Girona	21	9	4	8	29	25	31
7. Las Palmas	21	8	7	6	28	26	31
8. Cartagena	21	9	3	9	27	28	30
9. Real Oviedo	21	6	11	4	23	19	29
10. Burgos	21	8	4	9	21	21	28
11. Huesca	21	6	9	6	22	20	27
12. Sporting	21	7	6	8	21	24	27
13. Málaga	21	7	6	8	20	28	27
14. Zaragoza	21	5	11	5	17	21	26
15. Leganés	21	6	7	8	24	24	25
16. Ibiza	21	5	10	6	19	23	25
17. Lugo	20	4	11	5	24	24	23
18. Mirandés	21	6	5	10	28	34	23
19. Fuenlabrada	21	3	11	7	15	22	20
20. Amorebieta	21	3	10	8	24	31	19
21. R.Sociedad B	21	4	5	12	16	27	17
22. Alcorcón	21	2	5	14	16	39	11

Malaga back José Alberto and focus on the transfer market

The Blue and Whites are working on lifting Fifa's ban, as the club prepares for a busy January window

BORJA GUTIÉRREZ

MÁLAGA. Malaga head coach, José Alberto, will continue at the helm of the team going into the second half of the season. The Asturian, who was on the receiving end of chants calling for his resignation against Leganés (18 December), has received the backing of the club, sources said.

Malaga played their last game of the year over the weekend, and won't be back at training until 27 December. Their next game will be on 3 January.

The confidence the club has in the head coach remains unchanged and it believes that the team's recent dip in form is a direct result of the numerous injuries that

key players - like Jozabed or Juande - have picked up over the last month.

As well as the aforementioned players, the Blue and Whites have also been without Ramón, Kevin and now Hicham through injury; while winger Paulino has been out with pneumonia.

Fighting at the top

The club still has high hopes of reinforcing the squad when the January transfer window opens. Sources have also said that Malaga are going to be ambitious with their signings, given that the team's objective is to finish in the upper half of the table.

However, that objective could slip away if their recent form continues into the new year. The situation is not yet critical and the Blue and Whites' performance so far is seen as positive, albeit with some reservations.

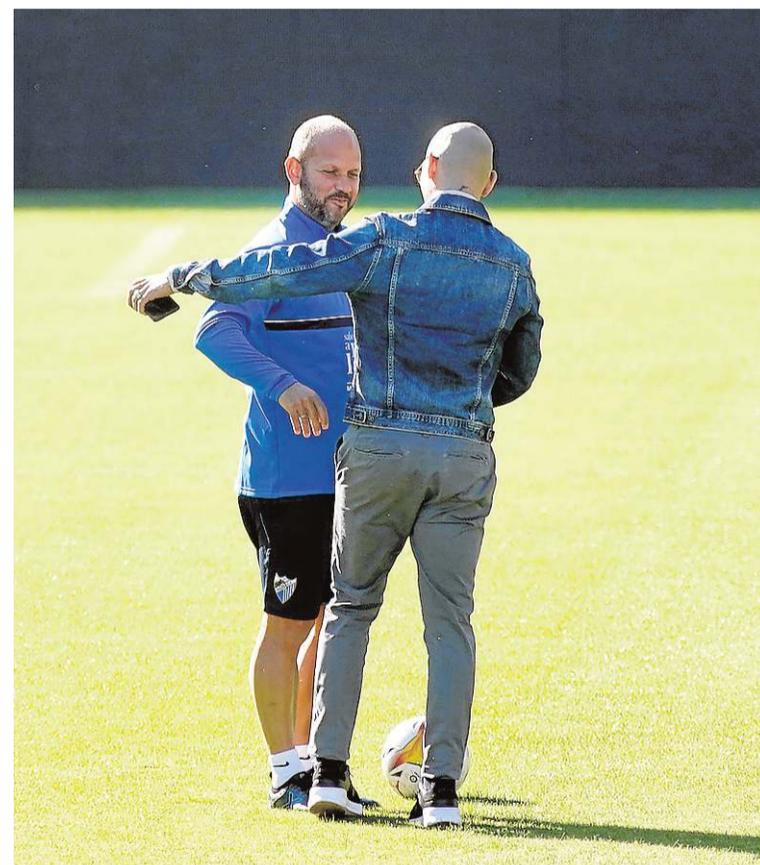
"It's clear that we need reinforcements," said José Alberto, just

minutes after Malaga's most recent defeat. It's a message that clearly precedes a month of January full of changes, although that depends entirely on whether there are enough available players on the market.

Another thorn in Malaga's side is the looming Fifa ban, which would see them unable to sign players until the summer of 2023, and is currently being worked on by the club.

If Malaga cannot overturn this ban within the next few days - which the club disagrees with, as they blame a lack of communication on Fifa's part as the reason they were unaware of an outstanding payment - then they will fork out the 800,000 euros needed to compensate ex-goalkeeper Cenk Gonen.

Regardless, sporting director Manolo Gaspar and his team have not stopped working on the upcoming transfer window. Gaspar has reminded everyone that the



José Alberto greets sporting director Manolo Gaspar. MARIANO POZO

club still considers this season to be transitional, due to the young age of the squad and the multiple changes it suffered over the

much-deserved result to a slick Leganés side.

This defeat was a huge blow to a team who desperately needed to win at home due to their dire away form. Malaga's current hopes for promotion now hang in the balance going into 2022; and the fate of José Alberto is also in question, as La Rosaleda made it very clear that they had had enough, calling for the coach to step down on several occasions.

summer, but at the same time he considers the club to be in a stronger position, economically speaking.

A LOOK AT LA LIGA
ROB PALMER
LaLiga Commentator, Sky Sports

Christmas in La Liga: who has been naughty and nice?

Despite the festive break, Spanish football is offering a lot of talking points



Ferran Torres is driving home for Christmas, Real Madrid sit top of the tree, Diego Simeone is under rare scrutiny, Rayo continue to disrupt, and Jorge Molina defies science.

There may be a festive break from Spanish football action, but there are still so many talking points.

Is Ferran Torres really leaving Manchester City for FC Barcelona? The news bulletins confirmed a €55 million deal has been done and he's packing his cases.

Anyone who has ever moved home will know that things may not be so simple if there is a chain involved. Basically, Barça don't have 55 million euros and wage structure to welcome Torres.

To sign they must sell; Philippe Coutinho, Samuel Umtiti and possibly Sergiño Dest need to move on to accommodate any new signing. The issue for Barça is that few clubs have the money to invest and know that they can cut a mean deal with a desperate club.

If Torres does move, it all makes sense. He's been excellent for the Spain national team but surplus at City. He'd be elevated from bit-part to star status and playing alongside his international teammates of the future.

As Barça struggle, Real Madrid roll on. Twelve games unbeaten, leaders by a distance, advanced in Europe and with a pool of players so deep, the loss of eight players for the last two games made little difference.



Ferran Torres celebrates a goal scored against Italy. EP

Contrast the calm at Real Madrid to the unrest at Atlético. Diego Simeone has the safest seat in football management. For the first time in a decade, he's sitting uncomfortably in that seat after enduring his fourth straight defeat. Those who suggest that his position may be under threat don't know the man or the club.

The player who did the damage is the Christmas miracle Jorge Molina. The 39-year-old followed up a hat trick against Mallorca with the decisive goal to knock the champions down into fifth position.

It's a joy to see Rayo Vallecano sitting a point and a place above them. They are the Tranmere to the Mersey giants, the Leyton Orient to the London clubs. It's not the first time they've performed the role of "disrupters", but if they managed to make it into the Champions League it would be so romantic.

Can you imagine the faces of the European elite as they tried to find the humble home which definitely isn't on a tourist map and then discovered the three-sided stadium with a block of flats overlooking one goal?

¡Viva Rayo! And Merry Christmas.



Marbella Rugby Club's under-10s, winners in their category. sur

Marbella Rugby Club youth players impress in Barcelona

SHAY CONAGHAN

MALAGA. Youth teams from Marbella Rugby Club came away from a prestigious tournament in Catalonia last week with "magnificent results".

All of the club's academy teams were highly placed in the annual Melé tournament, with the U-10s

winning their category. The U-8s and U-16s took third place, U-12s and U-14s took fourth while the U18s held onto fifth. The U-10s' win means that the club has won in at least one category in the last four years.

The competition, which was celebrating its 100th anniversary, is organised by Unió Esportiva

Santboiana, and is one of the most important youth tournaments in Spanish rugby. Participation in the competition held in Sant Boi de Llobregat, in Barcelona, is by invitation only.

The Marbella club made a huge financial and organisational effort to send all members from all categories to the Catalan region. In total, over 160 players, 40 coaches and representatives filled the three buses in a trip that cost 30,000 euros.

A record-breaking 85 teams and 1,800 players took part.

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THE STARS

Aquarius
January 21st - February 19th
Finances may start to look healthier as Jupiter moves into Pisces. More money might come your way, but there is a chance that you'll spend more too.

Pisces
February 20th - March 20th
If you put effort into realising your dreams, you'll be amply rewarded. Feeling uneasy about a fallout with a friend? Don't let it get worse.

Aries
March 21st - April 20th
Finding closure on long-standing issues can free up energy. With a New Moon in your career zone, an opportunity could revolutionise your life.

Taurus
April 21st - May 21st
Who you know could be dynamite, as Jupiter's move into your social sector brings you into contact with movers and shakers. They could help you with your goals and plans.

Gemini
May 22nd - June 21st
There's a chance to strike a business deal that could work out very well. Has an ongoing project been a waste of time and money? It might be time to let it go.

Cancer
June 22nd - July 23rd
Starting this week, the coming months could be exciting in so many ways as feel-good Jupiter moves into a far-reaching zone. It's time to take a leap of faith and accept a challenge.

Leo
July 24th - August 23rd
This week sees the start of a phase that can boost confidence in both the spiritual and material sense. There's a new beginning on the cards concerning a job or activity.

Virgo
August 24th - September 23rd
If you're in a long-term bond you'll be keen to take on bigger projects. Keen to start a romance? Be sure you are finished with a past relationship before going ahead with anything new.

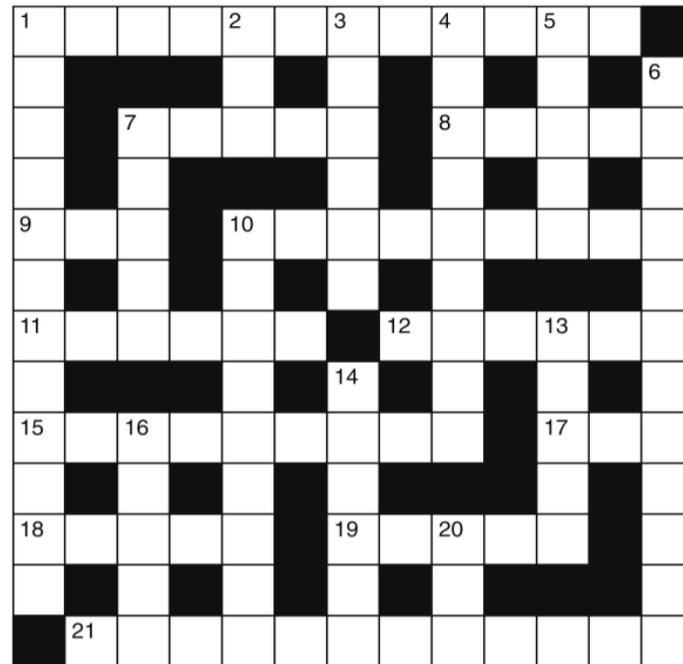
Libra
September 24th - October 23rd
Planning to redecorate in the New Year? If you have time to declutter, then tackling the worst areas first is a good way to start. You'll be able to think more clearly.

Scorpio
October 24th - November 22nd
Is a situation holding you back? Talking about it could be the best way to unravel this issue and, once resolved, can lead to a new beginning.

Sagittarius
November 23rd - December 21st
The urge to upscale could inspire you to think about a move, to enlarge your current property, or perhaps to expand your family. You'll be ready for a fresh financial start too.

Capricorn
December 22nd - January 20th
If your mind is on an intense issue right now, it's worth taking the time to sort it out. Then you can channel all your energy into a fruitful goal or dream.

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD N° 11493



Across

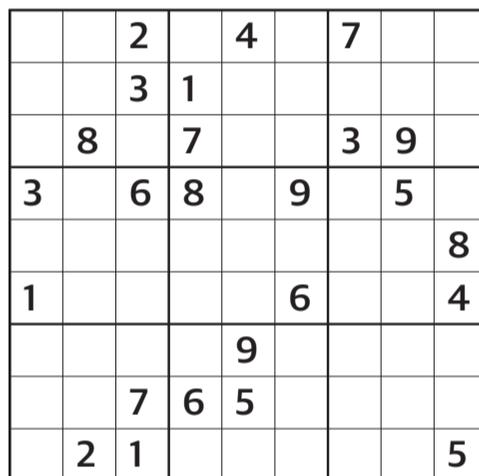
- 1 Business involved in shooting incidents (4,8)
- 7 Tradesman is one who places bets, losing 100 (5)
- 8 In water in second part of washing process (5)
- 9 This tune is first-class – right? (3)
- 10 They are sailed over even with stupid asses around (5,4)
- 11 Made dog eat in senility (6)
- 12 Tassel on the roof? (6)
- 15 Teetotaller wrecks seat in bar (9)
- 17 Suited one (3)
- 18 9 in company provide capital (5)
- 19 One speed when angry (5)
- 21 Gamble on what the professional dramatist has to offer? (4,3,5)

Down

- 1 Military command a month in advance? (7,5)
- 2 Writing runner (3)
- 3 Get something out of spin round the East (6)
- 4 The murderer is an unknown person about fifty (9)
- 5 The scope of anger (5)
- 6 Doggedly reply in tests (12)
- 7 Overheated in pub urn, tea leaves turned to ashes! (5)
- 10 Unexpected gains by Conservative party in agreement (9)
- 13 Search successfully for an indication (5)
- 14 During excavation, ring found of dark greyish-blue colour (6)
- 16 Whiskey producer not moving (5)
- 20 Intend to cripple 1000 fewer (3)

SUDOKU BY HANZO

Instructions
Complete the square making sure that every row of nine numbers includes all digits from 1 to 9, every column includes all digits from 1 to 9 and every 3 by 3 subsection includes all digits from 1 to 9



THE WORDPUZZLER



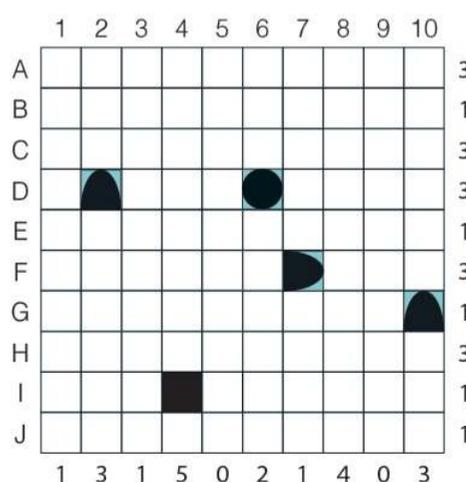
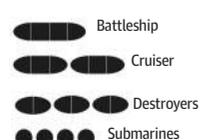
Can you identify the words that may follow 'safety' from the clues listed below?

- 1. Strike heavily
- 2. Shaving device
- 3. Contributing element
- 4. Mesh
- 5. Light
- 6. Sports game
- 7. Join
- 8. Drape
- 9. Metal fastener
- 10. Latch

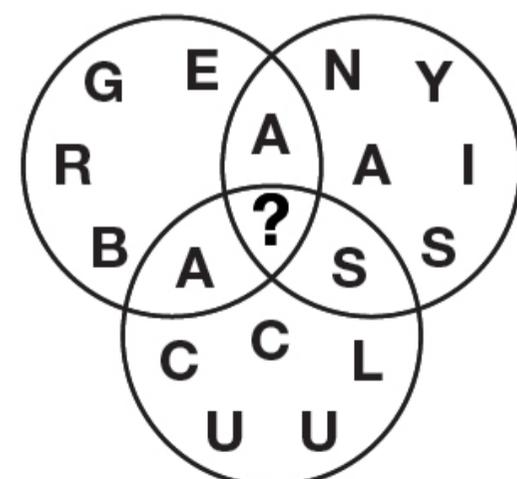
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CIRCLEGRAM



Instructions
Replace the question mark with a letter so that the letters in each circle can be arranged to form words, names or terms on a common theme. What are the three words, and the letter represented by the question mark?