

(travel)

Marbella

Pride of the Costa del Sol

Yachts, beach clubs and a following of international revelers keep the party going in the capital of Spain's sun drenched coast.

By **Leah Furman**

Natural Monument of Tornillo del Torcal





Presided over by the magnificent rolling peaks of the La Concha mountain, caressed by the sapphire blue waters of the Mediterranean, Marbella shines as the whitewashed, Spanish-tiled crown jewel of Andalusia's storied Costa del Sol. A perennial magnet for international movie stars, socialites, sheiks and princes, this once modest fishing village has transformed into one of the world's toniest ports of call without losing any of its warm hospitality, natural beauty and old world charm.

Sixteen miles of sandy, palm-dotted coastline make Marbella the resort destination of choice for sun-worshippers the world over. Between the Marbella city center and Puerto Banus, which lies just to the west, you'll find the marble-paved boardwalk known as the Golden Mile—a stretch of pristine, beachfront property known to locals and visitors alike as the ultimate "right address."

While the jet set still kick back at the Marbella Club's secluded beach and private golf course, the city's other half, a.k.a. the yacht set, spend their time at the lavish Puerto Banus. Even the seasoned traveler will marvel at the sight and size of the gleaming prize yachts gathered in the celebrated marina. The definitive spot to see and be seen features everything from the town's most exclusive round-the-clock yacht parties and nightclubs to its most prestigious shopping district. Die-hard fashionistas can spend the first half of the day testing the limits of their Centurion cards at Hermes, Ver-

sace and Ralph Lauren, and the second half people-watching at Sinatra's. This Marbella institution is the perfect place to appropriate a sidewalk table and unwind with a glass of Tinto de Verano, or four, while taking in the endless parade of designer cars, clothes and personalities that endow the city with



its lustrous reputation.

Come nightfall, the smart money head straight for the first name in Eurodiscos—Olivia Valere. Inspired by the architecture of Moorish palaces, this dramatic nightclub transports guests into the exotic, spice-filled world of 1001 Arabian Nights. Located just off the Golden Mile, Olivia Valere remains the city's preeminent boîte and has everyone from Bruce Willis and Mick Jagger to Naomi Campbell and Kate Moss gracing its dance floors and banquettes.

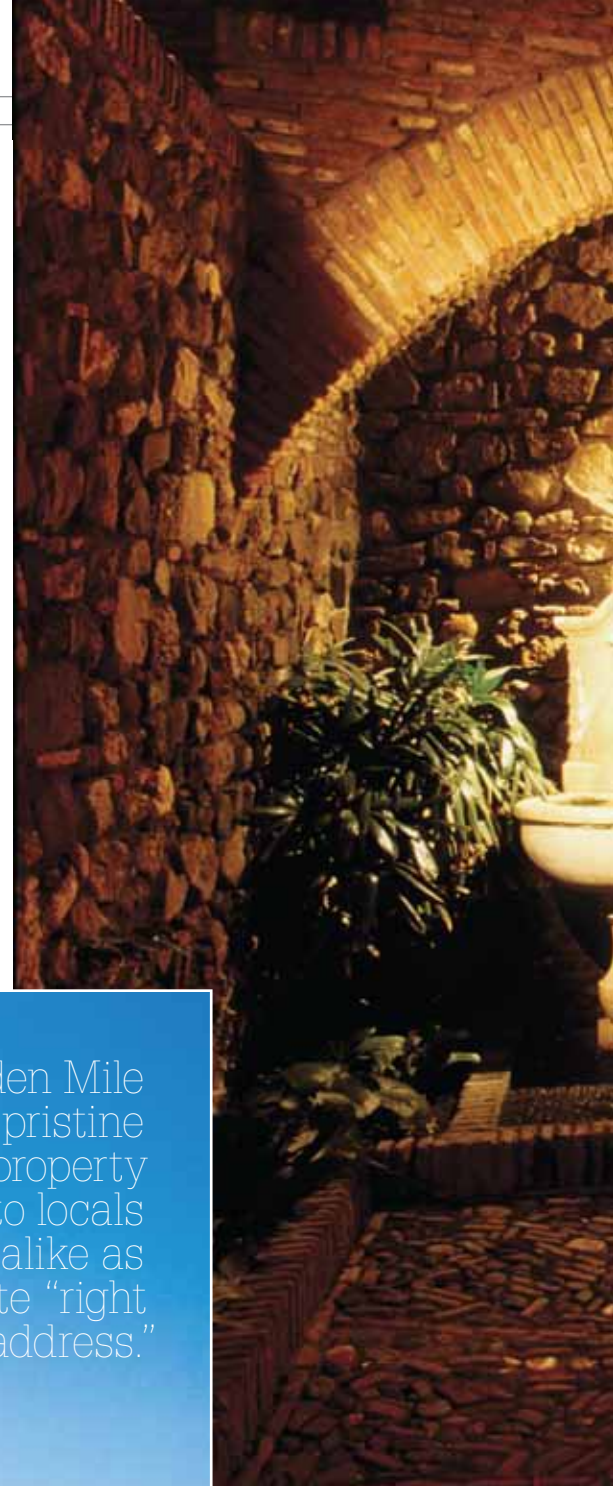
No matter how happening spending all night at just one club is rarely a good idea. Enter La Noche, another Marbella tradition in perpetual good-standing with the international party circuit. Kylie Minogue, the Artist No Longer Formerly Known as Prince and many others have spent their nights here after having lavish dinners at the adjoining La Meridiana, one of the city's top restaurants and a crucial stop on any informed visitor's itinerary.

The all-night-party theme hits a crescendo at Nikki Beach, the hottest spot to have graced Marbella's sexy shores in decades. Once the sun sets on the immaculately maintained Pinomar Beach, the bronzed bodies pick up, shower off the sand,

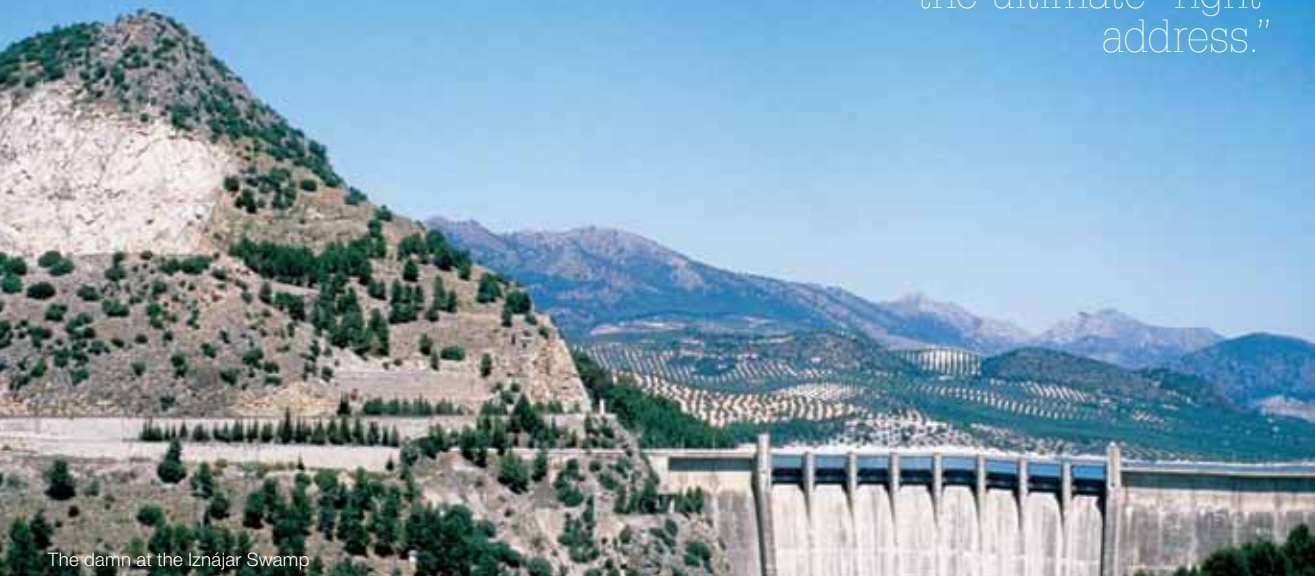
and head straight for the palapas and couches of Nikki Beach, just next to the luxurious Don Carlos Hotel. Attracting Marbella's sophisticated crowd with its brilliant nightly soirees and signature SoBe style, Nikki Beach elevates the party to an art form as stylish revelers dine, drink and dance from noon until night.

While it may surprise some to learn, not everyone heads to Marbella strictly for its celebrated party scene. In fact, it is the coast's many golf courses that are responsible for the Costa del Sol's affectionate nickname—the Costa del Golf. Known as the finest winter golf resort in all of Europe, the temperate Marbella and its surrounding areas are home to some 30 high-quality golf courses that are bustling with avid golfers all year round.

Leaving the golf to the enthusiasts, the foodies who descend upon Andalusia in droves cram the restaurants and small shops housed in the central squares and back alleys of Marbella's Old Town. The jovial centerpiece of the city's dining scene is the stunning Plaza de Naranjos. Peppered with orange trees, this cobble-stoned square is where 15th Century Spanish architecture and globe-trotting café society converge into one dynamic mass



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The damn at the Iznájar Swamp



Concurso de Enganches in Ronda



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Illuminated interior of La Alcazaba

Escalante Tower

Yunqueira and Encarnación Church





Panoramic view of the Maro Cliffs



Nikki Beach Marbella

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of air kissing, table-hopping and late-night festivity planning. Once in the neighborhood, it is a sorry soul who does not wander past the threshold of Marbella's most fabulous bodega, Tasca Don Mate. Catering to the likes of local property owners Antonio Banderas and Julio Iglesias, as well as the people who want to eat like them, this jam packed gourmet deli is a scene onto itself.

Gastronomes determined to seek out the best and brightest of Andalusia head about eight miles east of the city center to the prestigious La Hacienda restaurant. The first of the region's fine dining establishments to earn the coveted Michelin star, the restaurant is styled like a classic Andalusian villa and has been serving a fusion of regional and international cuisine since it was first opened in 1969.

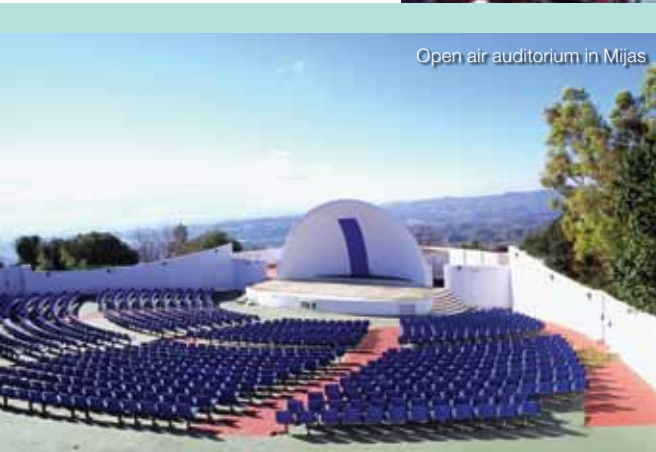
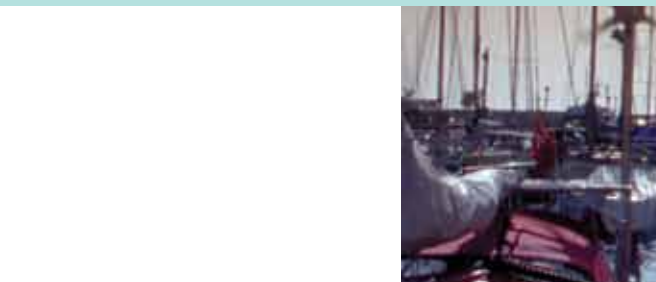
After a few sun filled days on the yachts and beach clubs, champagne soaked nights in the discos, and Mediterranean cuisine fueled afternoons on the 18-hole golf courses, visitors can shift gears by setting their course for the simple pleasures of a sightseeing stroll. The Paseo Marítimo is the shimmering boardwalk that stretches along the famed Marbella coast, where the beautiful people bask in the glory of the dramatic seascape. At dusk, nothing says "Spanish province" quite like a meander along the narrow pedestrian streets and romantic alleyways of the Casco Antiguo, Marbella's charming Old Quarter. Here, the sound of Spanish guitars, the fragrance of oleander and the authenticity of restaurants bring visitors back to, what is essentially, the heart and soul of Marbella.



Virgen de la Aurora Square in Arriate



Puerto Banús Beach



Open air auditorium in Mijas



La Salud Beach



Tasca Don Matute... catering to the likes of local property owners Antonio Banderas and Julio Iglesias.