

THE GECKOS OF GAUCÍN



COSTA NATURA



OVERLOOKING GIBRALTAR

GAUCÍN IS ONE OF ANDALUSIA'S MOST SPECTACULAR PUEBLOS BLANCOS – WHITE VILLAGES – SPREAD OVER THE MOUNTAINS OF SOUTHERN SPAIN, AS IF A BENEVOLENT BEING HAD SCATTERED SNOWFLAKES ACROSS THE HILLTOPS. ROGER WHEELER VISITED THIS QUIET GEM – AND ITS BIZARRE LIZARDY ATTRACTIONS

Gaucín's labyrinthine, car-challenging streets, under the shadow of a Moorish castle, make driving here a very interesting experience. But there is no other way to get here other than to hire a car at either **Málaga** or **Gibraltar** airports, both about 90 minutes' drive away.

We've been coming to Gaucín for several years. It is without doubt the quietest place I have ever visited, the only sounds are... oh, wait a minute, there are no sounds. The village is home to about 2,000 people, of whom about ten per cent would seem to be from Brighton, the vast majority of them retired solicitors living in their own personal paradise.



Cascading down the side of the mountain, most of the village's houses face an unbelievable view, looking southwest over a huge valley down to Gibraltar and then to the **Atlas Mountains of Morocco**, all of which are clearly visible. As the sun slowly sets, the lights of **Algeciras** and then the North African coastline twinkle with the ships going through the **Strait of Gibraltar**.

It really is a magical place.

This is rural Spain. The locals are friendly but don't really speak

English, as the need to retain their identity is very important. It's only 45 minutes drive from Marbella and Torremolinos but in all other respects it is light years away.

With so many expats living among them, this tiny community believes it is important to retain its sense of the true Spain. That being said, most of the few restaurants and hotels are British-owned and run.

There must be hundreds of these white villages scattered across the **Serranía de Ronda Mountains**, and quite a lot have 'de la frontera' tacked onto their names. This just means that once they were in the front line of the fight against the **Moors** when they were ruling **Al Andalus** between 711 and 1492.

The nearest beach is, as it happens, nudist and, of course, quite gay. **Costa Natura** is about 5km west of **Estepona** and about 45 minutes

drive from Gaucín. The beach is lovely and the sea is great for swimming. There is plenty to look at; the eye candy covers all tastes. It gets very hot in midsummer, in the 30s, which can make the sand a bit hot to walk on but if you're not just 'walking' then the pain is worth it.

Gibraltar is close and well worth a visit. Once you get through the Spanish border controls, the town is interesting. Just like being in Cheltenham but with heat and, being a military base, it has some very impressive sights. Don't try to bring too many duty-free goods back into Spain. The Spanish have never forgotten losing the Rock to the British in 1713 when the French and the British divided up the Spanish possessions after the War of Spanish Succession – the border officials can be very officious.



GAUCÍN

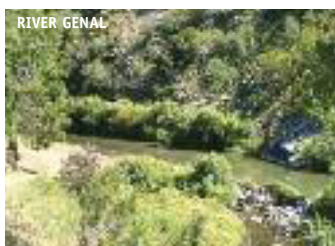
Gaucín is a great base from which to visit some of Spain's greatest cities: **Córdoba, Cádiz, Granada, Jerez, Ronda** and **Málaga** are all within reasonable driving distance. If it's water sports you want, then **Tarifa**, windsurfing capital of the

region, is 90 minutes from the village. This is also an old, gated Moorish town with the remains of a kasbah and castle. It is Europe's southernmost point and where the Mediterranean meets the Atlantic. You can also get to Africa from Tarifa (**Tangiers** being 35 minutes away by hydrofoil).

The coast west of Tarifa has some of the most beautiful stretches of beach imaginable – golden sand for miles and miles – but now you are on the Atlantic and it's a bit cooler than the Med.

Take a look at www.andalucianvillageholiday.co.uk, a small company based in Gaucín with a load of local knowledge. www.andalucia.com is another good website for local information, as is the official site www.andalucia.org. There are nine airlines serving Málaga from Gatwick and three fly into Gibraltar.

And these mysterious geckos of Gaucín? The new mayor of the village decided that to encourage tourism the place needed some decoration and, in the spirit of gilding the lily, he got some brightly coloured stone geckos fixed onto the walls of several of the houses. A strange decision indeed, but there they are, stuck to the white walls but adding nothing to the overall beauty of the place.



RIVER GENAL

