

## The Appeal of Axarquia

When family and friends ask, “Why Spain? Why didn’t you buy a house in Florida?” I just smile to myself. The three-bedroom, marble-floored villa with Mediterranean and mountain views that I bought with my partner cost a fraction of what a similar home would anywhere in the States.

### Hauling in the night’s catch.

The Costa del Sol is often pictured as an overdeveloped high-rise tourist trap. Drive away from the resorts by the airport, however, and you find small towns and villages where no building is more than three stories high, and where it’s impossible to tell the difference between an 800-year-old Moorish mansion and a brand new townhouse. Local fisherman still haul in the night’s catch long before sunrise, and pounds of delicious fresh seafood can be had for just a few dollars—either right there on the beach if you get up early enough, or in the ancient market in Malaga, dating back to Phoenician times.



The region we live in is known as the Axarquia, a small group of pueblo blancos, or white villages, in the southernmost part of Andalucia. It’s a short drive from Roman ruins, Moorish fortresses, and local wine-producing vineyards and a shorter stroll to the sea. If we are too lazy to carry down our own chairs, a sun bed can be rented for 3 euro a day, and the waiter brings a never-ending supply of calamritos, fried whole baby squid, washed down with a cold bottle of Verdejo, a crisp citrus-ey local white wine. Our tapa and drink in the sun will cost just \$15.

### Not just good sport.

After a day spent hiking in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada above the villages of Friligiana or Maro, biking along the hilly N340 coast road, or kayaking in the calm blue sea, there’s no shortage of other activities. Nerja town’s cultural center beckons, which may feature a traveling orchestra from Germany or a flamenco performance. And Torrox Pueblo, five minutes’ drive away, often offers concerts, most recently by a visiting concert pianist from New York. After the show, a restaurant feast of rosemary-scented lamb chops and locally cured Serrano ham can be enjoyed.

The magical cities of Granada, Sevilla, and Ronda are all a short drive away. The Ruta de Sol y Vino, the Route of Sun and Wine, passes right through our village, and sweet local wines—perfect as an aperitif or with cheese—cost 2 euro per liter. Sebastian at the wine shop in Frigiliana fills the bottle directly from the barrel, corks it, shrink-wraps the foil in front of you, and only affixes a label if you tell him it’s a gift. It’s certainly not Florida!

**Mike DeSimone**

