

BRINGING TOGETHER MARBELLA AND SOTOGRANDE

Estepona magazine



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Get your chestnuts, November is here...

CONTENTS ²⁶ NOVEMBER 2004

04 News

A round-up of news and reviews from the area and beyond.

14 Column

Gwilym Rhys-Jones looks at Europe's common budget and new EU member Lithuania.

16 Jaén

We continue our series on travel to Andalusian cities with Jaén.

26 Nature

R. Lambert and Oscar Rulli return to the sea to discover the world of crustaceans.

34 Golf

Jo Ward reports on all the latest news during the lead-up to the Volvo Masters.

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40 Nautical

Peter Brookes offers an introduction to the complex and intense America's Cup.

50 Décor

Helen O'Leary visits two great places to find furnishings and ideas for town and country.

60 Good Food Guide

A selection of the best restaurants in the area.

68 Em Wine Club

A whole day was devoted to wonderful sensory impressions at the 2nd Em Wine Fair.

69 Tastes of Andalucía

The Gourmet Girls are back on the road, visiting this time *Rincón de Pepe*, in old-town Estepona.

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72 Agenda

Find out what is coming up on the cultural and entertainment front.

79 Classifieds

A selection of special properties.

82 Horoscopes

Delia Knight studies the stars and discovers what's in store for us all this month.

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A developing Europe

Country by country

"Europe has never existed. It is not the addition of national sovereignties in a conclave which creates an entity. One must genuinely create Europe." Thus spake Jean Monnet who is looked upon as the founder of the European Community. On 1 May another ten countries joined the previous fifteen in the new Europe. Mix and match: the Eurovision Song Contest has been turned into a much-needed geography lesson.

The Union now comprises 25 countries with a combined population of 450 million. That is an awesome lot of people to fool any of the time, never mind all the time. Eight former communist bloc states were included amongst the new boys as emergent and ambitious free market economies. The combined economic might of the ten, with a population of more than 75 million, including Cyprus and Malta, is no larger than that of the Netherlands and the addition of the new countries increases the gross domestic product of the EU by a paltry five per cent.

Vibrant, however, they are. The new economies grew by 3.5% in 2003 and their growth rate is expected to be twice that of the old members. So go east, young man, to the lands of opportunity. On the other hand, European Central Bank chairman Jean-Claude Trichet recently announced that the fourth-quarter growth figures for the 12-nation euro zone had been revised upward thanks to robust exports and strengthening domestic consumption. The forecasts are that the euro countries will grow between 1.4% and 2% in 2004. No sooner had he sat down than the sewage hit the air-conditioning system in Saudi Arabia and oil went back up through \$40 a barrel. Back to the drawing board.

Treaty by treaty

The European Union has metamorphosed from the fledgling European Coal and Steel Community established in 1952. The Single European Act was signed in Luxembourg and The Hague on 17 February 1986, and came into force on 1 July 1987. The treaty set a deadline of 1 January 1993 to establish a full internal market. Provisions to allow for the free movement of goods, people, services, and capital were made, and majority voting was extended to allow the necessary directives to be passed.

Union advocates then marched on to the Treaty of European Union, signed in the Dutch city of Maastricht on 7 February 1992. Beyond incorporating and appending the three original treaties, the new treaty also dealt with economic and monetary union. 'Maastricht' laid down the rules to govern the operation of the Commission, Parliament, Council, and Court of Justice then moved on to Common Foreign and Security policy to allow the EU to act as a whole in these areas. Justice and Home Affairs were next on the agenda to deal jointly with asylum, immigration, customs, and cross-border crime—including terrorism, drug trafficking, and fraud.

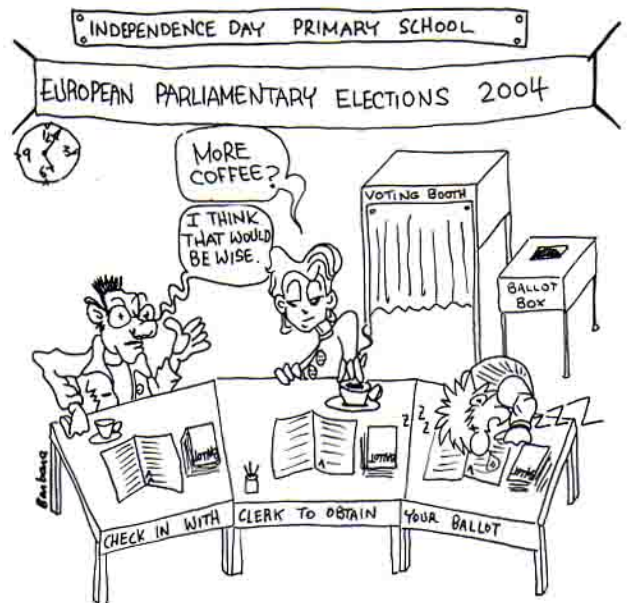
Maastricht provided the blueprint for economic and monetary union (EMU) and the introduction of the euro. Subsequently the Treaties of Amsterdam in 1999 and Nice in 2000 sorted out a number of operational and institutional issues, extending majority voting over unanimity in certain areas and streamlining European institutions in preparation for enlargement.

But who cares?

Yet this year's European Parliament elections gripped the public's *apathy* as never before. Senior politicians across Europe voiced dismay at the low turnout and large gains for opposition parties. Although many Europeans like the idea of a united Europe, it has always been tricky to persuade people to put their hats and coats on and trot down to the voting booth and vote for something they like. What seems to stimulate people is the idea of voting against something they do not like.

Governing parties in Germany, France, and Poland suffered heavy losses and *euro-sceptical* parties reaped the benefits. Overall turnout sank to 45.3% of EU voters casting ballots whilst in the ten new member states the turnout was a pathetic 26.4%. The ruling German Social Democrats suffered their worst result in quite some time with a mere 21.5% whilst the Christian Democrats romped home with 44.5%, an ominous signal for incumbent chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Similar story for lame *canard* French President Jacques Chirac's Union for the Popular Movement, which achieved a not-so-popular 16.6%, trailing the socialists on 28.95%. In Britain the Labour and Conservative vote combined scraped 50%—another record low. The *euro-sceptic* Independence Party of former Estepona resident Robert Kilroy-Silk doubled its haul of votes on 1999 to 16%, quadrupling its number of MEPs to twelve.

In Spain the governing socialists led by prime minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero repeated their surprise general election victory last March in the wake of the Madrid bombings but by a much narrower margin than the opinion polls had suggested. They edged out the *Partido Popular* conservatives by just two percentage points winning 25 seats against 23. Here too turnout hit a record low of 46% compared to 77% at the general election and 63% in the last European elections. A recent opinion poll by Eurobarometer indicates that 62% of Spaniards believe that membership of the EU is a "good thing", well above the average for the former 15-member EU. This is perfectly logical since Spain has benefited tremendously in receiving European *cohesion* and *structural* funds awarded over the last decade on the basis of regional need. Unsurprisingly, the Spanish have expressed reservations over the way in which acceding poorer members will themselves qualify for this type of funding. ■



Nudibranchia and planaria

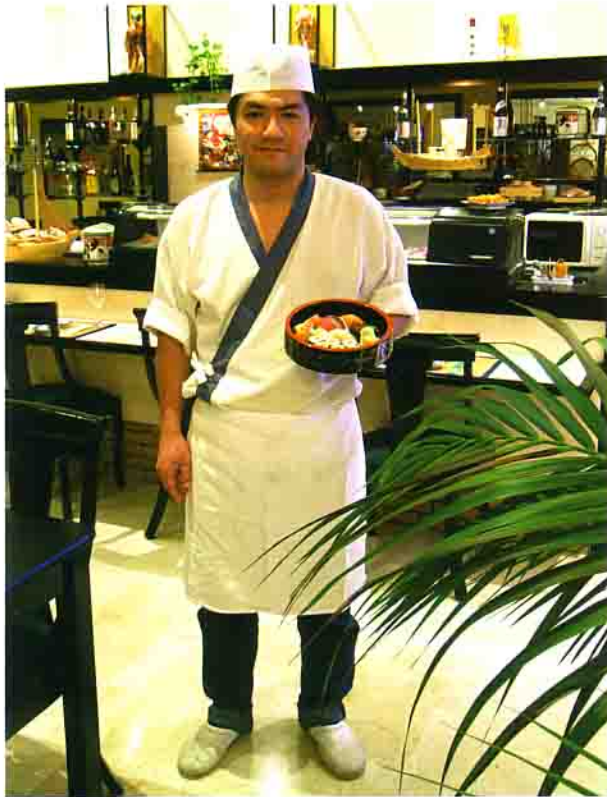
The lives and loves of seawater slugs and flatworms

We go down to the depths again this month to marvel at the incredible world captured on film by underwater photographer Oscar Rulli. Our nature correspondent R. Lambert describes some of the countless vividly coloured species creeping and crawling along the bottom of the sea.



New tastes for a new season

By Patricia Caldwell



CHEF HIRONOBY YASHIRO makes delicious sushi with a smile at the Kempinski Resort Hotel's Sakura Sushi



Spring is in the air

"In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love," said the poet Tennyson. But I bet it also turns to thoughts of food. Lighter, fresher food is what we anticipate as we throw off our sweaters and leave winter's warming stews behind. We look forward to the season's fresh fruit and vegetables. Wild asparagus with the slightly bitter taste so good when added to omelettes; young broad beans which can be chopped (pods and all) and steamed; fresh artichokes, peeled and lightly cooked; they can all be found in the street markets during April.

Strawberries are delicious and cheap at this time of the year. As they don't freeze well, indulge yourself and eat them straight away or make into jam. Apricots are also plump and plentiful now, so snap them up as they have a limited season.

Now is the time to drive into the countryside while the air is fresh and pure and before the heat of summer burns up everything. Enjoy lunch at your favourite venta (roadside restaurant) or other restaurant while admiring the fields of spring flowers and fruiting trees.

One of the bonuses of living on the Costa del Sol among so many nationalities is the diversity of restaurants. This is a fairly recent phenomenon, and for anyone interested in food it is a splendid opportunity to experiment with new ingredients and flavours. An enthusiastic cook may well be willing to share his or her knowledge and expertise with others. In this way we can

learn new techniques and try different recipes that will add fresh interest and zest to our own meals.

Chef Hironobu Yashiro at the Kempinski Hotel's Sakura Sushi bar and restaurant was kind enough to demonstrate for us some of the traditional techniques used in the preparation of two kinds of roll sushi, norimake and inside-out rolls. He takes infinite care in the preparation of his rice and raw ingredients and the cleanliness of his work surfaces. A professional makes the whole thing look very easy but when I tried it at home it was obvious that Yashiro's sure hand was the product of years of experience. Nevertheless I did my best and—with the help of Japanese products bought in the gourmet shop in El Corte Inglés—my first sushi was at least edible.

It seems to me that if you get the fundamentals right the rest will follow with practice. Start with sushi rice which must be washed as many times as necessary in cold water until it runs clear. This gets rid of the starch and ensures that it absorbs the ideal amount of water when it is cooked.

As I was only making enough for two types of sushi I cooked one cup of rice with one cup of water. Bring it quickly to the boil, cover the pan with a lid, lower the gas to a minimum and cook for 15 minutes. Switch off the gas, keep the lid on and leave for 10 minutes. All the water will be absorbed. Dampen a wooden bowl or other container before adding the cooked rice. Pour over 250ml of sushi vinegar per kilo of rice

continues >>>