

# Outstanding Ojen!

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Less than ten minutes' drive from La Canada, Marbella's huge commercial centre, Ojen is a busy village that combines tradition with contemporary living.

One of the best known of the white villages – 'pueblos blancos' - of Andalucia, Ojen has a rich history. A plentiful water supply and arable land meant that the area was perfect for raising livestock and agriculture, which probably began in the Roman era.

The first time Ojén is mentioned, however, is in the "Chronicle of the exploits of the Cordoban emirs". It details a battle in 921 outside the castle between the the Mozarabs (Christians who lived in Muslim lands), and the Moorish leader Abderramán III. In 921 the Christian rebellion forced Abderramán to take the village and its church was converted into a mosque.

Life then continued relatively peacefully in Ojén, with produce including raisins, dried figs, almonds, silks, wax and honey being sent down the mountain road to Marbella for export to Africa.

In 1485, King Ferdinand captured the village during the 'reconquest'. The King decreed that no Muslims (Moriscos) could live less than a league from the coast, to avoid Muslim collaboration with Turkish and Barbary pirates. Many moved to Ojén and settled peacefully until taxes and 'Christianisation' ended in an uprising in 1568 in nearby Istán. Ojén

rose up the following year, burning the church and crops, killing Christians and then fleeing into the countryside. The Duke of Medina Sidonia was called in to put down the uprising, which he did ruthlessly. The surviving Moriscos scraped out a living until 1609, when King Philip III expelled all the Moors from Spain.

Thankfully, Ojén has enjoyed a more peaceful history since then.

In 1772, the British chronicler Francis Carter, on a trip around Andalucia, described Ojén as "a town of affable, simple people, who do not know tea and coffee, but enjoy goat's milk in their clay cups.

In 1906 the Marquis of Larios built the Juanar Palace as a hunting refuge, where King Alfonso XIII was once invited. The Juanar Palace was turned into a National Parador (state run hotel) in 1965. French leader Charles de Gaulle sought out the peace and quiet of the area to write his memoirs in 1968.

The greatly improved road from Marbella to Ojén, and then onwards to the Guadalhorce valley, had opened up the village both as a tourist destination as well as a permanent home for those looking to enjoy the easier pace of country living, but with all that Marbella has to offer within easy reach. Marbella's main shopping and leisure centre, La Canada, is just a few minutes' drive away and the road links onto the toll motorway, meaning that Malaga, with its international airport, can be reached in under 30 minutes. These seamless infrastructure links have made Ojén an attractive location for several contemporary, luxury developments and individual villas on the outskirts of the village.

The village itself, however, has been unaffected by these changes and life still appears to continue at the same unhurried pace that it has done for centuries. Now a popular tourist destination - with several viewing points just off the main road that provide wonderful photo opportunities of Ojén – the Mill Museum, which allows you a glimpse of the centuries old process of refining olive oil – Ojén's liquid gold – is just one of the attractions. A visit to Ojén's main church and the caves that surround the village are also popular.

For those who prefer their visit to be a little more lively, Ojén boasts a busy cultural programme throughout the year, including its feria and Semana Santa processions. The Castillo del Cante de Ojén Festival, held every August, is one of the most important and well attended Flamenco festivals in the region. And if you really want to let your hair down, check out the OJEANDO Festival, where leading indie, pop and rock bands take over Ojén for a weekend of musical hedonism each July!