

Moraga Magic

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Spanish Tit-Bits



Think “Marbella Beach Party” and images probably spring to mind of champagne spraying celebrations in a swish beach club; scantily clad girls dancing around the pool to a thumping bass line and more Premiership footballers than a referee can wave a red card at.

There is, however, a more traditional and thankfully much more relaxed beach party. The ‘Moraga’ is an Andalusian night-time barbeque unique to Málaga province. What makes a moraga extra special, apart from getting together with good friends as the sun dips below the Mediterranean horizon, is the way that the food is cooked. Rather than dragging a barbeque onto the beach (spoiler alert. You are not allowed to), moragas involve cooking with charcoal on colourful containers already in place, often created from old fishing boats.

The boats are filled with sand and covered in coals and, when hot enough, the first speciality of the evening is prepared. Normally this will be sardines cooked ‘espeto’ (on a stick), and a tempting array of other types of marinated fish, meat and vegetables then follows, all washed down with a few beers or tinto de verano.

Just for once, the history behind this particular celebration does not involve the Romans, Visigoths or Moors – although I have a sneaking suspicion that the Romans, with their love of a good time, must have held beach parties at some stage.

The modern moraga dates back to the 19th century, when fishermen's nets would be thrown into the shallows and the fishermen, their friends and families whatever was caught. At the end of the day, the catch would be cooked on a small wood fire by the sea, and the food preparation and cooking would be accompanied by singing, dancing and guitar playing. The moraga was even the subject of painting of the same name by mid 19th century Malaga artist Horacio Lengo, although to be honest the assembled children in the aforementioned artwork don't seem to be particularly enjoying themselves.

Take an evening stroll along the beachfront paseo and you are almost certain to see families or groups of friends enjoying moragas, with the enticing smell of sardines roasting over burning coals wafting over. If you are tempted to organise your own moraga, there are a few requirements that you should bear in mind.

Firstly, you cannot just turn up to the beach and start cooking. Marbella Town Hall has 56 designated moraga grills for use between June 1 and October 15. There are 33 on El Cable beach in Marbella (including two for people with reduced mobility – PMR), three on Playa del Rodeito in Nueva Andalucía, 17 on San Pedro Alcántara Beach (2 for PMR) and three on La Víbora Beach in Las Chapas. The operating hours are from 8pm-1am, and the moraga must be requested at least three days before the event.

You can find more information on how to book on the Marbella Town Hall website, but among the do's and don'ts are regulations on the size of gathering (30 people maximum), and a ban on most portable music systems. The idea behind the moraga is to enjoy the lapping sound of the waves as you eat – not Spanish pop at full blast!

Why not try to organise a moraga with a group of friends this summer? As you watch the sun set on another perfect Mediterranean day, take a sip of your drink and savour the smell of grilled sardines, you will once again congratulate yourself for [moving to Marbella!](#)