



Rincon De Embrujó (Corner Of Enchantment)

Taken from an article written by Ric Polansky, writer and raconteur

Enchanted? Bewitched? Mystical? No one has yet been able to explain the hypnotic and magical sensation that one experiences while visiting the hilltop village of Mojacar, and the "spell" is attested to by residents and tourists alike. Everywhere one goes in the town you see replicas of the local totem: The INDALO. This man-image symbol of a man holding a rainbow has survived from prehistoric times. Found only 100 years ago in northern provincial mountain caves, it was adopted by the village of Mojacar as its talisman for good fortune. Initially worn by only the women of the town to ward off the evil eye of the passing infidel tourist, it has become such a popular charm that it is now painted on almost every local building. One usually never leaves without purchasing at least one as a gift - for Indalos are special, they can only be given. Custom dictates that an Indalo is never worn unless received from a friend. Indalos are good reminders of Mojacar's prehistoric past and hopeful future.

BEWITCHED: I wish that I could claim that I was the one that unveiled the delights of Mojacar to the European tourist world. But how can one discover a place that has already been in existence for centuries? In fact, Mojacar as a village has been "here" for a long time. The first metal arrowheads found in civilised Europe came from Mojacar, and one of Europe's oldest civilizations, the Argars, known for their beer and symmetrically designed ceramics, were in Mojacar some 3000 years ago. Gerald Brenan, the English author of "South From Grenada" claims that the people that built Stonehenge on the English Salisbury plain were migrants from the original Almerian culture.

FANTASY: Modern day interest in the village stems from the many recent articles and a book published by a Frenchman in 1994 that unequivocally states that Mojacar was the birthplace of a fantasy maker: the legendary Walt Disney. The Town Hall agrees. Mojacar's claim is simple: born Jose Guirao in 1901, the fatherless son of a local villager escaped poverty and sailed from Garrucha on an iron-ore ship to the dream land of California where his mother worked as a domestic and eventually married her rancher employer who then adopted the lad and changed his name to Disney. The Disney people haven't yet come up with a birth certificate to authenticate his supposed birth in Chicago but to Mojacar's favour, they not only have one but plenty of "testigos" that still remember his return home to the village many years ago.

In the nearby harbour village of Garrucha, some 5 kms from Mojacar, one can rent a boat and view the "pock marked hills" of neighbouring Villaricos. There, more Phoenician slaves laboured digging the silver ore than those that built the great pyramid of Cheops, in Egypt. It was, in fact, these rich mineral deposits that first attracted the Moors from Africa to our area in 400 AD. Their religious centre being our regional capital - Almeria: "mirror of the sea". Still today on the castle walls of the "Alcazaba" is enscrolled the history of that forgotten era: "when Almeria was Almeria ... Granada was it's garden".

TRANSCENDENTAL: When the "Catholic Kings" initiated the reconquest of Spain from Islam they could not bring aldea of Mojacar into their religious subjugation. The village, perched high atop a hill with its own interior water supply proved unconquerable. Therefore the "Reyes Catolicos" very cleverly signed a truce allowing the "Ancient and Noble People of Mojacar to keep their Moorish customs in return for their strict allegiance to the Spanish crown." This inscription can still be seen today at the local fountain in Mojacar, dated 1488.

NATURAL: That enchanted lure of gold sought by so many conquistadors in far off lands was already here in the radiant embrace of our Iberian sun that blesses this region of Andalucia 323 days per year! In a corner of our Province lies the only desert in all of Europe. It was this notoriety that enticed the making of such films as "Lawrence of Arabia", "Patton", Orson Welles "Treasure Island", and of course those many "Paella Westerns" that brought Clint Eastwood instant fame.

Modern day Mojacar was "almost discovered" some 40 years ago thanks to the efforts of one Don Enrique Arias, a Columbian concert pianist. While driving thru "then unknown Spain" he chanced upon our unique mountain village and immediately envisioned its great potential and unique qualities. A pact was immediately formed between the Mayor, Don Jacinto Alarcon, and Enrique, that if Enrique was given the land and ruin of the highest building on the derelict hill to remodel into a new house, Sr Arias would reciprocate by showing the locals how to promote tourism. What wonderment Sr. Arias spoke, of bringing strangers once again to what was then a desolate and abandoned town. Growth and prosperity became a dream. In 1958, Enrique placed small adverts at his expense in all the major international newspapers of that era telling of Mojacar. Investors were invited to come here, select a house and receive FREE title to the property once it had been renovated. Naturally, interest abounded. Famous and well-read people came from the far corners of the Earth to view, select and initiate Mojacar's instant success story. These celebrities brought others. Men of position and high rank formed queues to be next to each other. Ambassadors started a street of their own with governors living nearby. Mojacar's fame spread and the village grew and in less than four years almost all the houses were taken up by a multitude of varying nationalities and professions; no one was too strange for Mojacar nor too foolish to refuse the free property. Writers and story tellers, upbeat musicians and downbeat poets brought prosperity and notoriety to the abandoned town. Then the crisis came; in a poor village unaccustomed to the benefits of tourism many of the locals refused to give up their pigs which they corralled by custom in their cellars. The new resident-foreigners objected to the pigs on hygienic grounds and the "very idea of keeping pigs next to our house!" But the locals were just as stubborn. Their inherent rights of local dominion had been infringed upon by tourists. It was the first Mexican standoff in Spain, no one flinched or blinked an eye; not a muscle twinged nor a moustache tweaked; nobody moved an inch (unless it was to scratch). Finally, in his infinite wisdom the local mayor called a caucus and allowed the foreigners to suggest the solution. Contrary to those Franconian times, and in the European spirit, the small minority opted for a democratic vote. It was taken: and the pigs won!

WORLDLY: Coincidentally, the first developer arrived in Mojacar just at this time, 1964. Instantly recognizing the untapped natural development potential, he avoided the town's argument and started building along the derelict beach. He was my brother, and almost all of those initial beach clients were those same chagrined immigrants from the village above, reinvesting in this same place. Now many years later, Mojacar Playa has become almost a "cult escape route" for the discerning tourist that wants more of the real Spain, and less of the concrete jungles. Mojacar is a breath of fresh air. Where else can one sit on ones rooftop terrace during a summer's night and read under the natural light of the moon and stars, or stroll down the narrow cobblestone mazed streets, each lined with the many bars and boutiques that flourish during our nine month summer. In any one of them, you may meet a film star or future starlet or one of the many fine practicing artists, poets or photographers OR become totally confused with the myriad of pretenders or street artists. The combination of eccentric types makes the journey worth the trip. One simply cannot help but feel that all is only a veil that shrouds and momentarily deludes each passer-by.

MAGICAL: Whatever adventure one craves it can be found in Mojacar. For the more eccentric Mojacar abounds in tennis courts, health clubs, jogging or aerobic clubs, and remember skiing is just two and a half hours away in nearby Granada. The beaches yield an infinite number of activities. They too are special, awarded the EEC's special blue flag for ecology and cleanliness. Of course there is also water skiing, jet skiing, wind surfing or just plain sunbathing. Horse trekking in the mountains is a delight, or just taking a stroll by yourself and enjoying nature at it's natural best. Bird watchers from around the world come here to see seven different African species that can only be viewed in this province. Mojacar is also becoming a Mecca for golf, within a 10km radius four courses are now available offering a choice of sea facing, mountain setting, or highly challenging championship courses. Two major lawn Bowling centres already exist with players coming 12 months a year to compete. You can jump in a car and view Almeria province, acclaimed as the California of Europe, because of the special climate and the innovative practice of planting under plastic greenhouses. Almeria has three tomato and orange crops per year. Why not visit Mini Hollywood and any one of the four Western sets: get your photo taken with your head in the noose or at the wild west bar. Every visitor to Mojacar is made to feel welcome. A new tourist office has been opened as part of the town hall with interpreters available to aid enquiries. Some writers have suggested that we are an ancient and mystical people, but I know that our heritage belongs to that enchantment that allows the historical past to mingle with these modern times, which of course makes for a better undiscovered tomorrow.

Mojacar's fame has become so well known that the government has declared Mojacar a place of National Touristic Importance and it now appears on all government maps in blue, as a city of special attraction for Spain. Of course not only for it's ancient heritage but for the fact that no building can be more than two stories in height.

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