

A gastronomic journey through time

By Dee McMath

RESTAURANTE Pueblo López is a hidden treasure worth finding. The first time you come upon the picturesque little cobbled square with its typical Andalusian white-washed arches and central fountain, all shaded by an ancient *platanos oriental* tree, you would be forgiven for thinking that you had strayed miles off the beaten track – or even been transported back in time. Surprisingly, this small corner of Eden is not more than two minutes walk from Fuengirola train station.

The restaurant has enjoyed a fruitful journey through several decades, as the Blom family (who have owned and run it for over a quarter of a century) will happily testify. Husband and wife team Pim (Dutch) and Kim (Swedish) have now embarked on a well-earned retirement from running this bijoux business for so many years, and have happily handed over to daughter Gabriella, who is already firmly following in her parents' footsteps up the culinary ladder to continued success. The namesake of the restaurant is the enchanting little Andalusian "village" of Pueblo López itself. The brainchild of a far-seeing Englishman in the 1960s, Pueblo López is an amazingly tranquil oasis in the midst of the now-thriving, modern-day metropolis that Fuengirola has become. The Pueblo is a privileged enclave and this gem of a restaurant is a favourite venue for many long-standing diners and residents, who never tire of coming back time and again.

Specialities on the wide-ranging yet simple menu include a famously tender fillet steak in an exquisite pepper sauce garnished with seasonal vegetables or accompanied by a crisp succulent salad. The fresh salmon served in a light, aromatic dill sauce is also a favourite dish in high demand.

Whether you choose from the *menu del día* (at just €13.50) or from *à la carte* (average cost per head around €25) the quality is superb and the price is surprisingly affordable for the quality of food and level of service. There is also an excellent wine list from which to select a fine vintage to accompany your favourite dish.

Finally, the home-made deserts are worth giving in to; especially the mouth-watering cheesecake, the irresistible chocolate mouse or the enormously popular Dame Blanche (involving just the right proportions of ice cream, Grand Marnier, chocolate sauce and cream – a truly tantalising blend of flavours).

The overall dining experience is simply enchanting, with the little tables scattered around the courtyard in summer or inside the cosy restaurant in winter – the ideal setting for a group celebration or a romantic dinner. The combination of tasteful surroundings, excellent cuisine and welcoming atmosphere has attracted the rich and famous from the outset.

At the height of his acting career, iconic film star and notorious sex symbol Omar Sharif famously frequented the restaurant after playing a few games of backgammon with his friend, Formula One racing star of his day, James Hunt. Actor Donald Pleasance, who always enjoyed the good food and genuine friendly service, was another regular diner in this delightful little corner of tranquillity. Other clients of that golden era also included singer Billy Fury, legendary tennis star Lew Hoad and even former UK Prime Minister Edward Heath.

Today's clientele is equally as interesting, with familiar faces often in evidence. The superior cuisine, friendly service and delightful setting make this gem impossible to forget. Once you have found Restaurante Pueblo López, you will doubtless want to return.

Restaurante Pueblo López
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(bookings recommended)
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