

VILLA MAYA: *THE JEWEL IN MIJAS'S CROWN*

DRIVING 20-MINUTES FROM MALAGA AIRPORT, AS SLOWLY AS POSSIBLE TO TAKE IN EVERY SHIMMERING SECOND OF THE BREATH-TAKING MEDITERRANEAN BACKDROP, I FELT THE STRESSES OF EVERYDAY LIFE FALL AWAY WITH EVERY FOOT WE CLIMBED TOWARDS VILLA MAYA. ALTHOUGH I KNEW THE SIX-BEDROOM VILLA PROMISED A MODERN, SUPER-LUXURIOUS EXPERIENCE, WHAT I HADN'T EXPECTED WAS TO BE COMPLETELY BLOWN AWAY. NOT JUST BY THE AWE-INSPIRING LOCATION AND THE IMPECCABLE INTERIOR DESIGN, BUT BY THE PALPABLE RELAXATION THAT ENVELOPS YOU AS SOON AS YOU WALK THROUGH THE GATE AND CONTINUES TO SOOTHE YOUR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING UNTIL THE MOMENT YOU LEAVE. **BY POLLY HUMPHRIS**



Accessed via a private gate and stone steps that lead you down a garden path towards the front door, the first thing you notice is the beautiful banana trees that line the panoramic terrace and set the scene for the villa's Southeast-Asian style. Immediately, there is an authentic and calming sense of nature, which continues throughout the property in the high-end natural materials and earthy tones the owners have thoughtfully chosen in their design. A symphony of white, cream, chestnut, taupe and walnut, rich in real wood and with pops of colour added by fascinating photography, animal print and quirky objet d'art, the interior is heavenly – and incredibly stylish.

That said, there is no air of pretension at Villa Maya. Although the interior is impactful from the outset, the entire experience here has been designed as a welcoming home-away-from-home. Cleverly, every effort has been made for both adults and children to truly relax – the former made possible in part by a friendly and extremely talented housekeeper who goes above and beyond to keep the villa spotlessly clean and organised while being utterly unintrusive, and the latter by the 10-metre heated swimming pool. Before we knew it, all three kids – still wide-eyed from realising they each had their own en-suite bedroom and wall-mounted digital TV – had their swimmers on and were making the most of the amazing array of inflatables and pool games supplied.

Very much about inside-outside living, the property itself is based over three levels with three huge bedrooms on both the pool and lower level – all six ensuite – and an opulent, very comfortable living/dining area at the top. Double doors slide open across the entire living area, so you can simply step – cocktail in hand – out onto the expansive terrace and survey the endless views across the Sierra de Mijas mountains and the sparkling Mediterranean Sea.



The whole setup flows so effortlessly that pessimists might presume this is a case of style over substance, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Custom-designed and handmade in collaboration with Sybartum, a 35-year established family run business who work directly with furniture artisans who have a deep knowledge of wood and handcrafted wood furniture, the décor is not only exceptional in that it is unique, instantly putting guests in mind of a Balinese retreat, but it's also ecologically sustainable and made from elements exclusively available only in nature. Every effort has been made to ensure comfort and usability, from the giant ceramic pots that nurture the banana trees to the mid-level jacuzzi, and the cosy daybeds that sit poolside allowing you to lay back and take in the incomparable views.

If you can tear yourself away from the villa, Mijas Pueblo is a charming, very pretty and quintessentially Andalusian mountain town with some great restaurants, quaint shops to browse, fascinating walking tours and a popular line in (very well looked after) donkey taxis. Those seeking adventure will relish the spectacular scenery and fresh air of the nearby Sierra de Mijas where you can hike through a natural balcony of olive groves and native flora to peaks overlooking the Malaga coastline. Alternatively, beach-lovers are also in luck and can head to Playa De Los Alemanes, an unspoilt stretch of golden sand that's ideal for a sunset stroll, or the beach clubs and

crystal blue water of Playa De Los Peligros - both reachable within 15 minutes.

Although we did venture out to explore the local area, the pull of the villa was just too tempting for us and, thanks again to housekeeper, Pilar, and her faultless hospitality, we had every good reason to stay and make the most of our temporary hideaway. Fortunately for the youngest Humphris, we were visiting over her fourth birthday and Pilar asked if we could like 'a little tapas' to celebrate. The little tapas in question turned out to be the best tapas any of us have ever eaten: garlicky gambas pil pil with a smoky paprika kick; classic, creamy ensalada Rusa; soft tortilla with a crispy edge; a tangy cocktail of plump prawns; and buttery scallops served in their shells all followed appetisers made with anchovy, Parma ham, olives and sweet juicy tomatoes. Every dish was so fresh it sang with flavour; words can't really do it justice, so I advise you coincide a trip here with a celebration and devour Pilar's unforgettable food.

Tearing ourselves away from the outdoor dining area (that had been especially decorated for the occasion), and the dreamy evening views across Mijas which blend seamlessly with the villa's classy night-time light scheme, it was no hardship to retire to the tranquillity of our elegant bedrooms. A masterclass in rest and relaxation, the super-king

beds are dressed in silky soft bedding, which perfectly complements the Southeast-Asian-inspired furnishings handmade from a selection of natural wood in a soothing muted palette.

Lighting up the Mijas Hills on Spain's southeastern coast, Villa Maya is a sophisticated sanctuary that shines like a priceless jewel above the beautiful, whitewashed village of Mijas Pueblo. No request is too much trouble, nothing to make your stay more pleasurable has been overlooked, and the weather here is warm and pleasant all year round with temperatures sitting at a balmy 18-22°C even during the off-peak season between November and March. So much more than a summer holiday, this Spanish escape is a haven of serenity that refreshes and revitalises in equal measure.



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