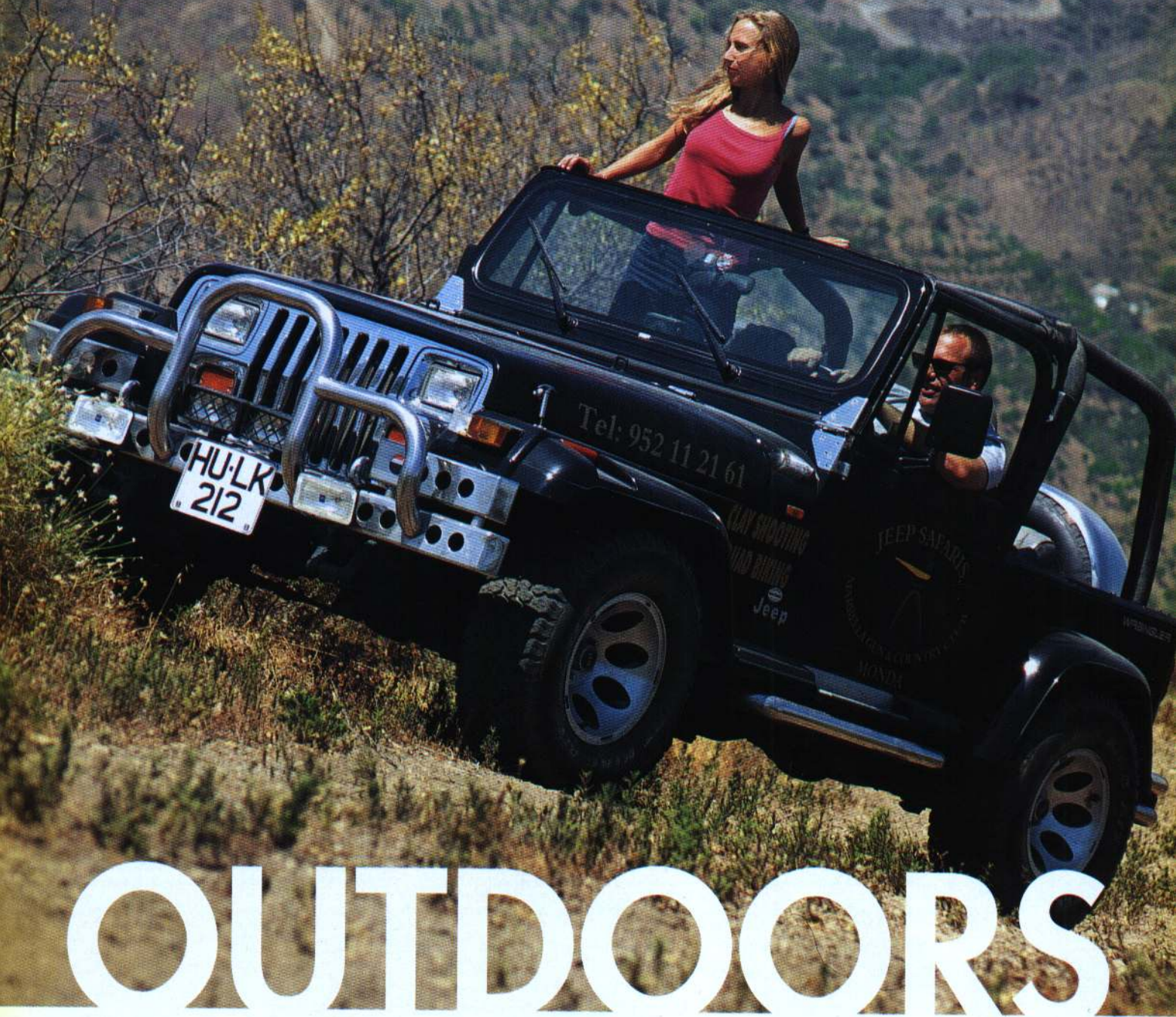


THE GREAT



OUTDOORS

It is refreshing to know that there is more to enjoying life on the Coast than just beaches and bars. *Giles Brown* dons his Timberlands and sets out to quench his thirst for adventure...

Photography: Gary Edwards - Andres Vallejo - Words & Pictures

The Costa del Sol is world renowned for jet set marinas, fabulous nightlife and that 'lazy days on the beach' lifestyle. But there are more leisure options in southern Spain than deciding where to go for a long, relaxed lunch or whether one really should have a second glass of *fino*. For those who want to enjoy the great outdoors, inland from the Coast offers a huge variety of options from abseiling and canoeing to quad-biking and canyoning, all overseen by trained professionals.

One of the most popular companies specialising in outdoor pursuits is Ticket-to-Ride. Established for over four years under the direction of Lars Walker, a former world class kayak competitor, the company offers a wide range of outdoor activities. One of the most popular options is canoeing on the unspoilt Istán lake, just 10 minutes drive from the Coast. When you are paddling gently across the expanse of water, surrounded by beautiful countryside, the only sound being the gentle splash of your paddles, you could be 10 light years away! Ticket-to-Ride is the only company allowed to operate on the Istán lake, and has its own *finca* where participants can enjoy a cooling beer and post-activity BBQ. Planned for the future is the Lagoland centre, which will be the base for Ticket-to-Ride's activities on

the lake, and will be available to host conferences. The company has considerable experience in catering for corporate clients, and has designed tailor-made packages that have included team building and the annual Aqua Festival that even includes Chinese Dragon Boat Racing!

Water also plays an important part in another of the company's most popular activities - canyoning. Starting out at the natural rock pools just below the mountain village of Benahavis, an area better known for gastronomic excess than athletic prowess, Lars and his team lead small groups down the Rio Guadalmina. If this all sounds like a pleasant stroll along the riverbank, think again. Participants are issued with hard hats and safety harnesses, and the first part of the journey begins with a three metre leap into the pools below! This is followed by rock climbing and abseiling stages, all under the most stringent safety precautions. The group then makes its way down the valley through a series of rock pools, rapids and fast flowing water requiring participants to wade, and in some cases swim, through certain sections. Needless to say, it's best to wear clothes that you don't mind getting wet! The journey finishes with an exhilarating 50-metre rope slide over the river.



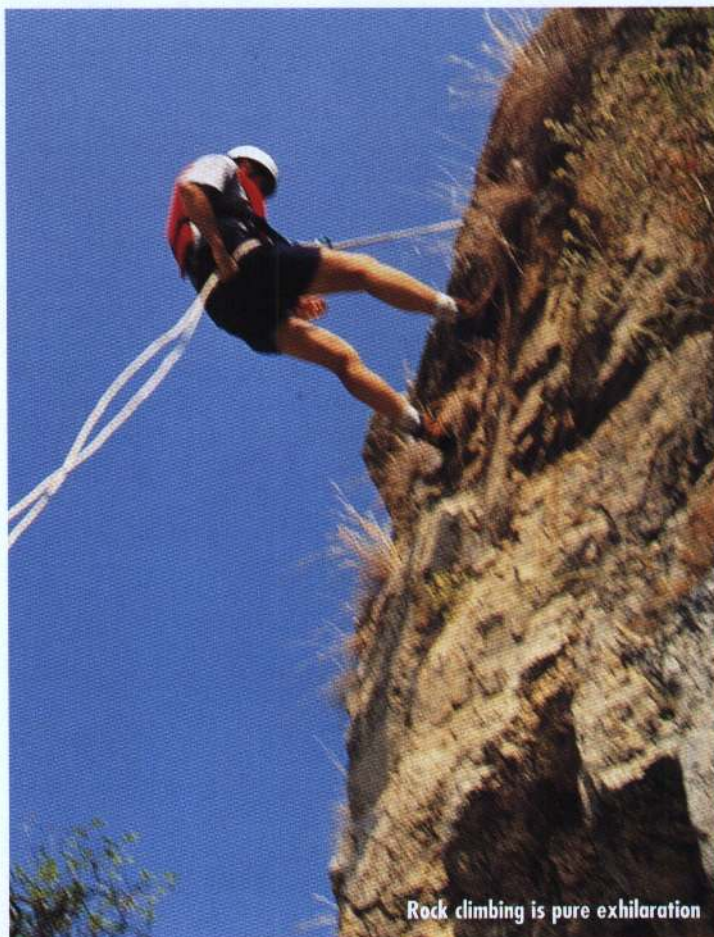
Try canyoning in the rock pools of Benahavis



Hit the Road

If getting your feet wet isn't your thing, there are several less damp activities that the intrepid explorer can enjoy. With miles of mountain track running throughout the countryside, safaris, either on four-wheeled quad-bikes, or by Land Rover and Jeep have proved extremely popular. The more energetic can get even closer to nature via mountain bike rides, although you'll be more interested in trying to stay in your saddle to have much time to appreciate the scenery! By far the most popular method is Jeep safari, where you can leave the business of sticking to the road to your experienced driver and take in the amazing countryside around you. Jeep safaris are particularly popular among older clientele.

One of the best known firms is Monte Aventura. The trips take place in the beautiful Parque Natural Sierra de los Nieves, an area described as a biosphere (protected area of outstanding natural beauty) by UNESCO. The company is extremely environmentally aware, keeping strictly to predetermined paths that allow passengers to enjoy the huge variety of flora and fauna in this natural paradise - over 4,000 species of plants and 420 types of animal. There are several tours to choose from, including the popular 'White Villages' and 'Sierra de las Nieves' excursions, and all include a stop for lunch in an Andalusian venta. Participants return from their trip, not only having had an exciting off-road experience, but also with a greater understanding and respect for the fascinating environment of the region.



Rock climbing is pure exhilaration



"Quadrophenia" the latest cross country craze

For those wanting to try a variety of activities but not stray far from the comforts of a fine restaurant and well-stocked bar, then the Marbella Gun & Country Club in Monda may be the answer. Now under new management, the Club has been completely renovated. A superb new restaurant, bar and lounge lead onto a terrace, complete with swimming pool, that enjoys fantastic views over the surrounding countryside. Long regarded as southern Spain's premier gun club, the club offers a variety of clay shooting as well as an air rifle range. In addition to this, however, the Marbella Gun and Country Club also has a challenging 4x4 off-road course and quad-bikes for both adults and children. And for people who find dinner at the restaurant too tempting, there will soon be log cabins available in the grounds for cosy country stays.

If, however, all you and your partner want to do is spend a day on the beach, but your delightful offspring are proving a little too hyperactive to handle, then perhaps Ticket-to-Ride's adventure course for children at the Hotel Don Miguel may be the answer to your prayers. With rope slides, swing bridges and climbing walls, Lars should ensure that the kids come home happy and exhausted! And if the world under the seas holds fascination, scuba diving centres offer official training courses to make the most of the underwater scenery.

With all of these options available, there's much more to enjoy on the Coast than just topping up your tan! ♡



Mountain biking for off road fitness and adventure

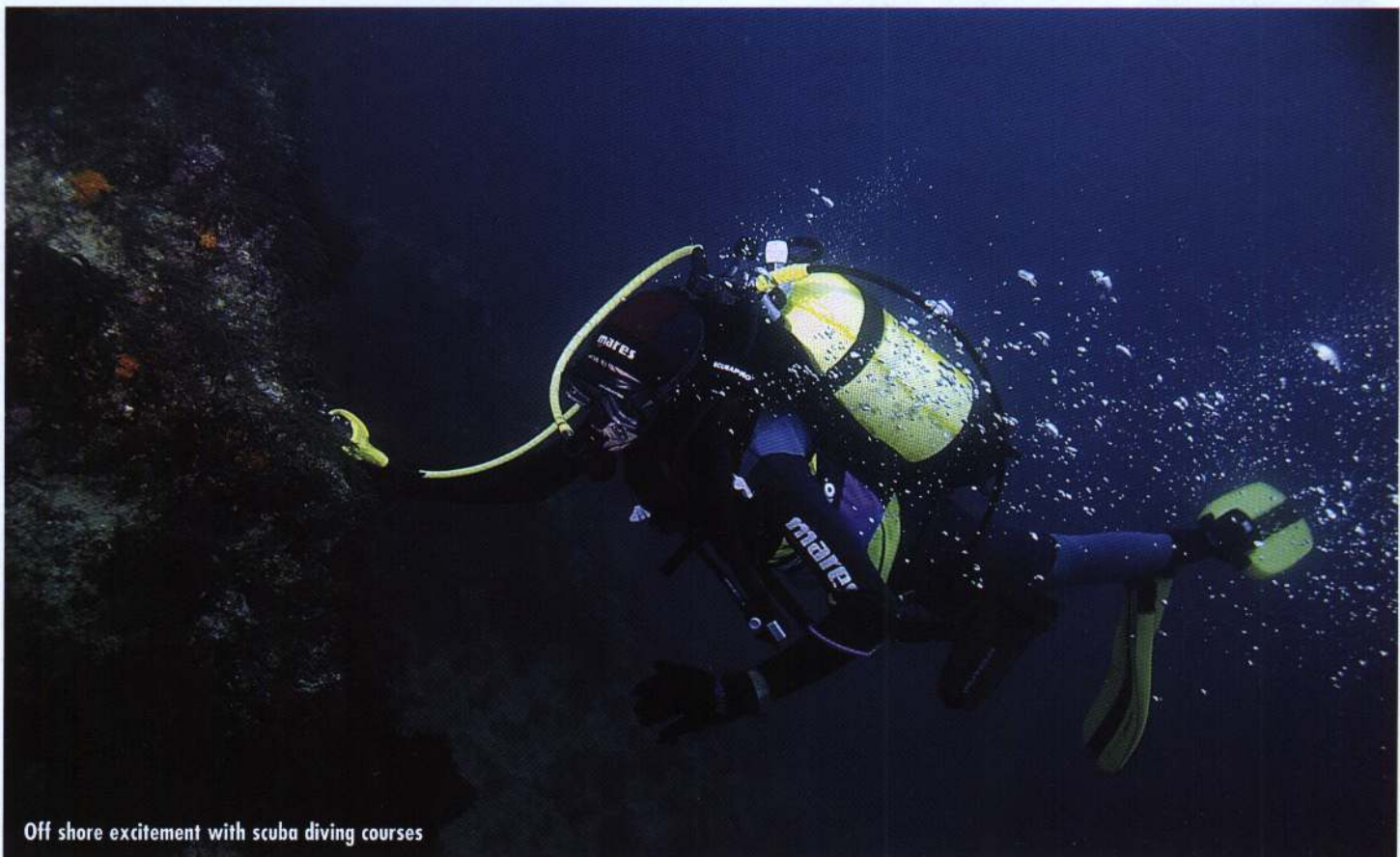
Contacts for Adventure:

Ticket to Ride
Tel: 952 905 082
www. Spain4Fun.com

Monte Aventura
Tel: 952 881 519
monteaventura@jet.es

Marbella Gun & Country Club
Monda
Tel: 952 112 161

Diving Marbella
Puerto Deportivo
Tel: 952 902 304



Off shore excitement with scuba diving courses