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GO WITH THE FLOW

From rising visitor numbers to island-wide regeneration, Mauritius is on a high as it prepares to celebrate 50 years of independence

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“A meal out is still maybe half what you’d pay in Italy and a similar hotel a fraction of the cost it would be in France and Italy.”

There is also a growing focus on Spain as a cultural destination, says Millar. “In the past it lost out to France and Italy; cultural travellers thought of it as bucket and spade holidays but there are impressive art galleries, opera and music.”

He says Malaga’s rise is particularly notable. “People may think of it as a gateway to the beach resorts but over the last few years it’s been really investing... I think it’s the fastest growing cultural destination in Europe,” adds Millar.

Highlights include the Guggenheim Museum, the only Guggenheim outside Paris and the Hermitage Museum of St Petersburg’s Hermitage Museum – the recently opened Gran Hotel Miramar in Malaga, which offers beautiful UK regional flights and a spa.

Madrid, also known for its architecture, is to gain Spain’s first Michelin star, but not until 2019. Meanwhile, Mandarin Oriental is behind a €90 million renovation of the Hotel Ritz Madrid this year, including a new spa, restaurants and bars.

Barcelona announced a one-year moratorium on new hotel licences in 2019 in an effort to keep tourism at sustainable levels. But since its repeal, the hotel sector is flourishing with openings, such as headline-grabber Soho House, with its showy rooftop pool drawing high-end attention the city’s way. The Almanac brand will launch its first luxury property in Barcelona later this year – a 91-room hotel near Paseo de Gracia featuring a rooftop bar and concierge app – and Marriott’s cool Edition brand will be adding a 100-room hotel this year.

Place for all seasons

Costa Brava has hired London-based marketing agency Lotus to help push its year-round golf appeal. Complementing this drive for longer seasonal appeal, it’s worth noting that the region is home to Spain’s highest concentration of Michelin-starred restaurants, all helping give reasons to extend the season and not just seek the sun in the busy summer high season.

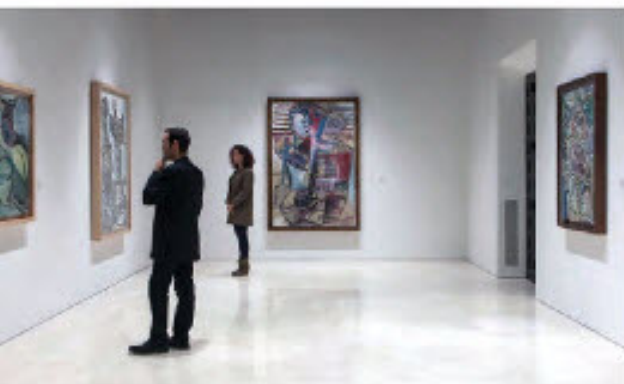


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