

## WHERE TO STAY



### INSIDERS' FAVOURITE

## HACIENDA DE SAN RAFAEL

A beloved bolthole of some of the world's most clued-in travellers, exactly half way between Seville and Jerez but seemingly in the middle of nowhere, this was the family farmstead of Kuky Mora-Figueroa, who inherited it in a dilapidated state 25 years ago and created a wonderfully playful pile. She is that tantalising mix of glamour and eccentricity, a former wild child from one of Andalucía's most powerful families who dated bullfighters and flamenco singers, and took off to India long before the hippy trail even got started. The house, a whimsy of cobbled courtyards and gardens with bougainvillea, lavender and quinces, is stuffed with her curious art works. There are portraits of her beloved staff smiling down from the walls in the sitting room, which leads onto a horseshoe-shaped terrace overlooking fields of cotton. The best bedrooms are in three little *chozas* – the traditional straw-thatched cottages of the region – with kitchens for fixing drinks, beamed two-storey living rooms and a shared swimming pool. Stay in for dinner; chef Isabel is a whizz at cooking up robust dishes such as pumpkin risotto and venison stew. And pay no heed to the pixie in a straw hat flitting through the olive groves. That'll be Mora-Figueroa, making sure all is right in her world. +34 954 227 116; [haciendadesanrafael.com](http://haciendadesanrafael.com). Doubles from about £220

### FAMILY FUN

## CASA DEL RIO

This elegant, five-bedroom villa is on the same private estate as Torre de Tramores (see page 49). Surrounded by 600 hectares of unruly woodland bordered by rocky streams, it's a contemporary take on a classic *cortijo* with whitewashed walls and teal trim, exposed beams and terracotta-tiled floors brightened by treasures from the owner's travels: reed and wool Tuareg rugs, crisp blue-and-white Mallorcan *roba de llengües* textiles and eye-catching headboards made from *suzanis* (embroidered fabrics from the Stans). Cricket on the big lawn is a summer-afternoon institution, while the children snatch terrapins or water snakes out of the river. Everything is recorded in a guest book that is shuttled between both properties and makes riveting reading. When you tire of playing, there's the bonus of a year-round heated pool and organic kitchen gardens. And with lusty country feasts of local fish, game and paella made by Maria the cook, you won't go hungry. Breakfast (of freshly laid eggs) and lunch are included in the fee, but ingredients – vegetables and fruit – can be bought from the estate. It's also worth strolling into Benahavís, known as the gastronomic hub of the Costa del Sol, to eat at Los Abanicos restaurant; try the spoon-tender *cochinillo asado* (roast suckling pig) with crackling as brittle as candy. +44 20 7351 6384; [sjvillas.co.uk](http://sjvillas.co.uk). Whole property from about £4,600 per week

