

The Sunday Times **travel**

A WORLD OF EXPERIENCE



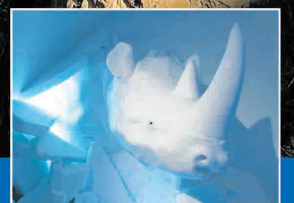
**COST OF HEALTH &
BEAUTY CRISIS?**

NOT IN BALI

The
world's
most

DANGEROUS PATH

ICE HOTEL'S 35TH YEAR (& VERY A COLD RHINO!)





An old bridge is one of the remnants of industrial activity in Desfiladero de los Gaitanes (Gaitanes Gorge) which can be seen while walking the Caminito del Rey. Pictures: Suzanne Morphet

Spain's Caminito del Rey tests phobias and thrills all at once

SUZANNE MORPHET walks a cultural trail — these days firmly attached to a mountain side

Wait guys, is someone here afraid of heights?" asks our hiking guide, Mercedes.

A couple of dozen of us have gathered at the trail head that leads to a suspended walkway high above Spain's Guadalhorce River.

"Don't worry," she says with a

big smile, "you've come to the right place to get over your phobia completely."

Mercedes is joking, of course, as no one suffering from acrophobia would want to walk the Caminito del Rey — the King's Little Pathway — which is not "little" in anything but name.

In fact, it was once considered the most dangerous path in the world. At least a dozen people are said to have fallen to their deaths from the original steel and cement walkway that was built to assist workers on a hydroelectric project.

Constructed between 1901 and 1905, it began to rot and fall apart after 1970, when it was no longer maintained. Yet, the natural canyon it passes through — Desfiladero de los Gaitanes (Gaitanes Gorge) — is spectacular.

The mountains on either side of the canyon are so close, their near-vertical rock walls almost touch.

Embedded in those limestone and dolomite walls are fossils from millions of years ago when this was an ancient sea. Mountain goats inhabit the upper reaches and, overhead, vultures soar on thermal winds looking for their next meal.

It's so appealing that even when the old walkway was officially closed in the 1980s because it was too dangerous, people would not stay away, especially thrillseekers with climbing apparatus.

In 2014, the regional government of Malaga smartly decided to rebuild the walkway,



Visitors to the Caminito del Rey pass many metres of water channels used in the hydroelectric project.

making it safe for visitors to enjoy, while preserving its cultural heritage and bringing in welcome revenue. The new, award-winning Caminito del Rey opened in 2015 and now attracts about 1000 people per day, year round.

Before reaching the elevated walkway, we follow a wide trail through an attractive forest of Aleppo pine trees and sandstone cliffs. Natural erosion over the eons created many caves in the sandstone, and some once housed workers and their families. Mercedes points out one in particular: "It is said that even children were born inside this cave."

At the Caminito's control cabin (the number of people allowed at one time is strictly regulated), Mercedes hands us each a helmet

and instructs us to keep it on for the remainder of the four-hour hike. The new walkway — 3km long, barely a metre wide and up to 100m above the river — is bolted securely to the mountain side but there's always the danger of rock falling from overhead.

It's not just the natural beauty of the canyon and mountains that brings visitors here, but also the industrial heritage from the 19th and 20th centuries. Providing Malaga with hydroelectricity is what led initially to the building of the Caminito. A walkway through the gorge was necessary for workers and their pack animals. One of the oldest power stations in Spain is still here, as well as two dams, hundreds of metres of water tunnels, bridges and an aqueduct.

When the second, much bigger dam opened in 1921, King Alfonso XIII arrived for the official grand opening and walked some of the path. From then on, it was called the Caminito del Rey. But the hydro project might never have happened had a train track not been laid decades before, providing access for development.

In the mid-1800s, Malaga urgently needed coal from a mine in Cordoba to grow its iron and steel industry. But blasting tunnels through these mountains wouldn't be easy.

"It is said that all the gunpowder made in Spain was needed," Mercedes tells us as we admire the cut-out for a tunnel directly across from where we're standing.

But in less than six years and over a distance of 192km, 17 tunnels, eight viaducts and 19



One of the viaducts — part of the Caminito del Rey.



bridges were built, many right here in Gaitanes Gorge.

It was an unprecedented milestone for Spain and celebrated by Queen Isabella II who rode the inaugural train from Cordoba to Malaga in 1866. Today, a high speed train connects those cities on a newer track, while this old route serves passengers going between Seville and Malaga.

In those early days it must have been quite the ride, crossing iron bridges, going through tunnels, then emerging into sudden daylight with a yawning canyon at your side. The steam trains would screech on one long bridge and “spread panic among the passengers”, reads the inscription under a black and white photo.

Walking the original cement path must have also taken some nerve too, given the limited technology of the day. We see remnants of it a metre or so below the new trail, iron clamps still holding what’s left of it to the rock face.

Elements of the new path might also elicit fear, especially a glass balcony — where you can peer straight down — and the rather springy hanging bridge — where you cross the gorge on a narrow perforated platform.

But mostly, I feel awe and wonder. The awe of being in a place so big and beautiful that even substantive man-made structures look laughably small and insignificant.



This narrow section of the Gaitanes Gorge shows how close the Caminito del Rey is to a railway viaduct on the opposite side.

Crossing the hanging bridge near the end of the Caminito del Rey.



fact file

- Walking the Caminito del Rey requires a ticket, which you can buy through the official website for €10pp (\$16.70). An official guided visit costs €18pp. Tickets sell out weeks in advance. caminitodelrey.info/en
- Private companies including Aloratur sell a variety of tours, some with transportation from Malaga. aloratur.com
- You can also reach the Caminito by train from Malaga. Check the RENFE timetables.



Botox can be found for half the price in Bali. Pictures: Getty

Bali's cosmetic and medical tourism boom

DAVE SMITH saves a fortune on treatments

For decades, Australians have flocked to Bali for inexpensive holidays, where a bowl of nasi goreng, Indonesia's famous fried rice, sells for as little as a dollar and pool villas with staff start at only \$100 per night.

But with the cost-of-living crisis intensifying in Australia, more and more tourists are capitalising on their holidays in Bali by booking health and beauty treatments that can cost a fraction of what they cost back home.

On a recent trip to Bali, I investigated. Here's a rundown on the service, the results and how much we saved.

HAIRCUT

I've been going to the same daggy old barber shop in Australia for as long as I can remember.

They do a good job but I can't book in advance; I have to wait in line on broken old couches for half an hour like everyone else. And the price keeps going up; now it's \$28. If I went to a trendier place it could cost double.

In Bali, some barber shops do men's cuts for as little as \$2, though they'll leave you looking like Milton the Monster, something I know from experience.

But I got a sharp haircut at the Head Most Barber Shop in Seminyak, a tourist precinct. There were about 10 barbers on duty so I didn't have to wait. I walked out of there half an hour later sporting the same hairstyle



Hair treatments in Bali are much cheaper than in Australia.

as Daniel Craig's James Bond. It cost \$9.

My girlfriend got her hair done at Parlour Me Beauty Salon in Jimbaran, a beach town south of the airport.

“The fit-out was daggy, like something out of the 80s,” she recalls. “But it was spotless and the service was excellent.”

“I asked for face-framing layers and got a beautiful head massage, cut, colour and blow, all for \$40.”

“The same thing costs me \$215 at the salon in the shopping centre near our home in Sydney, but the service and attention to detail I got in Bali was on par with a more expensive salon I visit once a year when I want to splurge. You can't walk out of there without spending \$400.”

• **Cost in Australia:** \$400 for women, \$28 for men. **Cost in Bali:** \$40 for women, \$9 for men. **Savings:** \$360 for women, \$19 for men.

BOTOX

Botox is measured and sold in units equal to 10 per cent of a millilitre.

To treat crow's feet, wrinkles that form around the corners of the eyes, requires five to 15 units per eye. Men generally need more than women because our faces are generally bigger; I need 10 units on each eye to treat my crow's feet.

It works like magic but only lasts three to four months, meaning the cost can easily add up into the thousands per year.

In Australia, the best deal I have found for 20 units of Botox is \$200.

In Bali, I paid half that much at Jade Chen Aesthetics in Canggu, another popular tourist district about an hour's drive north from the airport.

The clinic was modern and clean. The receptionist was all smiles and gave me two options: 20 units of Botox for \$130 or 20 units of Ellitox 100, a South Korean version of Botox that is just as effective, for \$100.

The treatment was administered in a private room by a medical doctor who looked and dressed