

PADELing at the Mar Menor Active Seniors Winter Escape

By Peter Smith

Five years of living the French rural countryside dream in the Limousin turns out not to be so dreamy in winter.

One month of dragging wood inside and shovelling it into the wood-burner after 2 years of COVID isolation, was enough; I looked at my wife and pleaded, “Spain?”

It had been 2 years since we’d discovered the sporting joys of the area of La Manga and, in particular, the game of padel (not to be confused with the water sport).

So, mid-January 2022, off we drove to spend 2 mild winter months amid like-minded, sporty seniors (sadly lacking where we live in central France). I always say, I may be old, but I am not ready to be put out to pasture ...

For many of us, our age only hits home when confronted by the dreaded *mirror*, but to quote author—[Cecelia Ahern](#), “Age is only a number, not a state of mind or a reason for any type of particular behaviour.” Many seniors are more energetic and active than their grandchildren, and this is never more evident than in the La Manga area of Murcia, Spain.

From our very reasonably priced 2-bedroom unit in [La Manga Club](#), due to our two-month stay, it is just a 5-minute drive straight ahead, to the nearest and most social, padel club at the aptly named [Mar de Cristal](#). Mar de Cristal is on the [Mar Menor](#), which is a coastal saltwater lagoon and is the largest lagoon in Spain. I say, aptly named, because the water really does have the colour of blue crystal on a sunny day—gorgeous.



View from Mar de Cristal over the Mar Menor towards the La Manga strip

Two years ago, when we first discovered this area thanks to our Interval Timeshare exchange, I was raring to get into the swing of tennis again, and this I did with great gusto, it being only a short walk from our apartment, the same one we’d rented again in the La Manga Club. Afterwards was always the social coffee/drink get together, and this is where I was first bombarded with, “*you’ve got to come play padel!*” This didn’t make sense. How do you play at rowing a boat? Ok, so let me explain ...

What is Padel?

Padel is an easy to play, social game. It is a form of tennis that is played in a doubles format on an enclosed court about a third of the size of a tennis court. *Paddles* are used instead of tennis rackets, hence the name. The rules are broadly the same as tennis, although you serve underhand and the walls are used as part of the game, with the ball being allowed to bounce off them.

Mexican businessman Enrique Corcuera set up the first-ever padel court at his holiday home in Acapulco in 1969. His friend—Spanish entrepreneur Alfonso de Hohenlohe, enjoyed the game so much that he built Spain's first two padel courts at the Marbella Club in Spain's Costa del Sol in 1974, and it is now extremely popular all over Spain.

Being played in over 40 countries around the world now, it is considered to be the fastest growing sport around the world.

Why Padel

When asked why so many of them have switched either entirely or partially from paying tennis to padel, they say that it's less physically demanding, especially as they get older, and they enjoy the social aspect. The aerobic workout needed is minimal as they need to make fewer movements compared to tennis, making it less strenuous on their bodies, therefore also making the risk of injuries less. Nevertheless, players who desire to have a physical challenge can certainly do so if they constantly increase their training intensity, as evidenced by viewing the World Padel Championships. https://youtu.be/DkY-6j_bHvM

Who plays Padel here?

English speakers, predominantly from the UK, with a smattering of Dutch people, aged anywhere from forty to eighty with a range of levels, make up the majority of the players at Club de Padel, Mar de Cristal. The Spanish, obviously, also play there but tend to be in their own private groups.



Entrance to the Camping Caravaning La Manga site

Players here range from those holidaying to escape the cold in their homeland, to living here permanently, and they reside anywhere from the elite 5-star area of the La Manga Club to the [La Manga Camping ground](#), where they have their on-site caravans or cabins and come yearly for several months at a time, not withstanding Brexit or COVID. Both places are situated within a five-minute drive and do actually have their own padel courts onsite.

Mar de Cristal Padel Club

Everyone is coordinated, juggled and partnered up by the ever-energetic, smiley Eric through the WhatsApp group, which may often need to be silenced due to the constant to and fro from morning to night of eager participants.



Luckily, being in the La Manga Club area alleviates the need to worry about lack of speaking Spanish, as the club is a sports and leisure [resort](#) hosting international events in various sports, including tennis and golf, so the area and its surroundings are well versed in English.

However, the padel court fees are cheap and not at all affected by being so close to that international 5-star area. In fact, a 2-hour game will set you out of pocket a mere €3.00.



Two of the eight Padel courts at Mar de Cristal

A tree canopy running from the restaurant/bar, separates the eight padel courts which are always all occupied for the games scheduled twice a day from Monday through Saturday. I have never personally seen an unoccupied court.



Socialising outside the bar after padel

The social aspect is a large drawcard towards keeping players returning to this particular club, as players always sit outside the cafe, chat, joke and tease each other after games.

More Padel Clubs

As variety is the spice of life, games are also organised between players for the other two main padel courts available in the area, namely **Cartegena** and **Playa Paraiso**, but more so because some of the better players choose to play a higher-level competitive game amongst themselves. Though rain is rarely a hindrance, the indoor [Padel Center Cartago](#) at Cartagena is then the option, whilst [Playa Paraiso](#) is an all-encompassing sporting complex, therefore, along with padel courts, there is a gym, gym classes, soccer stadium and tennis courts.



Indoor Padel courts at Cartagena



Padel Courts at Playa Paraiso

COVID

Luckily, there were hardly any inconveniences caused due to COVID, as mainly only the bar, restaurant and indoor teaching professionals wear, or are required to wear, masks.

Brexit

Brexit, however, has caused a never-ending cycle of players coming and going from the United Kingdom due to their now restricted timeframes

Whereas previously many would come from October to April with a brief return to England for Christmas, they now have to make complex plans as to when they can come, juggling how long they can stay and then when they are able to return again.

There have, however, been talks with the Ambassador of Spain to the UK, José Pascual Marco, in relation to extending the 90-day period that British citizens are allowed to stay when visiting Spain within any 180 days.

Weather



Views over the Mar Menor during the dust storm

Our Last visit, prior to this, saw us due to leave mid-March 2020 just as COVID restrictions and border lockdowns came into force and this 2022 visit ended with our last day enduring a dust storm blowing over from Africa, an occurrence which apparently happens from time to time.

Let's see what kind of sendoff is planned for us this time!

Author, **Peter Smith**, 62, currently resides in a small rural town in central France, having moved there permanently six years ago.

He has been married for 27 years with no children and loves sport, and travelling, Austria, Hawaii and Canada being his favourite destinations.

Having had two prior articles published in the weekly Travel section of a well-known Australian Newspaper he now has the time, and is situated in a place where he intends to continue travelling and sharing his travel experiences.