

q travel: with BARRIE MAHONEY

'Tweeters from the Atlantic'

Barrie Mahoney was a head teacher and school inspector in the UK, as well as a reporter in Spain, before moving to the Canary Islands to launch and edit a new English language newspaper. He enjoys life in the sun as a columnist and author, and continues to write a series of popular novels and books for expats.



Overweight 'Bridegrooms of Death'

I guess that many of us may have over indulged during the Christmas and New Year festivities, and I assume that many are now in the period where reluctant gym memberships are booming, as well as desperate subscriptions to Weight Watchers. Sadly, all those temptations do have a price to pay when we see that we can no longer squeeze into our favourite clothes.

One of the many fat inducing temptations readily available in Spain and the Canary Islands are 'Churros con Chocolate', which is basically deep fried pastry strips, rolled in sugar and dipped into hot chocolate as they are eaten. This 'snack' is hugely popular in Spain, Portugal and the Canary Islands, as well as the United States, France and Mexico. Depending upon the time of day, and the state of your appetite, they can be both delicious and disgusting at the same time. Indeed, it is not unusual to see locals polishing off a huge quantity of churros in cafe bars for their breakfast. Needless to say, it is an excellent way to pile on the pounds, as well as keeping the health service busy with the coronaries that are the result of this over indulgence. My advice is to avoid them at all costs.

Speaking of being overweight and diets, you really should take a look at Spain's 'Bridegrooms of Death', which is the cheerful nickname given to Spain's elite infantry regiment, 'La Legión'. The regiment is loosely based upon the French Foreign Legion, as a prestige combat unit with its best known member being General Franco during the Spanish Civil War.

Usually admired for their handsome physical appearance, these fine men are usually well known for their tasselled caps, to keep the flies off, and open necked shirts, to keep us all interested. Their uniform traditionally does not have a top button, which aids their reputation as "the top totty killers of Europe". Sadly, this much-coveted reputation is rapidly disappearing, since it was found that a significant percentage of the 3000 troops were found to be obese, based upon their body mass index (BMI) of over 30.

This elite force is now having a few problems in the obesity department and the troops are now being given dietary advice, nutrition tips, as well as additional exercise to overcome their rapidly expanding waistlines with a target loss of between 500g and 1kg a week. Although 'La Legión makes the valid point that significant weight gain may be as a result of cultural, pathological and psychological factors, I firmly believe that churros and hot chocolate are to blame.

So, there we have it. As we humbly trot off to the gym at the beginning of this New Year, and preferably to one that does not include a bar and restaurant, let us think long and hard about these fine Spanish men who are undertaking one of the biggest battles of their lives - that of losing weight without the comfort of a plateful of churros and hot chocolate to fall back on. Sadly, for many, I suspect that it will soon not just be the top button of their shirt that is missing.

If you enjoyed this article, take a look at my websites: <http://barriemahoney.com> and <http://thecanaryislander.com> or read my latest book, 'Living in Spain and the Canary Islands' (ISBN: 9780995602724). A

available in paperback, as well as Kindle editions.

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