



THE MAX FACTOR

Elmburgh resident
Max Clifford
gives us an insight
into his busy life
in the county
and beyond

Feeling the 'COSTA CRUNCH'

TO SPEND New Year's Day sunbathing and swimming outdoors in Southern Spain was a lovely way to start the year.

Although good weather is by no means guaranteed, for five of the last seven years I've been here, it's been predominantly sunny and warm at my holiday home in the hills above Puerto Banus.

It seems amazing when you realise you're just a little over two hours away from England where there was snow everywhere and everyone was freezing.

That being said, Puerto Banus and, indeed, Marbella were far less busy than in previous years; I would guess almost 50 per cent down than my previous

holidays at this time of year.

Many ex-pats who are living in this region are really feeling the pinch. I spoke to several who retired to live there and have suddenly found that the drastic change in the value of the pound against the euro has had a huge impact on them. A little over a year ago, £100 was worth 150. Now it's one for one.

Last year's New Years Eve party at the picturesque Villa Tiberio restaurant in Marbella, cost around £200 per head. This year, for virtually the same five-course meal with champagne, entertainment and a spectacular fireworks display, the cost was well over £300.

One of my neighbours was offered £1.5 million for his three-bedroom apartment less than a year ago. Recently, he put the same apartment on the market to find out that he will be lucky to get £1.25 million for it in today's market.

Many estate agents, shops and restaurants have or are in the process of closing. Friends who have business interests in this part of Spain told me that the next six months would be a real struggle for them.

Blue skies and warm sunshine maybe, but many ex-pats will be facing up to a real financial struggle, like many others back home, during the year ahead.

Right: Max welcomes in the New Year in Spain with friends at the Villa Tiberio restaurant in Marbella. (From left to right) Peter Elliot, Frank Scolaro, Helen Bygraves, fiancée Jo Westwood and Chris and Don Morgan



Why Nasty Nick is fighting fit

EASTENDERS bad boy Nasty Nick returned to the nation's screens over Christmas to terrorise Albert Square, which made it doubly strange when I bumped into him, or rather the actor behind the character, at a charity event at the Fit Gym in Weybridge.

You'll be pleased to hear that actor John Altman bears absolutely no resemblance to the character he plays with such impact in the BBC1 soap. John lives locally in Hampton and when not filming, keeps in

very good shape with regular gym sessions. "It's a small and intimate gym and I get personal attention and coaching, which is a perfect way for me to keep off the pounds and enjoy the benefits of being reasonably fit," Nick said about Fit Gym, which also has premises in Wimbledon. "They're a very friendly crowd here and I've made a lot of really good friends".

He's clearly in good shape for someone of 56 and the hour workout he does three times a week is really paying dividends.



John Altman, pictured here with Simon Cook, is a regular visitor to the Fit Gym in Weybridge

And a bit of cheer amongst the economic gloom

I FIRST met Kavita Oberoi when she was living in Kingston upon Thames many years ago and we both took part in a TV chat show. Kavita is now one of the UK's most successful female entrepreneurs. At the age of 38, she runs her own multi-million pound healthcare and IT consultancy, which she started from scratch in 2001, and has a personal fortune of more than £10 million.

Already well-known in her native Derbyshire, where her business is based, Kavita came to receive wider public attention in August 2008 when she appeared on Channel 4's hit show *The Secret Millionaire*.

We had dinner last week in the marvellous Halong Bay restaurant in West Byfleet. Kavita really surprised me with her view that the current recession is a great time to start up a new business.

"If you're thinking of starting a company then there are real opportunities to build a successful business for a fraction of what it would have cost you in the past decade," she explained.

"Amazing bargains are to be had in just about every area of business; supplies,

premises, manufacturing and transport costs are at an all time low."

Add to this low interest rates and I started to see why Kavita is convinced that talented entrepreneurs have a real

opportunity to make a success out of the current doom and gloom out there.

It's so nice to hear a positive view, particularly coming from someone who is currently enjoying such success herself.



Kavita Oberoi says now is the perfect time to start a business

MAX CLIFFORD

has kindly donated his fee for this month's column to the CHASE children's hospice in Guildford, which supports families with life-limited children and teenagers. For more details, see www.chasecare.org.uk