

Ever fallen in love?

Holly Hudson has and, as she explains here, it was one of those head-over-heels, love at first sight moments that simply made her heart melt

5 am: My four-year-old son and I trundle into the waiting mini-cab and set off in the dark frozen dawn for Heathrow bound for Málaga, Costa del Sol, to visit my partner stationed there for work. Sunshine, heat, sea. These words I chant like a mantra to get me through the next few hours. Chiswick Roundabout: "Mum, are we there yet? Where's the plane? Where's Spain?"

10 am: I am not a good flyer so when we touch down in Málaga after a very bumpy ride, I savour a skewed sense of personal satisfaction at having survived the flight. We step into the blazing mid-morning Spanish sunshine and my anglicised skin recoils in temporary shock; no wonder they call it the Costa del Sol.

Driving along the coastal road from Málaga to San Pedro, our final destination, I can't take my eyes off the sky and sea, both of which seem inexplicably more vast than I've seen on any other European coastline. The mountain range seems to tumble into the water and we can see Gibraltar and the coast of Africa. It feels terribly exotic that I could have managed to come so far south with only two hours suffered in the air and a week's mid-term break stretching before us.

11.30 am: We have arrived at my partner's burnished yellow apartment block with a view of the ocean. I am not much of a runner, but I have brought my gear with me in case my holiday intake of Rioja and tapas adheres too enthusiastically to my hips. I am already so intoxicated by the climate that I need no further urging and I leave my son and partner to their own devices and sprint down to the boardwalk. The February streets are nearly empty and the apartment blocks along the way seem in hibernation, preparing for the throbbing high season yet to begin. This becomes my morning ritual during the week, followed by a

breakfast at one of the many cafes of *pan con tomate*, a lightly toasted baguette topped with the most succulent chopped tomatoes and drizzled with olive oil and salt, accompanied by *cafe con leche*, of course. As is typical of Mediterranean hospitality, my son is made to feel welcome and fussed over everywhere we go.

4 pm: The whole family is recovering from a languid lunch followed by a bracing romp on the beach, which the northern Europeans have laid claim to. It's still too cold for the locals, of

whom there is not one in sight. I mull over the logistics of pulling up sticks and moving to Spain... that coveted place at the local primary school for my son versus the small bi-lingual schools available here? Rip-off Britain versus more affordable living in an amazing climate? My reservations are crumbling by the minute.

With the possibilities swirling around my brain, I leave the boys crashed on the couch and take myself off for one of my favourite rituals whenever I'm abroad - scouring the

local supermarket to eat like the locals do. I am not disappointed. There is an expansive, well stocked - and by local standards no doubt expensive - supermarket just a few steps from the apartment. I trawl the aisles, examining 17 kinds of manchego cheese, chorizo, pastries galore and fresh seafood at drop dead prices. I settle on a bushel of Spanish clams and squid for dinner (6 euros) accompanied by fresh vegetables (2 euros), pastries (2 euros) and let's not forget a couple of bottles of rioja (10 euros).

8 pm: Our first evening in San Pedro, with my partner eager to show us his usual haunts and my son still on British time, we hit his local - a small, rugby-themed tapas bar. Wary at first of taking our rumbunctious little boy into a bar, my partner assures me that there will be others like him already there. Sure enough, he's right, and with a giddy, slightly naughty feeling of relaxing with the most expertly mixed grande gin and tonic I've ever imbibed, we played 'Paper, Scissors, Stone' with our son and soak up the atmosphere.

10 pm: Back at the flat, I confess to my partner: "I'm converted - I don't ever want to leave." He clucks a knowing: "I told you so." I open the bottle of Marques de Caceres to let it breathe and feel my own sigh of contentment escaping at the same time.

