

Combine the twin vogues of 'eco-tourism' and 'de-stressing' and stay at a yurt or tipi hideaway, says **Will Gethin**. He checks out the best in Andalucia and meets two London couples who have left the rat race to set up retreats

Present tents

VALLE DE VIDA

Meandering through olive groves with panoramic mountain views, a scattering of conical structures rises skyward from a tipi valley.

Having sized up my 21ft tipi — stylish tiled floor, elegant furniture, electricity — I descend a solar-lit pathway for a poolside barbecue with my English hosts, serenaded by crickets and cicadas grinding the night fantastic.

"It's the kind of place we always dreamed of staying in but never found," enthuses osteopath Robi, who opened Valle de Vida with wife Keri last year. "The tipis are close to nature but with all the mod cons and luxuries we like around us."

Luxuries include hydrotherapy tub, steam room, hill-top yoga platform and treatments such as osteopathy, acupuncture and reflexology. Reclining in the hydrotherapy tub after dinner, my body aches dissolve in hot bubbling water as I lose myself in the matrix of stars.

Retreats (yoga, Pilates, mosaic classes) run throughout the year (0034 951 238614, www.valledevida.com; seven nights from £450pp or from £1,000 per group of 10).

Beyond the 18-acre oasis of serenity, the nearby El Chorro gorge offers awe-inspiring scenery, and the El Tintero Campo restaurant in Cartama Estacion seats 1,000, serving exquisite local dishes (Crta Carretera, Churriana-Cartama, Km 2; 0034 952 420 475; three-course meal from £20).

garden, private bathroom and solar-powered mod cons. Opening shutter doors, light spills through the crowned roof, lined with red velvet. Criss-crossing poles weave lattice walls, encompassing a luxurious double bed, hand-painted Mongolian furnishings and shag-pile rugs strewn over wooden floorboards (0034 952 117 055, www.yurthotel.com; seven nights from £300 for a double yurt).

"The rounded structure feels more natural and liberating," says Ed. "Since I discovered them four years ago, there's been a dramatic yurt revival and we're lucky we got involved from the start."

Yurts started out as tipis in Siberia but the shape changed for ease of travel. Robust, portable and popular with nomads, they have been lived in throughout Asia for centuries.

Over a tantalising three-course dinner al fresco, Henrietta expounds on their environment conservation endeavours, including composting loos and recycling water.

After a good night's deep sleep I am lulled back to consciousness by an ambient dawn symphony of goat bells and cockerels, as shadows of fluttering leaves dance across the translucent walls of my bedroom.

Lounging in hammocks and lazing by the pool, days slip blissfully by. Alternative therapies, massage and yoga classes can be arranged on site.

Local restaurants in Cortes de la Frontera offer quintessential Spanish flavours, and beautiful mountainous countryside awaits

