

Mallorca

HIGHLIGHTS

- o Feeling the salty wind in your hair and the warming sun on your back as you hike the cliffs above the sparkling Mediterranean on the **Sóller to Sa Calobra** walk (p250)
- o Savouring the views of the Sóller valley, way below, from the Mirador d'en Quesada on the **Barranc de Biniaraix & Embassament de Cúber** walk (p246)
- o Enjoying the superb seascapes from the Camino del Archiduque on the **Valldemossa Loop** (p248)
- o Clambering down Mallorca's deepest gorge, the **Torrent de Pareis** (p253)

Area: 3700 sq km

Average summer high: 28°C

Population: 702,000

Mallorca is the largest of the **Islas Baleares (Balearic Islands)**, an archipelago of four inhabited and several smaller islands that spangle the Mediterranean off Spain's eastern coast.

Measuring 75km from north to south and 100km from east to west, it receives over 13 million visitors each year. However, most visitors are packed into the beach resorts of the south and northeast, while the upland areas of the northwest remain magically unspoiled and underpopulated. Here, the imposing Serra de Tramuntana dominates, its abrupt cliffs plunging into the sea. And it is here that the good walking lies.



HISTORY

Over the centuries, Mallorca was occupied by wave after wave of invaders; Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Visigoths and Arabs have all touched Mallorca and left their mark.

The Arabs built the first water channels for irrigation and introduced the *sinia* (water wheel) to raise water from wells and underground reservoirs. They also constructed the island's earliest *marjades* (banks of terracing), which increased cultivable space on the flanks of the steep valleys. Then, in 1229, the Catalan army of Jaume I, king of Catalunya and Aragón, put an end to more than three centuries of Islamic occupation.

After the 'discovery' of the Americas, Spain's attention was drawn increasingly to its transatlantic possessions, to the neglect of its offshore Mediterranean islands, which were repeatedly battered by raiding Barbary pirates and Turkish warships. In Pollença and Sóller commemorative events recalling this period are held every year.

Mass tourism, which began as a trickle in the 1950s and has gushed in greater volume with every subsequent year, has been the economic saviour of the islands but at considerable environmental cost.

Throughout recent Mallorcan history the Serra de Tramuntana was mainly the preserve of olive farmers, charcoal-burners and *neveras*, or snow-collectors (for more about *neveras*, see the boxed text *Neveras: the Original Fridges*, p230). Nowadays, the major part of the range, which is classified as *Áreas Naturales de la Serra de Tramuntana*, enjoys a degree of environmental protection.

There's no longstanding tradition of walking for pleasure among Mallorcans. Until relatively recently life was hard for most and leisure time limited. You walked for a purpose – to get where you needed to be – and not for the intrinsic pleasure of the journey. To this day, many walks follow ancient paths between villages and a lot of the walkers on the trails are still foreign visitors.

ENVIRONMENT

Mallorca is a continuation of the Andalusian mountains, also known as the Baetic Plate, on the Spanish mainland. Limestone,

uplifted from the sea floor by tectonic forces some 150 million years ago, constitutes the core of the Serra de Tramuntana. There, north-facing crags and cliffs are much steeper than those facing south, in many places making access to the coast impossible from the landward side.

Evergreen oak (*alzina*), its leaves waxy and shiny to reduce evaporation in the heat of summer, is common. Its subspecies, the holm-oak, once the charcoal-burners' favourite, thrives at lower altitudes. Seeds of the carob or locust bean, formerly fed to livestock, are now mainly used as a substitute for chocolate and as a guaranteed, flush-you-through laxative.

At higher levels pines predominate, surviving up to about 1000m. Most common

