

# Balearic Islands



Each of these four islands (Islas Baleares in Spanish; Illes Balears in Catalan), floating serenely in the glittering Mediterranean, could be said to have a theme. Mallorca is the senior island, combining a little of everything, from spectacular mountain scenery and hiking through to the standard sea 'n' sun tourism. Ibiza is synonymous with clubbing, the island that gave Europe the rave. Menorca is a haven of tranquillity – splendid isolated beaches and coves, and prehistoric monuments standing as taciturn reminders of how small we are in the grand scheme of things. And tiny Formentera, a chill-out island, where some people lose themselves for the entire summer, needing little more to keep them happy than white beaches and sunset parties.

Each year a massive multinational force invades the islands in search of a piece of this multifaceted paradise. The total population of the isles barely stands over the million mark, but many times that number are involved in a round-the-clock airlift and disembarkation of sun- and fun-seekers from Easter to October.

Surprisingly, the islands have managed to maintain much of their intrinsic beauty. Beyond the high-rise resort hotels, bars and more popular beaches are Gothic cathedrals, Stone Age ruins, fishing villages, spectacular walks, secluded coves, endless olive and almond groves and citrus orchards. And a growing spread of elegant, rural retreats and A-list eateries are attracting a range of visitors beyond the party package crowd.

## HIGHLIGHTS

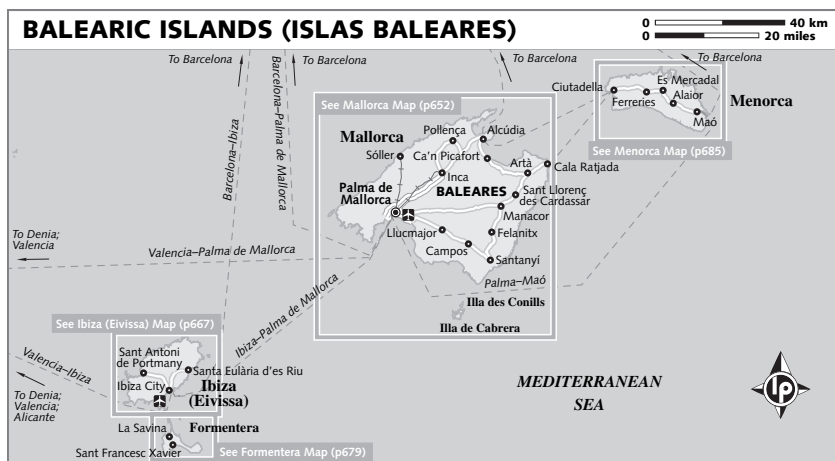
- Admire the building genius at Palma de Mallorca's enormous Gothic **cathedral** (p653)
- Take a hike in Mallorca's **Serra de Tramuntana** (p659)
- Join the party that sets the Mediterranean on fire in **Ibiza's amazing clubs** (p672)
- Chill out at Formentera's sunset parties at the Blue Bar on **Platja de Migjorn** (p683)
- Enjoy scented strolls in villages like **Fornalutx** (p662) in Mallorca's northwest
- Gasp at the turquoise hues of the sea around the **Cap de Formentor** promontory (p664)
- Peer into prehistory at **Naveta des Tudons** (p692) and Menorca's other ancient monuments
- Slip into Menorca's limpid waters at **Cala Macarelleta** and **Cala en Turqueta** (p694)
- Prance with the prancing horses at the **Dia de Sant Joan** (p691) in pretty Ciutadella
- Say three Hail Marys before winding along the spectacular 12km route to **Sa Calobra** (p662)



■ AREA: 4992 SQ KM

■ AVE SUMMER TEMP: HIGH 28°C, LOW 20°C

■ POP: 1.07 MILLION



## History

Archaeologists believe the first human settlements in the Balearic Islands date from around 5000 BC and the islands were later regular ports of call for Phoenician traders. The Carthaginians followed and founded Ibiza City in 654 BC, making it one of the Mediterranean's major trading ports. Next came the Romans, who, in turn, were overwhelmed by the Visigoths.

Three centuries of Muslim domination ended with the Christian Reconquista, led by Jaume I of Catalonia and Aragón, who took Palma de Mallorca in 1229 and sponsored the invasion of Ibiza in 1235. Menorca was the last to fall: Alfons III took it in 1287 in a nasty Vietnam-style campaign, completing the islands' incorporation into the Catalan world.

After their initial boom as trading centres and Catalan colonies, the islands had fallen on hard times by the 15th century. Isolation from the mainland, famines and frequent raids by pirates contributed to their decline. During the 16th century Menorca's two major towns were virtually destroyed by Turkish forces and Ibiza City's fortified walls were built. After a succession of bloody raids, Formentera was abandoned.

After backing the Habsburgs in the War of Spanish Succession (1702–13), Mallorca and Ibiza were occupied by the victorious Bourbon monarchy in 1715. Menorca was granted to the British along with Gibraltar in 1713 under the Treaty of Utrecht. British rule lasted until 1802, with the exception of the Seven Years War

(1756–63), during which the French moved in, and a brief Spanish reconquest after that. In the Spanish Civil War, Menorca was the last of the islands to succumb to Franco's forces.

Tourism since the 1950s has brought considerable wealth. The islanders now enjoy – by some estimates – the highest standard of living in Spain, but 80% of their economy is based on tourism (14 million arrivals each year). This has led to thoughtless (and continuing) construction on the islands (the term *balearización* has been coined to illustrate this short-termism and wanton destruction of the archipelago's prime resource – its beautiful coastlines).

The islands' foreign admirers have their preferences. If the Germans have set their sights on Mallorca, Formentera becomes Little Italy in July and August. The Brits are numerous in Mallorca, but have a special affection for Menorca. Ibiza's clubs, on the other hand, attract an international brigade of hedonists.

Place names and addresses in this chapter are in Catalan, the main language spoken (with regional variations). The major exceptions are Ibiza and Ibiza City – both are called Eivissa in Catalan but we use the better-known Spanish rendition.

## Getting There & Around

### AIR

If your main goal in Spain is to visit the Balearic Islands, it makes *no* sense to fly via the mainland. If already in Spain, scheduled flights from major cities on the mainland