

Destination Mallorca

To Mallorquins, it is Sa Roqueta (Little Rock), to the Romans it was Balearis Major. Mallorca is not only the biggest, but also the most varied and spectacular of the four main isles that make up the Balearic Islands (Illes Balears in Mallorquin, Islas Baleares in Spanish).

Tourism since the mid-1950s and the accompanying massive development have turned the island's values on their head. In half a century a largely rural backwater has been transformed into one of Spain's richest regions. Coastal land that until then had been considered worthless was suddenly a gold mine. Agricultural land has come to be seen as a dead weight.

In a process known as *balearización*, swathes of the coast have been disfigured forever by thoughtless construction. All too often builders and the authorities have cheerfully ignored regulations limiting construction. Backhanders are part of daily life in municipal and regional politics and this corruption goes largely unpunished. The Andratx scandal is the exception that proves the rule.

Many Mallorquins (who admit to being a conservative lot) fear that policies that don't favour development could lose them tourist euros. A canny bunch, they have become world leaders in major hotel chains. In 2007 an international conference on the Caribbean hospitality industry was held in...Palma.

The massive arrival of mainland Spaniards and Europeans, buying up property across Mallorca, has pushed housing prices beyond the reach of many locals and unleashed debate on island identity. Some fear that local culture and language are being swept aside.

The bulk of visitors to the island remain blissfully ignorant of all this. Many, stuck in package-holiday enclaves, remain equally unaware of the island's varied and captivating beauty.

From bayside Palma, with one of the world's greatest Gothic cathedrals and a fascinating medieval centre, to the four corners of the Part Forana (Part Outside, ie the rest of the island), Mallorca presents a kaleidoscope of natural and artificial attractions. The mighty Serra de Tramuntana mountain range along the northwest coast is a highlight. Atop its vertigo-inducing cliffs is strung a series of compact villages, each with its own tiny pebble beach, which has attracted curious outsiders for centuries. The area around Sóller, where the mountains draw inland from the sea, is a golden valley crammed with sweet-smelling citrus orchards. In the interior, cream and ochre towns are scattered like dice over a gaming table. The reddish plains are dotted with castles, ancient sites and hilltop hermitages.

Tourism made farming unviable for most and much agricultural land lies abandoned. In an ironic twist, tourism is now perhaps coming to the rescue, as farms increasingly turn to rural accommodation formulas to keep their core activities alive. Environmentalists fight a constant battle to turn the tide of thought and to brake development. They have scored successes down the years, including the creation and improvement of several natural parks. Ever practical, a measure of the environmental debate centres on trying not to kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

FAST FACTS

Population: 790,760

Area: 3620 sq km

GDP (Balearic Islands):

€24.4 billion

GDP per head (Balearic

Islands): €24,460

GDP growth (Balearic

Islands): 3.5%

Unemployment rate

(Balearic Islands): 6.5%

Average life expectancy:

80.5 years

Highest point in Mallorca:

Puig Major de Son

Torrella 1445m

Number of Michelin-rated

restaurants in Mallorca:

48 (six have stars)

Number of air passengers

through Mallorca's air-

port (2006): 22,408,230

Getting Started

Mallorca is a case of good things coming in small packages. Although largely perceived as a summer-only, sun-and-fun destination, there is much more to the place. The mountain trails of the Serra de Tramuntana can be walked throughout most of the year, and cyclists will also enjoy the back inland roads. Diving, sailing, sea kayaking and other sports are attractions for the sport-minded (see p60). The growing network of quality rural hotels makes for peaceful country holidays at any time of the year and Palma offers everything from culture to shopping for the short-break city-stopper. Many of the island's resorts are geared to families, so bringing the kids isn't a problem. Everyone from toddlers to clubbers is catered for.

WHEN TO GO

Mallorca can be considered a year-round destination. Want to be in the thick of the summer heat and action? Then July to mid-September (high season) is for you. The coastal resorts largely shut down from November to March but country hotels and the like are open most of the year.

Touring the countryside is pleasant any time of year. Spring (April to mid-June) is generally the best. September is also good but can get rain. In winter, city breaks in Palma and country stays, especially in the plains towns (watch for the almond blossoms), make for a great escape. There's a good chance you'll find crisp sunny weather, except in the Serra de Tramuntana, which is often cold and wet and where snow falls as low as 1000m (although it rarely lasts long).

Mallorca's rich calendar of traditional festivals and cultural activities (see p20) should also be taken into account.

COSTS & MONEY

Your biggest costs in Mallorca will probably be accommodation and food. For a family holiday of a week or two, the best value will come from self-catering apartments or villas, allowing you to prepare your own meals. Car hire is cheap by general European standards and distances are moderate.

Backpackers sticking to the cheapest hotels (not always easy because in many locations there are few dirt-cheap options), sandwiches and the occasional simple meal can reckon on spending around €50 a day. Solo travellers are penalised, as single rooms generally cost at least two-thirds the price of a double.

A couple staying in a typical rural hotel, eating out and touring by car each day should expect to pay from €120 to €150 a day each. Opting for a sandwich at lunch helps rein in the expense.

TRAVELLING SUSTAINABLY

Feelings can run high in Mallorca on ecology issues and sustainable development (see p56).

See Climate Charts (p197) for more information.

GOOD THINGS SOMETIMES COME IN PACKAGES

Package tours need not simply mean a week holed up in some high-rise apartment on the holiday coast. Various companies provide alternative package offers to Mallorca for those who want to get to know the island without any of the hassle. See p204 for a list of operators offering anything from wine tours to bird-watching holidays, generally of a week's duration. Operators for more standard packages include **Try Holidays** (www.tryholidays.co.uk), **Thomson** (www.thomson.co.uk) and **Ibertours** (www.ibertours.com.au).

FIND A VILLA

You can rent self-catering apartments and villas all over the island. There is no shortage of agencies and websites offering such accommodation. A typical two-bed apartment, perhaps in a complex with its own pool, can cost around UK£700 to £800 in August, and drop to less than half that in winter. An apartment sleeping six will typically cost around UK£1000 in August. Generally, rental is for a week at a time. Some places to try:

- **Cottages 4 You** (☎ 0870 078 2100; www.cottages4you.co.uk)
- **Fincaservice** (www.fincaservice.de, in German)
- **James Villas** (☎ 0870 055 5118; www.jamesvillas.co.uk)
- **Landmark** (www.landmark-gmbh.de)
- **Mallorca Farmhouses** (☎ 0845 800 8080; www.mfh.co.uk)
- **Owners Direct** (www.ownersdirect.co.uk)
- **Villaparade** (☎ 0870 062 6040; www.villaparade.co.uk)
- **Villa Retreats** (☎ 0870 013 3979; www.villaretreats.com)
- **Vintage** (☎ 0845 344 0457; www.vintagetravel.co.uk)

In 2004 the non-profit Fundació pel Desenvolupament Sostenible de les Illes Balears (Sustainable Development Foundation for the Balearic Islands) was set up. It introduced the **Targeta Verda** (Green Card; ☎ 902 929928; www.targetaverda.com) in 2005. Anyone can buy the card (€10) from hotels, airline desks, newspaper stands and post offices. It entitles holders to discounts at many sights, restaurants and shops throughout the Balearic Islands.

Proceeds go to environmental protection and sustainable projects. The most important of these so far has been the improvement of infrastructure and protection at the Parc Natural de S'Albufera (p148), at a cost of around €1 million.

A motorised vehicle is definitely advantageous for getting to some parts of the island but some judicious choices can give drivers, their vehicles and the atmosphere a rest. You can cover some of the ground easily with local transport. Trains run from Palma to a series of inland towns (plus the popular Palma-Sóller run) and, in summer especially, buses cover most destinations. Mallorca is ideal for cycling too.

You are what you eat! Seeking out better restaurants that use fresh island products or shopping at the produce markets is a way of contributing to your wellbeing and the local economy. The restaurants in this guide have been selected with the quality of their cooking, and hence the use of good products, in mind. Foodies with an interest in local products (wine, olive oil and traditional foodstuffs), food and wine touring routes across the island, and recipes should check out **Illes Balears Qualitat** (www.illesbalearsqualitat.org).

Being an island, Mallorca is sensitive to water use, so reining in those long showers is good for everyone!

Just as walkers should tread softly and leave no refuse behind them, so divers should be careful not to disturb the seabed, coral and marine life. Boaters should not drop anchor in areas where poseidon grass grows on the seabed, as they will tear up this sea flora. Look for a sandy bottom.

In Palma you'll see strange copper-toned receptacles for separated refuse all over the town centre. Containers for separated refuse to aid recycling are also liberally scattered around, making it possible to dispose of paper, plastic and glass items separately for recycling. And if locals and visitors used these and the standard bins all the time, maybe the city of Palma would not need to expend so much water on street cleaning!

HOW MUCH?

El País newspaper €1

Admission to dance clubs
€10-20

Cocktail €6-8

Palma city bus ride €1.10

Taxi from airport to
central Palma €15-18

YOUR CARBON TRAIL

Your travel leaves a carbon trail whether you fly, drive or take the train. Take a trip from London to Palma as an example: taking the train as far as Barcelona and then a ferry will emit 97kg of carbon (per person). Substituting the rail portion with a car will increase this to 320kg (this halves if two travel together) and flying direct will emit 189kg, the negative effect of which is multiplied due to emissions being pumped into the upper atmosphere. Calculations are not simple: precise figures for trains depend on speed (high-speed rail works out equivalent to flying), where the power comes from and whether your train is diesel or electric. While there are no easy answers, taking fewer long-distance trips and staying longer reduces your footprint and means longer, more relaxing holidays for you. Where you can't reduce your carbon think about offsetting your emissions.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

The earliest written accounts of Mallorca come from the Roman chronicler Plinius the Elder. Northern European travellers, especially from France, began writing on the island in the 18th century.

For a light-hearted, contemporary foreigner's view of Mallorca, Peter Kerr has managed to monopolise many a visitor's attention with his series of four chortlers based on his family's attempts over three years to run an orange farm. *Snowball Oranges*, *Mañana Mañana*, *Viva Mallorca* and *A Basketful of Snowflakes* follow the seasons and tribulations of rural life, in which the author becomes a master at relaxation. They offer a lively diversion, possibly more therapeutic on a rainy day in London than on location. The last in the series, *From Paella to Porridge*, sees the Kerrs returning to their native Scotland, where Peter turns his hand to fiction.

Tuning Up At Dawn, by Robert Graves' son, Tomás, is full of subtle wit and joy. The book looks at Mallorca (and Spain) since the Civil War, especially the music world in which he was caught up. Graves also writes at length of the Deià expat crowd and its links with the UK music world. His *Bread and Oil: Majorcan Culture's Last Stand*, takes a broader look at contemporary Mallorca.

The French novelist George Sand (actually Amandine-Aurore-Lucile Dupin), a feisty writer, traveller and lover, landed in Mallorca with her then partner, the Polish composer Frédéric Chopin, and two children in 1838–39. She later wrote of their somewhat disastrous stay in *Un Hiver à Majorque* (A Winter in Mallorca), causing much vexation among Mallorquins, about whom she was not altogether complimentary.

Gordon West's *Jogging Around Mallorca* (1929) remains one of the wittiest and most enjoyable accounts of the trials and tribulations of getting around Mallorca (jogging in those days meant touring!).

The easiest access to 19th-century writing on Mallorca comes through *British Travellers in Mallorca in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Brian J Dendle and Shelby Thacker. Eight different accounts show all manner of ways of seeing the island. Some thought the roads good, while others found the lower classes rather cheeky.

Charles W Wood's *Letters From Mallorca*, composed in two trips in 1886 and 1887, offers a largely idyllic view, at times owing more to fantasy than research. Getting hold of an illustrated edition makes all the difference.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The following sites will get you started on a virtual research tour of the island.

a2z Mallorca (www.a2zmallorca.com) General site with lots of links to anything from the Mallorca Yellow Pages in English to a selection of island legends.

'Getting hold of an illustrated edition makes all the difference'

TOP 10

MALLORCA

Golfo de

(es)

PLACES TO BASE YOURSELF

For such a small island, Mallorca is teeming with landscape and hideaways. Weekenders can base themselves in the medieval heart of Palma, while those in search of peace might opt for pleasant towns like Pollençà or Artà, or a seaside or country location.

- Fornalutx (p128)
- Pollençà (p134)
- Palma (p64)
- Sant Elm (p110)
- Artà (p167)
- Deià (p117)
- Sóller (p119)
- Cala Figuera (p190)
- Cala d'Or (p192)
- Cala Sant Vicenç (p138)

RURAL HOTELS

The Mallorcan countryside was once the island's main source of richness. Ignored by many beach-seekers, it is peppered with beautifully restored, often centuries-old country mansions converted into stylish places to stay. They range from the tastefully simple to the sublimely luxurious.

- Finca Son Brull, Pollençà (p137)
- Muleta de Ca S'Hereu (p126)
- Finca Son Palou (p129)
- Sa Torre (p154)
- Es Castell (p158)
- Agroturisme Monnàber Vell (p158)
- Hotel León de Sineu (p159)
- Scott's (p154)
- Cases de Son Barbassa (p170)
- Hotel Sant Salvador (p169)

BEACHES & COVES

From narrow hidden inlets to the occasional broad, dune-backed strand, the Mallorcan coastline presents innumerable options for those thirsting for the Med's sparkling waters. While some get fairly crowded in mid-summer, others remain surprisingly little visited on all but weekends.

- Platja de Formentor (p142)
- Cala Mondragó (p191)
- Portals Vells (p106)
- Cala Figuera (p190)
- Cala Llombards (p190)
- Platja des Trenc (p187)
- Cala Sant Vicenç (p138)
- Cala de Deià (p118)
- Cala Torta (p170)
- Platja de Sa Canova (p150)

abc-mallorca.com (www.abcmallorca.com) A business and leisure guide with hotels, restaurants, properties for sale, events and classifieds.

Consell de Mallorca (www.conselldemallorca.net) The island's government website, with information on tourism, history and upcoming events.

Infomallorca.net (www.infomallorca.net) Mallorca's official island-wide tourist office website.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Travellers' tips, links to other sites and the valuable Thorn Tree forum.

MallorcaWeb (www.mallorcaweb.com) A search engine with articles, upcoming events, listings, village-by-village information and more.

www.mallorca.web (www.mallorca.com) A general site with all sorts of information.

A Year in Mallorca

Hardly a Mallorcan town can resist putting on a show at least once a year in honour of its patron saint. Many indulge in several annual events. Some go on for a week or more, with concerts, parades, traditional dancing, feasting and, often enough, not a little drinking. Palma's calendar, with traditional events, concert cycles of all musical genres, fashion shows and fairs, is busy year-round. There's rarely a dull moment on the island.

SPRING

Spring is the time to come for wild flowers around the island, and bird-watching in the Parc Natural de S'Albufera (p148), when you can see migratory species at home with the resident fauna.

MARCH

Semana Santa (Easter Week) usually falls some time in March or April and is the occasion for colourful processions around the island. In Palma the most impressive are those on Holy Thursday evening (p86). North, in Pollença, the **Davallament** (bringing down, p135) is a Good Friday procession in which the body of Christ is symbolically paraded down the steps of Calvari. It is one of the most moving of the island's Easter celebrations. Over in Montuïri, locals celebrate **S'Encuentro** (p161) on Easter Sunday.

APRIL

The world comes to Palma (p85) for five days in April for the **Festival Mundial de Danses Folkloriques** (www.worldfolkdance.com), with folk dancers performing in central Palma's streets and squares. **MUST** (www.dissenymallorca.com) is a three-day fashion fest held around central Palma.

MAY

The **Festival Internacional de Teatre de Teresetes** (www.festivalteresetesmallorca.com) brings puppet companies from around the world for about two weeks to Palma and towns around the island.

Sineu stages the annual **Sa Fira** (p159), one of Mallorca's biggest produce markets, on the first Sunday of May.

On the second weekend of May, Sóller stages one of the island's most colourful traditional festivals. The high point of **Es Firó** (p121) is a re-enactment of a pirate assault on the town.

One of Palma's most important religious celebrations, **Corpus Christi** (p86), falls on the Thursday of the ninth week after Easter. The weeks leading up to it are marked by concerts in the city's baroque courtyards.

SUMMER

The island's towns move into top gear in summer. Annual patron saints' festivals, in which religious tradition mixes with good old-fashioned pagan partying, are the excuse for many a knees-up. Mallorquins happily traverse the island to get to their favourite *festes*.

On a more restrained note, various concert cycles fill the warm night air. Palma's Castell del Bellver hosts the **Estiu de Cultura** (www.palmademallorca.es), a series of musical events through July and August ranging from classical to jazz. In Pollença, the Sant Domingo cloister is the stage for concerts during the **Festival de Pollença** (www.festivalpollenca.org). Outside Deià on the Serra de Tramuntana coast, the Son Marroig mansion hosts the **Festival Internacional de Deià** (www.soundpost.org), a series of light classical concerts.

JUNE

All over the Catalan-speaking lands, the feast day of St John (24 June) is preceded the night before by fiery partying on the **Nit de Sant Joan** (p86). In Palma this is one of the year's big events, with *correfocs* (fire running), concerts and partying on the beaches until dawn. Other towns also celebrate, including Deià, Muro, Sant Joan, Mancor de la Vall and Son Servera.

Port d'Alcúdia holds the **Festival de Sant Pere** (p146) in honour of its patron saint, St Peter, on 29 June.

JULY

Many coastal towns stage processions on 16 July for the **Festa de la Verge del Carme** (p155)

and p173), the patron saint of fishers and sailors. Curiously, the inland hamlet of Ruberts also celebrates.

Cossiers do traditional dances in the streets of Algaida for the **Festa de Sant Jaume** (25 July, p160).

On 28 July Valldemossa celebrates the **Festa de la Beata** (p116), in honour of its saintly daughter, Santa Catalina Thomàs.

Santa Maria del Camí puts on its party clothes for three weeks in July to celebrate the **Festes de Santa Margalida** (p153).

AUGUST

One of the most colourful festivals and intense moments of partying, culminating in a staged battle between townfolk and invading Moorish pirates, takes place in Pollença on the first two days of August during the week-long **Festes de la Patrona** (p135).

Four days later the focus shifts to Artà (p167) for the **Festa de Sant Salvador**.

On 16 August, Alaró celebrates the feast day of **Sant Roc** and dances by *coissiers*.

August can be a musical month in Mallorca. Classical music performances are held in Valldemossa's Cartoixa for the **Festival Chopin** (p116; www.festivalchopin.com), and jazz comes to Sa Pobla for the annual **Mallorca Jazz Festival** (p160; www.jazzinmallorca.com).

The **Festa de Sant Bartomeu**, patron saint of Montuiri, falls on 24 August. The main event is the traditional dancing by the *coissiers* on the 23rd and 24th.

AUTUMN

September remains a busy month in Mallorca's towns, but thereafter things begin to slow down. Autumn is a good time for catching migrating birds in the Parc Natural de S'Albufera (p148).

SEPTEMBER

The small town of Santa Margalida in the eastern plains of Mallorca springs into action for the **Festa de Santa Catalina Thomàs**, with a colourful procession at 9pm on 2 September.

One week later Santa Ponça commemorates the Christian conquest of the island with a re-enactment of the landing of Jaume I on the beach as the focal point of the **Festes del Rei Jaume I**.

Mallorca's wine centres celebrate the annual grape harvest with the **Festes de la Verema** (aka Festa d'es Vermar, p154). Binissalem's celebrations are the best known and grandest, stretching over the last nine days of September.

September is a key month for contemporary art lovers in Palma, which stages **Art Cologne**, **Jam Art Mallorca** and **Nit de l'Art** (p86).

OCTOBER

Alcúdia's big annual event is the **Fira d'Alcúdia** (p144), on the first weekend of October, which combines a produce market with traditional dancing, music and parades.

NOVEMBER

Inca bursts into life on **Dijous Bo** (Good Thursday, p157), the third Thursday of November.

WINTER

Throughout the island, but especially in and around Palma, a rich calendar of concerts and other events are promoted as part of **Hivern a Mallorca** (Winter in Mallorca). Information is available from the tourist offices by mid-autumn each year.

DECEMBER

On the second Sunday in December, the town of Sineu holds the **Fira de Sant Tomàs** (p159), which features the annual *matanza* (pig slaughter).

THE LONG MARCH

At midnight on the first Saturday of August, a flood of folk (around 15,000) leaves Palma to walk the 48km to the Monestir de Lluc. The quickest arrive around 6am. It all started in July 1974, when a soda-water bottle exploded in the hands of the six-year-old daughter of Tolo Güell in a bar in Palma. Fortunately nothing happened to her and Tolo's pals all agreed it was a miracle. And so they decided to walk to Lluc to give thanks to the Virgin Mary the next day. This became a regular event (especially when the same daughter later contracted leukaemia, from which she died) that has since developed into a social and sporting expression of, as Mr Güell put it, 'Mallorquindad' (Mallorcanness).

JANUARY

Almond trees blossom, especially from mid-January to mid-February. The best place to plunge into these cotton-bud-white forests are the south and central western areas of the interior, particularly around Bunyola, Santa Maria del Camí, Sencelles, Lloseta, Selva, Manacor and Sant Llorenç. Rose-coloured late blooms can be espied as late as March. The flowers are traditionally used to produce an almond-based perfume (*flor d'ametler*).

The **Festes de Sant Antoni Abat** (17 January) are greeted the previous night with huge pyres in towns across central Mallorca. On the day of the festival itself, parading farm animals get a blessing (St Anthony being their patron saint). This feast day (which has pagan Roman origins) is celebrated with particular gusto in Sa Pobla (p160), but you can catch celebrations in many other towns including Algaida, Artà, Costitx, Maria de la Salut, Montuïri, Petra, Porreres, Santanyí and Sant Joan. The night of 16 January is the liveliest, with concerts, public barbecues, drinking, dancing, prancing demons, pyres and fireworks. In Algaida, the 16th also happens to see the **Festes de Sant Honorat**, at which traditional dances by *coissiers* please a local audience. The night before the festival,

YEAR-ROUND ART

La Artevisita (www.laartevisita.com) is a curatorial initiative linking you to local and foreign artists across the island. Through their website you can create itineraries to visit the artists involved (and buy their works). Twice a year, usually in April and October, La Artevisita organises two week-long joint exhibitions at different points on the island.

townsfolk light pyres in Algaida's church square.

Palma holds the **Festa de Sant Sebastià** (19 to 20 January, p85) in honour of its patron, St Sebastian. It is marked with concerts, pyres in the streets and fireworks.

FEBRUARY

Dates change each year, but the high point of February (and sometimes March) is Carnival. Towns all over the island celebrate. In Palma a children's procession, **Sa Rueta**, is followed by the grown-ups' version, **Sa Rua** (p85), which is the biggest Carnival procession on the island.

A rather more odd approach to this pre-Lent feast is Llubí's **Festa del Siurell** (p158), held on the Saturday before the Tuesday of Carnival.

On the Road



DAMIEN SIMONIS Coordinating Author

On a sweltering August day, I found myself within sniffing distance of the sea on the edge of pretty Alcúdia, rambling the Roman ruins of ancient Pol-lentia (p142). At this 1st century AD theatre, at the height of the Pax Romana, local citizens would settle down for a little theatre or spillage of gladiatorial blood. Did the Romans go sunbathing at the nearby beaches? Perhaps not. Either way, the passage of civilisations through the island's history adds a fascinating dimension to the traveller's discovery of Mallorca. Although not a great deal remains of this once thriving provincial town, there is enough to fuel the time traveller's imagination.



SARAH ANDREWS

It was a breezy, cloudy afternoon when I decided to visit Artà's Santuari de Sant Salvador (p167), which turned out to be the perfect time to visit. The walk up was cool enough to be enjoyable, and the view from the top of the fortress was amazing. Those low, dark clouds made the landscape so much more dramatic than it would have been on a perfectly sunny day. I spent way more time than I'd planned to at the Santuari, just soaking in the view and writing in my notebook.

See full author bios page 224

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