

# PALMA



*Majorca's capital has long attracted sun-seekers, but its burgeoning high-end food scene, chic design boutiques and laidback bars make this a stellar Spanish city break*

**WORDS:** Helen Warwick **PHOTOGRAPHS:** Cat Allen

**I**t's late afternoon and the autumn sun is blazing down on a tiny, honey-coloured beach. Distant yachts bob just offshore, paddleboarders negotiate waves, and a lone swimmer momentarily surfaces from the water to breathe before plunging into the depths once more. Pink-faced from the heat, I'm polishing off a barbecued sea bass and a dry white at a weathered beach cafe, and after a post-lunch swim in the almost empty water, I'll doze on the sands where just a handful of other bathers lie, cheeks pillowled on folded sarongs. Didn't think quiet beaches existed in Majorca? They do if you know where to look. I may be on the outskirts of ever-popular Palma, but I've got the little cove of Cas Català almost to myself: a pretty stretch just 15 minutes from the city centre. Here, after lugging their beach gear down the steep steps, locals cool off in the turquoise waters, and order a beer or two from the cliff-front restaurant.

The handsome Majorcan port city has been perfecting the art of the great escape for the past couple of decades. In particular, travellers can expect a culinary scene that's seriously upped its game in recent years, with a steady stream of chefs and new openings blurring the lines between the traditional

and the experimental. What were once fairly tatty hostels have been transformed into swish hotels with restaurants run by young, trailblazing chefs. Hipster bars and cafes have sprung up among remnants of the trademark Moorish architecture. The city's tally of Michelin stars reached eight as of 2019, including Marc Fosh's eponymous restaurant — the first British chef to be recognised with the accolade in Spain. And when you just want to graze on a few *pintxos* and local wines from Binissalem, there are scores of low-key bars to seek out. One thing's for sure: you won't be leaving hungry.

But as it's always done, the Balearic beach town draws tourism's mainstream: the fly-and-flop summer crowds, cruise shippers, city breakers and clubbers. Yet it's entirely possible to escape the droves, especially between April and early June, or September until late October — the latter period a glorious time to visit, when days are long and warm, but crowds are thinning. This is the time to wake for sunrise swims, to wander shady medieval streets and peer behind the shutters of grand renaissance villas, to jog along the coast and to sip a livening *café con leche* on a sunny terrace: the best start to a day's exploration.



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 SEE & DO

**WALK TO PORTIXOL:** You could catch the bus from the centre of town or flag down a cab to get to this tiny village, but the best way to reach it is to stroll all the way along Palma's Paseo Marítimo. The walk is backed by numerous accommodating bars and restaurants — the sort where you pop in for a quick one and end up staying for hours watching the world go by.

**ES BALUARD:** Once you've explored the exhibits of this acclaimed modern art museum — much of which is by Balearic-based artists — make for its restaurant perched on the ancient city walls. The menu's half-decent, but the real beauty of the place is the sprawling views from the terrace: the glimmer of rooftop pools, the fronds of palms, the turrets of Moorish buildings, and yachts docked in the marina. [esbaluard.org](http://esbaluard.org)

**PALMA CATHEDRAL:** If you lose your way in Palma then just look up for La Seu. The honey-coloured cathedral lords itself over the city, with hordes arriving daily to queue to admire its stained-glass window — one of the largest in the world — and to nose around its gothic interior with modernist touches

from Antoni Gaudí and Majorcan artist Miquel Barceló. Occasionally, closed areas are opened to the public, including access to the upper terraces (keep an eye on its website for dates), but views of La Seu lit up after dusk are mighty impressive, even if only from a nearby rooftop bar (try the Hotel San Francesc terrace). [catedraldemallorca.org](http://catedraldemallorca.org)

**EXPLORE SANTA CATALINA:** This central neighbourhood is brimming with inspiring local enterprises and a whole smattering of bars and restaurants: book yoga sessions at Earth Yoga, hunt down Scandi-style plates at La Molienda, pick up buttery French pastries at La Madeleine de Proust, and rifle through fresh fruit at its daily market.

**SEE PALMA AFLOAT:** Sunrise paddleboarding in the Bay of Palma is a thrilling way to take in the cityscape. Feeling flush and fancy a treat? Go one better and charter a boat and skipper to sail from Palma along the coast, dipping into coves with hidden grottoes, calling into beaches backed by huge sand dunes. Escape to Formentor in the north, the rugged Cabrera National Park, or the dramatic shingle beach of Cala Deià in the west. [performanceribsmallorca.com](http://performanceribsmallorca.com)

**FROM LEFT:** A street scene in Santa Catalina; locally grown summer squash for sale in one of the city's markets; Palma Cathedral above the rooftops; Caló des Macs, one of the many secluded beaches dotted along the coast

**PREVIOUS PAGE:**  
Plaza Mayor





### LIKE A LOCAL

**TARDEO:** Saturday in Santa Catalina is 'tardeo' time. Loosely translated as 'afternooning', this day-time partying session is embraced by the 30-plus local crowd who head out around 2pm and slink back home for around 10pm to relieve babysitters. The dancefloors are often packed as early as 3pm in popular bars such as Kaelum Club and Sala Luna.

**FREE ART:** September is a glorious time to visit the Majorcan capital, and if you time your trip with the annual Nit de l'Art, you'll enjoy free access to city galleries and museums featuring special exhibitions for one night only (19 September 2020).

**BICIPALMA:** Avoid the touristy carriage rides from Plaça de la Reina, which sees horses pounding the pavements carrying passengers in scorching temperatures. Instead, keep yourself in shape by hiring a bike via the BiciPalma public bike service, which has docking stations all over the city. [bicipalma.es](http://bicipalma.es)





## BUY

**MERCAT DE L'OLIVAR:** This market near the Plaça d'Espanya is where to go for salty slices of Ibérico ham, buckets of shiny olives and red prawns landed from Sóller. Walk upstairs to one of the on-site bars, and they'll cook up your ingredients while you sip a *carajillo* (coffee) shot through with local Ron Amazona rum. [mercatolivar.com](http://mercatolivar.com)

**B CONNECTED LIVING CONCEPTS:** A hip lifestyle store in Santa Catalina where design-conscious browsers flick through its own interiors collection, bright berber textiles and works by local artists including those by venerable native painter-sculptor, Rafa Forteza. It's pricey, but worth a visit for inspiration alone. [bconnectedmallorca.com](http://bconnectedmallorca.com)

**CALAME:** An offshoot of the Parisian concept store, this bijou emporium stocks everything from intricate jewellery and accessories to leather bags. [calame-palma.com](http://calame-palma.com)

**MERCADONA:** The Spanish supermarket chain is the perfect place to fuel up for family picnic: freshly baked bread, piles of seafood caught that morning and juicy, locally grown lemons the size of your fist.



## EAT

**MERCADO GASTRONÓMICO SAN JUAN:**

An abattoir-turned-cavernous food hall, where diners perch on high stools, grazing on olives and sipping beers. There are stalls serving everything from around the globe, but make a beeline to the back for *pintxos* and aioli-topped tortilla. [mercadosanjuanpalma.es](http://mercadosanjuanpalma.es)

**LA CHICA DE SANTA CATALINA:** Nab a table beside the open kitchen to gaze at pioneering chefs elevating traditional tapas. There's the still-pink Ibérico pork along with juicy mussels in chorizo, and garlicky prawns in a sauce to mop up with hunks of sourdough. [facebook.com/lachicadesantacatalina](http://facebook.com/lachicadesantacatalina)

**BOTÀNIC:** Occupying an idyllic spot in the luxury Can Bordoy Grand House & Garden, this newcomer is making its mark on the food scene. The premise is healthy fine dining: highlights include chia-speckled yoghurt, artisan Majorcan ricotta and apple, and tapas of steamed avocado with pumpkin puree and curry. [canbordoy.com/botanic](http://canbordoy.com/botanic)



**FROM LEFT:** Chef Andrés Benítez from Botànic, Can Bordoy; Connected Living Concepts, a hip lifestyle store in Santa Catalina; the patio at Botànic



Tapas and wine at the vibrant Mercat de l'Olivar, near the Plaça d'Espanya



## AFTER HOURS

**ROXY'S BEACH BAR:** Walk all the way to the top end of the beach in Puerto Portals and you'll find this playfully hip space dug into the rocks. Swimmers heave themselves over surf-sprayed rocks to order a mojito and dry off on wicker chairs, while sunglass-clad yachters moor here to soak up the vibe. [facebook.com/puertoportalsbeach](https://facebook.com/puertoportalsbeach)

**CHAKRA BAR:** Perfect for that post-dinner slump, grab a corner table at this moodily lit space whose walls are daubed in bright murals and kama sutra scenes, and order a potent espresso martini off the inventive cocktail menu. [facebook.com/chakrabarmallorca](https://facebook.com/chakrabarmallorca)

**ABACO:** There was a major outcry when this much-loved address announced its closure in 2019. Stacked with antiques, floral displays and piles of fruit, this decadent den has since been saved, and continues to cement its place in Palma's after-hours scene with cocktails like the Abaco Special (rum, whiskey, grand marnier). [bar-abaco.es](http://bar-abaco.es)



## SLEEP

**HOSTAL APUNTADORES:** Rooms in this La Lonja hostel won't win any design awards, but they're comfortable and include free wi-fi. The highlight: an unassuming staircase climbs to a roof terrace where you can have breakfast with knockout views of the cathedral. [apuntadorehostal.com](http://apuntadorehostal.com)

**INNSIDE PALMA CENTER:** Crowned with a serene roof terrace, where guests sip on G&Ts and dangle their feet in the pool, this centrally located hotel is a swish place to bed down. Exceptional breakfasts seal the deal, with tender serrano ham, fresh fruit and warm pastries. [melia.com](http://melia.com)

**HOTEL MAMA:** This first foray into the hotel world for the Balearic's Cappuccino Group is still making waves after opening in 2018 on Plaça de Cort. Its rooms and suites are all different, with hand-painted frescoes and columns, beautifully upholstered furniture and windows offering epic city views. Plus, there's a rooftop pool and underground cinema. [hotelmama.es](http://hotelmama.es) □

## ESSENTIALS



### Getting there & around

British Airways, Jet2, Norwegian, EasyJet, Ryanair and TUI Airways all fly non-stop from regional airports. Average flight time: 2h10m. [ba.com](http://ba.com) [jet2.com](http://jet2.com) [norwegian.com](http://norwegian.com) [easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com) [ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com) [tui.co.uk](http://tui.co.uk)

There are plenty of taxis waiting on arrival, or follow the signs for the airport bus (number one; €5/£4 per person), which takes around 20 minutes to reach the centre.

One of the best ways to see Palma is to walk — it's relatively small and easy to navigate on foot. The Palma Pass allows use of public transport and discounted entrance into many of the city's monuments, museums and restaurants (48 hours from £28). Heading out of town? Catch one of the air-conditioned buses from the station on Plaça d'Espanya where there are connections to all corners of the island. [seemallorca.com/buses](http://seemallorca.com/buses)

### When to go

Spring or autumn, when temperatures are in the mid-20Cs and there are fewer crowds.

### More info

[visitpalma.com](http://visitpalma.com)

### How to do it

**RYANAIR** flies direct from airports across the UK from £48.

**HOTEL MAMA** has doubles from £159, room only.