

Mallorca Redefined

Much maligned by images of foam parties and Magaluf stag cruises, **Piers Townley** discovers a jewel of an island that offers a wealth of natural beauty, hospitality and breathtaking adventure to impress even the most sceptical traveller.

Holidaying in Mallorca isn't everyone's cup of tea. Even the country's name conjures up images of Brits abroad, rampaging stag and hen parties and two-for-one deals that drown out the appeal of the seductive Mediterranean climate. Times and places change though, as should attitudes, especially where Mallorca is concerned. From the flora and fauna of the Binibona region and the stunning mountain scenery of the Sierra de Tramuntana range, to the boutique restaurants and scores of traditional vineyards, villages and coves, Mallorca has many secrets up its sleeves. Away from the bustling capital of Palma, a whole new impression of the island awaits.

For a taste of the real Mallorca, the best advice is to team up with the likes of Balearic Discovery, a hugely enthusiastic company that brings together local knowledge and outfits to tailor-make your trip down to the smallest details; part of a growing trend for people looking to get away from the usual package-tour experience. A long weekend can be crammed with just the right balance of r'n'r and white-knuckle rush. Jane and Tony, now residents of the island, have years of experience that brings a sympathetic appreciation of the traditions and livelihoods of the island's locals and what they can offer the visitor.

GETTY IMAGES

Saturday

On Your Bike

Running along the North-West ridge of the island lies the Sierra de Tramuntana, prime walking and biking country framed by cascading olive-grove valleys and hidden farmsteads. With a base in the picturesque town of Sóller (pictured top right), Michelle and Andy run Tramuntana Tours, guided mountain bike and trekking adventures into the mountain range. They can take you for a number of days, aiming to get you lost (and found again) among a range of terrain to suit everyone from the casual cyclist to the downhill kamikaze nutters. With half a day spare though, it's a mere 15km round biking trip that's on hand. Not far on paper but not a single metre of it is on flat ground. Any aches and pains on the way down the slopes are made up for by the scenery as we pass through the terraced slopes of the Balitx valley—ancient farmland that has seen off more than one invasion of this fertile and secluded area. As is always the case unfortunately, going up is never as easy as going down and avoiding the boulders and potholes soon replaces the downward stress of not colliding with a local goat. Luckily Michelle's on hand to gauge the frequent stops, filling in the history of the land and the fauna that covers it before a well-earned rest in the idyllic town square of Sóller. Keep an eye out for the tram that runs through the centre of the square, it may be your only chance to sit back and watch the Mallorcan world drift by. More often the case though, it's *whiz* by. Two wheels seem to be the favoured transport of choice across the island, motorised or pedal-powered.

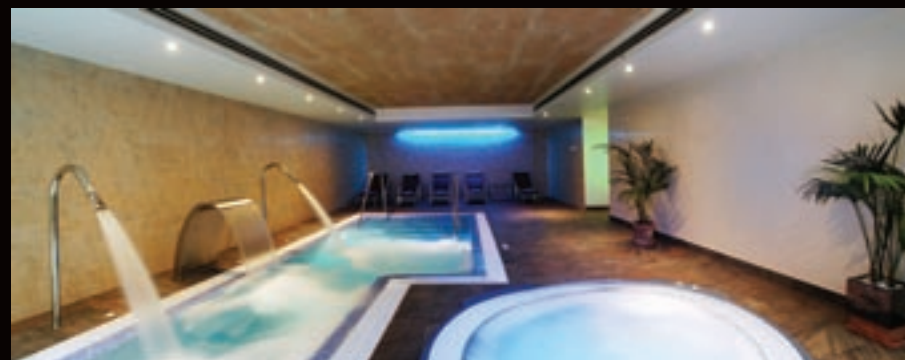
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PHOTOS: PIERS TOWNLEY

Blowing hot and cold

To knock out the strains of the mountain biking and steam out the dust of Tramuntana trekking, a *Scottish* shower is the answer. On offer at the Aimia hotel's ultra-sleek spa, a Scottish shower involves soothing hot jets interspersed by frankly, bloody freezing ones, in a sequence recommended by the spa experts who designed them. There's also an aromatherapy and an obligatory cold water shower; the later is literally a bucket (albeit a very stylish one) suspended over a wet room area. Or, in this rather chic setting, why not opt for a far more civilised Turkish bath and aromatherapy massage. Minutes from the mountain-framed backdrop of Port de Sóller the Aimia hotel has restaurants and bars bordering the harbour. www.aimiahotel.com • Tel. +34 971631 200





Sail the seas

Knowing your Jib from your Bilge isn't a pre-requisite for enjoying a day under sail. Not with Saracen anyway, a sailing company based out of the North Eastern Puerto de Alcudia. Taking to the waves has been made easy, with expert tuition (and patience), and they'll also put up with any cheap sailing puns you care to throw about the deck as you navigate out of the port. As the wind picks up, take in the jagged coastline from Alcudia to Cabo del Pinar and around towards Cabo de Formentor, the northernmost point of the island, glimpsing isolated farms and decrepit defensive outposts. If all you want to do is take in the views, enjoy the tranquillity of the secluded bays on this part of the coastline and sip a fine Mallorcan rosé—then fine. However, it can also be very hands on. There's a plethora of winches, rope-things and levers to press and pull aboard these vessels and, within reason, you can have a good old play with them. For the more hardy (and knowledgeable) would-be sailors, you can take a week-long introductory course that will prepare you for the official RYA sailing qualifications that a fully-fledged skipper needs. Bad pirate impressions are optional.

www.saracensailing.com • Tel. +34 971 509 519

Dine in style

You'll certainly work up an appetite from the waves, so head straight for the finest steaks around, to be found at the atmospheric and welcoming Restaurant Meson Dulcinea (pictured below); the Carne a la Brassa is the speciality here. There are several gems like this along the coastline and for a real treat head back inland, to the edges of the Binibona National Park, to the likes of boutique restaurants such as the Sa Tafoneta at Can Furios (pictured right). Nestled in a tiny village at the foot of the slopes of the Binibona park, this 17th century olive press room is the perfect spot to savour fine examples of Mallorcan hospitality with top-notch food alongside a quality choice of local white and red wines. The picturesque hamlets of this area will sooth even the most Magaluf-impressioned mind.

www.mesondulcinea.com • Tel. +34 971 548 825



From a budget to bespoke range of activities, experiences and tailor-made travel on the island, contact Balearic Discovery. They have access to over 30 different activities for all levels and interests; from sea kayaking to archaeology, cookery to motorcycle tours. If they don't organise it themselves, they know a man (or woman) who can.

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easyJet

flies to Mallorca from many destinations. See page 172 for details.