



Crowd-free Palma

The Balearic isle shines in winter. Go bask in its glorious art and soul

For decades the capital of the Balearics was somewhere you flew to en route to Deià or Magaluf — and then only in summer. Yet this sparkling seaside city, replete with glorious buildings and an enchanting Old Town, is never more delightful than on a bright winter's day, when the locals have its pretty streets (almost) to themselves. **By Paul Richardson**



SEE & DO

● Fourteenth-century Palma was an economic powerhouse — that much is clear from Sa Llotja (① on map). In its heyday this Gothic masterpiece on the harbourside, the old seat of the Merchants' Guild (the name translates as 'exchange'), would have been abuzz with traders from all over the Med. **Take a breath of crisp sea air and marvel at the slender columns holding up its soaring roof.**

● A taxi-ride away in the suburban streets above the Paseo Marítimo, the **former farmhouse home of Catalan painter and sculptor Joan Miró** is now a fascinating museum where, off-season, you may well find yourself alone. Sitting alongside the 18th-century house, a series of all-white Modernist pavilions by Josep Lluís Sert show Miró's work in all its luminous vitality (Carrer Joan de Saridakis 29; miro.palmademallorca.es; £5; ②).

● Palma Cathedral, known locally as La Seu, is packed with treasures; one don't-miss is the Capella del Santíssim, **Mallorcan painter Miquel Barceló's undersea-world makeover of a side chapel.** But the glory of the building is its vast Gothic roof. Arrive mid-morning to catch the winter sun's rays flooding the flagstones with psychedelic colour as they shine through the 14th-century rose window (catedraldemallorca.info; £4.75; ③).

● A mooch around the Casco Antiguo (Old Town), peering into patios and

creeping into convents, would make a fine wake-up call on New Year's Day. Here, **monasteries and churches jostle with the palatial houses of Mallorca's aristocracy.** It's hard to believe that this was a near-derelict no-go zone in the early '80s; now, *palacios* have turned into posh hotels and the streets are cleared of sleaze.

● Palma's contemporary-art scene is on a roll, and the epicentre of the gallery explosion is downtown. Seek out La Caja Blanca (Carrer Can Verí 9; lacajablanca.com; ④), where Iranian/Spanish art maven Eva Shakouri holds court in an all-white gallery, and Galeria Kewenig's magical converted chapel on Carrer Sant Feliu (kewenig.com; ⑤). Or visit Horrach Moyà (Plaça Drassanes 15; horrachmoya.com; ⑥), and finish with a **festive Martini at the retro-chic coctelería on the ground floor.**

● Forget Nadal, Ramon Llull was Mallorca's first superstar. The movingly simple tomb of this medieval Mallorcan mystic, missionary, monk, theologian, alchemist and writer can be seen in a side chapel in the Basílica de Sant Francesc ⑦. Part of a little-visited Old Town convent, it's better known for its **divinely beautiful Gothic cloister, Palma's finest, with a statuesque palm tree in its central patio.** Take a coat — it can get chilly in there.

● Fancy a dip? Stroll along the bay to pastel-painted Portixol, with its mini-harbour and **small curve of sandy beach ringed with former fishermen's houses** (now desirable holiday homes). After a bracing swim, repair to Can Punta for a superb Greco-Hispanic fusion lunch at a quiet pavement table overlooking the marina (Carrer Vicari Joaquim Fuster 105; 00 34 971 277 364; mains about £12; ⑧).

● Many tourists just gape, overwhelmed, at the **spectacular feast of colour and flavour** on offer at the Mercat Municipal de l'Olivar ⑨. But do try to buy something: a link of spicy *sobrassada* sausages or a bottle of Mallorcan olive oil (both at their freshest in winter). Then perch on a stool for a glass of Cava and a fried-fish *tapa* at the much-loved *bocadillo-* (sandwich) touting Bar des Peix ⑩. ➤

Frame by frame: view from Sa Llotja towards the cathedral. Below from left, sunset swimmers on Palma's Ca'n Pere Antoni beach; Miró sculpture at the artist's former home

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EAT

● **The market canteen**

BAR JUAN FRAU (Tapas about £5)
Because: The food at the Frau brothers' bar at Santa Catalina produce market is some of the best Mallorcan nosh you'll find, with highlights including stuffed aubergines and fried cuttlefish. **Travel's tip:** For an intense local experience, get there by 1pm to nab one of the three tiny tables behind the bar. *Mercat de Santa Catalina; Carrer d'Annibal 19; ⑪.*

● **The new-wave bodega**

BODEGA GAUDEIX (Tapas about £6)
Because: Cristina Díaz and Maria Moreno have given the Palma bodega a new dimension, with creative tapas such as crispy ox tail and a 'Ferrero Rocher' of morcilla (black pudding) and crushed nuts. **Travel's tip:** Book a week ahead for an outside table on an idyllic little square. *Carrer Can Sales 2; 00 34 871 231024, gaudeixpalma.com; ②.*

● **The secret gastro-bar**

TAST CLUB (Tapas about £10)
Because: You'd never know it's there, but that's half the point of this speakeasy, where the stone ceilings are high, the music's low, and the top-end tapas are perfect for late-night grazing. **Travel's tip:** Regulars aim for the cosy tables in the alcoves at the back of the dining room. *Carrer Sant Jaume 6; 00 34 971 710150, tast.com; ⑬.*

● **The laid-back brasserie**

MISA (Mains about £15)
Because: Kent-born Marc Fosh, chef/owner at two of Palma's best restaurants, brings a London-style eclecticism to this basement bar-braseria. **Travel's tip:** Insist on the pollo asado. Made with a free-range island-bred bird and fragrant local herbs, it's one of the best spins on roast chicken in the Med. *Carrer Can Maçanet 1; 00 34 971 595301, misabraseria.com; ⑭.*

● **Mallorca munchies**

ES ROBOST (Mains about £5)
Because: Food and furniture at Helmut Clemens' island-inspired place (on Palma's busiest shopping street) are organic and locally sourced. **Travel's tip:** People come from all over Palma for Es Robost's sobrassada sandwich – try one and you'll know why. *Passeig de Mallorca 18; 00 34 971 722223, lacucharamallorca.com; ⑮.*

DRINK & SHOP

● **The smart watering hole**

BARNICOLAS
Because: Stylish bar Nicolás appeals to a fun-loving older crowd who pack the place on weekend nights, lounging on the streetside tables. **Travel's tip:** The Spanish drink of choice is G&T. Taste an incredible range of designer gins here, but beware the half-and-half servings! *Plaça del Mercat 19; barnicolos.com; ⑯.*

● **Hot chocolate and history**

CAN JOAN DE S'AIGO
Because: Sweet-toothed devotees of all ages flock to this fabled Old Town establishment for chocolate a la taza (drinking chocolate) and rich ensaimada pastries. **Travel's tip:** Avoid early afternoons, when schoolkids and their parents invade for merienda (teatime). *Carrer Can Sanç 10; ⑰.*

● **The ideal home store**

RIALTO LIVING
Because: It's a heavenly, Swedish-run home store in a Renaissance palacio behind the Passeig del Born. **Travel's tip:** Escape the crowds on the Born with a tea at the cafe in the shop's inner patio. *Carrer Sant Feliu 3C; rialtoliving.com; ⑱.*



ASK THE LOCAL

Mari Creu Homaris is a teacher who has lived in Palma for 50 years

“The cafe and bookshop Literanta on Carrer de Can Fortuny (literanta.com; ⑲) is a favourite spot of mine for a peaceful moment after a busy day at school. On Saturday mornings, you'll find me bargain-hunting at Pere Garau market ⑳; it's in a non-touristy part of town on Plaça Pere Garau. For a fun night out on the weekend, I go to Bar Flexas (Carrer de la Llotgeta 12; barflexas.com; ㉑), a great bohemian 'music bar' run by the drag queen La Terremoto ('The Earthquake'). As a quality souvenir, I'd recommend some beautifully packaged boxes of Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc, a hand-produced salt from Mallorca's own salt-flats. You can find it in food shops all over Palma.



STAY

● **The designer digs**

HOTEL BRONDO ARCHITECT (Doubles from £94, room only)
Because: Hipster style comes to Palma in this mash-up of urban hideaway and designer showroom. Service is scarce, but interior-design fans will be having too much fun to notice. **Travel's tip:** Avoid the radical chic of the newest wing. It looks raw and gritty, but feels a bit like the money ran out. *Carrer Can Brondo 4; 00 34 971 720507, brondoarchitect.com; ㉒.*

● **The suite sensation**

PALMA SUITES (Suites from £114, room only)
Because: It does Swedish-run excellence in a quiet Old Town location. Each suite has a fridge and washing machine, and there's a heated pool on the roof. **Travel's tip:** The suites' well-appointed kitchens are perfect for eating in – or nip out to Quina Creu Tapas, a neighbourhood gastrobar where a tapa and a drink will cost you about £2.75. *Plaça del Mercadal 8; 00 34 971 727900, palma-suites.com; ㉓.*

● **The high-end 'hostal'**

HOSTAL CUBA (Doubles from £118, B&B)
Because: Working-class Santa Catalina has been upping and coming as Palma's trendiest barrio for yonks. Now the 'hood has a fine hotel, a classy revamp of a much-loved 1904 hostal. **Travel's tip:** Some of the city's hippest drinking spots are to be found in Santa Catalina. Check out cool boho-bar Patrón Lunares, or the hostal's downstairs coctelería. *Carrer Sant Magí 1; 00 34 971 452237, hotelhostalcuba.com; ㉔.*

● **The perfect palacio**

CAN CERA (Doubles from £140, room only)
Because: It doesn't get much better than this restored 17th-century palace. There's a stone patio with a stately palm tree; Mallorcan fabrics, contemporary art and antique furnishings. **Travel's tip:** Feeling lazy? Skip room service – the Vietnamese nems (rice-paper rolls) at hole-in-the-wall restaurant Las Olas, just around the corner, are a cut above. *Carrer de Sant Francesc 8; 00 34 971 715012, cancerahotel.com; ㉕.*

● **The central reservation**

CAN ALOMAR (Doubles from £140, room only)
Because: This palace-conversion scores both on location (just off the leafy avenue of the Born, with Palma's 'mini Ramblas' right outside the door), and on the cunning use of a historic building. **Travel's tip:** Stay in one night to eat delicious fusion tapas joint on the idyllic terraza at De Tokio a Lima. It's Palma's hottest ticket for dining à deux. *Carrer Sant Feliu 1; 00 34 871 592002, boutiquehotelcanalamar.com; ㉖.*

● **Par for the course**

SHERATON MALLORCA ARABELLA (Doubles from £232, B&B)
Because: With four world-class golf courses surrounding the hotel – a total of 63 holes – you don't have to be a golfer to stay at this serene hotel in beautiful grounds, but it helps. **Travel's tip:** Meals can be slightly lacking in atmosphere – rather than dine here, we say spend your money in Palma town, as it's only a €12-15 taxi ride away. *Urbanización Son Vida, c/de la*

Vinagrella s/n; 00 34 971 787100; sheratonmallorcagolfhotel.com; ㉗.

GET ME THERE
GO INDEPENDENT

BA (ba.com) flies to Palma de Mallorca from London City from £96 return and from Gatwick from £109. **EasyJet** (easyjet.com) flies from 11 UK airports, including Gatwick, Stansted, Liverpool and Bristol, from £21 one way.

GO PACKAGED

Cosmos (0843 227 1464, cosmos.co.uk) offers seven nights in a five-star from £600pp, half board, with Manchester flights. **EasyJet Holidays** (0843 104 1000, easyjet.com) has a week in a four-star in the Old Town from £457pp, B&B, with Gatwick flights. Or try **Cresta** (0844 800 7020, crestaholidays.co.uk).

FURTHER INFORMATION

See infomallorca.net. Winters in the Balearic Islands are mild. Temperatures hover around 10°C, and though January sometimes sees showery days, it can be surprisingly calm and sunny. ■

Holy night: clockwise from top left, statue of medieval mystic Ramon Llull outside Palma Cathedral; traditional ensaimada pastry; room at urban-chic Hotel Brondo Architect; terrace tables at De Tokio a Lima; Misa restaurant's catch of the day

PHOTOGRAPHS: ROBERT HARDING; A.W.L. MAP: MAIDENHEAD CARTOGRAPHIC