



# Capital gains

Palma is no longer just a day trip from Majorcan beach resorts — it's time to offer the capital as a stylish city break. By *Larry Pryce*

**J**ust two hours' flying time from the UK, 300 days of sunshine, a magnificent Gothic cathedral, an historic old town with new restaurants and tapas bars everywhere and an abundance of luxury boutique hotels and shops, all wrapped up in typical Catalan hospitality. You may be forgiven for thinking I am in Barcelona. But no, this is the new European "hot ticket" city destination, Palma de Mallorca.

An old Palma hand, I have gladly kept this delightful seaside capital to myself while most visitors rushed off to other parts of the island. But now my secret is out. These days, there is an exciting new vibe to this stylish city. Changes in the law allow shops to open seven days a week and outdoor "terraxas" all year, and as Pedro Homar, director of the new Tourist Foundation of Palma, points out: "The city is easily accessible year-round from the UK with regular

flights and accommodation options to suit all budgets."

A welcome addition to help your clients access the city is the Palma Pass, a smartcard in a 48-hour or a 72-hour format, (€34 and €41) giving free entrance to the major museums and attractions, with free public transport and discounts in various shops and restaurants.

Palma's multicultural history is reflected in the variety of its architecture, with grand palaces, magnificent courtyards and exquisite gardens everywhere. Even the shops have history. Rialto Living, the beautifully renovated lifestyle store full of modish clothes and accessories just off the Passeig de Born, is located in a former palace.

El Born, a smaller version of Barcelona's Ramblas, is a good place to feel the city's pulse. Its tree-lined boulevard is ideal for romantic promenading, and for indulging in some serious retail therapy in the many designer stores lining the avenue. Above Louis Vuitton is the 16-room Can Alomar, one of the city's new designer boutique hotels. I book for dinner at its Japanese/Peruvian fusion restaurant, De Tokio a Lima, whose terrace overlooks the Born. I enjoy grilled razor clams with a lightly spiced teriyaki sauce followed by lightly smoked rack of lamb in a plum jus, while people-watching the display below.

Hotel Cort, in Placa de Cort, is a gem of a boutique find, with 16 light and airy rooms and suites as well as a cosy, well-appointed bistro. Another gem is the elegant 26-room Posada Terra Santa, situated in the historic centre close to the 14th-century Plaza [Turn to 58](#)



Junior suite at designer boutique hotel Can Alomar

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Japanese-Peruvian fusion De Tokio a Lima restaurant

Mayor. However, the jewel in the crown of Palma's new luxury boutique hotels is the recently opened Sant Francesc Hotel Singular, located in the charming square of the same name. Part of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World group, the beautiful facade of the 18th-century former manor house has been carefully restored, while the 42 stunning contemporary rooms and suites abound with chic furnishings and original artworks. There is a courtyard bar with tinkling fountains and olive trees, a restaurant in the old stables and a roof terrace with views over the city to complete the picture at this new landmark hotel.

### Tapas revolution

It has been said that tapas are the window into the soul of Spanish cuisine and there has been something of a foodie revolution in the city as the capital's chefs raise their game. Bite, on the Paseo Portixol by Palma Bay, is one of the new breed of tapas restaurants where Basque chef Igor Rodriguez Sanz creates an array of delicious tapas and small bites at the former rice warehouse, with much of the produce coming from his sister's organic farm.

Michelin-starred British chef Marc Fosh is another old Palma hand whose deft culinary touch is felt around the city's eateries. His uber-cool fashionable restaurant, Simply Fosh, at Carrer de la Missio 7A, is one

of the city's gastronomic hot tickets, as is the less formal Misa Braseria, just down the road. There, I enjoyed a memorable melt-in-the-mouth tortilla, and perfectly grilled sea bass served with creamed broccoli and kale-like Majorcan spinach as part of the great-value set lunch for €17.

"In Misa we are focusing on a more casual style with classic combinations," says Fosh, who adds that the restaurant scene in Palma is much improved in recent years. "There is a great gastronomic vibe in the city," he says. "A lot of good young chefs have opened cool restaurants and bars and the tapas scene is definitely flourishing"

### Cool nightlife scene

The nightlife in Palma is pretty cool these days too, with an abundance of trendy new bars and restaurants in and around Santa Catalina, the former fishing quarter, as well as some old favourites among the maze of narrow medieval streets of La Lonja, the old town. Step through the big wooden doors into the fruit- and flower-filled courtyard of the 17th-century Palacio of Abaco cocktail



Ornate facades in Palma's old town

bar and you will be assailed with music and oversized exotic cocktails... the perfect start - or even finish - to an evening.

There is plenty for your clients to enjoy throughout the year, including the spectacular "Nit De Foc" (Night Of Fire) on June 23, culminating at the Parc de la Mer in a grand firework party set against the dramatically lit backdrop of the cathedral. On August 1 the city hosts the 34th International Copa Del Rey Mapfre yachting



Marc Fosh

### BOOK IT:

Cosmos offers four nights' B&B at the Grand Melia Victoria in Palma, departing London Luton on October 13, from £515, based on two sharing.

■ [cosmos.co.uk](http://cosmos.co.uk)

Classic Collection Holidays offers three nights' B&B at Santa Clara Urban Hotel & Spa from £637pp in June. Price based on two sharing a double superior room and includes Gatwick flights and private transfers.

■ [classic-collection.co.uk](http://classic-collection.co.uk)

Small Luxury Hotels Of The World offers double rooms at the Sant Francesc Hotel Singular, from £143 based on two sharing on a room-only basis.

■ [slh.com](http://slh.com)

Regatta in the Bay of Palma, and on September 18, Palma's museums and art galleries throw their doors open to locals and visitors alike, serving up music, tapas and drinks until late as part of their "Nit de Arte" (Art Night). With the Mediterranean Marathon in October and the Evolution Mallorca Film Festival in early November, the first week in December features the city's popular gastronomic TaPalma event, in which more than 50 bars and restaurants showcase the creativity of the local chefs and their innovative take on tapas.

With a great exchange rate between the pound and euro, and a 24% increase in direct flight connections, the levels of occupation during weekends have already risen from 65% last year to 85% this year, so it looks like Palma has firmly arrived on the city-break scene. As Alvaro Gijon, first deputy mayor and tourism councillor, explains: "The project we initiated three years ago is now giving its rewards with the perception of our city as a major urban destination throughout the 365 days of the year."