

THE BIG WEEKEND

Sunny Palma (over 20C right now) is the shot of vitamin D we all need this spring after what feels like a very long winter. It's easy to access – a two-hour flight from the UK, followed by a 30-minute airport bus to the centre – and, even if the weather doesn't play along, its setting is uplifting, backed by the Tramuntana mountains and spread around the Bay of Palma. Its handsome gothic cathedral, La Seu, overlooking the latter, is the showpiece. The Romans left their mark, as did the Muslims, and Antoni Gaudí's influence can be seen in the art nouveau-style architecture (and the cathedral restorations). The outdoor sculptures by Joan Miró – who lived here in his latter years – can also be spotted around the city. There's contemporary art, a thriving restaurant and bar scene, a huge marina and several beaches offering surfing, volleyball or ideal conditions for slothing.

WHAT TO DO

● This year marks the 40th anniversary of the death of Miró, a Palma resident from 1956 to 1983. Pay homage at the Miró Foundation in Cala Major (take the 46 bus from Santa Catalina – and admire the grand villas in La Bonanova). An exhibition in the Moneo Building explores his final creative period and his graceful studio, designed by Josep Lluís Sert, is full of the everyday objects that inspired him, from animal bones to newspaper cuttings. In Son Boter, the neighbouring 18th-century house where he also worked, paint is splattered on the floor and jasmine scents the courtyard. Pause on the bench out front to admire the sweeping sea view (£9; miromallorca.com).

● The beach at Cala Major is less than a ten-minute walk away and has low-key surf. A palm tree provides shade and Avocado, a café in the street behind, offers handy picnic materials (sandwiches £6; avocadomallorca.com).

● There are loftier seaside views from La Seu – the waves used to lap at the cathedral's walls. Look out for the sun, moon and star symbols on its magnificent Mirador Portal, which faces the sea. Inside, the rose window – created from over 1,000 pieces of glass – casts rainbows on the pews as the sun shines through. If you have the stamina for the 215 steps, the terraces offer views over the city (catedraldemallorca.org).

● On the way to the old town, pause in the ordered Bishop's Garden, open in the mornings (except Sundays). The streets are narrow here, the houses built close together, their roofs throwing shade. Look out for the devilish faces under the roofs, designed to ward off evil. The original entrance to the old town is on Carrer de L'Almudaina. The palmy internal courtyards will make you long for the Mediterranean lifestyle.

● Reserve an afternoon to walk east along the Paseo Marítimo – there's a bike lane too – to the sheltered bay (which is ideal for swimming) at Platja del Portixolet, beyond Portixol Hotel. It's an attractive (and flat) stroll with handy sangria stops, such as at Animabeach, en route (animabeachpalma.com). Time the return leg for sunset.

THE COOLEST NEIGHBOURHOOD

Santa Catalina – the Soho of Palma – is lively by night and by day. Go to the indoor food market (the city's oldest) for a browse and a bite. The fish counters are thrilling (really). Stop for bacalao or pica pica at Bar La Tapita (tapas from £3). The



PALMA

Soak up the culture in Mallorca's waterside city

surrounding streets are full of semi open-air restaurants and breakfast is a speciality – Santina by the market does a brisk brunch trade (mains from £7; santina-palma.com). In the evening try the recently opened Ombu for its signature Aperol spritz (cocktails £11; ombupalma.com).

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

La Rosa
Bag the window seat and watch life go by on Plaza de Weyler over a homemade vermouth – a speciality at La Rosa and delicious. Soak it up with huevos rotos La Rosa, a sustaining Spanish fry-up served in the pan. Round that all off with rice pudding croquettes and buy prettily packaged tinned fish to take away (tapas from £2; larosavermuteria.com).

Restaurant C'an Tito

Book for Sunday lunch when C'an Tito is crowded with local families and order gallo frito con cebolla. The famous dish of white fish in a nest of fine strips of fried onion is so sought after that Juan Carlos, the former king, has eaten it here (gallo frito con cebolla £30; restaurantecantito.com).

El Camino

Admire the chefs at work behind this buzzing white marble bar, which is both trendy and friendly. Classic tapas dishes – jamon croquettes, tomato bread – are done beautifully and salads are imaginative. Chatting to your neighbours is encouraged (dishes from £5; elcaminopalma.es).

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Es Princep

For rooftop glam, there's the hotel Es Princep, gazing out to sea and serving Mallorcan/international dishes including burgers with cured sausage-style sobrasada (mains from £13; esprincep.com).

Giovanni L

A holiday isn't a holiday without an ice cream and Giovanni Lasagna's are as good as they get. Lasagna is Sicilian and the pistachios for his gelato come from the Italian island, as does the chocolate. The Mallorcan almond and mandarin varieties celebrate local flavours (from £3; Carrer de Jaume II).

WHERE TO STAY

HM Balanguera

Next to Parc de la Riera and within easy reach of the old town and Santa Catalina, minimalist HM Balanguera is budget, but with luxury features such as a mini rooftop pool with cabanas. The city's elaborate, statue-filled cemetery is a ten-minute walk away (B&B doubles from £87; hmbalanguera.com).

Nakar Hotel

Nakar is well located, right by El Corte Ingles department store and ten minutes from the marina. It also has a rooftop plunge pool with views over the cathedral (breakfast on the eighth-floor restaurant comes with this vista) and plenty of sunloungers (B&B doubles from £131; nakarhotel.com).

Can Cera

This grand 17th-century palace in the old town is now an adults-only hotel and it's resolutely grown-up with locally sourced artworks, such as Jaume Roig's ceramics in the palm-laden internal courtyard, and a solarium where guests can sunbathe in peace (B&B doubles from £314; cancerahotel.com).

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING

Take a tour with Pedro Oliver. He's passionate about Palma (and Mallorca) and can tailor the tour to suit, whether you want to know where the locals (or visiting celebrities) go for supper or the history of the island's invaders (from £30 for 2.5 hours; toursbylocals.com).

By Jenny Coad, who was a guest of Nakar Hotel (nakarhotel.com), Tours by Locals (toursbylocals.com) and Palma Tourism (visitpalma.en)

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