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JUNE 2016

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MALLORCA'S BEST WEEKEND HOTSPOT

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ON HOLIDAY WITH

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THE GREAT EUROPEAN ESCAPE

Freshly polishing its first Michelin star and now teeming with cool hunters who see it as the new Mediterranean design hotspot, Palma is looking strong, says Emma Love



SHORT BREAK

FALLING FOR PALMA is inevitable. For the ridiculously tall palm trees that line the rejuvenated waterfront; the characterful Old Town with Moorish architecture; and for the funky yet low-fi vibe of the place. In Portixol, the tanned houses with sun-faded, forest-green shutters span the curving bay, and there are only three shops (plus a tobacconist), all of which sell fishing kit. This barrio is bookended by Nassau Beach Club, with sunbeds and raffia umbrellas on the sand, and the harbour, where shiny Sunseekers are moored alongside bobbing wooden boats. Borrowing a bicycle from Portixol hotel – the first proper design bolthole to open in the city 17 years ago – I take the path that runs along the beach, following the shoreline past paella-eating diners at El Bungalow and behind the thrumming Purobeach club, all the way to El Arenal. Rollerbladers and teenage boys on scooters whizz by.

'This is our Ocean Drive,' says Mikael Landström, the Swedish owner of Portixol hotel, when we meet up later in the bar. He and his wife Johanna bought the place as a wreck when the area was completely run down. 'It's not easy to find property right on the sea here [since the coastal road was built in the 1960s], and we thought it wouldn't be long before it started blooming.' It's taken some time, but things are now looking peachy in Portixol. The couple renovated the hotel from top to bottom: there are 25 rooms, the best of which have balconies with views of the pool and beyond. There's a tiny spa, a boutique that sells the same lovely pinstripe robes as in the bedrooms, and a restaurant under a bamboo pergola that buzzes with locals at lunch. The seafood – octopus carpaccio, seabass ceviche, grilled scallops – is delicious.

Top spots for equally fresh fish are harbour-side Ola del Mar, where the most sought-after seats are out on the front terrace,

BRONZED ELBOWS JOSTLE DAY AND NIGHT FOR DRINKS AT THE TINY SEA-FACING BAR

or the traditional Sa Roqueta, where I sit at a linen-covered table and order a steaming silver tureen of crayfish, langoustine and mussel soup. The Prosecco bar is full of bronzed elbows jostling day and night at the counter for smoothies, snacks and glasses of sparkling wine (at weekends, book ahead for a spot on the tiny, sea-facing balcony). But it's Santa Catalina to the west of the city that's garnering a reputation as the real foodie quarter. Unlike the rest of Palma, the roads are arranged in a grid formation: it was one of the first areas where new housing was built when the population grew too large to be confined inside the now-demolished city walls. Along those streets is restaurant after restaurant, unassuming places with wooden tables, director's chairs and blackboards with chalked-up menus.

At Bunker's I perch on a stool under a white awning to tuck into melt-in-the-mouth tuna *tataki* with fennel salad, *calamarata* pasta with squid, and strawberry sorbet with basil, ginger and grappa ice-cream, all made by chef-owner Luigi Valdambri in his open-kitchen. Next door is Duke's, which was set up by two Mallorcan friends and named after Hawaiian surfer Duke Paoa Kahanamoku. It feels like a smart beach shack with a menu that mixes Japanese curry and burgers. At the end of ➤

Clockwise, from top left: Portixol hotel; Frida Watson furniture shop; Sant Francesc Hotel Singular; Viveca antiques shop; terrace at Purobeach club; a room at Sant Francesc. *Previous pages, from left:* vintage homeware at Viveca; sea views from Purobeach club





► pedestrianised calle de la Fábrica, Patrón Lunares plays up to its heritage as a former social club for retired fishermen: lobster-cage lights and nautical flags hang from the ceiling and a series of portraits on the walls include co-founder Javier Bonet's grandfather, a local angler. 'We wanted to make it a homage to the people from the sea, so we've tried to keep the same spirit,' says Bonet. The area feels vaguely hippyish and a touch studenty, and the architecture is a hotchpotch of colour. There are a couple of charming vintage furniture shops worth a look (both named after their owners Ariela Shöneberg and Frida Watson) and a great food market, the Mercat de Santa Catalina, where you can munch on traditional tapas or sushi after picking up waxed-paper parcels of *jamón ibérico*. One artisan-pasta stand, La Sorrentina, offers yacht delivery, which shows just how much the island has changed over the years.

The Old Town is still the beating heart of Palma and Hotel Cort is in one of its loveliest squares; there is a huge gnarled ancient tree in the middle where visitors stand around licking dripping ice creams and watch just-married couples come out of the town hall. From the cherry-red exterior, Hotel Cort looks like a café with people-watching tables outside that are full from breakfast (flaky croissants, scrambled eggs with ham and cheese) until last orders (the corvina ceviche is fantastic). Inside, there's a Soho House-meets-the-Balearics vibe with blue-and-white Mallorcan ikat fabrics hanging on walls and thrown over armchairs (similar textiles are sold around the corner at the Rialto Living store), patterns of monochrome tiles on the floor in the restaurant, and suites with sitting areas, bookshelves, libraries, vast velvet sofas and Juliet balconies overlooking the Plaça de Cort. Nearby, Hotel Sant Francesc Singular, in an



Nearby, Hotel Sant Francesc Singular, in an

THE MARKET STALLS NOW DELIVER TO YOUR YACHT, WHICH SHOWS HOW MUCH PALMA HAS CHANGED

elegant 19th-century mansion, has a sophisticated and grown-up feel, with its tonal taupe colour palette. It has what is surely a contender for the biggest and best rooftop terrace in the city, and a pool in the shadow of the beautiful looming basilica.

Palma, with its Gaudi-like, Art Nouveau buildings, restaurants with

My favourite find is Viveca, an interiors shop in an alley of converted garages. Gerhardt Braun Gallery, where the 20-something staff are to Mallorca from Madrid four years ago; inside are Kantha quilts folded over bamboo ladders, one-off artworks made by their father from discarded wood, and second-hand Danish chairs. 'It's impossible to start something like this in Barcelona or Madrid because it's too pricey,' says Camila. 'It's too expensive to even pay the rent,' adds Carla. 'Here, tourism

Above right, a room at Hotel Cort. Opposite, clockwise from top left: salmon sashimi at Bunker's; Markers installation by Carlos Marcía at Gerhardt Braun Gallery; retro furniture at Frida Watson; Hotel Cort

money, and the island is small enough that people

word is spreading about the Mallorcan art scene. The Pilar and Joan Miró Foundation (which spent the last years of his life in Palma and and finished works for visitors to see), which with a residency programme. Sound artist Susan and a place here before she won the Turner Prize's also attracting international collectors, including Polish, Manuela Wirth and Ursula Hauser, who al comes Art Palma Brunch, Palma Photo and the galleries stay open until midnight.

Guard Museum of Modern and Contemporary art, a medieval merchant-guild hall Sa Llotja; the Juan March, which has a permanent collection of 19th-century Spanish vanguard artists, and a high-profile galleries such as La Caja Blanca, founded by duo Eva and Amir Shakouri-Torreadrado. 'The art scene is growing here, which is quite curious,' says Eva, who has worked on projects with Irish artist Richard Mosse. 'It was quite insular for many years, but now it's opening up to the world. It doesn't boast about what it has though; people just eventually discover it.' Which is exactly what can be said about Palma. **T**

GETTING HERE

British Airways (ba.com) flies from Heathrow to Palma nine times a week from £95 one way. Portixol hotel (portixol.com) has doubles from about £170. Hotel Cort (hotelcort.com) has doubles from about £130. Hotel Sant Francesc Singular (hotelsantfrancesc.com) has doubles from about £225