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Hemispheres

MAY 2023

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Where you can wander the cobblestoned alleys of Valldemossa, one of the island's many storybook villages

THREE PERFECT DAYS

Mallorca

Spain

STAR ALLIANCE

UNITED



THREE PERFECT DAYS

Mallorca

Spain



The restaurant Ca's Patro March, in Deià; **previous page:** looking out over Palma from La Seu cathedral

When British novelist Robert Graves was considering moving to Mallorca, he sought out the opinion of his friend Gertrude Stein. The American author, who had visited the Spanish island twice, replied, "It's a paradise—if you can stand it." While the distractions of such a sensual locale may be antithetical to productivity, they're pure nourishment for travelers seeking a reset. Aside from its turquoise coves, the largest of the Balearic Islands boasts a rich history of cultural exchange, with Phoenicians, Romans, Moors, and Christians leaving their marks everywhere, from the buzzy capital of Palma to the many charming mountain villages. Here, the ancient and modern intersect, as artisans keep traditions in food and art alive, and historic landmarks sit alongside chic boutiques and restaurants. Three days will hardly do justice to Mallorca's pleasures, but they're certainly enough to test Stein's thesis.

By Victoria De Silverio • Photography by Adrian Morris

DAY 1

→ A sweet *ensaïmada*, a surreal cathedral, and a dozen eggs in Palma

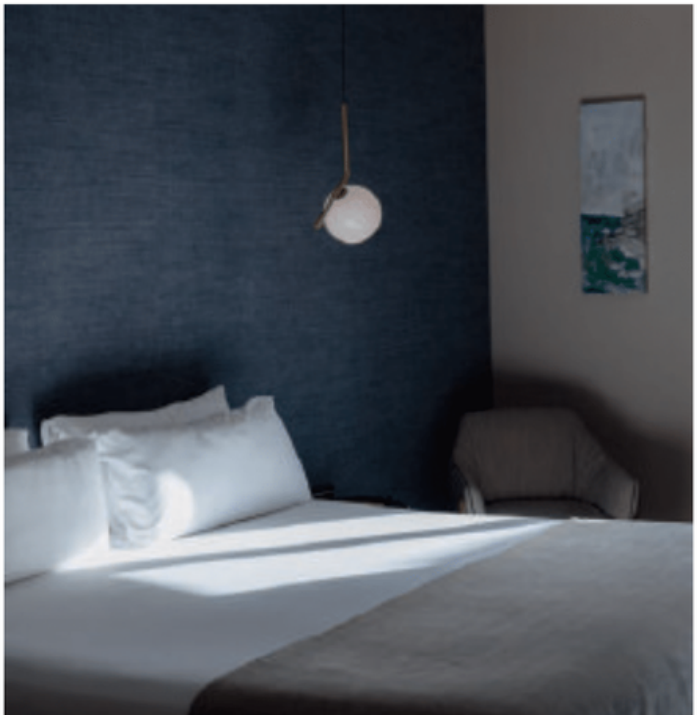
Church bells jostle me awake at the **Sant Jaume Design Hotel** in the heart of Old Palma. I take a peek out my window and spy a pair of nuns, their brown habit hems skimming the cobblestones as they pull in emptied garbage cans. Around two dozen churches are crammed within the city's eight square miles. Seeing a nun doing such a normal thing is a thrill, but, I wonder, maybe they're everywhere, like palm trees in Los Angeles and cats in Istanbul?

I start my day with a stroll down La Rambla, a tree-lined promenade with flower stands, cafés, and kiosks that buy and sell rare coins, before entering into the warren of narrow streets in the historic center. I'm meeting a local guide, Pedro Oliver, at **Ca'n Joan de s'Aigo**, an old-school bakery. As I round the corner of Carrer Can Sanç, he spots me and waves. "*Bon dia!*" he calls. "Come! This is one of my favorite places. My grandmother would take me here after church on Sundays."

With its emerald glass chandeliers and well-trod tile floors, the café has a faded glamour befitting a beloved classic. Oliver orders, and as each delicacy arrives he tells me a story. The origin of the *ensaïmada*—an airy pastry made with lard and dusted with sugar—is hotly debated. Some think that Jewish bakers invented them (breaking kosher law because of religious persecution); others believe the Moors created them, because of their turban-like shape (although they wouldn't have used lard either, so who knows). The meat and pea empanadas, on the other hand, harken to Mallorca's more recent history, when the economy revolved around agriculture and workers would snack on them in the fields. That heritage is baked into many local surnames. "My name is Oliver because my great-grandfather made olive oil," my guide says. "The café's named s'Aigo—'of the water'—because the family, in 1700, started by selling melted mountain snow." I appreciate the next bite of my almond ice cream a little more. "Come back in the winter when the almond trees blossom," Oliver continues. "Their pink flowers cover the island like clouds."

Next, we walk toward the sea in search of more of the island's secrets. We reach the **Royal Palace of La Almudaina**, which was the seat of the Arab emir before becoming the home of Mallorcan kings in the Middle Ages. The influences of conquest are everywhere: The Romans brought olives and wine, the Moors windmills and orange and lemon groves. At the palace, a statue stands up to Mallorca's constant waves of invaders (the latest being tourists): a loincloth-clad warrior brandishing a slingshot. "The word *balearic* means 'master of throwing,'" Oliver says. "They were so skilled, Hannibal and Caesar hired them as mercenaries."

Across the way is a mirage in sandstone, the magnificent Gothic cathedral known as



This page: a guest room at Sant Jaume Design Hotel; **opposite page:** the Gothic arches of La Seu cathedral







From left: colorful light inside La Seu; the Museu Fundación Juan March

La Seu. Inside its macho, fortress-like shell we find a softer, more surrealistic beauty. The kaleidoscopic rose window—39-plus feet in diameter—throws colors on the walls, and Antoni Gaudí's massive suspended altar canopy is embellished with wrought-iron candelabras and a glowing, hovering crown of thorns.

"La Seu's kaleidoscopic rose window—39-plus feet in diameter—throws colors on the walls."

Equally mind-blowing is a redesigned chapel Miquel Barceló completed in 2006. Riffing on the parable about Jesus feeding his followers, the Mallorcan artist created a mural of abstracted fish, bread loaves, and human skulls on melting mounds of clay and smudged the windows a smokey black, as if a kiln had exploded. It's weird

WINEMAKER SPOTLIGHT: CATI RIBOT OF VE D'AVIOR

One sip of a natural wine changed Cati Ribot's life. "It felt real, true—a totally different world than the conventional wines I was making," she recalls. Inspired by that first taste, the third-generation winemaker changed everything about her family's Santa Margalida estate. "I was making and selling wine I didn't like to drink myself," she says. "I could not continue in this way." She not only moved toward organic and biodynamic farming practices, but also adopted a traditional style of fermenting grapes, without using additives such as sulfur. In 2019, she launched her natural wine label, Ve d'Avior ("From the Past" in the local dialect of Mallorquí), made with rare indigenous varietals that express the island's terroir. These bottles are now among the most sought-after on the island. "You must do what you like in this life," Ribot says. "It may take a long time, but we must arrive at this point."







This page, clockwise from above: Marlene Albaladejo at La Pecera; a Palma street; goods at Colmado Santo Domingo; **opposite page:** cuisine at Fera



and beautiful, and I'm amazed that someone let him do it.

Back under the sun, we return to the medieval maze. On Carrer de L'Estudi General, we walk past a gated courtyard where Romans would rest their horses and gossip around the well. We dip into an alley to the **Convent of Santa Clara**, where we exchange euros for buttery orange biscuits via a wooden turnstile that obscures the cloistered nuns. A young couple approaches with a dozen eggs. "They'll give them to nuns to guarantee a sunny wedding day," Oliver says. Hopefully their prayers will fix the grimace on the groom's face.

Here, I part ways with Oliver and head to Santa Catalina, an old fisherman's village that's been rejuvenated in recent years. My appetite piqued by convent cookies, I opt for tapas at **El Txoko de Martín**, owned by superstar chef Martín Berasategui. Settling in at the counter, I enjoy Yzaguirre Rojo, a balsamic vermouth that's a tasty, herbaceous, spicy match for a slightly tart gazpacho, crispy squid with lemon aioli, and acorn-fed *jamón ibérico*.

After lunch, I head down Carrer de la Victòria and peek into **La Pecera**, a shop where owner Marlene Albaladejo works with local artisans to handcraft espadrilles and furniture. I see an oak and palm chair I wish I could tuck into my carry-on. I *have* to walk into **Colmado Santo Domingo**, a minuscule shop with hanging hams and bottles of local olive oil, honey, and pâté stacked in hoarder fashion. Red salt and an herbal liqueur pop out as gifts for a friend, and before bagging them the nice lady hands me a spoonful of salty black pork *sobrasada* on a tiny toast. On Carrer de Sant Miquel, I take a quick look in

"The Mediterranean-Asian menu is Michelin-level, as is the atmosphere in the Balinese lantern–lit garden."

the **Museu Fundación Juan March**, a serene 17th-century mansion that now houses modern art, including works by Dalí and Miró. I stop at a striking panel that looks like a soupy pool of algae, thanks to irregular mounds of green paint. It looks somehow familiar—and a glance at the card confirms that it's by Miquel Barceló, he of the molten cave in the cathedral.

After a quick stop at the hotel, I go for an aperitif at **La Viniloteca**, a cute wine



bar and record shop run by Aldana Areco and Javier Vegas. She picks the wine—natural and biodynamic bottles from small Spanish producers—and he, a musician, picks the vinyl, everything from Carmen Linares to The Smiths. As the sun sets, I enjoy a juicy Cati Ribot red made with escursac grapes, a recently revived Mallorcan varietal.

My whistle wet, I stroll to **Fera**, a restaurant in a restored mansion with a kitchen run by Austrian chef Simon Petutschnig. The Mediterranean-Asian menu is Michelin-level, as is the atmosphere in the Balinese lantern–lit garden. There are so many courses I lose track. It's a symphony of exquisite morsels—oyster, caviar, Mudéjar Wagyu, truffle, sea bass, *tom kha gai* soup—with a timpani finale of chocolate and caramel tapas.

On my way home, I see revelers outside **Café L'Antiquari** and decide to have a nightcap. Francois, the owner, pokes his head out and says he's closing up shop—but if we want, we can keep drinking with him and friends inside. No one declines.



Shelbi Okumura (cover)

ON THE COVER

Mallorca is dotted with inviting villages, and one of the most photogenic is Valldemossa. Nestled in a valley amid the Serra de Tramuntana, just a 20-minute drive from Palma, the town is known for its car-free cobblestoned alleys, stylish boutiques, and the Real Catuja, a 13th-century monastery where Frédéric Chopin once spent a winter.

St. Regis Mardavall Mallorca Resort, Mallorca's top-end family resort just south of Palma de Mallorca

Just above the glitzy, yacht-lined Puerto Portals, a short drive from Palma de Mallorca, is The St. Regis Mardavall Mallorca Resort. Encircled by beautiful gardens and facing expansive seascapes, this is a little kingdom built from traditional marés sandstone with a very strong sense of place. All 125 guest rooms – all of them with the traditional English butler service and mostly suites - have private terraces and sea views, plus enormous beds covered in soft goose down duvets. At cocktail hour pass by The St. Regis Bar for the Champagne sabering ritual before moving into the freshly refurbished, oh-so romantic Es Fum. Choose a table on its terrace and watch the sunset as the lights twinkle on and around the Bay of Palma as you sample the Michelin-starred food, head to the all-day Terra Restaurant or visit the spectacular Mar Sea Club. Visiting children particularly love the Explorers Club, which comprises a pool, a sandpit, video game room, and guided activities. Adults pursuits include sailing trips on the St. Regis electric boat, golf at three nearby courses and treatments at the enormous Arabella Spa. As one of the largest spas on the island, the extensive amenities include an Egyptian saltwater pool, salt sauna, Traditional Chinese Medicine therapies and 24-hour gym.



DAY 2

→ Sea kayaking, tasting a nice John Dory, and driving with goats



Before leaving Palma, I seek a hearty bite to settle my woozy-boozy hangover. I walk back into the maze to Plaça de Santa Eulàlia, where the classic hole-in-the-wall **Bar Tony** is tucked behind some trees. The hour is early, but it's buzzing—over the deep hum of the espresso machine, ladies in skirts with straw totes on their shoulders and gentlemen in fedoras with hands cradling morning beers chitchat noisily.

The gab here is in Mallorquí, the local Catalan dialect, which sounds like a mishmash of Spanish, Portuguese, and eating marbles. Since Tony's is the kind of place you want to fit in, I utter my most important phrase when traveling—"May I have an espresso?"—in the best accent I can muster: "*Bon dia! Me pots posar un solo?*" With hesitation, I add, "*y un pa amb oli*." Literally "bread and oil," it's Mallorca's most ubiquitous snack, made by scrubbing a ramallet tomato onto a slice of country bread and adding a drizzle of olive oil and sea salt. I get a nod from the all-business barista, but I already know I'm going to take, and enjoy, whatever he hands me.

I'd like to stay here all day and people-watch, but I have to hurry to pack in all my daylight adventures. I pick up a rental car (a cute white Fiat) and drive half an hour north along the edge of the Serra de Tramuntana mountains, where a subterranean world of wonder was accidentally

Above: kayaking on the Mediterranean



discovered in 1945. I follow the trail down to the **Caves of Campanet**, where the stalactites and stalagmites have been forming since the dinosaurs roamed. The deep purple, red, and black calcium drips are breathtaking.

In the nearby town of Pollença, I make another stop, at the storefront of **Teixits Vicens**, a family-run business that has been making traditional textiles since 1854. I'm told I just missed the workshop during which you can see women weave special ikat designs. I could spend hours browsing the wares—tablecloths, bedspreads, shoes, clothes—but I resist temptation and snatch a little pouch for a friend before running out.

A little while later, I reach my hotel, **El Vicenç de la Mar**, in Cala Sant Vicenç, a whitewashed village on a secluded cove where I'm meeting guide Toni Gómez to kayak the crystal-clear sea.

I park at the hotel and walk toward Gómez, who's lining up our yellow vessels on the sandy beach, where families are cooling off from the midday sun. "*Bon dia!*" he calls. "Climb in! Let's go!" And we're off, paddling toward a set of cliffs so craggy they look like they just fell into the sea. Gómez says to keep an eye out for sea turtles clinging near to the rocks, and dolphins farther out. We paddle a ways to clear the cove, and suddenly the distance we've gone feels great, and the sunbathers look tiny.

I pull the paddles in and lay back and enjoy the feeling of floating away from civilization ... but maybe for a bit too long, because when I sit up, Gómez has receded from view. Oops. Scanning





This page, clockwise from above: the decor at El Vicenç de la Mar; a goat braves the cliffs; the beach at Cap de Formentor; **opposite page:** making textiles at Teixits Vicens



the area, I finally see a speck seeming to signal me into the next cove. We meet on the pebble beach and share water and snacks. A few sunburned tourists are feeding carrots to a couple of peckish goats.

Gómez points to the cliffs. "Do you see the goats at the very top?" Squinting into the sun I see a dot that could be a goat. "They can cling to the rocks—but sometimes they fall into the sea, and they die." I'm really hoping these beach bleaters don't take any chances. After a swim, we paddle back through waves, larger and rougher. When we reach shore, the kayak rental guy asks if it was bad out there. I don't know, because I have nothing to compare it to. "The wind sure picked up," I say. "You made it back, so it wasn't that bad," he replies, which strikes me as a clever way to stave off any complaints.

Starving, I walk over to **C'al Patró**, a family-owned restaurant famous for its paella. As it's on the later side for lunch, there's a free table. Fishing-basket lamps and wood beams add rustic touches, and the owner, an older gentleman behind the bar, cultivates a delightfully blasé vibe. I ask him about the paella, and he gives me a blank stare. "OK," I say, "what do you think I should order?" He asks me where I'm from. "New York." He shrugs. "I have a nice John Dory." He leaves for a moment and returns holding a raw fish in his palm. The ladies next to me look and laugh. I ask if I should get a starter. "No," he responds, "it comes with fries and a salad. You'll be fine with wine." He leaves and returns with a glass of white wine. It's not fancy, but it's perfect.

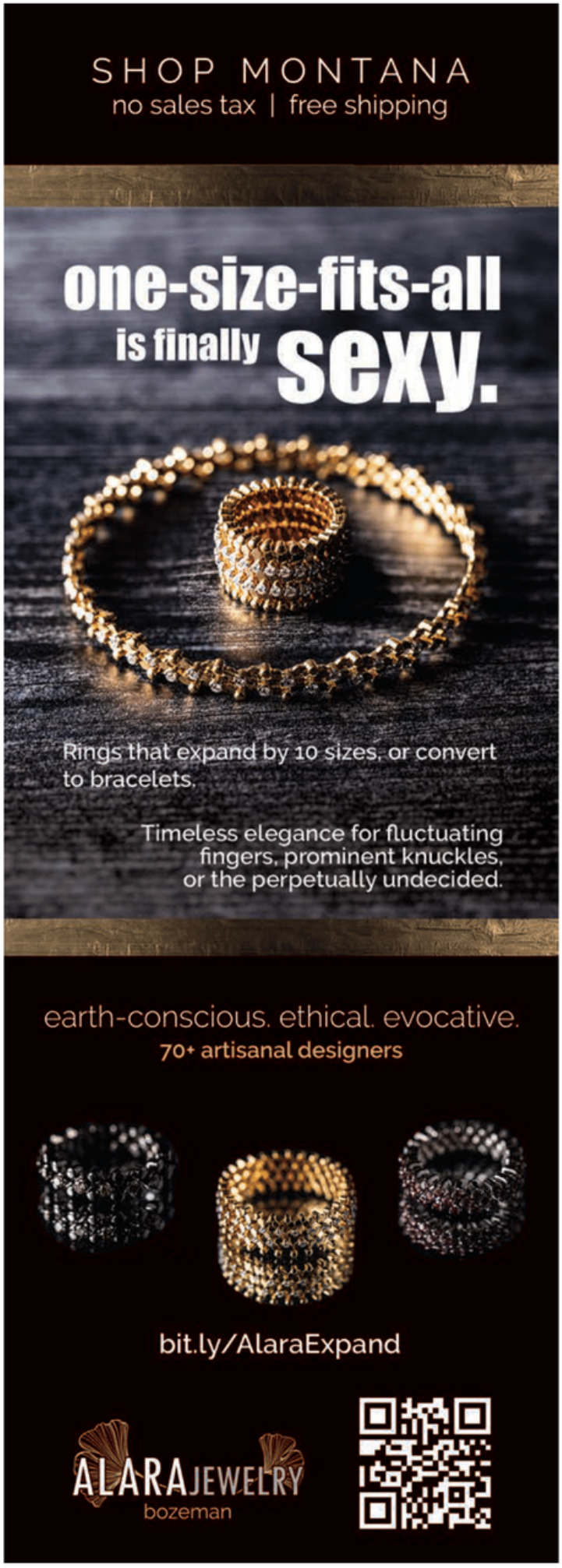
I head back to my car and drive out to where those



"The narrow, vertiginous road takes hairpin turns, and packs of cyclists in fancy gear battle for the asphalt with chocolate-brown goats."

goats were hanging on for dear life: **Cap de Formentor**, the island's northernmost point. The narrow, vertiginous road takes hairpin turns, and packs of cyclists in fancy gear battle for the asphalt with chocolate-brown goats. In some places, the road is inches from the edge—no guardrails, no lights for the way back—so I keep my brilliant time at the grand lighthouse brief. When the sky turns the shimmering sea pink, I make my way back.

Hungry again and anxious to spend time in my room's mini pool, I order food from the hotel's **Restaurant El Vicenç**, helmed by Michelin-starred chef Santi Taura. Soon, aromatic dishes arrive—a fried squid ball with a gazpacho shooter, lobster soup, filet mignon with Bordelaise sauce and potato terrine. It's a very decadent spread and definitely worth the guilt. While sipping a white vermouth, I ponder my next guilt-inspiring move: a swim in the pool on my terrace or in the cove. I may never be lucky enough to return, so I choose both.



DAY 3

→ Mountain scenery, centuries of olive oil, and a duck named Jaume

It's just after sunrise, and I'm back in the car and excited to tackle the Serra de Tramuntana mountains, the highest chain in the Balearic Islands. Their winding roads and dramatic terrain attract legions of cyclists, both recreational and professional, and the whole area has become a training and touring hub.

I make a quick detour through the storybook sandstone buildings and cobblestoned streets of medieval Pollença. If I had more time, I'd investigate the vast Roman ruins a stone's throw from the center. Right now, however, my interest is more pedestrian: buttery chocolate croissants. Gómez told me where to find Mallorca's finest, at **La Mar Dolça** on Carrer de Sant Domingo, and like a bloodhound on the trail, I'm there as the bakers take their first batch out of the oven. In one bite, I'm on the banks of the Seine, madly in love.

Temporarily satiated, I steer the car onto scenic Ma-10. Soon, the plains give way to another landscape entirely, one of colossal Mediterranean pines and scrub-covered limestone bluffs. The road bends left and right, sweeps down and climbs back up. Cyclists in colorful onesies flow alongside, passing then hanging back. Together we're like a school of fish carried by a current. I stop at a blue-green reservoir dwarfed by Puig Major, which at 4,747 feet is the highest peak on the island.

At a *mirador* (viewpoint), I spot the reason for the area's recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Cultural Landscape: stone walls and terraces from an underground waterworks system built by Muslims a millennium ago and later enhanced by Christians. In awe of the ingenuity and sheer will to grow food on the sides of mountains, I solemnly promise to never again complain about grocery shopping.

My new appreciation sets me up for my next stop, Caimari, where I'm meeting Tomeu Deya, whose family has been making olive oil since the 16th century. When I pull up to **Can Det**, he's filling a jug from a stone chute where spring water flows from the mountain. Inside his family's ancestral home, the original stone mill is still kicking, with only a small concession to modernity: It's powered by a motor, not a donkey. "We now do Instagram!" he says. "But I leave that to my daughter, the 17th generation." In the dining room, we nibble on almonds, oranges, and wrinkled black olives from the garden, along with homemade bread soaked in deliciously nutty oil. "We use ripe olives, making it sweet and yellow," Deya tells me, "completely different than industrial oil." In the groves, he shows me trees that are well over 1,000 years old yet still bear kilos of olives thanks to the family's knowledge and care.

With bottles of "liquid gold" in my hands, I get back on the road and veer toward the sea, to Deià. English poet and novelist Robert Graves, who made the hamlet his home in 1929, put it on the map, and soon artists, poets, and intellectuals—the whole boho celebrity set—joined a coterie of German and Catalan painters who were already in the know. On the approach, it's hard not to gawk. Tucked between mountainsides, the village



This page: olive oil at Can Det; **opposite page:** La Residencia, A Belmond Hotel, in scenic Deià



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This page, from left: La Residencia, A Belmond Hotel; Restaurante Miró; **opposite page, from top:** a cyclist at Mirador de s'Entreforc; sardines and wine at Ca'n Lluc

is impossibly pretty. Ochre-hued houses with terra-cotta roofs blend into the hills, dripping with purple bougainvillea and blue hibiscus.

Arriving at **La Residencia, A Belmond Hotel**, I take one look at the fantastical hillside retreat and know if I go in, I'll never leave. I fight its magnetic pull, park the car, and trek up a hill to a medieval church with a small cliff's-edge cemetery and a panoramic view of the shimmering sea. (I guess you have to die to be able to afford this real estate.) I follow a steep dirt trail through an olive grove to a tiny cove where two restaurants face each other. Ca's Patro March, where the BBC series *The Night Manager* was filmed, has a line out front, so I opt for its more ramshackle neighbor, **Ca'n Lluc**. Soon, I'm biting into salty grilled sardines on the pebble beach.

Making the rounds between tables is a white duck with goofy yellow feet. He's got a waiter on his tail, carrying a bowl of water for him. The bird finally stops long enough for a sip. I ask what's going on, and the waiter says, "We call him Jaume. His wing isn't so good." I learn that someone will be taking him to a lake in another town once he's mended. "He's here, but I already miss him," the waiter says. I want to hug him, but instead I walk across the rounded rocks and wade into the warm, clear water.

"Ochre-hued houses with terra-cotta roofs blend into the hills, dripping with purple bougainvillea and blue hibiscus."

A gentle afternoon sunshower starts as I make the steep climb back to the hotel. I gravitate toward a spot on the terrace, and a spritz and little bowls of olives and almonds magically appear. My self-imposed pressure to explore disappears. Eavesdropping on my neighbors, I hear a telling story about how expats were renovating their hillside villa with materials they flew in by helicopter (as one does), much to the annoyance of the locals.

WHERE TO STAY

Sant Jaume Design Hotel

On a quiet street in Palma's Old Town, this chic, 36-room hotel in a restored 18th-century mansion is close to the shops on Paseo del Borne and walking distance to the Bay of Palma. Bookend the day with a generous breakfast buffet and a cozy nightcap on the rooftop terrace with views of La Seu. In between, cool off in the cold-water plunge pool. *From $217, santjaumedesignhotel.com*

El Vicenç de la Mar

In sleepy Cala Sant Vicenç, this brand-new, 35-room hotel features the design flair of Diesel's Magnus Ehrland; an enormous spa with a steam room, lap pool, and treatments using local ingredients; and dining options from Michelin-starred chef Santi Taura. Book a suite with a terrace and private pool, and reserve the theater for a private movie night. *From $260, elvicenc.com*

La Residencia, A Belmond Hotel

Mallorca's grand dame delivers unapologetic luxury, but with an inviting feel. Nestled on the mountainside in Deià, this retreat has 70 rooms and suites styled with antiques and Mallorcan textiles. Indulgences abound, including fine-dining restaurants, an award-winning spa, indoor and outdoor pools, and tennis courts with sea views. *From $537, belmond.com*



After a visit to my room, I head back over to the cozy **Restaurante Miró**, named for its impressive collection of 33 original works by Joan Miró. Francesco, the loquacious maitre d', leads me to a terrace facing the mountains. I start with a flatbread topped with fresh tomatoes, olive oil, and wild mushrooms, and move on to croquettes of red prawns from nearby Port de Sóller and spicy Mahón mussels. The grand finale is the silkiest, most delicious cheesecake, topped with fig jam.

Beyond satisfied, I wander through the fragrant gardens, which are brimming with citrus and olive trees and dotted with modern sculptures. On a terrace below are donkeys and sheep, and in the distance the lights are on in the resident sculptor's studio; I tiptoe to the window to take a peek and see him making a sketch. Turning a corner, I come across the glass door to the spa's indoor pool. It's so grand, with white columns and a vaulted wood ceiling, and I want to jump in, but it's closed. Walking away, I encounter a stone hot tub built into the lawn.



On this island, I've learned to always have a bathing suit on or in a bag. I slip in, push the bubble button, and take in the starry sky. I think about where I started, at a hotel called Sant Jaume, and how today I met a duck named Jaume. He's not long for Deià, and neither, sadly, am I. When do those almond trees bloom again?

Marvelous Mallorca ... and More: United serves more destinations in Spain than any other U.S. airline. Nonstop flights to Mallorca depart three times a week from New York/Newark during the peak summer travel season.







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