

TRAVEL

on Sunday

FOR THE RECORD

The tiny Caribbean island that's hosted some of rock's biggest stars

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Why now's the best time to book a winter holiday

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PAULA RADCLIFFE

'Sarah Jessica Parker picked me out a handbag in New York!'

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AMERICAN BEAUTY

A night in a retro bus that brings California chic to the Cotswolds

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Come on in! Mallorca's lovely

An old holiday favourite has reinvented itself – and the result is rather wonderful, says Paul Richardson

Seen from my cliff-top suite at Cap Rocat, the Mediterranean sea had the vitreous blue-green of hand-blown glass. To the left and right were swathes of rugged coast with not a building or soul in sight. I picked at my grilled fish and gazed. On an evening in high summer you'd expect to see mega-yachts and motor-launches busy on the water. The pandemic had put paid to that: there was nothing to break the rosemary-scented silence. Out there in the blue

beyond, a single white fishing boat pattered across the horizon.

It's worth remembering that Mallorca is, if not the birthplace of tourism as we know it, one of its earliest and most successful exponents. Since the very first decades of the 20th century when it was already selling the idea of "sol y playa", the Mallorcan tourist industry has grown into a formidable machine whose rattle and hum is felt in every corner of the island's economy. On any

given summer day in the "old normal" a plane touched down at Son Sant Joan airport every 90 seconds. But on March 14 2020, when the state of emergency was declared in Spain, the great machine abruptly ground to a screeching halt.

I flew in from Madrid more than a year later, still unsure whether I'd be writing the "come now while it's still empty of tourists" story, or the "masks and distancing, but otherwise back to normal" story. The reality was somewhere

between the two. As the plane made its final descent in a fly-past of the south coast, the creamy-white beaches of Magaluf and Santa Ponsa were visibly devoid of parasols and foreign bodies. On the ground, there was puzzlement and despair. Taxi drivers and shopkeepers complained of one lost season and another still hanging in the balance. Yet on the positive side,

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Cover story



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I found locals busily coming up with cunning solutions and bright ideas for coping with the crisis – all signs, maybe, of an island getting its act together.

Mallorca and I go way back. When I first visited this biggest of the Balearics it was the late 1980s and I was a foot-loose student. In those olden days the island still clung to its rural essences, its placid provincial routines. I wondered whether now, mid-pandemic, I'd find a slower-paced Mallorca, truer to itself, like the one I discovered 35 years ago.

I checked in to the relatively new El Llorenç Parc de la Mar hotel, one of the phalanx of townhouse hotels that have sprung up in old-town Palma over the past two decades. In my day the Plaça de Llorenç Villa longa, a tree-lined square on a rampart behind the medieval city walls, wasn't somewhere you'd venture after nightfall, let alone expect to find a sleek urban boutique like the El Llorenç Parc de la Mar. Dinner on the rooftop terrace was courtesy of the chef Santi Taura, who sat with me over a glass of local white to tell me how much Mallorcans like him had relished the quiet and emptiness when, for once, they'd had the island to themselves. "We've been discovering corners we didn't even know existed. We've even been going to the beach, which in summer we usually leave to the tourists," said Santi, laughing behind his black cotton mask.

In the fresh early morning I walked along the sea wall towards the cathedral, as mesmerising in its soaring gothic beauty as the first time I saw it. On an "old normal" summer morning, the cathedral square would usually be rammed, but I'd never seen it so nearly deserted. One souvenir stall was bravely open, but no one was buying its tea towels and fridge magnets. The horse-drawn carriages that ply their trade beside the cathedral were also having a slow day. One driver lay back yawning with his hands behind his head; even the horses looked bored.

I walked along the sea wall to the cathedral, as mesmerising in its gothic beauty as the first time I saw it



▲ Walk this way: the promenade in Palma is usually bustling with life

▶ Perched in a ravine, Deia has long been a magnet for artists and writers

▼ Quiet contemplation: the courtyard of Es Baluard, the museum of modern art in Palma

Farther into the old town, the Passeig del Borne – a promenade both intimate and grand, shaded by high trees like a vast outdoor drawing room – was a becalmed version of its usual bustling self. At the marble-topped tables of the classic Palma café Bar Bosch, local gents in short-sleeved shirts still eked out their morning coffee as they flicked through the *Diario de Mallorca*, just as I'd seen them do way back when.

At the Bosch I ran into Tania Baidés, an island-based PR and events organiser whose project Amb les Mans ("with the hands"), a series of workshops given by local experts in crafts and cookery, kicked off for the second year running on June 20. "People have been enthusiastic after all the months of boredom. Last year the workshops sold out – even without tourists. When the world stopped, it seemed like an idea to try something useful and interesting."

It was a story I was to hear in various guises over the following days. Hotels that had been planning to open before Covid hit and, in mid-crisis, had decided to seize the day. Chefs who had closed their Michelin-starred restaurants and opened something simpler instead. Pau Navarro at Clandestí, the Palma gastro-bar beloved of palmesano foodies, had had the clever idea of serving takeaway spit-roast chickens (*pollos al ast*) – but soon branched out from chickens into spit-roast ducks, rabbit, pigeons, quail and even whole fish. Another example is Macarena de Castro, whose restaurant El Jardín in the port of Alcudia is among the island's top two or three eating places. When lockdown started to bite she closed her doors in Alcudia and, in June last year, opened Andana, an airy revamp of the canteen in Palma's old railway station. On a broiling summer day Macarena made me a refreshing lunch of *trepmpó* (Mallorcan salad of finely chopped tomato, green pepper and onion, served with roast octopus and crumbled salty biscuits) and a delicious crisp *coca* of onions, mozzarella and marjoram.

Little by little, in fits and starts, the great machine is rumbling into life. At the time of my visit the big resort hotels of the south had largely stayed shut, but some of the smart inland ones, being smaller and more easily managed, had been up and running for months. The night I spent at Pablo Carrington's repurposed military fortress carved out of a cliff high above the Mediterranean reminded me that Cap Rocat is surely one of Spain's – and the world's – more astonishing hotels. If you were at all concerned about the need for social distancing on your Balearic holiday, its peerless sense of space and isolation, its 30 rooms on a 30-hectare site permanently fanned by salty breezes would put your fears at rest.

Amazing though it may seem, new hotels are still opening, even as the tourist sector stares down the barrel of financial oblivion. I was impressed by the chutzpah of the Ferrari-Gual family of Alcudia, who with no previous experience in hotel-keeping opened their breezily designed old-town guest house in the middle of the pandemic. And I was frankly blown away by Can Auli in Pollensa, the new offering from Miquel Conde whose stable of hotelitos in historic houses has helped to transform downtown Palma. Under his energetic



hands this 17th-century townhouse with its stone arches and beamed ceilings has morphed into a Mallorcan mansion for the 21st, mixing Carl Hansen chairs and Santa & Cole lamps with rustic carpets and installations by the ceramicist Jaume Roig.

I would willingly have whiled away the rest of the day in Can Auli's peaceful patio where cicadas whirred among the orange trees. But there was one more stop to make. I took the winding mountain road from Sóller towards the coast, remembering how as a backpacking student I bussed it to the village of Deia, then a swinging boho scene whose artistic milieu turned around the venerable figure of Robert Graves. This was the era when you might catch Andrew Lloyd Webber playing honky-tonk piano in some village bar, when Sting and Bob Geldof rocked the terrace at Sa Fonda and you could rent a stone house for next to nothing.

Staying at La Residencia, the emblematic and luxurious Deia hotel, was unthinkable for me back then – but more than three decades later I would finally luck out. La Resi had reopened and after a year of lockdown and layoffs, it felt like a significant moment for the

The hotel's collection of Miró paintings had been brought out of storage to dazzle once again



island. I had seen Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones' Instagram posts from S'Estaca, their sprawling historic finca down the road towards Valldemossa, and fantasised that, just maybe, the couple might drop in at the hotel bar for a celebratory drink.

For months the Residencia had been deserted and forlorn, with goats on the roof and sheep nibbling the garden, but had thankfully re-emerged with all its gorgeousness intact. Its collection of Miró paintings had been brought out of

storage to dazzle once again, while the in-house gallery had opened with an exhibition of new work made by Deia-based artists in lockdown. Like Deia itself over the years, La Resi has gained in glamour as it has lost in bohemian charm, but its connection to the artistic life of the village still remains.

I rose early on my last Mallorcan morning and sat outside to take in another peerless view: the curving wall of the Sierra de Tramuntana looming above a picturesque tumble of stone houses crowned by a foursquare village church. Groves of ancient olives were racked up on steep terraces; palms and cypresses lent a graceful verticality. A donkey brayed somewhere. I never did get to hang out with Michael and Catherine, but the sight of Deia on a summer morning made up for that.

Tourism on this island is nothing if not resilient. Over its hundred years of life it's survived two world wars, a civil war, at least two recessions and a financial crash, and there's an argument for thinking it may emerge from this crisis leaner and fitter than ever.

Mallorca's new normal is firmly on the way – and it might even be better than the old.

REINVIGORATED RESTAURANTS

DINS/COR BARRA I TAULA
The ground floor restaurant at Hotel Llorenç Parc de la Mar brings the extravagantly talented Santi Taura into town with a menu inspired by long-forgotten Mallorcan dishes like rockfish and vegetable empanada, fish with capers, and lamb casserole with plums. Cor Barra i Taula, Taura's new gastrobar beside the S'Olivar market in Palma, is good for tapas, aperitifs and brunch. dinsantitaura.com



▲ Just the ticket: Andana serves simple classics in the old station canteen in Palma

ANDANA
Faced with falling demand at her Michelin-starred El Jardín, Macarena de Castro decamped to Palma with a radically different culinary concept. The menu at Andana turns around salads, stupendous sandwiches, vegetables cooked in the kamado oven, and simple classics like steak tartare and roast porcella (suckling pig). The high-ceilinged, white-walled dining room (once the station canteen) is pleasant on a hot day. andanapalma.es

VINYA TONETA
The restaurant Ca Na Toneta in the village of Caimari belongs to Maria and Teresa Solivellas. The sisters' reaction to the forced closure of their restaurant was to open a wine bar, which they christened Vinya Toneta, serving natural wines from the island along with plates of Maria's delectable modern Mallorcan cooking (think aubergines filled with lamb, pear and rosemary; apricot sorbet with almond and mint cake). Open Friday,

Saturday and Sunday nights. canatoneta.com

CLANDESTÍ/CLAN D'AST
Rock 'n' roll memorabilia plaster the walls; black leather swivel chairs surround a huge white stone table where the young team serve their fizzingly creative market cuisine made with island ingredients. Pau and Ariadna's new *pollo al ast* (spit-roast chicken and more) attracts a hungry crowd both for takeaway and sit-down feasting. clandestini.es

RADICAL (RE)INVENTIONS

S'ERA FORN ARTESÀ
A heart-warming example of retail resistance, this artisan bakery opened in mid-lockdown (when bakeries were exempt) beside the railway station in the inland town of Sineu. Formerly based in Hamburg, the master baker Simón Moreno uses local flours wherever possible. S'Era's range of half-a-dozen loaves reflects the rich tradition of Mallorcan breadmaking wedded to Germanic flavours and techniques. facebook.com/fornsera

FLOR DE SAL D'ES TRENC
The salt-makers of Es Trenc have reopened their divine little onsite shop, plus a shack-like café selling craft beer and coffee. Guided tours take visitors among the salt pans and dazzling white "mountains" (the annual harvest is under way). New products for summer 2021 include *flor de sal* (the delicate surface crystals) flavoured with saffron. flordesaldestrenc.com



▲ Crafty: workshops in ceramics to cooking with Amb Les Mans

AMB LES MANS
Small-group workshops focused on island crafts and traditions. "With the Hands" offers a rolling programme of masterclasses with renowned local experts: there's ceramics with the potter Jaume Roig, savoury biscuits with Deborah Piña, truffles with the patissier Lluís Pérez and hydraulic tile-making at the traditional Huguet factory. taniabaidés.com/proyectos/workshops/amb-les-mans

JOANNA DE DEIA/SAVE THE MED FOUNDATION
Dolphins were seen in the cove at Cala Deia during lockdown, says Joanna Kuhne, whose Save the Med Foundation lobbies local authorities to prevent pollution and ecological degradation. Originally from Chicago and a Deia resident since 1980, Joanna, a potter, spent the months of confinement working on a series of ceramic wall-pieces that depict scenes of beach cleaning. ceramicsbyjoanna.com/savethemed.org



TRAVEL WARNING

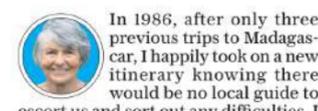
There are varying travel restrictions in force in each of the four nations of the UK. For the latest information, see gov.uk/coronavirus; gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19; gov.wales/coronavirus; nidirect.gov.uk/coronavirus-travel

For more advice on holiday bookings during the pandemic see telegraph.co.uk/tt-covidtravel

Hilary Bradt

No plane? Pas de Problème

Aeroplane heists were all part of the service for a novice tour guide in 1980s Madagascar



In 1986, after only three previous trips to Madagascar, I happily took on a new itinerary knowing there would be no local guide to escort us and sort out any difficulties. I was so new to tour-leading that I hadn't quite grasped the extent of my inadequacies or the challenges of this delightful but idiosyncratic country. I also wonder why I decided to leave the trip funds in the hotel safe in Tana, the capital, except that transporting a wad of local currency on our excursion to the East Coast felt risky. And the hotel we were heading to in Maroantsetra, described cautiously as "the best available" in the brochure, had been paid for.

If Madagascar throws up apparently insurmountable problems, there is always a creative individual committed to sorting them out. This time it was "Monsieur Pas de Problème" in the Air Madagascar office in Maroantsetra who blithely explained that there was no point in booking our onward flights to the north of the island because the radio control tower was down. He beamed comfortably when I tried to explain in halting French that I needed to get seven people to Diego Suarez the next day. No plane, but no problem, a 16-seater Twin Otter could apparently land without radio and he was expecting one in three days. But it was fully booked with 14 people on the waiting list.



▲ Slow travel in Madagascar wasn't going to work for Hilary Bradt and her group

No roads connected the town with the rest of the country; flying out was the only option. Even if a convenient plague decimated the booked passengers, we had to spend at least an extra two days in Maroantsetra. I needed to organise excursions and book two more nights in our hotel, which I loved because it had striped tenrecs, a little spiny creature and one of Madagascar's most endearing animals, running about the grounds after dark. The passengers were less keen – indeed vociferously unhappy, because there was no hot water, and often no water at all. Or electricity.

And I had no money.

I called a meeting. "First the good news: you don't have to get up at 6am tomorrow." Loud cheers. "Now the bad news: you don't have to get up at all."

We pooled all available cash but it still wasn't enough to pay for the hotel or extra excursions Fidel, the sympathetic hotel manager, said he could arrange. He asked if any of the group might be

willing to sell their camera, such luxury items being hard to obtain in Maroantsetra. Lucy offered hers, Fidel arranged the sale and the money side was sorted. I had kept quiet about the waiting list and enthused about the pleasures in store to fill those extra two days.

A boat trip on the nearby river was arranged while I stayed behind to make another visit to the Air Madagascar office. Pas de Problème assured me that 10 people on the waiting list had dropped out. Really? And the Twin Otter would indeed arrive on Thursday, as scheduled, en route to Diego Suarez with stops at two small coastal towns. Next day I sent the group to explore the market while I paid another visit to the office. All was well. But we should come to the airport early the next morning, keeping our luggage as light as possible. Clothes and footwear were discarded and distributed to the hotel staff.

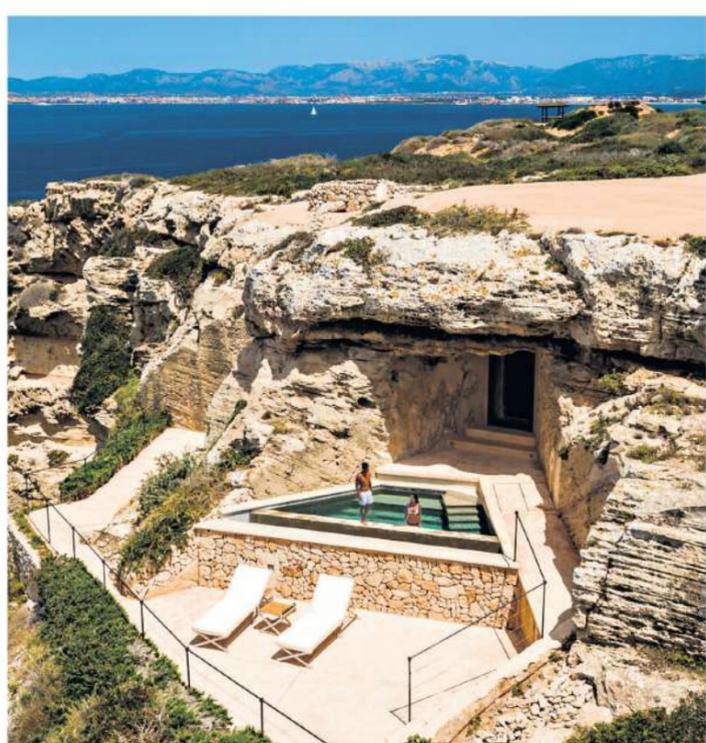
Pas de Problème greeted me with a conspiratorial wink at the airport and gave me seven boarding passes. After a few hours a little Twin Otter landed and passengers got off, some to stretch their legs before the next section of the flight to Sambava. "Run!" instructed Pas de Problème and we did. There were no allocated seats, we had children on our laps, prayers on our lips and luggage in the aisles. The propellers whirred and we took off. As we gained height I looked down at a handful of open-mouthed passengers standing on the runway gazing up as their plane – and presumably their luggage – drew away.

That evening, in Diego Suarez, I was presented with a T-shirt by John who had spotted it in the market. "No Problem" was written on the front.

Hilary Bradt is the founder of Bradt Guides

Open-mouthed passengers stood on the runway gazing up as their plane – and presumably their luggage – flew off

HOTELS NEW AND REIMAGINED



▲ Rock and roll: the swimming pool at Cap Rocat ▼ La Residencia has legions of worldwide fans

CAP ROCAT
A former military fortress (from 1898) in pinkish local sandstone bolted on to a promontory at the edge of Palma Bay, Cap Rocat has retained all its power to amaze after 10 years of life. Rooms to book are the three fabulous Centinela suites, which are like caves sunk into the rock with cliff-edge terraces and pools (wannabe James Bond villains take note). Double rooms from £713 (caprocato.com)

HOTEL ARA ALCUDIA
In which Catalina Gual, a lawyer, and her two sons (one of them the project's architect) launch themselves on the choppy waters of post-pandemic hospitality. An old-town Alcudia house made over with a winning freshness and lack of clutter, Ara's design scheme conjures rough stone walls, beams and arches with polished-cement floors and Scandinavian furniture for a "rustic minimalist" look that feels just right for the times. Double rooms from £110 (araalcudia.com)

LA RESIDENCIA
Formerly owned by Richard Branson, now subsumed into the LVMH empire, the much-loved Residencia has reopened to its legion of worldwide fans. With personality and style in spades, La Residencia is so much more than a corporate grand hotel. Novelties this year include the art workshop at Cala Deià with the local painter Manuella Holló and the boat trip (free for hotel residents) along the Tramuntana coast in the 1949 fishing boat Bonnie Lass. From ubiquitous masks to QR menus and a purge of "touch points" like minibars and coffee-machines, no stone has been left unturned in the hotel's careful observance of coronavirus safety measures. Double rooms from £572 (belmond.com/laresidencia/mallorca)

CAN AULÍ
Miguel Conde's eagerly awaited restoration of a 17th-century townhouse in the pretty town of Pollensa suggests Palma's boutique-hotel revolution will shortly extend to the island's interior. The 29-room hotel, which reopened on June 10, brings Conde's inimitable flair to this laidback region of Mallorca's far north. He and his wife Cristina have designed the interiors with a sparing use of colour but plenty of texture in the handmade raffia carpets, contemporary furniture and Travertine marble floors. Double rooms from £153 (boutiquehotelcanauli.com)



owned property is open for its first summer – not that the seasons are evident in its hermetically chic interior. The hotel's moody lighting, perfect soundproofing, and wraparound service, feel more Manhattan than Mallorca, while the design scheme combines Scandi austerity with 21st-century art deco and splashes of tropical colour. The top-floor pool and bar area, with its views of the sea and old town, are worth the detour even if you're not staying. Double rooms from £237 (elllorenç.com)

EL LLORENÇ PARC DE LA MAR
This Swedish/Mallorcan-



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