48 hours in. . . Palma, an insider guide to Majorca's cosmopolitan capital

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With the glistening Mediterranean Sea at its feet, Palma offers a delicious melting pot of cultures and historic influences CREDIT: ALEX

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By **Anna Nicholas**, DESTINATION EXPERT
6 SEPTEMBER 2019 • 10:45AM

Edgy districts, traditional taverns and modern art on the Mediterranean

With a dramatic and turbulent history harking back to the Bronze Age, Palma has had its fair share of invasions – from the Romans and Vandals to the Moors and Christians. So it's hardly surprising that this perky, perfectly formed city has such a welcoming and grown-up attitude to international visitors. With the glistening Mediterranean Sea at its feet, this effortlessly accessible capital offers a delicious melting pot of cultures and historic influences. Whether in the cobbled streets of the atmospheric old town, or in the heart of the grand plaças, impressive monuments, museums, galleries and churches of Gothic splendour abound. Edgy districts happily rub shoulders with more traditional and exclusive neighbourhoods, while a vibrant food and shopping scene weaves its magic across the city. So much to do, so little time? Head for a seafront café, breathe the air, relax and enjoy that first sip of ruby red Majorcan wine.

Discover the best of Palma

Where to eat, sleep, drink and explore

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Hot right now . . .

Anna Nicholas, our resident expert, offers her top tips on the hottest things to do and places to eat, drink and stay this season.

Drink

Evoking the spirit of the beat generation, new American-style **Beatnik** (Puro Hotel, Carrer de Montenegro 21; 00 34 971 425 450) is garnering admirers with its cool, jazzy monochrome and gold interiors, and eclectic menu of scrumptious lobster rolls, tempura prawns, salads and burgers. Enjoy cocktails or an exclusive VIP rooftop sunset dinner with panoramic views to Palma old town.

- The best bars in Palma

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Sip on a cocktail at Puro Hotel's new jazzy bar Beatnik

Eat

Long awaited **Dins** (El Llorenç Hotel, Plaça de Llorenç 4; 00 34 656 738 214), the brainchild of celebrated Majorcan chef, Santi Taura, has just opened its doors serving gastronomic, seasonal wonders such as red mullet pie, based on historic Balearic recipes. Guests can commune around an intimate dining bar for sixteen or choose their own company.

- The best restaurants in Palma

Dins serves gastronomic, seasonal wonders such as red mullet pie, based on historic Balearic recipes

Do

During October and November, contemporary art museum, **Es Baluard**, (Plaça de la Porta de Santa Catalina, 10; 00 34 971 90 82 00) and leading Spanish department store, El Corte Inglés, have teamed up to offer two-hour guided tours of the museum and public works of art in Palma, for €3 (£2.70) per person, every Saturday and Sunday from 10am-12pm. A coffee or soft drink is offered afterwards. Pre-book at mediacio@esbaluard.org. The museum also offers its own guided tours all year round.

- The best things to do in Palma

Stay

Those with a nose for a bargain are heading to recently refurbished **M House Hotel** (Can Maçanet, 1A; 00 34 971 214 848). Though bang in the heart of Palma, close to the main bus and train station, this family-friendly hotel is artfully tucked away in a peaceful enclave. With 37 rooms, a casual bar and restaurant, it doesn't disappoint.

- The best hotels in Palma

With its central yet peaceful location in the heart of Palma, four-star boutique M House Hotel is the perfect hideaway for an all-year-round city break

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Insider tip | Attractions

A good way to avoid the crowds is to arrive at a historic sight during the lunchtime and siesta period (normally sometime between 1pm and 4pm), or shortly before the attraction closes. The advantage is that you face fewer queues and crowds and have more breathing space to admire the exhibits on show. Just remember to pack a water bottle and your shades.

Bellver Castle

48 hours in . . . Palma

Day one

MORNING

Start the day at landmark **La Seu cathedral** (Plaça de la Seu; 00 34 902 022 445), which looms above the city walls, and admire the shimmering **Parc de Mar Lake** below. Don't miss the quirky re-design of St Peter's Chapel by artist Miguel Barceló, before heading to neighbouring **Almudaina Palace** (Carrer del Palau Reial; 00 34 902 044 454). There's some exploring to be done at this gothic masterpiece, but on a sticky day, take respite in the King's Orchard, a smaller version of Granada's Generalife water garden.

Now stroll up the leafy Borne, once a river in the 17th century, and pop into **Centro Cultural Can Balaguer** and take a peek at **Café Balaguer's patio** (Carrer de la Unió; 00 34 971 72 01 35) where you'll find 4,000 years of history and impressive skeletons at the Sa Galera exhibition. On Jaime III, take a right turn for **Fera** restaurant (Carrer de la Concepció, 4; 00 34 971 595 301) where you can enjoy a cool glass of wine and an exceptional menú del día. Expect exciting creations such as crab roll in salsa verde, or subtly flavoured sea bream ceviche with pomegranate tiger milk and shiso.

The original 10th-century alcazar may have long been demolished but the Almudaina Palace is a gothic architectural masterpiece in its own right CREDIT: VLADISLAV ZOLOTOV

AFTERNOON

Walk off lunch along Jaime III, home of the famed **El Corte Inglés department store** (00 34 971 770 177) and various chic boutiques. From there, cross over to trendy **Sant Nicolas**, a labyrinth of stylish shops, before continuing to **Plaça Santa Eulàlia** in the Calatrava historic quarter, with its medieval cobbled streets, exquisite patios, bijoux palaces and renaissance architecture.

Bear left on the far side of **Santa Eulàlia Church** and take time out at **Ca'n Joan de S'Aigo** (Carrer de Can Sanç 10; 00 34 971 71 07 59), Palma's oldest and most cherished café, for a snail-shaped ensaïmada pastry and refreshing cup of tea. On your departure, pass the magnificent

Plaça Sant Francesc and church (pop in if the fancy takes you), and cut through the lean streets to quaint **Santa Clara Convent** (Carrer de Can Fonollar, 2; 00 34 971 71 006), where you'll need to ring a bell to buy the sisters' delicious lemon biscuits.

Although Ca'n Joan de S'Aigo has opened two further Palma outlets, nothing can beat the ambience of the original in Carrer de Can Sanç CREDIT: PICASA

LATE

Aim for **Santa Catalina**, a five-minute taxi journey from the centre, or walk through La Lonja old town area towards Santa Catalina, just 15 minutes away on foot. If you're on a budget, stop here at **Café Sa Lonja** (Plaça de La Lonja; 00 34 971 722 799) for good-value tapas on the terrace. Otherwise, head on and enjoy dinner at svelte and urban **Vandal** (Plaça del Progrés; 00 34 871 045 174), where an Argentinian chef and sommelier duo conjure up a world menu of bold and inventive dishes, expertly matched with local and international wines.

After dinner, take a fun two-minute stroll through this buzzing enclave with its village feel, lively bars, stores and cafés, and enjoy a welcome cocktail or hierbes local liqueur at rooftop **Sky Bar at Hotel Hostal Cuba** (Carrer de Sant Magi, 1; 00 34 971 452 237). Here you can enjoy mesmerising views over the Bay of Palma on the lovely rooftop terrace, while enjoying a relaxing and welcoming ambience.

Pick Vandal for dinner if you would like to dine on inventive dishes paired with fine wines led by a Argentine chef-sommelier duo

- The best restaurants in Palma

The best things to do in Palma
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Insider tip | City hack

Surf the Palma bus routes and avoid the capital's stressful traffic and parking problems with an easy to use **pre-paid card** (00 34 971 21 44 44) that costs €10 (£8.60) for 10 rides. You can buy the card at the central bus station off Plaça Espanya or from many newspaper kiosks across the city.

MORNING

The city's bustling **Olivar market** (Plaça Mercat; 00 34 971 720 314) is a wonder to behold and it's a pleasure to browse the halls of seafood, fruit and vegetables and observe locals bargaining with stallholders.

From here, stroll up to majestic **Plaça Mayor**, surprisingly, for 300 years the seat of the Spanish inquisition, and head for **Plaça de Cort** with its 600-year-old olive tree and medieval town hall. Stop here for a coffee or fresh orange juice, perhaps at **Café Cappuccino** (Plaça de Cort; 00 34 871 03 74 37) before weaving through the pedestrian cut-throughs to El Borne.

Cross over to **Calle Sant Feliu** and head for **Es Baluard museum** (Plaça de la Porta de Santa Catalina; 00 34 971 908 200) to view its eclectic collection of neoclassical, abstract and modernist art. Have a snack lunch in the alfresco café on the rear patio surrounded by modern sculptures, and enjoy the spectacular views over the city walls to Palma bay.

Browse the halls of seafood, fruit and vegetables at Olivar Market and observe locals bargaining with stallholders

AFTERNOON

Jump in a taxi and drive a few kilometres from the city centre to **Bellver Castle** (Carrer Camilo José Cela; 00 34 971 735 065), which sits aloft a peaceful wooded hill overlooking the Bay of Palma. Dating from the 14th century, it is the only circular castle in Spain and one of few in Europe. Allow for an hour's visit, as there is a courtyard, museum and historic kitchen worth seeing, and then hop in a taxi and set off for the **Joan Miró Foundation** (Carrer de Saridakis, 19; 00 34 971 701 420) in Cala Major, just a five-minute drive away.

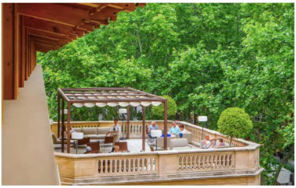
Here you'll find a vast display of the prolific artist's works, including paintings, sculptures and ceramics. Meanwhile, the artist's re-imagined studio and home give an authentic feel to the estate. Enjoy a coffee in the grounds after exploring the fragrant gardens.

Joan Miro's re-imagined studio and home give an authentic feel to the estate CREDIT: PEP ESCODA

LATE

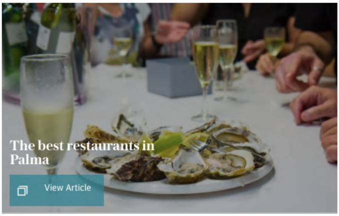
Head to Calle Sant Feliu for dinner at **De Tokio a Lima** (Calle San Feliu, 1; 00 34 871 592 002) on the spectacular, candlelit roof terrace of **Boutique Hotel Can Alomar**. Offering a fusion of Peruvian, Japanese and Mediterranean gastronomy, this stylish eatery sets a mellow and relaxing tone, and staff members extend a warm welcome to customers. A good selection of wines and tapas sharing plates are offered so there's no need to break the bank. The location is particularly special with sweeping views of El Borne and the giant plane trees flanking it, as well as the city's lights.

For a postprandial treat, pop along the same street to enduring local favourite, **Café Atlantico** (Calle Sant Feliu, 12; 00 34 971 726 285), for chilled music and innovative cocktails such as the Smoky Storm, a heady blend of rum, cinnamon and chocolate.



Spend the evening dining on a fusion of Peruvian, Japanese and Mediterranean gastronomy on the roof terrace at De Tokio a Lima

- The best nightlife in Palma



The best restaurants in Palma

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Insider tip | Neighbourhood watch

Don't miss sea-facing **Santa Catalina**, the chilled district that was once home to fishermen weaving their nets. Aside from possessing the oldest market in Palma, built in 1920, and **Teatr Mar I Terra** (Carrer de Sant Magí, 89; 00 34 971 45 23 58), an innovative theatre, it's a magnet for eclectic international restaurants, businesses and designer boutiques. Drop into **La Madeleine de Proust** (Carrer d'Annibale 17) for lip-smacking pastries and good coffee.

Where to stay . . .

Luxury Living

Sant Francesc Hotel Singular is a skilfully renovated, 19th-century mansion and boutique five-star situated in the capital's atmospheric historic quarter. Designed by well-known architect and designer, Maria José Cabré, the hotel has a warm, relaxing and pleasant ambience. There are 42 elegant and individually styled rooms; a number have balconies and verandas, and dreamy views over Sant Francesc square or the hotel's garden.

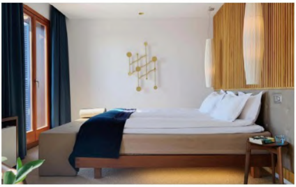
Double rooms from €210 (£185). Plaza Sant Francesc, 5; 00 34 971 495 000

Many original features at Sant Francesc Hotel Singular have been retained, including frescoes and moldings, large windows and arched doors

Boutique Beauty

With its stylish white façade, deep blue shutters and jaunty, nautical theme, Hotel Portixol has the feel of a beautifully designed yacht. It occupies an exclusive position in the gentrified harbour, directly overlooking the sea, and inside has a relaxed Scandinavian feel. There are 25 comfortable rooms comprising port and sea view doubles and two large suites, one of which, Atico, occupies the top floor and has its own lift and roof terrace.

Double rooms from €235 (£200). Calle Sirena; 00 34 971 271 800



Nice touches at Portixol include complimentary soft drinks and beer in the minibar (refreshed daily) and binoculars for watching fishermen sailing into the harbour

Budget Bolthole

The four-star **Brondo Architect** boutique hotel is a good-value and comfortable urban getaway right in the heart of Palma. It comprises three buildings in the same street and marries 17th-century Majorcan architecture with modern industrial design (no mean feat). The pièce de résistance on the first floor is the lovely bright dining-room-cum-bar and tranquil, leafy, wood-decked courtyard.

Double rooms from €80 (£67). Calle Can Brondo 407001; 00 34 971 720 507

All rooms are named after famed international architects and individually designed with an eclectic mix of furniture, both retro and modern

- A complete guide to the best hotels in Palma

Insider tip | Hotels

Can Bordoy Grand House & Garden (Carrer del Forn de la Glòria, 14; 00 34 871 87 12 02) has the largest private garden in Palma, perfect for coffee, lunch or dinner. One can sit here and listen to birdsong with a cunningly brewed coffee while tucking into a pastry from Forn de la Gloria, the oldest bakery in Palma that happily supplies the hotel with its goodies.

The best hotels in Palma
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What to bring home . . .

The two emblematic food heroes visible in Palma, and island-wide, are **sobrassada**, a cured pork sausage made with paprika and sometimes, honey (00 34 971 425 360), and **ensaïmada** snail-shaped pastries that come in different sizes and are beautifully boxed for visitors (00 34 971 725 528). Other hot buys in Palma include **Gordiola handmade glassware** (00 34 971 711 541).

Ground pork, paprika, salt and sometimes honey come together to make the cured Balearic sobrassada sausage CREDIT: STOCKNSHARES

Did you know?

During the 17th century a dragon allegedly gobbled up Palma's citizens by night until Captain Coch, governor of Alcudia at the time, happened upon it and killed the beast. In reality it was an escaped crocodile from a ship in the port and had survived in the sewers. It was later embalmed and is exhibited in the Diocesan museum today (Carrer del Mirador, 5; 00 34 971 71 31 33).

When to go . . .

Palma is temperate most of the year, even in the colder months when the temperature can drop in other parts of the island. As an all-year-round destination, most of the hotels stay open, unlike those in the beach resorts. Off-season, particularly from January to April, and mid October to December, there are hotel bargains to be had. Special city fiestas include the Three Kings parade on January 5, Easter processions, Sant Juan fire fiesta in June and Nit de Art, night of art, in September.

Know before you go . . .

Essential information

Tourist board information: 00 34 971 17 39 90; infomallorca.net

Emergency fire and ambulance: 112

Emergency police: 092

British Consulate: Carrer dels Caputxins, 4, Palma. 0034 933 66 62 00; gov.uk

The basics

Flight time: (from UK) Two hours

Currency: Euros €

Internationals dialling code: 00 34

Time difference: GMT + 1

Local laws and etiquette

- Anti-social behaviour, such as drinking in public, and wearing inappropriate attire, such as beachwear, is unacceptable in Palma city and local police can issue heavy on-the-spot fines. Drunken and aggressive behaviour is not tolerated in local beach resorts either, and fines may be issued.

- Although Majorcans speak Castilian Spanish, they are proud of their own language, Mallorquin, a dialect of Catalan. Road signs and public notices will often be written in the local language.

- An excellent bus network serves Palma (EMT 00 34 971 214 444; emtpalma.cat) and there is also island-wide transport, including metro, train and bus, which run from Plaça de Espanya (00 34 971 17 77 77, tib.org). Taxis charge an initial €3 (£2) and the cost per km is approximately €2 (£1.50) (00 34 971 40 14 14). Bike hire is popular in Palma with many cycle lanes (palmabikeandgo.com 00 34 971 75 54 63).

- Tipping is at a client's discretion but 10 per cent is considered acceptable.

- Mainly due to the warm weather, Majorcans tend to dine later so 2pm at lunchtime, and in the evening, the majority of locals won't arrive at restaurants before 9pm and often later.

- Normally Majorcans – male and female – will shake hands at a first meeting but some might offer women kisses on both cheeks. Men often hug male friends in public.

Author bio

Anna Nicholas is Telegraph's Palma expert. Since settling on the island 17 years ago, she has written six Majorca titles, offering a brilliant excuse to explore the city and island. You'll find her sipping espressos in a café on El Borne.

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Boutique Hotel Can Alomar

Palma, Majorca, Spain

9/10 Telegraph expert rating

Housed in a magnificent former palace, this sumptuous five-star boutique hotel in the heart of Pa...

Read expert review

From
£227 inc. tax

Check availability

Rates provided by Booking.com

Nakar Hotel

Palma, Majorca, Spain

9/10 Telegraph expert rating

Situated on Avenue Jaume III, arguably Palma's smartest, most emblematic shopping street, four-st...

Read expert review

From
£188 inc. tax

Check availability

Rates provided by Booking.com

Castillo Hotel Son Vida

Palma, Majorca, Spain

9/10 Telegraph expert rating

Perched high on a hill and commanding magnificent panoramic vistas of the bay of Palma is sumptuo...

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