

Discover the mellow side of Mallorca

Far from Magaluf's party animals Janet Christie raises a mojito to a boutique apartment that lets her soak up the island's antique charm like a local

Surveying Palma de Mallorca from the rooftop terrace of StayCatalina Boutique Apartments, a converted ironmonger's shop in the up and coming Santa Catalina district just outside the old town walls, I wondered why it had taken us so long to visit this largest of the Balearic Islands. Our 360-degree view included a sparkling white cruise ship moored in the harbour behind an ancient windmill standing sentinel in one direction and the gothic grandeur of the cathedral and the sandy yellow arc of The Bay of Palma in the other.

"How very British," said a Croatian friend, when we had mentioned our mini-break destination for a splash of winter sun. True, and there are very good reasons for the nation's enduring love of the island: it's a short affordable flight from Scotland, has safe, sandy beaches, year-round sun, cuisine ranging from tasty tapas to top-end Michelin, and a bucket-load of culture. With a slew of affordable boutique hotels and apartments such as StayCatalina springing up in the island's capital, dodging the party madness of Magaluf is easy and living like a local in an apartment instead of a hotel gave us the chance to explore one of Palma's most interesting districts.

Just outside the city walls and a ten-minute walk to the cathedral and beach, Santa Catalina is a former working class district, once home to fishermen, rope and flour makers, and currently being gentrified. The flats and houses still have old wooden shutters and balconies and the place has a cosmopolitan vibe which mixes the traditional and trendy. In the street next to the apartment is Palma's oldest food market, dating from 1920, the Mercat de Santa Catalina, its stalls piled high with local produce, from shoals of fresh fish to vast displays of vegetables. Cafés and restaurants nearby offer a world of choice, including traditional paella and tapas, sushi, Italian, Lebanese, Asian, vegan and gluten free options.

After checking into our two-bedroom, four-star apartment in a refurbished townhouse, with its pleasing vintage



furnishings, vast comfy beds and up-to-the-minute spotless bathrooms and kitchen, we stocked up at the Mercat then jumped on the free bicycles provided by the friendly, helpful owner. It was time to head for the bay and soak up some rays.

Just ten minutes and a short, terror-free ride later, we raced across the sand and jumped in the sea. Splashing about happily, we were remarking how crowd-free the waves were when a buff lifeguard approached and summoned us out.

"The sea is fickle," he said. "Yes, it can be," I said, wondering if all Mallorcan beach guards had a touch of the Hemingways. "But it's quite calm today." "No, fecal," he repeated, pointing at the red flag. Ah.

It seems the capital's somewhat ageing sewage system was temporarily struggling after unseasonal torrential rain, so after a quick shower beachside we headed to the nearest bar for a stiff cocktail to kill any opportunist bugs.

Then it was back on the bikes and along the seafront cycle path to another beach at Portixol, where red flags were absent and bathers aplenty. After lazing around until the sun went down, we cycled back to Palma with the breeze at our backs



Clockwise from above left: the Santa Catalina apartment; La Seu dominates the skyline of Palma; the beach on the Bay of Palma.

Photographs: Getty/iStockphoto



'We were remarking how crowd-free the waves were when a buff lifeguard summoned us out'

ruffling the fronds of the palm trees lining the prom.

Next day the picturesque little town and port of Sóller was our destination. It's possible to catch a 1912 wooden panelled train all the way but time was short so we enjoyed views of the craggy Tramuntana mountains from the bus then hopped on the quaint old tram running from the town to the beach. With its perfect sandy bay lined by a quaint white horseshoe of hostels, hotels, shops and restaurants selling everything from ice cream to paella to inflatable sharks, it was little wonder the beach was full of sun-seekers. The sea too was full, this time with shoals of tiny fish that flitted around us as we swam. No red flags here.

A couple of hours on the beach was enough for sun-starved flesh, so as the afternoon wore on we headed back into Sóller town. There we strolled around shady alleyways and squares abuzz with locals and tourists sitting chewing the fat, slipping into the cool of the church that dominates the town centre piazza for a blast of baroque excess courtesy of its ornate side altars and beautiful stained glass.

Our final day, with the sun and sand quota met, and topped up by frequent trips up to the rooftop loungers with



my bonkbuster, it was time for some culture. First stop was the impressive Cathedral of Santa Maria de Palma, or La Seu, built on the site of an existing mosque when the island was taken back from the Moors in the 13th century. Seeming to rise out of the sea with its flying buttresses and towers, it was full of tourists, heads thrown back, gazing up

at the 43-metre vaulted ceiling and one of the largest stained glass windows in the world.

When neck strain kicked in it was time to head through the alleyways of Palma's old town to the fascinating Arab baths, unchanged since the 10th century, and virtually all that still stands of the old Arab city. The remains of a villa with an

ancient garden where the air is heady with the scent of bougainvillea and jasmine tumbling over centuries-old walls, it's a quiet space to sit and let the busy city around you melt away.

As the sun went down we headed back to Santa Catalina and the neighbourhood selfie-spot, the rooftop Sky Bar at Hotel Hostal Cuba where questions were popped along with champagne corks at the busy tables around us. Cocktails in hand, we watched the cathedral emerge into the dusk bathed in a stunning mantle of white lights for its own Instagram moment, and as the ice melted in our mojitos, the sun dissolved slowly into the bay.

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FACTFILE

Prices at StayCatalina Boutique Apartments start from £88 a night for a one-bedroom patio studio. Book via www.i-escape.com/staycatalina-boutique-apartments. StayCatalina Boutique Apartments, Calle Bayarte 14-07013, Santa Catalina, Palma de Mallorca, Spain. <http://staycatalina.com>. Tel: +34 601182881. Email: info@staycatalina.com Ryanair flies Edinburgh to Mallorca from £16.99, and Glasgow Prestwick to Mallorca from £19.99. Visit www.ryanair.com for latest prices

@SCOTSMANDAVID

The Duke would be dining with us tonight, we were told. Lord Burlington too. They'd been shooting on the hill and having dinner later in the restaurant. Fair enough. They owned it, after all.

The 12th Duke of Devonshire and his eldest son, it turns out, own a large, scenic slice – 30,000 acres – of Wharfedale, along with even more of Derbyshire, and a few thousand extra acres in Ireland. The Devonshire Fell is one of the Cavendish family's smaller enterprises, its 16 bedrooms palming besides the 126 rooms in their main home, Chatsworth. But if you want a classy boutique hotel in the Yorkshire Dales, and one that allows you to take advantage of all the spa facilities on offer at the Devonshire Arms, down the road at Bolton Abbey, look no further.

Room service

If you know the Yorkshire Dales, you'll know all about that road (the B6160) from Bolton Abbey, and how it heads downhill for about a mile as it nears the picture-postcard village of Burnsall. On 6 May this year, that's what the cyclists of the tour de Yorkshire will be doing, and because they'll be going so fast, they probably won't notice this millstone-grit mansion – once a clubhouse for Victorian mill-owners – near the bottom of the hill. It has lovely views over Burnsall (where they filmed *Calendar Girls*) and its five-arched stone bridge over the Wharfe. There's a wonderful mix about its clientele, from Lycra-clad cyclists to walkers opting for a luxury stop-off on the seven-day Dales Way from Ilkley to Windermere and hunters heading for the hill with a dog and gun. Most, though, are like us – middle-aged comfort-seekers looking for a dog-friendly stopover on a slow journey south from Scotland or a good place for a luxurious but not over-expensive weekend break. We stayed in a Superior Double room with river views (worth asking for) which cost £225 for dinner, bed and breakfast.

Do Not Disturb

The Devonshire Fell, Burnsall, Yorkshire Dales

Gold in them thar hills



Budget or boutique?

Definitely boutique. For anyone expecting classical country house style, all hunting prints, antlers, taxidermy and heavy drapes, the Devonshire Fell is a welcome surprise. Yes, there'll still be a secure case for your grouse-shooting guns in your room, but on the way there, you'll be walking on grey and purple striped carpet past modern art from the Chatsworth collection in the bar area, portraits of designers such as Achille Castiglioni, Frank Duffy and Shiro Kuramata in the corridors upstairs, and there'll be a Hockney or Rothko print in the bedroom. Yet you'll still find good Yorkshire craft ales like Timothy Taylor's Boltmaker behind the bar, and – at least when we were there – not a male ponytail in sight.

Wining and dining

Rob Harrison, former sous-chef under James Mackenzie at the Michelin-starred Pipe and Glass near Beverley, is in charge in the kitchen and has an AA rosette for his menu, which makes the best of fresh, local produce (lamb rump and kidney faggot, £23.50; belly pork sage and onion risotto, £18.50) at a reasonable price – all to be consumed in the comfortable conservatory dining room with its great views. And if you're looking for a well-stocked cellar, the Devonshire Fell's can draw on that of its

nearby sister hotel, which has one of the best in Yorkshire.

Worth getting out of bed for

First of all, the prospect. We pulled back the curtains on one of those dawns when every spider's web shone like diamond clusters, every field was bright with dew. This is the Dales at their picturesque best, the Wharfe sweeping by in the middle-ground, the limestone hills gently lowering to the south. Nearby are the ruins of Bolton Abbey, with its extensive riverside walks, and the beautiful village of Grassington, both about five miles away in opposite directions.

Little extras

There are Feeling Fruity toiletries for two-legged visitors, and free concierge service for canines if you book through PetsPyjamas.com (otherwise your dog adds another £10 per night to the bill), who give it a good dog-friendly rating.

Guestbook comments

A colourful, quirky treat. Not what I expected – but in a good way!

David Robinson

Double rooms cost from £125 B&B per room, while suites (two bathrooms plus settee/sofabed) range from £175 to £325 per room. The Devonshire Fell Hotel, Burnsall, North Yorkshire BD23 6BT. Tel: 01756 729000. www.devonshirefell.co.uk