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Mallorca isn't famed for its gourmet cuisine, but as local chefs and producers join forces to showcase the island's culinary riches, from fruit and vegetables to wine and cheese, that may be about to change

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sun, sea and slow food





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ALLORCAN FOOD? You might be forgiven for thinking it's all greasy paella, curry-wurst and Full English breakfasts. One of the Med's leading package-tour destinations, Mallorca receives an amazing 12 million visitors a year – mostly British and German tourists for whom local gastronomy does not rate high on the holiday checklist.

As usual, however, the statistics tell a misleading story. Mallorca not only offers gourmet cooking of a five-star international standard, but also possesses a distinctive cuisine of its own, a rustic repertoire based on fresh vegetables, fruit and nuts, fish, pork and lamb. More to the point, the island boasts a magnificent range of raw materials, and it is here, arguably, that the real soul of Mallorcan food resides.

What we eat says a lot about the way we make our money. Mallorca was once an entirely agricultural economy, with the *pagès* (peasant) playing a pivotal role in the management of the land. The tourist boom of the 1960s turned Mallorcan society inside out, as these rural guardians fled the countryside to become waiters and night porters in the coastal hotels. Farms were abandoned, local crop varieties lost and historic dishes forgotten; and a whole way of life and food began sliding towards oblivion.

The 21st century brings welcome signs of reversal and resistance. The changes are coming from several directions. As much as 96 per cent of all food consumed on the

Mallorca a gourmet guide

where to eat

● Ca Na Toneta

The Solivellas sisters (see main feature) are committed to using Mallorcan produce in their acclaimed restaurant. 21 Carrer Horitzó, Caimari (00 34 971 515226; www.canatoneta.com). About €60 for two without wine

● Es Ginebró

Joan Coll, chef at this diminutive vegetarian restaurant in the centre of Inca, grows all his own vegetables and fruit organically on a farm outside Lloseta. The restaurant is a favourite of Slow Food heroine Vandana Shiva on her regular visits to Mallorca. Avinguda Bisbe Llopart 119, Inca (00 34 971 500209). Menus from €15 per person

● Es Molí d'en Bou

Local-ingredient maestro Tomeu Caldentey recently made the surprise move from a rustic setting in the village of Sant Llorenç des Cardassar to a sleek modern dining room in the tourist resort of Sa Coma. A paradox? Very probably. Carrer Liles s/n, Sa Coma (00 34 971 569663; www.esmolidenbou.es). Menus from €49 per person

● Restaurant 3/65

Joan Marc Garcias's restaurant in Son Brull hotel (see 'Where to stay', page 123). About €120 for two without wine

● Santi Taura

In 2003, Santi Taura opened an eponymous restaurant in his home town of Lloseta. He has since become the island's most successful chef. Taura is passionate about island-produced ingredients, which he uses with impeccable taste. The only problem is that the restaurant is booked solid for months in advance (but it is worth calling on the night in case of no-shows). The nearby Set de Vins wineshop is a great place to get the lowdown on new Mallorcan wines. Carrer Joan Carles I 48, Lloseta (00 34 971 514622; www.restaurant.santitaura.com). Menus from €30 per person

● Es Vi

Try local ingredients, with a map to indicate their origins, at Caty Perras's restaurant. Castillo Hotel Son Vida, Carrer Raixa 2, Palma (00 34 971 606136; www.castillosonvidamallorca.com). About €120 for two without wine

the producers

● Arc al Cel

Mallorcan Tomeu Morro and his Tuscan wife Biancamaria Riso oversee the growing of rare island wheats such as Xeixa and Blat Mort

Above left, the entrance to Son Brull hotel, a former monastery. Opposite, clockwise from top left (all at Son Brull): the view from a rooftop Jacuzzi; the hotel gardens; deputy manager Xisca Llado at reception; Room 33: an alfresco dining area; the lavender walk; Joan Marc Garcias, chef at the hotel's 3/65 restaurant; a terrace. Centre, the spa pool



island may still be imported, but local products, handmade and organic, enjoy a higher profile than ever. Slow Food, the organisation that does for foodstuffs what UNESCO does for buildings, is currently involved in a range of projects aimed at rescuing island varieties of fruit trees, vegetables, cereals and livestock breeds (including the critically endangered Mallorcan red sheep). In a Mediterranean version of the USA's 'locavore' movement, Mallorcan chefs and their customers have been quick to latch onto the benefits of island-grown ingredients in terms of flavour, health, energy-saving and the repercussions on a rural community that is fighting for survival.

The movement here is less about revolution than reaction. Many Mallorcans now realise that mass tourism has wreaked havoc on their culture and environment, and that the time has come to redress the balance. For Alberto Fraile, editor of the magazine *Namaste*, which is the focus for the organic scene on the island, local food is less about a poke in the eye for mass tourism than about asserting the right of other sectors, such as small-scale agriculture, to exist in the shadow of that mighty edifice. A little more diversity wouldn't go amiss; for, as Fraile points out, when the going gets really tough – what with economic crashes, Icelandic volcanoes and fierce competition from other Mediterranean destinations – tourist hot spots such as Mallorca may just have to turn their hand to other things.

Sustainability is the key. But then the Mallorcans, like other essentially rural societies, have always been big on reusing and recycling. The *senalla*, the traditional Mallorcan

and grind the grain in one of the island's last working stone mills, in Sa Pobla. From this flour they make *galetes* (savory biscuits), Italian-style cakes and superb breads. They have a stall at Santa Maria del Camí market (see 'Where to shop', page 123). 00 34 971 531638; e-mail: arcaeco@orange.es

● Can Not

This farm makes one of the best *sobrassades* (Mallorcan sausages) on the market and has recently begun using the local *tap de cortí* pepper. The *sobrassada* is available at Can Maneu in Palma (see 'Where to shop', page 123). 60 Carrer Agustín Font, Porreres (00 34 971 647202; www.sobrasada-mallorca.com)

● Finca Can Morey

Mallorca once had a strong cheese-making tradition which it almost allowed to die. Llorenç Payeras is working to bring it back to life with his two fine cheeses: one made from goat's milk, the other from the milk of the Mallorcan red sheep. This noble breed, of African origin, is now reduced to just 1,000 animals, of which Payeras has 200. His raw-milk organic sheep's cheese, made from September to June, owes its distinctive squarish shape to the cloths in which the curds are drained. Carretera Antiga Palma-Inca km 25.1, Lloseta (00 34 971 501305)

● Finca Sa Teulera

This organic farm shop, run by Joan Adrover, sells home-grown fruit and vegetables, plus milk, cheese and yogurt from its own Menorcan cows. An on-site bakery makes delicious island specialities such as *cocarros* (vegetable pasties), *panades* (small pies with various meat or fish fillings), *crepsells* (sweet biscuits) and *coques* (the Mallorcan version of pizza). This year Adrover plans to grow organic rice. Sa Teulera also has two other branches, in Porto Cristo and Manacor. Carretera Palma-Manacor km 4, Petra (00 34 971 183474)

● Pedruxella Gran

Bos Dewey and Liz Barratt-Brown, from Washington DC, possess one of the last remaining horse-powered olive-oil presses still in working order on the island. Their spectacular farm in the mountains outside Pollença is a sanctuary for 3,000 ancient olive trees of the local *Empeltre* variety, from which the family makes a delicious, fragrant olive oil. (Two houses on the property can be rented when the owners are away: see www.ownersdirect.co.uk/balearics/b4002.htm and www.ownersdirect.co.uk/balearics/B4849.htm.) Vall d'en Marc, Pollença (00 34 971 532625; www.pedruxella.com)

Above left, Liz Barratt-Brown of Pedruxella Gran farm. Opposite, clockwise from top left: Finca Filicumis, a farm with guest apartments; grain at Arc al Cel bakery; a room at Finca Filicumis; vegetables grown by Joan Coll; chef Santi Taura; orange cake at Es Ginebró; Tomeu Morro and Biancamaria Riso at Arc al Cel; olives and, centre, oil from Pedruxella Gran

where to stay

● Cap Rocat

This haute-luxe hideaway in a converted fortress at the southern end of Palma Bay is Mallorca's last word in James Bond-style glamour. Chef Victor García works closely with local fishermen – ask him about the catch of the day. Carretera d'Enderrocat s/n, Cala Blava (00 34 971 747878; www.caprocat.com). Doubles from €334

● Finca Filicumis

A classic Mallorcan possessió (country house) beautifully located at the foot of the Serra Tramuntana, Finca Filicumis has to be seen to be believed. Set in a working farm, the house has been converted by its owner, architect Joan Riera, into one of Mallorca's most attractive agroturismo properties. Three self-catering apartments in calming, minimalist style offer a perfect counterpoint to the glorious natural surroundings. Camí es Tossals Verds, Lloseta (00 34 630 663056; www.filicumis.com). Apartment for two from €110 per night

● Son Brull

A former monastery given the less-is-more design treatment, Son Brull holds pole position as the island's most fascinating hotel. Organic and locally produced ingredients shine at the restaurant run by chef Joan Marc Garcías. Carretera Palma-Pollença km 49.8, Pollença (00 34 971 535353; www.sonbrull.com). Doubles from €260

● Son Gener

Designer Antoni Esteve's cool take on Mallorcan country style has made Son Gener something of a classic among the island's top-end hotels. The in-house restaurant puts the emphasis on home-grown and local produce (it has its own organic vegetable garden). Carretera Vella Son Servera-Artà km 3, Son Servera (00 34 971 183612; www.songener.com). Doubles from €290

where to shop for local produce

● Santa Maria del Camí

The Sunday 'ecological' market in Santa Maria del Camí, specialising in Mallorcan produce, started off small, as an offshoot of the town's weekly food market, but it has become a big hit with local gastronomes – a sure sign that the new culinary scene is getting into its stride. Held in the main square, it is well worth a visit for its panoply of colours and aromas. A similar market is now planned for Palma.

● Can Maneu

Genuine old-fashioned grocers, still in the same family after 50 years. Sells *sobrassada* from Can Not (see 'The producers', page 116), local almonds, and apricots from Porreres. Carrer Sindicat 70, Palma

● Colmado Manresa

Famous old grocers, good for Mallorcan staples such as *galetes d'Inca*, almonds, sea salt and *sobrassada*. Carrer Fabrica 19, Palma



shopping basket, is emerging from the souvenir shops as an elegant, locally made alternative to the plastic bag, becoming a symbol of local green practice in the process.

The island is buzzing with local-food projects and initiatives, schemes and associations. The *porc negre* (black pig) of Mallorca, once shunned in favour of the more productive large white, is making a recovery thanks to the Black Pig Association. Restaurants in Palma are renting allotments to grow their own produce, and every one of Mallorca's schools will soon have its own organic vegetable patch. Partly in response to demand from the island's 50,000 German residents, good bread from organic local flour is no longer the rarity it once was. Fruit-and-vegetable 'box schemes' are all the rage.

FOR AN ISLAND LESS THAN HALF the size of Cyprus and a fifth the size of Sicily, Mallorca's range of quality local foods is impressive. In pride of place is its olive oil, a traditional island product that fell on hard times but is once again being made in large quantities, often from the fruit of 500-year-old trees. Something similar can be said of Mallorcan wine, which has come from almost nowhere to become an oenological phenomenon. No less than 65 bodegas are now in operation, many of them working with the local grape varieties Callet, Manto Negro and Premsal. (See opposite for more on Mallorcan wine.)

The island is a paradise for fruit, including tasty varieties of apricot, peach, orange and almond, and an estimated 180 types of fig. Fish, though now scarce and expensive, can be fabulous, and the famous Sóller prawn is as succulent a crustacean as you will ever taste. Local lamb, chargrilled with aromatic Mediterranean herbs, is justly celebrated, as are the products of the *porc negre*. *Sobrassada*, a minced-pork sausage cured with sweet paprika or (even better) island-produced *pimentón*, is a delicacy to which it's easy to become addicted.

A handful of products have become standard-bearers of the local-food movement: Es Trenc salt, for one. This exquisite *flor de sal* (gathered from salt pans on the island's south-east coast, beside the unspoiled beach of Es Trenc), is the perfect example of a local product that was once spurned and is now sought-after. Maria Solivellas – vice-president of Slow Food in the Balearics and chef, with her sister Teresa, at Ca Na Toneta restaurant in Caimari – tells the heartening story of a revived local variety of red pepper. The *tap de cortí* pepper, dried and ground as the spice for *sobrassada*, had been passed over in favour of

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► inferior *pimentón* from the mainland. When Slow Food's rescue campaign began, the pepper was being grown by a handful of people; after just a year the amount produced has increased four-fold, and the island variety is once again valued for its depth of flavour and deep scarlet colour.

For a good number of Mallorca's 2,500-odd restaurants, geared to the lowest common denominator of the package market, the new food sensibility may hold little immediate relevance. But a handful of forward-thinking cooks are responding enthusiastically to the call for local ingredients, local varieties, local dishes. Tomeu Caldentey, at the Michelin-starred Es Molí d'en Bou, offers a seasonal menu which, when I was there, included crisp *coca* (the Mallorcan equivalent of pizza) with onion and *sobrassada*; locally landed hake with almond mayonnaise; suckling pig with apple; and almond cake with an apricot sorbet. Another chef doing great things with island products is Joan Marc Garcías at Son Brull, the minimalist hotel in a former Jesuit monastery outside Pollença. Garcías is the son of a butcher in Inca who had a vegetable patch and kept pigeons and chickens, informing his son's subsequent commitment to traceable and sustainable food. Son Brull grows its own organic vegetables and makes its own wine and olive oil; the maximum in food-miles here is the distance from one end of the island to the other. Garcías's *menú del dia* on a hot day in July was a delight, full of fresh Mediterranean flavours: stuffed local calamari with whole roasted Cor de Bou tomato; albacore tuna tartare with basil and lemon; roast organic chicken with sage; and peach ice cream with mint biscuits.

IT'S GOOD TO REPORT THAT even the island's poshest hotels are getting in on the 'locavore' action: Victor García at Cap Rocat (Mallorca's most talked-about hotel, which opened in June 2010) uses local suppliers; and Caty Pieras at Es Vi, in-house restaurant at the chintzy Castillo Hotel Son Vida, hands diners a map of the island showing exactly where her ingredients hail from: prawns from Sóller, beef from Felanitx, rice from Sa Pobla, cheese from the Mallorcan red sheep (yes, the critically endangered one).

But the restaurant that best represents the new mood on Mallorca has to be Ca Na Toneta. Maria and Teresa Solivellas belong to a country family with a natural understanding of the land. Caimari is their village; the family farm, source of much of what ends up on the table, is a few minutes' drive away in Selva. When I ask Maria which olive oil she uses, she laughs. She can pick and choose, she says, between her own, her uncle's and her cousin's. (Her uncle, Pep Solivellas, makes one of the island's best oils, while her cousin's is a fragrant oil from the *Empeltre* 'mountain olive'.) The lamb and kid the sisters serve at the restaurant are bred by a neighbour in Caimari. The tomatoes they use are the heirloom varieties Cor de Bou, sweet and fleshy, and Ramallet, perfect for rubbing on toast with olive oil in the classic *pa amb oli*. Maria is acutely aware of the catastrophe facing Mediterranean fish, and buys directly from the boats she trusts (avoiding the two that still fish with dredge nets) in the nearby port of Alcúdia. On the morning I spoke to her she was planning the day's menu, a high-summer feast that made me long to go back to the restaurant with her: Cor de Bou carpaccio; *coca* with onion confit, figs and *sobrassada* from the Solivellas family's own pigs; pea purée with fillets of red mullet; Caimari lamb with couscous; apricot ice cream with carob brownie. 'I will only buy and use products from Mallorca,' says Maria firmly. 'I have discovered I can create a complete and healthy diet using nothing but local ingredients. Most people don't realise what a treasure-house for food this island is.'

The new Mallorcan food has its roots in respect for biodiversity, ancestral flavours and traditional rural life. It's a new sensibility that has come, says Maria, in the nick of time; but the situation is still critical: 'A generation of *pageses* is about to disappear, and there is no new generation to take over from them. The tour operators need the almond blossom to sell the image of Mallorca to the tourists. But who looks after those almond trees?' 📍



Chef Joan Coll in his garden

● Colmado Santo Domingo

Hole-in-the-wall grocer's shop in the heart of Palma's old town, specialising in *sobrassada de porc negre*. Carrer Santo Domingo 1, Palma

● Mercat de l'Olivar

The market has dozens of food stalls. Colmado La Montaña (www.colmado.lamontana.com) is a safe bet for charcuterie from Mallorca and mainland Spain. The deli stall d'Origen (www.dorigen.es) sells a good range of local wines, oils, organic vegetables, Es Trenc salt and 'Fet a Sóller' jams made from quince, pomegranate and prickly pear. Plaça de l'Olivar s/n, Palma

● Mercat de Santa Catalina

This popular market forms the heart of the vibrant Santa Catalina neighbourhood, where many of Palma's buzziest restaurants are to be found. Plaça Navegació s/n, Palma

● Sa Formatgeria

Bijou charcuterie and cheese shop which stocks Can Morey sheep's cheese (see 'The producers', page 120). Carrer Orms 30, Palma

● Son Vivot

This classic deli is worth a visit for its encyclopaedic collection of Mallorcan foods and wines. Plaça Porta Pintada 1, Palma (www.son-vivot.com)

food glossary

coca (pl. coques): Mallorca's take on the pizza, sold by the slice in most forms (bakeries). Toppings include peppers, onion, Swiss chard, pineapples etc

ensaimada: a rich pastry whorl dusted with icing sugar

galetes d'Inca: savoury biscuits, great for snacking. Quely is a popular brand

pa amb oli (pamboli): bread with oil and tomato, a Mallorcan staple, often served with grilled meats

panada: a little pie with a filling such as tuna and tomato or pork and peas

sobrassada: minced-pork sausage flavoured with *pimentón*

tombet: oven-baked dish made in late summer with aubergines, courgettes, peppers, potato and tomato

trempo: Mallorcan summer salad of tomato, onion and green pepper

getting to mallorca

British Airways (www.ba.com) flies from London City to Palma. **EasyJet** (www.easyjet.com) flies to Palma from 11 UK airports.

Journey time: Flight time from London to Palma is 2hrs 25mins

weather to go

☀️ Mallorca has a mild, dry climate: even in January, the daytime temperature averages 14°C (compared to 6°C in the UK). Go in spring or autumn for warm weather without the holiday crowds. In October, for example, you can expect temperatures of about 23°C and nine hours' sunshine per day.