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# Majorca's the REAL deal

IT'S NOT hard to see why Britain's pioneering package tourists in the Fifties were so delighted with Majorca. The place is breathtakingly pretty and perfectly charming.

In most places the views have hardly changed since Chopin made his ill-advised visit 170 years ago (when the Polish composer's lover George Sand called the locals light-fingered 'monkeys' their unhappy winter stay went from bad to worse).

Earlier this month we rented a house between Pollensa and Alcudia, on a swathe of flat land framed on either side by primeval jagged mountains. We were just a few miles from the sea but the odd distant mobile phone mast apart, it was deliriously unspoilt. Pollensa and Alcudia were also thoroughly delightful, by the way.

Tourism from the UK to Majorca has been going longer than you might have expected. Nearly 75 years ago, Agatha Christie featured the locale in her 1936 story *Problem At Pollensa Bay* (I imagine el butler did it).

It's easy to presume that Majorca is simply an island version of mainland Spain yet visitors quickly discover it is its own small world: quiet, intelligent and very civilised.

Hang on, you might protest: Majorca is famously the island that boasts the inelegant delights of Magaluf with Rovers Return pubs, all-day English breakfasts and binge drinkers permanently blotto from eternal happy hours. True: but to imagine all of Majorca is like Magaluf is to suggest the whole of Wales resembles Barry Island.

Less than ten minutes after leaving Palma airport in your hired car you are likely to be very far from the madding crowd. Heading north to Inca and beyond, the holiday throng quickly vanishes. The problem that Majorca has at the moment is that the holiday crowd has disap-

peared a little too much. Everywhere you go, people in the tourist business complain things are too quiet. Most of the blame is laid at the door of the Icelandic volcano.

The volcano now slumbers but there is no obvious upturn in business. There are other issues: the faltering German and UK economies have affected bookings in the two countries that provide Majorca with the bulk of its tourist income. One bar owner reckoned the riots in Greece had also put people off foreign holidays. Added to this is the stuttering value of the Pound. As a result, tour operators are being left with unwel-

come over-capacity – particularly in Greece but also in Spain. The result? A price-cutting bonanza.

If you are looking to pay the bare minimum you can find seven-night self-catering packages to Rhodes on [lowcostholidays.com](http://lowcostholidays.com), for example, for little more than £100 per person per week (this would barely cover your share of the aircraft fuel for the return journey). Destinations that seem to be thriving are outside the Eurozone and include Turkey, Egypt and Croatia (The Turkish Lira is a particularly good buy at the moment). My advice, however, is to play it canny. Don't go for the cheapest of

the cheapest – the biggest source of holiday complaints is that people find an inexpensive holiday cheap and nasty, not cheap and cheerful.

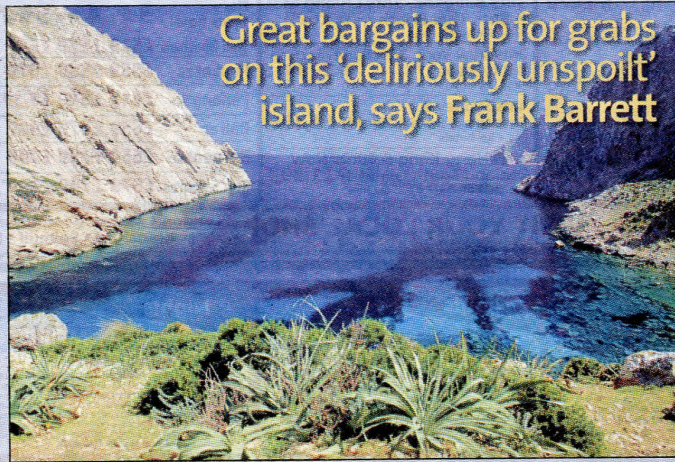
THE SMART thing to do is to use the price-cutting frenzy to trade up and enjoy the sort of holiday that would hitherto have been out of your league. In Majorca, therefore, check out the deals available on self-catering in stand-alone properties with pools. The property we stayed at, 'Carteras', sleeps ten – which means if you fill it prices start at just £145 per per-

son for the week. With no-frills return fares to Palma from around £90, it's possible to have a luxury holiday at a bargain price.

Shop at the Eroski supermarket chain and you can eat well for a week at no more than you would pay in the UK. Wine and beer are cheap. And most properties offer big-screen TVs with UK stations.

You will barely need to venture out. Why head to the beach when you can relax by your own pool?

As you loll in the sun sipping a glass of wine, you can ponder on the fact that the ill Icelandic winds have blown you rather a lot of good...



Great bargains up for grabs on this 'deliriously unspoilt' island, says Frank Barrett



**BARGAIN STAY:** The villa where Frank Barrett stayed and, left, a secluded bay coast near the town of Pollensa

**Mallorca Farmhouses** offer exclusive villas, country retreats and rustic farmhouses, all with maid service, starter pack and a private pool. Properties can also be booked to include car hire with full insurance. Prices for Carteras start from £1,451 per week in 2010. Sleeping ten, this equates to approximately £145 per person. Call 0845 800 8080, [www.mallorca.co.uk](http://www.mallorca.co.uk). A gourmet chef service can be arranged for any special occasion. A chef will come to the villa and prepare breakfast, lunch or dinner. Prices start from €45 per person (around £37).