

TRAVEL

with Anna Brosnan

WHEN it comes to popular spots for those in search of a beach holiday with guaranteed sunshine, Mallorca has to be one of the top destinations in Europe.

But, while some may look down on this Balearic island as a 'Brits abroad' type location, there is a reason it is so popular.

My recent trip to the island was my first and I did not know what to expect - I was half anxious I would be caught up in a new British enclave, with the sadness of lost Spanish authenticity. But I was relieved to find out this was far from the truth.

While there are portions of Mallorca which seem to have given themselves over to commercialism, my sister Katie and I went in search for a quieter part of the island; namely the little town of Soller.

Overlooked by the rolling Tramuntana mountains, lush with orange and lemon groves, Soller is a popular destination for those who want to leave the tourist trail far behind.

Katie and I wanted a little bit of culture, beach time and some countryside strolls - so Soller fitted the bill perfectly.

After flying to Palma, we took a 30 minute taxi ride (costing about 45 euros) to Soller and checked in to the beautiful hotel L'Avenida.

Once there, we were greeted with friendly smiles and immediately ushered to the relaxing surroundings of a balcony overlooking a pool.

There, on a scorching hot day, we were presented with a cold glass of Cava and we both started to feel our travel tensions ease away as we sipped our drinks and looked out across the blue water



together beautifully.

L'Avenida was this year recognised in the TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Awards as one of Spain's top 25 hotels, and we could definitely see why.

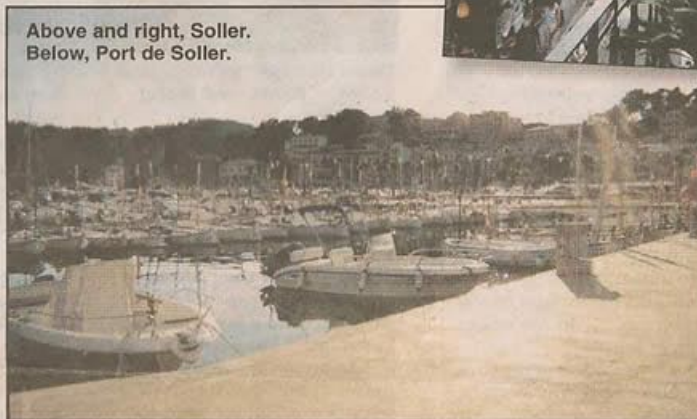
We spent more time down by the pool the next morning where we enjoyed the first of a series of delicious breakfasts at L'Avenida. Here, continental breakfasts are no poor relation to the 'full English' and each day we were treated to a sumptuous buffet of cold meats, delicious cheeses, pastries, fruit and even lemon mousse.

With just a few days to enjoy in Mallorca, we had to plan our time well.

One of our favourite evening haunts became the little town of Soller itself and the Placa

Marvellous Mallorca

Above and right, Soller.
Below, Port de Soller.



Familia in Barcelona, was also responsible for designing the amazing mansion house which is now L'Avenida.

some lunch at a cafe in its main square.

Having spent an active day walking, we felt that we needed a

TAKE OFF

UK/IRELAND

- **EDINBURGH FESTIVAL:** Corona (01582 390 939) offers four nights' B&B at four-star Malmaison Hotel from £489, incl return flights ex-Stansted Aug 19.
- **ISLE OF WIGHT:** Wightlink (0871 376 0013) offers three nights' B&B at Harbour Hotel in Ventnor from Aug 24 from £178.50, departing Portsmouth/Lymington by ferry Aug 24. A three course dinner in Michelin-starred restaurant costs £55.
- **WHITBY FOLK WEEK:** HF Holidays (0845 470 7558) offers seven nights' full-board from Aug 21 at Larpool Hall Country house on outskirts of town from £599, incl season tickets to festival events, transport to/from venues, and HF holiday co-ordinator.

SHORT BREAKS

- **CAIRO/PYRAMIDS:** BA Holidays (0844 493 0758) offers four nights' B&B at 4.5-star Le Meridien during Sept from £536, incl flights ex-Heathrow.
- **ABU DHABI:** Pure Luxury (0844 472 0100) offers four nights' B&B from £899, saving £210, incl Etihad returns ex-Heathrow departing Aug 19-Sept 9, and transfers. Book by Aug 31.
- **BERLIN:** Cities Direct (01242 536 900) offers three nights' B&B, at three-star Castor Devine hotel, round corner from KaDeWe and the Ku'damm, for £229, saving £38, ex-Stansted Aug 24.
- **LAS VEGAS:** www.netflights.com (0844 493 4944) offers three nights' room only at four-star Luxor Hotel and Casino for £579, incl United Airlines returns ex-Heathrow on depts Aug 25-31.
- **NORTHERN FRANCE:** Taste of Inntravel (01653 617 000) offers two nights' half-board from Aug 12 in traditional Auberge D'Inxent in Course Valley, some 39 miles from Calais, for £174, incl return P&O Dover-Calais crossings for passengers and car.
- **PARIS:** Flight Centre (0844 800 8628) offers two nights' room only at three-star Glasgow Monceau Hotel from £129, incl Eurostar returns ex-St Pancras, for travel until Aug 31.
- **LAS VEGAS:** Virgin (0844 557 3870) offers three nights' room only at three-

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Such is the feeling of calm and tranquillity at the hotel, we noticed that many guests would spend the majority of the afternoons lounging on sun beds by the pool, while being served cold drinks and tasty snacks.

Our room was just as impressive as the rest of the hotel, complete with a giant squashy bed, silk drapes, hardwood floors and a plush bathroom with aromatherapy products. We opened the shutters to enjoy a breathtaking view of the surrounding hills.

Other features of the hotel include a wellness room where guests can enjoy a range of relaxing spa treatments.

This stylish and serene eight bedroom boutique hotel is more than 100 years old but blends new and old styles of decor to

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One of our favourite evening haunts became the little town of Soller itself and the Placa Constitucio. This central square is dominated by the beautiful neo-gothic Cathedral of San Bartomeu, but also includes a plethora of restaurants, cafes and ice cream shops.

We found this a great place to enjoy some tapas and sangria in the evening, while soaking up the atmosphere of this bustling town.

Our explorations of the area also brought us to the Ca'n Prunera modern art museum, just two minutes walk from the central square.

Set in a modernist style house designed by the celebrated architect Josep Rubio I Bellver, this gallery includes works by such esteemed names as Picasso, Matisse, Warhol and Cezanne.

Bellver, who worked with Gaudi on such projects as the Sagrada

Familia in Barcelona, was also responsible for designing the amazing mansion house which is now L'Avenida.

For me, the beauty of the gallery house was as exciting as the art itself and I particularly enjoyed wandering around its carefully designed gardens.

But our trip to Soller would be complete without a walking day in the surrounding countryside.

One day, we decided to set off for nearby Fornalutx, often heralded as 'Spain's prettiest village.'

As we left Soller behind us and toured our way through the breathtaking countryside, past olive, lemon and orange trees, we soon lost our bearings, but luckily found a helpful lemon grower who pointed us in the right direction.

If Fornalutx is Spain's prettiest village, then it thoroughly deserves its title and my sister and I spent a lovely afternoon exploring the village and munching on

some lunch at a cafe in its main square.

Having spent an active day walking, we felt that we needed a couple of lazy days so we took the opportunity of catching the quaint wooden tram from Soller's to the seafront of Port de Soller.

Although the area does not boast huge sandy expanses, the beaches were big enough to serve our purpose and we spent some glorious hours topping up our tans and swimming in the sea.

But Port de Soller, with its waterfront bars and restaurants, is also a great place to spend the evening and we had a gorgeous meal at El Pirata, where the pudding selection in particular is not to be missed.

Soller certainly banished any pre-conceived notions I had about Mallorca as simply a tacky tourist hotspot, but instead impressed me as a snapshot of real Spanish life.

Anna and Katie travelled from Kettering to Luton airport with East Midlands Trains, where they picked up a flight to Palma with Easyjet. For more information on these routes, complete with booking details, log onto www.eastmidlandstrains.co.uk and www.easyjet.com
Rates at L'Avenida vary according to the type of room and time of year. A standard double room between April and September costs 225 euros a night while, during October, rates are lowered to 125 euros. For reservations, call 0034 971 634 075 or visit the website www.avenida-hotel.com

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