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Mallorca's the real deal

Picture: PHOTOLIBRARY.COM



SITTING PRETTY: The traditional farmhouse with pool, inset, on the outskirts of Pollença with its charming main square, above



A well-equipped villa on this charming Balaeric island will offer enough to keep all the family happy, including two little ones, says NICK McGRATH

AS ANY parent of young children knows, the key to a successful family holiday is ensuring that the small people are entertained, well-fed and constantly distracted. With this in mind, a well-planned, action-packed week on the family-friendly Balaeric island of Mallorca seemed like the perfect passport to seven days of sun, sand and stress-free adventure.

We arrived at our traditional four-bedroomed farmhouse on the outskirts of Pollença, in the north-east of the island, after a straightforward 45-minute drive north from Palma airport. Our expectations were of lazy lunchtime barbecues, sun-drenched games of hide-and-seek in the spacious grounds and regular dips in the refreshing pool. The manicured gardens of our immaculately furnished Finca Plomera residence were, indeed, sun-drenched and furnished with giant pots and seats carved into the stone walls. We even had our own mini menagerie in the form of a couple of swans, whom we soon found loved croissants, and a gaggle of geese. The children, Aoife, four, and 13-month-old Art, were soon careering round the place having tremendous fun.

Suitably exhausted after their exertions, "los niños" slept soundly (Aoife in a bed big enough to accommodate her entire soft toy collection, Art in the cot provided) while I stocked up on dirt-cheap plonk (Campo Viejo rioja for €4, Freixenet Rosado cava for just €6), tortilla, chorizo and Manchego cheese from the local supermarket.

With its solid, dark-wooden furniture, chunky dining table and heat-deflecting shutters, the farmhouse proved a welcome retreat from the blistering midday sun, while there were enough nooks and crannies to provide ample hiding places for our mischief-making offspring.

Invigorated by a peaceful night's sleep, we headed into

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Pollença's picturesque 13th-century old town to attempt the 365-step ascent to the summit of the Calvari hill and its small chapel. Local folklore maintains that a successful ascent will vanquish the previous year's indiscretions.

Twenty sweaty minutes later, with my deceptively heavy youngest perched on my shoulders tugging my hair like reins, I'd added several more blasphemous black marks to the previous 12 months' transgressions. The reward, however, was a spectacular view of the rugged Mallorcan coastline and the Tramuntana mountains.

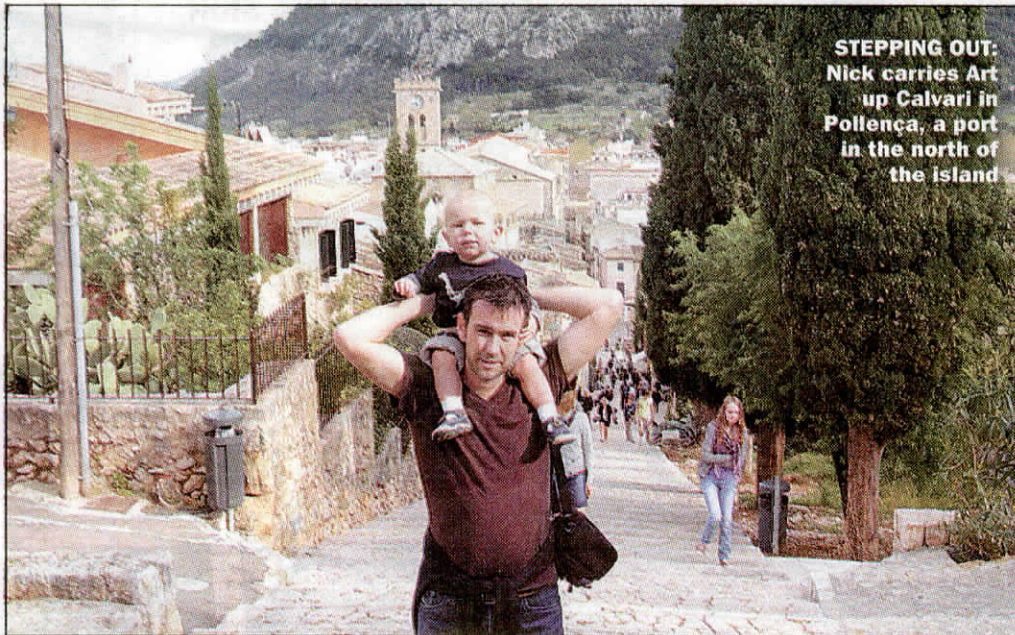
Back in the square after our descent, we rewarded our exertions with naughty but nice goodies (exquisite cream puffs and mouth-watering strawberry pastries) from the nearby C'an Bisquererra on Calle De Munar.

Warming to our altitudinous theme we took the short drive to the spectacular Formentor peninsula and its Victorian-era lighthouse perched on the north-eastern tip of the island, Cap de Formentor.

Adjacent is a small but perfectly formed beach. Here, we took a very brief toe dip in waters previously enjoyed by the esteemed digits of none other than Winston Churchill, Audrey Hepburn and Mallorca's most famous modern residents, Michael Douglas and his wife Catherine Zeta-Jones (pictured).

We spent the next day curled up in front of the property's DVD system watching Disney films. Coupled with some indoor treasure hunts and a home-cooked paella, this seemed to diffuse any brewing junior insurgency.

The day's biggest challenge was preventing our fear-free youngest from precariously descending the property's grandiose Dynasty-style



STEPPING OUT: Nick carries Art up Calvari in Pollença, a port in the north of the island

Island with star quality

staircase in his Postman Pat slippers.

The holiday's unlikely highlight, for my daughter at least, came the next day when we drove south-west to the subterranean caves at the small town of Porto Cristo.

The Cuevas del Drach are home to one of the world's largest underground lakes, the Lago de Martel, and are located just a short walk from the town itself.

Here, our little white lie, that the whispered multilingual commentary accompanying our tour of the network of stalagmites and stalactites was the fictional resident giant's wife listing the ingredients for her



husband's dinner, fired my daughter's imagination to unanticipated heights. Perhaps she was just dazzled by the operatic underground lake finale, performed by a pair of papier-mâché marionettes in a gondola.

Either way, she proclaimed the experience the apex of our holiday, unlike the following day's late-afternoon road trip along the craggy western coast from pretty mountain village Valldemossa to Pollença, via the sleepy seaside resort of Sóller.

Lured by the promise of stunning views, we foolishly ignored every parent's golden rule: never drive with irritable, hungry children when you're light on snacks and patience. It meant we spent most of the trip with the children chiming: "Are we there yet?"

The final leg of our Mallorcan family adventure fared much better though as we ambled through the beautiful squares and cobbled streets of the stunning capital city Palma. We followed this with an afternoon at nearby Marineland, another huge hit with keen amateur zoologist Aoife. The park has an aquarium with sharks and penguins (though not in the same tank), a tropical house with amphibians and an entertaining dolphin show.

I'm still not entirely comfortable with enforced animal captivity but my daughter was positively ecstatic to get up close and personal with the sea creatures and, given it managed to keep the children so entertained, I certainly wasn't going to argue.

● GETTING THERE:

Mallorca Farmhouses (0845 800 8080/www.mallorca.co.uk) offers seven days at Finca Plomera from £1,266 (sleeps eight). *easyJet* (0871 244 2366/www.easyjet.com) offers return flights from various UK airports to Palma from £106. *Economy Car Hire* (0845 450 0877/www.economycarhire.com) offers seven days rental from £200. *Spanish National Tourist Office*: 0207 486 8077/www.spain.info