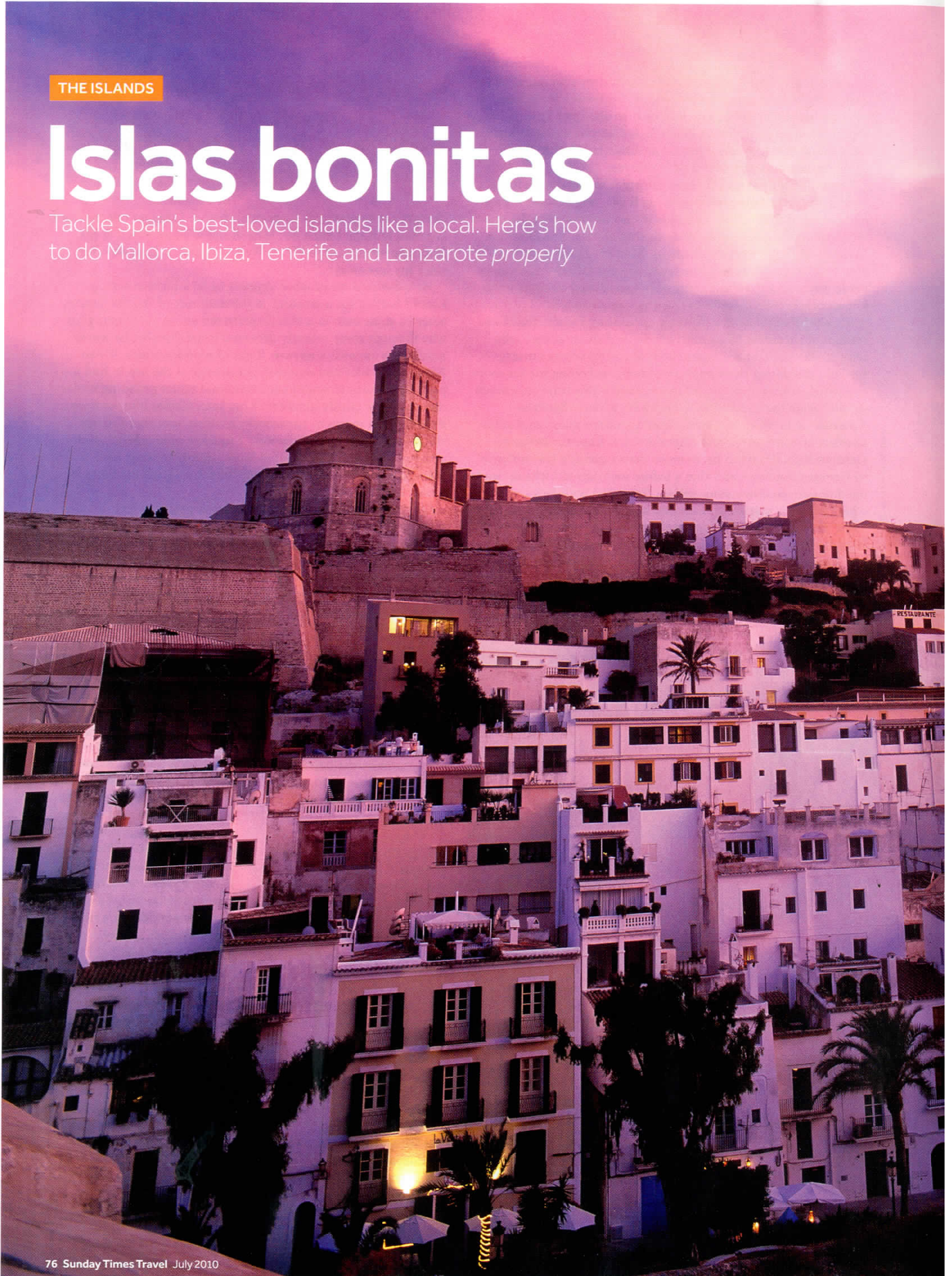


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THE ISLANDS

Islas bonitas

Tackle Spain's best-loved islands like a local. Here's how to do Mallorca, Ibiza, Tenerife and Lanzarote *properly*



MALLORCA

Inside track: To really unravel Mallorca, you need to stretch your legs. This is walking country, so start with the least-trodden path of all, on uninhabited Cabrera island, an hour's ferry ride away. Here, you can hike to the castle for some sensationally rugged scenery or flop on one of the pretty, deserted beaches. There is no hotel and only one bar, so if you fancy staying the night, take your own supplies – last ferry back departs 6pm.

Back on the mainland, leave the coastal party scene and drive inland towards d'Alaró (PM210). Leave your car by the Restaurant Es Verger and take a walk up to the 13th-century Castell d'Alaró – from the battlements, the sweeping views of Palma Cathedral to the south and Formentor peninsula to the north are spectacular. Once back at the restaurant (00 34 971 182126; mains around £10), order lamb in olive oil and brandy, a local speciality.

For a hearty hike through one of the most beautiful valleys on the island, start at the Mirador ses Barques restaurant on the C710 between Puerto Sóller and Lluc. This is a four-hour walk through pine forests and olive groves, with marvellous views over the cliffs.

Halfway down, call by the farmhouse at Balitx d'Avall for a glass of fresh orange juice from Maria and Guillermo. When you arrive at Cala Tuent, there's a great paella restaurant, Es Vergeret (00 34 971 517105; mains around £12) – it's best to book.

Wander down through the woods below the restaurant, either for a cooling dip in the sea or to catch a boat back to Sóller (Barcos Azules; 00 34 971 630170).

The best tip of all? Cala Castell is the most secluded beach in Mallorca. To get there, put on some good walking boots at Cala Sant Vincenç, then head for Cala Barques; the path is well-signposted to Cala Castell. It's a one-hour walk but the gorgeous bay is worth the slog, and en route you might well see one of the few black vultures left in the Med.

Secret sleep: Can Reus (00 34 971 631174, www.canreushotel.com) is hidden away in one of the prettiest villages on the island, Fornalutx. The former orange merchant's house has a small pool and lovely views over citrus orchards. Doubles from £105, B&B.

Get me there: Ryanair (www.ryanair.com) flies to Palma from Bristol, Bournemouth, Birmingham, Stansted, Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, East Midlands and Leeds. ■



WORDS: KATIE BOWMAN, JOE CRAWLEY, LAURA GOULDING, GORMAN KEELEY; PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/STOCK MARKET

GET ME THERE

GO INDEPENDENT

FLIGHTS: BA (0844 493 0787, www.ba.com) flies from Heathrow to Barcelona from £104 return, Gibraltar from £185, Málaga from £149, and Madrid from £113; and from Gatwick and London City to Ibiza from £138. **Iberia** (0870 609 0500, www.iberia.com) flies direct from Heathrow to Madrid from £114, and to Barcelona from £104, with onward connections to 35 Spanish destinations, including Málaga from £166, Bilbao from £103, and Palma, in Mallorca, from £164. **Spanair** (00 34 902 131415, www.spanair.com) flies direct from Birmingham and Edinburgh to Madrid from £88, and to Barcelona from £106, with onward connections to 17 further Spanish destinations, including Tenerife, Fuerteventura and Lanzarote. **Air Europa** (0871 423 0717, www.aireuropa.com) flies direct from Gatwick to Madrid from £104, with onward connections to 22 cities. **Thomson** (0871 231 4691, flights.thomson.co.uk) has flights from Luton, Stansted, Gatwick, Cardiff, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle and eight other regional airports to Girona, Reus, Alicante and Málaga. **Bmibaby** (www.bmibaby.com) flies from East Midlands, Birmingham and Cardiff to Málaga, Alicante, Palma, Murcia,

Almería and Barcelona. **Flybe** (www.flybe.com) has flights to Málaga from Humberstone, Southampton and Exeter, and to Alicante and Palma from Southampton and Exeter. **EasyJet** (www.easyjet.com) flies to Madrid, Málaga, Barcelona, Alicante, Bilbao, Murcia, Almería, Valencia, Asturias, Ibiza, Palma and Menorca, with regional UK departures from Manchester, Edinburgh, Doncaster and more. **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com) flies to Palma, Málaga, Seville, Murcia, Alicante, Ibiza, Reus, Girona, Lanzarote, Tenerife, Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria, Granada, Zaragoza, Santander, Jerez, Valencia and Santiago de Compostela from Stansted and several other UK airports.

Vueling (www.vueling.com) has direct flights from Heathrow to A Coruña, Seville and Bilbao, and from Edinburgh to Barcelona. **Jet2** (www.jet2.com) flies to Ibiza, Murcia, Menorca, Palma, Tenerife, Málaga, Alicante, Lanzarote, Gran Canaria, Barcelona and Reus from Belfast, Blackpool, Edinburgh, Leeds Bradford, Manchester and Newcastle airports. **Monarch** (www.monarch.co.uk) flies from Birmingham, Gatwick, Luton and Manchester to Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria, Tenerife, Gibraltar, Málaga, Almería, Alicante, Ibiza, Palma, Menorca and Barcelona.

GET AROUND

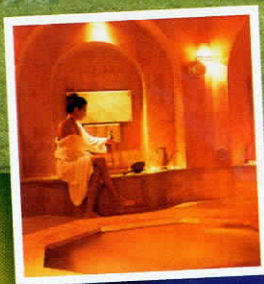
BY PLANE: Iberia (as before) serves 37 airports across the country including Almería, Bilbao, Granada, Ibiza, Jerez, Lanzarote, San Sebastián and Valencia. Return fares start at £92. **Vueling** (as before) serves 18 Spanish cities, with the bulk of flights operating from Madrid, Seville, Málaga, Valencia, Barcelona and Bilbao. **Air Europa's** (as before) network covers 23 Spanish cities, with a main base at Palma; return fares start at £50. **Spanair** (as before) serves a network of 19 Spanish airports; its hub is located in Barcelona. Popular routes include Mallorca to Málaga (from £73 return), Barcelona to Ibiza (from £34) and Bilbao to Madrid (from £44). **BY CAR: Europcar** (0845 762 6640, www.europcar.com) has more than 120 pick-up locations across Spain, including the islands; a week's hire costs from £167. Or try **Hertz** (08708 415161, www.hertz.co.uk) or **Avis** (0844 581 0147, www.avis.co.uk).

GO PACKAGED

FOOD AND DRINK: Arblaster & Clarke (01730 263111, www.winetours.co.uk) has a one-week tour of the wine regions of northern Spain from £1,795pp, full board, including vineyard visits and tastings, excluding flights.

www.cometotunisia.co.uk

TEE OFF IN TUNISIA



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Just 2½ hours away

The Jewel of the Mediterranean



TUNISIA



Or try **Annie B's Spanish Kitchen** (00 34 620 560649, www.anniebsspanishkitchen.com).
ACTIVITY: Exodus (0845 863 9600, www.exodus.co.uk) has walking and cycling trips across Spain, including an eight-day Andalucía walking itinerary, taking in olive groves, villages and hills, including accommodation, most meals and London flights, from €949pp. Or try **Inntravel** (01653 617001, www.inntravel.co.uk).
VILLAS: Vintage Travel (01954 261431, www.vintagegetravel.co.uk) has villas with private pools across Andalucía, Catalonia, Galicia, Mallorca and Menorca; a week's rental for a villa sleeping seven starts at £1,050. Or try **Meon Villas** (0800 783 1410, www.meonvillas.co.uk).
CITIES: Kirker Holidays (020 7593 1899, www.kirkerholidays.com) has three nights at the Hotel Arts in Barcelona from £816pp, B&B, including flights from Heathrow. Or try **Cities Direct** (01242 536900, www.citiesdirect.co.uk).
FAMILY: Explore (0844 499 0901, www.explore.co.uk) has trips for adventurous families, including eight days of mountain-biking, white-water rafting and canyoning in

the Pyrenees, from €938pp, with Heathrow flights. Or try **Responsible Travel** (01273 600030, www.responsibletravel.com).
CULTURAL: The Traveller (020 7269 2770, www.the-traveller.co.uk) has three nights in Madrid, visiting the Prado Museum, the Royal Palace and the Plaza Mayor, from €695pp, including Heathrow flights. Or try **Martin Randall** (020 8742 3355, www.martinrandall.com).

SPAIN FOR ALL SEASONS

SPRING: Temperatures start hotting up in April, when it's pleasant all over and sunloungers begin to come out in the south. You'll find cheaper flights and shorter queues in the big cities too, apart from during *Semana Santa*, the week leading up to Easter Sunday, when Seville and Málaga fill up; the cities of Valladolid and León are just as important, but less frenzied. Two weeks later, the Seville fair is a fine time for horses, castanets and flamenco. Over the May bank holidays flight prices soar, particularly for citybreak destinations such as Madrid and Barcelona.

AUTUMN: September and October are great months to visit the south – you'll get cheaper flights as soon as the kids have gone back to school, as well as plenty of sun. Many of Spain's best grapes are harvested at the end of September, and individual wine regions hold festivals: in Jerez, there's the blessing of the grapes, sherry tastings, flamenco and horse shows, while in Rioja, things kick off around September 24, with the biggest party taking place in Logroño.

WINTER: You'll find decent weather in the south, the Balearics and in the Canary Islands during the months that are gloomiest at home (December to February). Christmas is expensive for flights, but you'll find good deals if you don't mind travelling on Boxing Day or New Year's Eve. Spain's two biggest carnivals take place in Cádiz and Tenerife in February, just before Lent – make sure you book hotel rooms ahead.

FURTHER INFORMATION

020 7486 8077, www.spain.info. ■