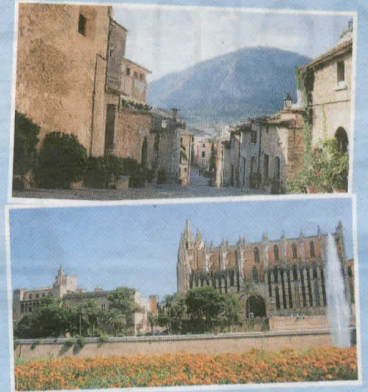


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WILD FOR MAJORCA



Hannah Stephenson explores the untamed side of the Balearics

TRAVEL INFORMATION
● Thomas Cook (0844 412 5970, thomascook.com) offers seven nights' self-catering at three-star Villa Concha apartments in Puerto Pollensa from £957 for a family of four, ex-Manchester in early May. Avis car hire from £148 for three days

WE weaved our way through narrow medieval streets, past a children's birthday party spilling out into the alleyway outside a small café in the old part of the Spanish town of Pollensa. As the birthday girl was given a cake and relations toasted her with Rioja, we made our way to the town square, where young and old mixed in a clutch of open-air bars.

In Pollensa, you can feel the ambience of old Majorca, where Spanish is spoken and locals enjoy a glass of wine and tapas. As we watched the world go by, ordering the speciality of *pa amb oli* – local bread, garlic, olive oil and tomatoes, sometimes topped with serrano ham or cheese – we could appreciate the true beauty of the island and its people.

Pollensa, with its cobbled streets, austere buildings, sun-baked walls and faded wooden shutters, could be anywhere in Spain and a million miles away from the tourist trails of this famous Balearic island.

Situated in the north of the island, the

Treasure island: Cap de Formentor (main picture), the old town of Pollensa (inset top) and Palma cathedral (inset bottom)

town dates from the 13th century after the Spanish conquest in 1229 – although it was originally founded by the Romans – and offers a welcoming feeling of history peppered with up-market souvenir and trinket shops.

Pollensa was built a few miles inland to avoid pirate attacks, the most famous of which, the Fiesta de los Moros y Cristianos, the battle between the Moors and Christians, is re-enacted every year on August 2 with parades, concerts and general merrymaking leading up to a battle when streets heave with mock guns, swords and cutlasses.

The largest of the Balearic islands, once a haven for all-night parties, lager louts and sangria sisters, Majorca has reinvented itself in the last decade. The locals prefer calling the island Mallorca, as they sense Majorca has connotations of pink flesh and grey concrete.

It is a magnet for A-list celebs, too. Antonio Banderas and Claudia Schiffer favour this Balearic bolthole, while Hollywood couple Catherine Zeta Jones and Michael Douglas have a luxurious villa on the hilltops outside Deia, to the west. Quieter coastal spots in the north attract millionaires, with luxury homes

carved into rocks overlooking the sea and sunseekers moored in the harbours of Puerto Pollensa and Port d'Andratx.

Puerto Pollensa, a 15-minute bus ride from Pollensa town, is perfect for families who like a quieter resort, with a wide, sandy beach, safe swimming and sailing and windsurfing for action fans.

Pollensa is commercial – there are English bars, fish and chip shops, and English-speaking staff – but it has a relaxed atmosphere.

Away from the highly commercial east coast, where Alcudia has everything from tattoo clinics to a Burger King, we found peace on the rugged northern end of the island at Formentor.

Another day we explored the pretty coastal town of Cala de Sant Vicenc, with its rugged coast and crashing waves.

Pretty resorts on the east coast retain their Spanish feel. We drove to Porto Cristo, which has a small beach and an impressive harbour. The town still feels like old Spain with narrow streets leading from the beach.

Some Majorcan restaurants charge London prices, but you can find bargains at markets selling leather goods, olive wood utensils and famous local pottery,

or when you visit a pearl factory.

At the Wednesday market in Puerto Pollensa, I was invited to try delicious tiny plums by a friendly stallholder. I also bought juicy peaches, melons, serrano ham and local cheese. Olives stuffed with everything from garlic and peppers to acidic cornichons were expensive but too good to resist.

On a tour of the island we realised why BBC's show *Top Gear* loves filming there. We went round enough hairpin bends to keep even Jeremy Clarkson quiet on the descent into Sa Calobra, a tiny cove at the bottom of sheer cliffs near Escorca in the south west.

You can also catch a train from Palma to Soller in the heart of the Serra de Tramuntana mountains. From there, we caught a tram, passing through orchards of citrus fruit on our way to the sea at Port de Soller, with its wide, sandy beach.

Palma, the beautiful capital in the south, is worth a weekend trip of its own, with a magnificent cathedral, an impressive harbour and long streets – but that's another holiday. I'll settle for the memories of the wilder side of the island, with its rugged coastline and choppy sea – untamed and untainted by tourism.