



Fornalutx lives up to its title of 'prettiest village in Spain'

Travel

Island paradise

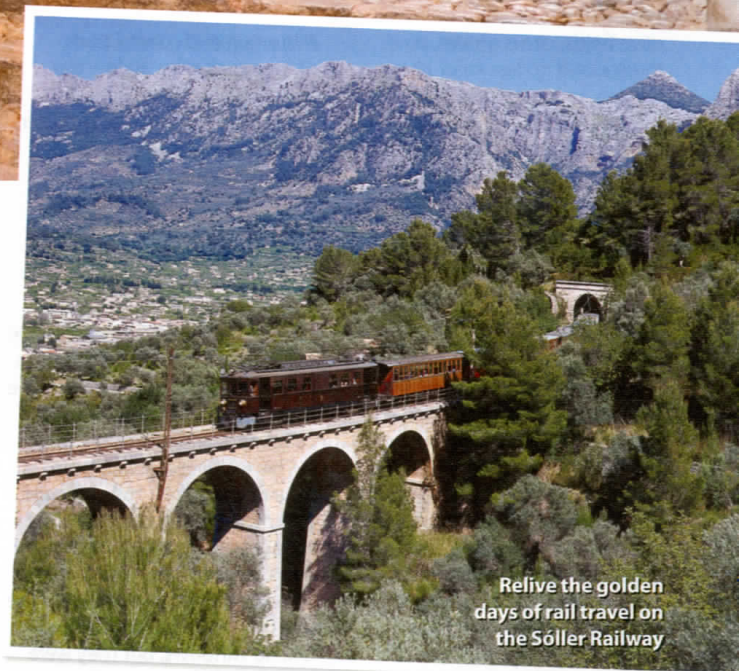
Peter Moss discovers the *real* Mallorca, a world away from the crowded tourist traps

To be perfectly honest, I viewed visiting Mallorca (note the re-branded spelling) with the suspicion that it would be naff, predictable and just a bit cheesy. I could scarcely have been more wrong. I loved the place. It took me decades of avoiding the island before losing out to curiosity, and when I finally got there, it blew me away. I had a good travel companion and guide, my old football mate, Laurence, who knows the island, back-to-front. He assured me that only four per cent (he's very specific with these things) of the island is Magaluf-like — overbearingly, high-risingly tacky — while the other 96 per cent offers unspoiled and largely off-the-beaten-track beauty. He was right.

The prettiest village in Spain

Mallorca has many highlights, and nowhere more than in the north-west of the island. From our base in Fornalutx — once voted the prettiest village in Spain — we explored coastal cliff-top paths, mountain trails, timeless ochre-coloured towns like Deià, Sóller and Pollença, and headland capes with dizzying panoramas, most notably Cap de Formentor, its sheer 760ft cliff enough to bring on vertigo in James Stewart.

Pollença is a little gem, perhaps the most charismatic town on the island, where the 365-step, cypress-lined stairway, the Via Crucis, leads up to the simple chapel on the hilltop of El Calvario.



Relive the golden days of rail travel on the Sóller Railway

Heaven knows how the local monks haul a figure of Jesus up the staircase each Good Friday, though the views to the mountains and the sea are worth the climb.

Vintage train

If Pollença is a gem, then the Ferrocarril de Sóller (Sóller Railway) is the diamond-studded bracelet of the north-west. The train is straight out of Toytown.

When I first glimpsed it, I half expected it to be called Tomaso The Tank Engine. The ticket office still dispenses old-fashioned paper tickets like the old British Routemaster buses, while the carriages are hewn mostly from dark wood with banquet-style leatherette seats, brass fittings and gaslights — not at all like the old Routemaster buses. The 17-mile ride to Palma, through



The magnificent Catedral de Palma



Travel information

- For information on Mallorca, visit www.tourspain.co.uk or call the Spanish National Tourist Office on 020 7486 8077.
- Peter Moss stayed at Casa Mia, a four-bed town house in Fornalutx with a small private swimming pool and mountain views. Rates from £100 per night, or from £500 per week. For details, call 01732 460884, or visit www.casamia-mallorca.com

olive fields, citrus groves, pine forests, and no less than 12 tunnels, is an undiluted joy. At one point, I leaned out the window and plucked a lemon from an overhanging tree (then felt guilty and tossed it into the nearest garden).

Palma and Gaudí

Palma is an unexpected pleasure. As it's impossible to do the whole city in half a day, I was content just to bask in the Gothic splendour of the Catedral de Palma. Sunlight flooded through the huge rose window, spilling a kaleidoscope of colours on to the delicate octagonal columns that line the nave. Much of the credit for the celestially light interior goes to the architect Antoni Gaudí, more famed for his distinctive Modernist creations in Barcelona, who supervised a major restoration in the years before the First World War and re-modelled the interior expanse to create an open, airy and joyous space in which to sit in peaceful contemplation.

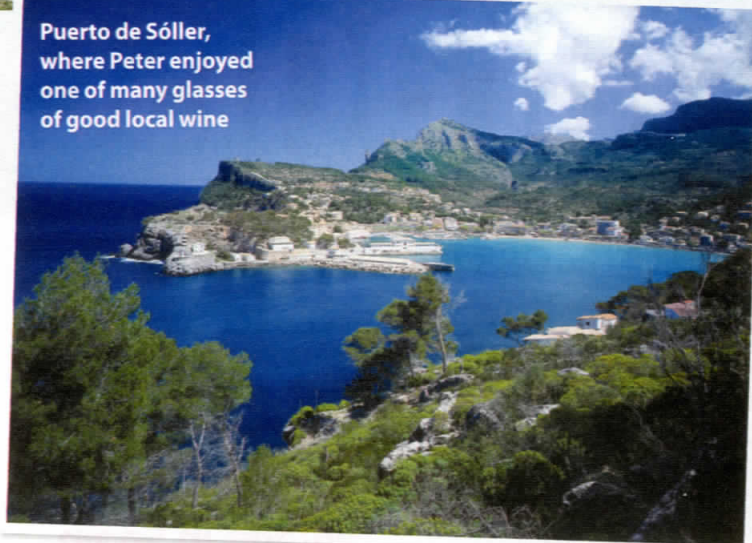
Mountain and coastal trails

For me, the real highlight of Mallorca is trekking along the

mountain and coastal trails of the north-west. Below the arrestingly pretty village of Deia (where one of the grander homes belongs to Bob Geldof and another to Andrew Lloyd Webber) is the breathtaking cove known as Cala de Deia, with its cluster of tumbledown fisherman's cottages, upturned rowing boats, and the wooden slats of Ca's Patro March waterside restaurant. I stood and gazed as towering waves crashed in off the rocks and on to the sandy little cove with almost seismic force.

This was our starting point for a gorgeous 12-mile hike up and over the cliffs, across olive terraces and groves of lemon trees, over twisted tree trunks, dry-stone walls and boulders the size of a Dubai skyscraper (well, OK, no windows, but they *were* massive) all the way to Puerto de Sóller. The port curves sinuously around a pretty harbour and is so laid-back, it's not so much a resort as a retreat, a Mallorcan seaside town blissfully free of the booze-and-lads vibe that is just a wee bit prevalent on the island's south-west coast. Sitting with a plate of *boquerones* (fresh anchovies) and a glass of Rioja, I could think of nowhere better to end a hike of such contrast and beauty.

Puerto de Sóller, where Peter enjoyed one of many glasses of good local wine



Only one hike can top the Deia-Sóller route, and that's the Tossal Verds route, arguably Mallorca's mightiest walk — and the one with the silliest name. The walk has everything: steep, rocky ascents that pass through a series of ancient tunnels, two lakes of iciest blue, craggy mountains and serene valleys, streams with log-bridge crossings, rock-strewn paths through plummeting gorges, and best of all, a *refugio* with cold drinks and bars of chocolate at the exact point where we ran out of cold drinks and bars of chocolate. At no point on this hike are the views anything less than spectacular.

And that was it, really. A week of hiking, exploring, railroading, cathedral-gazing, and drinking sufficient quantities of decent local wine to float the Spanish Armada. Each day ended as it began, back in the tiny central square of Fornalutx with its orange tree, its fountain that still pumps water, and the rising sound of birdsong that fills the village each evening at sunset. And all of it without encountering tourism on anything more than the tiniest scale. Mallorca — most of it, anyway — is warm, incredibly beautiful and off the beaten track. It certainly has my seal of approval.