

# Balearic blues

Joey Tyson seeks out Majorca's authentic side on an off-season escape without the crowds

**m**iguel cuts the engine a few metres from Far d'Alcanada, a tiny islet just off the coast of Alcudia. An old lighthouse peeks out over a copse of low pines; the surrounding, shallow waters reflect pure turquoise colour in the sunlight; and there's not another soul around. For a moment, we float in silence.

"Come here in summer and there are boats everywhere," says Miguel, our captain, first mate and cook, as he serves up dinner on a low, wooden table at the centre of the boat.

Everything on the menu is Majorcan; local to an intimate level. The pig for the *sobrassada* – the island's signature lobster-red, cured sausage – was slaughtered

by Miguel's father. The olive oil, spicy and thick, is from a neighbour; the wine, from a vineyard in the next village over from Miguel's; and the dessert, a local *ensaimadas* pastry topped with fresh fruit, from a bakery in Alcudia.

Even the boat is pure Majorca. A traditional wooden *llaüt*, it was built for fishing in the 1950s. When Miguel decided to set up his own excursion company, Llaüt San Francisco, he wanted a vessel that would represent his island. After a year of painstaking renovation, it's finally seaworthy and business is good. Authenticity has wide appeal, it seems.

"The boat is Majorcan, the food is Majorcan, I am Majorcan", he says, as we finish the last bottle of wine.

The idea of Majorca as the simple, classic package ➤



ASK THE expert

“We have several routes from the hotel where you can discover the local surroundings by foot, bicycle or car. You can walk around the whole southern corner of the island, where there are wonderful views over small bays and out to sea. If guests hire a scooter or a car, there are some lovely villages to explore such as Calvia, where you’ll see how the locals truly live. If you go over towards Es Camp de Mar and Andratx, you’ll find some beautiful scenery. Those who like a bit of luxury can go to nearby Puerto Portals, which is a nice marina with some of the best restaurants in the area. We’re also close to the medieval city of Palma, which has its splendid Gothic cathedral, a huge range of restaurants and plenty of art galleries, shops and museums.”

**Estibaliz Santa Maria, general manager, Zafiro Palmanova**



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:

Alcudia’s old town;  
cycling in Majorca;  
Palma cathedral

PICTURES: Shutterstock

holiday destination is just one small part of the largest Balearic island’s appeal. Majorcans wear their traditions with enormous pride, and clients keen to step away from the pool will find plenty more to discover around the island.

**ALCUDIA: STROLL AND SHOP**

Authenticity is not hard to find in Alcudia’s old town. A labyrinth of cobbled alleys and quiet squares, its medieval sandstone streets are jammed full of typical Majorcan tapas restaurants, cafes and intimate little shops peddling all manner of traditional wares.

Colourful Balearic pottery, olive oil, Majorcan sea salt, wine, *senallas* – the traditional wicker bags that are seemingly all over Instagram – and enormous *sobrassadas* hanging from hooks. If you’re after a real souvenir to remember your time on the island, this is probably the place to get it.

For a more local shopping experience, the

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town’s weekly market, set amid the old town’s narrow streets, takes place on Tuesdays and Sundays.

Parts of the old town date from the 13th century, and one of the best ways to enjoy it is to simply take a stroll. Alcudia’s 14th-century wall traces a loop around most of the town, offering spectacular views of the surrounding mountains and the sea.

For some historical context, the Alcudia tourist office runs free guided walking tours on Wednesdays and Fridays.

**PALMA: MARKETS AND MIDDLE AGES**

Palma was made for an aimless wander. Set off in any direction from its historic centre and before long, you’re bound to stumble over some ancient cathedral, improbably crammed into a backstreet, or a tiny bar packed with people gossiping over coffee.

Here, the city itself is the attraction; a chance to appreciate the patchwork of architectural styles – Gothic, baroque, Moorish – created by centuries of power swapping.

Even just a few streets back from Passeig des Born, one of Palma’s main shopping thoroughfares, it can feel as if you have the city to yourself, as paths hemmed in by old, elegant townhouses seem to wind and twist from one quiet alley to another.

For a taste of Palma’s much-lauded culinary credentials, head to Mercat de l’Olivar. An enormous indoor market, it’s a colourful tapestry



LEFT: Passeig des Born, Palma  
BELOW: Ribas Bodega

PICTURES: Shutterstock; Paul Thuysbaert



of cured meats, freshly caught seafood, and kaleidoscopic fruit stalls known for their Majorcan produce. It's even possible to buy seafood from a stall and have it cooked up at one of the small restaurants upstairs.

Besides filling your belly and ogling wondrous architecture, Palma also has a reputation for its impressive art scene. Highlights include the Museu Fundación Juan March, which houses a small collection of works by Spanish greats – including Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dalí – and CaixaForum Palma, where you'll find an impressive permanent collection by Balearic painter Hermen Anglada-Camarasa.

**CENTRAL MAJORCA: WINE COUNTRY**

A big chunk of Majorca's 70-plus vineyards are huddled at the island's centre, amid a setting of steely mountains and sleepy villages. In fact, its two major wine regions – Binissalem and Pla i Llevant, Majorca's only two Denominación de Origen regions – are here.

For a true taste of tradition, Ribas Bodega

is hard to beat. Founded in 1711, it's the oldest winery on the island, and is still run by the same family. With 300 years of experience, if they claimed to have actually written the book on Majorcan wine, you'd probably believe them.

The bodega is set among 40 hectares of sprawling vines in the village of Consell, where grapes native to the island are used to create small-batch wine – only about 100,000 bottles are produced each year. Its enormous 18th-century manor house has been meticulously preserved, along with the original winemaking warehouse and cellar. Tasting tours start at £16.

For a more personal touch, take a private tour of a traditional Majorcan *finca* with an expert sommelier. Clients will enjoy being winned and dined in a truly stunning setting: a tremendous, white-washed tumble of a house, draped in fragrant bougainvillea. Everything here is produced by hand, in extremely small batches – fewer than 1,500 bottles a year go out to sale. Visits to each can be arranged through Mallorca Wine Tours. [TW](#)

WHERE TO stay



**Zafiro Palace Alcudia**

Zafiro Palace Alcudia is a five-star hotel right next to the beach with facilities to please families and couples – there's an on-site spa for adults, while kids can splash around in a huge pirate ship – so it's a good all-rounder. With five restaurants (everything from a delicious buffet to a romantic Italian) there is a good range of dining opportunities, too. A handful of top-floor penthouse rooms, complete with Jacuzzi, offer splendid views of the surrounding mountains, while swim-up suites add a touch of class to lower-level rooms. Set between the old town (a 15-minute walk) and the beach, the hotel couldn't be better placed for guests to get the most out of Alcudia.

**Book it:** Rooms start at £180 per night.



**Zafiro Palmanova**

This four-star hotel is all about the location. You've got the sandy beaches of Palmanova within easy walking distance, yet it's only a 15-minute drive to the island's capital, Palma. An excellent-value hotel, it's ideal for clients on a budget. Little touches such as free Bali beds, a reasonable on-site spa and swim-up suites provide luxury for less, while the kitchenette that comes as standard with all 198 apartments is a handy extra. For entertainment, there's a lively lounge bar and swim-up bar.

**Book it:** Rooms start at £120 per night. [zafirohotels.com](http://zafirohotels.com)