

# 1 Family Highlights of the Balearics



**E**ven though you're only reading the first line of this book, you probably already know plenty about the Balearic Islands. So does your neighbour. And your boss, your brother and your postman. There's the high-rise hotels, the sunkissed strips of sandy beach. The child-friendly villas, the English cuisine and the charter flights. The banana boats, the glass-bottomed cruises and the tourist buses. And you're all right, partly. You'll certainly find each and every one of those on a family trip here, if you know where to look. But if you think that's all you'll find, think again. Or even better, read on.

The Balearics pretty much invented the package holiday – it still thrives at key resorts, and has much to offer family travellers. But independent travel to the islands has become much easier, too. During the summer months, Mallorca, Ibiza and Menorca are well served by low-cost airlines. Formentera's just a short onward hop by ferry. It's all just far enough away to guarantee sun from May to October; just close enough to make the flight bearable with toddlers. Know where to search and you can find your own accommodation quicker than ever. There's no need to stay in high-rise hotels if you don't want to: self-catering options are unending, apartments, villas, farmhouses, whatever you like. Sort out some transport for your stay, and you're off.

While the sun and sand may be what attracts you in the first place, a closer look while you're here reveals much more. Don't be put off by a handful of infamous resorts on Mallorca and Ibiza. These are just one tiny side of these multi-faceted islands, easily avoided once you know where they are, and when not to visit. Take a walk in Mallorca's mountains, or through the cobbled streets of Sóller, or in towns where you'll hardly hear Spanish spoken, never mind English, and you couldn't feel further from Magaluf. On Ibiza, tiny whitewashed villages littering the island's interior mark a sharp contrast with its fame as a clubbers' haven. Menorca's prehistoric and military heritage is a constant reminder that tourism is still a relatively new development here, and in fact has barely stained Menorca at all. And Formentera is little more than one giant sand dune: hire some bikes and you'll find all sorts of fun within a few miles of its tiny port.

For all the compromises these islands have made to tourism (not all of them bad), it's still refreshing to travel inland and see that much remains unaffected, whether it's the almond harvest in Mallorca, Ibiza's hippy markets or dairy farming in Menorca. Throw in some cobble-stoned hill towns, the odd rural frustration, a great place for you and the kids to stay in, and, yes, a spin on those banana boats, and you have the makings of a great family holiday. Enjoy!

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## Bilingual Balearics: Chatting in Catalan

**Alongside Spanish, Catalan is the second official language of the** Balearic Islands. Its use is widespread – particularly in government offices, in schools and on road signs. In smaller towns and villages, it thrives. Spanish tends to dominate in cities and resorts, however, as many Spaniards travel to the Balearics from the mainland to work during the summer season.

There are few islanders who will actually describe their local language as Catalan, though – for fear of Barcelona claiming the islands as part of their vision of a Catalan Country. So expect to hear it described as *mal-lorquin*, *menorquin* and *eivissenc*. Those who have studied French may find many Catalan words familiar, and with a good knowledge of both French and Spanish, you can often piece together a conversation.

Each island has developed its own dialect, and many unique words. Menorca is a special case. As the British dominated the island for the best part of the 18th century, several local words reflect that influence, like *xoc* (chalk), *mèrvils* (marbles) and, most famously, *gin*.

An attempt to speak in Catalan will be highly appreciated, even if it is just a brief greeting in a shop or bar. Here are a few words you may come across:

*Bon dia* – good morning

*Benvinguts* – welcome

*Gràcies* – thank you

*Si us plau* – please

*De res* – you're welcome

*Adéu* – goodbye

*Platja* – beach

*Ajuntament* – town hall

*Gelat* – ice cream

*Formatge* – cheese

*Peix* – fish

*Carn* – meat

*Vi* – wine

*Aigua* – water

*Llet* – milk

*A poc a poc* – little by little

## BALEARIC FAMILY HIGHLIGHTS

**The Best Beaches** You're hardly short of choice on Formentera, but a trip to the island isn't complete without walking the A-list strip of sugary sand at **Platja de Ses Illetes**. It's the place you'd take a Martian who wanted to know what a perfect beach should look like. See p. 248.

Mallorca's best beach requires a boat ride from Port de Sóller: **Sa Calobra**. It's the stuff of movies, with towering granite cliffs, sparkling turquoise water and bottle-green umbrella pines providing pockets of shade for those who get here early. If all your kids want to do is mess about on the water, this is a treasure island. See p. 76.

**Son Bou** is Menorca's longest beach, and even on the hottest





At the Beach, Menorca

summer day, if you walk westwards away from the bars and activities, you're still guaranteed a patch of sand all to yourselves. See p. 166.

**The Best Markets** There may not be many hippies left, but the **hippy markets** around Santa Eulària des Riu on Ibiza are still going strong 30 years on. The incense and the kaftans you probably expect; the fine crafts and kiddie crèches might come as a surprise. See p. 217.

You can't leave Formentera in the summer without stopping at **La Fira de la Mola**, the tiny island's unique market. Your kids will love the place, particularly the central plaza where a 60-something hippy sits on a high-stool playing the slide guitar. See p. 247.

For hand-made toys, jewellery, pottery and trinkets on Menorca, **Mao's artesan market** on Fridays during July and August may be small, but it is well worth strolling through. See p. 163.

**Sineu's Wednesday market** is one of the oldest on Mallorca, with a long tradition as a meeting point for the *campesinos* of Es Pla. It's also become something of an attraction, with gifts and souvenirs, from hand-made pottery and herb-infused olives, to artisan cheeses and colourful strings of peppers. See p. 142.

### The Best Nature Reserves

There is nowhere quite like Ibiza's **Ses Salines Nature Reserve**. The bleached salt hills and pink pools make for an unreal landscape. Migrating flamingos and herons rest here from July to October, and February to May, so pack the binoculars and rent some bikes. See p. 213.

When Menorca was declared a Biosphere Reserve in 1993, the 2000 hectares of marsh, dunes and headland at **S'Albufera d'Es Grau** was designated its core. Over 100 bird species can be sighted, or just follow the nature trails to hunt for animal footprints. There are even pushchair-friendly walkways. See p. 167.

### The Best Animal Attractions

**Top billing goes to the brand new Palma Aquarium**. An iconic building, it draws visitors across shimmering pools, through tropical rock gardens and beneath waterfalls as a backdrop to its incredible diversity of aquatic life, including giant sunfish and white-tipped sharks. It's perhaps the finest animal kingdom in all of Spain. See p. 55.

Not quite in the same league, but you can't leave Menorca





Palma Cathedral

without taking the kids to meet the red cows at **Lloc de Menorca**. See p. 167.

If you prefer your nature a bit wilder, **Cabrera National Park** is a Galapagos in the Med. If you're really lucky, you might even spot Audouin's gull and Eleanor's falcon. The children will love the boat trip to get there, too. See p. 124.

Platja de ses Illetes



**The Best Cities** The Balearic Islands' capital, and their only real city – **Palma** – is an unlikely but great spot for a fun-filled family weekend. From chi-chi shopping to stunning architecture, and getting pleasantly lost in the twisting cobbled streets, there's plenty to keep everyone happy. See p. 43.

Don't miss the views from Ibiza's old town, the **Vila Dalt**. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1999, it's a living testament to battles, defeats and conquests of the island's 1000-year history. See p. 43.

**The Best Adventures on Water** If you want your children to learn to windsurf, kayak or sail, the **Escuela Municipal de Vela** on Formentera is one of the very best places in Spain. Run with passion by a former Olympic windsurfing instructor, the school has produced a number of Spanish and international



Wooden Train to Sóller

champions – but prices remain reasonable. See p. 243.

In Menorca, renting a **canoe** from **Es Grau beach** is a cheaper, slightly more genteel, way to get out and about on the water. The shallows of Es Grau's enclosed bay means that even little ones are safe in their life jackets. See p. 166.

While for many parents waterparks can be a trial, **Aqualand**, near Magaluf in Mallorca, is a cut above the rest, continually renewing itself with ever wilder and more wonderful rides to keep little ones quiet. Even teens will return in awe of the Tornado and the Boomerang. See p. 62.

**The Best Train Ride** Okay, it's pretty much the only train ride on the islands, but the little wooden train that bores through the Tramuntana, from **Palma to Sóller**, is a real family highlight. See p. 74.

**The Best Sunsets** The 14th century **Castell de Bellver** holds

a lofty spot above the bay of Palma, flanked on either side by pine woods and framed to the west by the hazy outline of the Tramuntana. It's a magnificent sight, and has the most spectacular view of the city below. See p. 54.

For a bird's eye view of Menorca at the end of the day, drive up to **Monte Toro** to watch the sun go down. It's a privilege

Castell de Bellver



to see the fields, towns and water in Fornells' bay gradually change colour as the giant orb melts into the water. See p. 179.

**The Best Active Fun** The flat terrain around **Ciutadella**, makes for perfect **cycling**, even with little children in tow. From the town centre, it's an easy ride through fields bordered by dry-stone walls down to isolated beaches. Several of Menorca's prehistoric sites are also within reach. See p. 159.

There's no shortage of fantastic dive schools on the islands, but Ibiza's **Punta Dive** is perhaps the best. It offers dive sites for all levels, and 'Bubblemakers' courses to get young kids interested. The adjacent beach is a winter kite-surfing mecca, too. See p. 220.

**The Best Museums** A museum with exhibits indoors and out, Menorca's **Ecomuseu de Cap de Cavalleria** brings its interior alive by linking it to the surrounding countryside. Children will be especially intrigued by the Roman city of Sanisera that was swallowed up by the sea. See p. 183.

This long-overdue **Robert Graves Museum**, a tribute to the poet who put Deià on the map, was finally opened in July 2006. It's an absolute must for anyone who wants to understand Mallorca's artistic appeal. See p. 79.

You can't miss the fake castle on the Palma–Manacor road: **Vidrierias Gordiola**, a glassmaking factory that's been in the



Off the Beaten Track

same family since the 18th century. Watching craftsmen blow bubbles from molten glass is a jaw-dropping experience for little ones, especially when you tell them that the fires are as hot as volcanoes. See p. 141.

**The Best Buildings** Built to protect Menorca from an attack that never happened, the old military fortress on **La Mola** at the mouth of Maó's port impresses with its rock-solid construction above and below ground level. The guided tour will keep family members of all ages entertained, with stops at tunnels, gloomy prisons and immense British cannons. See p. 168.

Valldemossa's magnificent sandstone Carthusian monastery, the **Real Cartuja de Jesús de Nazaret**, dates back to the 17th century, and still presides regally over this sleepy hill town. These days, it provides children with a wonderland for exploration. See p. 77.



No trip to Mallorca is complete without taking in the **Catedral de Palma**. This magnificent pile, converted from a mosque in 1229, is one of the most extravagant Gothic cathedrals in the world. See p. 52.

**The Best Family Walks** The **Parc Natural de Mondragó**, near Santanyí, is one of Mallorca's best-kept secrets. Finding your perfect patch of sand means a walk through pine trees and sand dunes, dodging basking lizards and chirruping birds, and drinking in stunning views along the way. Take picnic fodder, sunscreen and some shade, and find a secluded spot in the dunes for a secluded spot in the dunes for a lazy day out. See p. 108.

Menorca's perimeter path, the **Camí de Cavalls**, is gradually being opened up to the public. The walk along low-level cliffs between Punta Prima and S'Algar takes you past a restored defence tower perched on a key lookout point. See p. 173.

With older children who don't mind a 4–5-hour hike, a lovely way to take in southern Mallorca's wild places is on foot from the **lighthouse at Cap de Ses Salines** to **Còlonia de Sant Jordi**. There are a couple of virgin beaches, and plenty of scrambling over rocks. See p. 126.

**The Best Fiestas** Alcúdia's **Fiesta de Les Llanternes** on 24th August is designed with tots in mind. The town's littlest children parade through the streets at night carrying lanterns made from melons, singing traditional

folk songs. It's one of the cutest sights in Spain. See p. 91.

To close Menorca's summer-long party season, **Maó** holds a three-day fiesta in early September. It ends with a bang: two nights of fabulous underwater fireworks. See p. 161.

The annual **Regata Internacional 'Bahia de Cala Millor'** takes place during the last five days of October. It attracts hot-air balloon aficionados from all over Europe, the US and Africa, filling the sky above Mallorca's east coast with colour. See p. 107.

**The Best Caves** The **Cuevas del Drach** is hands-down one of Mallorca's top sights. It's a mysterious underground labyrinth of stalactites and stalagmites, dripping from the ceiling and rising from the floor like great wax sculptures. Your kids will spot a Buddha, fairies, witches and warlocks, all in the rocks around them. As mesmerising as anything Disney imagined. See p. 109.

Though it morphs into a nightclub after dark, Menorca's **Cova d'en Xoroi** is not to be missed during the day. Or even better, find a perch on its terraces to watch the sunset. See p. 167.

One of Ibiza's must-sees, the old smugglers' **Cova de Can Marçà** is over 100,000 years old. Your children will sense the magic right away. See p. 225.

**The Best Art Stop** For budding painters in the family, no course of study is complete without a peek into the world of Pablo



Old Wooden Door

Picasso. At Palma's **Es Baluard**, you can enjoy his works alongside that of his friend and contemporary, Joan Miró, who lived on Mallorca until his death in 1983. The architecture of the place is a highlight in itself. See p. 56.

### The Best Attractions for Free

Swap flip-flops for trainers, and explore the pine gorge between Es Migjorn Gran and Binigaus beach, Menorca to discover the **Cova des Coloms**. The cave itself is an incredible 24 metres high, so it's no surprise that locals nickname it 'the cathedral'. See p. 181.

On a smaller scale, in **Sóller**, you can enjoy works bequeathed to the town by Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso for free at the train station above Plaça Constitució. See p. 75.

Kids love nothing more than a spook or a ghou, and the collection of benign 'demons' at the **Museu de Sant Antoni i el**

**Dimoni** in Sa Pobla is one of Mallorca's underrated attractions. See p. 96.

**The Best Shops** Menorca is internationally renowned for designer footwear, and leading labels **Jaime Mascaró** and **Pons Quintana** both have factory shops on the island. Grab yourself a bargain. See p. 186 and 187.

**Joyas Forteza** in Palma may just be the place to buy your little darling her first string of pearls. Specialists in typical Mallorquín jewellery, they stock a wide range of Mallorcan grey pearls, as well as diamonds and other precious stones. See p. 60.

## THE BEST ACCOMMODATION

### The Best Hotels for Families

In Menorca, **Punta Prima's Insotel Hotel and Apartments** are a haven for family holidays. With pools, tennis courts, bikes for hire and the beach just a couple of minutes away, you could easily spend your break without leaving the resort. The rooms are spacious, with satellite TVs, and there are babysitters on hand if Mum and Dad need a night out on their own. See p. 188.

Just outside the pretty village of Porreras in Mallorca's quiet interior, **Can Feliu** is an old farmhouse with tasteful rooms, as well as a working organic farm. You can pick fruit straight from the tree for your breakfast, and enjoy the other farm produce during your stay – you can

even roll up your sleeves and muck in. There are bikes for hire and a secret Wendy house hidden in the trees. See p. 143.

### **The Best Family Boutique**

**Hotels** In fact, few of the islands' stylish hotels are suited to children, but Ibiza's cliff-top **Hacienda Na Xamena** is a bit different. The interiors are eclectically fitted with Indian and Asian artifacts, and the terrace has some of the best views in the Med. Best of all, it's a bargain for what you get. See p. 226.

You've got to love a town where even the trendiest boutique accommodation welcomes the kiddies with open arms: Palma's **Hotel San Lorenzo** certainly fits the bill in the style department. A converted 17th century town house in the old quarter, its best features include a Parisian Art-Deco bar, and an oasis-like swimming pool surrounded by lush plant life. It doesn't come cheap, of course. See p. 63.

### **The Best Self-catering**

**Accommodation** Menorca's **Son Bou Gardens** have well-equipped apartments in a perfect setting for children. They can play in ample gardens while you keep a watchful eye from your terrace. There are pools and restaurants nearby, as well as water slides, a giant maze and tennis courts, all within the complex. See p. 192.

**Astbury Formentera** have been in business for 25 years renting islanders' bungalows, villas and apartments from the beginning of April to the end of

October. Having your own place eases the stress of *hostal*-dictated life and enables you to move at your own island pace, in a place which soon feels like home. See p. 251.

**The Best Setting** The spectacular, windswept **Sa Duaia** feels like the edge of the world, a remote and untouched corner of Mallorca surrounded by umber mountains and rippling wild grasses. It has a decent-sized swimming pool, with wild and romantic terraces that could have been plucked from the Arizona desert. Book early: it's small and great value. See p. 99.

### **The Best Country Retreat**

Located in a 17th century mill-house, the renovation at **Son Mas**, close to Mallorca's east coast, is sympathetic and tasteful, opening up the building to let in natural light while preserving original features. It's a home-from-home for anyone looking for something a little special – and your kids are very welcome. See p. 114.

## **THE BEST EATING OPTIONS**

### **The Most Child-friendly**

**Restaurants** In Menorca, you'd be hard pushed to find a better family eatery than Cala en Porter's **La Salamandra**. With a great-value set menu, a nearby playground and tortoises living in the flowerbeds, your children will love it. See p. 197.



Practically an Ibiza institution, don't miss a trip to **Daffers** in Cala Sant Vincent. With its cavernous interior strung with Moroccan lanterns and intimate nooks, it's a cut above the local plastic places – and it makes a change to go somewhere where the children's choice is as wide as the adults'. See p. 222.

**The Best Seafood** It's certainly not cheap, but it's hard to find a better lobster stew on Menorca than **Es Cranc's**, in Fornells. The owners have their own fishing boat, so it's as fresh as it gets. See p. 195.

There's no special tourist treatment at Port de Sóller's **Ca's Mariner**, just superb home cooking and the island's best catch. Try the *bandeja de marisco* (a selection of seafood including clams, mussels, three different kinds of shrimp and razor clams) or *parrillada de pescado* (a mixed fish grill). See p. 85.

### The Best Outdoor Dining

Handily placed in Ciutat Jardí, just a short hop from Palma, **El Bungalow** is an essential water's-edge dining experience. This charming fisherman's

cottage on the beach is everything seaside eating should be: boat-fresh fish and seafood, clams and mussels; whole sea bass baked in salt; and some of the island's best paellas, with crisp, cold white wine to wash it all down. See p. 67.

**The Best Fine Dining** Housed in a handsome 16th century olive press, **L'Olivo** in Deià is one of the best dining experiences in Spain. Its soaring rafters and whitewash make it light and airy by day, romantic and intimate by night. If you're with the family, book a spot on the terrace for a long, lazy lunch. See p. 84.

It's only been open a year, but already chef Peter Urbach, who previously had restaurants in Munich, is making waves with his fresh approach to Mallorcan cuisine at **Es Pinaret**. This is a place where kids get to play grown-ups in an enchanted garden, and still get catered for on a menu that features everything from saffron risotto to kiddies' schnitzel. Failing that, the pool should keep them happy. See p. 129.

**The Best Ice-creams** No matter where you eat in Sóller, save room for ice-cream at **Sa Fàbrica de Gelats**. People travel from all over the island to taste its 40 excellent home-made ice-creams and sorbets. See p. 86.

**The Best Breakfasts** For a Menorcan breakfast (there's no egg and bacon on the menu),

Ca's Mariner



visit **Can Pota** in Maó. Stop in for a large plate of tomato-smeared toast, pile it high with ham, sausages and cheese, and finish it off with a strong cup of coffee. See p. 196.

Since opening five years ago in Ibiza, childhood friends Pam and Barbara's **Club Sandwich** in Sant Antoni has become something of an institution. Their famous Potbelly Breakfast is more than just a heaven-sent hangover cure for clubbers – it'll fill hungry teens, too. See p. 231.

### **The Best Atmospheric Bars**

**La Fonda Pepe**, Formentera's 'Hippy Bar', is the focus of evening action in San Ferran. It's usually warm enough for you to sip drinks outside on the pedestrianised *rambla* and watch the world go by. See p. 246.

Sure, seaside bars are ten-a-penny on Ibiza, but there's only one synonymous with the birth of the Balearic Beat: Sant Antoni's **Café Del Mar**. Grab a

beer, get the children a fruit juice, and watch the sun go down. See p. 228.

**The Best Picnic Treats** For a tasty DIY-picnic, Balearic style, don't bother making sarnies in advance, just tear open a piece of crusty bread, smear a plum tomato inside and liberally scatter with salt and olive oil – this is the classic **pa amb oli** you'll see in bars and restaurants, occasionally finished off with a wafer-thin slice of Serrano ham.

For sweeter teeth, Mallorca may have claimed **ensaïmades** as its own, but you can find these spiral pastries across the Balearics, in individual portions or filled with angel's hair jam in huge round boxes.

To finish it off, **horchata** may look like a strange milkshake, but it is in fact made from tiger nuts. It's best drunk poured fresh from one of the glass churns you'll see in bars – not from supermarket plastic bottles.