



PAINTED SKY

*Orange trees are everywhere in Mallorca, from downtown Palma to this grove outside the French-influenced town of Sóller at the base of the Serra de Tramuntana.*





# *place in time*

**In Mallorca, it's all about the landscape.**

**BY DINA MISHEV**

**PHOTOGRAPHY BY JULIA VANDENOEVER**



**T**HE MEDITERRANEAN SEA does not want me to go swimming. Walking down a staircase carved out of a cliff, the waves below are undeniably angry. If the swells were smaller, I'm sure there'd be dozens of swimmers waiting to dive off these steps directly into the water. Instead, I have the cliff to myself. Waves crashing into them spray me, even though I'm standing 15 feet above. It's magical, in a mysterious, moody way.

Mallorca has hundreds and hundreds of miles of coastline. In the western Mediterranean, nestled off the east coast of Spain almost equidistant between Barcelona and the northern shore of Algeria, the island is famous for its beaches, aquamarine waters and sheltered harbors. It has more beaches than anyone seems to have been able to count—I ask around and get answers from “about 100” to the very specific “218.” There are white sand beaches, dramatic beaches perched beneath cliffs, beaches you can only get to by boat or by foot, long beaches, beaches at the end of dead-end roads, beaches where celebrities like Claudia Schiffer or Michael Douglas hang out (both own homes on the island) and secret, little-known beaches.

During my week on the island—my very first time there—I spend, in total, less than half-a-day on beaches. And I don't care. By day three the island has so engaged me, I start to plan a return trip. At least I think it will be just a trip, but the locals warn me that it could turn into something else.

“Be careful,” says Rory Lafferty, founder of the Vespa rental company Bullimoto, in Sóller and Palma and formerly of Sussex, England. “We came here for my sister-in-law's wedding, stayed for five days and decided to give up the UK and move here.”

That was in 2011. My tour guide around Palma, the southern city home to half of Mallorca's population, had a similar story. Teresa Solivellas, who, with sister Maria runs Ca Na Toneta, a restaurant their parents opened 20 years ago in Caimari, an unassuming village on the southern slopes of the Serra de Tramuntana mountains says, “This is not the Caribbean. Mallorca has millennia of history shaped by its complex landscape.”

ONE OF THE 151 Balearic Islands—only five are inhabited—Mallorca is a geological, archaeological and cultural playground. Bronze Age tribes lived here and conducted primitive trade around the western Mediterranean. The island was under Phoenician and then Carthaginian rule in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C. For five centuries, the Romans, who founded the city that grew into Palma, ruled. Next came Vandals, then Byzantines and, at

the end of the 8th century, Moors. In 1229 the Catalan King Jaume I conquered the island and gifted it to his youngest son as an independent kingdom. Independence lasted only briefly. Within a century the island was forcibly re-incorporated into the Kingdom of Aragon and, in the 15th century, made part of Spain. Fast-forward 300 years to the 18th century: The island is still Spanish, but in constant fear of raids by North African pirates.

Mallorca's is a knotty history, to say the least. Traveling the island—driving, biking or hiking—you see evidence of all of these cultures: Bronze Age rock temples, Phoenician citadels, well-laid Roman roads, graceful Arab arches and the Gothic Le Seu cathedral in Palma, which took more than two centuries to construct and was finally consecrated in 1601.

**Mallorca is a geological, archaeological and cultural playground. Bronze Age tribes lived here. So did Phoenicians and Carthaginians. It was part of the Roman Empire for five centuries and then under Byzantine rule.**

“Our history is a crazy one and doesn't always feel so much in the past,” says Pep Solivellas, cousin of Teresa and Maria and, with his father and brother, the maker of the olive oil, Oli Solivellas, served at Ca Na Toneta. “I think there are olive trees up in the mountains here from more than 2,000 years ago,” he says.

The oldest trees in Pep's 21-acre Oli Solivellas grove were planted in 1999 but the land has been in his family “since ancient times, I don't even know how long,” he says. While we talk, we sit in his kitchen and he shows me how to smush a tomato onto a slice of fresh bread, sprinkle it with salt and drizzle it with olive oil for the ultimate local's breakfast. The olive tree—gnarled and sculptural—that greets visitors to his farm is about 600 years old, but isn't original to the property. “It was transplanted from the mountains,” Pep says. “All of the ancient olive trees you will see around the island—in Palma, on the plains, on golf courses—are originally from the mountains. People moved them down to be decorative. They're beautiful, aren't they?” Yes, but all of Mallorca's landscape is beautiful.

On the flight into Palma, I pressed my face against the window. Below, the Mediterranean was dozens of different



**ISLAND LIFE**  
*(Clockwise from left) Chef Maria Solivellas at the restaurant she runs with her sister Teresa; Riding a Vespa through the village of Deia; A cafe in the Tramuntana Mountains; Going for a swim on Mallorca's rocky northern coast; Oranges for sale; Hake with pea puree and field beans at Ca Na Toneta; A shrine to ancestors along a hiking trail.*



place in  
time



**UNIQUELY  
CATALAN**

*(Clockwise from left)  
Similar to flatbread,  
coca is a traditional  
Catalan food; Pep  
Solivellas Sr. (left)  
and Jr. (right) in  
their 21-acre olive  
grove; The harbor in  
Palma, the island's  
capital; Hiking on  
the Dry Stone Trail  
above the town  
of Biniaraix.*



shades of azure. Sunlight glimmered off the tops of rolling waves and strips of sand of varying sizes popped into and out of view. Before I could even begin to count them, they, along with the sea, were gone. Snaggly, forested, wild mountains, the Serra de Tramuntana, replaced them. As historic as they are rugged, the range is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Beneath my window it exploded, almost directly from the sea, up several thousand feet. No foothills temper this range as it runs for 50 miles along the island's northwest coast. And then, as quickly as the Tramuntanas appeared, they were gone and we touched down in a flat plain dotted with windmills. If sea, mountains and plains are not enough variety, the passenger next to me told me about Cuevas Drach, a series of underground caves with millions of stalactites and an underground lake on the island's southern coast.

"Mallorca is its landscape and its landscape is a diverse mix," Teresa says. "The mix explains us—our lifestyle, our gastronomy." As eloquent and impassioned as Teresa's words are, Maria wants to explain in greater detail. "You must eat," she says. "I explain Mallorca with its flavors." Okay!

Absolutely everything on Ca Na Toneta's menu is grown, raised or caught locally. Pep makes the olive oil. His traditional Mallorcan oil is guaranteed through the Protected Designation of Origin "Oli de Mallorca" and sold in gourmet shops around the island and at the family farm. The sisters' mother Catalina, the restaurant's original chef, grows much of the produce in a garden a 5-minute drive from the restaurant. The menu changes weekly. "There is no compromising on ingredients. Except for coffee, chocolate and sugar, it's only Mallorca flavors," Maria says.

Six courses—including cuttlefish and hake and rosemary, artichokes, unleavened bread made from grain endemic to the island and pork loin—and a bottle of wine later, I have a burgeoning idea of the island's flavors, and full awareness that I've just had one of the best meals of my life. Maria's food is rustically delicate. I've never before been a fan of cuttlefish—bitter and tough—but Maria slices it paper thin to add a lovely texture and saltiness to her fish soup with watercress. Dishes are beautiful, but not fussy. Flavors are simple, but strong. The first time I had a truly farm-fresh tomato, it was revelatory. Every dish at Ca Na Toneta is like that.

Leaving, I can't help but wonder if the meal, and the restaurant, is a dream. There are certainly restaurants that enjoy being off the beaten path, but the Solivellas sisters seem to actually be hiding. Caimari has a population of around 700. When I leave the restaurant, only a few streetlights illuminate the town's cobblestone streets, which are so narrow I have to pull my car's side mirrors in or risk scraping them on centuries-old buildings on either side of the road.

"It is not very touristic. It is not rich or fancy," Teresa says



of Caimari. "It is one of the places that is deep Mallorca."

If Caimari and Ca Na Toneta are deep Mallorca, I want more. I start by hiking up to the 2,800-some foot Coll de l'Ofre, in the Tramuntana Range at the back of the Biniaraix Gorge. "These mountains dominate our landscape and this area of them is the most special," says the guide I consult at Hiking Mallorca.

MANY VILLAGES TUCKED between the Tramuntana Range, "mountains of the north wind," and the sea cascade down hillsides in a series of terraces ending just

**Caimari has a population of around 700. Only a few streetlights illuminate the town's cobblestone streets, which are so narrow I have to pull my car's side mirrors in or risk scraping them on centuries-old buildings.**

above precipitous drop offs. The range is the island's heart and backbone but also a geologic noose, separating the towns and villages in the north from those in the south. Several peaks are more than 4,000 feet tall and often snow-covered in winter.

Until 1912, when the first safe route through the mountains was completed (it had 13 tunnels and took seven years to build), the north was more influenced by France than by the rest of Mallorca. France was easier to get to than Palma. If you had to go to Palma, a boat was the safe option. There was an overland route, a narrow path up and over the Coll de Sóller, but at its best it was harrowing and at its worst, dangerous. A road elsewhere in the range built in 1932, Ruta de Sa Calobra, is, to this day, considered among the most dangerous drives in Spain. It is also considered one of the world's great road bike rides, if you hit it when there's little car traffic. Professional cyclists often train in Mallorca before their race season starts in early spring. Sa Calobra's

*place in  
time*



**HIGHS AND LOWS**  
*(Above) The 8-mile road Sa Calobra switchbacks 50 times before reaching the Balearic Sea; (Below) Cueva Drach is touristy, but its millions of stalactites and stalagmites are worth the crowds. Tours end with a live classical music concert played by musicians floating in a boat in the largest of the cave's underground lakes.*

eight miles—it dead-ends at the sea—include 50 curves and no tunnels. (The former allowed the latter.) One turn curves 270-degrees and then goes under itself. From top to bottom the elevation change is 2,200 feet. Thankfully my walk up to the Coll de l'Ofre is not dangerous, although the elevation gain is about the same as Sa Calobra.

Leaving Biniaraix, a French-feeling village above the bigger and even more French-influenced town of Sóller, the path is tidy cobblestones with a border of boulders. The Hiking Mallorca guide says the uniqueness of the Biniaraix Gorge is how well-preserved its dry stone trail is. This hike is only one part of the longer, multi-day Dry Stone Trail. Formally known as GR221, that trek is, without question, the island's most famous long-distance walk. The Dry Stone Trail name comes from how the trail was constructed, without the use of mortar.

When the cobblestones start switch-backing to climb up the gorge, stone stairs appear. You would think such a well-constructed and orderly trail would make for comfortable hiking. My feet, in thin-soled running shoes and unaccustomed to walking on stones, no matter how smooth, disagree. The beginning of a blister festers on the ball of my right foot. I keep waiting for the stonework to end and the trail to turn to dirt. The effort behind building such a trail for any serious distance is unimaginable. But one mile and 600 vertical feet up the trail is still stone. Two miles and 1,500 feet and there's no dirt yet in sight. When I begin to feel fatigued, I remind myself what I'm doing is nothing compared to the labor it took to make the trail. Dry stone is among the longest-lasting types of construction, but building it is backbreaking labor.

Dry stone structures—terraces, roads and fences in

addition to trails—are visible throughout Mallorca's mountainous northwest. Arabs are credited with introducing the agricultural technique of dry stone terracing to the island in the 10th century. The provenance of the Dry Stone Trail itself is murky, but most people agree it's a route that has been used for centuries. I've only been hiking it for an hour, and it feels like centuries. This is only partly because of my sore feet. Mostly it's because of Mallorca.

**The Serra de Tramuntana explode directly from the sea up several thousand feet. In winter, the highest peaks can be snow-capped. No foothills temper the range as it runs for 50 miles along the island's northwest coast.**

Nearly at the top, the breeze smells of rosemary and piñon and my only visible companions are wild goats scampering between exiguous holds on the craggy cliff walls on either side of the gorge. The nooks and crannies between the stones beneath my feet are full of fallen Mallorquina olives, ripened to a dark brown after they weren't taken in the most recent harvest. Nowhere ahead or on any of the peaks that rise above is there any sign of modern civilization. I've hiked back in time. Or maybe I've just found one of the rare places in the world so connected to its landscape, time becomes irrelevant. ❖

*Dina Mishev is Inspirato's editor.*

## INSPIRATO RECOMMENDS



### Mallorca

Inspirato Members settle into the stunning, four-bedroom, oceanfront Villa Turquesa residence.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT INSPIRATO'S MALLORCA ACCOMMODATIONS, GO TO [INSPIRATO.COM/DESTINATIONS](http://INSPIRATO.COM/DESTINATIONS).



*Nick Stone's picks*  
Inspirato Destination Concierge

#### FAMILY FUN:

Take a break from the beach and check out the **House of Katmandu**, an interactive theme park with mini-golf and an upside-down house that has to be seen to be believed.

The **Palma Aquarium** is designed for children with indoor and outdoor play areas and a large shark tank, which hosts sleepovers for kids.

For dinner, book a table at **Pirates Adventure** for a meal and a thrilling pirate-themed acrobatic show.

One of the most scenic ways to

explore the countryside is on the **Orange Express**, the 100-year-old electric train which runs from Palma, the capital, to the town of Sóller, winding through the mountains and 13 tunnels.

**La Reserva** is a private, natural paradise of waterfalls, spring fed swimming holes and wildlife, including bears and exotic birds.

The warm shallow waters off the beach serve as an easy introduction to **SCUBA diving**. More advanced divers can hire on with a guided trip to the undersea wonders of Puerto Andratx, off the island of Dragonera.

June 23-24, 2016

#### NIT DE FOC

This Palma celebration features the "correfoc," or a run through a shower of firecrackers.

August 7, 2016

#### DAVID GUETTA

Magaluf will host this global DJ phenomenon, attended by throngs dancing throughout the night.

September 5-11, 2016

#### FESTIVAL OF KING JAMES

Mallorca's biggest week of parties features a medieval market, fireworks and a parade of giants.