

Western Mallorca



Some of the most spectacular coastline in the Mediterranean forms an impervious rock barrier to powerful north winds that, in winter especially, can batter Mallorca. Tourism took off with the bucket-and-spade masses on the southern beaches in the 1960s, but the island's first tourists made a beeline for the Serra de Tramuntana long before.

Deià became an artists colony in the early 20th century and a bevy of Catalan painters led by Barcelona Modernista Santiago Rusiñol would applaud the sunsets there as if in a theatre. Deià and nearby inland Valldemossa, site of a grand monastery, are undeniably pretty (and much visited) towns.

They are only the beginning. A grand depression that opens to the northwest's only port, Port de Sóller, is an enchanting world. The air of shady Sóller and picture-postcard villages like Fornalutx and Biniaraix is heavy with the intoxicating perfume of the oranges and lemons that were long the area's economic mainstay.

Each of the burnt-orange villages along the coast has its own outlet to the sea, where turquoise waters lap tiny pebbly strands. Among the most enticing are those of Deià and Lluc Alcari. In the southwest, Sant Elm offers a 'proper' sandy beach. Yachting folk promenade between buzzy Port d'Andratx and Port de Sóller.

It is hard to pull away from the magic of the glittering sea, but inland excursions bring other rewards in villages like Orient and Esporles, the mystic calm of the Monestir de Lluc and the medieval castle ruins above Alaró.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Dive the transparent depths off the **Illa del Toro** (p107) near Santa Ponça
- Wander the steep and scented lanes of **Deià** (p117), one of Mallorca's prettiest towns
- Walk through citrus, almond and olive groves to the villages of **Biniaraix** and **Fornalutx** (p128)
- Discover the tranquil beauty and Modernista flair of the island's orange capital, **Sóller** (p119)
- Feel your heart leap as you take the dramatic hairpin drive to **Sa Calobra** (p131)
- Climb to the impregnable fortress ruins of **Castell d'Alaró** (p130)
- Marvel at the monastic peace of **Monestir de Lluc** (p132)



THE SOUTHWEST

Heavily if not always tastelessly developed in parts, the southwest corner of the island holds a couple of delightful coastal surprises. It remains to be seen whether these last re-doubts of natural beauty will resist human greed. Judging by the building scandals and phalanxes of cranes in and around Andratx, it might be an idea to get in quick before the cement-mixers do.

TO CAP DE CALA FIGUERA

The residences of the rich in the soulless suburban-style development of Sol de Mallorca, 2km south of Magaluf, look across the Punta de S'Estaca to three dreamlike inlets collectively known as **Portals Vells**. Their view over the turquoise-emerald waters is enviable. Will the developers' grip stretch to the other side?

To reach Portals Vells, take the road from south Magaluf (the number 8 roundabout by Aqualand) in the direction of El Toro and, after 800m, the narrow road south through

OUR TOP PICKS

- **Hotel** Muleta de Ca S'Hereu (p126)
- **Restaurant** Bens d'Avall (p122)
- **Town** Valldemossa (p114)
- **Beach** Cala de Deià (p118)
- **Festival** Es Firó (p121)

the golf course rather than swinging right (west) for El Toro. About 2km through pine woods brings you to a junction. To the left is signposted 'Playa Mago', which is two narrow inlets. The one on the right has a restaurant and is generally frequented by nudists, while the longer inlet with the narrow, shady beach to the right is prettier.

Nicer than either is **Cala Portals Vells**, another 1.8km south from the junction. Turquoise waters lap the beach, whose sands stretch back quite a distance beneath rows of straw umbrellas. To the south a walking trail leads to caves in the rock walls, one of them containing the rudiments of a chapel.

Right on the beach, **Es Repòs** (☎ 971 180492; meals €30-35; ☎ lunch Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun Jul & Aug) serves relaxed, sea-salty punters a simple array of seafood, salads and refreshments.

A few hundred metres back up from the beach, the road south to the **Cap de Cala Figuera** lighthouse is blocked off as private property.

SANTA PONÇA, PEGUERA & AROUND

South of Magaluf, the road west leads to the holiday residential district of El Toro and then on to adjoining Santa Ponça (and its indistinguishable extensions of Ses Rotes Velles and Costa de Sa Calma). The whole area has largely been created out of nothing to meet the demands of mass tourism.

The Santa Ponça **tourist office** (☎ 971 691712; Carrer des Puig de Galatzó 1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) is on the main beach. Check also www.santa-ponsa.com.

Entering El Toro from Magaluf, you could follow the signs to the marina of Port Adriano, opposite which stretches **Cala de Penyes Rotjes** (Red Cliffs Beach). It is pleasant enough but without shade, and the red cliffs are partly made up of ochre apartment blocks. South of this, a long point faces an islet that divers should note: **Illa del Toro**. At around 30m down the island's steep walls there are lashings of sea life, including plenty of moray eels.

Keep to the coast road approaching Santa Ponça and you will arrive at a lookout point, **Cap Negret**, from which you can see the marine reserve of **Illa Magrat** and the tiny **Illa dels Conills**. From here the road passes villas, the shady **Caló d'en Pellicer** beach and **Jungle Park** (☎ 630 948295; www.jungleparc.es; Avinguda de Jaume I 40a; admission €14; ☎ 10am-8pm daily mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-6pm Fri-Sun May-mid-Jun & mid-Sep-Oct), which offers a little adrenaline rush as you walk along rope bridges, swing through the branches and engage in other Tarzanesque activities.

The main **Santa Ponça beach** is broad and sandy and backed by a mix of high- and low-rise development. The beach is fine, the rest a little tedious. Divers should seek out **Zoea** (☎ 971 691444; www.zoemallorca.com; Club Náutico Santa Ponça, Via La Comisa), a professional outfit that does boat dives in the area, including Illa del Toro. In September try to be here for the **Festes del Rei Jaume I** on the 9th, when the 1229 landing by the Catalan king in Muslim Mallorca is staged on the beach.

REGIONAL SPECIALITIES

Local Sóller ice-cream company, Sa Fàbrica de Gelats, makes a wonderful orange-flavoured ice cream. The same fruit is at the heart of a sweet new liqueur, the Finca Can Posteta's Angel d'Or.

Valldemossa is famous for its versions of *coca*, a pizza-like snack that you will find around the island. One of the local specialities is the potato version, *coca de patata*.

A couple of kilometres west along the Ma1 road is nondescript **Peguera**. The pine-backed beach itself is pretty but some of the apartment blocks wouldn't be amiss in a Soviet suburb. Barely 1km southwest, **Cala Fornells** is more enticing, with its pair of bijou aquamarine strands framed by high, wooded promontories and not overly obtrusive hotels. Relax in the **Hotel Petit Cala Fornells** (☎ 971 685405; petitcf@balears.com; d per person €90-96; ☎ May-mid-Oct; ☎ ☎ ☎), which sits between the two beaches and offers 24 spacious rooms, sauna, putting green and gym.

Another 2km west, **Es Camp de Mar** is a colourless residential holiday zone (where Claudiaia Schiffer has a pad) with an acceptable beach. Follow the Ma1020 road out of here for fine views over the coast before turning into high wooded country and then dropping down the other side to Port d'Andratx (p108).

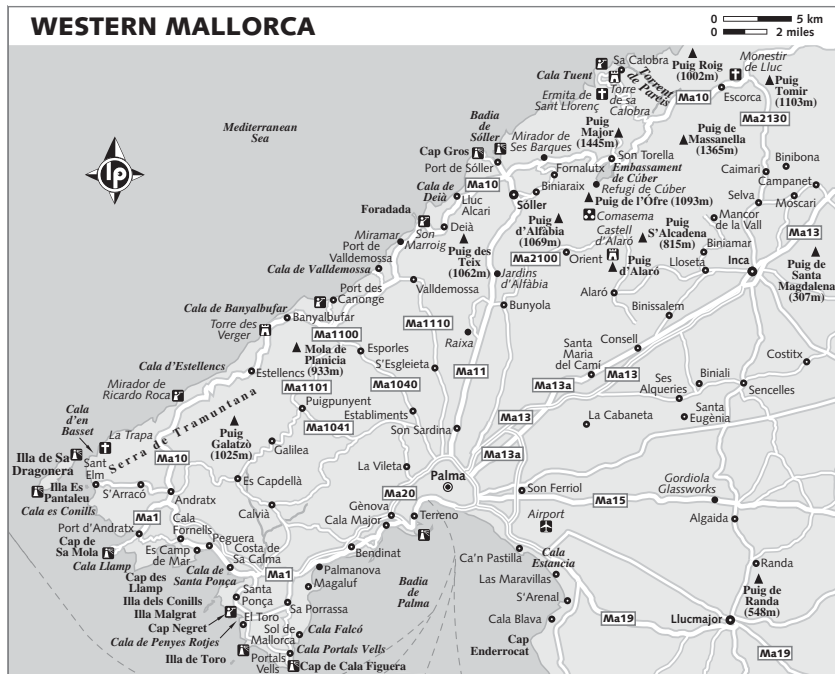
The 102 bus from Palma to Santa Ponça continues to Peguera (€2.60, 55 minutes from Palma). Quite a few of these buses continue to Andratx and Port d'Andratx.

CALVIÀ & ES CAPDELLÀ

Calvià is one of the richest municipalities in Spain thanks to the money pouring in from the mass coastal tourism in Palmanova, Magaluf, Santa Ponça and company, but the sleepy, bucolic capital of the same name doesn't flaunt its wealth.

The **Església de Sant Joan Baptista** was originally raised in the late 13th century and is curious because its 19th-century remake includes a gaudy neo-Romanesque entrance. A handful of restaurants and bars help out with sustenance.

About 1km southwest of the town centre, a modest country house awaits guests in search of tranquillity within a short drive of the coast.



Son Malero (☎ 971 670301; www.sonmalero.com; Camí de Son Malero; d €100-120; ☞ late Dec-early Nov; 📍 📷), set in a valley of almonds and carobs, dates to at least 1430. Its six rustic rooms can accommodate 12 people. Three have terraces. You might get to try wines from the *finca's* own cellars.

Four kilometres west of Calvià, **Es Capdellà** is a hamlet set in flourishing country, with almond and citrus groves. It's a minor crossroads you will probably encounter if exploring the southwest.

Three to seven buses run from Peguera via Santa Ponça and Palmanova to Calvià and Es Capdellà. From Santa Ponça they take about 30 minutes to Es Capdellà (although some take longer) and cost €1.35. The three to five daily buses from Palma to Es Capdellà take anything up to 1½ hours (€2.60).

ANDRATX

pop 4995 / elev 132m

Andratx is the largest town in the southwest. Typically for Mallorca, it lies well inland as a defensive measure against pirate attack, while its harbour, Port d'Andratx (right), lies 4km southwest. The tight concentration of houses around a grid of narrow streets offers few specific sights, but is a world away from the coastal mayhem. The wealth and corruption generated by the orgy of building on the coast to the south has left no visible signs here in the municipal capital.

Andratx is pasted like crunchy peanut butter onto the flank of foothills of the Serra de Tramuntana. Its most important buildings stand tall on two rises. The 16th-century **Castell de Son Mas** is an elegant defensive palace with a tower and Renaissance touches in its exterior decoration. Lying on the roundabout for the roads to Estellens and Es Capdellà, it houses the *ajuntament* (town hall). From it you can see the hulk of the **Església de Santa Maria d'Andratx** (Camí de la Rectoria 62), built in the 18th century on the site of the original 1248 church.

The enormous **Centre Cultural Andratx** (☎ 971 137770; www.candratx.com; ☞ 10.30am-7pm Tue-Fri, 10.30am-4pm Sun & holidays May-Oct, 11am-4pm Tue-Fri & Sun Nov-Apr) is 1.2km northeast of Castell de Son Mas along the road to Es Capdellà. It is a modern, private space for art exhibitions housed in an ochre building, a cross between what could be the spaceship *Jupiter* from *Lost in Space* and a supposedly Mallorcan-style

posseïó. Temporary exhibitions are staged on two floors gathered around an immense courtyard, along with film programmes, concerts and more. The land around the centre produces oranges, lemons, almonds, figs and olives.

The best thing about Andratx is people-watching. Turn up around 8pm in summer and, in addition to the pleasing afternoon light, you'll see folks in the bars and in the streets, chatting, playing and checking out their motorbikes. Carrer de Sa Constitució, Plaça d'Espanya and Via Roma are best for this, along with Plaça des Pou (whose one-time well is marked by a towering stone cross).

Wednesday morning is market day and another lively moment for a visit.

For simple island fare in a time-warp atmosphere, **Font i Caliu** (☎ 971 137070; Carrer de Juan Carlos I 2; meals €20; ☞ Sun-Fri) is a good choice. Nothing seems to have changed here over the years – there's no fusion fuss and chilling out here. There is a courtyard out the back or you could take an inside table with ageing white linen beneath exposed beams for some *trampò* (a cold vegetable dish), followed by *arros brut* (dirty rice), a typical rice dish jammed with *sobrassada*, rabbit and other optional meats.

For accommodation, head the few kilometres to Port d'Andratx. The Palma to Port d'Andratx bus (102) calls in to Andratx (€3.80, one hour 10 minutes).

PORT D'ANDRATX

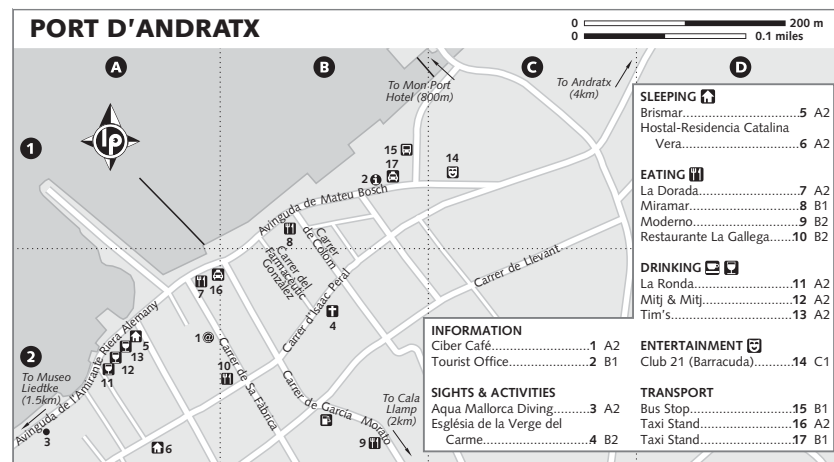
pop 1060

Port d'Andratx was once a kind of laid-back Portofino. It is a fine, long natural bay that attracts yachties from far and wide. While it is still a pleasant place for an evening waterfront meal, the blight of construction is rapidly eroding its charm.

The **tourist office** (☎ 971 671300; Avinguda de Mateu Bosch s/n; ☞ 9am-4pm May-Sep, 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat Oct-Apr) is next to the bus stop. Check email at **Ciber Café** (☎ 971 671010; Carrer de Sa Fàbrica 10; per hr €3; ☞ 1-3pm & 7pm-2am Fri-Wed).

Sights & Activities

The port is short on sights. You could easily slip past the tiny **Església de la Verge del Carme** (Carrer d'Isaac Peral) without noticing it. About 2km south of the port centre is the eccentric **Museo Liedtke** (www.liedtke-museum.com; Carrer de l'Oliviera,



built in 1987–93 into the cliffs near Cap de Sa Mola by German artist Dieter Walter Liedtke. Home to his art and temporary exhibitions, it is also a selling point for Liedtke's theories on life, art, the universe and anything else you care to contemplate. Finding it open could be a matter of chance, but the coastal views warrant the detour.

Aqua Mallorca Diving (☎ 971 674376; Avinguda de l'Amirante Riera Alemany 23) is the main local dive shop. One dive with all gear costs €53.

Those with wheels should make a detour for **Cala Llamp**, for at least three reasons: to jump into the sparkling, bottle-green waters in this sandless bay; to marvel at the extent of construction (a bit of investment in the potholed roads wouldn't go astray) all around this stretch of rugged coast; and to relax over a drink at the **Gran Folies Beach Club** (☎ 971 671094; www.granfolies.net; ☞ 10am-2am). This bar-restaurant is placed right above the rocky cove and offers use of a pool to cavort in between cocktails. It also does breakfast and full meals and runs free yoga classes (the latter on Friday mornings). Take the Ma1020 from the centre of Port d'Andratx and follow the signs over the ridge.

Sleeping

Hostal-Residencia Catalina Vera (☎ 971 671918; Carrer de Isaac Peral 63; s/d €42/68; 📍) A couple of hundred metres back from the harbour, this is a lovely guesthouse retreat with rooms set around a tranquil garden courtyard. The best doubles have balconies.

Brismar (☎ 971 671600; Avinguda de l'Amirante Riera Alemany 6; s/d from €67/95; ☞ Mar-Nov) The only waterfront hotel, this is a straightforward place with a bar and reasonably spacious if unexciting rooms. If the budget will stretch, ask for rooms with sea views (€90 for a single, €116 for a double).

Mon Port Hotel (☎ 971 238623; www.hotelmonport.com; Finca La Noria, Camí de Cala d'Egos; s €103-145, d €148-222; 📍 📷 📷) Away from the hub of the action, on the west side of the bay, this is a pamper palace. Pools, gym, massages, facials, sauna...you name it. Everything for your 'wellness' is on offer.

Eating

The waterfront is lined with restaurants, all with dining areas right on the water. A few worthwhile options lie hidden a block or two inland.

Restaurante La Gallega (☎ 971 671338; Carrer de Isaac Peral 52; meals €30; ☞ Tue-Sun, Dec-Oct) Try northern Spanish seafood faves, such as a quarter-kilo of *percebes* (a strange-looking mollusc) for €37, at this popular, no-nonsense backstreet eatery.

La Dorada (☎ 971 671648; Avinguda de Mateu Bosch 31b; meals €30-40; ☞ Feb-Oct) You are assured of a stylish presentation (those nice square plates) and well-prepared dishes. The *filete de dorada en salsa de trufa* (gilthead bream fillet in truffle sauce) is delicate and the *parrillada de pescado* (mixed fish grill) abundant. On cooler nights, retreat inside and grab an upstairs table by a window.

Miramar (☎ 971 671617; Avinguda de Mateu Bosch 18; breakfast €9, meals €35; ☎ daily) In business since 1927, this remains a waterfront classic that serves decent seafood and meat dishes. It offers an abundant set lunch for €19 and is open for breakfast too.

Moderno (☎ 971 673035; Carrer de García Morato 24b; meals €35; ☎ 7pm-1am) Back on the hill road leading to Cala Llamp (just past the petrol station) is this charming mansion turned into an elegant Italian restaurant and bar. Several lowlit dining areas lead to a rear terrace. Some folks just hang about the bar by the entrance.

Drinking

In summer the waterfront is a minor party zone. **Mitj & Mitj** (☎ 971 672608; Avinguda de l'Almirante Riera Alemany 9) attracts a mixed crowd to its waterside terrace, as does the more lounge-style **La Ronda** (Avinguda de l'Almirante Riera Alemany 9) next door. **Tim's** (Avinguda de l'Almirante Riera Alemany 6) is for the under-25s and pulses to the barely controlled hormones of a mostly foreign clientele. These locales generally open from 7pm to 4am (March to November) but this depends largely on how busy they get.

Everyone then heads for **Club 21** (Barracuda; Avinguda de Mateu Bosch s/n; www.mallorca-nightlife.com; ☎ midnight-6am), to dance the night away.

Getting There & Away

Most of the 102 buses from Palma continue from Andratx to the port (€1.35, 10 minutes). Bus 100 runs seven or eight times a day between Andratx and Sant Elm, calling in at Port d'Andratx en route. Taxis (☎ 971 235544, 971 136398) will whisk you to Palma (€30) or the airport (€43).

S'ARRACÓ

Two kilometres west of Andratx and 4km north of Port d'Andratx, this smiling hamlet, bundled fish-bone-style along the main road, dates to about the 18th century. The rich territory around it attests to its rural traditions, although hard times in the 19th century forced many farmers to migrate to France. Today it is simply a pleasantly relaxed place to stop and is blessed with several good restaurants. Those with more than a passing interest could stay in the rustic UK-run **Hotel L'Escaleta** (☎ 971 671011; www.hotelescaleta.com; Carrer del Porvenir 10; s/d €60/95; ☎ ☎). The three-storey house has been sympathetically restored and rooms are each a little different, although some elements are

common, including terracotta floor tiles and timber beds. If even wandering around the village seems like too much effort, relax over a book in the garden. You should crawl out to try a couple of the better restaurants, such as **Es Puput** (☎ 971 674703; Carrer del Atajo 1; meals €40-45; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat Aug-Jun), a German-run gastrodome offering hybrid Med-Asian dishes. It's hard to avoid salivating at the thought of a tender *solomillo de cordero con coucou al cilantro y yogur al lima* (thick cut of lamb with cilantro coucou and lime yoghurt).

SANT ELM

pop 80

For 5km, the Ma1030 ducks and weaves up hill and down dale to suddenly emerge in this tranquil beach haven at Mallorca's extreme southwest edge.

The **tourist office** (☎ 971 239205; Avinguda de Jaume 1 28b; ☎ 9am-4pm May-Sep, 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat Oct-Apr) is a short walk from the beach.

Sights & Activities

The main town **beach** is a pleasant sandy strand (no shade) that faces the gently lapping Med to the south. Within swimming distance for the moderately fit is **Illa Es Pantaleu**, a rocky islet that marks one of the boundaries of a marine reserve. That reserve is dominated by the much bigger, 4km-long **Illa de Sa Dragonera**, which looms like an aircraft carrier to the west. Constituted as a natural park, it can be reached by **ferry** (☎ 639 617545; tickets €10; 15 min, 3-4 times daily Feb-Nov) from a little harbour north of the beach in central Sant Elm. The ferry lands at a protected natural harbour on the east side of the island, from where you can follow trails to the capes at either end or ascend the **Na Pòpia peak** (Puig des Far Vell, 349m). The ferry operators also do **glass-bottomed boat tours** around the island. If you want to dive off the island, try **Scuba Activa** (☎ 971 239102; www.scuba-activa.com; Plaça del Monsenyor Sebastià Grau 7; 1 dive incl equipment €57).

To the south of Sant Elm's main beach (follow Carrer de Cala es Conills), **Cala es Conills** is a sandless but pretty inlet.

A couple of nice walks would see you heading north from Plaça del Monsenyor Sebastià Grau, at the northeast end of town. One follows the GR221 long-distance route (p112) for about an hour to **La Trapa**, a ruined former monastery that is being transformed into a hikers' refuge. A few hundred metres from

the building is a wonderful lookout point. You can start on the same trail but branch off west about halfway (total walk of about 45 minutes) to reach **Cala d'En Basset**, a lovely bay with transparent water but not much of a beach to speak of.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostal Dragonera (☎ 971 239086; www.hostaldragonera.net; Avinguda del Rei Jaume I 5; s/d with balcony €51/65; ☎ Feb-Nov) The best of the two hotel options, this is cheap and cheerful and on the main drag. Go for broke and take a room with balcony for sea views (the extra outlay is less than €10). Rooms are smallish and Spartan but clean and light. The place has its own restaurant and sea views are also on the menu for breakfast, lunch and tea.

Indeed, there is no shortage of restaurants with water views. A cluster of them are perched off Plaça de Na Caragola, halfway into the town (past the tourist office). Of these, **El Pescador** (☎ 971 239198; Avinguda de Jaume I; meals €30; ☎ daily) is reliable. Paella (€16) is a good midday option and meat mains are available, but the best bet is the fish of the day (sold by weight).

Getting There & Away

Seven or eight buses run from Andratx to Sant Elm (€1.35, 40 minutes) via Port d'Andratx and S'Arracó. You can also take the boat between Sant Elm and Port d'Andratx (€7, 20 minutes, once daily February to November).

SERRA DE TRAMUNTANA

Dominated by the rugged Serra de Tramuntana range, Mallorca's northwest coast and its hinterland form a spectacular opposite to the mass coastal tourism you leave behind around Palma. The vertiginous coastline is unforgiving, rocky (mostly limestone) and mostly inaccessible; the villages are largely built of local stone (as opposed to concrete), and the high, rugged interior is much loved by walkers for its beautiful landscapes of pine forests, olive groves and spring wild flowers.

The highest peaks are concentrated in the central mountain range. The highest, Puig Major (1445m) is off limits and home to a military communications base. It is followed

by Puig de Massanella (1365m). The area is virtually bereft of surface watercourses, but rich in subterranean flows that feed the farming terraces of the coast villages.

The main road (the Ma10) starts at Andratx and runs roughly parallel to the coast to Pollença. It's a stunning scenic drive and popular cycling route, especially during spring, when the muted mountain backdrop of browns, greys and greens is splashed with the bright colours of yellow wattles, blood-red poppies and other spring blooms. Plenty of *miradores* (lookout points) recommend themselves as stops to punctuate the trip, as do diversions down to tiny bays for a dip.

ANDRATX TO VALLDEMOSSA

The Ma10 road climbs away from Andratx into the wooded hills that mark the beginning of the majestic Serra de Tramuntana range. After about 6km you get your first sea glimpses from on high. Three kilometres short of Estellencs, pull in at the parking area opposite a restaurant to climb up to the **Mirador de Ricardo Roca**, a stunning lookout point.

Estellencs

pop 350 / elev 151m

Estellencs is a coquettish village of stone buildings scattered around the rolling hills below the **Puig Galatzó** (1025m). A 1.5km road winds down through terraces of palm trees, citrus orchards, olives, almonds, cacti, pines and various primary-coloured flowers to the local 'beach', **Cala d'Estellencs**, a rocky cove with crystal-clear water. Park your steed, go for a swim and enjoy a simple lunch at **Sa Punteta**, a summertime eatery on the rocks overlooking the sea. To ascend Puig Galatzó, a walking trail starts near the Km97 milestone on the Ma10 road, about 2½km west of Estellencs. It's not easy going, so you'll need good maps and plenty of water and food. Reckon on a five- to six-hour round trip. An alternative but easily confused trail leads back down into Estellencs.

An arts and crafts fair is usually held in Estellencs on the third weekend of April.

SLEEPING & EATING

Petit Hotel Sa Plana (☎ 971 618666; www.saplana.com; Carrer d'Eusebi Pascual; d €98; ☎ ☎ ☎) At the western entrance to the town, this higgledy-piggledy, stone place dominates a rise that catches the evening sun. The five rooms are all

quite different and tastefully decorated with period furnishings.

Hotel Maristel (☎ 971 618550; www.hotelmaristel.com; Carrer d'Eusebi Pascual 10; s/d €100/125; 🏠 🚗) More functional, Maristel is on the main drag at the western end of the village. The best rooms have balconies and sea views. Whatever room you get, indulge in the spa facilities.

Finca S'Oliver (☎ 971 618591, 629 266035; www.pan.gea.org/fincaolivar; d/tr from €109/195; 🏠 🚗 🚚) A more curious option, about 1km east of town, this series of renovated stone houses scattered over a sprawling valley property (with olive terraces) is perfect for those in search of total tranquillity. Most of the property is a wi-fi area if you have to bring work along. Or forget the work and do laps in the pool, which seems to hang at the edge of nothing.

Montimar (☎ 971 618576; Plaça de la Constitució 7; meals €25-30; 🍷 Tue-Sun; 🏠) In town, this place opposite the church remains the best of the handful of

eateries. The high terrace above the main road affords great views that may distract you from your *arros brut* or vegetarian dishes.

Banyalbufar pop 460 / elev 112m

Eight kilometres northeast of Estellencs, Banyalbufar is similarly positioned high above the coast. If anything it is an even tighter and steeper huddle and its quiet lanes beckon strollers. All around are carved-out centuries-old, stone-walled farming terraces, known as *ses marjades*. They are kept moist by mountain well water that gurgles down open channels and is stored in cisterns. A steep 1km walk downhill brings you to a shingle cove, **Cala de Banyalbufar**, for a swim. One kilometre out of town on the road to Estellencs is one of the island's symbols, the **Torre des Verger** (aka Torre de Ses Ànimes). This 1579 *talayot* (watch-tower) is one of the most crazily situated on

the island. One step further and it would plunge into the seething Mediterranean far below. Climb to the top and fight off vertigo as you check the horizon for yachts (pirates stopped their business some while ago).

SLEEPING

Hotel Baronia (☎ 971 618146; www.hbaronia.com; Carrer de Baronia 16; s/d €52/65; 🏠 🚗) A maze of a building with an olde-worlde feel, Baronia is built in the ruins of a Muslim-era fort (part of the central tower remains). It has modern rooms, some with excellent sea views, and a great cliffside swimming pool. For a little more (€88 for a double) you get half-board and a guaranteed room with a view.

Ca Madò Paula (☎ 971 148717; www.camadopaula.com; Carrer de la Constitució 11; d€105; 🏠) At the seaward rim of the village core, this charming stone house is home to four guest rooms, decorated simply with a few antique touches and views out to sea.

Hotel Sa Coma (☎ 971 618034; www.hotelsacom.com; Camí des Molí 3; s/d €76/118; 🏠 🚗 🚚) Partway down the road to the village cove, this place boasts unbeatable sea views from the balconies of its rooms. The accommodation itself is basic enough but reasonably sized and spotless (however, running water is a trickle).

EATING

Pegasón y el Pajarito Enmascarado (☎ 971 148713; Carrer del Pont 2; meals €20-25; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, dinner Sun) Hidden from the main road, this cosy cavernous spot offers simple pizzas, pasta and mains like *magret de pato agridulce y espàrragos* (sweet-and-sour duck slices with asparagus) at little candlelit tables, some of them sitting uneasily outside.

Son Tomás (☎ 971 618149; Carrer de Baronia 17; meals €30-35; 🍷 lunch & dinner Wed-Sun, lunch Mon) A classic, this place almost seems to lean over the main road at the southwest end of town. Cracking suckling pig (*lechona* in Spanish, *porcella* in Catalan) or a chunky *suquet* (a seafood and potato hotpot) await the ravenous.

our pick **Ca Madò Paula** (☎ 971 148717; www.camadopaula.com; Carrer de la Constitució 11; meals €40-45) The small dining room is what you might expect at your Mallorquin granny's place. The rear garden is perfect for romantic summer nights. And the menu of international Med grub with a strong Italian leaning is mouth-watering. The pasta options are fine as mains, but you might opt for the *solomillo de avestruz*

a la mostaza de Cassis (sirloin of ostrich in a Cassis mustard).

Port des Canonge

From Banyalbufar, the Ma10 road curls away from the coast. After 6km, a side road squiggles 5km down to this coastal settlement. Clear waters lap the short waterfront, which is backed by fishing boat shelters and pine tree roots hold together the fragile red earthen cliffs. You can walk along a trail through woods towards Banyalbufar, or follow the coast for about five minutes to reach another, hardly frequented, shingle beach. Back in the village, two restaurants cater for hungry lunchers.

Esporles & Inland Circuit

A few hundred metres beyond the Port des Canonge turn-off, the Ma1100 breaks off southward towards Esporles. After 1km you reach a road junction and **La Granja** (☎ 971 610032; www.lagranja.net; Carretera d'Esporles-Puigpunyent; adult/child €10/5; 🍷 10am-7pm Apr-Sep, 10am-6pm Oct-Mar), a magnificent *possessió* that has been turned into something of a kitsch Mallorcan exhibit, with folks in traditional dress doing traditional things. The grand mansion is, however, well worth the visit, as are its extensive gardens. Some elements of the property date to the 10th century. You could spend hours exploring the period-furnished rooms, olive and wine presses, grand dining room, stables, workshops and some medieval instruments of torture in the cellars. In the gardens a stout old yew tree is estimated by some to be 2000 years old!

From La Granja, those with wheels could make a circuit inland. Follow the Ma1101 south, which plunges through thick woods and slithers down a series of hairpin bends to reach **Puigpunyent**. This typical inland town offers few sights but there are a couple of enticements to stop here. One is the luxury, rose-hued hilltop **Gran Hotel Son Net** (☎ 971 147000; www.steinhotels.com/sonnet; Carrer del Castell de Son Net; d €412-680; 🏠 🚗 🚚), where pampering is the order of the day. This award-winning 17th-century mansion is home to a considerable modern art collection, a renowned restaurant in a grand stone-walled hall, and plush, spacious rooms and suites. A minimum four-night stay is required from May to October.

Rather more down to earth is the **Rose** (☎ 971 614360; Carrer de la Ciutat 3; meals €35; 🍷 lunch

THE RUTA DE PEDRA EN SEC

A breathtaking walkers' week in Mallorca would see you traverse the entire mountainous north-west, from Cap de Formentor to Sant Elm. Old mule trails constitute the bulk of the (still incomplete) 150km GR221 walking route, aka the Ruta de Pedra en Sec (Dry Stone Route). The 'dry stone' refers to an age-old building method here and throughout the island. In the mountains you'll see paved ways, farming terraces, houses, walls and more built of stone without the aid of mortar.

The GR221 begins in Pollença (Map p134) near Can Diable and the Torrent d'en Marc stream, but you could start with a day's march from Cap de Formentor. A reasonably fit walker can accomplish the stretch from Pollença to Port d'Andratx in as little as four days, but with an extra few days you can include stops in some of the beautiful villages en route.

The first stretch is an easy walk of about four to five hours gradually curving southwest to the Monestir de Lluc (where you can stay overnight). You will ascend about 600m in the course of the day, before dropping back down a little to the monastery. The following day sees another fair climb to over 1000m, taking you past the Puig de Massanella (1365m), southwest to the Embassament de Cúber dam, past Puig de l'Ofre (1093m), which many like to bag, and down the Biniarix ravine to Sóller to sleep. You might want to spend a couple of days here to explore the surrounding area.

To Deià you are looking at two to three hours' walking (from Sóller you could follow several trails, not just the GR221) and another two hours for Valldemossa. Those in a hurry could make it as far as Estellencs but, again, you might want to spread the walking over a couple of days. The last day would see you hiking from Estellencs to Sant Elm via La Trapa.

The walking requires a reasonable level of fitness but no special skills or equipment, other than good boots, sun protection, water bottle and so on. Good map-reading and compass skills are essential, as paths are not always well marked (one of the delays in completing the GR221 trail has been that 92% of the Serra de Tramuntana is private property and many rights of way are disputed). With various alternative routes, it is easy to become disoriented.

There are six refuges along the way (to book a sleeping berth, call ahead on ☎ 971 137700). There are also plenty of overnight options in the villages. For more information on the route, check out the Consell de Mallorca's web page, Pedra en Sec i Senderisme a Mallorca (www.conselldemallorca.net/mediambient/pedra).

GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL

Those who like detours are in for a treat in Esporles. As you enter the town from the south, a sign along a lane to the left beckons you 4.5km into the mountains to the spectacularly located **La Posada del Marqués** (☎ 971 611230; www.posada-marques.com; Es Verger; s/d €160/203; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰). From the dining terrace and pool, the view sweeps between mountains and across valleys to the distant plains. The 16th-century stone manor offers accommodation in a variety of rooms and suites, decorated with rustic antique good taste and equipped with plasma TVs and DVD players. The restaurant does fine Mediterranean meals (€40 to €45), including pasta that even recalcitrant Italians will have to admit is good.

& dinner Thu–Mon, dinner Wed). Sitting on the junction of the roads leading to Gran Hotel Son Net, Palma, Galilea and central Puigpunyent, this is a breezy roadside restaurant with an appetising mix of meat and fish mains, usually dressed up with a little imagination. Locals love it.

From Puigpunyent, make a quick dash for **Galilea**, a high mountain hamlet about four serpentine kilometres south. Climb to the town church square for views across the valleys and a drink in the bar next door, or head even higher up this straggling place for a greater sense of altitude. **Scott's Galilea** (☎ 971 870100; www.scottsgalilea.com; Sa Costa d'En Mandons 3; s/d €141/187; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) has a series of luxury studio apartments here.

Back in Puigpunyent, follow the Ma1041 east and make for **Establiments**, a string of villages through which the narrow Ma1040 runs north from Palma to Esporles. Apart from a couple of restaurants with typical Mallorcan fare, such as **Es Porxo** (☎ 971 768643; Carretera d'Esporles; meals €35; ☎ Tue–Sat), there is little to hold you. George Sand and Frédéric Chopin spent time here before moving to Valldemossa in 1838.

Esporles, about 10km northwest, brings you back into the Tramuntana foothills. This shady, ochre village, set beside a generally dry stream, is an open invitation to aimless meandering. A weekly market sets up in Esporles on Saturdays. The plane tree-lined Ma1040 serves as the main road, on which reside a pompous church and five bar-eateries. Of these, **Es Brollador** (☎ 971 610539; Passeig del Rei 10; meals €30; ☎ Sun–Fri), with its tiled floors, high ceilings and rear courtyard, makes a pleasant stop for anything from a morning coffee to lunch or dinner. Esporles can be animated at night, as many folks from Palma have opted to live here and commute to the capital.

Getting There & Away

The Palma–Estrellens bus (€3.30, one hour 20 minutes, four to 11 times a day) passes through Esporles and Banyalbufar.

VALLDEMOSA

pop 1710 / elev 425m

From the Esporles turn-off, the Ma10 climbs high on its inland thrust to Valldemossa. Known as the 'town of the four valleys' because, well, it is surrounded by four valleys, Valldemossa is a blend of tree-lined, cobbled lanes, stout stone houses and impressive villas. Yes, the place swarms with tourist bus contingents and, yes, the bulk of the restaurants and bars serve average fare at inflated prices. But there is a reason for all this. It may owe most of its fame to the fact that the ailing composer Frédéric Chopin and his domineering writer-lover George Sand spent their 'winter of discontent' here in 1838–39. But Valldemossa is quite simply one of the most beautiful towns on the island.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 971 612019; Avinguda de Palma s/n; ☎ 9am–1.30pm & 3–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–1pm Sat) is on the main road running through town, about two minutes' walk from the main bus stop. Banks abound; one with an ATM is **Banca March** (Carrer de Chopin 13). If you have a problem (not with the ATM), contact the **Policia Local** (Carrer del Rei Sanxo 1).

Sights

Sand, Chopin and the kids stayed in the **Cartoixa de Valldemossa** (Cartuja; ☎ 971 612106; www.valldemossa.com; adult/student & child €7.50/3; ☎ 9.30am–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Jun–Sep, 9.30am–4.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–1pm Sun Oct–May), a grand monastery that was turned into rental accommodation (mostly to summer holiday-makers from Palma) after its monks were expelled in 1835.

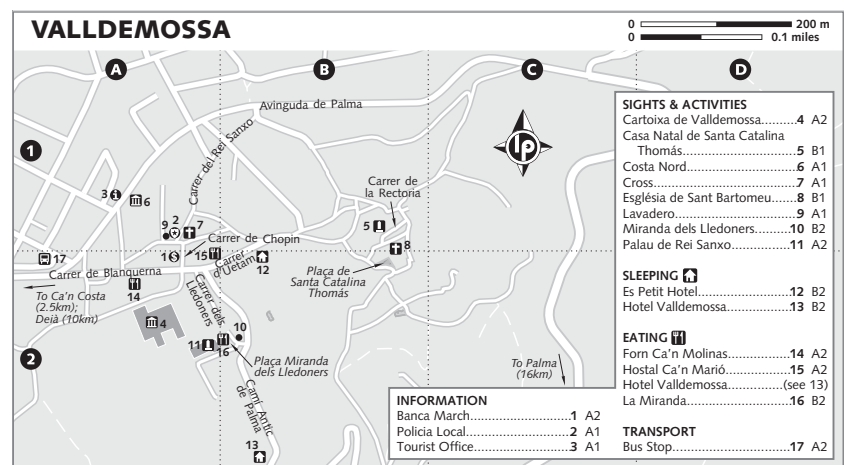
Their stay wasn't an entirely happy experience and Sand later wrote *Un Hiver à Mallorca* (Winter in Mallorca), which, if nothing else, made her perennially unpopular with Mallorquins (although you will find copies of her rant at souvenir stands). Chopin's poor health, constant rain and damp and the not always warm welcome from the villagers, who found these foreigners rather too eccentric, turned a planned idyllic escape from the pressure-cooker of social life in Paris into a nightmare. Years later Austrian Archduke Luis (Ludwig) Salvador, another eccentric, also moved into the area, living in the S'Estaca property (now owned by US actor Michael Douglas) and then buying other properties.

The monastery is a beautiful building surrounded by gorgeous gardens and enjoying fine views. Jaume II had a palace built on the site in 1310. After it was abandoned, the Carthusian order took over and converted it into a monastery, which, in 1399, was greatly expanded. A series of cells shows how the monks (bound by an oath of silence they could break only for half an hour per week in the library) lived. Following the rules of the order, just 13 monks lived in this cavernous place. Various items related to Sand's and Chopin's time here, including his pianos, are also displayed. Entry includes piano recitals (eight times daily in summer) and Jaume II's 14th-century **Palau del Rei Sanxo** (King Sancho's Palace), a muddle of medieval rooms jammed with furniture and hundreds of years of mementos, gathered around a modest cloister.

For an exquisite view taking in the terraces, orchards, gardens, cypresses, palms, the occasional ochre house through the mountains and the distant plains leading to Palma, walk down Carrer del Lledoners to **Miranda dels Lledoners**. You may notice that most houses bear a colourful tile depicting a nun and the words '*Santa Catalina Thomàs, pregau per nosaltres*' ('St Catherine Thomas, pray for us'). Yes, Valldemossa has its very own saint.

The **Casa Natal de Santa Catalina Thomàs** (Carrer de la Rectoria), her birthplace, is tucked off to the side of the parish church, the **Església de Sant Bartomeu** (Plaça de Santa Catalina Thomàs) at the east end of the town. It houses a simple chapel and a facsimile of Pope Pius VI's declaration beatifying the saint in 1792. Born in 1531, she is said to have had visions of (and was tempted by) the devil from a precocious age. Apparently this was a good thing and she wound up in the Església de Santa Magdalena in Palma (p79), where she died in 1574. Sor Tomasseta, as she is affectionately known, has been venerated by locals as a saint since she was canonised in 1930. Other curious sights around town include a characteristic **cross** (Carrer del Rei Sanxo), once used as a waymarker, and the nearby **lavadero**, where the local women used to do their laundry.

From the sublime we head for the ridiculous. **Costa Nord** (☎ 971 612425; www.costanord.com; Avinguda de Palma 6; adult/senior/child €7.75/6/4.75; ☎ 9am–5pm Oct–Apr, 10am–6pm May–Sep) was dreamed up by part-time Mallorca resident and Hollywood celebrity Michael Douglas.



His (what should we call it?) show, including a 'documentary' and a mock-up of the master's quarters of the good ship *Nixe*, is rather silly. The vessel belonged to Archduke Luis Salvador (Ludwig to his family), son of the 19th-century Habsburg ruler of Tuscany, Leopoldo II. Luis spent much of his life bobbing around on the Mediterranean in *Nixe* and writing treatises on an astounding range of subjects, including Mallorca, which he came to live on and love. Indeed, he liked it so much that he proceeded to buy as much of it as he could (see opposite).

Festivals & Events

Sunday is market day in Valldemossa. On 28 July, the town celebrates the **Festa de la Beata**, for Santa Catalina Thomàs, in which a six-year-old is chosen to represent the saintly child. In August the **Festival Chopin** (www.festivalchopin.com; admission €15-25) sees a series of international classical performers putting on music of Chopin and other greats in the Cartoixa de Valldemossa (p114).

Sleeping

Es Petit Hotel (☎ 971 612479; www.espetithotel-valldemossa.com; Carrer d'Uetam 1; s/d from €108/120; 🏠 📺) Set in the heart of Valldemossa, this enticing stone town house is a great midrange option. The buffet breakfast bursts with variety and you get the feeling that everything is done with an eye to detail and comfort. For a little extra, upgrade to a superior room with balcony (single €144, double €160).

Hotel Valldemossa (☎ 971 612626; www.valldemossahotel.com; Camí Antic de Palma s/n; s/d/ste €235/353/460; 🏠 📺 📺 📺) Composed of two 19th-century stone houses that once belonged to the monastery, this hotel rests on a slight rise off the old Palma road about 300m south of the village, surrounded by olive and orange groves. Of the 12 immaculate rooms, eight are spacious suites. Each is decorated with antique furniture and artwork.

Eating

A sprinkling of cheerful eateries festoons the streets. Few are of culinary significance.

Forn Ca'n Molinas (☎ 971 612247; Carrer de Blanquerma 15) For the local speciality of *coca de patata* and other pastries.

La Miranda (☎ 971 612296; Plaça Miranda dels Lledoners 3; meals €20-25; 🍷 noon-5pm & 7pm-midnight May-Jun, 6pm-midnight Tue-Sun Jul-Oct, noon-5pm Nov-Apr) Settle

in for anything from salad with goats' cheese to a selection of cold meats and cheeses, along with less Spanish options such as risotto. On warm days, you might get lucky and snare a table outside with views down the valley. It's ideal for tapas.

Hostal Ca'n Mاريو (☎ 971 612122; Carrer de Uetam 8; meals €30; 🍷 daily) If you can grab a window table half the job is done, as you'll have views almost clear to Palma! Enjoy the simple local fare, with a brief selection of fish and meat dishes. It's a shame they don't rent rooms here any more.

Ca'n Costa (☎ 971 612363; meals €30; 🍷 Wed-Mon) About 2.5km out of Valldemossa on the road to Deià, this makes a great roadside rustic stop for *porcelleta al forn* (suckling pig). Take a seat inside the stone house or beneath the straggling pergola. The Valldemossa-Deià buses stop outside.

Hotel Valldemossa (☎ 971 612626; www.valldemossahotel.com; Camí Antic de Palma s/n; meals €80-120; 🍷) The hotel's restaurant is considered one of the island's best. It offers a tasting menu (€78) and a vegetarian menu (€59).

Getting There & Away

BUS

The 210 bus from Palma to Valldemossa (€1.50, 30 minutes) runs four to nine times a day. Three to four of these continue to Port Sóller (€2.10, one hour) via Deià. From May to October, various special services run on Saturdays only from resorts on the southeast coast to Valldemossa. Ask at tourist offices.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

From Palma the quickest way to get to Valldemossa is the 16km run along the Ma1110 via **S'Espleieta** (so named for the little church on the roadside). A few hundred metres north of the church, you might want to stop off at the **Lafiore glassworks** (www.lafiore.com; 🍷 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat). Otherwise, Valldemossa is just off the Ma10 between Banyalbufar and Deià (the latter lies 10km to the northeast).

PORT DE VALLEMOSSA

About 1.5km from Valldemossa on the road to Banyalbufar, a spectacular mountain drive (the Ma1113) drops 6km to Port de Valldemossa. The giddy sea and cliff views are enough to make you want to jump into the surf on the shingle and algae 'beach' when

MIRAMAR & SON MARROIG

Five kilometres north of Valldemossa is **Miramar** (☎ 971 616073; www.sonmarroig.com; admission €3; 🍷 9.30am-7pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, 10.30am-6pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), one of Habsburg Archduke Luis Salvador's former residences. The archduke built this home on the site of a 13th-century monastery, of which only a small part of the cloister remains. The evangelist and patron saint of Catalan literature, Ramon Llull, founded the monastery, where he wrote many of his works and trained brethren in Arabic and the Good Word for the task of proselytising among the infidel Muslims. Walk out the back and enjoy the cliff-top views. Nearby, the curious could set off on walking trails either side of the highway to discover the Capella del Beat Ramon (Beatified Ramon's Chapel) and the Cova del Beat Ramon (his cave).

Two kilometres further is one of the archduke's other main residences, **Son Marroig** (☎ 971 639158; www.sonmarroig.com; admission €3; 🍷 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat & holidays Apr-Sep, 9.30am-2pm & 3-5.30pm Mon-Sat & holidays Oct-Mar). It is a delightful, rambling mansion jammed with furniture and period items, including many of the archduke's books. The views are the stuff of dreams. Wander down to the **Foradada**, the strange hole-in-the-rock formation by the water. It's about a 3km walk, and a soothing swim in the lee of this odd formation is the reward.

Private events, banquets and the like are often organised in one or the other of these properties. Son Marroig also hosts the summer **Festival Internacional de Deià** (☎ 971 639178; www.soundpost.org; admission €20), a series of light classical concerts that take place on Thursday nights (starting at 8.30pm or 9pm) from June to September.

you arrive. Behind it cluster a dozen or so houses, one of which is home to the justifiably popular **Restaurant Es Port** (☎ 971 616194; meals €30-35; 🍷 Feb-Nov). Try for a table upstairs on the terrace. Seafood is the mainstay, and you might like a hearty *cazuela de rape con mariscos y patatas* (monkfish casserole with sea-food and potato in a delicious peanut broth). The *calamares al ajillo con patatas* (cuttlefish cooked in garlic with potato cubes and lightly spiced) is perfectly prepared.

DEIÀ & AROUND

Deià has long attracted foreigners of all sorts. Those who want to live here now pretty much have to be wealthy. A 16th-century house in the old town with four small bedrooms and sea glimpses? That will be €2 million please.

Deià

pop 650 / elev 222m

Deià is perhaps the most famous village on Mallorca. Its setting is idyllic, with a cluster of stone buildings pasted on to a conical hill and dripping into the surrounding valleys. The steep hillsides are terraced with vegetable gardens, citrus orchards, almond and olive trees and even the occasional vineyard. The mountain backdrop is the **Puig des Teix** (1062m). Deià was once a second home to an international colony of writers, actors and musicians, the best known of whom (to Anglo-Saxons at

any rate) was the English poet Robert Graves. Check out **Deià Mallorca** (www.deia.info) and **Enjoy Deià** (www.deia-mallorca.com).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The Ma10 passes through the town centre, where it becomes the main street and is lined with bars, restaurants and shops. Several pricey artists' workshops and galleries flourish locally produced work.

The steep cobbled lanes, with their well-kept stone houses, overflowing bougainvillea and extraordinary views over the sea, farm terraces and mountains, make it easy to understand why artists and other bohemians have loved this place since Catalan artists 'discovered' it in the early 20th century. At the top of Es Puig, the hill at the heart of Deià, is the modest parish church, the **Església de Sant Joan Baptista** (whose **Museu Parroquial**, with a collection of local religious paraphernalia, you might find open on Saturdays).

Opposite is the town **cemetery**. Here lies 'Robert Graves, Poeta, 24-4-1895 - 7-12-1985 E.P.D' (*en paz descansa*, meaning 'may he rest in peace'). His second wife, Beryl Pritchard, who died in 2003, was buried at the other end of the graveyard. Famous for such works as *I, Claudius*, the novelised version of the Roman emperor's life, Graves also wrote reams of verse and a book on his adopted homeland, *Mallorca Observed* (1965).

Mallorquin migrants in search of a better life elsewhere. They headed from the port mostly to France and the Americas, especially Puerto Rico.

Not everyone was doing it tough though. Local landowners grew rich in the 19th century on the back of the citrus trade with France. Until the Palma railway was completed in 1912, overland travel had been difficult. With road communications so poor, locals moved about by sea.

Sóller's train station is the terminus for the Palma-Sóller railway (p99), one of Mallorca's most popular and spectacular excursions.

The main square, Plaça de la Constitució, is 100m downhill from the train station. It's surrounded by bars and restaurants, and is home to the *ajuntament* (town hall). The tram down to Port de Sóller rumbles through the square.

Simply wandering Sóller's peaceful, often cobbled, streets is a pleasure. In any direction, within a few minutes you exchange tight, winding lanes for country roads boarded by stone walls, behind which flourish orange and lemon groves.

Information

Internet Sin Café (☎ 971 631699; Carrer de Sa Lluna 30; per hr €2.60; ☎ 10am-3pm & 5-11pm Mon-Sat, 5-11pm Sun) This is the local internet stop.

Llibreria Calabruix (☎ 971 632641; Carrer de Sa Lluna 7) A good bookshop for local material plus hiking guides.

Tourist office (☎ 971 638068; Plaça d'Espanya; ☎ 9.45am-1.30pm & 2.45-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.15am-1pm Sat) This is in a one-time postal wagon from the Sóller railway.

The main Sóller website is www.sollernet.com. Also worth looking at is www.viu-soller.com.

Sights

You can start your sightseeing without even leaving the train station. The town has set up a couple of intriguing art exhibitions, the **Sala Picasso** and **Sala Miró** (Plaça d'Espanya 6; admission free; ☎ 10am-6.30pm) with, respectively, a ceramics collection and a couple of series of prints.

One of the architect Antoni Gaudí's disciples, Joan Rubió, got some big commissions in Sóller. The town didn't want to miss the wave of modernity and so Rubió set to work in 1904

on the renovation of the 16th-century **Església de Sant Bartomeu** (Plaça de la Constitució). The largely baroque church (built 1688-1723) preserved elements of its earlier Gothic interior, but Rubió gave it an unusual Modernista façade. Finding the church open seems to be a matter of divine will.

Across the lane from the church, Rubió set to work on another temple, this time to Mammón. Now the Santander Central Hispano, the one-time **Banco de Sóller** (Plaça de la Constitució s/n) is a still more daring effort, with two massive, circular galleries sticking out into the square. The windows are draped in lacy wrought-iron grills typical of the Modernistas.

The **Casal de Cultura** (☎ 971 631465; Carrer de Sa Mar 13; admission €2; ☎ 11am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-1pm Sat) museum is housed in an 18th-century house, Ca'n Mo, and contains a curious collection of old-time furniture, farm implements, a few works of art and all sorts of household objects from down the ages.

A wander down to the central **Mercat** (Market; Plaça del Mercat; ☎ 8am-1pm Mon-Sat) is interesting just to see locals going about their shopping business. Saturday is the best day.

A pleasant stroll (about 600m) west from the town centre brings you to the main road to Deià and the entrance to the peaceful **Jardí Botànic** (☎ 971 634014; www.jardibotanicdesoller.org; adult/child under 11yr €5/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun), with collections of flowers and other plants native to the Balearic islands, as well as samples from other Mediterranean areas.

At one end of the gardens is the **Museu Balear de Ciències Naturals** (☎ 971 634064; www.museocienciasnaturals.org), housed in a once private mansion surrounded by lemon groves.

Most visitors take a ride on one of Sóller's open-sided **trams**, which shuttle 2km down to Port de Sóller on the coast (€3). They depart from the train station every 30 minutes between 7am and 9pm.

Courses

Trabalenguas (☎ 971 635079; www.trabalenguas.net; Avinguda de Cristòfol Colom 3) offers Spanish courses at €165 for a week (20 hours).

Tours

Tramuntana Tours (☎ 971 632423; www.tramuntana-tours.com; Carrer de Sa Lluna 72) organises walking and mountain bike tours in the Serra de Tramuntana.

Festivals & Events

Around the second weekend of May, Sóller is invaded by a motley crew of Muslim pirates. This conflict (involving about 1200 townsfolk) between *pagesos* (town and country folk) and *Moros* (Moors), known as **Es Firó**, is full of good-humoured drama and not a little drinking. It re-enacts an assault on the town that was repulsed on 11 May 1561. The centrepiece of this event is remembered as **Ses Valentes Dones** (Valiant Women). Two sisters, instead of covering as corsairs barged into their house, took a heavy bar and proceeded to kill several of the pirates, thus contributing to the town's final victory.

Sleeping

You will find a variety of attractive hotels in historic buildings in and around Sóller.

BUDGET

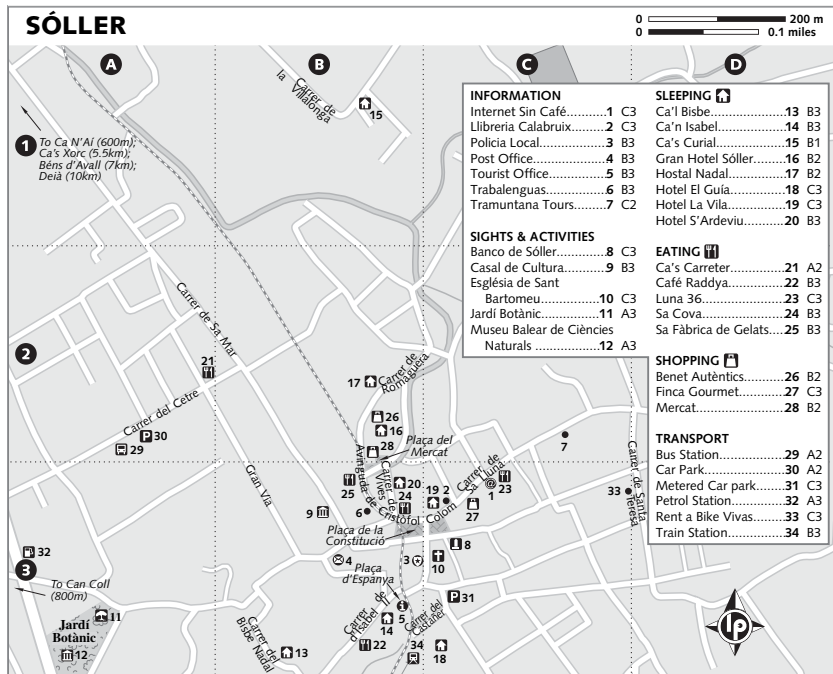
Hostal Nadal (☎ 971 631180; Carrer de Romaguera 27; s/d €23/36) It may be simple, but it's home, and about as cheap as it gets on the island. Rooms are basic but clean and there's a courtyard out the back to flop in after a day's hiking. It has even cheaper rooms without their own shower.

Hotel El Guia (☎ 971 630227; www.sollernet.com/elguia; Carrer del Castañer 2; s/d €51/79) Handily located beside the train station, this is a charming place to meet fellow walkers. Set in an 1880s house with an old well in the courtyard, it offers bright rooms featuring timber trims and modern bathrooms. The restaurant here does decent island cooking too.

MIDRANGE

Hotel La Vila (☎ 971 634641; www.lavilahotel.com; Plaça de la Constitució 14; s/d €72/99; ♿) Bang on the central square, this hotel offers a choice of four rooms looking over the square towards the mountains or another four with views of the garden in the rear. They are simple and clean, with polished tile floors, flat-screen TVs and elegant bathrooms.

Ca'l Bisbe (☎ 971 631228; www.hotelcalbisbe.com; Carrer del Bisbe Nadal 10; s/d €85/129; ♿) The bishop who once lived here would no doubt appreciate the addition of the pool in this nicely restored bishop's residence. Perhaps he would have snorted at the little gym. Some grand details (such as the stone arches and fireplaces) have remained intact and most of the 25 rooms have their own balcony.



Hotel S'Ardeviu (☎ 971 638326; www.sollernet.com/sardeviu; Carrer de Vives 14; s/d €95/120; ☞ Feb–Nov; ☞) Hidden down a lane in the centuries-old heart of the town, the seven rooms spread out over this cool stone house vary, some with bare stonework and others whitewashed. Most have exposed timber beams. Wander into the pretty garden, where breakfast is served.

Ca'n Isabel (☎ 971 638097; www.canisabel.com; Carrer de d'Isabel II 13; s/d €123/150; ☞ ☞) With just four rooms, this 19th-century house is a romantically decorated hideaway, with a garden out the back. The best (and dearest) of the fairly simple rooms comes with its own delightful terrace.

our pick Can Coll (☎ 971 633244; Camí de Can Coll 1; www.cancoll.com; s/d €145/180; ☞ ☞ ☞) Two kilometres west out of the town centre on a high point affording great views, this hotel is set in lemon groves and is something of a chillout zone. The nine spacious rooms are colour-themed by fruit (apple, peach, apricot etc) and decorated with a charming simplicity. Each has its own character. You can munch on the copious breakfast when and where you want.

Ca's Curial (☎ 971 633332; Carrer de La Villalonga 23; d €152-208; ☞ ☞ ☞) Barely out of the centre, this idyllically set hotel offers eight rooms, including three suites. Loll around in the grounds to the scent of the oranges or have a dip in the pool. It's hard to leave this sturdy stone *finca* to go visit anything!

Ca N'Ai (☎ 971 632494; www.canai.com; Camí de Son Sales 50; s/d €150/237; ☞ ☞ ☞) An impossibly romantic Mallorca *posseïssió* ensconced among generous orange groves (more than 5000 trees, they tell us), this place is a fragment of heaven on earth. You could come here just to dine. Take an outdoor table and enjoy – the Michelin folks did! And watch out for the winter specials.

TOP END

Gran Hotel Sóller (☎ 971 638686; www.granhotel.soller.com; Carrer de Romaguera 18; s/d from €192/321; ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞) As the name suggests, this is the big one: a five-star luxury getaway set in a late-19th-century mansion. The rooms are nice without being spectacular. What really makes the place is all the extras, from the gourmet restaurant to the neat ideas they sometimes have, like Chinese massages on the roof.

Eating

Sa Fàbrica de Gelats (Plaça des Mercat) This local ice-cream maker sells lickable treats all over the island. What better place to try one than on home ground? Tangy local oranges go into the orange-flavoured ice cream, a symbol of the town.

Sa Cova (☎ 971 633222; Plaça de la Constitució; meals €25; ☞ daily) Of the places on the main square, this is the best. Head inside the labyrinthine dining rooms for air-conditioned comfort in a rustic setting or sit on the crowded terrace to enjoy the night air and the almost constant clatter of passing scooters. The paellas and other rice dishes (€11 to €14) are generous.

Ca's Carreter (☎ 971 635133; Carrer del Centre 9; meals €25-30; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue–Sat, lunch Sun) Set in a leafy, corner cart workshop (founded in 1914), this is a cool and welcoming spot for modest local cooking, with fresh local fish, a couple of meat options and such specials as *calabacines rellenos de espinacas y pescado* (spinach- and fish-stuffed courgettes).

Luna 36 (☎ 971 634739; Carrer de Sa Lluna 36; meals €25-30; ☞ Mon–Sat) Mediterranean warmth meets urban chill in this tempting eatery. Ceiling fans slowly push the air around as you sit at your tiny round timber table, chatting over coffee. Or you might prefer the sunny courtyard for a plate of *pulpo al grill con tagliatelle de calamar* (grilled octopus with tagliatelle done with squid).

Café Raddya (☎ 971 630391; Carrer de d'Isabel II 23; meals €30; ☞ lunch & dinner Tue–Thu & Sat, dinner Fri & Sun; ☞) A leafy courtyard at the rear is the high point of this rambling house converted into a soothing restaurant. German-run, it works with a cool efficiency, bringing such classic Mediterranean dishes to your table as *cordero a la plancha con verduras y patatas* (grilled lamb with vegetables and potatoes).

Ca's Xorc (☎ 971 638280; www.casxorc.com; Carretera Sóller-Deià Km56.1; meals €45-60; ☞ Apr–Oct; ☞) Excellent island cooking with a restrained creative touch and generally brief if changing menus accompanies the fine views back over the Sóller valley. Fish of the day and goat cheese salad should be rounded off with a creamy *pannacotta*. This classic Mallorcan farmhouse-turned-hotel (12 suites) and restaurant is worth the 5km drive out of Sóller (or about a one-hour walk if you feel so inclined).

our pick Béns d'Avall (☎ 971 632381; www.bensdaval.com; Urbanització Costa Deià, Carretera Sóller-Deià; meals €70-90; ☞ Wed–Sun; ☞) Benet Vicens is one of

the island's foremost chefs. From Sóller, head 5km along the road to Deià. At about Km57, a sign points you 2km down a winding road to the restaurant, with its hopelessly romantic terrace overlooking the sea and surrounded by greenery. Avoid complex decisions and opt for the tasting menu (€78), with 10 scintillating courses, from prawn carpaccio in a champagne marinade to a foie gras and peach combo. The wine list is superlative, the service attentive and the sunset to die for.

Shopping

New shoes, old cheese, fine wine? You can find this and more on Sóller's modest approximation of Oxford St, Carrer de Sa Lluna.

Finca Gourmet (☎ 971 630253; www.fincagourmet.com; Carrer de Sa Lluna 16) This Mallorcan mansion has been converted into a den of sin for the palate, with all sorts of local food and wine products. The building itself invites a browse.

Benet Autèntics (☎ 971 638127; Carrer de Romaguera 20) Not content to feed folks his creative dishes in the restaurant he runs outside town, Benet Vicens also tempts us with delirious sweets and other *amuse-gueules*.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Less romantic but a little faster than the train to and from Palma is the bus. The 211 shoots up the Ma11 road to Sóller (€2.20, 30 minutes) 11 times a week (six to eight runs on weekends), and takes another five minutes to get down to Port Sóller. The 210 takes the long way to/from Palma (€3.30) via Deià and Valldemossa (€1.75, 40 to 50 minutes). Two daily buses run between Ca'n Picafort (on the east coast) and Port de Sóller from May to October (€9.10, 1¼ hours). A local service connects Sóller with Fornalutx (€1.10, 15 minutes) via Biniaraix. It runs four times a day Monday to Friday and twice on Saturdays.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Roads converge on Sóller from the south (the Ma11 from Palma via Bunyola and the tunnel), from the southwest (the Ma10 along the Serra de Tramuntana from Valldemossa) and from the northeast (the Ma10 from Polleña). When coming from Palma, you have the option of taking the tunnel (€4.25 toll per car and €1.70 per motorbike) or adding 7km to the trip and taking the switchbacks up to

the pass – with some great views back down towards Palma on the way.

TAXI

Taxis can be found near the train station. The fare to Palma is about €35, or €20 to €22 to Deià. The trip to Fornalutx is €7 to €10.

TRAIN

The Palma–Sóller train journey is a highlight. See p99.

Getting Around

Hire bicycles at **Rent a Bike Vivas** (☎ 971 630234, 654 110851; www.rentabikevivas.com; Carrer de Santa Teresa 20; racing bike per day €13). It has mountain bikes too. Tramuntana Tours (p121) also rents out mountain bikes.

WALKING TO FORNALUTX & THE BINIARAIX VALLEY

An easy wander for just about anyone and well worth the minimal effort is the 6.5km circuit from Sóller to Fornalutx and back via Biniaraix.

Start at Es Pont de Can Rave, a bridge in the northeast of Sóller about 100m east of the football pitch. This places you on the GR221 walking trail. Head north 100m along Carrer de ses Moncades and right along Camí de S'Ermita. This road rises gently; to the right you have lovely views across citrus groves, fig and carob stands to Sóller and the mountains. After 10 minutes, follow the GR221 signs for **Binibassi**, which you will hit within 15 minutes of starting the walk. Do not follow the GR221 signs for Biniaraix. Rather, on entering Binibassi, turn left up the steps and right through the gate marked Coto Privado de Caza. After the gate, wind up to the left (don't follow the Camino Particular). After a five-minute climb, follow the wooden signpost with an arrow pointing right along a dirt trail. Within another five minutes you will reach a Y-junction. Keep heading straight on this now smooth trail past almond terraces and the municipal cemetery. Almost immediately after, **Fornalutx** appears before you. The total walk from Sóller to here is around 30 to 40 minutes.

After lolling around in Fornalutx, walk along the main road past the Restaurant Bellavista. About 200m on, a sign on the left saying Sóller a Peu (Sóller on Foot), leads you down a shortcut that saves the trouble

is **El Pirata** (☎ 971 631497; Carrer de Santa Caterina d'Alexandria 8; ☎ noon-3am).

Rather different is the local kids' all-night hang-out, **St Tropez** (Carrer del Poeta Mossèn Costa i Llobera s/n; ☎ 10.30pm-4am Tue-Sun), good if you like pool, eardrum-rupturing music and adolescent hormones. For more of a mixed dance crowd, have a peak at **Discoteca Altamar** (Passeig Es Través; ☎ 1-6am). It ain't sophisticated, but it's the only club around.

Getting There & Away

Most buses to Sóller have their terminus in Port de Sóller. If driving, you must choose between going to the centre (take the tunnel) or the Platja d'en Repic side (follow the signs). For the tram to Sóller, see p121. There is talk of putting on a direct ferry from Barcelona from 2008. Several car-rental offices line Passeig Es Través.

BINIARAIX & FORNALUTX

From Sóller it's a pleasant 2km drive, pedal or stroll through narrow laneways to Biniaraix. From there, another narrow and scenic route continues north to Fornalutx, through terraced groves crowded with orange and lemon trees. This walk (as you will see on p123) can also be done with several variants.

Biniaraix is a quiet hamlet (that started life as an Arab *alqueria* or farmstead) with a shady central square, Plaça de Sa Concepció. **Fornalutx**, probably another *alqueria*, is a pretty village of distinctive stone houses with green shutters, colourful flower boxes, well-kept gardens and flourishing citrus groves. Many are owned by expats but it's a far cry from the (comparative) bustle of Sóller. These are the kinds of places people dream about and that lured the ilk of Peter Kerr to live on the island (his trials and tribulations settling in to Mallorca feature in his travel humour tomes *Snowball Oranges*, *Mañana Mañana* and *Viva Mallorca!*).

Wander the lanes around the central Plaça d'Espanya and pop into the **Ajuntament** (Town Hall; Carrer des Vicari Solivellas 1), with its cool courtyard dominated by a palm tree. Outside, water gurgles cheerfully along one of several irrigation channels. You can follow the course of the town stream east past fine houses and thick greenery, or climb the stairs heading north out of the town from the Església de la Nativitat de Nostra Senyora.

A delightfully converted former convent just off the main street, **Fornalutx Petit Hotel**

(☎ 971 631997; www.fornalutxpetithotel.com; Carrer de l'Alba 22; s/d €78/142; P ☎ ☎) is a friendly, tranquil place to stay with a half-dozen rooms and a couple of suites. The common areas glow with the warmth of terracotta floors and stonework. Room décor is mostly sober white but soothing. The Sa Capelleta (Little Chapel) suite is aptly named – it is a dreamy cream-coloured Gothic love nest. Have a snooze in the garden hammock, relax in the sauna or just gaze over the orchards from the pool terrace or Jacuzzi.

Ca'n Reus (☎ 971 631174; www.canreushotel.com; Carrer de l'Alba 26; d €120-160; P ☎ ☎) A couple of doors down from the Petit, this place is equally tempting for a romantic escape. The British-owned country mansion was built by a certain Mr Reus, who got rich on the orange trade with France. The eight rooms are all quite different and all have views.

Choose from four restaurants and a handful of cafés in Fornalutx. Two of the former, each with shady roadside terraces and views of the orchards below and mountains to the south, lie about half a kilometre out of the centre on the Ma2121 road leading northeast out of town.

our pick **Ca N'Antuna** (☎ 971 633068; Carrer de Arbona Colom 8; meals €35-40; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) is a classic of Mallorca cooking. They do a bubbling cauldron of *caldereta de llagosta* (a thick lobster stew) or a vegetable version of the same thing, but are locally famous for their oven-cooked lamb and other meats. The hand juicer on the sill connecting the kitchen with the terrace is a nice touch – order up lots of local orange juice!

Also good for sweeping views and popular with locals is **Bellavista** (☎ 971 631590; Carrer de Sant Bartomeu 26; meals €30; ☎ lunch & dinner Thu-Sat & Mon-Tue, lunch Sun), which is good for simple grilled fish and a handful of hearty meat dishes.

Café Sa Plaça (☎ 971 631921; Plaça d'Espanya 3; ☎ Wed-Mon) is a great spot for coffee, ice cream or snacks on the main square. A trio of other options stretches just off the square along Carre de Sa Plaça.

See Sóller (p123) for details of the occasional bus service to Fornalutx.

ROAD FROM SÓLLER TO ALARÓ

A nice driving route suggests itself south of Sóller. Climb the valley into the hills (don't take the tunnel) and enjoy the views to Palma as you follow the switchbacks on the other side.

First stop is the roundabout at the bottom of the hill, where you could visit the enchanting **Jardins d'Alfàbia** (☎ 971 613123; Carretera de Sóller Km17; admission €4.50; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat Nov-Mar). The endearingly crumbly *possessió* with the baroque façade (which looks like it was stripped from a Florentine basilica) is surrounded by gardens, citrus groves, palm trees and a handful of farmyard animals. There is a shady bar amid this mini-Eden.

The murmur of water gurgling along narrow irrigation canals gives a hint of the place's past, for it began as the residence of an Arab Wāli. The water comes from a generous underground source not far from the house in the Serra d'Alfàbia mountain range (maximum altitude 1069m) that stretches east. Of the original Arab house, virtually nothing remains but the extraordinary polychromatic, pyramidal *artesonado* (coffered ceiling), fashioned of pine and ilex, immediately inside the building's entrance. It is bordered by inscriptions in Arabic and is thought to have been made around 1170, although dispute persists as to whether it was made before or after the Christian conquest. From here you enter an inner courtyard. To the right is the *tafona* (large oil press that was typically a part of any self-respecting *possessió*) and a mix of Gothic, Renaissance and baroque styles. The rambling house is laden with period furniture and an extensive library.

Bunyola

About 2.5km south of the Jardins d'Alfàbia and just east of the highway to Palma lies this drowsy transport junction, known for olive oil and its Palo (herbal liquor) distillery. There's not an awful lot to hold you here, except for a slice of Mallorcan village life in the central square, Sa Plaça, with its single bar. Next to the square is the **Església de Sant Mateu** (☎ 629 310849; Carrer de l'Església 2), built in 1230 but largely redone in 1756.

S'Alqueria Blanca (☎ 971 148400; www.alqueria-blanca.com; s/d €120/160; ☎ Jan-Nov; P ☎ ☎) is a majestic country residence in sprawling grounds about 2km west of Bunyola, with six rooms (three doubles and three suites). The oldest buildings formed the Arab *alqueria* and now house these rooms. A whimsical Modernista building was added in 1906 (now the breakfast room). If travelling north from Palma along the Ma11, the turn-off west is

at Km13.6 and it's about 700m further down the trail.

Three bar-restaurants surround the church on Carrer de l'Església, but perhaps you'd prefer to look into **Restaurant Es Carreró** (☎ 971 615440; Carrer Major 17; meals €45; ☎ daily), a few metres east of the square. Take a seat on the romantic roof terrace and tuck into a *filete de dorada en mantequilla de alcaparras y anchoas con espinacas y puré de patatas* (bream fillet in a caper and anchovy butter with spinach and mashed potato).

Three kilometres south of town on the road to Palma, a turn-off west leads to one of Mallorca's grandest *possessions*, **Raixa**. It was restored in 2007 and will house an environmental centre and natural park organisations. Eventually it will also open to the public, but this depends on how long it takes to restore the extensive gardens.

Orient

A treat comes in the 9km road (the Ma2100) northeast from Bunyola to the hamlet of Orient. Nice enough by car, it is a fave with bike riders (in reasonable shape!). The first 5km is a promenade along a verdant valley that slowly rises to a bit of a plain before tumbling over the other side of a forested ridge. The next 2km of serried switchbacks flatten out on the run into Orient. All the way, the Serra d'Alfàbia is in sight to the north.

Orient is a huddle of ochre houses clustered nervously on a slight rise south off as in afterthought on the north side of the road.

our pick **Finca Son Palou** (☎ 971 148282; www.sonpalou.com; Plaça de l'Església s/n; s/d €129/150; P ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Climb up Carrer de Sant Jordi to the church of the same name and this quiet village mansion with restaurant. On its 150-hectare land around the town, you can watch the harvesting of apples and cherries, and go for walks and mountain bike jaunts. Rooms have a rustic simplicity, with bucolic terracotta floor tiles, timber furnishings and, in some cases, exposed beams. The better rooms have a terrace.

Barely a breath away is **Mandala** (☎ 971 615285; Carrer Nou 1; meals €45-55; ☎ lunch Tue-Thu & Sun, lunch & dinner Fri & Sat Oct-Apr, dinner Mon-Sat May-Sep), a boutique French fusion restaurant that is highly regarded and requires booking. By the road, **Dalt Muntanya** (☎ 971 615373; www.daltmuntanya.net; s/d €60/100; P ☎ ☎ ☎) is another

rural retreat, with 18 rooms, restaurant, bar and pool surrounded by greenery. Just 1.5km east of the hamlet stands **L'Hermitage** (☎ 971 180303; www.hermitage-hotel.com; s/d €120/189; ☹ Feb-Nov; P ☹ ☹), a 17th-century country manor that in 1950 was converted into a small monastery. It now offers 24 rooms, shady gardens and a good if somewhat fiscally demanding restaurant. All of this, however, is a little precious for islanders, who flood instead to **Ca'n Jaume** (☎ 971 615153; meals €20-30; ☹ Wed-Mon), a roadside diner that offers as house speciality succulent suckling pig for €16 a head. Follow this with chocolate profiteroles. It's a knockabout place on the left as you enter town coming from Bunyola, with a dozen tables outside and the radio and TV both blaring in rowdy unison inside.

Ancient history buffs might like to follow a narrow road about 2.5km northeast of Orient to the *possessió* of **Comasema**, an imposing, fortified farmhouse complex. About another 500m inside this property is a circular *talayot*. You need to ask permission to walk in to see it and this may not be forthcoming.

Alaró

As the Ma2100 rises away from Orient, surrounded by cypresses and gardens, you could be forgiven for thinking you're in Tuscany. The road meanders about 4km northeast before taking a leisurely turn around the out-riders of the mighty bluff that is **Puig d'Alaró** (821m). This rocky peak is matched to the east by **Puig de S'Alcadena** (815m). To the south you can make out the flat interior of Es Pla (The Plain). About halfway between Orient and Alaró, you could call it a day at the remote rural town, **S'Olivaret** (☎ 971 510889; www.solivaret.com; s/d €132/184; P ☹ ☹). You can't get too much further out of the way and this is a country idyll. Rooms are generally spacious and some have four-poster beds. It has tennis courts, art on the walls and an indoor pool too.

Eight kilometres from Orient, you arrive in **Alaró**. Head for Plaça de la Vila, flanked by the Casa de la Vila (town hall), parish church and a couple of cafés, and the busier junction of Carrer Petit and Carrer de Jaume Rosselló, with a couple of lively cafés. Alaró makes a pleasant if uneventful spot to stay overnight. **Hostal Ecològic Ca'n Tiu** (☎ 971 510547; www.hostalcantiu.com; Carrer Petit 11; s/d/tr €30/50/60; ☹ ☹ ☹) is a pleasant spot that tries to minimise its

environmental impact (this will include use of solar energy in the future). Guests who arrive by bicycle get 5% off and it has plenty of info on local routes. The 10 rooms are pleasant and fresh, with 100% cotton bed linen. A classier establishment is the central **Hotel Can Xim** (☎ 971 518680; www.canxim.com; Plaça de la Vila 8; s/d €80/100; ☹ ☹ ☹). The eight double rooms are spacious and light, and the hotel restaurant, **Traffic** (meals €35) has a certain local renown for its beef dishes. Those wanting a no-nonsense rural-style getaway could do worse than the **Agroturisme Son Penyaflor** (☎ 971 510071; www.sonpenyaflor.com; per person €49; P ☹), about 1.5km out of town on the road to Castell d'Alaró. Surrounded by oak stands and almond trees, this place offers a series of seven smallish and simple singles and doubles, 12 beds in all. You can rent the entire 12 beds for €36 per person, and the price drops further if you take the place for periods of two days, a week or a month. There are cooking facilities.

A weekly market is staged in Alaró on Saturdays.

From the entrance to the Agroturisme Son Penyaflor, you can see, perched at an improbable, Monty Pythonesque angle, the **Castell d'Alaró**, high up and imperious on the mount of the same name. This excursion is worth the sweat but if the two-hour walk doesn't appeal, you can cover most of the climb by car. The first 3km of switchbacks are asphalted. The next 1.2km is a dirt trail but OK. It leads you to the **Restaurant Es Verger** (☎ 971 182126; Camí des Castell; meals €20-25; ☹ 9am-10pm), a simple place for hearty dishes (they do especially good suckling pig) and good views.

The road continues in poor but driveable state (not after rain) another 1.2km to a parking area at the base of a path that leads (in 15 minutes) to the ruins of what was an impregnable castle. Christian warriors could only be starved out of this redoubt by Muslim conquerors around the year 911, eight years after the latter had invaded the island. Several stone arched doors and parts of the walls of what was clearly a major fortress remain today. You can see Palma, the sea, the Badia d'Alcúdia, the plains and Puig Major. Another minute's walk further uphill brings you to the **Ermita de la Mare de Déu del Refugi**, a 17th-century, fly-infested chapel that locals still visit to give thanks for miraculous events. The **Refugi S'Hostatgeria** (☎ 971 182112), is being renovated and should be ready from 2008 for

people who wish to sleep overnight. They have been working on it for several years and much of the building material was lifted by helicopter. How on earth did medieval Mallorquins build the great stone fortress? The snack bar offers three rooms with four beds each (bring your sleeping bag) at €12 a head. You can get sandwiches and drinks in the bar, open from 9am to 11pm.

Getting There & Away

Buses and trains running between Palma and Sóller stop at Bunyola (the bus stop is at Sa Plaça, and the train station a short walk west of the centre). From there local bus 221 runs twice a day east to Orient (€1.10, 30 minutes). This is a microbus service and you need to book a seat in advance (☎ 971 615219).

The Palma-Inca train calls at the Consell-Alaró train station (20 to 30 minutes), where it connects with local bus 320 for Alaró (15 minutes).

CALA DE SA CALOBRA & CALA TUENT

The Ma10 road from Sóller to the Monestir de Lluc is a beautiful drive. The first stop is the **Mirador de Ses Barques**, with restaurant (recommended by locals, closed Monday) and spectacular views, about 6km out of Sóller. The road unravels eastward to cross the Serra de son Torrella range, and at 16km out of Sóller a side road leads north up to the island's highest point, Puig Major. You can't take it, however, as this is Air Force territory and topped by a communications base.

The Ma10 slithers past two artificial patches of liquid blue, the Cúber and Gorg Blau dams. Shortly after the latter, a 12km road branches north off Ma10 and down to the small port of **Sa Calobra**. It was completed in 1935 with the sole aim of allowing tourists to reach the beach by land. You know what they say: it is

better to travel than to arrive. Nothing could be truer of this spectacular scenic drive. The serpentine road has been carved through the weird mountainous rock formations, skirting narrow ridges before twisting down to the coast in an eternal series of hair-raising hairpin bends.

If you come in summer you won't be alone. Divisions of buses and fleets of pleasure boats disgorge battalion after battalion of tireless tourists. It makes D-Day look like play-lunch. Sa Calobra must be wonderful on a quiet, bright midwinter morning. From the northern end of the road a short trail leads around the coast to a river gorge, the **Torrent de Pareis**, and a small cove with fabulous (but usually crowded) swimming spots.

Skip the crowd scenes and, 2km before arriving, follow a turn-off west for **Cala Tuent**, a tranquil emerald-green inlet in the shadow of Puig Major. The broad pebble beach is backed by a couple of houses and a great green bowl of vegetation that climbs up the mountain flanks. About 200m back from the beach, a turn-off leads 1.5km to **Es Vergeret** (☎ 971 517105; Camí de Sa Figuera Vial 21; meals €25-30; ☹ Feb-Oct), where the shady terrace looks from on high to the bay below and hearty servings of paella, *tumbet* (vegetable stew) and other dishes can be had. They are especially known for their grilled fish.

One bus a day (bus 355, Monday to Saturday, May to October) comes from Ca'n Picafort (9am) via Alcúdia, Cala Sant Vicenç, Pollença and the Monestir de Lluc. It returns at 3pm. The whole trip takes three hours 50 minutes to Sa Calobra (with a one-hour stop at the Monestir de Lluc) and 2½ hours on the return leg. From Ca'n Picafort you pay €7.60 (€15 return). Boats make excursions to Sa Calobra and Cala Tuent from Port de Sóller (see p125).

SLIPPERY DROPS

For those with a taste for jumping into ravines and streams, canyoning could be the sport for you. The best places for this are concentrated in the central Serra de Tramuntana between Vall-de-mossa and Sa Calobra. By far the most challenging (rated 5-6, for experts only) is the Gorg Blau-Sa Fosca canyon, descending north and then northeast from the dam of the same name. This 2.5km route (there and back) is tough. The drops and scrambling are accompanied constantly by freezing water and there is a 400m stretch in total darkness. Instead of turning back, you could continue north 3.3km along Torrent de Pareis, a much easier route surrounded by majestic rock walls. Either way, a local guide is essential. One group of guides to contact is **Mallorca Canyoning** (☎ 691 230291; www.mallorcacanyoning.com).

MONESTIR DE LLUÇ & AROUND

Back in the 13th century, a local shepherd claimed to have seen an image of the Virgin Mary in the sky. Later, a similar image appeared on a rock. Another story says that a statuette of the Virgin was found here and taken to the nearest hamlet, Escorca. The next day it was back where it had been found. Three times it was taken to Escorca and three times it returned. 'It's a miracle', everyone cried and a chapel was built near the site to commemorate it, possibly around 1268. The religious sanctuary came later. Since then thousands of pilgrims have come every year to pay homage to the 14th-century (and thus not the original) **statue of the Virgin of Lluç**, known as La Moreneta because of the statuette's dark complexion.

The present monastery, the **Monestir de Lluç** (☎ 971 871525; www.lluc.net; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-8pm), a huge austere complex, dates mostly from the 17th to 18th centuries. The word *monestir* (monastery) is a little misleading as the order of Sacred Heart Missionaries that run it are not, strictly speaking, monks.

Off the central courtyard is the entrance to the rather gloomy, late-Renaissance **Basilica de la Mare de Déu** (built in 1622-91 and bearing mostly baroque decoration), which contains a fine *retablo* done by Jaume Blanquer in 1629, and the statuette of the Virgin Mary. There is also a **museum** (admission €3.30; 🕒 10am-1.30pm & 2.30-5pm) with archaeological bits and bobs, religious objects, ceramics and a modest art collection in eight rooms on a 1st-floor wing just before you reach the basilica.

Outside, the modest **Jardí Botànic** (botanic garden) is worth a stroll, as is the climb up to the **Pujol dels Misteris**, a hill topped by a crucifix whose base is enveloped in barbed wire. Forget the cross and enjoy the lovely valley views behind it.

You might get lucky and hear the Els Escolanets (also known as Els Blauets, the Little Blues, because of the soutane they wear), the monastery's boarding school boys' choir. This institution dates to the early 16th century.

A couple of popular walking routes leave from the monastery. One is a four-hour circuit of **Puig de Massanella** (1365m), in the course of which the landowners will charge you €4. The other is the seven-hour **Puig Roig** (1002m) circuit, a long walk with plenty of ups and downs (but you don't ascend the peak). You can only do this on Sundays, when the landowners open the barriers. Ask for information at **Ca s'Amitger** (☎ 971 517070; 🕒 9am-4pm), a wilderness information office opposite the entrance to the monastery grounds.

Sleeping & Eating

Hospederia del Santuari de Lluç (☎ 971 871525; s/d from €13.50/23.50) The monastery's accommodation section has 97 rooms (of all sizes and some with kitchen access), and is popular with school groups, walkers and pilgrims. The downstairs rooms are dark and best avoided. It is also possible to pitch a tent about 600m from the monastery near the Ma10 road. Get permits from **Ca s'Amitger**.

Several restaurants and cafeterias cater to your tummy's demands. The **Son Amer refuge**, about 1km south of the monastery up the hill along the Ma10, was still not open at the time of writing.

Getting There & Away

Up to two buses a day (May to October) run from Ca'n Picafort to the Monestir de Lluç (€5.25, 1¼ hours) on their way to Sóller and Port Sóller. From Palma, two all-stops buses (bus 330) to Inca continue to Lluç via Caimari on weekends only (or take the train to Inca and change to bus 332). By road, the Ma10 from Sóller or Pollença is a scenic pleasure. A less common approach (if coming from Palma or the south) is via Inca and north up the Ma2130 road via Caimari. The 7km from Caimari are a treat, taking you high through woods and two ravines to reach the Ma10, where you turn right for Pollença (you reach the monastery turn-off after 2km).

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