

TRAVEL



THREE-STAR
HOTELS WITH
WOW FACTOR
P.13

LAVA LOVE

A summer break in Iceland? Your family will warm to it

P.5

ON A BUDGET

See Germany by rail without breaking the bank

P.7



GAME CHANGER

My mindful safari adventure in a vintage Land Rover

P.8



A MEAL WITH A VIEW

Savour the world's most spectacular dining destinations

P.10



Blazing paddles: explore Nova Scotia's islands by kayak

Why it's time to do Canada differently

With a surge in bookings to hotspots such as Toronto and Lake Louise, seize the opportunity to venture off the beaten track this summer, says Tim Jepson

Let's assume you understand the appeal of Canada: the majestic landscapes (mountains, fjords, forests, glaciers); the plethora of outdoor activities; the lure of the open road; the extraordinary wildlife; the scenic rail journeys; and the range of buzzing, contemporary cities.

Knowing this, why would you want to get off the beaten track? Surely, in a country of this size and scenic

grandeur, where wilderness and wide-open spaces prevail, pretty much everywhere is off the beaten track?

Well, yes and no. Like any country, Canada has its busy spots – places you and everyone else wants to see – and tours and activities in which far too many want to indulge: the Canadian Rockies (top of the list, of course), the honey pots of Banff and Lake Louise, along with Niagara Falls, Whistler for

winter sports, and the world-class cities of Vancouver and Toronto.

This summer, more than ever, Canada's hotspots are under pressure. UK tour operators report a surge in bookings, coinciding with larger than usual numbers of Canadian and American travellers who, post-pandemic, have chosen to holiday close to home. The result is a shortage of accommodation, hire cars and campervans.

Be flexible around dates, if you can, is the operators' advice and, more to the point, this year or any year, look beyond the usual destinations to get under the country's skin. The same goes for types of holiday – why always the same rail journeys through the Rockies or trips to predictable, oversubscribed spots for polar bear or whale-watching? And why only in summer when autumn colours in the forests of eastern Canada,

for example, are the equal of their New England counterparts?

We're not saying avoid Canada's highlights – nobody wants to miss the Rockies – but rather consider them as part of a less predictable itinerary, or plump for some of the quieter but equally glorious alternatives we have highlighted on the following pages.

Continued on Page 2



HOW TO SPEND A WEEKEND IN PALMA

BY: Anna Nicholas, destination expert
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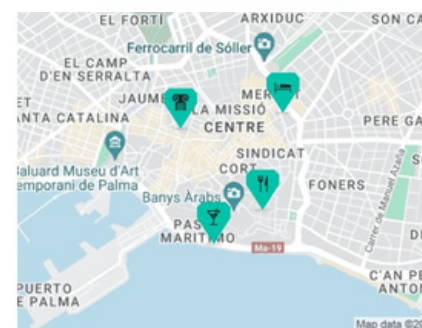
With a dramatic and turbulent history harking back to the Bronze Age, Palma has had its fair share of invasions – from the Romans and Vandals to the Moors and Christians. So it's hardly surprising that this perky, perfectly formed city has such a welcoming and grown-up attitude to international visitors. With the glistening Mediterranean Sea at its feet, this effortlessly accessible capital offers a delicious melting pot of cultures and historic influences. Whether in the cobbled streets of the atmospheric old town, or in the heart of the grand plaças, impressive monuments, museums, galleries and churches of Gothic splendour abound. Edgy districts happily rub shoulders with more traditional and exclusive neighbourhoods, while a vibrant food and shopping scene weaves its magic across the city. So much to do, so little time? Head for a seafront café, breathe the air, relax and enjoy that first sip of ruby red Majorcan wine.

Explore our interactive map below for all the local highlights, and scroll down for our suggested day-by-day summary of the best things to see and do...



**Where to eat,
sleep, drink
and explore**

[Launch the map](#)



Day One

Morning

Start the day at landmark La Seu cathedral, which looms above the city walls, and admire the shimmering Parc de Mar Lake below. Don't miss the quirky re-design of St Peter's Chapel by artist Miguel Barceló, before heading to neighbouring Almudaina Palace. There's some exploring to be done at this gothic masterpiece, but on a sticky day, take respite in the King's Orchard, a smaller version of Granada's Generalife water garden.

Now stroll up the leafy Borne, once a river in the 17th century, and turn right onto Carrer de la Unió towards Plaça de Weyler. Here, feast your eyes on The Gran Hotel, a modernist masterpiece created by acclaimed Catalan architect, Lluís Domènech i Montaner, in 1903. Refurbished by La Caixa Forum, it is now a vibrant arts and cultural centre. Return to Jaime III and take a right turn onto Carrer de la Concepció for Fera restaurant where you can enjoy a glass of delicious wine and choice of exceptional Mediterranean-Asian tasting menus by renowned chef, Simon Petutsching. For more suggestions of where to eat in Palma, see our guide.

Afternoon

Walk off lunch along Jaime III, home of the famed El Corte Inglés department store and various chic boutiques. From there, cross over to trendy Sant Nicolas, a labyrinth of stylish shops, before continuing to Plaça Santa Eulàlia in the Calatrava historic quarter, with its medieval cobbled streets, exquisite patios, bijoux palaces and renaissance architecture.

Bear left on the far side of Santa Eulàlia Church and take time out at Ca'n Joan de S'Aigo, Palma's oldest and most cherished café, for a snail-shaped ensaïmada pastry and refreshing cup of tea. On your departure, pass the magnificent Plaça Sant Francesc and church (pop in if the fancy takes you), and cut through the lean streets to quaint Santa Clara Convent, where you'll need to ring a bell to buy the sisters' delicious lemon biscuits.



Late

Aim for Santa Catalina, a five-minute taxi journey from the centre, or walk through La Lonja old town area towards Santa Catalina, just 15 minutes away on foot. If you're on a budget, stop here at Café Sa Lonja for good-value tapas on the terrace. Otherwise, head on and enjoy dinner at svelte and urban Vandal, where an Argentinian chef and sommelier duo conjure up a world menu of bold and inventive dishes, expertly matched with local and international wines.

After dinner, take a fun two-minute stroll through this buzzing enclave with its village feel, lively bars, stores and cafés, and enjoy a welcome cocktail or hierbes local liqueur at rooftop Sky Bar at Hotel Hostal Cuba. Here you can enjoy mesmerising views over the Bay of Palma on the lovely rooftop terrace, while enjoying a relaxing and welcoming ambience.

Day Two

Morning

The city's bustling Olivar market is a wonder to behold and it's a pleasure to browse the halls of seafood, fruit and vegetables and observe locals bargaining with stallholders.

From here, stroll up to majestic Plaça Mayor, surprisingly, for 300 years the seat of the Spanish inquisition, and head for Plaça de Cort with its 600-year-old olive tree and medieval town hall. Stop here for a coffee or fresh orange juice, perhaps at Café Cappuccino before weaving through the pedestrian cut-throughs to El Borne.

Cross over to Calle Sant Feliu and head for Es Baluard museum to view its eclectic collection of neoclassical, abstract and modernist art. Have a snack lunch in the alfresco café on the rear patio surrounded by modern sculptures, and enjoy the spectacular views over the city walls to Palma bay. For more recommendations of things to do in the city, see our separate guide.

Afternoon

Jump in a taxi and drive a few kilometres from the city centre to Bellver Castle, which sits aloft a peaceful wooded hill overlooking the Bay of Palma. Dating from the 14th century, it is the only circular castle in Spain and one of few in Europe. Allow for an hour's visit, as there is a courtyard, museum and historic kitchen worth seeing, and then hop in a taxi and set off for the Joan Miró Foundation in Cala Major, just a five-minute drive away.

Here you'll find a vast display of the prolific artist's works, including paintings, sculptures and ceramics. Meanwhile, the artist's re-imagined studio and home give an authentic feel to the estate. Enjoy a coffee in the grounds after exploring the fragrant gardens.



Late

Head to Calle Sant Feliu for dinner at De Tokio a Lima on the spectacular, candlelit roof terrace of Boutique Hotel Can Alomar. Offering a fusion of Peruvian, Japanese and Mediterranean gastronomy, this stylish eatery sets a mellow and relaxing tone, and staff members extend a warm welcome to customers. A good selection of wines and tapas sharing plates are offered so there's no need to break the bank. The location is particularly special with sweeping views of El Borne and the giant plane trees flanking it, as well as the city's lights. For a postprandial treat, pop along the same street to enduring local favourite, Café Atlantico, for chilled music and innovative cocktails such as the Smoky Storm, a heady blend of rum, cinnamon and chocolate. For more suggestions of where to drink in the city, see our bar guide.

Insider tips

Attraction

A good way to avoid the crowds at Bellver Castle is to arrive at a historic sight during the lunchtime and siesta period (normally sometime between 1pm and 4pm), or shortly before the attraction closes. The advantage is that you face fewer queues and crowds and have more breathing space to admire the exhibits on show. Just remember to pack a water bottle and your shades.

City hack

Surf the Palma bus routes and avoid the capital's stressful traffic and parking problems with an easy to use pre-paid card that costs €10 (£8.60) for 10 rides. You can buy the card at the central bus station off Plaça Espanya or from many newspaper kiosks across the city.



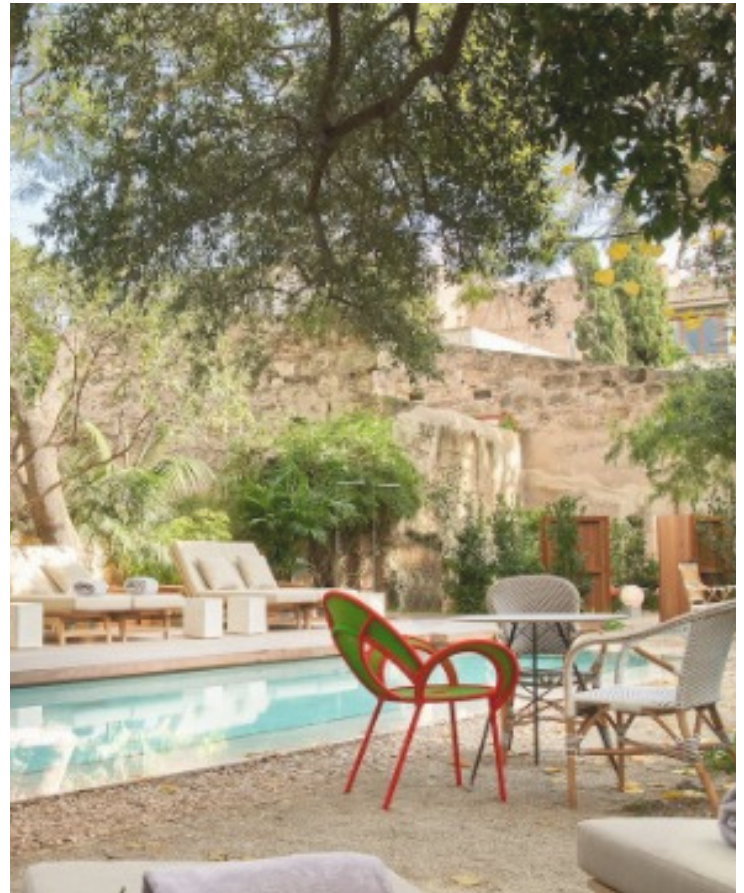
Neighborhood watch

Don't miss sea-facing Santa Catalina, the chilled district that was once home to fishermen weaving their nets. Aside from possessing the oldest market in Palma, built in 1920, and Teatr Mar I Terra, an innovative theatre, it's a magnet for eclectic international restaurants, businesses and designer boutiques. Drop into La Madeleine de Proust for pastries and coffee.

Hotel

Can Bordoy Grand House & Garden

has the largest private garden in Palma, perfect for coffee, lunch or dinner. One can sit here and listen to birdsong with a cunningly brewed coffee while tucking into a pastry from Forn de la Gloria, the oldest bakery in Palma that happily supplies the hotel with its goodies.



Did you know?

During the 17th century a dragon allegedly gobbled up Palma's citizens by night until Captain Coch, governor of Alcudia at the time, happened upon it and killed the beast. In reality it was an escaped crocodile from a ship in the port and had survived in the sewers. It was later embalmed and is exhibited in the Diocesan museum today.

