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THE SUNDAY TIMES

# Palma beats the world

It tops our list of places to live — and Mallorca's capital makes a great weekend, too

Paul Richardson Published: 22 March 2015



Spanish steps: Palma's casco viejo is a warren of narrow streets and winding stairways (Getty)

Yet this new glamour has not essentially altered the traditional rhythm of a Spanish Mediterranean city: the busy food markets, the open-air terrazas for lazing and grazing, the evening paseo under the high trees of Passeig del Born, a kind of Ramblas in miniature.

Location is all, and Palma's peerless setting at the centre of a glorious sweeping bay counts for a lot. The city even has its own beaches (one with a cool bar, Puro Beach) and a working harbour, where a state-of-the-art new marina, Moll Vell, has brought back the locals to stroll and gawp at the giant yachts.

From down here at the water's edge, the *casco viejo*, a jumble of golden stone with churches and palaces jostling as if for a better view, is crowned by the magnificence of Palma's 14th-century cathedral in its commanding position on the old sea wall. The soaring interior, held up by the slenderest of columns, makes it one of the most spectacular buildings in Spain.

Palma has neither too much nor too little of anything. With a population of about 425,000, it's big enough for a touch of urban buzz, but small enough to retain a slow-paced charm. There is one really good museum — the Miro Foundation, where the Catalan painter's masterpieces are perfectly accommodated in a modernist pavilion that was also his studio and home ([miro.palmademallorca.es](http://miro.palmademallorca.es)) — and a contemporary art scene that fizzes with life.

For the Nit de l'Art, in September, the city's 40-odd galleries throw open their doors in a brilliant nocturnal artfest. It's the annual event that residents most keenly look forward to ([nitdelartpalma.com](http://nitdelartpalma.com)).

For the best panoramic views of Palma Bay, you'll need to take a taxi up to Bellver Castle — stopping on the harbourside for a quick look at Sa Llotja, the graceful 15th-century exchange. That said, like all the world's most liveable places, this is a walking city.

I hesitate to say it, but... I told you so. For years I've argued that Palma de Mallorca is the finest little town in Spain. And now this newspaper's Home section has come to the conclusion that Palma is the best place in the world in which to live.

Very sensible — but what makes Palma good for a long stay makes it great for a short one. Just a two-hour hop from the UK and 10 minutes from Mallorca airport, the Balearic capital (of both the island and the archipelago) is nothing if not accessible. Yet it manages to keep something back, a whiff of exclusivity that the *guiris* miss in their sangria-fuelled rush for the resorts of Magaluf and Arenal.

For decades this was a provincial city in both the literal and derogatory senses of the term. The glorious old town had fallen into disrepair and there was nowhere decent to stay. Then, at the turn of the 21st century, came the upswing. Cute little hotels began opening. Within a few years, Palma had great restaurants, cocktail bars and a raft of fancy shops — none of them fancier than the divine Rialto Living, a Swedish-run concept store where I have often thought of taking up residence myself ([rialtoliving.com](http://rialtoliving.com)).



Por que no? There's always a good reason to stop for tapas in Palma

great shopping, good food and wine, a thoroughly civilised Iberian vibe... and down the road, there's a beach where you can nurse a big G&T with your feet in the warm sand. No wonder Palma takes the palm.

### NEED TO KNOW

island's take on the pizza; and sobrasada, a pimenton-spiced sausage— but Mallorca was never renowned for its gastronomy. In recent years, though, Palma has undergone a quiet culinary revolution.

The best restaurant in town is presided over by a chef from Kent — Marc Fosh, who has just won a Michelin star for his Mediterranean brasserie, Simply Fosh (set lunch £17pp; [simplyfosh.com](http://simplyfosh.com)).

Sharing plates and tapas are the order of the day at the speakeasy-style restaurant at Hotel Cort; don't miss the artichokes with parmesan and tomato-rubbed "crystal bread" (dishes from £6; [hotelcort.com](http://hotelcort.com)). De Tokio a Lima, which has unbeatable terraces overlooking the tree-lined Born, makes inroads into east-west fusion territory (mains from £13; [boutiquehotelcanalomar.com](http://boutiquehotelcanalomar.com)).

For a casual refresher when you're shopping, stop for a glass of Mallorcan red at an under-the-radar wine bar, La Mirona (c/Sant Jaume 21); take a tapa of morcilla with pine nuts at Bodega Gaudeix ([gaudeixpalma.com](http://gaudeixpalma.com)); or sip a hot chocolate at the 300-year-old ice-cream parlour Ca'n Joan de s'Aigo ([www.canjoandesaiigo.webs-sites.com](http://www.canjoandesaiigo.webs-sites.com)).

#### Where to stay

You want the old town, naturally. The Hotel Sant Francesc, which opens this month, raises the bar here — it is superbly stylish, though the minimalism may be a little severe for some (doubles from £134; [hotelsantfrancesc.com](http://hotelsantfrancesc.com)).

The Brondo Architect is a designer dream of eclectic urbanity, and great value (doubles from £72, B&B, [brondoarchitect.com](http://brondoarchitect.com)). For a more traditional Mallorcan feel, try the still wonderful Can Cera (doubles from £142, B&B, [cancerahotel.com](http://cancerahotel.com)).

#### Getting there

There are direct flights to Palma from more than 20 British and Irish airports, with airlines including British Airways, easyJet, Flybe, Jet2, Monarch, Ryanair, Thomas Cook and Thomson.

A morning constitutional takes you along the seafront to the pretty harbour at Portixol: check out the former fishermen's cottages behind the beach, now the most desirable of residences. Or stick to the old town, where silent corridors beg to be explored on foot, occasionally dipping into second-hand bookshops such as El Bazar del Libro (c/Sant Crist 2), hipsterish fashion emporiums like Piel de Gallina (c/Brossa 7) and delis that specialise in local produce. Las Gracias, for example, stocks Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc, a superb artisan salt from the island's south ([lasgraciasmallorca.es](http://lasgraciasmallorca.es)).

Don't miss the markets. L'Olivar is up there with Valencia's Mercat Central and La Boqueria, in Barcelona, for bustling spectacle: this is a food market on a stratospheric level. The fish section, in particular, though not cheap, puts the dodgy counters of the UK to shame ([mercatolivar.com](http://mercatolivar.com)).

There's also Santa Catalina, over in the former fishing quarter of the same name, where bohemian incomers rub shoulders and shopping bags with middle-class Palmesanos who have been coming here for ever.

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#### Where to eat and drink

Yes, there are some notable local specialities — ensaimada, a sugar-dusted pastry whorl; coca, the

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**Zoila Ugland**

March 22, 2015 08:20

I love palma, specially the casco antiguo, old part, and love the tipical spanish baby lamb from mallorca its a delicatese, and the roast arctichoke, the best places to eat this is in the mountains of Mallorca Estileces, Inca has great tabernas, with tipical mallorca s food. found a great tipical mallorca n place in palma by plaza los patines, an old building . the beach is the nicers and clean waterin Calas around Mallorca stren is amazing white sand beach!!

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