

A WINTER IN MAJORCA

Ex-pat writer **Helen Baker** explains what first attracted her to Majorca – and why so many long-stay Bondholders return to Biniorella every autumn...

Palacio Real de l'Almudaina



Joan Miró

Tramuntana mountains



Majorca, the largest of the Balearic islands, is also one of the most majestic, with sweeping scenery from the coasts to the mountains, and architectural wonders steeped in history. The south-west of the island is no exception, and it's a popular destination for many tourists throughout the summer, with its lively fiestas, laid-back lifestyle and busy nightlife. But what is it like when the high season draws to a close and the hordes retreat? What does Majorca offer to the traveller looking for somewhere to escape the dark of the British winter?

Unlike the writer Aurora Dupin (better known as George Sand), who wrote the book from which the title of this article is borrowed, I can guarantee that you will leave with a more generous opinion of this wonderful place than she did after her time here. She spent the winter of 1838–39 in Valldemossa with her daughter and the composer and pianist Frederick Chopin, and she was less than complimentary about her time on the island. However, as a now-permanent resident of the island, I can say with certainty that Majorca is the perfect winter retreat, with something for everyone: from the peace and quiet of the Spanish countryside to the hustle and

bustle of the nearby city of Palma.

The neighbouring regions of Andratx and Calvià are nestled into the south-western tip of the island, and sit at the foot of the impressive Tramuntana mountain range as it rises up and begins its long march northwards. Between them, they form the hub of the British community in Majorca, enveloping the inland towns of Andratx, s'Arracó, sa Coma, Calvià and es Capdellà, with the coastal towns of Puerto de Andratx, Sant Elm, Camp de Mar, Santa Ponsa, Palma Nova and Magaluf dipping their toes into the beautiful Mediterranean sea.

Winter is a popular time for many people to visit this very accessible area of the island, with the cooler weather making it possible to enjoy activities, from hiking to shopping, that are normally stifled by the intense heat of summer. By British winter standards, it is remarkably mild although it can get cold (pack a jumper or two): temperatures sometimes reach as high as 23 degrees in October, or as low as 12 degrees in December and January.

While the bars and restaurants within the towns and villages remain open to cater for visitors and residents alike, most of the main resorts, such as Palma Nova, are very quiet, with many of the hotels closing between October and February. This has the obvious benefit of significantly quieter roads than at busier times of the year, creating a more pleasant experience on the island's winding, narrow roads, and allowing for a more relaxed exploration of the island's breathtaking geographical features.

Something for everyone, from hiking to golf

This is certainly one of the best times of year to explore the island on foot, with the landscape awash with green forests that have recovered from the parched days of summer, and streams that have ▶



Palma Cathedral



reappeared thanks to the autumn rains.

One option is the easy first stage of the *Ruta de Pedra en Sec* (or simply GR 221), which begins in Puerto de Andratx and ends, 13km later, at La Trapa. It is the site of a Trappist monastery, part of small community of monks that sought refuge on Majorca following expulsion from Normandy at the time of the French Revolution. It was abandoned in 1820 and left to ruin, but since 1980 it has been the property of the *Grup Balear d'Omitologia i Defensa de la Natura* (GOB). From this beautiful location, it is possible to see birds such as cormorants, peregrine falcons and, until November when they migrate to the Indian Ocean, endangered Eleonora's falcons.

You can also hike on the small island of Sa Dragonera, of which there is also a fantastic view from La Trapa. With hundreds of plant and animal species, as well as evidence of a Roman necropolis, it has been a protected natural park since 1995, and is accessible by boat from the sleepy village of Sant Elm.

For those who like their exercise at a slightly slower, more relaxed pace, winter is one of the best times of year to indulge in some practice on one of the numerous world-class golf courses in the area. They include: Real Golf de Bendinat; Majorca's first golf course in 1964, Son Vida; Golf de Andratx, which has views across Camp de Mar; and the three Golf Santa Ponsa courses.

Art galleries and architectural gems

However, if you'd prefer to leave the exercise to someone else, Majorca also has a wealth of art galleries, architectural gems and much more besides.

One of these is the CCA Andratx art centre, which was founded in 2001 and is located in the heart of the countryside. It's dedicated to 'the creation and exhibition of contemporary art', with

paintings, sculptures, installations, graphics and photographs on display, with many of the works also for sale. The centre's Kunsthalle runs three to four international exhibitions every year, and once you've been inspired by the modern works on show, you can buy something for your own home from the centre's shop, before enjoying a well-deserved lunch with mountain views.

Joan Miró is perhaps one of the most famous artists associated with Majorca, where he lived and worked from 1956 until his death in 1983. He and his family donated four studio workshops to the city of Palma in 1980, as a 'stimulus for future generations of artists', and the *Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró a Majorca* was founded. The museum, also based in Palma and a short drive from Camp de Mar, contains a collection of Miró's works, as well as a number of important documents.

Miró also features in the permanent collection at the city's *Es Baluard Museu d'Art Modern i Contemporani*, alongside many other significant artists of the period. The museum was established to display and place twentieth and twenty-first century art from the region in an international context. This is the concept that forms the basis of its permanent collection, in addition to an exciting programme of exhibitions from artists from around the world.

Of course, if you're spending a day in Palma, the city's *La Seu Catedral*, overlooking the Bay of Palma, is also a must see; the French Gothic cathedral dominates the skyline, with the city's old quarter appearing to hide behind it for protection from the sea. Nearby, the *Palacio Real de L'Almudaina*, an enclosed Arabic fortress, was the official seat of political power for many different cultures as they passed through Majorca, and each has left its own mark.

Returning to the south west, Calvià runs its *invierno europeo*, or 'European

Winter', programme between November and March every year. Throughout these months, the region holds a wide variety of cultural activities, from guided walks and excursions to concerts and open-air shows. If you're feeling particularly active, you can even take part in the Calvià International Marathon in December.

And if you're looking for something a little bit different, the nearby town of Peguera, a popular destination for our German counterparts, holds its own 'Original Bavaria Oktoberfest'. It's held in true Bavarian fashion, with rows of wooden tables, live entertainment (with obligatory lederhosen, of course), regional foods, great casks of ale and waitresses in traditional dress. Come prepared to sing and make merry!

Christmas and the festivals

In addition to their regular weekly markets, villages and towns across the Andratx and Calvià regions hold Christmas markets and craft fairs. However, the island's largest market is Palma's Mercado de Navidad, which is held in Plaza Mayor at the start of December, with stands selling decorations, handicraft, jewellery and local produce. Be entertained by local performers, artists and musicians, and stave off any hunger pangs with delicious churros dipped in chocolate sauce or a bag of hot chestnuts (a slightly healthier option!).

After all that shopping, it's time to relax and let your hair down: Majorca's fiestas and celebrations must be seen and experienced to be believed, and Christmas time is no exception, with the festivities beginning in December and running throughout January. From the *Fiesta del Estandarte* on 31 December, which welcomes in the New Year, to the exuberant and colourful *Carnaval* in February, the Mallorquins certainly know how to have a party!

At the start of January, the island's residents celebrate the arrival of the Three Kings, *los Reyes Magos* (also known as the Adoration of the Magi). They arrive by horse, as part of a procession of brightly decorated floats, and after visiting the baby Jesus, they hand out gifts to the local children.

Also in January, the *San Antonio* and *San Sebastián* festivals are very popular, and are an excellent opportunity to get to know the centuries-old customs and traditions of each town, which all celebrate in their own particular way. No matter where you are though, this usually involves small bonfires called *foguerons*, which are lit in villages all over Majorca and on which residents cook traditional *botifarrón* and *sobrasada* sausages.

The largest of these fires is lit on the eve of San Antonio, when the devil is burnt; it's common to get involved in the theme of the event by dressing up as a devil on the day. On the eve of San Sebastián, open-air barbeques spring up in Palma's streets, which are thronged with revellers, entertainers and stalls; one of the best ways to soak up the atmosphere is to take along your own sausages, find a free spot on a fire on which to cook them and join in with the festivities.

If George Sand was alive now and decided to visit Majorca this winter, I think her book would have taken a distinctly different tone. If you decide to find out for yourself, I'm certain you will agree with me. □



About Biniorella

Situated in the unspoilt southwest corner of Majorca, La Reserva de Biniorella is an exclusive 'country club' style development spanning 27,000 square metres.

Set on a wooded hill-top, the site features 98 properties, including one- and two-bedroom apartments and bungalows, three-bedroom private villas with a shared private pool, and two four-bedroom villas (also with private pools).

Four of the properties have been specially adapted for accompanied disabled holidaymakers.

The site's extensive facilities include two large outdoor swimming pools and a further covered pool (which is heated in the winter), a children's playground, tennis courts, boules, snooker, table tennis, and golf driving nets.

Concessionary long stay holidays

Bondholders may wish to extend their out-of-season holidays at Biniorella, by taking advantage of our concessionary long-stay specials. Whilst the first week is full Points and User Charge, reductions in subsequent weeks are set out below.

Period (week no.)	No. of weeks stay	% Points payable	% User Charge payable
1-8, 50-52	2	90 %	95 %
	3 or more	80 %	90 %

(except Villa Roca Marina)

Even if your weeks are bookable Points free under any other offer, the User Charge discounts for second and subsequent weeks will still apply.