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# Take me *to the* island

From the luxury tranquillity of the Finca Serena to the buzzy backstreets of Palma, **LIZZIE GORE-GRIMES** enjoys switching up the pace in Mallorca.

I think I was about 12 when we took our first family holiday to France – to Lake Annecy in the Haute-Savoie. It was mid-July, and I remember thinking this was what “baking hot” really meant. Unlike our sunniest Irish summer day, inevitably punctuated by a fresh breeze to bring you out in goosebumps in your bikini, I remember experiencing for the first time heat you can actually hear.

As I wandered around the grounds of the Finca Serena on our first morning, I was brought straight back to that moment; the air was thick with heat and all I could hear was the crunch of the dry gravel path underfoot, the bushes pulsing with cicadas, and the distant tinkle of cattle-bells.

This rural idyll, just opened as a five-star boutique hotel in May, is located in a former farmhouse set up high on a hill, in the middle of the island, surrounded by a rambling, romantic estate of ancient olive groves, lemon trees, cypress

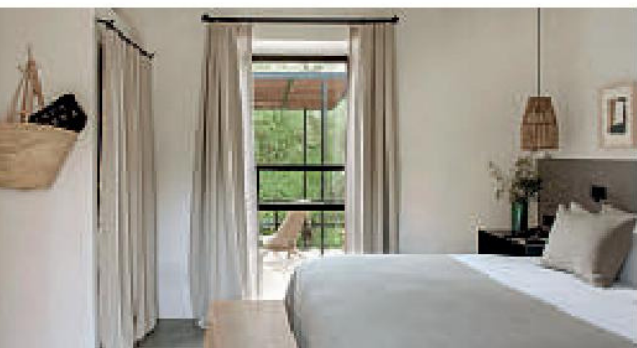
and pine – over 100 acres in total – with all the olfactory deliciousness that comes with it. With just 25 rooms in total, some located in the main house, and others scattered around the arboreal acreage as secluded standalone suites, this really is the perfect place to slow the pace and enjoy the silence.

Everything about the place is relentlessly soothing – from the calming palette of biscuit-coloured stone and neutral natural linens and fabrics throughout to the lovingly restored traditional wooden shutters and wonky whitewashed walls. The décor is a

lesson in stylish understatement that the Mallorcans seem to do so well.

Having arrived close to midnight the night before (both Aer Lingus and Ryanair direct flights to Palma are late evening ones, for some annoying reason), we hadn't fully appreciated how impressive the view was of the sweeping panoramic countryside and monastery-topped Puig de Randa mountains beyond; but we drank it in over breakfast served on the hotel's Jacaranda terrace overlooking the pool.

The food at the Finca really is something special. The hotel has its own (meticulously maintained) kitchen garden, plus acres of orchards and olive groves, which chef Celia Martin-Nieto uses to inspire her daily changing menu. They make their own cheese and yoghurt, press their own olive oil, and are perfecting a house wine as we speak.





**CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT** In each of the Finca Serena's 25 bedrooms, the décor is a lesson in stylish Mallorcan understatement; the biscuit-coloured stone of the hotel entrance and cobbled dining terrace; the honeyed hues of the Palma cityscape; Mar de Nudos restaurant by the marina in Palma; the pool and view at the five-star Finca Serena



“Between its intoxicating mix of Moorish architecture, cobbled backstreets, galleries, gardens and that glittering sea, Palma has it all.”

Over a long, lazy breakfast, we indulged in the requisite reviewing of our fellow guests, almost all of which were couples, apart from one group of three, and out of the seven or eight other sets of couples, four of the women were expecting. So clearly a popular babymoon spot, and you can see why, to be fair.

After breakfast, we could have picked from a host of what-to-do options, including yoga or tai-chi in the hotel spa (with indoor pool and gym), jogging the 6km winding pathway through the estate, exploring

the nearby tiny villages of Montuïri, Sineu or Algaida, or taken the hotel up on its offer to organise golf, hiking or biking. We chose wisely and went with the option of collapsing by the pool to read for endless unbroken-by-offspring hours, followed by sundowners on our room's private terrace with only the chirping cicadas for company. Pure bliss. A glorious Finca farm-to-table meal under the stars followed that evening.

Batteries fully recharged after the tasteful Temazepam of the Finca, we were ready to take things up a beat and head south to explore Palma. The Mallorcan coastal capital really has it all between its intoxicating mix of Moorish, medieval, and gothic architecture, labyrinth of cobbled backstreets brimming with galleries, gardens, hidden churches and designer shops. Not to mention the glam beach clubs, vibrant restaurant scene, and that glittering sea that weaves its magic around the city. Twenty-four hours just isn't enough, as we soon discovered.

One of the city's most impressive and imposing landmarks is, of course, the famous La Seu Cathedral, which stands sentinel overlooking the city and sea. Converted from Moorish-era mosque by King James I (Jaume I) in 1229, the imposing grand Catalan Gothic-style cathedral you see today with its golden sandstone façade took more than 400 years to complete. It's breathtaking. ►







**CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT**  
The atmospheric Arab Baths; old-world luxury at Hotel Glòria de Sant Jaume; lunch by the sea at the fashionable Assaona Gastrobeach Club



The city's Arab baths are also wonderfully atmospheric and easy to visit, as all that survives are two small underground chambers. So you'll still have ample time to hit the beach (or shops) after a post-breakfast detour here. If time allows (or cultural curiosity compels), the Miró Studio is also a must-visit. The studio, set on a piney hill overlooking the Balearic coast, was gifted to the city where Miró had lived and worked for nearly three decades; a place where the artist created some of his most important work.

Thus culturally enriched, you can now loll (guilt-free) by the beach for the rest of the day, and the insouciant chic of the Palma beach clubs really make them worth the day-bed spend. We spent the day at Purobeach Illetas, which is located on a rocky promontory jutting out into the sea. With its pristine all-white loungers, parasols and restaurant tables, all dazzling under the sun, the effect is mesmerising. Taking a low-key leaf from its Ibiza cousin, the mood here is very Café del Mar and between the refreshing sea swims, lulling soundtrack, tasty food and swanky cocktails, it makes for a wonderfully decadent day trip.

Returning to the city late that afternoon, skin sun-warmed and salty from swimming, we enjoyed getting a little lost among the pretty backstreets on the way back to our hotel. The Hotel Glòria de Sant Jaume, an intimate 16th century manor house in Palma's old town, is so discreet it's easy to miss. Inside, the listed building, complete with internal courtyard and sweeping staircase, has been beautifully restored with contemporary flair. That night, as we sat perched on high stools in the Glòria's exquisite jewel-coloured bar before heading out to eat, we toasted with glasses of ice-cold Spritz and made our pledge to be back before long. ■

fincaserenamallorca.com; gloriasantjaume.com

## WHERE TO EAT

### MAR DE NUDOS

Undoubtedly the restaurant's privileged location at the end of Palma's "golden mile" right by the marina gives it the immediate edge. If you enjoy looking at beautiful boats, you're going to love Palma in high season, when the superyachts descend and a table at Mar de Nudos offers you a front row seat. The menu offers Japanese/Mediterranean fare, while the bar area out front plays music 'til late, making it a great spot to settle in for a full night out. [mardenudos.com](http://mardenudos.com).

### QUINA CREU

This eclectic spot hidden away in the old town's colourful Sa Garmia neighbourhood is buzzing with character. Every inch of the place is interesting, from the vintage memorabilia-lined walls to the library space and traditional 1920s bar. The mood of the menu is creative tapes, with the likes of barbecued duck confit in beer bars, skewers of artichoke, mushroom and shrimp, and grilled octopus. It's one of the most popular places in town. [quinacreu.com](http://quinacreu.com).

### FERA

Palma's chef-of-the-moment Simon Petutschnig's latest venture is a feast for the senses.

Set in an historic palatial building, with high-impact modern art throughout, the stylish restaurant showcases Petutschnig's "Mediterranean" cooking style with flair. Expect exciting creations such as smoked Mallorcan suckling pig dim sum with ginger and shiitake and textures of carrot with coconut milk, curry and kimchi almonds. [ferapalma.com](http://ferapalma.com).

### SADRASSANA

The popular Palma restaurant, located in a 19th century Mallorcan manor house on Plaça D'Oriana, is well known for its buzzy cocktail atmosphere and distinctive décor (think elaborate fabric wallpapers, extravagant chandeliers and art deco furniture art gallery upstairs). On the menu, traditional Mallorcan "socarrat" (like flattened paella) are a focus along with local rice dishes and grilled fish and meat. [sadrassana.com](http://sadrassana.com).