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Invasions of Mallorca

By Kim Davis

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The island of Mallorca is the largest of the Balearic chain, which lies off the eastern Mediterranean coast of Spain. Thanks to its rugged topography, balmy climate, and old world architectural charm, Mallorca has been a favorite of European tourists since the 1960's. Many Americans have found their way to Mallorca as well, but Americans do not have the advantage of the cheap air and rail fares that the Europeans enjoy. The history of the Balearics is rich and culturally diverse. The islands' numerous protected ports have made them a logical stop along the trade routes of sailors for centuries, consequently the influences of African, Asian, and diverse European peoples is seen throughout the indigenous culture.

The 1960's saw a massive influx of tourists from first France, and then England and finally Germany as dictator Francisco Franco relaxed his foreign policy in the latter years of his life. On Mallorca, the first wave of tourists to fall in love with and "invade" the island was French. Since the Mallorquin people never really accepted Spanish rule, and still consider themselves first Mallorquin, and second Catalan, accepting their French neighbors was not a long stretch. The Mallorquin people, by nature are very capitalistic; therefore, though they grumble about the foreigners, they quickly learn their languages and find ways to take their money.

On a larger and more unattractive scale, the "English invasion" which came in the late 60's was accompanied by under-regulated construction of budget tourist accommodations, and nightclubs. Fortunately this budget class tourist tends to seek sun, sand, and sex, and they have proven to be satisfied with one or two

infamous coastal towns designed for their pleasure. Many of the young English tourists on package holidays spend their entire fortnight visit drinking and chasing the opposite sex in the town of Magaluf, and never venture any further. This arrangement worked relatively well for the islanders for 25 years. The ugly tourists rarely encroached on their homes. The government of Mallorca, to their credit, learned a lesson from this period of unchecked development, and has since become quite strict about new construction. No longer does one see the poorly constructed high-rise eyesores of 30 years ago. These unattractive buildings are gradually being renovated or replaced.

The wealthy, well-healed tourists carved their niche on the dramatic Northwestern coast from Estellencs through Valledmossa, Deia, and Soller. Here, care was taken to preserve the beautiful old fincas, and a number of them became small exclusive hotels and resorts. This area was always more exclusive than the more accessible regions of the island because of the Serra de Tramuntana Mountain range which divides it from the rest of the island. Up until the late 1990's when the EEC began to make money available for major development, even the major roads leading to the Northwestern coastal towns were very narrow and poorly maintained. The trip to Deia from the airport at Palma took over an hour even though the actual distance is only about 30 km as the crow flies. Now, however, new roads have made travel much easier.

Today Mallorca is home to quite a few expatriate residents from England, and America, but many of these long-term residents are leaving due to the current "German Invasion." As European Union became a certainty in the 90's, Germans afraid of loosing money with the equalization of the European currencies began to flood Mallorca spending exorbitant sums on properties and businesses where the rate of exchange worked in their favor. The net result of all this German investment was rapid, massive inflation on the island. Now, less than ten years later, no native Mallorquin can afford to buy property. On entering any restaurant, foreign guests now are addressed in German first. Upon learning that the guest is not German, many waiters will visibly relax, and if the guest speaks Spanish or Mallorquin, the waiter will often indulge in a bit of good-natured "German-bashing."

The negative effects of tourism long ago seeped through the very fabric of life on Mallorca. Now, however, with the dramatic escalation of prices the locals can no longer afford to buy houses.

Maintenance work for those who already own their houses can only be done at outlandish prices since wages have increased to compensate. The Germans have been chilly neighbors, fortifying their properties with impenetrable walls to keep prying eyes away.

Now, however, the financial advantages for the Germans have evaporated, and the other expatriate residents are expecting property prices to return to a more affordable level.

(c) 2003, Kim Davis Spent 6 years as a resident of Mallorca, and loved every minute of it. She is the author of the highly acclaimed "The Yachtie Bible: How to Get Paid While Traveling in Style." Visit www.kpdavis.com or www.yachtie.net for details.

A Quick Guide To Mallorca

By Chic Retreats

One of the ever-popular Balearic Islands, Mallorca is the perfect location for a quiet romantic holiday or full-on family fun.

Where is it?

Mallorca is the middle, and largest, of a set of islands set in the Mediterranean off the east coast of Spain. It has a varied terrain, which means that although the majority of visitors come for the coast and beaches, there is a growing interest in the island's fertile plains and mountainous regions.

Where can I stay?

If you want to avoid the over-developed resorts that dominate parts of Mallorca, then choose a boutique hotel. Less stuffy and more intimate than regular hotels, yet with discreet staff and service when you want it, a boutique Mallorcan hotel is the ideal way to truly experience the island. The Palacio Ca Sa Galesa, for example, is set right in the heart of Palma, and boasts the only swimming pool in the Gothic district. No detail has been overlooked, so you immediately feel comfortable in any of its 12 rooms. Alternatively, visit Palma on a day trip from Scott's Hotel, which is a charming boutique hotel set in a medieval wine-producing village off the main tourist route. Comfort is a key theme here, with goosedown pillows and breakfast until noon.

What can I see?

Visit Palma for a really cosmopolitan view of Mallorca. Half of the island's population live here so it comes as no surprise that sophisticated bars and classy shops sit easily alongside ancient streets and the astounding Gothic Cathedral. It pays to spend some time exploring the city - whether it's taking in the amazing view from the waterfront, wandering in and out of the tiny shops in the old Arab Quarter, or taking in the sights from a traditional pony and trap. Further afield, Mallorca boasts a range of interesting towns, secluded bays, and mountain walks that reward with perfect views.

How do I get around?

There are many low cost flights from Europe to Mallorca's main city, Palma de Mallorca. From there, you are spoiled for choice when it comes to travelling around the island. There is a comprehensive bus network that takes you from town to town, or you can hire a car so that you can be in complete control of your itinerary. Alternatively, you can rent a moped, or work off your meals by cycling. It's never too far from one town to another, so there's plenty of time for sight seeing however you choose to travel. Use the local ferry services to visit the other Balearic Islands and make the most of your holiday time.

Chic Retreats is a worldwide collection of cool, smart hotels with less than 30 rooms and an eye for design and style. Visit the website at

<http://www.chicretreats.com>



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