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COURTESY OF FUNDACIO DESTI MENORCA

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MENORCA

destination menorca

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Sun-kissed Menorca may be small, but it's packed full of delightful surprises and some of the most stunning coastline in The Med.

Sure, we've all heard of Menorca – Mallorca's little sister – but did you know some unusual facts about this intriguing destination? Firstly, the whole island has been designated a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO; it has the largest concentration of prehistoric sites in Europe; it produces its own gin; Formula One motor racing teams practice at the Aeroclub (Lewis Hamilton was there in early 2008); the oldest opera house in Spain is in Menorca, and the island boasts 216 km of idyllic coastline.

Menorca's wealth of serene beaches and coves falls roughly into two types, depending on where you are on the island. To the north lie dramatic cliffs and many small, secluded coves and caves where you may not see another living soul all day long. Tiny, picturesque fishing villages cling to the rugged shoreline and nature reserves play

host to diverse migratory and indigenous bird life. If you enjoy walking, painting or photography you'll be in seventh heaven.

To the south you'll find far gentler pine covered cliffs, long stretches of golden sand, crystal clear turquoise

seas and plenty of safe bathing. Low-key self-contained resorts along this stretch of coast are popular with families for obvious reasons.

Splish, splash, splosh

As you might expect, watersports are high on the activities agenda. In the north, visit Fornells Bay where the ultra-calm waters make it the ideal learning spot for beginners and the less experienced. Lessons in windsurfing and sailing are available and afterwards, when you've worked up an appetite, the pretty and unspoilt fishing village of Fornells offers a superb choice of seafood restaurants. »



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Ref. 17228 S'UESTRA.
A recently built country house of 450m². Set in large private landscaped gardens of 22,000m², only minutes from the beaches of the South Coast. Has large and bright rooms, 4 ensuite bedrooms, and ample living and dining areas, with first class fixtures and fittings. The landscaped gardens include a pool, pond, terracing and BBQ.

Casa de campo de nueva construcción de 450m², con materiales y acabados de alta calidad. Tiene un magnífico jardín de 22.000m² hacen de esta casa un refugio ideal tanto para vivir todo el año como para pasar temporadas.



Ref. 40751 SOL DEL ESTE
Magnificent duplex, nicely reformed and decorated with excellent panoramic views over Mahón harbour. Comprising 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, cloakroom, lounge-dining room, kitchen-office. Two terraces. Air conditioning. Sold furnished.

Magnífico duplex muy bien reformado y decorado con unas vistas panorámicas del Puerto de Mahón excepcionales. Consta de 3 dormitorios, 2 baños, aseo, salón-comedor, cocina-office. Dos terrazas. Aire acondicionado. Se vende amueblado.



Ref. 11122 BINISAFUA
High quality villa with communal swimming pool, changing rooms with shower, terraces, paddle court and kids playground. Comprises 4 double bedrooms all with en suite bathrooms, lounge and kitchen. Covered terrace with panoramic sea views. Garage. Gardens with swimming pool. Sea views.

Situado en un conjunto de chalets bio-climáticos de alta calidad. Zona común con piscinas, terrazas, pista de pádel y parque infantil. 4 dom. dobles (todos con baños en suite), salón y cocina. Terraza cubierta con vistas al mar. Garaje. Jardín con césped y piscina.

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If under the water is your preference, Menorca is excellent for scuba diving and snorkelling. Take, for example, the incredible coral galleries off the south-east coast – an amazing three level cavern filled with natural light. It features the wreck of a French man-o-war “La Laurette”, sunk in 1883 complete with cannon and musket balls.

Inland, central Menorca is still very much rural, with its rolling fields and abundance of beautiful wild flowers. It's a good thing that an island of such great natural beauty is officially protected. In 1993, UNESCO designated it a biosphere reserve – defined as ‘a place of important natural and cultural heritage where economic development is compatible with nature conservation’.

On the coast just north of the capital, Mahón or Maó (Catalan) as it is also referred to, is the Parc Natural de S'Albufera des Grau, the most important wetlands reserve in Menorca. It offers superb hiking and bird watching opportunities with its array of indigenous plant species, birds of prey and sea birds.

In ancient times

Anyone who's into archaeology may have difficulty in knowing where to start, with over 1,000 prehistoric sites to choose from island-wide! Many of these date from the Talayotic Period (2000-123 BC). Later came

the Romans, and after them the Moors, Catalans, British, French and Spanish, creating a real melting-pot of architectural and cultural influences.

One such example is the production of local Mahón gin. The British ruled Menorca from 1708 to 1802, and with them came the introduction of this quintessentially English tippie. A wily tradesman organised the import of large amounts of juniper berries in order to give visiting sailors something to keep them occupied. They began producing gin and islanders and tourists alike drink it with lemon to this day.

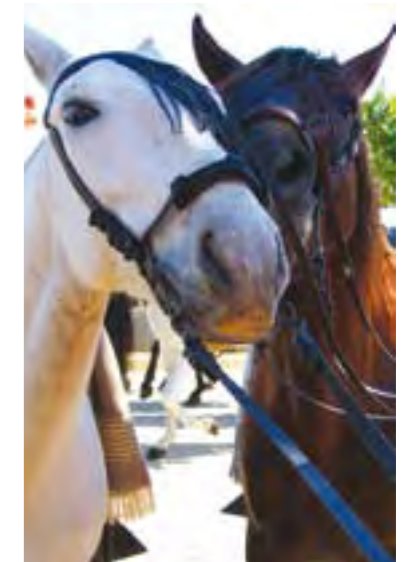
On the subject of high spirits, a beer drinking, card playing ghost is said to haunt the historic Marlborough Fort at the mouth of Mahón harbour! Another historical legend involves the French. The story goes that over 250 years ago, a French nobleman named the condiment we know today as mayonnaise in honour of his lover who came from Mahón.

Also in the capital – and possibly home to a few ghosts of its own – is the magnificently restored Teatro Principal, first built in 1829, making it the oldest opera house in Spain. Music, plays and films are staged, as is a celebrated annual opera festival. If jazz is more your bag, check out the internationally renowned Jazz Club in the town of San Clemente – also home to a wonderful Roman mosaic.

Viva la fiesta!

The religious centre of Menorca is the aristocratic, ancient and deliciously Mediterranean city of Ciutadella. As you enter by road, you'll see a magnificent statue of a rearing stallion. The island has its own indigenous breed of horse and these feature strongly in the many fiestas and celebrations held throughout the year. In this case, the horse symbolises Ciutadella's famous Fiesta de San Juan which takes place at the end of June each year.

The true beauty of Menorca lies in its diversity. You can live it up in »





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the plethora of colourful seaside bars, cafés and eateries amid quaint streets and ramshackle fishing cottages, or you can opt for quiet contemplation in an outstanding natural environment. Excursions are available to the highest point of the island – Mount Toro, 354 metres above sea level. As well as a breathtaking 360° view, at its peak is the 17th Century Sanctuary of the Mare de Déu del Toro.

Alternatively, day-dream the afternoon away at one of the majestic capes, such as the Cap de Favaritx with its jaunty black and white striped lighthouse. This is where the locals come to admire the spectacular waves when the Tramuntana wind is really blowing a gale.

A little local knowledge

To really get into the rhythm of Menorca, try a few simple things like saying bon dia (Catalan) to the locals instead of buenos dias (Spanish), eat a tasty fish dish by a harbourside,

sample a local delicacy of Menorcan cheese, pastry or gin, and watch the sun set from a beach bar. Also, why not shop for locally produced shoes and jewellery – the island is particularly famous for the latter.

As for the weather, Menorca enjoys a delightfully temperate climate – mild in winter and comfortably hot in summer - each season with its own contrasts. During July and August, sunshine averages over 10 hours a day.

We've only just scratched the surface in these pages. Menorca, for all its diminutive size (26 miles by 16 miles) is simply brimming with history, customs, scenery and a million-and-one "did you knows?".

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