



IN LIKE FLYNN

EVERY SUMMER, VISITORS FLOCK TO MALLORCA'S SHORES. GISELLE WHITEAKER DISCOVERS THAT THE WINTER SUN IN THIS SPANISH ISLAND DESTINATION ALSO HOLDS ALLURE.

Left: Boats in the bay at Port de Soller.
Below: The hilltop town of Valdemossa.
Bottom: The Hotel BonSol's dedicated yoga room.



Above: Hotel BonSol stretches from the beach to the hilltop.

A few years ago, in December, I went to Barcelona in search of sunshine. My misguided sense of geography placed it in a much warmer space than it really is, and my long-sleeved t-shirt proved incapable of keeping me warm. This year, I decided to seek my winter sun earlier, in Mallorca. Arriving on a glorious sunny day, not a single fluffy white cloud marring the cobalt blue sky, I know I have made the right decision.

Zooming through the outskirts of Palma de Mallorca, the capital of the Balearic Islands in Spain, I vow to visit soon, but my first stop is the beach at Illetas, nine kilometres south west of Palma. The gold-tinged sand crunches between my toes as I stroll gratefully along the 200-metre long expanse, my face upturned to greet the sun. The beach sits at the end of a U-shaped inlet, the azure sea gently lapping at the shore. It is surrounded by steep cliffs, where hotels and apartments perch like eagles, their gazes trained at the horizon.

The Hotel BonSol Resort & Spa shares this viewpoint, nestled in verdant gardens that give it a secluded air, despite its central location. I enter the cool space and I'm greeted with a cheery "Hola" and a

warm smile – a familiar moment for every guest throughout the hotel's 60-year history of welcoming visitors to Mallorca. The BonSol is a family hotel in more ways than one. It is family-run, on its third generation and guests are made to feel part of the family. It's like coming home – if your home is an extensive Spanish castle.

Sixty odd years ago, Antonio and Roger Xamena moved from Palma to Illetas and refurbished an old manor house on the Bendinat Castle Estate. Missing the bustle of city life, they decided to take in paying guests and arranged for taxi drivers to suggest BonSol to cruise passengers arriving at Palma's thriving port. Among the first guests was Australian-born swashbuckling Hollywood actor Errol Flynn, who enjoyed his stay so much that he returned several times and eventually rented a house nearby.

Errol Flynn was born in Tasmania, as was I, so it is with a sense of following in the actor's footsteps that I trail behind Alejandro Xamena, the hotel's current Director, as he shows me through the estate. It is larger than it feels, the rooms and villas spread throughout a large swathe of lush sub-tropical gardens, which are some of the finest on the island. The hotel's eclectic décor includes travel treasures

collected by the family over the years, creating an intimate feel, with numerous cosy corners in which to curl up with a book or a glass of wine, or as is my plan: both.

At dinner, I sit at the terrace restaurant, dining on delicious grilled lamb as the waves kiss the shore below. The inky blackness of the sea is spread out before me and a balmy breeze swirls through the air, tickling my neck on its way past. A singer gently strums an acoustic guitar, crooning familiar tunes to accompany the meal. There's no place I'd rather be.

The next morning, I start the day with a complimentary yoga session in the dedicated yoga studio, stretching out the kinks of a deep sleep. After indulging at the hotel's buffet breakfast, I begin my tour of the island. Despite sounding like Harry Potter's nemesis, Valdemossa is rumoured to be the island's prettiest village. Inching its way up the foothills of the Tramuntana mountain range, about 17 kilometres from Palma, the village is surrounded by forested hills and lush countryside. The narrow streets and lanes constructed with blonde stone are fringed by doorways punctuated by brightly coloured flowers tumbling from planter boxes.



Above: The terrace restaurant has fantastic sea views and a relaxed seaside ambience.

Below: The magnificent Cathedral of Santa Maria of Palma.

It is the 13th century monastery here which is perhaps the biggest drawcard. It is no surprise to learn that the stone edifice with its distinctive teal tower has provided inspiration for many, including the Polish composer Frederic Chopin. It was here at the Real Cartuja that Chopin spent one winter with French writer Aurore Dupin, better known as her alias George Sand.

Around 25 kilometres away, Port de Soller also lures its fair share of visitors. Reached by road, or by heritage tramway from Soller itself, the bay here is lined with restaurants and cafes. Yachts bob in the bay, the mountains providing a dramatic backdrop. It's a place to linger; to sip on coffee and contemplate life, mesmerised by the soothing splash at boats drift in from their day on the water.

Arriving back at BonSol, I have just enough time for a late afternoon dip and I race to the beach. The delicious chill of the water sets my body tingling as I glide into the deep. From here I can see how the hotel hikes its hill, the white buildings peeking out between the trees. As the sun sinks I make my way back to my room to dress for dinner.

Tonight I sample the delights of the more formal restaurant. Couples of all ages hold hands over the dining tables, in a moment of old-fashioned glamour. A musical duo performs for patrons, as we dine on the exquisite cuisine presented in the set menu. This is a place of romance and charm, and I almost expect to see a young Errol Flynn swan in.

I have one more day to explore Mallorca's delights, which I dedicate to Palma's old town. Martin Xamena, at BonSol's helm, invites me to tag along on his expedition to Mercat De L'olivar, a central produce market. We stroll aisle after aisle, admiring the brightly hued Mallorcan fruit tumbling from display baskets, the enormous legs of cured ham strung in a line over meat counters, and the towers of fish and seafood, so fresh that the only scent is of the ocean. "Here," Martin says, pointing to a busy counter. We edge in and secure a coveted space, where we snack on plump oysters washed down with crisp white wine.

Bidding Martin farewell, my cheeks ruddy from the midday drink, I amble down cobbled alleys past open squares filled with cafes and laughter, past artists and street performers, bag-sellers and musicians. My goal is the jaw-dropping Cathedral of Palma de Mallorca (La Seu), a structure so immense that the best view is from several streets away.

The evening finds me back at the hotel's beachside restaurant, my hair still damp from an afternoon swim. As my heart is warmed by sips of velvety red wine, I am content. I promise to come back to magical Mallorca, and when I do, I know the BonSol will welcome me home. ■

For more information or to book your stay at The Hotel BonSol Resort & Spa see www.hotelbonsol.es.



For your own slice of Spanish sun, consider these lovely properties



Monte Mayor, Benahavis

This exclusive villa is the only one in Spain designed by renowned Dutch architect Piet Boon. The use of textured materials such as the specially imported oak wood and natural stone flooring, as well as the mix of modern, contemporary and traditional styling has allowed for the creation of the most unique home in this green peaceful oasis.

Price: €3,950,000

Las Brisas, Nueva Andalucia

Newly refurbished and completely restyled this stunning contemporary villa is in a prime location in one of the most sought after areas in Marbella. Front line, with unrestricted views of Las Brisas Golf course and La Concha mountain, the villa has every conceivable modern convenience. With a mixture of stone, parquet and slate floors the different textures work well with the modern, open plan but livable spaces.

Price: €3,100,000



Gaucin, Andalusia

Situated just a short distance from the picturesque country village of Gaucin and yet within a short drive of the beach, this magnificent contemporary villa incorporates the finest of modern features. Boasting sweeping panoramic views, this house complements its thoughtfully landscaped surroundings. The stunning villa's focal features is a magnificent glass & oak beamed double height living room which offers views over the countryside.

Price: €2,850,000

La Zagaleta Golf & Country Club

Located within the prestigious Zagaleta Golf & Country Club the estate offers two golf courses, an equestrian centre and tennis courts. Crafted to engage with the rolling mountain scenery, this outstanding villa has floor to ceiling windows to frame the landscape, bringing light and space to all three floors. The lower floor is bathed in natural light and holds a heated swimming pool, gymnasium, sauna and steam room, games room and home cinema.

Price: €6,700,000



For details on any of these properties contact Fine & Country Spain on +34 952 764 010 or email marbella@fineandcountry.com.