Cultural tourism in Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza and Formentera

by

Gabriel Mayol Arbona and Sebastià Serra Busquets

Research project "Cultural tourism in the Balearic Islands: Analysis, diagnosis and future prospects" Chair Meliá Hotels International Tourism Studies, University of the Balearic Islands, Spain

gabriel.mayol@uib.es - s.serrabusquets@uib.es

These islands of the northwestern Mediterranean have developed an important tourism based on its natural and cultural heritage. Talk about cultural tourism resources of basic asset types in each of the islands. We offer tours of natural and cultural heritage. Emphasis on the international recognition of the environmental and cultural values. In Majorca, Minorca, Ibiza and Formentera are important parts of the territory declared as World Heritage by UNESCO from the combination of natural and cultural heritage. Menorca has been declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO and is pending prehistoric heritage is declared as a World Heritage Site. From the nineteenth century until the present proposals for cultural tourism generated from the Balearic Islands have been numerous. Literature and journalism initially collected many of the initiatives. From the beginning of the twentieth century intensified the cultural product based on nature trails and culture based on production painters and writers basically. In the field of tourist guides, photography and film find many innovations and mark the path of the future to the present day. The islands internationally recognized for its sun and beach tourism we want to know and assert cultural and environmental tourism. The intensity of tourism it receives, close to 14 million tourists annually and covers a five thousand square kilometers and more than one million inhabitants, lets talk about new culture and tourism initiatives to raise diversified.


Introduction

Cultural tourism across each of the islands of Mallorca, Minorca, Ibiza and Formentera has evolved over a long period of history. Ranging through the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, books written by travellers, the testimony of printed publications, together
with the images of painters and film makers have produced a living album of specific cultural features. The threads interweave the region’s history and geography, its landscape and art, its gastronomy, crafts, folklore and popular traditions, all of which go to make up a rich tapestry for the tourist to explore.

Let us look at how the seed of the Balearic Islands being valued as a cultural destination was sewn by the first travellers. Some of them, followers of the cult of European romanticism, were attracted by a territory which at the time seemed exotic. The image of the landscape of the islands, interpreted through tourist posters, contributed notably to promoting the Balearics. The key elements were the sea, the mountain and natural flora and fauna which flourished in defiance of its environment.

From the so-called «travelling class» tourism to mass tourism, each one of the islands cherishes the existence of its own culture rooted in antiquity, its own language, an identification with the essence of the Mediterranean and an intimate relationship between the landscape and a way of life.

An invitation to exploring the routes of cultural tourism in the Balearics and an acceptance of the challenge, opens a door on the natural, historic and artistic heritage of the land.

**Cultural routes in Mallorca**

On the island of Majorca, an outstanding choice of cultural routes has developed, defining a journey from prehistoric times until the present day. Three thousand years ago, talaotic tribes set up their stone-built communities not just on Mallorca but throughout the Balearics. There are various archaeological sites spread widely over the largest of the Islands. Sites of human habitation which have been excavated and embellished with access points and explanatory signposting for visitors can be seen at Capocorb Vell in Llucmajor, ses Païsses in Artà and Son Real in Santa Margalida. The restoration work provides visitors with a chance to see at first hand how life existed in prehistoric times. The influence of the Romans is most in evidence in the city of Pollentia in Alcúdia.

Features reminding us of the era of Islamic domination of Mallorca can still be seen in the Arab Baths in Palma, in some traces of street planning and urban dwellings, in some systems of water channelling, and in place names of Arabic origin. The Museum of Mallorca has some of its rooms dedicated to this historical period which finished in 1229 with the Catalan and Aragonese conquest of Mallorca.

Spread around the Island in large numbers are lookout towers, stone fortifications for defence, monasteries such as those built at Lluc and Cura, hermitages and castles - most notably Bellver Castle (west of Palma) allows us a glimpse into other historical periods dating from the 13th century until the present day.

Tourist excursions, essentially in Palma which explore gothic art – civil, religious and military – provide a portrait of the Middle Ages in the Balearics. The flagstoned courtyards embedded in the manorial homes of the old part of Palma show us the splendour of an era and of a social class whose way of life linked the gothic, renaissance, baroque and neoclassic eras of the city. Churches, not just in Palma, but
also the majority of outlying towns of the Island are windows onto the region’s historical and artistic heritage from gothic times until the present day.

Another route which can be taken by tourists features a look at the influence of early twentieth century Modernism on the architecture of Palma and other key centres of the Island in cultural terms, such as Soller and Bunyola. Similarly, the cult of rationalism – the principle that human reason rather than divine revelation is the correct means of regulating human behaviour - had an important presence in construction in the region during the 20th century.

The tourist route which explores the so-called «possessions» – mansions built on a grand scale in extensive grounds out in the country – includes such rural estates as Planisi, s’Estaca, Raixa, Alfàbia, sa Granja, and Son Marroig in the Tramuntana mountain range. Also in this category are es Calderers at Sant Joan and Son Sant Martí in Vilafranca, Son Real in Santa Margalida and Aubarca in Artà. All these magnificent properties present a variety of styles of architectural heritage of great value, beautifully maintained across the centuries right up until the present day. Over the last decades, many of these ancestral estates have been converted into rural hotels.

A number of the cultural routes suit walkers and excursionists. The Dry Stone Route runs through the Tramuntana mountains. It is dotted with mountain refuges built in unique structures which have been reformed using techniques which are traditional to local architecture. The cultural landscape of the Tramuntana mountains was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2011. The Llevant Natural Park is another place to go for those who enjoy following nature trails – there is also the opportunity to book accommodation in refuges there. All these itineraries provide visitors with an insight of how the lives of people on the Islands over the centuries have shaped the landscape that we see today.

**Cultural routes in Minorca**

On the Island of Minorca, the «Minorca Monument» network is beautifully set up. It guides visitors to the monuments and museums which explain the history of the Island. From prehistoric sites of long-gone talaotic tribes such as those at Talatí de Dalt, Trepucó, Torre d’En Galmés, Torralba d’En Salord, Naveta des Tudons, Son Catlar, Torretrencada, Torrellafuda, the trail leads us through architectural history right up until the gothic era where the Basilica of Son Bou, the cathedral of Minorca in Ciutadella stands as a proud example. From there, we journey onwards to the Marlborough fortress in the port of Mahón, the fortifications of la Mola, Santa Águeda castle, the Toro sanctuary, and «els Llocs» which is the local name for houses which belonged to great landowners, many of which today are converted into rural hotels. The entire route provides a panoramic view of a cultural heritage of exceptional value.

The urban landscape of Minorca has its own unique identity, a sense of continuity founded in the Middle Ages superimposed with later influences, most notably of the British who played a significant part in the history of Minorca from the 18th century onwards. The ancient centres of Mahón, Ciutadella, Alaïor, es Mercedal, Ferreries, Sant Lluís, es Castell, es Migjorn Gran, Fornells, and Es Grau are a melting pot of intriguing individual properties set against a backdrop of traditional architecture. It’s no wonder that visitors become lost in fascination, wandering the winding streets.
The declaration of Minorca as an area of global environmental importance, enshrined by UNESCO in 1993, was a milestone in the challenge to maintain the Island’s natural and cultural values.

The principal excursion routes on Minorca are found in the partly-reformed Camí de Cavalls. This is an historic route, ideally covered on horseback which runs right round the Island parallel to the coast, linking a chain of watch towers which were originally established for defence purposes.

**Cultural routes in Ibiza and Formentera**

Similarly, UNESCO’s declaration in 1999 of the historic and cultural importance of Ibiza also marked an undisputed turning point in the conservation of the Island’s historic monuments, its archaeological sites and the natural diversity of its countryside. Enshrined in UNESCO’s recognition, are the old fortified part of Ibiza town known as Dalt Vila, the Punic necropolis of Puig des Molins, the archaeological sites of La Caleta, the salt flats of ses Salines and the prairies of marine meadow grass lying underneath the waters between Ibiza and Formentera.

On Ibiza, we must, at the same time, define the wealth of architecture to be found in the smaller towns across the interior of the Island, namely Sant Miquel de Balanzat, Sant Joan de Llabritja, Santa Agnès de Corona, Sant Mateu d’Albarca and Sant Llorenç de Balafia. The rural churches and the traditional style of housing is remarkable in its simplicity and immaculate whiteness, serving as an inspiration to a contemporary architectural style now popular far beyond the shores of the Island.

The nature of the Islands’ inhabitants and their way of life can be discovered touring the Islands. The timelessness and enduring character of the region is linked to the ancient process of salt extraction from natural flats, its wetlands, its transport system, its mills and ports. Another unique feature of Ibiza is the way the rural countryside has adapted to the Island’s uneven terrain, in itself a window onto a rich ethnological heritage.

The fear of the pirate raiders from North Africa was the catalyst for the construction of watch towers, eternal sentinels in stone with privileged views over the coastline. Today, they are remnants of the past which have proved to be of great architectural and scenic interest.

Formentera, the smaller sister island to Ibiza, has been described as «the last paradise», doubtless prompted by the high value which visitors place on its unspoiled landscape. The light houses of la Mola and cap de Barbaria are two landmarks on the Island, which provide a fine panorama in terms of understanding the Island’s geography.

In spite of the limited land space of the Island, it is a surprising source of archaeological sites, and ancient mills essential to the survival of its scarce population during an era which preceded tourism. Formentera offers a selection of nature trails, along which the use of a bicycle is recommended. The route which includes s’Estany des Peix, s’Estany Pudent, ses Salines along its path as far as La Mola, allows visitors to link culture and landscape. The salt route is sharply defined in its historical simplicity, although to obtain a global vision of the Island, those interested can visit the Island’s museum which charters the life of its people over the centuries.
The scenic arts

The scenic arts, classical music, jazz, opera, dance, contemporary music and theatre represent one of the basic pillars of cultural tourism throughout the year. The Tourism ministry of the Balearic Islands has made a web page available, [www.artsescenic.es](http://www.artsescenic.es) which provides detailed information on the most significant. Coming highly recommended is the the Pollensa Classic Music Festival, the International Festival of Summer Serenades in Palma (*Serenates d’Estiu*); the Sóller International Folk Music and Dancing Fair; the Chopin Festival in Valldemossa; the Mahón and Palma opera seasons; the Jazz Festivals of Ibiza, Minorca, sa Pobla and Palma; the Sant Llorenç and Palma Dance seasons; the Deià International Festival; the Torrent de Pareis open air concert; the Cala Ratjada Musical Serenades; and the Mediterranean Nights staged at Valldemossa.

Apart from these well-established and prestigious events, we would highlight the activities of the town and village summer fiestas held annually right round the Islands where cultural events and communal neighbourhood suppers are held out of doors. During the months of winter and spring, the agenda is more limited although there are some programmes worth a mention such as «A Winter in Mallorca» - advertised by the Tourist board in the form of a handy booklet - which consists of an ample list of musical events, theatre productions, and excursions exploring the natural and historical heritage of the Islands bookable in advance. Also during the winter months, as part of the fiestas of a large number of outlying districts, important local events coincide with Christmas and New Year festivals, including the ancient bonfire festivals of Sant Antoni in January; in Palma, citizens celebrate the day of their Saint, Sebastià, with processions and concerts, and later in the year Carnival parades during February take place right round the Islands.

There are plenty of ways to become immersed in the culture of the Balearic Islands. The museums and exhibition halls are an excellent starting point, as are the theatres and concert auditoriums. There has been plenty of growth and development in this field over recent years.

Museums, galleries and exhibition halls

In Mallorca alone, there are some forty museums. Their style and content vary enormously but highly recommended are the art museums in towns such as Alcúdia, Valldemossa, Porreres and sa Pobla. In Palma, a recent resounding success has been the opening of the es Baluard Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, located on the seafront in Santa Catalina at the end of Paseo Mallorca. «Musts» on the cultural itinerary, amongst others, are the Museum of Mallorca; the Pilar and Joan Miró Foundation of Mallorca; and the Diocesan Museum of Religious artefacts and treasures. Museums of Science and Nature along with botanical gardens can be found in Sóller, Alcúdia, Cabrera and Costitx; Museums depicting the way of life of local people over the centuries are located in Muro, Esporles and Sant Joan. Some historical museums specialise in pre-history, although there are those focusing on later periods up until recent times to be found in Palma, Montuïri, Alcúdia, Lluc, Deià, Manacor. Religious museums are scattered across Mallorca from capital of Palma, to the central plain towns of Petra, sa Pobla, Sineu, Santa Margalida, Campos and Sencelles.
Exhibition galleries on Mallorca number no less than 135. Practically all municipalities on the Island have at least one. The city of Palma has 27, the majority of them devoted to contemporary art. There are plenty of exhibitions open to the public all year round.

The number of theatres and concert auditoriums totals forty-seven. In Palma there are nine, with significant establishments in Artà, Alcúdia, Sant Llorenç, Manacor, Campos, Vilafranca and Lloseta.

On the Island of Minorca, there are 14 museums spread out in practically all localities. The Museum of Minorca on Mahón, restored over the last few years; the Military Museum of Minorca in the fort of La Mola, and Sant Felip in es Castell; the Diocesan museum in Ciutadella, the Hernández Mora and Hernández Sanz museum in Mahón, the natural heritage museum of Cavalleria in es Mercadal, the ethnological museum in Sant Lluís, all offer a wide range to chose from.

On Minorca, tourists and residents alike can visit a total of twenty-one exhibition halls, with six in Mahón and six more in Ciutadella. There are twelve theatres and concert halls distributed round the island, notably four in Mahón and Ciutadella.

The sister islands of Ibiza and Formentera, jointly known as the Pitiusas, boast seven museums, of which four are on Ibiza, two in Santa Eulàlia and one on Formentera. The archaeological museum is an emblematic cultural symbol as is the museum of contemporary art, the ethnological museum, the archeological site of Puig des Molins and the cathedral.

In the Pitiusas there are 20 exhibition halls, nine in Ibiza town, four in Santa Eulàlia and three in Sant Antoni. There are also nine theatres and concert halls.

The museums and exhibitions of the Balearics proudly display the work of artists of international renown such as Joan Miró, Miquel Barceló, César Puget, Joan Vives Llull, Rafel Tur Costa, Hermenegild Anglada Camarasa, Josep Planells, Maties Quetglas and Josep Torrent.

Bibliography