

## Sailing the Balearics

**Overview:** a good example of how tourism can be effectively developed and organized without slaughtering heritage and landscape, the Balearic Islands became an absolute favourite among northerners and Anglo-Saxons... Each island is profoundly different, but all share a very good service for yachts, excellent charter fleets, plenty of anchorages and opportunities for everyone.

**The top places to visit:** Cap Formentor, Ciadadela, Fornells, Port Mahon, Palma de Mallorca, Soller, Formentera, Ibiza San Antoni.



### **Our rating:**

Wind and Sea: difficult in Menorca, gets easy going down towards Ibiza

Kids friendly: yes

Lifestyle: fashionable

**Gourmet:** not very refined but excellent ingredients

**Mileage** (approx): 200

**Cruise length:** two separate cruises of a week each

**When to go:** april to october

**Harbours and marinas:** superb, but a bit expensive in August

### **Our top 3 SAILPRO anchorages**

1. Espalmador - Formentera
2. Cala Figuera - Cap Formentor in Mallorca
3. Isla Colom - Menorca

### **Our sailing notes**

**Weather:** certainly a lively destination, being Menorca the Island of Winds... The Mistral can blow from the Gulf of Lion and turn right, investing the area from anything between ENE and NNW... As you can see even on an Atlas, the fetch is relevant, so you can expect a bumpy ride if the God of winds is in a bad mood. Northern Menorca is indeed a wild place. One of the peculiarity of this area is that swell looks capable of turning around every cape. A NE blows raises 2-4 metres swell in Menorca, and waves will just keep going around the archipelago to reach even bays against any physical law. I once spent a bumpy night in Ibiza in a bay only open to the SW!

Breezes are strong and reliable all around the Balearics, blowing up to 20 knots. They rarely blow towards the coast, but most likely with an angle between 30 and 45 degrees... During our three months in the area, we had a strong prevalence of Easterlies... It's a great sailing area, with steady winds and rare calm days. Good cruise planning, weather monitoring and the choice of anchorages are therefore of the utmost importance and cannot be overlooked.

**History and art:** Ciutadella is one of the most beautiful ports and villages of the Mediterranean Sea, and Menorca is rich in prehistoric ruins and cultural activities. Mahon is a spectacular town and rich in monuments, and Colom, another excellent harbour, has a fine fishing heritage.

**Gastronomy:** Menorca and Maiorca, like most of the Mediterranean Islands, have a culinary heritage that is more attached to the land than to the sea, which is where the invaders came from. Maiorca has superb meat dishes, especially lamb and pork (hams, sobresadas, sausages), while Menorca has a fine choice of pork and cheeses. The lamb leg at the Bardia in Palma is the best I ever had. Fornells is famous for its expensive lobsters. The local fish soup is the caldereta de pescados y mariscos. Overall, the French and the Italians can do much better, and at better prices. Prawns are so expensive that one loses the appetite. There is a good fish market or fishmonger in every town and the quality is excellent. The Spanish know their way around fishing. Wonderful octopus, lobster, mussels and cod.

San Antoni de Portmany has one of the best butchers I have ever seen, Carnes March.

**Wine:** summer is time for Cava, a palatable and not expensive local champagne. Red and whites tend to be really similar in my humble opinion...

#### **Recommended restaurants:**

Palma : Bardia (on the street between Plaça de Lotja and Carrer d'Apuntadors)

Soller : Can Miquelina

#### **Our itinerary**

The eastern itinerary of Eastern Mallorca and Menorca is perfect for those who seek landscape, nature, heritage and secluded anchorages. Western Mallorca, Ibiza and Formentera are more for the beach lover and for those who like to pack heavy, with plenty of opportunities to use fashionable clothes. Calmer winds, warmer waters and a definitely hotter nightlife in a Caribbean style environment.

**Ciutadella:** if you happen to find a place in the tiny and justly famous harbour of Ciutadella, get lost in the marvelous old town. Probably among the best coastal towns of the Med, together with Bonifacio, Hvar and few others. A handful of anchorages are close by...

**Ciutadella to Fornells:** there is a wide selection of spectacular anchorages, well sheltered from anything but the N... Cala Algayerens (40° 02' 56" N, 3° 55' 15" E) is certainly among the best, with its shallow azure waters and white (if popular) beaches. Good holding on sand, perfect landscape, desert at night.

**Fornells:** attractive village at the entrance of a spectacular natural harbour that offers several choices to spend a calm night. Anchorages is controlled but there are many mooring buoys (around 25 euros for 45 ft). Rolling hills with low trees all around, in a harsh, windswept environment. Fornells is one of the world capital of lobsters, but they do not come cheap! There is a family-run fishmonger south of the main street. Ask around

**Fornells to Mahon:** although more developed, this section of the coast deserves a praise for its several coves. Greener than the western side, we particularly loved the area around Isla Colom. In the various anchorages (and mooring buoys) one can find shelter from most winds. Cala Tamarells has spectacular beaches. The magnificent and secluded cove in the NE corner (on the main island) has no mooring buoys but provides shelter from anything except strong NE. In this case, let go and lay out a line ashore in the cove in the NW end of Isla Colom. One of our favourite anchorages in the archipelago.

**Mahon:** as Nelson used to say, 'there are only three good harbours in the Med, Mahon, July and August'. If a change in climate has certainly written off the last two, it's true that Mahon, the biggest natural harbour in the Mediterranean, deserves a visit for its size and beauty. Unfortunately anchorage is strictly limited to the (magnificent) cove just N of the entrance, linked to the main harbour with a man-made and well-lit channel, and to another area by the island in the middle. The citadel, forts, houses on the waterfront, and the harmony of the whole port make this a memorable stop.

The S coast of Menorca is sheltered from the NE winds but not as spectacular as the N coast. From Ciutadella it's a 25 miles crossing to **Cap Formentor**, one of the grandest of the Mediterranean; if you are moved by dramatic landscapes and wonder why so many artists love headlands (Chopin and Georges Sand came here for inspiration), sail around Cap Formentor. Properly impressive and deservedly historic, goes in to the Capes-to-round list. If the wind is from the S, anchor and spend the night in Cala Figuera, 4 miles W of the Cape (39 57' 09"N, 3 10' 38"W). This is a proper impressive anchorage, but be sure to have your ground tackle in order... The night breeze and S wind is funneled down the valley and can blow savagely. In case of NE swell you can find some shelter in a tiny cove just 2 miles EWE of the cape. You need a line ashore because swinging room is limited.

**Port Colom:** a bombproof and calm anchorage in a pleasant setting, with fishing village and small town attached. Perfect spot to begin and end a cruise. The bay is not small, and one cannot possibly row anywhere. Excellent holding ground.

**Cap del Freu area:** there are two very pleasant bays between Cap de Pera and Cap del Freu notably Cala Molto (39 43'38"N, 3 27'13"E). Sheltered from anything except NE. If the weather is calm, or if the wind blows from the SW, anchor along the spectacular coast between Cap del Freu and Cap Ferrutx, a must for those who like to take the picture of the boat floating in mid-air... Exceedingly azure waters. The whole 7 miles of this stretch are somewhat savage and wind-beaten, but the effect will surely not be wasted on the lovers of alpine meadows.

**North Coast of Mallorca:** often rolly, it's a magnificent coast that deserves exploration. Shelters are rare and basically non existent in case of northerly winds, even in the harbour of **Soller**. Just sail by the coast and find your favourite spot, without missing Cala de Calobra.

**Andratx:** this is very well developed harbour offers a wide anchorage area outside if you do not want to moor to the mooring docks, managed by PortBalear and very honest in price. In case of strong winds the port authority allows boats to anchor inside. The whole area is very popular and fashionable with the English crowds... Excellent bars, expensive restaurants. The Marisqueria Gallega is probably the best bet, but does not deserve a mention in the Blue Prawn.

**Dragonera:** this magnificent island is a national park and is well worth a visit. Anchor as close as possible to the small cove on the NE end, where there is the NP dock. In case of NW gales, good shelter can be found well into this tiny cove, with lines ashore to the dock, the anchor in 3 metres and the stern in 2.5. You can disembark here and do one of the well maintained hikes.

From Dragonera it's a 45 miles crossing to Ibiza.

**Tagomago:** a very nice welcome from Ibiza will reward those who anchor in the SW side of this small private island. Let go in sand, 5 metres, as close as possible to the coast. Magnificent waters.

**Eivissa:** the E coast of Ibiza is not our favourite, and I'd personally skip Eivissa altogether, with obnoxious mooring prices and a crowd that makes you wonder how the newer generations will ever find a job.

**Formentera-Espalmador:** the N tip of Formentera is just a 2-mile long spit of sand that at one point dives in to reappear after 100 metres and form Isla Espalmador. This whole Indian Ocean style marvel creates a wide bay where a varied collection of yachts, from 20 to 250 feet, find shelter and solace. Isla Espalmador itself provides more shelter and creates a magnificent bay where mooring buoys have been placed (reservation essential in high season) – not free. The clear waters, white sands, thermal pools, long beaches and beach-bars provide ample scope not to get bored.

**Formentera:** tour around the island and anchor wherever convenient in front of the big beaches

**Es Vedrà:** this magnificent island, a huge pinnacle of rock, is truly magnificent. There is a convenient anchorage in mid channel between the island and a smaller islet on the NW coast. Let go in 6 metres clear of the rocks. The water is amazing

**San Antony and Isla Conejera:** from Espalmador to San Antonio, this steep coast offers very nice anchorages, which we suggest for day use. Once in the San Antonio bay you can either spend the night anchored or moored close to the very lively town, where the chillout-famous Café Del Mar is located (expect the same crowds), or let go in the bay on the SE side of Isla Conejera, another National park. The hike to the lighthouse starts from the dock and is well worth the effort. If you can, anchor and snorkel in the outer islands, Islas Bledas. Unless you are on a ferry or sailing an AC boat, the passage between Isla Conejera and Isla Bosque is clear of danger in mid-channel.

**N coast of Ibiza:** this shores offer a very different side of an otherwise fashionable island. Steep and abrupt, the cliffs are impressive and barren. There are several anchorages, none sheltered from all sides but overall not bad. Our favourites are those around Cala Binirras, a deep cove well sheltered from most winds (except W-NW). Further E you can also anchor in Cala Portinatx, a very convenient jumping off point for Mallorca. Well sheltered even in strong NE, but swells finds its way in. Get away from the whole coast in case of NW gales.