

MAJORCA MODERN

In our series on European short-break destinations, **Sophie Campbell** finds time - between shopping trips - to relax at two elegant Majorcan hotels, one in Palma, the other in the mountain village of Sóller

As the plane dips its wing over Majorca, we glimpse an arm of rock flung elegantly into the sea, then a turquoise bite of bay, then olive trees plugged into the red soil like buttons on a sofa. Hot. Sunny. Great. Looking out of the other side of the plane, there's a different island entirely; a mountain range fills the window, its forbidding peaks rising through swirling cloud.

Majorca concertinas all the charms of Europe - city life, rural idylls, beaches, mountains, great coffee - into an island roughly the size of Kent. Combine the city of Palma with the mountain town of Sóller and you don't even need a car: the two are connected by a delightful, varnished-wood electric train that takes an hour to trundle up into the Tramuntana Range, creaking as it goes.

The restrained, white Convent de la Missió, my Palma hotel, offers twin temptations; it has a fine restaurant, run by chef Marc Fosh, and a dangerous proximity to the shopping street of Carrer San Miguel. San Miguel, it turns out, is the patron saint of shoes, from Converse to Christian Louboutin.

Modern Palma, down on the bay, is divided from the old city, set up on a hill, by a wide avenue, Las Ramblas. In shopping terms, designers are below and funky boutiques are above - not that we are

here merely to shop. The vast cathedral has an elaborate altar canopy by Gaudí, a new chapel so ugly, it's unmissable - it looks like a climbing wall designed by Hieronymus Bosch - and a charming animal frieze above the south portal.

Best of all, the city ramparts run for miles: hire a bike and pedal off for lunch at harbourside hotel Portixol. For traditional tapas, with charming service from waistcoated waiters, go to La Bóveda on Calle Botería. And if you are at a loose end around 5pm, visit the huge Basílica de San Francisco, where children just out of school skip beneath its magnificent rose window.

I love the train journey to Sóller. The Ferrocarril de Sóller, built in the 1890s to transport oranges down from the hills, has its own station in central Palma. It now transports tourists through the city outskirts and up through almond, lemon and olive groves to the hill villages. It even plays a little trick as you emerge above Sóller, making a U-turn in the next tunnel so the town appears to change sides.

I'm so excited that on arrival, I leap on to a waiting tram and rattle off to a nearby beach by mistake. I have to be retrieved and passed to an on-coming tram to return to Sóller, and L'Avenida, once

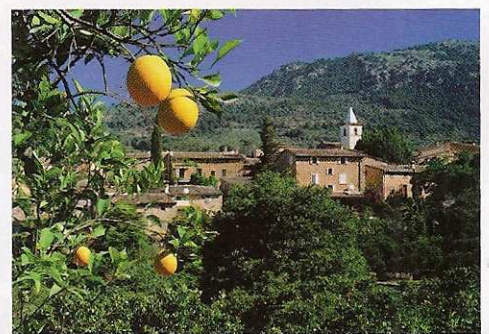
an orange baron's mansion, now converted into a funky, town-house hotel by a British couple, who have retained the original frosted glass, wrought-iron staircase, and ceiling medallions intact.

My sightseeing includes the charming Miró gallery, located beneath the station, and the town museum, which looks fusty but covers the trading links between Sóller and France, explaining the strong, local French influence. I walk to the hill village of Deià on a stone path smelling of oranges and sage, and lunch at ritzy, isolated Ca's Xorc (pronounced 'char chalk') en route, just catching the last bus home.

And guess what? Strolling innocently through Sóller's shopping quarter, I find that Ben Calçat makes surprisingly on-trend, traditional Balearic shoes, called *porqueres*, in a rainbow of gorgeous colours. What's a girl to do? □

Ways & means Sophie Campbell travelled as a guest of www.i-escape.com. Rooms at the Convent de la Missió cost from €225, B&B; rooms at L'Avenida cost from €241, B&B. Prices are based on two people sharing.

Palma's vast cathedral presides over the bustling harbour (this picture). The delightful, varnished-wood Ferrocarril de Sóller (right top) trundles from Palma up into the hill villages, which nestle amid almond, lemon and olive groves (bottom right)



TRAVEL SAVVY On the Kenyan archipelago of Lamu, a new 11.5-metre dhow is available for rent from Kizingoni Beach - a collection of seven boutique-style houses on the southern tip of Lamu island. *Kilindini*, as the boat is known, was hand-built by local craftsmen using traditional tools, yet it has all mod cons, including showers, loos and a sound system. The idea is to set sail for between one and three nights, exploring hidden villages, swimming with turtles and dolphins, fishing, and sleeping under the stars. The dhow, which sleeps up to four people, costs from \$600 for a day trip and \$750 for 24 hours - and you don't have to be a resident of Kizingoni Beach to rent it. For more information and reservations, visit www.kizingonibeach.com **PG** □