

PALMA

> By Antonio Pasolini

THOSE craving for a chilled holiday on the Mediterranean need look no further than **Mallorca**. The largest Balearic island, which has recently discarded its reputation as a destination for beer louts and tacky holidaymakers, has a lot to offer, both during the day and at night. True, the capital Palma is not the obvious gay Mecca that Gran Canaria and Ibiza are, but that's also its strongest point. You're likely to find a more select, friendly crowd and still quite a lot to do. Besides, the island itself offers breathtaking beautiful vistas and is incredibly varied considering its size, with a very high mountain range to the west and charmingly bucolic countryside to the east, dotted with small historical towns and natural attractions.

Palma is definitely the place to stay when in Mallorca since from there it won't take more than forty five minutes to get to any of the best beaches on the island (100km north-south/east-west). The gay scene concentrates in a part of the Balearic capital called **El Terreno**, to the west of the old city, specifically on and around **Avenida Joan Miró**, between Plaza Gomila and the Black Cat Nightclub. As usual in Spain, the night starts late with bars opening at 10pm and peaking at 1 or 2 while clubs stay open until 6 or 7am.

The epicentre of the gay village is the **Hotel Rosamar** at number 74, an impeccably run hotel that boasts a view to the marina and a terrace that turns into a meeting point in the evening where guests mix with visitors to the bar. Very near the hotel is the newly opened bar/lounge **Dylan** that offers a very relaxed, friendly atmosphere with strong emphasis on good, quality music. Further down the road are **Marcus** and **Status**, both more traditional-looking gay pubs. Still on Joan Miro are the **Silver Nights** (with go-go boys on Saturday nights) and **Yuppi**, a quite dark and a bit sleazy-looking place. On the other side of the road is a leather bar called **Ge** which opens at midnight. In a small road that shoots off from Joan Miro is the **Hotel Aries**, a complex that includes a sauna and a bar with a dark room, a very popular feature on the Palma scene. Just around the corner from it, on Calle Robert Graves, is the **Afrika**, a small lounge-style bar with zebra patterns and primitive masks giving it a slightly camp, warm feel. For those who like to go out earlier and perhaps grab a bite to eat one excellent option is **Café Lorca** on Calle Federico Garcia Lorca, 21, which is open throughout the day (from 12 to midnight-ish) serving food and drinks.

When it comes to clubbing, one of the longest-running venues in town is the **Black Cat**. It opens at midnight and rages on until 6 or even 7am. A typical night includes drag acts and lots of Spanish-flavoured dance music with a good chunk of cheese thrown in. For a more fashionable experience **La Demence** is just the bill. A style-conscious crowd, a pop-influenced, retro-futuristic décor and great house music are part of the equation that keeps the venue bustling until 6am on Saturdays.

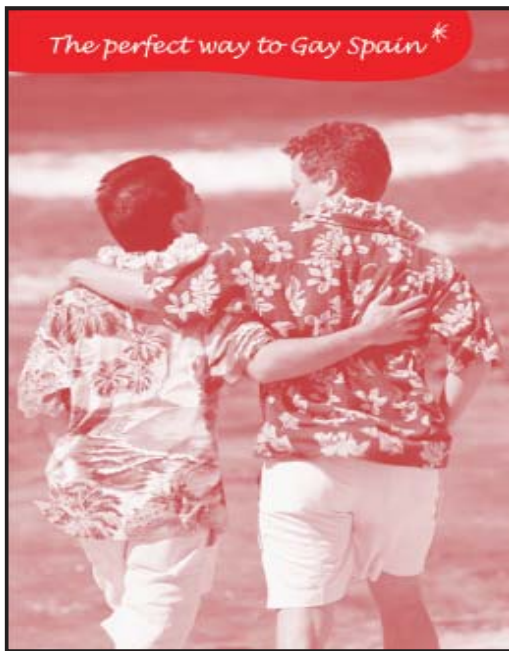
It's important to save some energy for daytime activities as there is plenty of sunbathing and a fair deal of alfresco cruising to do. If you're staying in the El Terreno area, **Dique Oeste** beach, just by the entrance to the port, is within walking distance and is very cruisy at mid-day and after dark. If you wish to travel a bit further, go on to **Illetas**, a fifteen-minute bus ride on the number eight. The beach is sandy and the place looks affluent and sophisticated.

For those who enjoy nudism a good option is El Mago, a beautiful spot about half an hour west of Palma. Bus number 12 will take you to **Palma Nova** and from there you can get a cab for about nine euros. Gay boys tend to congregate on the rocks on the left of the beach.

El Trenc, on the east side of the island, is often described as the most beautiful beach in Mallorca. You have to take the motorway past the airport and continue to Llucmajor and then to Campos. Turn right to Colonia San Jordi and at 10km you'll see the sign to Es Trenc. It's a long shoreline, with dunes and pine trees and if you're looking for action you just need to keep an eye out for it.

Finally, it would be a shame not to visit the old city of Palma with its beautiful architecture, including some *modernista* buildings designed by Gaudi, and bubbly atmosphere. Just get lost in its narrow roads and alleys trying to aim for the cathedral, a must-see monument. If you intend to stay on the island for at least a week, renting a car is fairly cheap (26 euros a day with tax and insurance included) and will enable you to explore the beguiling variety of sights in Mallorca which is surprisingly multilayered, affordable and fun.

> www.rosamarpalma.com, www.bar-dylan.com, www.hotelaries.com



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