

Sunny Delights

With its green-gold olive groves, ever-ripening vines and dazzling new restaurants, Majorca's culinary landscape deserves a glowing report, says Jane Stanbury



Majorca's sun is famed for bronzing bodies, but it's less well known for the crucial role it plays in cultivating the island's beautiful produce. A trip to Palma's Mercat Olivar demonstrates the variety of fresh ingredients available, including peppers, artichokes, squashes, figs, apricots and almonds. Olives are an important crop, with the verdant trees perched on the terraces of the ragged Tramuntana mountains producing litres and litres of green gold. For oil aficionados, the Majorcan *aceite* is undoubtedly some of the best in Europe. Superior local options are awarded a Denominación de Origen classification, like fine wines.

Olive oil is an essential ingredient of just about every Majorcan dish, whether it be suckling pig marinated in lemon juice, salt and oil, then slow-roasted to produce moist meat surrounded by the crispiest of crackling; or classic *frito Mallorquín*, a blend of chopped vegetables, liver and garlic that's so tasty even liver loathers love

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it; or *tumbet*, a baked, layered vegetable dish featuring potatoes, aubergines and onions.

It's also the star of the hearty Majorcan fast food known as *pa amb oli*. Meaning bread and oil, this snack is such an important part of Majorcan food heritage that Tomás Graves, son of *I, Claudius* author Robert, devoted a whole book to the subject. There are four basic ingredients. First up is the Majorcan *pan*, a hefty salt-free bread which is naturally dry in texture. Then there are *tomàtiga de penjar* (hanging tomatoes), which are air-dried to produce a thick-skinned fruit with a dense juice that is spread over the bread. Olive oil is then drizzled over, and sea salt added before the chosen toppings. These may include *butifarra*, a local black pudding-type sausage, *sobresada*, a uniquely Majorcan paprika and pork spread, or local meats and cheeses, all accompanied by pickles. Much debate centres around whether the bread should be toasted and in which order the ingredients are added. Villages have been known to feud for decades over the subject.

For an authentic version visit a *tafona* (olive oil press) such as Son Catiu (00 34 971 940 227, www.ballco.com/soncatiu.htm), a few miles outside Inca in the centre of the island. Visitors are encouraged to explore the production facilities and try a number of different types of oil pressed from a variety of local olives, before settling down to choose from a lengthy menu offering a *pa amb oli* selection that would make any Majorcan proud.

Of course, no lunch would be complete without wine. Over the years sour Majorcan table wine has been transformed into a wonderful selection of complex blends, and a *ruta del vino*, or wine route, is essential to sample the flavours on offer. Family-run Jaime Mesquida in Porreres (00 34 971 647 106, www.jaumemesquida.com)

makes bio-dynamic wines using moon cycles to gauge production. Macia Batle in Santa Maria (00 34 971 140 014, www.maciabatle.com) mainly grows indigenous Majorcan grapes to tantalise the taste buds. Finally, high in the mountains near Escorca, Vinyes Mortix (00 34 971 182 339, www.vinyesmortix.com) belies the cold winters to produce crisp, French-influenced rosés and whites. All of them welcome visitors and offer tastings, although one of the best ways to appreciate the beauty of the surrounding landscapes is from the air.

Sloane Helicopters (00 34 971 794 132, www.sloanehelicopters.com) has introduced the option of picnicking at some of Majorca's most inspiring destinations. With a specially designed hamper onboard, the nippy Robinson 44s travel over the island's breathtaking scenery to dramatic cliff tops, isolated mountain plains and deserted peninsulas for an incredibly special picnic. The menu features Majorcan goodies such as *empanadas* (small meat pies), *cocas* (pizza-like tarts), or more elegant options of salmon, champagne and strawberries.

While Majorcan dishes are traditionally rustic, a number of innovative restaurants have taken conventional dishes and added a touch of creative magic. Palma's Simply Fosh (00 34 971 720 114, www.simplyfosh.com) typifies this new style, offering *menus de dégustation* that enable diners to sample a variety of local plates. Slow-cooked pork belly with carrot and orange blossom purée, breast of guinea fowl with pumpkin and pearl barley, or loin of rabbit with locally grown bomba rice risotto are just a few examples of Fosh's contemporary menu. The modernisation of familiar dishes reflects Majorca's changing attitude to food and wine. Traditionally families would sit and sup on hearty fare such as stews, but now Majorcans are keen to share their new-found culinary sophistication, inviting tourists to sample the island's fabulous diversity. If you're lucky enough to visit, then make the most of the amazing selection of gastronomic delights on offer.



☒ Clockwise from top left: Majorca's rustic olive groves. Simply Fosh's contemporary cuisine. *tomàtiga de penjat* (hanging tomatoes)



PHOTOS GETTY, PHOTOLIBRARY

Tumbet

This classic Majorcan tomato and vegetable stew can be found at nearly every restaurant on the island. It's also easy to prepare it at home in your own kitchen – fresh vegetables are a must.

Ingredients

Serves 4
 500g aubergines, sliced
 4 tablespoons olive oil
 500g potatoes, sliced
 500g green and red bell peppers, sliced
 3 cloves garlic, sliced
 500g fresh tomatoes, peeled and chopped
 Black pepper
 Salt

1. For the sauce, fry the garlic in a little olive oil, then add the tomatoes and cook on a moderate heat for 25-30 minutes.
2. In a separate pan, fry the potatoes in olive oil until crisp, then stack in a casserole dish.
3. Fry the aubergines in olive oil. Remove excess oil with kitchen roll. Place on top of the potato slices.
5. Fry the bell peppers in olive oil. Remove excess oil with kitchen roll. Place on top of the aubergines. Add salt and pepper.
6. Pour the sauce over the vegetables. Add the rest of the oil and bake in the oven at 180°C for 15 minutes.

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