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## Two wheels in Mallorca: Is cycling the new golf?

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By Roger St Pierre  
Wednesday, 25 July 2012



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They say that cycling is the new golf – the new leisure activity of choice for fitness-seeking execs. They've got the Titleist clubs and the Audi but now it's that carbon-fibre Bottecchia, Specialized or Cervélo that's providing their thrills.

Given the success of British riders in the last Olympics and Brad Wiggins' landmark Tour de France victory this year, it's easy to understand the across the board explosion in UK interest in bike riding, while the exploits of Dan Martin and Nicolas Roche have captured Irish headlines.

But as well-heeled enthusiasts leave their BMWs in the garage and take to the roads aboard bicycles costing up to £9,000 apiece, this monumental explosion of not just spectator enthusiasm but active participation is a worldwide phenomena – and Mallorca seems to be at the heart of it, thanks to a year-round exercise-favourable climate, glorious scenery and superbly engineered roads along with a native population raised on cycle racing lore.

When I visited this spring, it was estimated that around 50,000 cyclists were on the island. They came from Scandinavia, the United States, Germany and two-dozen other nations besides the UK and Ireland. Many brought their own machines but there are plenty of bike rental shops on the island – their ranks full of advertising executives, money-men, doctors, engineers and other professionals. For once it was those in normal garb rather than the Lycra-clad hordes who seemed out of place.

Given the high social status of so many of these born-again cyclists, it's Mallorca's high-end hotel properties that have been able to reap benefit.

Set in the midst of a quiet, quintessentially rural web of traffic-free byways but

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with challenging mountain roads within short pedalling distance, the elegant Reads Hotel & Vespasian Spa, just outside the bustling little town of Santa Maria, is ideally placed as a cycling base. No wonder the holiday division of the famed Trek bike firm runs its programme from here.

Reads isn't just cycling friendly, it's run by a bike riding family and super-fit Malcolm Wyse, son-in-law of the hotel's creator, often joins his guests for a spin. For Reads own high quality cycling package you simply need to bring your own helmet, cycling shoes and pedals – they will loan you a top-end Giant road bike.

The four-night package includes accommodation, a hearty buffet breakfast, three x three-course lunches or dinners in the hotel's atmospheric Blues Brasserie, three deep-tissue massage sessions, energy drinks and energy bars to take out on the rides and free use of the spa and its pools – plus knowledge of how to find all the best cycling routes.

Reads isn't just for bikies though. There are walks into the nearby jagged 4,850-ft Serra de Tramuntana Mountains; a vast range of watersports at the many seaside resorts while Palma is a short taxi ride away for a great night out. Alternatively, you could slum it in the heaving bars of Magaluf – or 'Shagaluf' as the lager lout hordes call it. Alternatively, there's nothing to beat settling in the shade of one of Reads olive trees with an ice-cold beer and a good book, while anticipating some of the island's finest cuisine.

It's easy to tell if you are in Magaluf or its rival resort, El Arenal: the first is all Union flags and lager fuelled idiots, the second is lederhosen and sizzling sausages and race you to the sunbed.

Fortunately, it's easy to escape the Costa del Blackpool and its German counterpart. Fortunately it's easy to escape the madness and explore what is, with Corsica as its only challenger, far and away my favourite Mediterranean island – and what better way to explore it than on two wheels.

While you are doing it, don't miss the winding road that clings to the cliff edges of the north coast, from the delightful little bay of Puerto Soller to Richard Branson's La Residencia property in Deai and beyond or the dizzying ride along the narrow crest of the Formentor peninsula to its much photographed lighthouse.

Balearic Discovery, designers of tailor-made travel on the island and efficient co-ordinators of my visit, are on +34 971 875 395 and +34 636 238 015. Resident locally, proprietors Jane Stanbury and Anthony Quayle have many years experience of catering to UK visitors. They book quality hotels and villas across the island besides co-ordinating everything else it takes to create a worry-free holiday.

One of their suggestions was to take the very efficient modern train service that links Santa Maria to Palma then board the rattling, atmosphere-laden vintage train that cuts through the mountains to Soler.

#### Before you go

Mallorca is truly a year-round destination. The mountain peaks get snow cover but down at sea level it is mild, with low rainfall, even in mid-winter. Summer heat can reach 30 degrees but sea breezes help make it bearable. Peak time for cycling is Spring, especially Easter. The profusion of colourfully blossoming trees is a bonus at that time. Autumn is also very pleasant

#### How to get there

Monarch Airlines ([www.monarch.co.uk](http://www.monarch.co.uk)) operates year-round low-cost flights to Mallorca from London Gatwick and Manchester plus summer flights from London Luton and Birmingham, with fares from £59.50 return.

Seats can be re-allocated from £4.99 each one-way to enable family groups to sit with each other while seats with six-inches of extra legroom can be pre-booked from £9.99.

#### Where to stay

Reads is a beautifully restored traditional manor house of great antiquity, set amid immaculately manicured lawns and a splendid collection of olive trees and flowering shrubs. The bedrooms are supremely spacious and individually designed, providing an alluring taste of how the other half live.

The crowning glory, though, is the vaulted ceiling bar with its vast trompe l'oeil murals.

Besides a vast array of modern high-rise resort hotels, mainly along the south-west coast, Mallorca is fortunate to have a mass of characterful traditional properties, including sympathetic conversions of country houses, city mansions and a monastery.

#### How to get around

It's not expensive to rent a car with driver for a guided tour of the island. Several major international car rental companies have desks at the airport but it is cheaper to rent off-airport. A reliable choice is Autos Roig, who supplied me with a sparkling new Citroën C5, which I collected from the adjacent multi-storey car park, enabling me to collect my baggage and be on the road within 15-minutes.

#### What to eat and drink

There are Moroccan, Greek and Italian influences in Mallorcan cuisine, as well as its Catalan base. Bars across the island offer suer tapas at very reasonable prices, so resist the temptations of the "tea like mother makes" and "full English" offerings of the mass market bucket and spade resorts.

Bacchus: The on-site gourmet restaurant at Reads, this charming room offers top-end food at prices that are not budget breaking. I dined sumptuously on a

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"the UK has not been involved in any global imperialist conquest in the past 100 years"

starter of roasted scallops with a prawn crust and a light shellfish cream followed by laurel smoked turbot with coconut juice and flavours of cep and bergamot. I had no room for pud but they looked amazing. There's also a formidable six-course tasting menu.

The next evening it was fish and shellfish bouillabaisse followed by rack of lamb in a herb and olive crust. A perfect tarte tatin rounded out an outstanding meal.

Meson Dulcinea: Sited a two minute stroll from the port in the popular mid-market resort of Alcudia, this is a very traditional family-run Mallorcan hostelry on a bustling but traffic-free side street. Straight from the boat fish, succulent lamb and slow-cooked pork are specialities and there's an enticing array of tapas.

Es Parc: Set in the southern foothills of the Tramontana Mountains, Selva' is very pretty. Its town square café is a refreshment stop mecca for cyclists on their way to the national park. They sell beer that is brewed – in four varieties – just across the street by enterprising English resident Len Barnsdale and his brewmaster Guillermo Tamagni.

Joan Marc: A difficult to find location in a rather unattractive commercial city is not the best of locations. But please make the effort, go to Inca and enjoy the craftsmanship of an inspired chef who has been struggling to fill his eponymous beautifully designed and world-class modern restaurant.

Joan – that's a man's name – has a Spanish palate and traditional ingredients, like snails, pig's trotters and black pudding and gives them a flavoursome new twist

Now there's a near straight motorway arrowing right across the centre of the island, it's very easy to get to Inca, so give Joan Marc a try – and take a nominated driver so you can sample from his cellar of exquisite local wines.

Misa: Expat British chef Marc Fosh has been stamping his mark on the Mallorcan culinary scene. The newest of his five locations is Misa, a haven right at the heart of Palma, where you can enjoy the sun on a spacious terrace while sample a weekly changing three course set menu that focuses on the familiar spiced up with novel twists. After a lovely plate of mixed green vegetables and Iberian ham, my main was the best tagine I've ever had outside of Morocco – and that's no small praise. "Worldly farmhouse food at its best" as the New York Times put it.

Petit Café: A few gentle turns of the pedals from Reads, this tiny gem is run by an enthusiastic American lady who brings whole new meaning to 'home cooking'.

Focusing on fresh local ingredients, the food is flavoursome, sensibly portioned and great value.

Meson Dulcinea: [www.mesondulcinea.com](http://www.mesondulcinea.com)

Restaurant Es Parc: [bit.ly/JfXccC](http://bit.ly/JfXccC)

Cerveza Tramuntana: [www.cervezatrasmuntana.com](http://www.cervezatrasmuntana.com)

Joan Marc: +34 971 500 804

Misa: [www.misabraseria.com](http://www.misabraseria.com)

Es Petit Café [espetitcafe@hotmail.es](mailto:espetitcafe@hotmail.es)

#### What to speak

Most people, especially the younger ones, have a very good command of English. Road signs are all in both Spanish and Catalan. The locals speak Mallorquin, a Catalan dialect, but Spanish is the business language.

#### What to spend (and tip)

As in the rest of Spain, prices have been creeping up in recent years but there's still good value to be had if you steer clear of the tourist areas. Mallorca has a reputation for good quality leather goods and pottery – but make sure to shop around before committing.

Palma de Mallorca, the busy capital of the island, is a proper big city – with everything that implies. Shopping is world-class, from fascinating street markets to intimate little boutiques and massive department stores. Palma also has out of town shopping centres.

10-15 per cent tips are appreciated.

#### Flights

On-line check-in is available from 18 days to four and a half hours before departure. Hot and cold snacks and drinks can be pre-booked or purchased during the flight.

Besides flights, Monarch offers a wide range of keenly priced package holidays, accommodation deals, car hire and travel insurance.

For further information and ongoing news, follow the Reads Cycle Club pages on Facebook and Twitter.

Balearic Discovery, designers of tailor-made travel on the island are on +34 971 875 395 and +34 636 238 015.

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**Barack's sex factor made him a winner with female voters**  
 The day before the election, Barack Obama stopped by a Democratic campaign office in Wisconsin, sat down at a desk, and began phoning voters and volunteers. We don't know the details of all the calls he made, but the ones we do know about were all to women. Once he'd persuaded the recipients who he was, the calls appear to have gone rather well.

**We won the Cup... now give us our Brandywell money**  
 Such was their determination to grab a bit of the glory bestowed on Derry by Declan Devine's magnificent men at Lansdowne Road last Sunday that I feared that the stability of the Stormont institutions might be put at risk by injury to key political players at this fraught and delicate time.

**As Bard might have said, poll is much ado about nothing at all**  
 Never been there. Never done that. Never got the T-shirt. I was delighted to read that many other people hadn't either.

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**Why Nadine needs to get out of I'm a Celeb right now**  
 Politics, they say, is showbiz for ugly people. Not to be confused then, with I'm a Celebrity ... Which is showbiz for desperate people.

**We must tell these killers straight that their day has gone**  
 The murder of prison officer David Black tells us two things. Firstly, whatever the motley crew of republican dissidents are calling themselves this month, they still have the capability. And, secondly, they still have hope.



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