



FEW PEOPLE TAKE THE TIME TO GET TO KNOW THE REAL CHARMS OF PALMA... AND THAT'S THEIR LOSS BY ADRIANE PIELOU

How come that in all my visits to Mallorca – at least half a dozen over the years – I'd missed one of the most beautiful cities in Spain?

On previous visits to the island I'd stayed in Deià – the hill village and artist colony the *f. Claudius* writer and poet Robert Graves moved to on the proceeds of his First World War memoir *Goodbye to All That* – at the very de luxe Residencia. I'd stayed in Pollença, both in the inland town and at the old *llia d'Or* in Port de Pollença, the lovely old-fashioned resort that grew up on the coast, the way all resorts have on the island, the original villages all being built inland, safely away from pirates. But for some reason I'd never spent time in the island's capital, Palma. This visit, I couldn't believe what I'd missed.

It is stunning and has such interesting places to stay. The architecture is exhilarating. The restaurants are terrific and the shops good, whether at the chic level, on a large scale – there's a great Cortes Ingles, the Spanish department store – or at the neighbourhood level. I loved the pet shop around the corner from my hotel, for instance, full of jaundiced looking parrots (as in the sarcastic attitude, not the illness), beady eyeing up the customers buying bird food.

And I adored my hotel, the 17th-century *Convent de la Missió* (0034 971 227 347; www.conventdelamissio.com).

Set in what used to be one of the many convents that dotted Palma, in a back street about three minutes' walk from the opera house with the main street, Jaime III, in one direction, and pedestrian shopping streets and the huge indoor food market in



the other, the 14-room new hotel is a wonderful mix of the chic and the down-to-earth. Its neighbours, for instance, are a block of flats whose balconies are presented to you when you go up to the roof terrace, like an open-air soap opera. The rooms on the other hand are minimalist, sparsely furnished, a big open space with a white-canooped bed and large bathroom, in my case. And the food is truly sensational.

I had room service from the Refectorio the evening I was there, because I'd arrived late and felt tired, and so I had the blissful experience of sitting up in bed watching Spanish TV, munching my way through the most mouthwatering platter of caramelised lamb, followed by warm banana crunch with almond soup and citrus jelly.

Next morning, I had breakfast in the Refectorio, sitting in cool gloom while looking out onto the sunny courtyard decorated with a large potted palm and artistically posed cacti. Lunch I noted was €55, about €40 for five courses. What a brilliant find, and not overly expensive, either, at €230 a night. Next door, the 19th-century-looking old Hotel Ca Sa Padrina through, charges just €100 for a room (0034 971 425 300).

www.hotelcasapadrina.com). Fired with enthusiasm, I went to have a look at four other hotels. First was the Hotel Tres (0034 971 717 333; www.hoteltres.com) in a side street just opposite the cathedral.

I liked the courtyard bar here, shaded by a tall palm, but the pièce de résistance was the rooftop terrace with plunge pool from which you could see the whole city spread about you.

Across the road, I noticed a sign for the Hostal Ritz (0034 971 714 610; www.hostalritz.com), and went upstairs to have a look. It had battered old sofas in the salon, old posters on the walls of the dining room, and a friendly, slightly down-at-heel owner.

"There used to be so many places like this in Palma but I think we're the only one remaining," she said.

All the rooms were occupied, so I couldn't see any, but at about €60 a night – around £46 – I think you could afford to book one unseen. Combine a cheap flight with a stay there and you could have a bargain weekend.

A street away, the 23-room Puro (00 34 971 425 450; www.purohotel.com) was looking very cool. Its bar – just inside the entrance – noisy with Spanish