



Med charm: Sunseekers relax at Porto Petro, Majorca

Unfortunately, it rained rather a lot and the couple fell out badly with the natives, who were described by Ms Sand as resembling 'monkeys'.

It was the writer Robert Graves who probably did most to cement Majorca's image as a fashionable bolthole when he set up home there before the Second World War. He described the island as 'paradise'.

Celebrities have been following in his wake ever since. Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones are among the more recent arrivals and have become semi-resident showbiz royalty, while the island has a fair smattering of genuine blue-bloods. The Duchess of Palma is the youngest daughter of King Juan Carlos and is often seen shopping in her namesake city.

The thing that most impresses me about Majorca is how completely it has been transformed into a sophisticated holiday place, superior in many ways to most other Mediterranean destinations.

By chance, Majorca was the first foreign place I visited when, in 1961, it was our first port of call on a two-week P&O Mediterranean cruise (ports of call were sparing in those days - the only two others were Athens and Gibraltar).

After docking at Palma, we were taken on a seemingly endless coach journey across the island to visit the Drach caves at Porto Cristo. The caves were the usual bore. Never, ever visit caves, especially on an organised excursion. More impressive was the obvious rank poverty of Majorca.



Elegant: Mansion Ses Oliveres has six bedrooms, pool, grounds and internet connection.

I came from a fairly impoverished part of South Wales, but it was Rodeo Drive compared with the appalling bleakness of Majorca, which I remember as lots of barren fields with windmills and not much else. But tourism changed Majorca. Over the past 50 years it has been transformed out of all recognition. The package-holiday resort of Magaluf represents its worst excesses, but it is easily avoided.

This time I retraced my steps from 1961 and headed east to the small village of S'Horta, a few minutes' drive from the pleasant resort of Cala d'Or. We stayed at the stunningly good Mansion Ses Oliveres - stylish, elegant and surprisingly affordable (much like Majorca itself, it might be said).

It has six bedrooms (most en suite), a huge dining room (with a satellite television that picked up BBC and ITV), vast grounds, large pool, barbecue, free internet connection and much more.

S'Horta is a pleasant little village with a wonderful bread shop just behind the church. The nearest beach a couple of miles away at Cala Marsal is a little gem of a place with only a modest sprinkling of holidaymakers.

There are great restaurants in the vicinity. We enjoyed a good meal at the Maritimo restaurant in Porto Petro.

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