

# PALMA CHAMELEON

*Palma, Majorca's capital city, offers an ever-changing array of sights, activities and cuisine. Carole Edrich went to learn the language – and fell in love with the food*

**W**alking to the appropriately named International House for my first Spanish lesson in Palma, I mused that 9.15 on a holiday morning is a time better suited to thinking of breakfast or rolling over in bed. The streets were still in shadow, though when I looked up I could see the morning sunlight had already bleached all colour from the painted pastel walls of the higher buildings on my route. Tempting scents of freshly roasted coffee pulled at me and enticing glimpses of sun-drenched promenades and shining sands might have been impossible to resist, had I not committed to the lessons in advance, as I wanted to combine a holiday with friends with brushing up my language skills. After a brief test to determine the level of my Spanish (the kindest word would be 'rusty'), I was sent to a classroom and after an initial wobble I began to enjoy myself.

#### FOUR PUDDINGS

Regrouping at the famous vegetarian restaurant Bon Lloc on Carrer de Sant Feliu (my friends had no intention of losing their mornings to Spanish lessons), I eventually settled for pumpkin soup with toasted almond sauce, followed by a large yam salad with papaya, edamame and mixed beans with peanut sauce. Bon Lloc was the first vegetarian restaurant to open in Majorca in 1978, with a no-frills philosophy of vegetarian food made with carefully chosen, fresh ingredients bought daily from the market, many of which are organic. The attention shows, and even my meat-eating friends enjoyed the food. An intolerance to refined sugars and a sweet tooth

means I rarely find deserts I enjoy, but would have liked to have stayed longer for second, third and maybe fourth helpings of the pine nut and almond wraps in filo with a rich 70% chocolate cream.

#### KEEP WALKING

I couldn't do that, sadly, because we had arranged a two-hour guided tour around Palma, not realising that a walking tour from 3.30 to 5.30pm without water or a café stop was not a sensible move. Despite our hats, the sun was punishing, and as I wandered around the lovely art-deco sandstone facades in the heart of the old city and landmarks such as the 13th century Gothic cathedral and La Llonja gallery and museum in the old town, I watched the Segway-riding tourists gliding past with envy.

The island itself is around 100km by 70km, so everywhere is within easy reach, and while there is a bus service, we decided a hire car would give us more freedom. The week soon fell into a routine. I took my Spanish lessons every morning, and our afternoons would be spent alternating between touring the island, relaxing around the pool of our boutique hotel, The Nakar, and exploring Palma itself.

#### CAPERS AND COLUMBUS

Majorca is the largest of the Balearics, a chain of four islands that lie 100km off the coast of mainland Spain. Provided you don't go in peak season, you'd never imagine that 10 million people visit each year. We found that the beaches around the island's southern tip were better for the lower tourist count, that around

*'I settled for pumpkin soup with toasted almond sauce at Bon Lloc.'*

Palma Cathedral is one of the city's most popular sights.

