ISLAND IN THE SUN

A spontaneous detour leads **HEMA NARAYANAN** to Mallorca, the Spanish island that embodies the Mediterranean spirit with its turquoise waters, windswept lighthouses, and charming towns.

From left: Mallorca is the largest of the Balearic Islands, an autonomous community that makes up a province of Spain in the Mediterranean Sea; cobblestoned lanes of the old town of Palma.
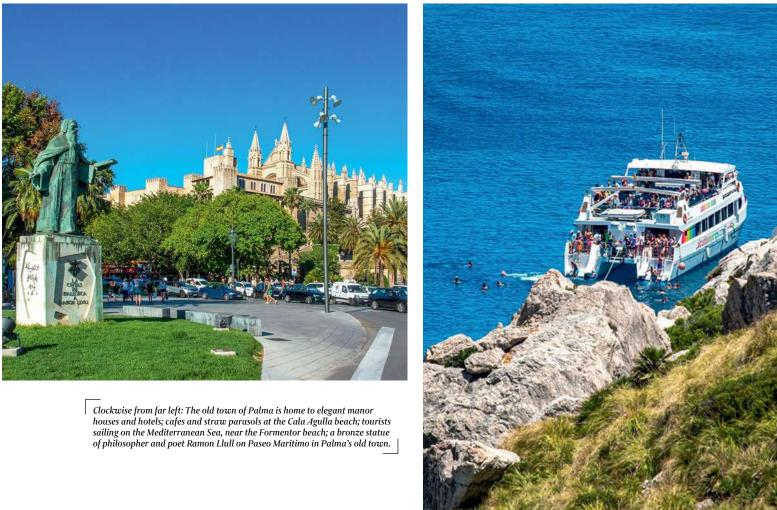
Clockwise from top left: A finca, or villa, in Pollensa Bay in Palma; courtyard of the 14th-century cathedral La Seu; the Cap de Formentor Lighthouse is the highest one in the Balearic Islands; De Tapas Bistro Bar in the old town of Palma.

Clockwise from far left: The old town of Palma is home to elegant manor houses and hotels; cafes and straw parasols at the Cala Agulla beach; tourists sailing on the Mediterranean Sea, near the Formentor beach; a bronze statue of philosopher and poet Ramon Llull on Paseo Maritimo in Palma's old town.

I T'S NOT EVERY DAY one is on an island surrounded by the beautiful Mediterranean Sea. I was in Mallorca, the largest of Spain's Balearic Islands and their crown jewel. An invitation from a dear friend to stay at her luxury *finca* (villa) had tempted me to take a detour from Amsterdam.

The charming Palma de Mallorca (or Palma), a resort city that's also the capital of the Balearic Islands, welcomed us with its sunny disposition. With no orchestrated plans, we rented a car and hit the road. We cruised along the sapphire coast whipped by a strong breeze, made pit stops at cobblestoned villages and cafes, and jived to Spanish music while sipping coconut drinks. We splashed in the waters of its numerous beaches—from the golden-sand Playa de Alcúdia in the north to the bay of Cala Agulla nestled between forests and hills on Mallorca's northeast coast, and the fine-sand beaches of Puerto Pollensa. Later, we made our way to Cap de Formentor, the northern tip of the island, and took in spectacular sea views. This is where the top end of the Serra de Tramuntana mountain range meets the Mediterranean Sea. We posed by the striking lighthouse that stands on this promontory and spent some time at the beach of Formentor.

The city of Palma is always on the move—street artists singing and sketching, horse carts ferrying tourists, and moored yachts bobbing in the water. To get a taste of Mallorca's rich culture, we walked through Palma's old town, which is home to manor houses and quaint shops. We waved at locals who pedalled away on bikes, and sampled churros, patatas bravas, and tapas. Our last stop was the 14th-century cathedral, La Seu, which is emblematic of Palma. Located in the heart of the city, it is called 'Cathedral of Light' by the locals. Its 61 stained-glass windows harness the morning sun, flooding the building with shafts of coloured light that call attention to the striking architecture.

Back at the villa, tastefully designed with orange orchards, we sat in silence under a moonlit sky to soak up Mallorca's lyrical landscapes and the deep blue sea. ✦