



photography: Habeeb Salloum

MALLORCA

Off the Spanish coast sits the Balearic Islands. It's here where I discovered wine production has been ongoing for centuries.

The Romans first introduced winemaking to this region. Production continued into the Moorish era and with the Catalan conquest of 1229, vine cultivation increased even more.

Today, the rich tradition continues with 66 wineries scattered throughout the island. From this lucrative industry I learned that 25 per cent of their finest vintages are exported to Germany.

After travelling through wooded mountains and lush valleys from Palma, the capital of Mallorca, we finally reached the winery of Santa Catarina. It was by a wine tasting table of house varietals and local cheeses in which Lena-Luiza Hertle, export manager, explained the winery's history. When

I remarked how the wines were so smooth, she delightfully replied, "Our wines have to be excellent in order to compete in a saturated wine market."

Nestled in the southern foothills of the Tramuntana Mountains, this Spanish winery which is part of the larger wine company called Macia Batle is a real paradise for wine lovers. In 1985 Swedish multimillionaire Stellan Lundquist purchased the Bodega Santa Catarina. He started cultivating the French varietals: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay. The wines are allowed to mature in oak barrels placed in sandstone caves dug deep into the mountains. Rich, smooth and satisfying, Santa Catarina wines have become known far beyond the Balearic Islands. The Bodega alone produces about half a million bottles per year which includes some of the best wines on Mallorca.

After the winery we drove past Claudia Schiffer's new luxury summer home perched on a hilltop in Camp de Mar next to the five-star Mardavall Hotel. Overlooking the Mediterranean Sea and edging Puerto Portals yacht harbour, it is built in a regional style and offers a world of luxury.

Just a few minutes from the exclusive Marina Harbour, the hotel includes the first Thalasso Spa and Wellness Centre in the Balearic Islands. With my tour group, I enjoyed a scrumptious lunch in Mardavall's Es Fum fine dining restaurant, relaxed around its indoor and outdoor pools, enjoyed seductive views of the glittering sea from one of its spacious terraces, and then toured the house of luxury.

Next door we strolled through the Puerto Portals yacht harbour, considered one of the most prestigious yacht marinas in Europe, before beginning our return journey. In less than 20 minutes, Palma's old Arab Quarter appeared. Like most tourists we began our exploration at the Sa Seu Cathedral, constructed on the site of a former mosque which itself was erected on the remains of a Roman temple. Considered one of the world's

finest and largest Gothic structures, the cathedral incorporates the minaret of the former mosque in its bell-tower.

By the cathedral, we rested for a while in Parc de la Mar with its impressive fountains and sculptures admiring the next-door Almudaina Palace, once the seat of the Moorish rulers. With its walls rising proudly above the defensive ramparts of the medieval quarter, this splendid palace contains an original Arab bath, and has a panoramic view of Palma's harbour.

Throughout the Middle Ages the historic building was used as a Royal Palace and today it is the official residence of the King of Spain when he visits Palma. It is also the home of the Museum of National Heritage and houses the Harbour Office of the Balearic Islands.

A five-minute walk from the Almudaina we reached the Arab Baths, hidden away on a tiny street. Dating from the 10th century these baths are the only complete structures remaining from Arab times, and are believed to have been part of a nobleman's house.

After the Christians invaded and conquered Mallorca, they destroyed countless Arab constructed architecture and settlements. These days, the Baths remain the last testimony of the more than 300 years of Arab presence on the island. They are popular with visitors and continue to generate much historic interest.

We continued to meander in the former Arab Quarter. It seemed that around every corner there was some reminder of the Moorish or Medieval eras. We sampled food in tapas bars, rested in tiny plazas and talked about Palma's history.

But on all occasions, Nicole, my affable tour guide,

ended up talking about the art galleries in Mallorca. As we walked, she noted, "Here in Palma we love art. Our city has per capita more art galleries than any place else in the world."

Other writers have penned how 'The Arab Quarter is stylish, sophisticated, intimate and exudes subtle Moorish influences yet is bursting with life.' I too had an exciting and fulfilling day ambling through this venerable quarter. Reports indicate that of the 11 to 12-million tourists who travel annually to the Balearic Islands, approximately 10 million of them pass through Palma.

Palma remains an attractive and prosperous city as it was in the days of the Moors. Jaime I, the conqueror of the city, described it as 'the most beautiful city that he had ever seen' and to many of its inhabitants it remains so. It is truly one of the popular tourist destinations in Europe



photography: yachtandboatguide.com