

Onboard

CRUISING · SEAMANSHIP · EQUIPMENT

BALEARIC BEAUTY

The rugged north Mallorcan coast is a World Heritage Site and it offers some spectacular unspoilt cruising for sailors

STORY **DAN HOUSTON** PHOTOGRAPHS **EMILY HARRIS**

The Old Salt fleet moored together at Cala Foradada near Deià

“The peninsula of Foradada is an amazing looking, boot-shaped promontory with a gorgeous natural bay”

The thought of diving into crystal blue water in early May was a deciding factor, plus the offer of a boat from which to do it. We would be sailing Mallorca’s iron-bound northern coast – most often cruised, at a dash it would seem, in one hit by yachtsmen keen to get around the northeastern headland of Formentor.

The north coast has a forbidding look, steep wooded mountains plunge from heights of 4,590ft (1,400m) into the wine dark sea; in a blow, which will mostly arrive from the north or north-west, the coast becomes a potentially dangerous lee shore with many of its anchorages exposed. The winds, called the Tramontana can famously blow for days and can arrive with little warning – though we found local forecasting was spot on. But such gales are unusual in summer and the coast offers sights and scenes that are unspoilt and rare compared to the rest of the island. There are many little bays, or calas, offering good anchorages and the beautiful area, as part of the Tramuntana mountain range, was awarded Unesco’s World Heritage status in 2011, which protects it from the kind of building boom that has affected some of the rest of the island.

Most sailing in Mallorca, the largest of Spain’s Balearic Islands, happens out of the port of Palma, a large natural harbour on the south-west coast. From there it would take a day at least to sail around to the

first spectacular anchorage of the north coast. The peninsula of Foradada is an amazing looking, boot-shaped promontory with a gorgeous natural bay and landing stage. This is close to Son Marroig – the house, and now museum, of Archduke Ludwig Salvator of Austria (1847-1915) who bought it after falling for the beauty of the local scenery.

The house also hosts the Deià International Music Festival in May. Deià is the local village frequented by musicians and artists who come for the scenery and a completely different kind of Mallorcan holiday. But you can only get to Foradada by boat or by foot, so it’s even more off the beaten track. There is a paella restaurant here where the dish is cooked over open fires. The local prawns – said to be the pinkest in the Mediterranean are a local foodie treat. When some smart trousered Americans pass through we learn it was Diandra, Michael Douglas’ ex-wife who still shares a property with the actor on the cliff nearby.

A GRAVE OF GRAVES

There are anchorages on either side of Foradada – the eastern being Cala Deià where there is good holding in sand and rock in 4m–6m of water. From here a small beach and landing stage lead up to Deià (or Deya to us English) and there are restaurants near the water. A good little climb from here would be through the village and up to the 15th century Church of Sant Joan Baptista,



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PREVIOUS PAGE EMILY HARRIS



DAN HOUSTON

Clockwise from far left: the entrance to Sóller is well lit; beach at Formentor showing patches of weed; the old hydro pool where we swam in seclusion; our little clinker sailing dinghy Muffin in the bay of Pollença. We towed her behind and could rig her to sail in 15 minutes or so

where the writer Robert Graves was buried in 1985. We can’t work out why his wife Beryl was buried on the opposite side of the churchyard... but the views from here are spectacular.

The main port on this coast, and the berth place for the boats of Old Salt Classic Sailing Charters, is Sóller. A largish natural harbour with marina and moorings, it’s also the main city on this coast, although the city proper is set back from the port, originally to protect itself from pirate raids, and charmingly connected by an ancient tram service dating from 1913 – The Orange Express, about 10 minutes into the hinterland through orange and lemon groves. There is also a train from here to Palma dating from a year earlier, which runs through the mountains. But since a toll tunnel was built a few years ago the connection to Palma Airport was reduced to 25 minutes or so and avoids the more scenic route over the mountain road with its 57 hairpin bends!

It’s well worth spending some time in Sóller and some of its surrounding villages are captivating. Six kilometres (3½ miles) to the east, Fornalutx sits at the head of the valley and is one of those Spanish hill villages that time has not touched. The area is popular for hiking and we meet groups of retirement-age Germans taking a late spring break. The sight of Germans in boots walking with purpose across the landscape seems vaguely familiar...

But it’s time to get back to the ship and to start heading east. Our next anchorage – we spent a whole

week on the hook and did not pay any marina fees – is a charming spot called Ens Sa Costera, where there is a small waterfall, two actually, with shelter from the north-west behind Punta Cala Rotja. This is the site of an old hydroelectricity power station and we swam in the holding pool, which is still full of fresh clear water just a few feet climb from the landing stage. We take big fenders for the dinghy though – even in a slight swell the concrete stage is a little bumpy. There is a hermit here in the one house, the place is backed by the mountain but he wasn’t home. It feels like it does not get many visitors.

BOULDERING IN A LAND OF BOULDERS

The two next calas, Tuent and Calobra have habitation and there are restaurants. Calobra is the more spectacular of the two with a huge gully, the Torrente De Pareis, running down to a sandy beach. There is good holding in 5m to 10m over sand and stones. The wide gully leads inland into the mountains and there are water torrents during winter months. There is a freshwater lagoon near the beach – full of frogs when we were there. Climbers will love the bouldering in this area. Swimming is excellent, though we were on the watch for jellyfish. These purple and pink parasol-like creatures are beautiful to see but not too good to swim into. Luckily the water is clear and you can see them, but it makes a fast crawl to the shore a dodgy undertaking, since they have two-metre-long trailing translucent stinging tentacles!

Above: Cala Murta was peaceful and sheltered on all sides. We had a lot of jellyfish for company in here



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Clockwise from top: the fleet off their home port of Sóller; the Avanzada lighthouse; if you are cruising on the anchor you need a substantial dinghy; diving into crystal blue water at Cala de San Vicente

We don't stop at the next cala – Codolar, two miles to the east of Calobra; the next part of the coast is quite barren, though there are caves a mile east of Codolar, which you can row a dinghy into (ideal for a cool down on a hot day apparently). Our next stop is Cala Castell with a beach of white pebbles and a track up to Castillo del Rey, a fortress built on a rocky outcrop 1,608ft (490m) above sea level and site of a 14th-century siege when the last king of Mallorca, Jaime III, was ousted by Peter IV of Aragon. This is a deserted anchorage with holding over rock (or sand closer to the beach) in 3m of water. There is one house at the beach and a winding track inland. With a good breeze we explored it in the dinghy and swimming (no jellies!) from the beach.

There is more happening at the next anchorage, Cala de San Vicente, which is backed by holiday apartments, restaurants and cafés. We anchor in 9m of crystal clear water – we can see the anchor chain running out all the way to the anchor (in sand) and dive into the cool azure sea. There are local fish here, a type of bream called oblada, which seem fairly abundant. A friend told me we should troll for fish if we were going offshore, tuna and bonito being a good catch. But we stay a bit too coastal to really try for that.

The two remaining calas on this north coast are the deserted Vall de Boca with a stony beach and track over the hills to the town of Pollença; Figuera is just 1.6nM west of Cap de Formentor, again with a little beach.



DAN HOUSTON



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Above, left to right: Kilena of Corsica about to anchor at Cala Foradada; cruising in front of the old hotel at Cala Fermentor.

Below: take a pilot book, it's worth it

With any east in the wind all these calas are exposed but they do offer some protection from a northwesterly wind, and sea breezes don't create enough swell to disrupt their anchorage. Protection from northerlies occurs just around the headland of Formentor, and into the bays of Pollença and Alcudia. Happily this and other headlands are benign features due to lack of tide.

Pollença is a harbour and marina protected by the Punta de Avanzada. It offers a huge anchorage that you share with the fire-busting seaplanes whose base is on the western side of the Avanzada peninsula. There's a house here, La Fortaleza, which is said to be Spain's most expensive property, owned by a British banker (naturally).

Pollença has supermarkets and restaurants and there is good holding in 7m to 10m five cables from the jetty. We left the dinghy there without locking anything up, among other tenders and the boats of local friendly boatmen.

The marina, built out into the bay, looked quite busy even this eagerly into the season – there are 375 berths according to the pilot book but it is quite shallow with just 2.1m in the entrance.

The calas on the south of the jutting headland of Formentor are again in clear water and the two near the cape are deserted. We anchored for a night in Cala Murta in 5m over sand. The practice is to always pick up a mooring when staying at a cala – but in early May we found none had been put down yet. If you do anchor it's a good idea to jill around for a while to find a good spot over sand – you can see what you are doing because the water is so clear. Drop the hook on sand rather than the darker patches of weed. This is likely to be the slow-growing *posidonia* – a type of seagrass that is vital to the ecosystem but which is also under threat of anchoring.

LOCAL INFORMATION

LOCAL CHARTS AND PILOTAGE

Paper charts

Imray: *Islas Baleares* (M3 series) 1:350,000 scale covering Ibiza, Formentera, Mallorca and Menorca with larger scales (1:10,000) for ports. On Imray's

good plasticised waterproof paper. Good value at £16. UKHO: The Admiralty Chart 1703 is a slightly larger scale at 1:300,000 but consequently shows only the eastern tip of Ibiza. Standard chart £22.45

Pilot books/guides

The Admiralty Mediterranean Pilot Volume 1 (NP45) is comprehensive but rare; we used Imray's excellent *Islas Baleares* by Graham Hutt under the auspices of the RCC Pilotage Foundation. It's clear, well produced and has a lot of good general information in its 23-page frontispiece. Chartlets are really good with lots of depth information and there are good aerial photos too. £32.50 www.imray.com

Weather (Mallorca)

VHF Ch10 (announced first on Ch16) 0835, 1135, 1635, 2135. Various websites offer weather and searching 'weather Med' brings many options and www.metoffice.gov.uk gives the latest synoptic chart. Wind guru seems good as does www.weatheronline.co.uk. Locals also use www.eltiempo.es, which is a site with good graphics

Water and showers

We bought all drinking water bottled on local advice, and otherwise used ship's supply. Water is not normally free and the etiquette is to be sparing. For boats with a watermaker the problem disappears. Most marinas have showers – free to berth-holders or for a small fee.

Digital charts

Navionics: Marine Europe for smartphones: £19.46

Sóller Marina

Tel: +34 971 63 13 26

Pollença

Tel: +34 971 86 46 35/VHF Ch9



Mallorca-based Classic Charter

Old Salt is the new name of a recently established fleet of wooden charter yachts operating out of Sóller, the only port on the north coast. The fleet ranges in size from the magnificent schooner *So Fong* to the four-berth *Ifarra*, and includes the Riva-esque powerboat *Freya*, which can act as a taxi to the entire fleet. Old Salt was set up by Bruno Entrecanales (pictured below) a venture capitalist with a passion for his organic olive oil farm as well as sailing and restoring wooden boats. CB sailed with the ketch *Kilena of Corsica* with crew skipper Raimundo 'Mumo' Torres and wife Sonia, who both hail from Barcelona.



1 So Fong 1937

One of Olin Stephens' schooners, built out of teak by the AH King Slipway in Hong Kong and arrested as a spy vessel by the Vietnamese in the 1970s. Rescued in a delapidated state by Roger Sandiford and restored at St Tropez between 2000 and 2003. Also a Rolex Trophy winner at Les Voiles de St Tropez in 2006. LOA: 70ft 3in (21.4m) LWL: 54ft (16.5m) Beam: 16ft 1in (4.9m) Draught: 9ft 9in (3m) Fully crewed with a chef. Berths for seven guests. Prices from €1,950 to €2,300 per day.

2 Kilena of Corsica 1934

Oak-on-oak, Swedish-built ketch



Above: With a staff of eight, Old Salt Sailing was set up by Bruno Entrecanales to share his passion for classic boats

designed by Jac Iverson with some (posthumous) Colin Archer influence. Won her class at Antigua Sailing Week in 1996. LOA: 57ft (17.4m) Beam: 14ft (4.2m) Draught: 9ft 7in (3m) Berths for nine guests with three crew. Prices from €1,500 to €1,850 per day.

3 Ifarra 1947

Restored double-ended Colin Archer gaff-rig type with standing headroom and four berths (saloon converts to double) and roomy, comfy galley. She can be bareboat chartered with an ICC (certificate of competence). LOA: 28ft (8.5m) Beam: 8ft 6in (2.6m) Draught: 4ft 7in (1.4m) Prices from €525 to €700 per day

4 Freya 1996

Danish Brandt-Møller Diva Royal design speedboat for day-cruising, waterskiing and exploring. Space for five guests with skipper. LOA: 24ft 8in (7.6m) Beam: 7ft 11in (2.4m) Draught: 7ft 11in (2.4m) 2 x 250hp Volvo Penta engines. Five guests with skipper. Prices from €495 to €650 per day (without fuel)

5 Delfino 1939

John Alden six-berth ketch recently brought into the fleet. LOS: 56ft (17.1m) Beam: 11ft 9in (3.6m) Draught: 7ft 11in (2.4m)

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Below: dinner is served on board our boat *Kilena of Corsica*



In Cala Murta we witness some jellyfish spawning, which is a very rare sight and has a slightly electrifying effect on the air. However, it means no swimming even though by next morning the water looks clear. Some hikers appear in the trees and there are paths around the coast and through the woods here.

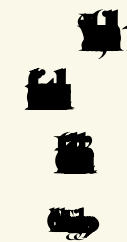
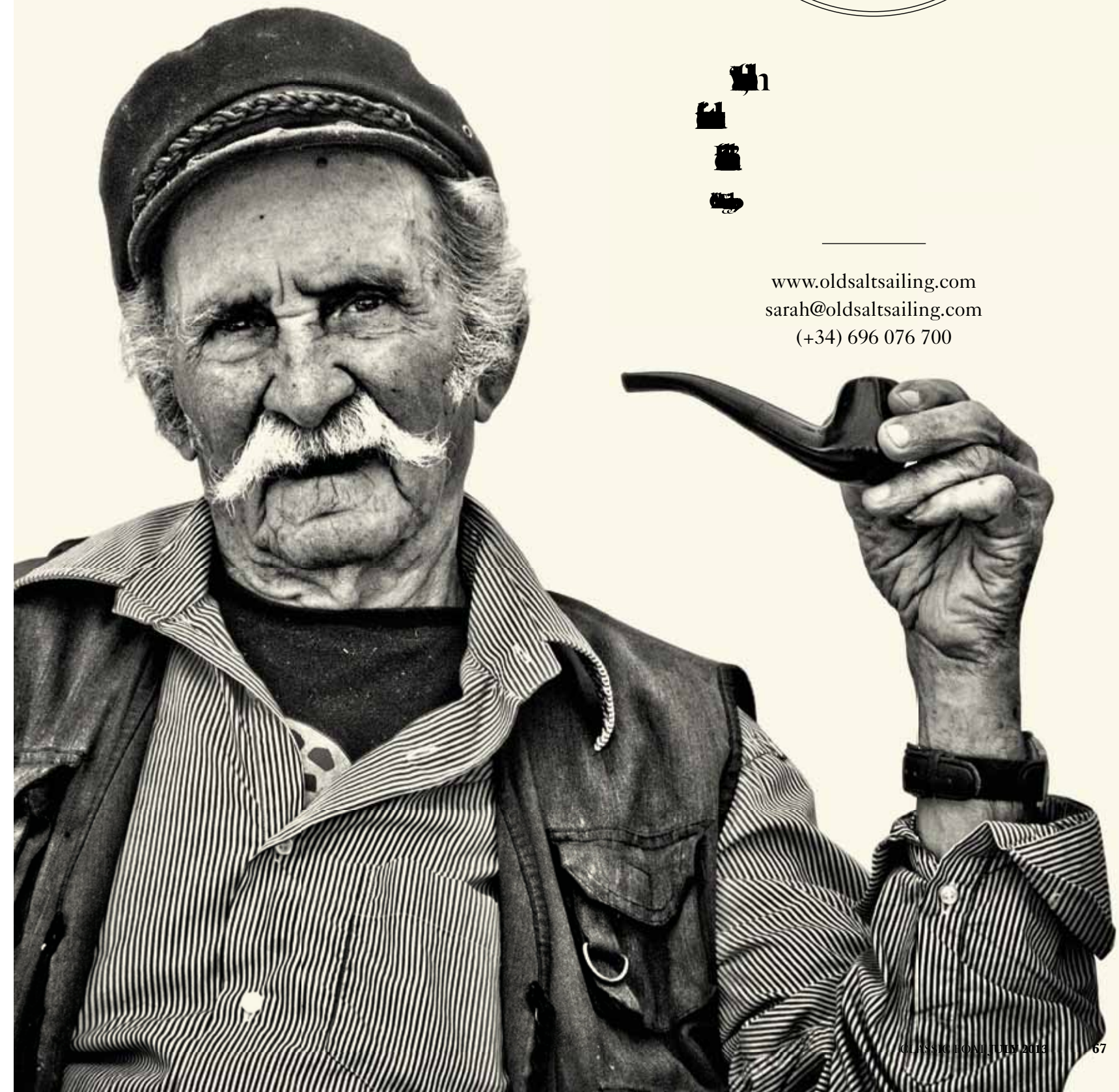
We also visit the calas of Engossaubas, just south of the cape, deserted and beautiful with high cliffs all around, and en Feliu, a tiny cala with a deserted beach. You can have too much of deserted calas though, so in search of ice cream we anchor in the Cala Formentor where there are a couple of beach restaurants and one of Mallorca's oldest hotels – the Barceló Formentor, built in 1929. Sadly it's not open to non-residents, which just makes us want to diss it. The beach here is sandy though and walking inland reveals pretty forest scenery. The north coast, just a mile

on the other side of this rocky peninsula seems so different to this more lush setting with its protected feel. We relax on board reading books or gazing at goats clinging to rock faces. We learn how local fishermen would shoot one down to pick it out of the water as a welcome change of diet.

GETTING BACK IN ONE HOP

All too soon the time has flown by and it's time to return to Sóller. Because we've taken our time getting along the coast and exploring the calas by boat and on foot it feels odd to look at the chart and realise it's just 30nM or so home. Our last day dawns calm with a latent swell of the easterly F5 from the day before. So it's on with the engine.

Off Punta Beca we see our first dolphin, who stays with us a few minutes; it often seems symbolic when this happens, as if he's saying goodbye; good luck.



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