

Alcudia

Alcudia is the oldest town in Mallorca, having been founded by the Romans shortly after they conquered the island in the 2nd century BCE. Part of this history is immediately apparent when you arrive and are greeted by the imposing Medieval walls that still nearly encircle the town.

The walls served a defensive purpose, helping the city to deal with many threats over the centuries. The walls were built in the 14th century, shortly after the Christian king - Jaume of Aragon - had conquered Mallorca and ended Muslim rule on the island. Alcudia was a stronghold in the north of the island and needed to be well fortified in order to prevent a re-conquest by the Muslim powers in Southern Spain and North Africa.

Over the following centuries, the city walls also helped to withstand attacks from pirates. Alcudia continued to flourish as a trading port throughout the renaissance period, and prospered thanks to its links with the nearby island of Menorca. Today, the walls are well worth exploring. You can walk around the perimeter of the old town and go inside some of the most impressive gates – including the imposing gate of San Sebastian, which you will see on arrival to the town. It helps you to get a real feel for what Medieval life would have been like in the town.

Inside the walls, the network of narrow streets is also a lot of fun to explore. They are lined with houses, cafes and boutique shops, all constructed out of the traditional bare stones.

Roman Pollentia

Situated just outside the south-western edge of the city walls are the remains of Roman Alcudia. Known as Pollentia, this was the first place where the Romans established themselves after conquering Mallorca in the year 123 BCE. For around fifty years after the conquest, Pollentia was a military camp. But in the mid 1st century BCE, it became a more established town and would be a flourishing port city for more than four centuries, as Rome became an all-powerful empire.

The Romans had originally conquered Mallorca as an attempt to deal with piracy in the Western Mediterranean. This had become a major problem that was badly affecting trade between Italy and the Roman provinces in Spain. Mallorca was known to harbour pirates (and many of the pirates themselves were from the local Mallorcan tribes). Rome's response was to take control of the island. They faced fierce opposition to the

conquest, with the local Mallorcans famed for their stone throwing abilities. But the Roman legions were a pretty well oiled machine by this point and eventually emerged victorious.

Alcudia Beaches

Like most historic towns and villages in Mallorca, Alcudia is set slightly inland, primarily as a way to help to defend against attacks from pirates. However, there are still several excellent beaches within walking distance. Our favourite is known as Es Morer Vermell and is situated directly to the north of the town – about a 1km walk from the center. Like all of the beaches on the north of the Alcudia peninsula, it is located in a small cove. It is a quiet beach that is excellent for bathing, with clear and shallow water, protected by the rocks.

There are many other beaches that are worth exploring along here, although it is better to do so by foot, rather than on bike. To the south of Alcudia there are larger, beaches around Port d'Alcudia, but these are a bit far to walk and also lack the charm of the ones to the north of the town.

Port Pollenca

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Port Pollenca (also known as Puerto de Pollensa) is only a small town, but it is one of the most popular bases in the world for professional cyclists. Throughout much the year you can expect to be passed by some elite cyclists on their training runs. Former Tour de France winner, Bradley Wiggins, is among the occasional residents of the town. And he reportedly still holds the unofficial for cycling from the town center to the lighthouse on Cap de Formentor and back. His time to cover the 37km route was slightly less than one hour.

Pollenca

The town of Pollenca (also known as Pollensa) was built by Catalans, who founded the town in the 12th century, shortly after they seized control of this part of Mallorca. It was named after the former nearby Roman settlement of Pollentia.

When founding it, the new Catalan arrivals were concerned that Pollensa would be vulnerable to attacks by rival kings and pirates if it was on the coast, so they decided to build it a few kilometres inland, surrounded by mountains. The town has a typically Mallorcan character, with dry stone buildings packed inside the narrow streets.

Highlights of Pollensa include the 'Roman Bridge', situated on the north edge of the town. The origins of this charming bridge are disputed by historians. Some believe that it was part of an ancient Roman aqueduct. Others believe it dates from the foundation of the town in the Middle Ages. Either way, it is a stunning piece of historic architecture that remains in excellent condition.

Another site worth visiting is the Calvari Chapel. This beautiful hilltop site dates from the 13th century and overlooks the town. It is accessed from the center of Pollenca by an impressive 365 step staircase (one for each day of the year) which is flanked by cypress trees. Elsewhere in Pollensa, the Placa Major is a lively hub of activity, surrounded by cafes and bars, and is a nice place to stop for a while and soak up the atmosphere.

Selva

The historic town of Selva is nestled on the southern edge of the Tramuntana mountains. Dating from the 13th century, it is a quiet place which is ideal for relaxing in the hotel facilities. You can also soak up the atmosphere by walking around the charming streets, or having a bite to eat on the lively main square (Placa Major), which is dominated by the impressive San Lorenzo church. Each wednesday, the weekly market also takes place in the square, where you can purchase local goods from across the island.

Lluc (Route 3c only)

The village of Lluc is home to the Santuari de Lluc, a 13th century sanctuary, which was built soon after the Christian conquest of Mallorca. This large complex includes an ornate church, a museum and a botanical garden which contains over 200 plants which are

native to the Balearic Islands. The sanctuary is also home to one of the oldest choirs in Europe.

Due to its iconic mountain location, Lluc has become a major pilgrimage site over the centuries since it was constructed. Hiking trails lead here from across the island, and the sanctuary itself also has basic hotel rooms where visitors can stay. Each year in August a night time pilgrimage takes place, with hundreds of people trekking more than 50km from Palma to Lluc.

Binissalem Wine

Mallorca's predominant wine region is situated in the shadow of the Tramuntana Mountains. Binissalem produces both red and white wines and grows a large variety of grapes. The route passes many wineries that offer tastings and tours, both in Binissalem and other surrounding villages.

Some of these are labeled on the points of interest on the routes. If you wish to do a tasting, we recommend clicking on the website links and arranging it beforehand, as some of the wineries are very small and require prior reservations.

Alaró

You arrive at Alaró fairly early in the ride, but if you are feeling thirsty then the main square here makes for a great coffee stop. Alaró is one of several historic towns dotted along the southern edge of the Tramuntana mountains. In years gone by it was defended by a hilltop castle, the ruins of which can still be seen high above the town. Today, it is peaceful but also lively – with the historic center always bustling with life in the crowded cafes.

Sineu

The area around Sineu has been inhabited since prehistoric times; however, the first known mention of the town is from the 1st century CE. At this time, the Roman scientist Pliny the Elder mentioned a place called Sinium de la Mallorca Romana, whose description matches that of Sineu. The Romans had conquered the Balearic Islands two centuries earlier in an attempt to gain greater control of the Mediterranean, stamping

out growing instances of piracy. And they decided to stay there having admired its fertile soils and potential for colonisation.

Sineu was really put on the map, however, in the 13th century after the Kingdom of Aragon removed the Andalusi Muslims as the dominant power on Mallorca. In this period the Santa Maria church was built and the town became one of the principal municipalities of central Mallorca.

Mallorca in the Medieval Era and the Middle Ages

After the rather protracted fall of the Roman Empire in Western Europe during the 5th and 6th centuries, most of Spain fell under the rule of the Visigoths – a people who, despite often having good intentions – struggled to maintain the riches and prosperity that the peninsula had enjoyed under Roman rule.

Mallorca, by contrast, was swiftly reconquered by the Eastern Roman Empire, based in Constantinople, and continued to enjoy relative prosperity as the island began to develop a strong Christian identity. After the Muslims settled in Spain in 707, Mallorca was subject to increasing raids and attacks from both the peninsula and North Africa. Together with the region of Catalonia, it turned to Charlemagne – newly crowned Holy Roman Emperor – for help against these attacks.

Charlemagne and his successors provided Mallorca with relative security for the following century, but, in 902 the island was conquered by the Muslims and, soon after, was incorporated into the Caliphate of Cordoba under Abd al-Rahman III. The caliphate was one of the most advanced and vibrant cultures in the world and introduced many important crops, agricultural machinery and building techniques which helped to shape the island for the following millennium.

The caliphate fell in the early 11th century and a series of more strict and less forward thinking Muslim regimes, such as the Almoravids and Almohads, ended up in charge of the island. There was still relative prosperity compared with much of Europe, but the dynamism and original thought of the Caliphate period and shortly after was no more.

Muslim rule was brought to an end in the early 13th Century when King Jaume I of Aragon (whose statue and name you will see everywhere on Mallorca!) launched an invasion at Santa Ponsa and conquered the island. Mallorca continued under Aragonese rule (a large and prosperous kingdom, which also included Catalonia, Valencia, Naples, Sardinia and Sicily, and which vied for control of the Mediterranean with Venice) until the 1470s. At

this time, through the marriage of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, the Kingdom of Aragon united with the Kingdom of Castile, forming the country that is modern day Spain.

Talaiot of Son Fornés

Situated near the village of Montuiri, the talaiot of Son Fornés is one of the best preserved ancient sites in Mallorca. It was part of a village constructed in the 9th century BCE, hundreds of years before the Carthaginian and Roman occupations of the island.

It was inhabited by a Bronze Age Mallorcan civilization, who occupied most of the flatter plains in the center of the island. The site is named after the remains of two talaiots (or towers) which are the most visible part of the site. Historians and archaeologists debate the exact purpose of these. Some believe that they were the impressive homes of village chiefs, while others claim that they were guard towers.

Very similar ruins dating from the Bronze Age have been found on other nearby Mediterranean islands, such as Sardinia (the Nuraghi civilization). This suggests that the ancient groups used the sea and had good communication. They were probably involved in Greek and Phoenician trade networks.

Elsewhere at Son Fornés, there are the remains of several lower level houses, and ceramic pottery and vases have also been found. You can find more about the Talaiot culture by visiting the archaeological museum in Montuiri. The museum also has an interesting history in its own right; being housed inside an 18th century windmill.

Puig de Randa

Puig de Randa is a hill, housing a 14th century sanctuary situated to the east of the village of Randa. The sanctuary offers a fantastic viewpoint across the entire island and is well worth the long but fairly gentle climb to the top.

The current building dates to the 14th century, although the site, being a highly valuable vantage point, is thought to have housed a Muslim castle before that period. The most famous and decorated Mallorcan of the Early Modern period – Ramon Llull spent time here, where he served penitence and performed some influential studies on computation theory.