

Bill and Cathy McArthur in Spain: 21

Our last few days in El Palo went by quickly. We did a lot of things for the last time in a conscious manner. Our host family and the other students held a special late night meal and party for us on our last night before we left for our last trip before leaving Spain. On Thursday morning at 6:00 AM we climbed in a Taxi and headed for the train station. Because of the extra traffic caused by Semana Santa, we were forced to ride in a second-class smoking car on a fourteen hour train ride to Barcelona. We were pleasantly surprised to discover that the train traveled through Valencia Province and Valencia City and up the east coast to Barcelona. It was interesting to see the mountains, rice paddies, and rugged coast in that part of Spain. When we arrived in Barcelona, we took a taxi to the port and got on a ferry for a seven hour ride to Palma de Mallorca in the Balearic Islands. Fortunately, we had planned this part well and enjoyed a short sleep in a cabin on the ferry. We landed in Mallorca at 6:00 AM, which completed our twenty-four hours of travel. Amazingly, our hotel gave us the key to our room when we showed up at 6:30 AM. We took advantage and slept for a couple of more hours. Palma is a big city of 300,000 residents. We found that Mallorca has a richly historic past and is only incidentally a resort in addition to being an important region of Spain. On our first day, we walked about eight miles as we toured the huge waterfront and the old pueblo area. The cathedral is as big and historic as any we saw on the mainland. It was sunny and warm so that we could spend the day in shorts.

Although public transportation is pretty good in Mallorca, we decided to rent a car for our next two days. We drove to Soller and then to Port de Soller on the coast, a popular destination for the German tourists, so plentiful on Mallorca. Port de Soller is a beautiful spot with some pockets of eerie quietness up on the cliffs overlooking the harbor. This would be a great place for a get-a-way as would some of the nearby villages. The mountains are unexpectedly big and rugged. We drove on a winding, precipitous road to the village of Deia, where Robert Graves' grave is located. This village, clinging to the side of the mountain is too quiet for our taste. We journeyed on to the monastery at the village of Valldemossa, where George Sand wrote the book, "Winter in Majorca", about a four-month stay in the monastery with Frederick Chopin. The sign said "Fundamenta en 1399", which Bill interpreted as meaning that they started charging fees to the tourists then. The tariff was 7 euros per person, with no senior discount (who else goes there anyway?), so we decided to look at the outside of the building and check it off.

The weather on our third day in Mallorca was perfect, even better than the good weather on the first two days. Bill started the day with an hour run to the sunrise and back, similar to many in Key West during other trips. Bill literally ran into the late night party scene as they poured out of the clubs around 7 AM. A lot of drunks were yelling encouragement and other things as Bill ran by. We took the rental car back into the mountains to the village of Lluc. The story goes that a boy

(Luke) found a statue of Mary in the 1300s and so a monastery and shrine were erected to attract German tourists. We climbed a nearby hill with several monuments to Mary. When the church bells rang down below, Bill said that another tourist has cashed a 50 euro note – such cynicism! We next drove a twisting mountain road at the highest possible speed to the quiet village of Pollensa at the base of the mountains. There were lots of cyclists and hikers along the road, since this area is noted for hiking and biking. We walked up another hill which offered superb views of the sea and the valley below. Then we drove to the seashore town of Port de Pollensa. We both liked this resort very much. It offers easy access to the mountains, a beach, clean calm water, and lots of restaurants in a nice family environment. One mostly hears German spoken around this area of Mallorca, but there are plenty of English-language newspapers and British tourists. We had read about a great five mile round trip walk across the base of Cape Formentor with trailhead in Port de Pollensa. We hiked it along with a lot of British birders and German walkers. It was just the thing to work up some appetite for lunch. We ate at the beach in Port de Pollensa and enjoyed the atmosphere as much as the food. The goal for the day and the day's highlight was the 20 kilometer drive out on Cape Formentor to the end. The narrow road high up on the cliffs provided thrills and great scenery. The deep blue of the water and the multi-hued blue sky provided contrast for the stark rocks of the cliffs of the cape. When we reached the tip of the cape, we got a bonus as we spotted some small whales feeding and cavorting down below. They seemed to be about twenty feet long.

We definitely recommend Port de Pollensa as a vacation spot. The local spelling is actually Port de Pollençà. For anyone planning to come, we'd suggest buying a book of hikes in Mallorca to get an idea of the variety available.

Bill and Cathy