

August 27, 2005

We spent ten memorable and relaxing weeks in the Balearic Islands. Prior to our arrival in the Mediterranean, we had been told by many people to “hide” somewhere during the crowded summer months of July and August when the phenomenon known as “Med madness” took place and not to “poke our noses out” until September. The Balearic Islands, being one of Europe’s main summer playgrounds, would especially be overrun with tourists and boats. We were also told that we would spend much of our time in marinas. Instead, we anchored our entire time in the Balearics and even enjoyed a few nights of solitude. We found that we could always find a good spot if we arrived at an anchorage before noon and didn’t move on the weekends when the local boats came out. By choosing our routes and times of arrival at anchorages, we ended up surviving “Med madness” and having a most enjoyable time in the Balearics.

The Balearic Islands (Islas Baleares) consisted of three main islands: Ibiza, Mallorca, and Menorca, with the small island of Formentera and Isla Esplamador lying just south of Ibiza. We made landfall in Formentera on June 13, and after three days anchored in Cala Sabina and two days off Esplamador, we headed to Ibiza, 8 nautical miles away.

Each of the islands in the Balearics had it own distinct character. Ibiza drew a young crowd and was known as the “party” island with many discos. The hippies of the 1960’s settled in Ibiza and Formentera, and their lifestyle could still be seen. We spent fifteen days enjoying the island of Ibiza and some of the beautiful coves (calas) along its western and rugged northwestern coasts.



Although Spanish was readily spoken, Catalan was the language of the Balearic Islands, and many of the towns and places throughout the Balearics were in the process of taking back their local dialect and/or Catalan names. At times this caused some confusion as our Balearic pilot book and tourist guides would say one name and signposts and maps another. During our stay in Ibiza, we spent one night in Cala de Port Roig (Porroig in Catalan), three nights in Cala Badella (Vedella), two nights off the town of San Antonio (Sant Antoni de Portmany), one night in Cala Salada, three nights in Cala Benirras, and five nights in Cala Portinatx. All these anchorages were within 4 to 10 nautical miles of each other.

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It wasn't until our arrival in Cala Vedella along Ibiza's western coastline that we first felt the lure and beauty of the Balearics. This beautiful cala with its rocky cliffs, lovely pine scent, crystal clear water, and beautiful sand beach was picture perfect. A few elegant restaurants lined the beach, and we enjoyed our anniversary dinner here.

From Sant Antoni we took a bus to Ibiza (Eivissa), the island's capital and main city, and explored Dalt Vila, the walled 16th century hilltop citadel and old town overlooking the present day city. We walked along its encircling walls enjoying superb views of the surrounding area. It wasn't until the bus trip to Eivissa that we first felt crowds of people, reconfirming our decision that sailing the less crowded west and northwest coastline of Ibiza was the right choice.

The coastline along Ibiza's northwestern coast was rugged and rocky, displaying interesting and unusual rock formations. Along this coast the calas continued to have lovely sand beaches and crystal clear water. As the days were hot, jumping off the boat into the Mediterranean water was the norm with siestas and reading during the heat of the day. In Cala Benirras and Cala Portinatx we met up with other cruising boats we knew, and many a fun evening was spent lingering on our boat, someone else's boat, or on the beach sharing stories and experiences.



On Sunday, July 3, we sailed from Cala Portinatx on Ibiza to the island of Mallorca, a distance across the channel of 49 nautical miles. Having motored our entire way around Ibiza, it felt good to sail with our drifter up, enjoying consistent winds of 10-12 knots SE.

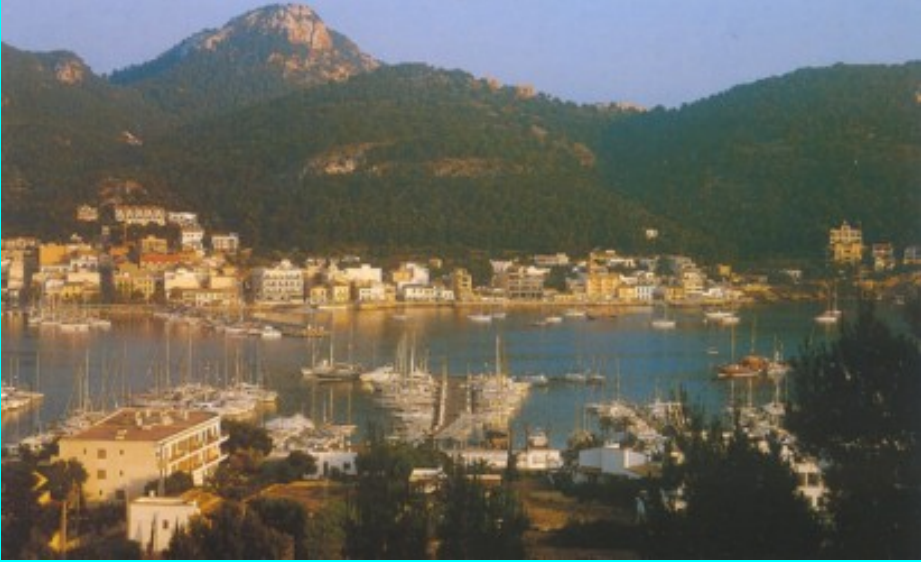
Mallorca was the largest island in the Balearics. It was 5 times larger than Menorca and almost 6½ times larger than Ibiza. Eighty percent of the entire Balearic population lived on Mallorca, and about half resided in Palma de Mallorca, the capital of the island. Mallorca was best known for its dramatic mountain scenery along its northwest coast.



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Our first anchorage in Mallorca was Puerto de Andraitx (Port d’Andratx in Catalan). Besides offering good protection, Port d’Andratx was set in a most attractive Mediterranean setting, surrounded by mountains and lined with waterfront sidewalk cafes. Often in the evening from our boat we could hear the clanging of silverware and glasses as people enjoyed a late evening meal in one of the many fine sidewalk cafes. As Port d’Andratx was a small harbor town, food supplies and other amenities were conveniently located, and the dinghy dock was just a few minutes from our boat. We could easily have stayed all summer, and as it was, we lingered in Port d’Andratx for 17 days.



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While in Port d'Andratx we took the bus one day to Palma. We visited two of the main historic sites that dominated Palma's waterfront: the Gothic cathedral, La Seu, and the Royal Palace of La Almudaina. Inside the cathedral we had our first exposure to the architecture and art work of Gaudi. Especially intriguing was Gaudi's wrought-iron canopy above the altar. The architecture of the palace included a mixture from the period of the Moors, including Arab baths, to the early Spanish Mallorcan royal families of the 14th and 15th centuries.

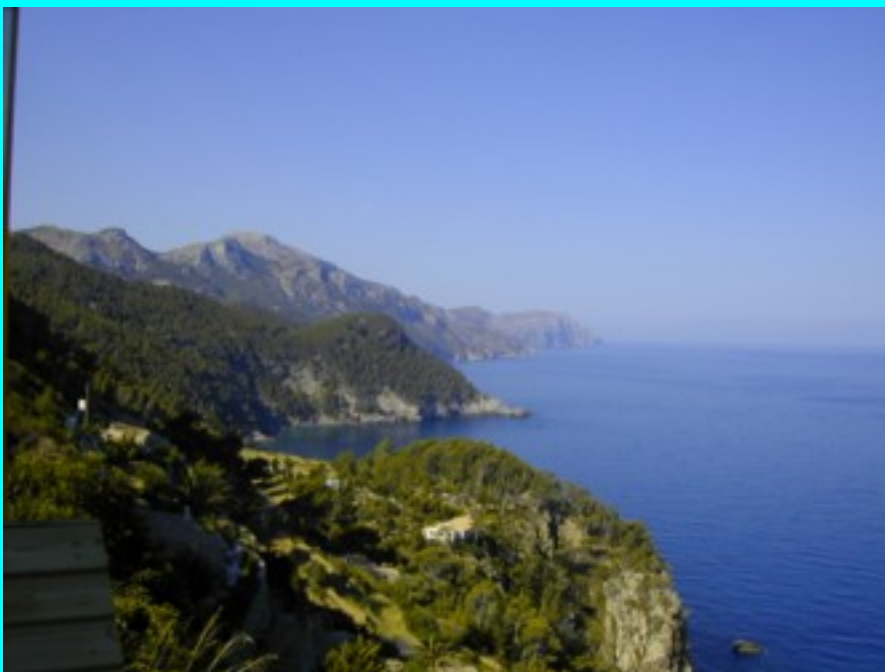
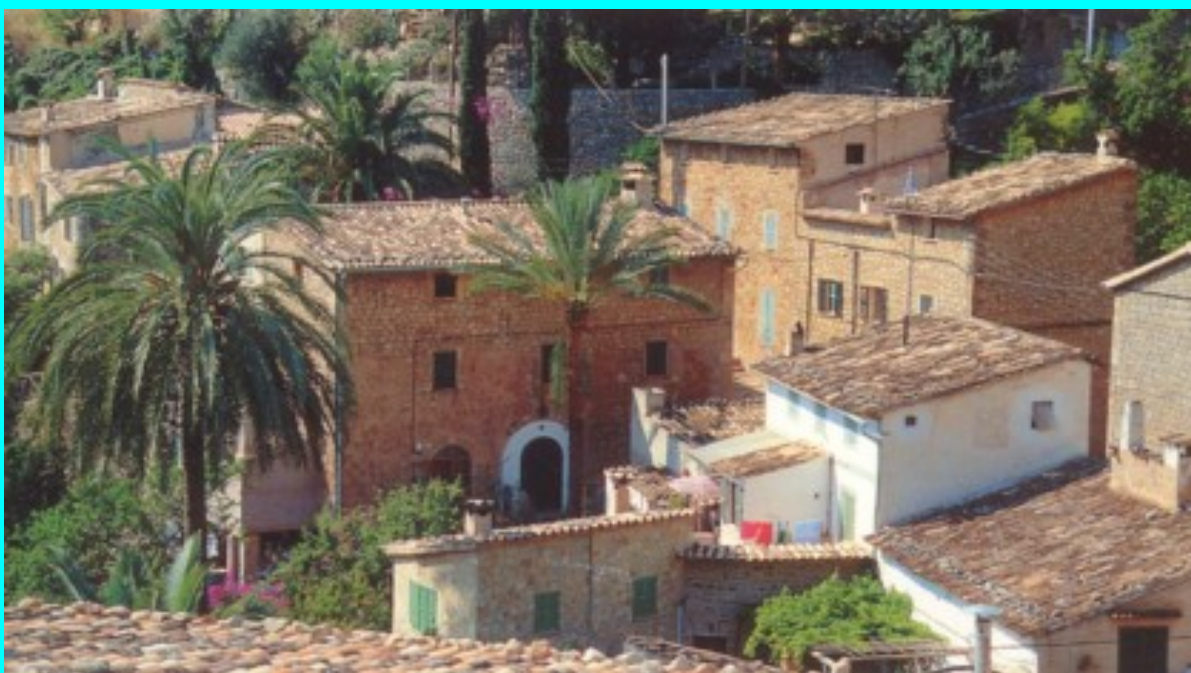


We hadn't realize how special Port d'Andratx was until our bus ride into Palma. Just over the hill from Andratx and continuing all along the drive into Palma, resort towns and hotel complexes lined the many beaches. We were inundated with tourists. The fact that Palma had one of the busiest airports in Europe began to make sense. At the end of the day it felt good to be back once more in Port d'Andratx with its peaceful, small town atmosphere.

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While in Port d'Andratx we rented a car for a day and drove along the entire northwest coast of Mallorca to Cape Formentor, enjoying Mallorca's varied and spectacular mountain scenery. We passed the lovely mountain villages of Banyalbufar, Valldemossa, and Deya (Deia) where stone houses and buildings blended in beautifully with the surrounding landscape. Shutters, like in most of Mallorca, were green. Here, backpackers and hikers, not beach goers, made up the majority of tourists. Terraced cultivation, which had been brought in by the Moors, could still be seen. During the drive that day we saw olive and almond groves, fruit orchards, and vineyards. It took us around six hours to drive the entire northwest coast with its many winding roads, but less than an hour to return to Port d'Andratx via the main central highway.



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Along the coastlines in the Balearic Islands, we always enjoyed looking for the watchtowers. Most were on hilltops, and all were in line-of-sight of each other. Between the 14th and 18th centuries, the watchtowers were one of the means of defense on the islands, especially against pirates. On our drive that day, it was exciting to finally be able to climb up into a watchtower. We climbed up into Torre Ses Animes, one of the oldest on Mallorca.



We had been told to be in Port d'Andratx on Saturday, July 16, for the Fiesta de la Virgen del Carmen, patron saint of fishermen and sailors, and we were so glad that necessary boat projects kept us in Port d'Andratx for this event. Early Saturday evening the procession took place. First came the bagpipe band, next the procession of the statue from the church to the waterfront, and last the sea procession of boats. The main boat carrying the statue was in the lead, and once out of the harbor the beautiful flowers surrounding the statue were placed in the water.

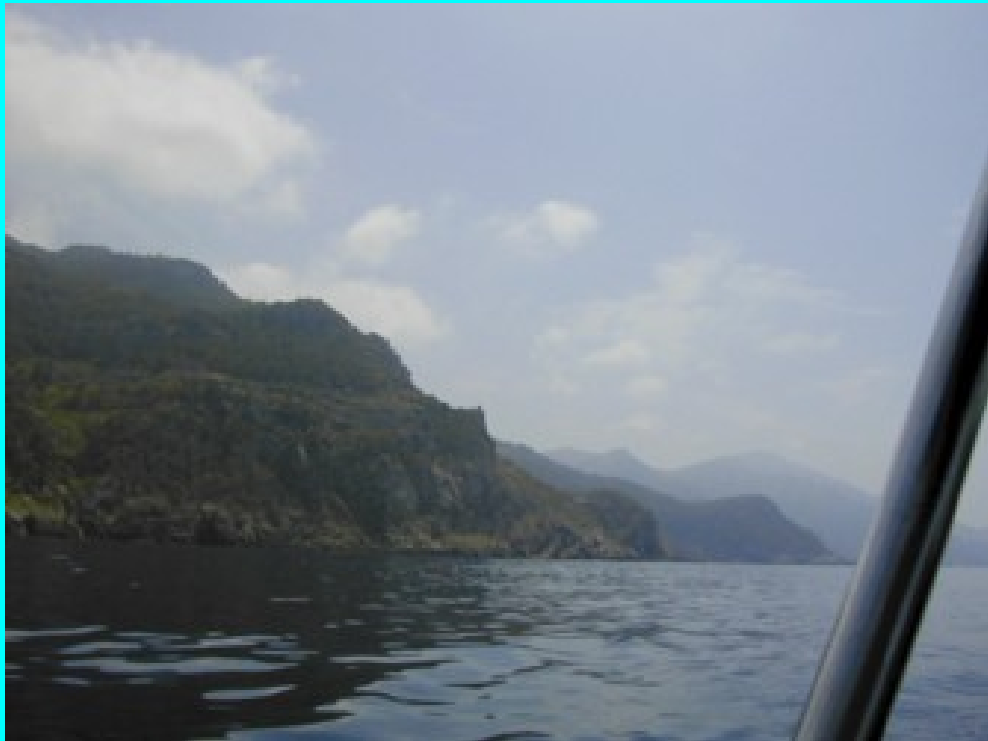


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A few hours later, “Correfocs” (a form of street fireworks) took place. It was an event so amazing, so different, and so spectacular, that if we hadn’t been there we would never have believed that anything like this could ever have taken place. It would have been impossible for this event to occur in the United States due to fire regulations and liability. As we close our eyes, we can still hear and see the devils dancing to the beat of drums behind a big dragon, all carrying huge lit sparklers as they traveled slowly down the middle of the narrow waterfront street of Port d’Andratx. We, the spectators, watched the devils and dragon from the sides. Fireworks, unknowing to us in the beginning, had been strung high up along both sides of the street from lamppost to lamppost, crisscrossing back and forth from one side to the other. At intervals these fireworks were set off, and we spectators would scream in delight, scurrying at times when the sparks got too close but then immediately returning. The distance traveled by the devils and dragon were just 3 blocks, but the entire event took 45 minutes. The normal fireworks display over the harbor took place the next evening as the grand finale to the festivities, but nothing compared to the excitement of the night before with the “Correfocs”

On Wednesday, July 20, we departed Port d’Andratx. Just like in Ibiza, we chose the less crowded but more scenic route, which was along the beautifully striking northwest coast. Over this 50 mile coastline it was necessary to be aware of the weather as there was only one good harbor of refuge, Port de Soller, about halfway down the coast. If timed right and in settled weather, it was possible to anchor in spectacular remote calas, often being the only boat overnight. In our first secluded anchorage, Cala Deia, we were surrounded by majestic peaks, and as the full moon rose over the peaks it made for a very memorable setting. Unfortunately, our stay was cut short by a wind change creating an early morning swell, sending us quickly into protected Port de Soller, 4 nautical miles away.



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We spent four days in Port de Soller before continuing on along the northwest coast. Typical of many coastal harbors in Mallorca, the main rural town was situated a few miles back from the port. This was done as a defense against pirate raids in earlier times. Port d’Andratx was like this with Andratx lying just a few miles inland and a bus ride away. In Port de Soller there was a tram connecting the port with its town Soller. From our boat we could often hear its whistle as it traveled back and forth during the day between the port and town. While in Port de Soller we rode the tram one day up to Soller and spent a few days rendezvousing with cruising friends.



After leaving Port de Soller we headed to Cala Tuent. This anchorage was surrounded by a lush pine forest with majestic mountain peaks behind. The smell of pine permeated the air.



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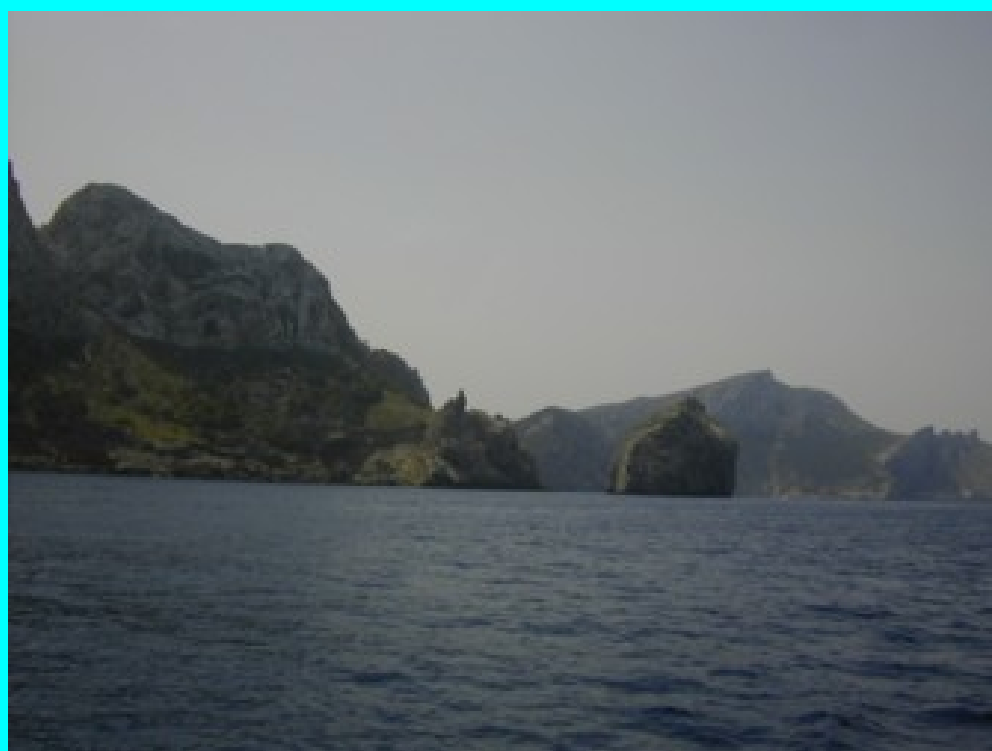
The following day we ventured quickly into Cala de la Calobra before heading further east to Cala Castell. Calobra was one of those “must sees” because of its spectacular high narrow canyon walls. Busloads of tourists came each day, and from our boat it looked like every inch of sand on that small beach had been taken up by a tourist.



Cala Castell, our last secluded anchorage along this coastline, was situated in a rocky setting. In the morning before leaving we were entertained by three mountain goats in a “domestic squabble”.



Wednesday, July 27, we passed around Cape Formentor at the northeastern tip of this rugged coastline and headed toward Pollensa Bay, not far away. We had planned to stay through the weekend at this anchorage before heading across the channel to the island of Menorca, but a change in weather altered our plans. Instead, we visited the area for just a day exploring quickly Port de Pollensa and the old walled town of Alcudia, a short bus ride away.



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On the islands of Ibiza and Mallorca the rugged northern coastlines were our choice of travel, but on the island of Menorca the southern coastline was our choice. With strong northeasterlies setting in on Saturday, we departed Mallorca on Friday and motorsailed across the channel to Menorca, 37 nautical miles away.

Menorca was not mountainous like either Mallorca or Ibiza. Instead, its topography was relatively flat, consisting mainly of a low plateau. Rocky limestone cliffs surrounded much of Menorca, creating many sea caves and innumerable calas. Compared to the other two islands, Menorca was noticeably more laidback and moved at a slower pace. And, its landscape was dotted with numerous megalithic monuments built between 1400 and 300 BC by a Bronze Age civilization known on these islands as the Talayotic culture.

We spent ten days enjoying Menorca’s beautiful 26 mile southern coastline. Our first anchorage was in Cala de Son Saura. As we had arrived in Menorca on a Friday, we spent the weekend at this anchorage enjoying its beach, water, and trails.



Our next anchorage was Cala Macarella, one of our most favorite in all the Balearic Islands. This cala was ideal with its crystal clear turquoise water, sandy beaches, and beautiful limestone cliffs. A couple of man-made caves had actually been cut into the cliffs and were being occupied while we were there. It was said that these caves were occupied by the Barbary pirates in medieval times. We spent three days lingering at this anchorage; it was so beautiful.



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Our last anchorage along Menorca's southern coast was Cala Porte (Cala en Porter). While at this anchorage, we visited the famous disco cave bar, Cova d'en Xoroi, created from a succession of natural caves; we walked to the Talayotic archeological site, So Na Cacana; and we visited via dinghy Calacoves where almost a hundred burial caves had been hollowed out along the cliffs by the inhabitants of the Talayotic civilization.



Two types of boats had become common sights, and before our arrival in the Balearics we had never seen boats exactly like these. The first we called the "litter scooper", a boat designed to pick up litter floating on the surface of the water. These boats were seen daily passing through all the calas keeping the waters clean. The second was a paddle boat with a slide, called a "pedalo". We saw these in anchorages with resorts, like in Cala en Porter.



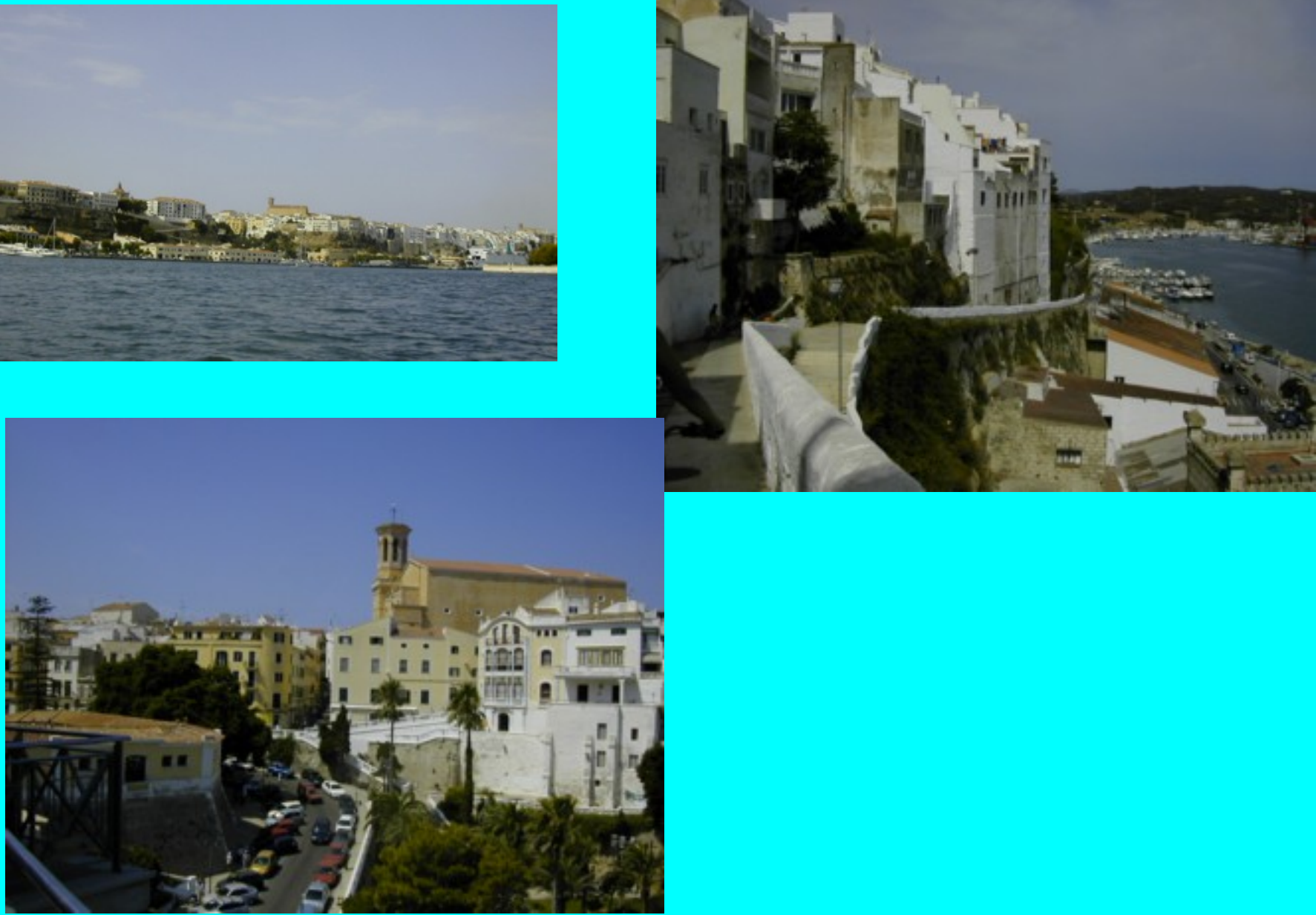
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On Monday, August 8, we departed the southern coastline of Menorca and headed to Mahon (Mao), the main port and capital of Menorca. Throughout history this excellent long natural harbor had been coveted by many nations due to its central location in the Mediterranean. As we approached from sea, the old large defensive towers and fortresses could still be seen surrounding the main entrance to the harbor. Particularly interesting was that fact that in the 18th century the island changed hands six times. The British occupied Menorca three times, the Spanish two times, and the French one time. Today, the British influence in Mahon could still be seen. And, during the French occupation, Richelieu’s chef created a sauce from a local Mahon sauce which we all know now as mayonnaise (mahonesa).



We spent 17 days in Mahon anchored in Cala Taulera. As this cala was near the entrance to Mahon harbor, we were anchored next to an old British defense tower and the 19th century Spanish Fortress of Isabel II at La Mola. This made for a pleasant setting; the only drawback was the thirty-five minute dinghy ride into Mahon near the head of the harbor. Once at the dinghy dock, there were many steps to climb as Mahon was clustered on cliffs above the port.



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All summer long it had become impossible to keep the boat clean. Every time the winds blew from the south, our boat was covered with a coat of Sahara sand; by our arrival in Mahon our boat’s top sides were filthy. Light rain showers just made the situation worse. During our stay in Mahon we had our first heavy rain in five months, and it was most welcomed.

While in Mahon, we visited the Museum of Menorca which displayed many artifacts from the Talayotic culture, especially those from the necropolis at Calacoves; we took the bus to Ciudadela (Ciutadella); we visited “La Mola”, amazed at its size and intricate defense system; and we walked to the archeological site of Trepuco to see the remains of this Talayotic village containing a talayot (large, circular tower) and a taula (a T-shape monument), considered one of the tallest taulas in Menorca.



The main reason for the long stay in Mahon was our need to wait for a weather window to sail to Sardinia. Strong northwest gales in the Gulf of Lion created dangerous sea conditions in the stretch of water between Menorca and Sardinia. The week before we left Mahon there had been 45 to 60 knot winds with 15 foot seas in this stretch. As winds could accelerate quickly in the Gulf of Lion, watching the weather became important. Once the winds subsided, it usually took another day or two for the seas to settle.

Wednesday, August 24, we finally had our weather window. That evening we departed Menorca for Sardinia, 187 nautical miles away. With the winds now light and variable, we mostly motorsailed. Surprisingly, even though the winds were light, a 6 to 7 foot swell still remained as we departed Menorca. Luckily, during the night the seas continued to subside and by Thursday morning were down to 1 to 2 feet. Friday morning as the sun rose in Sardinia, we dropped our anchor in Porto Conte Bay, just west of the town of Alghero. It felt good to be in Sardinia.

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