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MY CITY*: PALMA

DOMINIQUE AFACAN TAKES US ON A TOUR OF MALLORCA'S HIP AND SIZZLING CAPITAL CITY

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DOMINIQUE AFACAN

Dominique has been editing lifestyle magazines for over 10 years, living in London, Milan, New York and Hong Kong along the way. The journey continues in Mallorca, where she is a freelance editor and writer. Get her updates at facebook.com/theluxedit.com

Most of us live in cities. Even if a tiny part of us yearns for the country, it's hard to deny the excitement of the town. We ask one person – clearly in love with their city – to tell us what makes it so special. Through their eyes, we can take a fresh look at where we live, too.

How long have you lived in Palma?

I've been coming to Mallorca for years as my parents have a place in Port d'Andratx and spend about half the year there. I only moved to Palma at the end of 2013 though, so I'm a relative newbie!

What brought you here?

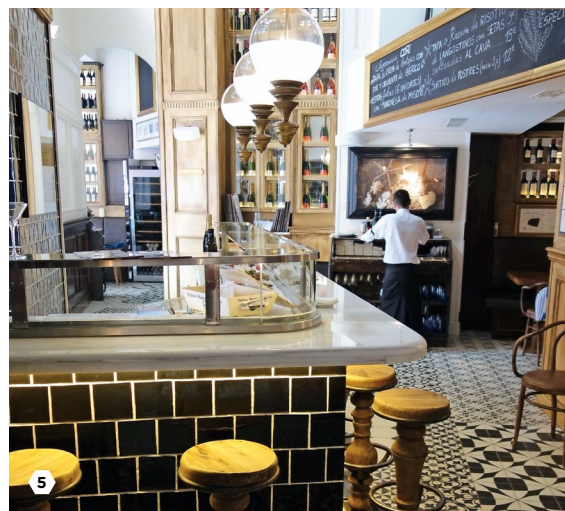
I'm from the UK but had been living in Hong Kong for five years and, although I loved it, I knew I had to head back to Europe at some point. I couldn't quite make it all the way to London – all that cold weather and long commuting! So I compromised and decided to stop off in Palma. The two-hour flight home seems so insignificant compared to the 12-hour journey from Hong Kong.

Which of the seasons makes Palma feel most alive?

I'm a real sun worshipper – so although it's a bit of a cliché, I love the summer. The island is made for it: lots of beautiful beaches, sailing, hiking, partying... what else is the summer for?



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1 A towering Gothic masterpiece: the Cathedral of Santa Maria of Palma is also known as La Seu.

2 Break for lunch after soaking up the sun and head to the main café stretch at Portixol.

3 It's best to explore the charming Old Town on foot, though locals navigate it by bike.

4 Enjoy delicious paella and more at Forn de Sant Joan restaurant in the bustling La Lonja fishing quarter.

5 People-watch and dine in style at the über-smart seafood bar at Hotel Cort

What's the mood of the city in May?

There's a feeling of excitement in the air – after a relaxing and quiet winter, there's a real sense that things are now kicking off. More tourists are arriving, all the restaurants and hotels have opened for the season and, of course, the weather is heating up.

What time of day do you most enjoy?

I love the morning for the sense of calm. Hearing birdsong or church bells as you wake up is a gift. I love throwing open the blinds and being met by such incredible views, too.

Tell us about the light and colours of your city.

When I first arrived here I was amazed by the air quality – I kept saying it was like viewing the world in high resolution. I like the fact that all the buildings seem to match. Looking down on it all from the castle is pretty »

PHOTOGRAPHY: © DOMINIQUE AFACAN / WWW.THELUXEDIT.COM; HELEN CATHCART



“The LIGHT here is fantastic and it stretches into the LONG evenings. I also love how the warm, dusty tones look under the SUN”

cool and I love how the warm, dusty tones look under the sun. The light here is fantastic, and I really appreciate the long, light evenings – it’s like being awarded an extra slice of time every day.

Where do you escape to?

I enjoy hiking in the hills near my parents’ place in Port d’Andratx, but equally I often stroll up to the castle (Castell de Bellver) for the ultimate view over Palma. And I’m often to be found in Portixol, a gorgeous former fishermen’s village with little bars and restaurants dotted along the seafront. The best thing about it is that you can walk there from the centre of Palma in around half-an-hour. I want to take up rollerblading as there are so many people speeding along here. I was dreaming of buying one of the renovated fishermen’s cottages, until I found out how much they now cost. I always fancy having a staycation at the Hotel Portixol, mostly because of its gorgeous pool.

What has been your best discovery in Palma?

The Tuesday night neighbourhood bar crawl! When I first got here I lived in the Old Town and was worried it

would be very quiet. But my first Spanish friend, Andrés, calmed my mind when he told me about the famous Ruta Martiana, which offers tapas and caña (small beers) at a number of bars in the area.

What do you miss most when you’ve been away?

I miss the food here – the vegetables taste so fresh, and I love buying my fish fresh from the market. There is something very natural and healthy about Palma which I haven’t found in many other cities – it never feels industrial or overcrowded.

Do you have a favourite way to get around?

I like to walk – it’s small enough and the roads are full of life, so it’s interesting to wander around. The best area for strolling is the Old Town, though I tend to get lost very easily down the winding streets. I always go out with a map in my bag. I’ve also been known to Segway (you can rent them out in the Old Town), though only when I have visitors!

What would surprise a newcomer to your city?

I don’t think many people realise that Palma has its own beach right here in the city. You really can work all day, then slip into your bikini and head to the beach in under five minutes.

If you could change one thing, what would it be?

Change my perfect city? Almost impossible! I guess I’m



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not doing myself any favours by giving it this glowing report, but perhaps I'd limit the number of tourists who descend on the city in the summer.

What would you say are your favourite places to gather with friends?

I love to hang out in La Lonja, Palma's oldest fishing quarter and now a lovely area bustling with cafés and bars. I'll start the evening in Escape or the Corner Bar – lots of my friends here work on the superyachts and these are their local hangouts. Otherwise, I like to visit Gibson at the top of Passeig des Born to mix with stylish Spanish locals. I also enjoy going for dinner at Forn or La Boveda, which are both in La Lonja, or I might head off to Santa Catalina. At the weekends, I go for lunch at Portixol or Darsena in the harbour if it's sunny and I'm feeling sophisticated.

Is there a best time of day to eat out?

When I first came here I honestly couldn't believe how late people went out for dinner. I still haven't got used to it – I tend to eat around 8 o'clock – but if you can, try to hold out until 10 o'clock and eat like the locals.



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Tell us about the people who live in your city.

I find the Mallorcans very happy, friendly people. They love the outdoors and are very proud, understandably, of their beautiful island. I'm learning Spanish at the moment, and they're very enthusiastic about helping me out and introducing me to their culture.

What do you do to keep fit?

I love tennis – as does the whole island – and I play at the Mallorca Tennis Club in the centre of Palma, near Santa Catalina. I have a great tennis coach called Carlos, who makes me run around a lot! There's a big focus here on »

- 1 The Island Suite at Hotel Cort has stunning views of the city.
- 2 Don't forget to try a traditional pastry, such as the sweet ensaimada bun at the Fibonacci Bakery at San Nicolás.
- 3 Chill out in the bohemian feel of Café Antiquari in Carrer Arabi 5 over cocktails, tapas and laid-back jazz.
- 4 The historic Old Town is brought alive with a vibrant mix of façades.
- 5 A favourite haunt of hip locals, Passeig des Born offers seriously good shopping in its tree-lined street.

DOMINIQUE'S PRIVATE TOUR

FAVOURITE SHOP

The English Bookshop

Carrer Morey 7

I love this dusty old bookshop run by Bernard, an eccentric English character. I pop by for a chat on the way to my Spanish lessons.
Tel: 34 971 723 797

FAVOURITE GALLERY

Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró

Carrer de Saridakis, 29

I particularly love this one because it's housed in Miró's original studios with his unfinished works.
<http://miro.palmademallorca.es>

FAVOURITE RESTAURANT

Abaco

Calle San Juan, 1

A must for design fans, it's set in a converted 16th-century palace – but it *is* expensive!
www.bar-abaco.es

FAVOURITE HOTEL

Hotel Cort

Plaça de Cort, 11

It's beautifully designed; I love all the different tiles by the pool and the ones in the bar.
www.hotelcort.com/en

FAVOURITE MARKET

Mercat d'Olivar

Plaza Olivar, 4

A vast, covered food market. Alongside the stalls, there are bars where you can stop and enjoy some oysters and a glass of Champagne.

WHERE TO WHILE THE DAY AWAY

ProSeCco bar

Calle Del Vicari Joaquim Fuster, 43 Portixol

Pick a bar stool, order a glass of bubbles and prepare to people-watch!

BEST PLACE TO LOOK UP

Everywhere in the Old Town

The architecture in Palma is just stunning.

BEST BAR

Agua

Carrer de Jaume Ferrer, 6

This tiny bar in La Lonja does great live-music nights and has a fantastic atmosphere.
www.aguabar.com

WHAT YOU MUST SEE

La Seu

It's the cathedral (also known as Santa Maria of Palma). It's a Gothic masterpiece.
www.spain.info

- 1 Marvel at the quirky Gaudí-inspired architecture of Palma.
- 2 Portixol still retains its fishing-boat charm amid modern high-rise hotels.
- 3 Hats off to Ontop – the one-stop, stylish headscarf shop on Passeig des Born.



tennis, thanks to Raphael Nadal (who is from Palma) and I'm always so impressed by the standards of the children having lessons around me – they're way better than I will ever be.

What types of shop do you most like to visit?

I'm a terribly lazy shopper and usually get everything from Zara. Here, I discovered that Zara has a sophisticated older sister called Uterqüe, so I've expanded my reach. I also love Massimo Dutti – I like Spanish labels. Another favourite is Ontop on the Passeig des Born – all it sells is headscarves.

Tell us what keeps you in Palma.

The weather keeps me (especially in winter), as does the manageable size of the place. I also feel much healthier in Palma than I do in bigger cities.

Where else would you like to live if you couldn't live in Palma?

I guess I might move to Mallorca's buzzy next-door neighbour, Ibiza. Or I might go back to Italy where I studied Italian at university – I could probably do with a top-up on my language skills. 