



Walking in sunshine in a hiker's paradise

Damian Fahey says
Menorca has even
more to offer than
just beautiful beaches
and good nightlife

MENORCA may have the four classical summer traits in abundance – sun/sea/sand and family-friendliness. But the most exciting aspect of this Balearic package is the amount of hiking options.

That's courtesy of a circuit of the island, originally designed with a military mind, but now allowing for a perfect view of the sea at all times.

The 200km Cami de Cavalls hugs the entire coastline, taking in over 130 beaches, lots of them unexplored, all with their own coves and inlets and craggy rocky formations. It is stunning scenery, so much so that the island and its deep water port of Mahon are regularly used for movie scripts that deal with the 18th and 19th century.

There have been shoots for the likes of *Master & Commander* (the first episode of the first chapter of the first book was actually set in the Governor's residence here), *Hornblower* (two of the BBC episodes) and *Sharpe*.

Overall, the island's good clean sandy beaches are family friendly in the extreme, and the hotels have the necessary fun elements of pools and activities.

There are also two treats when it comes to kids and

animals, a 'Pueculiar Zoo' at Lloc de Menorca (motto: 'Observe, Appreciate, Learn, Touch') and the horse dressage show at San Martorellet.

The zoo bears comparisons with the petting zoo areas many of us are familiar with here in Ireland.

The Menorcan version, stocked from rescue centres around the globe, has owls a plenty (Harry Potter's Hedwig lookalikes), tame snakes, lizards, ring-tailed lemurs, parrots, miniature goats, fat pigs, emus, marmosets, deer and such like in a tropical garden/forest.

The San Martorellet horse show is a Menorcan speciality; those with a love of horses or ponies will be riveted by this mix of thoroughbreds, dressage, music and showbiz professionalism.

There are two main towns on Menorca – the former capital of Ciutadella, and **DREAMY ISLAND:** Menorca has many isolated coves and beaches to be explored. Left, the picturesque town of Ciutadella

the present capital, Mahon (also called Mao in the local Catalan dialect), and any holidaymaker would be remiss not to take in both.

The former was originally a Moorish settlement and has the formal structure of the main square, a thriving shopping area and abundance of restaurants. Port Mahon was the garrison-centre of the British Navy during their century-long occupation of the island, an important one too as they had as many as 15,000 troops stationed there at the one time.

The redcoats were in

place to protect the almost fjord-like harbour, over 5km long and able to take the biggest of ships. A boat tour around the port of Mahon shows the various fortresses at their best while a trip on a glass-bottomed catamaran offers a fascinating picture of all manner of fish life in their natural habitat.

The white-walled village of Binibeca is something special too. Recreated in the 1960s, it is just the place you have seen in many band's music video – *Everything But The Girl* did one for *Missing* there.

Also, special mention for the arts and crafts fair at Ferreries – on the road between Ciutadella and Mao – featuring local fruit and vegetables, original ceramic crafts, plants and traditional dance shows each Saturday (9am-1pm).

Night-time can be the right time too for the extra spot of relaxation, although be aware the Balearic beat is a lot softer on Menorca.

The kick though comes with the island's wonderful secret, the Cova d'en Xoroi nightclub, which is built into the steep cliffs on the south-eastern part of the island.

This natural catacomb was the original lair of 15th century pirate Xoroi now with added architectural rework, tunnelling, glazing and terracing.

The sun sets over the horizon truly affording one of the natural wonders of the entire clubbing world – not just the famous Balearic clubbing world.

Bear in mind too that the practicalities of Menorca are part of the attraction;

the hiking is free, beer inexpensive at €3 a pint (the local Mahon brew is highly recommended), cigarettes are €4 for 20, while car rental is cheap, with petrol roughly at Irish prices.

FACTFILE

DAMIAN visited Menorca with **Sunway** Holidays whose summer service to the island runs till September. It offers the resorts of Cala Blanca, Cala'n Blanes, Calan Bosch, Calan Forcat and Sa Caleta. Prices start from €379pp and €1359 for a family of two adults and two children. The €379 price is based on seven nights departing September 12 and staying at the Los Lenticos in Calan Forcat. Family (2+2) price from €1359.

Damian stayed at the four-star Paradise Club & Spa Aparthotel in Calan Bosch, pictured below.

For something special, the four-star adults-only Valentin Star in Calan Bosch costs from €899.

*Prices include flights, return airport transfers, accommodation, taxes & charges, 20kg check-in baggage and services of a rep. www.sunway.ie

