

# Carved out of a cliff is the coolest bar on earth

**UTOPIA:**  
Cova d'en Xoroi is hewn out of the rock overlooking the Med

**Heidee Martin** has her very own Shirley Valentine moment in one of idyllic Menorca's brightest gems

**I**t's not a party island like Ibiza or Majorca, but the lesser spotted Balearic is home to the coolest bar on earth. Hidden along Menorca's exquisite coastline lies Cova d'en Xoroi, a bar offering a truly unique experience with your G&T.

The entrance to this fantastical place is completely unassuming. A gorgeous Spaniard behind a tiny reception desk led me to my first glimpse of calm, glistening infinity. The view beyond the reception was still water as far as the eye can see and it kept me enthralled as I walked down what felt like a thousand steps along the side of the cliff face. Even the banisters, fashioned from olive branches, tell you you're somewhere special.

At the base of the steps locals and tourists were enjoying drinks on a terrace with a small bar. Access to a couple of tables was guarded by velvet ropes – only those willing to shell out a few hundred euro to gain access can enjoy the best views of what feels like your very own nook of paradise.

Having said that, there are no bad views in Cova d'en Xoroi. Even the ladies' toilet enjoys an exquisite vantage point. As sunset approached, I watched from my terrace table as further up the cliff face the rocks came alive with people. There are several holes in the cliff which are the only clue as to the size of this bar hidden in a cave within.

When I ventured into the cave I immediately felt like Alice in Wonderland as I made my way through a magical warren of snugs and terraces, interspersed with wall art and ambient lighting on the beautiful rock. The 'windows' are simply holes in the rock which open to the view beyond.

As I followed the winding pathway through Wonderland the space widened to reveal a small stage area with the largest window of all as its backdrop. It's quite a coup to perform here but after 'making it', bands must compete

with the Mediterranean at its most spectacular, which always threatens to steal the show from right behind them.

I took a seat at a glazed window to enjoy the nesting birds on the rocks outside. They seemed so interested in watching the people within the cliff that it felt a little like a zoo in reverse.

Watching the sunset here is a Utopian experience: sitting in a bar carved out of the edge of the earth, watching the sun disappear over the horizon while sipping on the local favourite – gin and bitter lemon – well, it was my very own Shirley Valentine moment.

**U**ntil now, the Balearic islands made me think of loud, beer-swallowing, sunburnt men and cheap restaurants festooned with



photographs of omelette and chips. This image was aided by various tales of drunkenness in resorts like Magaluf in Majorca and San Antonio in Ibiza. Thankfully, there was no deep-fried debauchery on show in Menorca, which sated my yearning for sun, wine and a whitewashed, coastal idyll.

It took me about 36 hours to realise what felt so unusual about this friendly, sun-drenched island. And as I felt myself relax at the ATM, it hit me: Menorca feels safe. The crime rate is low and it has a very laid-back vibe (I must feel relaxed to use a word like *vibe*), making it ideal for families, young and old.

It was difficult to tell in May whether the peaceful pool-sides flanking every hotel would be as calm during the heady school holidays. Either way, the beaches of Menorca are as ubiquitous as the unusually shaped Menorcan sandals, leaving plenty of room for other people's little darlings to roam free. And if one beach isn't floating your lilo, another is minutes away.

A walk along the Camí de Cavalls shows the striking coastline at its best. This pathway dates to 1330 when it was used to keep watch over the island. It was later used by British and French forces during their occupation.

Stretching for 185km, it is conveniently broken down into 20 bite-size stages; ideal for walkers and seasoned hikers alike.

There are buses but you will need more than one to cross the island. I recommend hiring a car even if, like me, you are appre-

hensive at driving on the other side of the road – the roads are a lot calmer than Spain's other popular destinations.

There aren't too many busy resorts where secluded beaches are a possibility, let alone a given, and a car is a must to access some of the more beautiful ones.

Dining out in Menorca is as enjoyable as it is lengthy. Rather than take cover for a siesta, people flock to restaurants with covered terraces for lunches that can last up to three hours. Expect upwards of five courses of mouthwatering fresh seafood, beautifully lean meats, breads topped with tapenades, cheeses, wild asparagus and Menorcan lobster stew, all at very reasonable prices.

Menorca's wine industry is growing and you can while away an afternoon at the Binifadet winery with a well-priced light dinner and wine tasting on the terrace overlooking the vineyard. And if wine is not your thing, a beer costs around €3 in most places.

So if you find your way to Menorca and your bones get weary from the hiking, shopping, tanning and swimming, don't worry, I know a great place to get a drink at sunset.

## GETTING THERE

**Sunway** has recently launched package holidays to Menorca. Prices start from €379pp, or €1,359 for a family of two adults and two children for seven nights. See [sunway.ie](http://sunway.ie) for details.





**MAGIC:**  
The bar is a warren of snugs and terraces within the cliff with giant 'windows' opening to unrivalled views





**NAKED:** Ambient lighting makes the most of the bare beautiful rock



