

Mallorca 2014 – A Cycling Gem!

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by Vic Villhard

Alison Stone and her springtime Mallorca tours are like the Mary Poppins of cycling trips: “practically perfect in every way!” With way more bikes than cars on the winding back roads, comfortably cool mornings and warm sunny afternoons, a variety of attractions, rolling terrain and challenging mountain passes through the UNESCO World Heritage Tramuntana region, sweeping vistas, stunning sunsets at beach resort towns, superb meals and accommodations, and over-the-top happy hours combined with options for hiking, train and boat excursions on a flexible schedule with all multi-night stays ... well, you see what I mean.

Alison prepared the most organized and comprehensive route packet ever, with cue sheets, highlighted maps, and GPS files for a wide variety of options on each of the optional cycling days and for the transfer rides between hotels. Some of the mandatory transfer rides included more than 3,000 feet of climbing; others were nearly 50 miles, at the limit of the 2B rating. Optional rides included up to 4,400 feet of climbing and grades of 10-15%, with rewards of dramatic sea cliff views, hilltop villages, and 360-degree vistas of the island. The roads on Mallorca are in great condition with minimal traffic, courteous drivers and so many cyclists from it feels like you're out on an organized weekend ride. The singular exception to the outstanding cycling conditions occurred when we had a frightening encounter with a near-continuous stream of 5,000 oncoming motorcycles participating in the 38th annual one-day “Around the Island” rally.

Natural, historic and cultural attractions abound on Mallorca. The oldest settlements on Mallorca are the 3,000 year old Bronze Age Talaiotic structures and 2,000 year old Roman ruins. The unique, picturesque terraced seaside village of Banyalbufar (“vineyard by the sea”) was built by the Moors 1,000 years ago to enable agriculture on the steep slopes. The churches and cathedrals on Mallorca date from the 1200s. Extensive collections of art by Picasso, Miro and other masters are displayed in museum settings as impressive as the art itself. Gardens and limestone caves provide more options to explore. In the town of Soller, the 19th and 20th century mansions in various architectural styles including influences from Gaudi, were built to impress and they still do today. A charming, perfectly preserved 100-year old trolley and train connect Soller with Palma for a day trip to the city. A boat excursion to Sa Calobra provided another fascinating perspective on the island topography. We even saw a Flamenco dance show one evening.

The accommodations on this tour were first rate. Tops was Monnaber Nou, a tranquil hillside retreat in a 390-acre pastoral setting in the foothills overlooking Port de Pollensa, and surrounded by ancient olive trees. The stone facilities, pool, spa, and dining experience are every bit as outstanding as the setting. Others were cliff-side resorts with dramatic, breathtaking views of the azure Mediterranean far below and beachfront resorts with dramatic, sweeping views from the heart of bayside port towns with plenty of dining options on a schedule that accommodates hungry cyclists. Alison's happy hour tapas were so extensive that some of us only added coffee and dessert and called it dinner!

Mallorca has it all for a top-notch cycling experience. It's like combining the best of the coastal scenery of California with the luxury accommodations, exquisite cuisine, quaint hilltop villages, and sun drenched fields of wildflowers in Provence. Alison has refined this tour so everyone has the time and flexibility to tailor the experience to their own ability, preferences, and taste. In all, this trip was an absolute delight, and Mallorca truly is a cycling gem.



Group photo taken on the steps of the Hotel Mir I Vent in Banyalbufar, Mallorca, Spain