

## Luxury Spain

# Immerse yourself in Mallorca's wine scene

A former monastery in the hills near Pollença is the ideal base from which to explore the island's vineyards — and drink their finest produce, says **Ella Buchan**

The dusty, vine-flanked driveway hints at what's to come, as do intermittent glimpses of the building, the colour of honey-soaked apricots. When even the car park makes me smile, I'm certain this is a special place. The air is scented with lavender, jasmine and lemon trees, planted on terraces marked by low stone walls. No detail is overlooked at Son Brull Hotel & Spa.

The building, in the foothills of northern Mallorca's Serra de Tramuntana mountains and just outside the beguiling old town of Pollença, started life as an Arabic farmhouse in the 12th century. It housed a Jesuit monastery from the 1700s and opened as a luxury hotel in 2003, with monks' cells and dark corridors painstakingly transformed into 23 huge, light-filled bedrooms, most within the original friary. My room has a deep-soaking bathtub, king-size bed and hand-carved furniture, yet there's still enough space to dance with abandon. Loveliest of all, shutters open up to views across the grounds, a glorious patchwork of tree-studded lawns, stone terraces and vineyards.

The vines reflect the property's heritage, and the deep love of fine food and wine of its owners, siblings Alex, Miquel and Mar Suau. When Son Brull was a monastery, the monks grew and created their own produce. The hotel's assistant manager, Brenda Garcia, is certain that this would have included wine. "We know that the monks grew grapes here because the piece of land where we started planting has always been named by locals as *la vinya*: 'the vineyard' in Catalan."

The two and a half acres of vines don't yield quite enough to meet the needs of the restaurant and bar — the latter housed in the monastery's olive mill with tables

surrounding an original press — although Son Brull does produce proprietary wines in every colour, plus a cava. "They're all ancient native grapes recovered to make light, fresh wines that match perfectly with our Mediterranean cuisine," Garcia says. "Our vineyard is caressed by the sea breeze, which gives the wines a very special character."

There's definitely something in the air here, and the local wineries have found a way to bottle it. There are about half a dozen scattered around this part of the island. Among them is Vinyes Mortitx, a Mallorcan-owned co-operative off the mountain road between Pollença and Pixarells. I drive through the jagged grey-green landscape, occasionally skirting sheer drops to the sea or braking for a nonchalant, hazelnut-hued mountain goat.

Mateu Pons, the winery's commercial director, greets me at the tasting room, his arms spread wide in welcome. "It's a very special estate," he says as we walk between merlot, cabernet sauvignon and various indigenous grape varieties. "Not only for how beautiful it is. The terroir here is something else."

The vineyards are edged by steep, tree-studded banks. Shy and shaggy mountain sheep munch on acorns, the shells of which crunch under our feet. The whole estate sits between two peaks, allowing in a whisper of sea breeze, while the clay-rich soils bring mineral notes to the wines, from a somewhat savoury, skin-contact *giró ros* (a native grape) to L'u, a syrah bursting with plums, leather and blackberries.

On the other side of Pollença, reached via a narrow (although not nearly so hairy) road flanked by fincas and olive groves, Can Vidalet also benefits from the shelter of the mountains and the cooling mist that rolls in from Port de Pollença. Its focus on native grapes, many of them forgotten on the island, started with a few rows of



Son Brull hotel



View to the old town of Pollença



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Can Vidalet winery



A Son Brull bedroom

presnal, which yields a white wine fragrant with almond, fennel and grapefruit. Now, thanks to the winemaker Elisabeth Fuentes, more than half the grape varieties are indigenous.

For her latest project she submerged 300 mini amphorae of presnal in the Mediterranean, leaving them to age for nine months. I try a trickle during a tasting on a bougainvillea-covered terrace that juts out over the vines. It really does taste of the sea, with a marine tang and aromas of slightly smoky, salt-sprayed herbs.

I try more of the island's wines at dinner, an eight-course tasting menu at Son Brull's Restaurant 365. Diners are often seated on the huge outdoor terrace, but tonight, with storms forecast, we're ensconced in the cosy dining room.

It hardly matters once the plates start to arrive. I opt for the vegetarian menu, with ingredients drawn from the surrounding landscapes and kitchen garden. Hors d'oeuvres of tangy pickled vegetables and olive oil crackers are followed by an intense cold tomato soup, warm pumpkin bread and a smokily rich aubergine cannelloni, balanced by a malvasia with notes of charred grapefruit. There's also a creamy rice dish with island-grown chickpeas and spearmint.

I'm particularly taken with the dessert of "spring honey from our bees" — pollen and drizzly nectar served with goat's milk ice cream. It's paired with Vinyes Mortitx's Dolc de Gel, a delicately floral ice wine. The winery's high altitude means that on crisp autumn mornings riesling and mus-

cat grapes can be harvested semi-frozen.

Joan Amengual, the hotel sommelier, has been stocking the cellar in the monastery's flour mill for 15 years with the island's best wines. The focus on Mallorcan bottles, he says, is because of their quality as well as demand: Son Brull's guests are often concerned with provenance. "They're interested in experiences and the opportunity to try original wines that express the meaning of Mallorca," he says.

Next morning I rise early for another experience: the spa, reopened after renovations in which four tucked-away villa suites were also unveiled. The spa has sliding glass doors that open up the thermal pool to vine and mountain views. You can book a treatment, although just taking the waters is a treat. I could easily spend a few hours here, alternating between the pool's jets and the plush day beds.

Breakfast beckons, though, and the food is once again on point (although it doesn't come with Mallorcan wines). I've barely sat down at my table, in a sunken area close to the outdoor infinity pool, when a personal buffet is swiftly laid out: fresh fruit, a platter of cheese and charcuterie, a basket of still-warm rolls and pastries, and a selection of homemade jams and honey. I order coffee and eggs florentine, and watch as fellow guests claim space around the pool.

After several days of clotted-cream skies, the sun has made an early breakthrough and is warming the ground. People are keen to make up for lost tanning time, and you couldn't find a lovelier spot for it. Rows of loungers face the pool like languid theatre seats, ready for the daily show of beautiful views.

although it's a short drive to reach the trailhead. The hike follows a series of zig-zagging past fragrant shrubs and crumbling sandstone walls. It gets tougher near the top; the ground becomes looser underfoot and the trees fall away, which in summer means struggling in the heat.

It's nearly midday when I reach the top, and I curse myself for ignoring advice to set off at dawn. The effort proves worthwhile, though, when I see that the tiny crown is actually a series of impeccably preserved sandstone buildings with ornate archways. The monastery and chapel date from the 14th century, and today are being visited by a few humans and many more mountain goats, grazing the terraces and skipping around the exterior walls.

Inside, it's wonderfully cool. There's sometimes a café open up here, although not today. I do, however, discover a vending machine stocked with water, cans of soft drinks and cerveza (sadly, no wine).

You can spend the night here, sleeping in a converted hermit's cell. My aching limbs and the strengthening sun have me craving something a little more luxurious, though. The thought of a dip in that pool, and perhaps a flute of Cava Son Brull, make descending the hill a relative breeze.

It looms right behind Son Brull, making descending the hill a relative breeze.



Son Brull's pool

## 3 more boutique Mallorca hotels

### Can Auli Luxury Retreat

On the corner of a quiet street, but close to the bars, restaurants and shops of Pollença's old town, this adults-only sanctuary occupies three 17th-century houses knocked together and elegantly restored. It opened in spring 2021 with 21 rooms overlooking the pool or the Serra de Tramuntana, some with terraces with spectacular mountain views. Island-made furniture and accessories, from woven throws to coffee cups, add a sense of authenticity, as do the regional products used for the excellent breakfasts. Note the striking wall of sculpted clay in the lobby; the artwork was made with offcuts from ceramics crafted for the hotel. **Details** B&B doubles from £165 ([canauliluxuryretreat.com](https://canauliluxuryretreat.com))

### Ten Mallorca

In the centre of the island, this townhouse was once the home of the Mallorcan artist Joan Riera and has been turned into a tranquil retreat. With just nine rooms, some with balconies or terraces, it has a wonderfully exclusive feel — and there's a good chance you'll have the saltwater pool to yourself. The town of Sineu, known for its weekly market and butter-coloured buildings, is within walking distance, while most of the island's towns and beaches are an easy drive. A new suite, with upper terrace and private plunge pool, is due to open this summer, completing the ten in the hotel's name. **Details** B&B doubles from £120 ([tenmallorca.com](https://tenmallorca.com))

### Concepció by Nobis

Opened in summer 2021, this boutique hotel, below, is in the heart of Palma yet feels delightfully secluded. Its 31 rooms and suites occupy a 16th-century soap factory where the old town meets the former fishing barrio of Santa Catalina. Every detail of the redesign, by the Scandinavian Nobis Hospitality Group, is thoughtful, from the yellow-striped loungers around the tucked-away pool to the handcrafted tiles that brighten rooms. The chef Xema Álvarez offers locally inspired cuisine in the airy Xalest restaurant; sea bass tatakí with truffle dressing and carrot chips is a highlight. **Details** B&B doubles from £200 ([concepciobynobis.com](https://concepciobynobis.com))



**Need to know**

Ella Buchan was a guest of Son Brull Hotel & Spa, a Relais & Chateaux member, which has B&B doubles from £210 ([sonbrull.com](https://sonbrull.com)). Fly to Palma