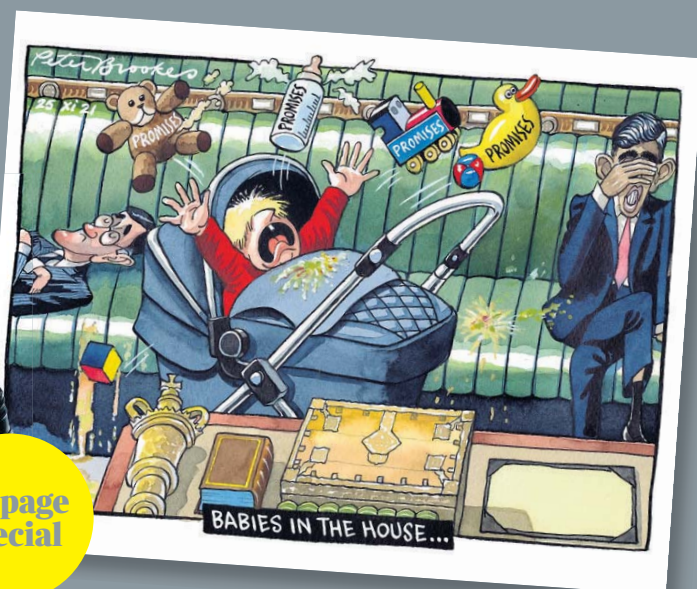




Peter Brookes Cartoons of the year



MAGAZINE



Your 14-day Christmas TV guide



Downing St parties inquiry in disarray after chief quits

Simon Case forced out over claim his office held gathering during lockdown

Henry Zeffman
Chief Political Correspondent

Downing Street was plunged into greater turmoil last night after the top civil servant appointed by Boris Johnson to lead a significant inquiry had to step down from the role.

Simon Case, the cabinet secretary, quit the investigation into Downing Street Christmas parties after it emerged that his office had held one itself during lockdown.

Johnson admitted that public anger about the parties last year had contributed to the Conservatives' capitulation in the North Shropshire by-election yesterday, a seat that they had held for 200 years.

Downing Street's hopes of a clean bill of health over the parties from an inquiry led by Case, head of the civil service, were dashed after *The Times* revealed that his office organised a party on December 17 last year.

The Christmas quiz for Case's private office was held the evening before a Downing Street gathering. Aides later laughed about the Downing Street party at a mock press conference which was revealed in a leaked video.

Case's resignation from the inquiry came as Conservatives questioned Johnson's future as leader after the party lost the North Shropshire seat, which it had held with a 23,000 majority, to the Liberal Democrats on a 34-point swing. The Tory MP Sir Roger Gale warned the prime minister that it was "one more strike and he's out".

Meanwhile, a record number of 93,045 new coronavirus cases were reported yesterday, the third record-breaking day in a row.

It was revealed that Whitehall was drawing up plans to ban people from meeting indoors as part of a two-week circuit breaker after Christmas. Officials were preparing draft regulations that would ban indoor mixing, except



Simon Case's exit from the inquiry adds to No 10's woes after their by-election defeat

JAMES VEYSEY/SHUTTERSTOCK

for work purposes, and limit pubs and restaurants to outdoor service. The plans will be presented to ministers within the next few days.

The party at Case's office took place at a time when mixing between households for social reasons was banned in London. The party, organised by a private secretary in Case's team, took place outside his personal office. It began at 5.30pm and was listed in digital calendar invitations as "Christmas party!"

The event occurred the day before an alleged Christmas party in Downing Street at which officials and advisers are said to have made speeches, handed out prizes, eaten from a cheese board and drunk together until 2am.

Footage of a mock press conference in which Allegra Stratton, then Johnson's press secretary, laughed with other aides about how to explain the event led to her resignation last week.

Case was given the task of investigating the party, an inquiry that has subsequently expanded to cover several other events in Downing Street during periods of severe Covid restrictions including a leaving party on November 27 at which Johnson is alleged to have made a speech and a drinks event for staff at the Department for Education on December 10. Other alleged gatherings in Downing Street that could be investigated include claims of a party in Johnson's flat on November 13, which are forcefully denied.

The latest revelation led to a widespread acceptance at the top of government that Case's role in the inquiry was untenable. He has been replaced by Sue Gray, a former director of propriety and ethics who works in Michael Gove's Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

A Cabinet Office spokesman said: "Staff in the cabinet secretary's private office took part in a virtual quiz on Continued on page 2, col 3

WEEKEND



31 best pubs for winter

Grab a seat by the fire. Cheers!



Vegan guests at Christmas

Great food and all shop-bought

COMMENT

Giles Coren

Please don't ask me personal questions





Having vegan guests? What to serve

We test the best (and worst) supermarket food

Weekend

Travel
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Grab a seat by the fire

The best winter pubs for a festive drink with friends

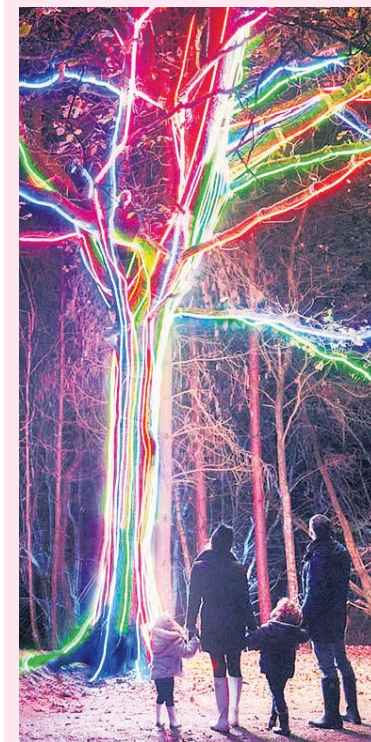


The Brisley Bell pub, Norfolk

Last-minute
gifts Order
from the sofa!



Night gardens
Where to
see the lights



Travel

Page

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'I awoke to the numinous beauty of the desert beyond my floor-to-ceiling window'

Susan d'Arcy checks in to the new Six Senses Shaharut

Church of St Bartholomew, Soller



Mallorca: the year-round island

Join the locals as they claim back their restaurants, celebrate festivals and go on hikes into the mountains, says **Sarah Gordon**

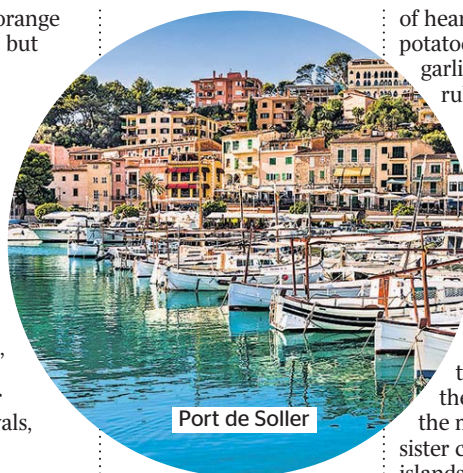
When the composer Frédéric Chopin first arrived in Palma in November 1838 he was enraptured. He wrote to friends: "The sky is turquoise, the sea blue, the mountains emerald, and the air? The air is as blue as the sky." And he marvelled at the people dressed "as in the summertime".

Cycling along the Paseo Marítimo promenade that unfurls from Palma, speckled with bars and restaurants serving fresh fish and sea views, I can see why he was so enthused. Locals sit on terraces enjoying a pre-lunch

vermouth with a festive slice of orange and an olive. The breeze is fresh, but in the sunshine it's almost warm enough for short sleeves.

This is Mallorca at its best. Through my sunglasses it looks like August. The only difference is that there are no tourists.

And that's the beauty of this Balearic island out of season. In summer it heaves with visitors, and islanders retreat into the background. But once the tan-seeking crowds dissipate, local life picks up where it left off. Mallorquins claim back their restaurants, celebrate local festivals, and go into the mountains for lung-bursting hikes and lunches



Port de Soller

of hearty frito — a dish of lamb offal, potatoes, peppers, wild fennel and garlic, served with rustic bread and ruby-red island wine.

You could argue that Mallorca is made for the cooler months; the warming food (thick soups, suckling pig, local cheeses and *botifarron* blood sausage), the old stone farmhouses such as LJs Ratxo, northeast of Palma, which have become cosy boutique retreats.

Most trips begin in Palma, on the south coast and crowned by the ornate cathedral looking over the marina and out to sea. Unlike her sister capitals on the other Balearic islands, this is a year-round city. ▶

32 Travel



► Visit in January and you may wonder why Christmas lights still illuminate the streets. This is when Palma celebrates its patron saint, St Sebastià, with musical performances and exhibitions across the city. They culminate on January 19, when concerts take place in the squares and public barbecues called *torradas* are lit so you can grill your own paprika-spiked *sobrasada* sausages. The festival ends a couple of days later with a *correfoc*, when people dress up as devils and run through the streets, whirling torches above their heads and spinning Catherine wheels on sticks. It is a surreal sight.

Even when the festivities end, there's a lot going on in Palma. Locals frequent the bars and restaurants of the rejuvenated Santa Catalina area, set back from the marina. The Olivar market is a picture of bounty, with fresh fruits, vegetables, fish and meats and a food hall that's great for a lunch of local produce such as cured hams, cheeses and plump prawns, served with delicious wines.

From the newly opened Nivia Born Boutique Hotel, the luxuriously renovated former headquarters of Iberia Airlines, where I am staying, it's a short walk to find boutiques, galleries and sites such as the marina and medieval La Lonja mercantile exchange. It is surrounded by the smart mansions that line the elegant Paseo del Born, and the roof terrace has views across the leafy boulevard to the cathedral.

The charming streets of the old city are quieter still (even in peak season), and on an early morning visit to the grand sandstone cathedral I have the place almost to myself (£7; catedraldemallorca.org). Next door is the Almudaina Palace, a gothic beauty built on the remains of the original Arabic alcazar (£7; patrimonionacional.es).

Chopin was not the only one captivated by the "blue air" of Palma and Mallorca. The island light inspired other artists. Joan Miró had his studio just outside Palma and the Joan Miró Foundation has a display of his works, from his oldest drawings and oil paintings to the few bronzes he created, as well as tropical gardens to explore (entry £8; miromallorca.com).

Back in the city, the contemporary art museum Es Baluard is set in the 16th-century bastion of Sant Pere and has an impressive collection of works by artists such as Joaquín Sorolla, who spent a summer in Mallorca, and the Palma painter Juli Ramis (entry £5; esbaluard.org). At this time of year earlier sunsets mean an afternoon visit can end on the outdoor terrace with cathedral and coast set against burnt orange skies. In the evening the temperature does drop, but only enough



The roof terrace of Hotel Sant Francesc, Palma



The village of Deia, in the Tramuntana mountains

Need to know

Sarah Gordon travelled independently. B&B doubles at LJs Ratxo from £215 (ratxo.com), at Nivia Born Boutique Hotel from £166 (niviabornboutiquehotel.com) and at Ecocirer from £150 (ecocirer.com). Fly to Palma

for a jacket. All the more reason to hole up in a cosy bar somewhere, such as the former fishing village of Portixol on the edge of the city. (It's also a lovely stroll or bike ride along the coastal promenade here.)

In recent years bohemian bars and restaurants have popped up around this small marina and the fashionable set have moved into revamped fishermen's houses. It even has its own tiny crescent of a beach, although the indigo waters tempt only the hardy for now. I'd prefer a vermouth on the terrace at Vermuteria La Gloria followed by a seafood paella with sea views at Ola del Mar (oladelmar.es).

Unlike some hardy locals, I'm no

convert to the wonders of cold-water swimming (although Mallorca sea temperatures in March are a balmy 12.7C, compared with 8C on England's southern shores), but it's a beautiful time to be by the coast. At Es Trenc, on the southern edge of Mallorca, a ribbon of white sand stretches for four miles, backed by pristine dunes. On a winter stroll of this protected area I find just a few fellow walkers and two hardy Germans who splash into the water for the briefest of swims.

To the east, near the pretty town of Santanyi, Playa S'Amarador and Cala Mondrago in the Mondrago Natural Park are local favourites but are packed

in high season. Now, though, following the route through the pines to find sandy coves and clear blue waters takes on a much more romantic atmosphere.

Up the west coast the Tramuntana mountain range is another option for glorious walks, and the winding roads won't feature the usual peloton. But the weather here is chillier, as Chopin and his lover, George Sand, discovered. Staying in a lonely Carthusian monastery in the mountain village of Valldemossa, they soon fell out of love with Mallorca.

They had travelled to the island with Sand's two children for Chopin's health, but the damp conditions of the monastery worsened his illness, and locals feared his tuberculosis and frowned upon their non-traditional set-up. Sand took out her frustrations in her book *Winter in Mallorca*, and locals have never quite forgiven her for calling them "barbarians". But even Sand was inspired by the island's scenery, with its clear air and crisp colours, and she dedicated passages of the book to its beauty.

My visit to Valldemossa is rather more comfortable. One of Mallorca's most picturesque villages, its lanes are lined with stone villas, perked up with plants and flowers. Cosy cafés serve mud-thick *chocolate caliente* (hot chocolate) and traditional light sugary buns made from potatoes (*coca de patata*). Even a visit to the aptly named cells in the monastery where Chopin and Sand stayed does little to dampen my spirit.

Many hotels are closed for winter, but in charming Soller, about 40 minutes' drive north, the family-run Ecocirer is open except for a couple of weeks in

ALAMY



Winter in the Balearics? Yes, please

Cool and calm in Ibiza

The newly opened clifftop Six Senses Ibiza launches its “cool season” for winter, with a wellness focus. Sunny days are spent on coastal hikes around the wild north of the island and there’s the chance to do daily asanas on the seafront yoga deck. The retreat also offers first-class cuisine with seasonal and nutritional ingredients, many grown at the hotel’s organic farm. Finish it all off with soul-nourishing treatments in the spa, from personalised scrubs to advanced skin-renewing facials and biohacking cryotherapy. A luxury treat at a fraction of the summer price.

Details Seven nights’ B&B from £2,250pp, including flights and transfers, plus €200 daily resort credit (turquoiseholidays.co.uk)

A city retreat in Palma

Do Palma in style, staying at the Hotel Sant Francesc, an elegant mansion built in 1860. Understated rooms with garden and courtyard views provide a cosy retreat in winter, while the roof terrace is perfect for sundowners. The 13th-century cathedral, royal palace of La Almudaina and Arab Baths are near by, while the hotel’s fine-dining restaurant, Quadrat, is where the chef Alvar Albaladejo conjures contemporary dishes with seasonal island produce. Take a guided Palma Dark Histories and Legends Private Walking Tour with ToursByLocals (£172 per tour).

Details B&B doubles from £278 (hotelsantfrancesc.com). Fly to Palma

A Menorca walkabout

Make the most of the cooler temperatures to set off for an adventure on foot. HF Holidays offers springtime walking trips to Menorca, one of the quieter Balearic islands. Rolling countryside, rugged coastlines and pretty fishing villages await, with routes that take you past 1,500-year-old megalithic sites and lookout points. Spend a day visiting 18th-century British forts in the capital, Mahon, and explore Ciutadella, with its gothic and baroque architecture. There are two guided options each walking day, plus one full day of sightseeing.

Details Seven nights’ half-board from £1,074pp, including flights and transfers (hfholidays.co.uk)



Finca Ca’n Beneit, Mallorca

White Isle inspiration

Black Tomato’s newest Bring It Back collection is all about transformational trips that will leave you feeling inspired, whether you want to be creative or get the entrepreneurial juices flowing. With a focus on wellness, this tailor-made Ibiza experience includes private daily yoga and meditation sessions, dishes created by a macrobiotic chef throughout your stay, nutritional workshops and even a cooking lesson with a chef who has worked in a Michelin-starred restaurant. Accompanied by a guide, you’ll visit the mysterious unpopulated island of Es Vedra, famed for its energy, and over the week

you’ll be given the tools for a healthier life.

Details Seven nights’ all-inclusive from £6,100pp, including flights (blacktomato.com)

Hot-springs hideaway in Mallorca

Escape to an adults-only sanctuary in Mallorca, with the white sands of Es Trenc on one side and the salt flats of Es Salobrar on the other. From the boutique Font Santa hotel there’s serenity to be found watching the flamingos paddling in the salty waters — and you can paddle too in the island’s thermal pools. In the spa the mineral-rich waters come from the hot springs the Romans used, and there are (naturally) a variety of wellness treatments and experiences.

Stroll around the gardens, enjoy the art on show and savour the tasting menu at the restaurant.

Details B&B doubles from £223 (fishandpips.co.uk). Fly to Palma

Active Ibiza

Discover the outdoorsy side of the White Isle with this six-day small-group walking tour. On daily excursions you’ll hike along

the rugged coastline and through fragrant pine forests. Your base is the eastern town of Santa Eularia des Riu, with its long waterfront promenade and pretty beaches. From here you’ll explore sleepy backstreets, visit traditional villages and spend a day cycling on the nearby island of Formentera. Strenuous hikes include summiting the highest mountain on Ibiza, while clifftop walks will take in the dramatic northern coast, with most days ending on sandy beaches.

Details Five nights’ B&B from £699pp (gadventures.com). Fly to Ibiza

Menorca on two wheels

The untamed beauty, undulating terrain and breathtaking coastal views make Menorca ideal for a bicycle tour, no matter what your level. This two-centre self-guided trip by e-bike kicks off in Monte Toro, from where you’ll zip through the rugged interior and marvel as the rolling hills and wooded gorges give way to rocky coves and sandy beaches. You’ll pass through traditional whitewashed villages and stop off at Ciutadella, a pretty port with honeyed buildings in the old quarter.

Details Six nights’ B&B

from £965pp, including three dinners, luggage transfers, maps and GPS navigation (inntravel.co.uk). Fly to Mahon

Farmhouse favourite in Mallorca

Make for the Tramuntana mountains for a rustic-chic stay in this stone farmhouse. Finca Ca’n Beneit has been converted into an agroturismo rural hotel, with just ten rooms — but 200 acres to explore. Pine trees blanket the hills stretching off into the distance, and the estate has a historic church, its own flock of sheep and sturdy olive trees. Rooms feature arched ceilings and exposed stone, and there’s a farm-to-table restaurant. Ask for a picnic and head out for the day with a sample of the best Mallorcan wines from the hotel cellar.

Details B&B doubles from £130 (fincacanbeneit.com). Fly to Palma

Formentera retreat

High on a cliff of precipitous pines, Villa Federico is the ultimate Formentera hideaway, with terraces looking out to sea and an alfresco bathtub ideal for stargazing. All taupe and natural stone, this four-bedroom country house is the perfect base for winter walks. There’s an outdoor screen for movie nights, plus an indoor cinema for chillier evenings. Fresh bread and pastries are delivered to you every day, and there’s an option to hire a private chef plus maid, and organise in-house yoga and Pilates classes.

Details Seven nights’ self-catering for eight from £3,912 (dynamiclives.com). Fly to Ibiza

Mallorca spa escape

Give yourself a winter treat for body, mind and spirit at the five-star GPRO Valparaíso Palace and Spa. This “urban resort” combines the benefits of a coastal location just outside Palma with all the perks of a luxury city hotel. After a day’s sightseeing, try the indoor saltwater pool, Jacuzzi and sauna, or a therapeutic Ayurvedic treatment. You can explore the cycle routes that fan out from the hotel, enjoy a game of golf at one of the nearby courses and dine on Mediterranean dishes at the Paraiso and Bistro Mar Blau restaurants.

Details Seven nights’ B&B from £718pp, including flights and transfers (sovereign.com)

Sarah Gordon



Six Senses Ibiza