

Our three-generation journey

Gail Willis, *Choice* yoga expert, enjoys a three-generation holiday on the delightful island of Menorca in the Mediterranean

Mahon - views from city
shops down to the harbour



MY TWO sisters and I decided to take our parents and one of their granddaughters on a sunshine holiday to Menorca. It was such a success that we are all going again this summer.

The Rogers family cast for the trip was:

■ Parents: Gordon, 83, and Janet, 78 (*Choice* yoga column)

■ Sisters: Julie, 55, Gail, 52 (*Choice* Yoga expert), and Tracey, 49

■ Granddaughter: Hannah May, 16 (Tracey's daughter).

This all came about when we three sisters enjoyed a week in Menorca a couple of years ago. We made friends with a family consisting of mum and dad both in their 80s and their two daughters in their 50s. We were all in the Rafalet Apartments in S'Algar. The parents had been visiting Menorca for more than 25 years and their daughters for the past 20 years. As a family they were having a

© SPAIN TOURISM



An idyllic beach at Cala Macarelleta



The family minus Julie - the photographer - in the S'Algar pool

wonderful time and the parents loved having them with them; the sisters loved being able to spend quality time with their parents, too.

This planted the seed for us asking our mum and dad to come out with us the next year. We made it clear we would organise all the travel and show them around. Without hesitation, dad said yes and as soon as we asked mum, that was it.

So last June we all set off in a taxi for Luton Airport and arrived in sunny S'Algar after a two-hour flight and a 15-minute taxi journey from Mahon.

With the cases left in apartments next to each other, we all went to the local

supermarket, two minutes away, to get essentials as we were self-catering. Within 15 minutes we were all sitting on our decking having our first lunch together, mum and dad already relaxed from the journey.

The same day, possibly 30 minutes after arriving, we bumped into the family we had met the year before. Hugs, kisses and introductions of parents took place; they got on well straight away.

Mum and dad had their own apartment which was two-bedroomed, sleeping four. We three sisters had the adjoining apartment. Hannah May used her 'nanny and poppy's' apartment as her wardrobe in the spare room and slept with her mum in our apartment. There were twin beds in all apartments.

We had made sure mum and dad knew they did not have to do everything we did. As a group we could split up, do things together or they could go off on their own.

Mum (Janet) came down to the beach with me one early morning to do yoga on

the beach platform right in front of the sea. I even tried some new moves out on mum to take back to my classes. I didn't crack the whip and make mum do yoga; she came knocking on the apartment door at 8am asking if she could join me.

Some of us are quite early risers and some days we walked around S'Algar before we had breakfast. Others stayed in bed or sat in the early-morning sun. After breakfast we would discuss where we would like to take mum, dad and Hannah that day, all of them keen to see as much

as they could, and off we would go. Going with the 'hassle'-free holiday for mum and dad, I held the 'kitty' which was topped up when necessary. Mum and dad like to treat us girls, which is brilliant, but we made them agree that all bills would be split six ways.

What we did in Menorca as a three-generation family shows what a fabulous island this is for all ages, levels of fitness and mobility.

We all agreed Menorca is the jewel of the Mediterranean. It has countless coves and beaches, crystal-clear water and good-natured people, probably due to the lovely weather. The description we found suited it best was 'a tranquil island for all'.

S'Algar is a well-maintained resort which has escaped the urban sprawl that has occurred over the years, remaining small and friendly. Although there is no beach there are bathing platforms (great for us as none of us likes the sand between our toes). There is an excellent choice of sporting activities: swimming pools, tennis courts, an outdoor bowling club, bike and kayak hire and a spa in Hotel S'Algar.



Alcafar - the smallest beach on the walk up to a look-out station

There is also a long-established diving centre for those wanting to explore the underwater world.

Within a two-minute walk there are two family-run restaurants serving a wide variety of Spanish and English meals, with outside eating under canopy or indoor dining on cooler nights. We had our first night's meal here: one course each and a few rounds of drinks for six worked out at 16 euros each (£13) - very good value for money.

The S'Algar Express is a 'little train' bus which carries up to 20 people free of charge around S'Algar nightly from 7 to 10pm. It's a 'hop on and off' service - all ages love it - and locals and holidaymakers always wave at it on its journey. We did this at least three times.

There is a hotel/apartment private pool and bathing area. The outside pool warmed up by early afternoon and is huge, so you can have a proper swim. All of us used it. There is a poolside café, lots of sunbeds spread around three different areas and steps from the bathing platform into the sea.

Mum and dad wanted to try out the hotel's restaurant one night. You buy a buffet voucher for 18 euros (£15) and eat from the buffet as many times as you like. This suited dad as he loves his food - as do we all. The buffet was constantly replenished and the Rogers family certainly tried all the desserts that kept coming out.



The Fort de San Nicolau

Alcafar

Originally the townsfolk of Mahon had their summer homes here. The beach is calm and very sheltered, making it ideal for families. It's a pleasant, sleepy little village built along one side of a narrow inlet. A 15-minute stroll along the beautiful coastline from our apartment, it's rugged but walkable; mum and dad managed fine. We saw young and old doing the walk, though it's not really suitable for wheelchairs or baby buggies.

Alcafar only has one hotel and adjoining apartments. The hotel sits on one of the most beautiful small beaches I have seen, with rocks either side and small boats moored in the sea. There are spectacular views when walking down to the sea. Tracey calls it the 'Mama Mia' village as it reminds her of the beautiful



Alcafar - a view of the fishing village beach

village in the film. There is a restaurant, the *Piccolo Mundo*, with seating inside and outside – where most people sit – the views going right back over to S'Algar.

We did this walk most days. Mum and dad went on their own one day and stayed on the beach, and had drinks at the hotel before returning. In that respect I can say it is safe to walk for the older generation.

At the back of the beach is the start of a walk up into the rocks and woods, leading up to a 'look-out' building over the whole coastline. That walk takes about another 20 minutes, but with the stunning views, the camera always comes out.

Halfway up you come across what we all think must be the smallest beach in the world. It fits in three people on the sand. From the 'look-out' building you can walk right along to a tourist resort called *Punta Prima*. This walk can take another 20 minutes, all along beautiful coastline.

Punta Prima is a beach resort for families: it has shops all along the front, a good-size beach and lots of cafés and restaurants. It is nowhere near as quiet or pretty as S'Algar and Alcafar but families will enjoy all the facilities.

Mahon

The island's capital was moved from *Ciudadella* to Mahon in 1721 in order to have better control of the harbour and therefore defend the island. It is claimed to be the second largest natural harbour in Europe. There is a constant coming and going of ferries, container ships, cruise liners, fishing boats and very expensive cruise boats and yachts.

Visiting Mahon is a must. Two minutes



© SPAIN TOURISM

Above: The lovely old port of Puerto de Ciudadella
Below: The lovely sweeping beach of Cala Galdana



© SPAIN TOURISM

from our apartment was the bus stop to Mahon. They run hourly but take the siesta time from noon to 2pm. The bus trip lasts about 20 minutes, taking you through *Saint Luis*, a large town founded in the mid-18th century during the brief period of French rule and featuring a distinct, architectural style. There is also a windmill, which has now been converted into a museum.

The Mahon bus station is right at the top of the city and you walk into a large, busy market, which is held on Saturday and Tuesday. The market sells lots of leather products, jewellery and clothing, all reasonably priced.

The population of Mahon is more than 30,000 and it retains its colonial feel, due to the deep impression the British occupation left behind. On your journey down to the fascinating harbour you can visit the Town Hall, with its neo-classical exterior, and a gothic church with a monumental organ and pipes. There are the remains of medieval walls, and an 18th century church which is built next to the first convent of Mahon and is now the Museum of Menorca. There are shops galore for everyone.

Colonial white steps – of which there are many – take you down to the harbour where there's an abundance of bars and restaurants, mixed in with a balance of nautical, industrial and commercial activity. Some of the boats moored there must be worth millions.

There's also the gin factory to visit, and taste and purchase its products. We sisters visited it last year and of course tried various flavours of their gin (rude not to

and, yes, we did buy a bottle or two to bring home. Mum and dad are not gin drinkers and it is quite a walk with nothing else really to see at that end, so we decided not to revisit it.

Although there are a lot of steps down from the city to the harbour, there are alternatives to get down there. These include a taxi from the bus station, and the Mahon express bus that looks like a train which was six euros (£5) per person but takes you on a picturesque ride down from the marketplace to the harbour, and returns to the marketplace. You can get off at the bottom and catch it again for returning to the top.

Once down at the harbour, you walk



The Mahon market

smallest municipality of Menorca but historically was of great strategic importance.

The castle was built to defend the island from attacks from the Turkish fleet and was demolished by the Spanish when Menorca was recovered in 1802. During the second British occupation, the town was moved to its current location and given the name of *Georgetown* in honour of King George. It was then named *Villacarlos* and is now known as *Es Castell* (the Castle), clearly referring back to its origins.

Es Castell has some excellent cafés and restaurants by the water's edge. We tried on recommendation a restaurant called *Dinkums*, run by an Englishman and a Spaniard. The food and service were wonderful and, again, it was another reasonably priced dinner. To get to *Es Castell*, you can catch a bus from Mahon bus station or a river taxi from Mahon harbour.

Binibeca

This is a stretch of white sand, as deep as it is long, with an unusual beach bar at the water's edge. The place reminded us of the *Flintstones* film as all the seats are made out of wood and sit higgledy-piggledy up a slope under trees. It's a must visit for families as there's a buoyed area for swimming. Parking, buses, taxis, toilets, sunbeds and pedalos are available.

Fiestas

From June to September, every town and village celebrates its fiesta. Although religious in origin, fiestas nowadays are a good excuse to stop work and party. While Menorca has a reputation for being a tranquil island, it comes to life when it is fiesta time.

The streets are closed, fairgrounds set up, and there are games, races, concerts and firework displays on the final night. Everyone is welcome at the fiestas, where black Menorcan-bred horses are the stars of the show, their riders dressed in black tail-coats, white trousers and three-pointed hats. The horses dance on their hind legs through the crowds.

Getting around

There's a very good network of bus routes that run to the main towns, villages and

The family's verdict

Julie, Gail, Tracey and Hannah

It was our chance to have the up-to-date memories of a family holiday, spend quality time together and just enjoy each other's company.

We all have busy lives and, yes, we see each other for coffee and meals out, but there's no time for a proper long chat, without the pressure of time and work. We are all so glad we had this holiday together. Would we do it again – yes.

Janet and Gordon's view

"For the first time in 37 years as a family, we were flying to Menorca for a seven-day self catering holiday at S'Algar with our three daughters plus a special bonus, our youngest granddaughter, Hannah. Excitement was building up after all these years - how would things work out?"

"There are no nightclubs or late-night activities - except music and dancing in the hotels. S'Algar is a small, compact resort offering peace, relaxation, enjoyment and charm. For a little activity, there are some wonderful coastal walks. Our favourite was to follow the old pirate trail from the sea front at S'Algar, to Alcafar - a hidden treasure."



S'Algar to Mahon - the 'pirate trail' walk

some of the resorts on the island. If you want to get off the beaten track and explore some of the beaches, renting a car, motorbike or moped is highly recommended. The main routes are generally in very good condition and well signposted. It is the parking that is very limited in towns and there are pay-to-park areas, with lots of euro coins required.

Taxis are very reasonable – it's best to check the rate first. The drivers' command of English is excellent.



The train/bus in Mahon just like the one in S'Algar