





# GIRL POWER

*An all-women bike trip through Mallorca redefines what a girls' trip can be.*

BY SARI ANNE TUSCHMAN







**WHEN A DEAR FRIEND CALLED** and asked if I wanted to go on an all-female five-day bike tour through Mallorca, Spain, I said yes instantly. I had visions of fresh fish and blue water, delicious wine and endless laughs. Never mind that I'd never done any real road biking. I'd mountain biked for years when I lived in Colorado, but I've lived in Los Angeles for years now, which means my biking career has been relegated almost exclusively to beach cruisers. All of that seemed secondary. What was really important were the things we would see, the fun we would have and—best of all—the calories we would burn to counteract the inevitable pastries, pastas and cocktails that are musts of a European getaway.

My friend chose DuVine Cycling + Adventure Co. for our trip, rated second on the *Travel + Leisure* list of Top 10 Tour Operators in 2017. She had traveled with them the summer before on a group trip and loved the experience. This time we would customize our trip: four nights, four days of biking and six friends. Each day would consist of between 20 and 40 miles with epic meals and gorgeous scenery as the reward for peddling our hearts out.

Determined to be in great shape and to become familiar with the intricacies of the road bike, I contacted my local bike shop, and they

recommended one of their employees as a good ride partner-slash-teacher. A couple of training rides with my patient and knowledgeable teacher, countless spin classes, and several hundreds of dollars spent on spandex later, I was ready for my Spanish adventure on wheels.

I flew from LA to Barcelona on a Friday to spend the weekend with a couple of the women from the trip, giving us a few days to acclimate and recover from jetlag. On Monday morning we flew to Palma, the capital of Mallorca, one of Spain's Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean. Surprisingly large in size and population (it is home to almost 900,000 people), it is a vast and stunning destination that is quickly becoming a biker's hotspot thanks to varied terrain and windy, mountain roads.

We arrived to our hotel, the Son Julia, to meet the rest of our group and relax by the pool before having dinner and getting a good night's sleep in anticipation of the miles yet to be covered. The next morning we met our guides, Gonzalo and Ernesto, who gave us an overview of what the next few days will entail. When Ernesto told us our first day of riding will be about 50 kilometers, I did a quick math equation in my head and realized that meant more than 30 miles. My longest training ride had been 18 miles. Panic began to set in.

Ernesto briefed us on the routes we would take each day, the level





Sa Talaia's rooftop pool.



*"We pulled into a vineyard to find a lone table set up outside of an old, imposing stone building. The table was positioned to provide epic views of the vines and the sunset, which it did as we enjoyed dish after dish prepared by a private chef."*

A view of Port de Sóller's bay and harbor.



of difficulty of the rides, and the lunches and dinners we would have afterward (perhaps the most important part). This inaugural day entailed getting set up on our bikes and departing from the hotel for a long ride to a winery. One guide rode with us, while the other trailed in a relief van. Our bikes were equipped with a GPS system that ticked off our kilometer progress and ensured we were headed in the right direction in case we lost sight of the rider in front of us or of the guide. (Although the guides circled back to check on us frequently, so there was never any real fear of getting lost). The almost 50-kilometer ride was broken up by a few stops in which the guides set up snacks—fresh fruit, nuts, M&Ms—and offered beverages like coconut water, and replenished our water with ice.

The route took us down small roads with very little traffic. A coffee pit stop at a charming town some 10 miles shy of our destination was our final break before completing the day's ride at a Celler Tianna Negre, where we toured the grounds and enjoyed an al fresco lunch paired with the varietals made on-site. Day one and 30-some miles in the books, I was feeling triumphant, blissfully ignoring the fact there were three more days to go. A casual dinner in a quaint town square near our hotel was followed by everyone scurrying to bed, nervous about the discomfort and sore muscles the morning might bring.

Waking up on day two didn't bring the soreness I had feared, a happy discovery as I outfitted myself in spandex before meeting our guides for a rundown on the day's agenda. Ernesto explained that day two would be similar mileage to the previous day, but the afternoon would bring a 2,000-foot-elevation-gain climb. Three miles, straight up. We were told that anyone who didn't want to attempt it was welcome to ride in the van, but we could decide that later. For the moment, we took off from the hotel for a long windy ride until we broke for a shot of espresso at an adorable café along the route and did our final mental prep for the much-discussed extended uphill.

The guides—perhaps wisely—did not do the afternoon climb justice. It was far longer and steeper than they prepped us for. It was an unrelenting, arduous crawl for three straight miles. In retrospect, we realized that was a wise tactic. While at different paces, we all conquered it. Elated at our personal victories, we completed the day's ride at Port de Sóller, a picturesque seaside village on the west coast of Mallorca, thick with tourists, tiny shops and epic scenery. White wine and rosé flowed over a much-deserved lunch. Exhausted, we piled into the van to be transported back to the hotel where power naps and dips in the pool were had before we packed back into the van for what our guides promised to be a very special dinner.

They were right. We pulled into a vineyard to find a lone table set up outside of an old, imposing stone building. The table was positioned to provide epic views of the vines and the sunset, which

it did as we enjoyed dish after dish prepared by a private chef DuVine and our above-and-beyond guides commissioned to make a magical meal for us, leaving an opinionated group of alpha females speechless.

The next day promised a similar elevation gain, but more gradual and slightly less mileage overall. Still feeling the high of our accomplishments of the day before, we were ready for whatever may come. And least we thought we were. The van transported us to our starting point and as it wound its way along a narrow mountain road, you could almost feel the trepidation growing within the van. The guides assured us there weren't too many cars on the road and the vehicles that did traverse the mountain pass would be respectful of bikers, but we felt skeptical. Were we experienced enough bikers for this? The van went silent as we collectively worried about the challenge before us.

Once again, our guides pleasantly surprised us. The long, gradual climb took us at a perfect incline over several miles of gorgeous scenery. Day three seemed to invigorate all of us: We stayed close together, summiting the mountain pass without any real issue. The guides were right—the cars were few and far between and they were respectful of bikers. We made the long descent to Port d'Andratx, a fishing village on the southwestern tip of Mallorca popular with the Italian elite. A sun-soaked lunch of Spanish specialties—pane con tomate, croquettes, fresh fish, salads and calamari—rewarded us for another successful day completed.

Knowing our trip was almost over, the guides outdid themselves on night three. Pulling a few favors, they got us a reservation at the beyond-words-spectacular Cap Rocat, a former military fortress-turned-hotel located in Palma's most secluded bay. It's the second time on this trip that the entire group was rendered speechless. We ate grilled fish and meat dishes at The Sea Club restaurant, each outdoor table offering an epic view of the water. Luck had it that it was the summer solstice, and we were spending the longest day of the year here.

Our adventure concluded with a 35-kilometer (a little more than 20 miles) fun ride to the hotel where we spent our final night in Mallorca. There were no real hills on day four, so it was all laughs and smiles as we made the journey from the hotel that had been our home for the last several days to check into a new one. As we completed the final few miles of the trip, I couldn't believe I once thought 20 miles on a bike sounded like a lot. I realized I'd fallen in love with road biking and began to plot how I could continue to ride once back in LA. Our bags had been transferred to our new hotel where we were forced to bid our fearless guides goodbye, a sad task after having experienced so much together. Talk turned to doing it all again next year—same guides, new destination. Seeing Mallorca from the seat of a bike proved to be a truly unforgettable way to experience a beautiful place, and we all agreed we couldn't wait to do it again. Duvine.com