

Our pilot is quietly cursing the French who, it seems, have swiped our slot. Departure will be delayed by 10 minutes as an Air France jet pulls away ahead of us. I am unconcerned. We have a Dornier 328 as our private taxi, and any extension of the time spent in it is a treat. It is a chance to sink a little deeper into the enveloping leather armchairs, or indulge presidential fantasies. This is Air Force Me.

These little jets are the most glorious toys. They take a dozen sprawling passengers, with space for two (delightful) cabin crew to craft Bloody Marys, and deliver breakfast. The interior is all cream leather and mahogany. A delicate switch in the cabin wall silently raises the central coffee table for dining. We had boarded, passports viewed and luggage loaded, within 15 minutes of entering the airport - Southampton, for this trip - and memories of ordinary ass-aching air travel were banished with this thought: Why wait to arrive for your journey to begin?

And where to take this rock-star's plaything? Ours was bound for Palma de Mallorca and lunch. From the top terrace of the Palacio Ca Sa Galesa, you can peer across the roof of La Seu, the city's awesome cathedral. Inside the Galesa (www.palaciocasa.galesa.com), the rooms mix Bang and Olufsen sounds systems with four-poster antiquity and the halls hold original Joan Mirós. Guests are given skeleton keys to explore as they wish: the idea is that you roam as though it were your own house. Anywhere but the other 11 suites of course...

Everybody knows there's much more to Mallorca than the tawdry package tour attractions and escaping the thronged throng is not difficult especially if you head inland. But one forgets just how enchanting the island is. Son Net, for example, is a delight. The grand old finca has held lordly views over the village of Puigpunyent for 300 years.

Peak through any window or from any terrace to take in the light and the hills. Peak down any corridor to see an original Hockney or Warhol or the work of a Spanish Master. It was David Stein's home - he still keeps a room here - before he went into the hotel business and began developing a deeply desirable portfolio (www.steinhotels.com).

A 20ft high olive press dominates the restaurant, a huge converted barn - until your view falls to the 6ft tall knife and fork sculptures. The food and local Soller oil (from unwatered olive trees) and wine are outstanding. And the morning brings... helicopters. Our bijou choppers - one red, one blue - hug the hillsides and race around the island. Red proves a winner, as our man in blue takes a more scenic route through mountain passes, including Valldemosa, home of George and Fred (Sand and Chopin) as well as lingering briefly over the cliffside pool of Michael and Catherine (Douglas and Zeta Jones - they were out: no pap snaps today). And then the rotors rustle the vines of Macia Batle tended by the winemaking family for 150 years (www.maciabatle.com). The wine here is excellent - so good, in fact, they rarely leave the island - with some unfamiliar local varietals such as the red manto negro - which also makes a cracking rosado - and crisp and flinty prensal blanc.

And so to lunch, at Reads (www.readshotel.com): three generations of the English family stay here, to cultivate the olive groves and run the hotel. They are the second people to tell me that Mallorca claims more Michelin stars than Madrid, their pride encouraged by the fact that one of these belongs to their chef, Marc Fosh. In the dining room, with its vast, mock classical murals, he serves up cold soup of almond milk, cappuccino of green asparagus and beef sirloin in cognac sauce. While the décor touches on garish, the food touches on divine.

Son Julia, a new addition to the Stein Group outside Palma, manages to touch somewhere between the two. It was once the family estate of some landed Mallorquin gentry, dating back to the 15th century, and retains some of the grandeur of that era. But now it has taken Arabian and Oriental styles. For this, read bling. One banquetting suite is swathed in enough gold to make a sultan swoon. But the halls are a pleasure, all hand-crafted rugs and furniture, and the bar's gaining cachet - and it's only a short hop from the airport, and our excellent toy.

Balearic Discovery put our trip together (balearicdiscovery.com) - a tremendously enterprising outfit that specialises in all things Mallorquin. The Dornier was provided by Club 328 (www.club328.com). Prices are based on time in the air: a 10-hour package costs £30,000 in a light jet that can carry six. For a larger jet, which will take up to 15, the cost is £56,000. London to Marrakech takes five hours.

By Matt Farquharson

Lufthansa Private Jet, the bespoke operation of the mighty German carrier covers 1,000 European airports with 70 jets and has just branched out to the Russian Federation. It can take you point to point almost anywhere in Europe or link up with its long haul flights from Frankfurt or Munich. Prices are based on a zone system, rather than per hour costs which can increase according to weather. A zone zero trip - say London to Paris, Amsterdam or Dublin in a Citation Bravo (which holds seven passengers) will cost Eur4,550; a zone nine trip - London to Greece - Eur18,410. www.lufthansa-private-jet.com

PrivatAir offers everything from luxury tours to corporate shuttle services, and 40 aircraft from turboprops to heavy business jets. www.privatair.com. With 45 years experience, on four continents, **Air Partner** is having a great result with its Jet Membership Card programme, guaranteeing availability across Europe and the US at 24 hours notice. www.airpartner.com



Our Midsummer geomancy venture into the wilds of Wiltshire was made all the more magical by the team staying at Bishopstrow House, near Warminster. It's part of the von Essen collection - whose sparkling roster includes properties from Cliveden to Dalhousie Castle, Edinburgh. We loved the rooms, grounds - 27 acres with temple - pools, spa, restaurant and service. www.bishopstrow.co.uk www.vonessenhotels.com

LATE SUMMER SUN

Kasbah Tamadot, Atlas Mountains, Morocco
This is a divine hideaway, just 45 minutes from Marrakech. The Kasbah features just 18 beautifully decorated bedrooms and suites. Enjoy the pools, spa and Hamman. Or excursions - from the souk in Marrakech to riding, driving and trekking through this wild region. www.virginlimitededition.co.uk/Kasbah

Chateau de Bagnols, Bagnols, France
The finest five-star deluxe chateau-hotel in the country, discovered by Lady Hamlyn in 1987 and restored to its former glory. Managed by Rocco Forte Hotels, this is fabulous to visit late summer, beautiful wines and a huge selection of two and three Michelin star restaurants in vicinity. www.bagnols.com

Mykonos Hotel Theoxenia, Greece
Late summer is a really good time to visit Mykonos and fill your days with fun at this hip and funky hotel. The service is great and the location close to the beach and town but the pool area with its curtained four poster beds is hard to leave. www.mykonostheoxenia.com

Calistoga Ranch, California
Tucked into a private canyon in the Upper Napa Valley, sister property to the Auberge du Soleil, Calistoga Ranch is a 46-room luxury resort located on a 157-acre site marked by ancient oaks, majestic hills, a rock-hewn stream and private lake. It also captures the rich culture of wine and food in the region. www.calistogaranh.com

La Casa in Collina, Le Marche, Italy
This is Italy's newest hippest hotel. Informal, luxurious with beautiful views of the Italian countryside, enjoy your time at the pool, the market town of Ascoli Piceno - or shopping for Prada, Tods and Laura Baiagiotti at the factory outlets. www.chicretreats.com

Samara, The Great Karoo, South Africa
One of the largest private game reserves in South Africa, Samara is a traditional, family-owned homestead, surrounded by 70,000 awe-inspiring acres. The six luxurious suites serve as a centre point for romantic picnics overlooking the Plains of Camdeboo, thrilling game drives or star-gazing under the massive sky. www.samara.co.za

By Penny Fieldgate

STOCKISTS

Alexander McQueen +44 (0)20 7278 4333	Christian Dior +44 (0)20 7172 0172	Dom Pérignon @ Harrods +44 (0)20 7893 8000	Jenny Packham +44 (0)20 4281 387	Queen's Club +44 (0)20 7386 3424
Anoushka Hempel +44 (0)20 7589 4191	Cigar stores +44 (0)20 7290 8600	El Relicario +537 33 36 36	Jimmy Choo +44 (0)20 7584 6111	Quintessentially Wine +44 (0)870 850 8585
Bamford & Sons +44 (0)20 7881 8010	Claridge's Bar +44 (0)20 7629 8860	Floridita London +44 20 7629 8860	London Fine Foods +44(0)20 8133 1748	Ungaro +44 (0)20 7629 0550
Basia Zarzycka +44 (0)20 7 730 1660	Club Macanudo +212 752 8200	Gina +44 (0)20 7254 9811	Loop +44 (0)20 7288 1160	Weardowney +44 (0)20 7725 9694
Boisdale +44 (0)20 7730 6922	The Conran Shop +44 (0) 207 589 74 01	Harrods +44 (0)20 7893 8000	Oliver Sweeney +44 (0)16 2683 0663	Wilson +44 (0)14 2058 7272
Billionaire Couture +44 (0)20 7581 5004	Costume Studio +44 (0)20 7275 9614	Harper and Tom +44 (0)20 7792 8510	Paul Smith +44 (0)20 7836 7828	Yves Saint Laurent +44 (0)20 7908 7777