

## Europe holidays

# Can Ferrereta – art meets nature in Mallorca

A new retreat in Santanyí mixes the historic old town, natural surroundings and modern works to impressive — and relaxing — effect

Jan Dalley JULY 28 2021

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The tea has a subtle, fragrant, slightly smoky tang. I sip it from a delicate bowl, served to me after I emerge blinking into the bright daylight, my senses heightened after two hours of intense and blissful wellness treatment at Can Ferrereta's spa. It is well-named Sa Calma; I feel as if my anxiety nub has been wiped clean.

But I still can't identify the tea. Olive leaves, I'm told, with notes of orange. I never knew you could infuse an olive leaf (too leathery?) but it seems this is a piece of magic local to Santanyí, in Mallorca, where the newly opened Can Ferrereta is sited in the centre of the pretty old town.

The tea sipped, and my legs returned to full working order, I wander back towards my room past the giant swimming pool. I am trying to work out how it is possible that newly made gardens could look so established, with cypresses, tall palms, gnarled and ancient olives, clumps of rosemary. Tall grasses that glint silver in the sun; a lemon tree in fruit. Only the small purple bougainvillea just beginning its journey up the sides of the pool's changing rooms, built in stone with a domed roof in the style of traditional Mallorcan shepherds' huts, betrays its youth.



In the next courtyard, where that morning we'd sat for breakfast, you start to appreciate the delicate dance of old and new that has gone to make up this place. The building was once the magnificent townhouse of a noble family, parts of it dating back far beyond the 17th century, and Bastidas architects, based in Palma, have woven every contemporary luxury into the ancient fabric with a light touch.

In the entrance lobby — the front door straight off the street, as was the way in Spain's historic towns — a high, chunky arch of old sandstone, beautifully restored, announces the age and grandeur of the structure, and parts of a patterned age-old stone floor have been seamlessly wedded to the smooth gloss of contemporary stone, giving a look that's as sleek as can be, with gentle rustic touches that have a can't-fake-it authenticity.



View over Santanyí, in Mallorca's south

And then to the still more contemporary: in the hallway, at the foot of a curving stone staircase, you immediately see the first of the many works of art that fill Can Ferrereta. It's a sculpture in iron by Josep Maria Riera i Aragó, abstract but with its elegant blades suggestive of agricultural machinery, and of flight. This was a serious house, it seems to say, where work got done; this is also a place of dreaming, of taking wing.

It's Wednesday, market day in the town, and I set out to explore. The picturesque streets around Santanyí's church, which yesterday were lined with the usual mixture of cafés, bars, cheap-and-cheerful restaurants (most signs in German), have sprouted a small town's-worth of stalls.

**Down the street a little begin the food stalls, a vivid tableau of hams, sausages, heaped-up fruit and vegetables, fish galore**

A happy half-hour's wandering and browsing takes me through booths selling the normal mixture of craft jewellery, scarves and leather bags, pottery, T-shirts and flip-flops, floaty dresses that you know would be a mistake. Nothing very special there. But down the street a little begin the food stalls, a vivid tableau of hams, sausages, heaped-up fruit and vegetables, fish galore. I have a sudden longing for a kitchen — really just so that I have a reason

to buy some of this glorious produce.

But dreams of my own cooking are immediately quashed by the lingering memory of last night's dinner. At Ochre, Can Ferrereta's main restaurant, I made a real celebration of the fruits of the sea: tuna tartare with mustard and *spaghetti del mar* — samphire — eaten with greedy hunks of *coca*, Mallorcan flatbread, was followed by scorpion fish with cockles and a sauce of aioli. Now all I can think is: how soon can I have lunch?



Black basalt head by Catalan sculptor Jaume Plensa © Arturo+Lauren





The reception at Can Ferrereta



The hotel has 32 suites and an adults-only policy

Very soon, as it turns out, as the hotel's poolside bar-restaurant beckons seductively. The pool and its surrounds are huge and, with only 32 rooms here, and an adults-only policy that attracts mainly restrained and casually elegant couples and means you are not going to be dive-bombed by yelling youngsters, there is a sense of space and calm.

Early — but not too early — this morning I had the whole enormous pool to myself, watching the sunlight grow stronger as I swam, picking out the features of another of the hotel's significant artworks, a giant black basalt head by Catalan sculptor [Jaume Plensa](#) looming in a flower bed in the shade of an old olive tree, sleek and mysterious as a big cat.

A large lunchtime salad later, I need a walk. I decide to head for the sea. Santanyí has the feel of a seaside town but is in fact six or seven kilometres from the coast, where there is a choice of some of the best beaches of this southern part of Mallorca. For no particular reason, my destination is Cala Santanyí.



La Fresca restaurant and pool bar at Can Ferrereta

Mistake. The road is long, straight and dull, with the fields on each side already dusty and bleached by early summer heat. This part of Mallorca has none of the dramatic mountainous scenery of the north; although I'm sure there's excellent walking to be had, it needs a little more research than I'd bothered with.

Forty hot minutes later, though, the road takes a sudden turn and makes a dip, and I'm in one of those magical *barrancas* typical of the Balearic Islands: steep white rocks dotted with dense shady pines and oaks, a glint of blue water ahead. After the heat of the road, the natural cool comes like a shock. And the beach, when I finally reach it, is true to form: high rocks framing a narrow gulch with perfect pale sand leading down to that gleaming, translucent, turquoise water.

But although a long, deep swim restored my temper, I didn't linger. I'll admit it: I am a beach snob. Apartment blocks and sunloungers are not my thing and this beach, even in very early June, is already too crowded for my liking. Perhaps better to seek out the more spacious nearby beaches at Cala Llombards or S'Amarador, in the Mondragó Natural Park just to the east, or walk the cliffs to find something more private.



Sa Calma spa and wellness centre © Arturo+Lauren

Back at Can Ferrereta, the quiet and cool wrap their soothing arms around me. My suite is enormous — the bathroom alone, equipped with everything you'd expect of five-star luxury, including a freestanding tub you could almost dive into, would still fit a ping-pong table.

In the bedroom, with soft sofas and a desk in the window looking out to the hills beyond the town, and the cosy dressing room with fireplace, it's pretty impossible to think of something that has not already been thought of. I know because I tried.

## Even the information about the artists whose work hangs on the walls is carefully done

Even the information about the artists whose work hangs on the walls is carefully done. The theme here is Spanish art — most pieces are from the collection of the Soldevila Ferrer family who owns this hotel, as well as Hotel Sant Francesc in Palma — and although there are great and familiar names such as Joan Miró, I'm making

discoveries.

In my bedroom a large abstract canvas intrigues me, and I've looked at others in the library off the hotel lobby: the artist is Dominica Sánchez — new to me. Photographer Bárbara Vidal has a thoughtful series on the landing above the stairs; geometric works by Manolo Ballesteros catch the eye.

It adds up to an environment I was loath to leave. As for the friendly and faultless staff, who will (and did) organise anything from a rubber band to a PCR test, one of them noticed that I had used only the decaf coffee capsules for the machine in the suite. The next morning, there were twice as many.

*[Jan Dalley](#) is the FT's arts editor*

### Details

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Jan Dalley was a guest of [Can Ferrereta](#) and the luxury tour operator [Carrier](#). Carrier offers a seven-night package from £2,490 per person, including business class flights with British Airways from London and return private transfers.

Mallorca is open to tourists, though with requirements for vaccination or pre-departure testing vary according to country. For details see [safetourism.illesbalears.travel](https://safetourism.illesbalears.travel)

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