

The 365 Calvary Steps

The 365 Calvary steps in the charming old town of Pollenca lead up to an incredible Good Friday procession.

Experience the charm of Pollenca and the 365 Calvary Steps (Calle de Calvari), one step at a time.



Up the 365 Calvary Steps, Pollenca, Mallorca

If you don't look hard enough, you could possibly miss an important attraction in old town Pollenca, the 365 Calvary

Steps (Calle de Calvari).

Worn down from thousands of Christian devotees and tourists, there are numerous steps required to reach the top, in fact, one for each day of the year. If you feel fatigued half way to the top, enjoy a rest under the cypress trees or the fourteen tall crosses evoking Christ on the way to his crucifixion.

Along your journey, catch your breath and view the gorgeous homes and shops dotted along the steps. You will also find the occasional cat enjoying a siesta under the trees – a welcome sight to get your mind off the steep trek. Once you reach step number 365, enjoy gorgeous views of the Traumantana Mountains.



A cat along the 365 Calvary Steps in Pollenca, Mallorca

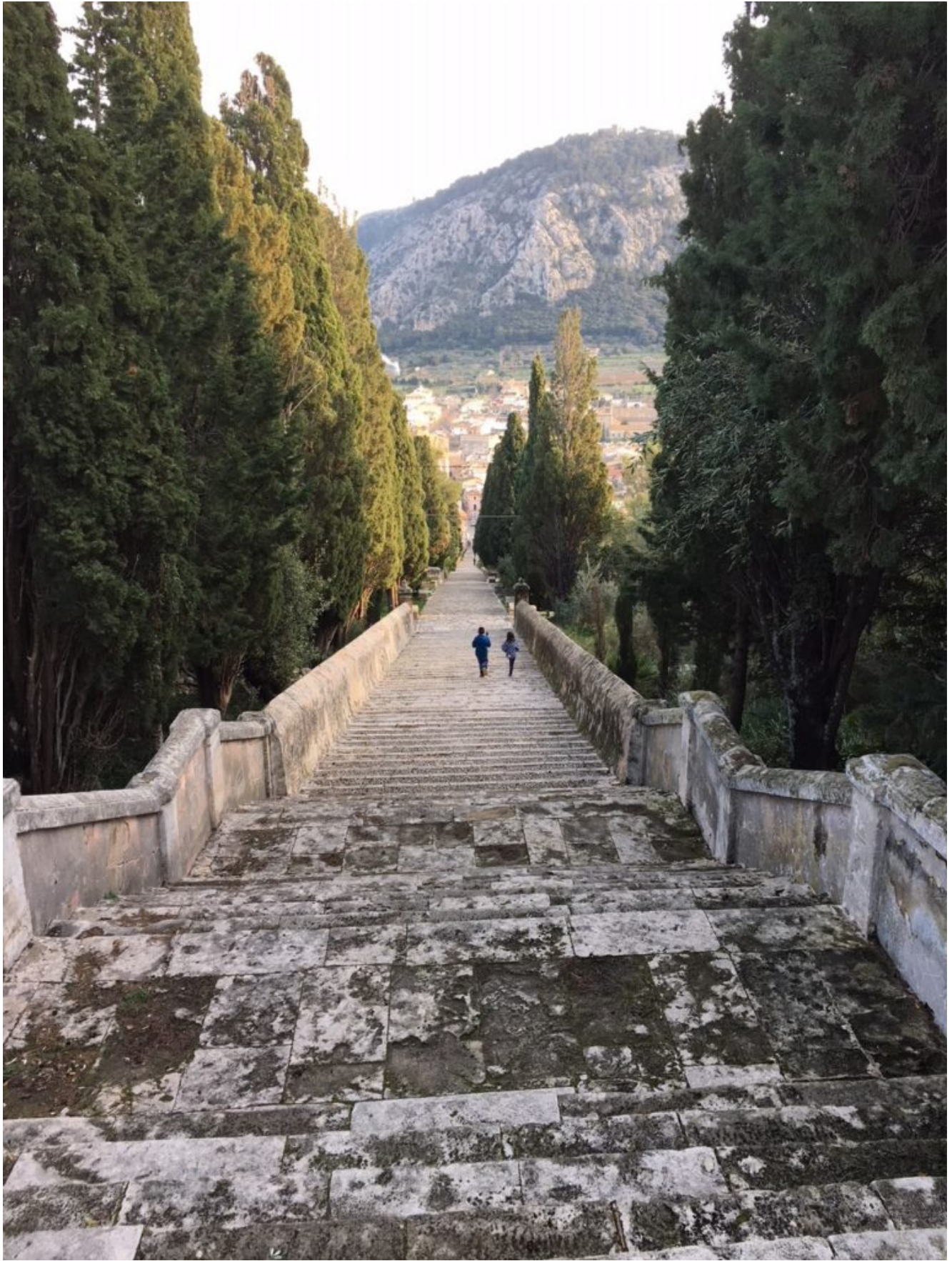
The Knights Templar were the first owners of this mount. Today, it hosts one of the most impressive traditions of Mallorca's Easter week celebrations.

On Good Friday, the Calvari steps is where the Davallament (Descent from the Cross) takes place. A carving of Christ is removed from the cross. Then, in a somber torchlight parade, the carving is carried down the steps. The ritual is performed in silence except for the beating drum. Locals and tourists follow the procession led by members of various brotherhoods dressed in hooded robes. The parade ends at Our Lady of the Angels, the parish church dedicated to the patron saint of Pollença, the Virgin Mary, and St. Michael the Archangel.

What goes up, must come down.

You can retrace your steps down the hill or venture along the side streets back to Pollença. Reward yourself for your efforts and massive fitness tracker step count at one of Pollença's many restaurants.

Tip: One of my favorites is [La Font del Gall](#). Just look for the fountain with the rooster on top at Calle Montesion, 4.



Down the 365 Calvary Steps Pollenca, Mallorca

Perfecting Paella

Perfecting Paella, pleez! Is it all in the pan or is there more? If the dish is made correctly, it's one of the most perfect comfort foods. If made incorrectly, it's a disaster dish that just can't be fixed. Maybe that's why discussions about Paella recipes can go on until the wee hours of the morning, similar to the perfect New Orleans Gumbo recipe—a post I'll get to one of these days.



Traditional preparation of paella

Historically, Paella the Spanish rice dish that includes different combinations of vegetables and meats, characteristically seasoned with saffron and good olive oil, originates from Valencia in Eastern Spain and requires the freshest ingredients and the best rice to make it truly wonderful.

Where does Paella come from?

The most common story of paella's origins is that servants would take leftovers from Moorish royal banquets and cook them over open fires preparing delicious dishes to bring home to their families. Those must have been some seriously delicious leftovers!

The word “paella” may come from the Arab word ‘baqiyah’, which means ‘leftovers’. Some linguists though believe that the word ‘paella’ is derived from a Latin word ‘patella’, which was a flat plate used for religious offerings. So the dish name is actually for the cooking utensil.

What’s required to make an Authentic Spanish Paella?

For hundreds of years people not only argue over the origins, but on the ingredients and the perfect paella recipe since many different varieties of paella are passed on to the family cooks as best kept secrets. This includes for example, the Valencia version where fish and shellfish are an absolute ‘no go’ which makes sense because the laborers of the fields serving at the Moorish royal banquets were far from the coastline.

Therefore an authentic Valencia version never includes fish and seafood, but chicken and rabbit as well as snails and often beans and artichokes. Let’s not stop there, other varieties include *Paella de Marisco* (Seafood Paella), a vegetarian versions containing hearty white beans, artichokes, eggplant and peppers, or the mixed Valencian Catalan version.

The Perfect Paella Pan

There are many different ways to prepare paella as there are little fishing villages in and around Spain, but first things first I need a Paella pan and I need it fast. I’m only in Barcelona for the weekend and want to make paella at home this winter.



Traditional Paella Pan

I should go to a little *Ferreteria* (hardware store) to get my Paella pan, but I'll head to El Corte Ingles, my favorite Spanish department store and ask for a '*paellera*'. I'll opt for an enameled steel pans made of carbon steel and coated with a speckled black enamel finish. They won't rust, are affordable, and make cleanup a breeze. It should also be a flat-bottomed pan, which is uniquely made for my modern burner.

If I don't have luck finding a '*paellera*' at El Corte Ingles, I'll just buy a Gucci purse instead and head towards 'La Boqueria', Europe's best food market which has been operating since the 13th century. No, I won't buy a Gucci purse, that's just the Diva in me is coming out. I'll buy a Chanel.

Seriously, at La Boqueria I'm sure to find the pan, the rice, and a place to rest my legs while enjoying Tapas. I'm on vacation after all.

Perfect paella, it's all in the Bomba

The perfect paella is not only in the pan but the rice they say and namely the Bomba rice, a short grain and pearl-colored round rice. Bomba is 'the' supreme rice in Spain, because it absorbs three times its volume in broth (rather than the normal two), yet the grains remain firm and delicious. Since Bomba can absorb much more liquid, it's hard to overcook it and since I'm new to paella, this is the rice for me.



Bomba rice; Wiki photo by J.P.Lon

Bomba rice grows leisurely in the village of Calasparra until it matures. This longer growing cycle produces dehydrated kernels which are ready to absorb the utmost flavors of paella broth. This is my absolute fear, the absorptions process which can be the difference between crunchy or mushy paella. I don't know how to control the amount of liquid yet, but will soon learn.

Ay, yi, yi! I pray the primrose path to perfecting paella is a perpetual pleasure. ☐

Just as paella historically melded unique ingredients, the dish is a union of Spain for the dish, the Romans, for the pan, and the Arabs, for the rice. Without the unity of these nations, we'd be living in a world without paella and that would be a pity.

Tapas vs Pinchos

Tapas vs Pinchos vs Pinxtos? You've most likely heard of tapas and maybe even pinchos (aka pintxos) too! Tapas are Spanish snacks or savory finger food using all sorts of ingredients from fish to veggies to cured ham hanging from the ceilings as

well. They vary from one Spanish town to another, but always taste delicious since there are unlimited varieties enough to please even finicky eaters.



Tapas and Pinchos

History of Tapas

The legend goes that the thirteenth century Castilian king Alfonso X (the Wise) was ill and had to eat small snacks with his wine between meals to maintain his strength—never heard about drinking wine while ill but so be it. After he recovered, he passed a law that beer and wine served in taverns be accompanied with food. What a great idea since dust and insects just love to find a new home in your drink.

Hence the meaning of “tapa” aka “lid”. The idea of a mid-afternoon snack worked out perfectly for the manual laborers so they could eat small snacks and continue to work until the main meal.

Tapas vs Pinchos vs Pinxtos

In Spain people “tapear”, from one bar to another for drinks and tapas after work (especially since Spaniards eat dinner around 11:00 pm) and/or before special events—it’s a fun part of the social culture of Spain that all tourists should try.

In Catalan (Barcelona), they serve tapas which comes from the Spanish verb ‘tapear’ which means ‘to cover’.

In the Basque country, they serve pinchos which comes from the Spanish verb 'pinchar', which means 'to pierce'.

Still confused? Me too, but the main difference between pinchos and tapas is that pinchos uses toothpicks to avoid the food top from falling off the bread slice bottom. Hence you'll find a toothpick pierced in your pincho, which the Basque people call 'pinxtos'. Tapas on the other hand can usually be consumed by mouth in one delicious bite.

Hey, wait a minute!! Did you eat pinchos? If so, don't throw away that toothpick too fast you'll need to have the wait staff count your toothpicks to determine your invoice.

See, now you can impress friends and colleagues next time you "tapear" ! Better yet, make your own tapas in 10 minutes.

3 Days in Barcelona

One thing is for sure, 3 days in Barcelona, a mere 72 hours is not nearly enough time to enjoy this magnificent city, but I was limited for time and took the chance to take in as much as possible from the city situated between the sea and the mountains.



Parc Güell's "El drac" (the

dragon).

Day 1 in Barcelona

Get to Know the Hood – Barcelona is full of trendy and cool “barrios”, or neighborhoods as they are called in Spanish. Take the time to walk around living and interacting with the locals to explore the uniqueness of at least the top five barrios; Gracia, El Borne, Gotico, Raval, and Eixample. You’d be surprised how much 3 Days in Barcelona can yield.

Head to the Market – La Boqueria is the city’s large public market in the Ciutat Vella district of Barcelona, and a must for all foodies. Located right off Las Ramblas, you’ll feast your eyes on some of the freshest seafood, meats, fruits and vegetables in the world. There are places to enjoy excellent Tapas such at [El Quim](#) and watch the mad photographers clicking away at the gorgeous food displays.

Please Don’t Stop the Music – A visit to [La Palau de la Musicas](#) a feast for the eyes and ears. The concert hall is an exquisite example of Catalan modernism design. Daily tours are available and the most fascinating thing to see is the stained-glass skylight, but the rest of the concert hall is also full of intricately detailed sculptures and metalwork. The concert hall is truly magnificent and well worth the price to spend on a concert instead of the building tour only.



Magic Fountain of Montjuïc

Watch the Waters Dance – Ok, the Magic Fountain Show is sort of touristy but also romantic and FREE. The water fountain show has been drawing crowds since 1929 and the spectacular display of light, streaming waters, and music make for a romantic water acrobatics performance.

Tip #1: If you arrive by airplane, take the [Barcelona airport bus](#) and arrive in the city center in about 30 minutes. Alternatively, you can purchase T 10 strips and take Bus 46 to the city. The strips are also good for local Metro travel.

Day 2 in Barcelona

Take a Walk – I love city tours which are a perfect way to get a sense of the city, its history, and the surroundings. I love them even more when they're FREE such as [Runner Bean Tours](#). The guides are extremely knowledgeable, most having studied not only the Catalan and Spanish languages, but the history and architecture of Catalan too. The tour guides are fun, informative, and helpful if you need local tips, so I didn't hesitate to tip accordingly after the tour.

Rumble Las Ramblas – You'll probably end up on Las Ramblas anyway looking for a tour, Tapas restaurant, shop, or just to

people watch. The tree-lined car-free zone stretches for 1.2 kilometers (0.75 miles) and is made for walking, shopping, and hanging out on lazy days.



Las Ramblas

Go to Church – A visit to La Sagrada Familia is an absolute must. Barcelona's most famous landmark does charge admission, but I must admit, it's best viewed from the outside where you get a better sense of the magnitude architect Antoni Gaudí emphasized on this place of worship. Also, some of the best photos are taken outside the structure, an architectural wonder to the heavens.

Weird Barcelona – How about a visit to the Museum of Funeral Carriages. Ok, it's creepy, weird, FREE, and one way to find out how people transported their deceased to the cemetery and much more. Enough said! If that doesn't grab your interest, remember that admission is FREE at many of the city's museums every Sunday from 3 pm and the first Sunday of every month all day. Check museum sites to plan your visit and confirm entrance fees.

Tip #2: Do you hate queuing as much as I do? Then avoid the long lines at [La Sagrada Familia](#) and purchase your tickets ahead of time.

Day 3 in Barcelona

Roam the Roman Remnants – Old Gothic Quarter (Barrio Gotico) is a labyrinth of winding streets full of peaceful squares

(plaças). It's just perfect for strolling through the medieval part of the barrio which is full of history, palazzos, mansions and Gothic churches. In addition, you'll find tradespeople who still take the time to perfect their skills repairing and tuning guitars, mending repairers, restoring furniture, as well as new designers showcasing their unique crafts. You can easily get lost in Barrio Gotic discovering another side of Barcelona, so don't forget your map or download an app.



Casa Milà

Ogle at the Architecture – Barcelona architecture masterpieces are a mix of old and new, bizarre and brazen, but one thing is for sure, there's plenty of it and all nearly picture post card perfect and best discovered on foot. You can gaze for FREE at some of Gaudí's wonders such as the Casa Milà, Casa Batlló, Casa Calvet and more just by walking the city. Gaudí's Casa Fajol o de la Papallona located near Placa Espanya and Parc Joan Miro. Check your Barcelona map tourism map for details.

Walk the Champions Route – It's been a while since Barcelona hosted the 1992 Olympic Games, but I still adore a walk along the sea front at Barceloneta, Port Olympic. It's generally void of tourists and peaceful as you look at the seagulls gliding through the sky. There are lots of restaurants, clubs, place to dock your yacht, and lots of wide spaces for wheel chairs, strollers, and skateboards too. You'll pass by the port anyway on the way to L'Aquàrium de Barcelona, the largest

Mediterranean-themed aquarium in the world, so go check it out.

Put your Credit Card to the Test – Some of the best shopping for all budget types is found in Barcelona. With around 35,000 shops, including El Corte Inglés, Spain's premier full-service department store (a great rainy day alternative) you are sure to find something to bring back home. The 5 kilometer shopping line extends from the top of the Las Ramblas, through Plaça de Catalunya along Passeig de Gràcia and up Avenue Diagonal. Also, you'll find lots of trendy designer boutiques in and around the Barrios of Barcelona.

Tip #3: If you have an early check out, ditch the suitcases and get more mile for your vacation, by storing your luggage before you depart. I used [Locker Barcelona](#) (across from the side of El Corte Inglés) which was affordable, has a friendly staff, and the best is that you enter personal key codes, so no need to carry a key.

Anytime of year whether on sunshiny days or rainy day, 3 Days in Barcelona gets you a lot of bang for your Euro with so many interesting and FREE activities to discover on vacation in only 3 Days in Barcelona.

Shiver Me Timbers, I Just Ate Gooseneck Barnacles

From the rocky shores of Spain's coast, a slip of the foot and you'll plunge 300 feet into the deep icy waters of the sea. As the water violently beats against the cliffs, the crustaceans are not weary, in fact they take pleasure in hard beatings which will eventually make them, the gooseneck barnacles, even

more bankable.



© Arturo chausinho, on Flickr

The crustacea challengers on the other hand are tired yet persist knowing all too well the danger of prying away the pesky little creatures. At least one life per year is lost gathering the opponent, but the bottom line is getting paid. The risk is high, but well worth it because far too many people will relish a plate of gooseneck barnacles nonetheless.

Percebes or goose barnacle is a crustacean that grows on wave beaten rocks mainly in Asturias, Basque Country, Cantabria and Galicia. They attach themselves to mussels and can only be reached near the bottom of cliffs mainly along the Spanish coastline.

As you can imagine, the location of one of Spain's most sought after delicacy is difficult to reach. At dusk and dawn, and always at low tide, the brave divers or *percebeiros* as they are called work in teams of two to four. Using their sharpened hand tool and awaiting cues from the safety lookout, they quickly take the chance to pry small clusters of the treasure from the rocks sometimes jumping from one cliff to another to avoid the strong tide surges.



Divers in search of Percebes, © Gabriel González GGL1, on Flickr

Sailors consider the hull-adhering barnacles a nuisance to their ship, which can create considerable drag on the boat, slowing it down and costing fuel. On the other hand, foodies consider percebes an ultimate gourmet treat. Captain Haddock, said “Blistering Barnacles” probably not because of the appearance, but the price, where in Europe, barnacles cost up to \$100 a kilogram.

For some the taste is to die for, and the quest to get them is as well and many percebeiros drown in an attempt to reach the crustaceans before the pounding icy waters reach them first. Some amateurs attempt to capture percebes, but the locals watch over their territories to safeguard their livelihood.

The percebes flavor depends on water motion for feeding, hence the stronger the waves crash against the cliffs, the more flavorful they become. Tasting like the sea; not salty but briny, I’d say the flavor is a mix of crab and scallops, but you’ll just have to see for yourself. That is if you can get over the appearance. Remember how grotesque the crustacean-faces were from Pirates of the Caribbean? Well, percebes look similar to that–no they look worse, more like dead toes or little arms.



Gooseneck barnacles, an expensive foodie choice

The components of percebes are the shell, claw, and delicious meat within the claw. After a glass of the local beverage or two, you get over the less than visually appealing appearance as the platter of long, slender, percebes in their triangular shells are served steaming hot.

At the current prices you have to pay, one thing is for sure, you had better not waste a single gram by eating them incorrectly. Pay attention to your restaurant neighbor, or follow these guidelines to enhance your blistering barnacle dining experience:

1. Grab a percebes from the end of its claw end.
2. Break the sleeve (outer shell) from the claw to expose the arm (meat).
3. Slide off the sleeve and eat the arm.
4. Imagine the ocean's roar, and suck the briny juices from the sleeve.

Finally, sip a glass of Spanish white wine and repeat steps 1-4!