

## The “Authentic” Mallorca: Finding “Familiarity” or Searching for “Difference”

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### **Familiarity as “Authenticity”**

One night in late July, I talked with tourists and hosts in a lively bar which looked onto the town square. I realised how comfortable I felt whilst enjoying cheap drinks and cheaper laughs. *Bar Bony* relied on a comfortable setting and cheap alcohol in order for tourists to feel at ease and be inclined to spend more money. The waiters provided straightforward service much different to the upmarket restaurants situated along the beach front where there was more of a formal approach to clientele. Some tourists believe *Bar Bony* provides a more “realistic” experience of Port de Pollenca in a *what you see is what you get* attitude. Hosts spoke to a “cultural familiarity” which tourists may not find elsewhere, approaching them like long lost friends. *Mr. Bony*, the bars host, made extensive personal jokes whilst serving up giant glasses of sangria. The cocktail menu, which lay between piles of salty nuts and used ashtrays, advertised strong drinks and easy to handle food: sandwiches and crisps. I argue that tourists at *Bar Bony* sought “familiarity” in the very “British” reminder of the bar: through the very “British” experience of “going to the pub”. If there was any quest for an “authentic” experience of Port de Pollenca, situated in this bar, it was found in the “familiarity” to these tourists’ own experiences in Britain.



*Bar Bony's Front Entrance*

### **Difference as “Authenticity”**

In some experiences, tourists felt they were gaining an “authentic” viewpoint of Port de Pollença because they were “culturally different” to their own “familiar” lives back home. One Wednesday morning, around early August, I walked past the hotels, bars and restaurants which lined the promenade and entered the Market in Port de Pollença’s town square. It was already packed with people, sights and smells. The market was an important place to some tourists’ conceptions of “authenticity” as it provided a melting pot of difference, brought about by different cultures selling different products at their market stalls. Not only were there considerably “authentic” Mallorcan items for sale - such as olives, soap, fruits and vegetables - but also items from non-Mallorcan cultures such as pan-pipes. People working in the market came from places as far as Ecuador to sell products sampled from their countries of origin.

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I noticed a stall run by an elderly Puerto Rican man. He sold linen tea towels with the words *Mallorca 2017* sewn into the front. I interrupted a Liverpoolian couple browsing the stall. *Jane* and *Phillip* were in their early twenties and had visited the island for the first time that Summer. I asked them what it was about the Market that they found “authentic”. *Phillip* claimed ‘you get a genuine Mallorcan experience at the Market which you just wouldn't find elsewhere’.

Some tourists sought “difference” in places like the Market without realising that they were being subjected to a performance, ‘places are about...the systems of difference that they perform’ (Sharpley 2004: 6). The “difference” of some of the objects sold in the Market were “staged” (MacCannell 1973: 595) to a certain extent. Ironically, most of the products which were described by hosts as Ecuadorian or Mallorcan were in fact mostly made in South Africa or China, noticeable in the trademarks of products. However, this brings us back to whether tourists actually care if products sold by hosts are “authentic” or not. *Jane* and *Phillip* saw objects sold at the Market in Port de Pollenca as “authentic” as long as they were different from the “familiar” markets in Britain.

## References

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