

history

Hidden inside stones, rocks and mountains are hollows or crevices of varying sizes. Even in the most compact minerals minute cavities, the product of diverse circumstances, are visible to the naked eye. In the mountains it is unusual not to find these hollows of assorted shapes and sizes, some of which are completely closed off while others have openings to the outside world, obstructed to a greater or lesser degree by rock slides. The origin of these concavities can be found in the following phenomena:

1. Sudden dislocations of the earth.
2. The constant action of groundwater.

The formation of mountain ranges during the different geological periods and earthquakes are two of the main causes of the formation of caves. Groundwater flowing along impermeable beds slowly undermines the upper clayey layers until they eventually collapse, leaving a space covered by other calcareous or tufaceous layers that are sustained by their arched forms. The formation of caves is observed in almost all types of known terrain but where they are most abundant is in calcareous rocks, where they acquire gigantic proportions and take on extraordinary forms.

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If caves do not have an outside opening, water penetrates their walls producing the same effects. Once the cave has been formed as a result of either of the phenomena mentioned, water circulating above the cave, containing calcium bicarbonate and smaller amounts of magnesium, filters slowly through small fissures giving rise to the following features: when a drop of water appears on the roof of the cave, it leaves a deposit – as a result of excess carbonic acid being released – of the calcareous material that it carried in solution, which is the material from which a stalactite is slowly formed. When the drop falls to the ground it still contains some calcium bicarbonate, which is deposited on the cave floor to form the stalagmite. After many years these two formations may eventually come to meet and form a solid column, which will often have a bizarre, fantastical shape. Furthermore, before evaporating, the fallen drop slides across the ground creating the hard, sinuous surface that forms the floor of almost all caves and underneath which lies a clayey soil that often contains a considerable number of bones from extinct species plus the remains of man's primitive tools. The age of the geological formations is not always in relation to their height. Sometimes it is possible for a four metre high stalactite to have been

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formed more quickly than one two metres high or even one a metre high. Caves are not only an object of wonder for visitors but also an object of study for scientists who have found irrefutable evidence of man's prehistoric period and of many animal species that are now completely extinct.

They are dark, silent places, where it is almost impossible to hear the fall of the minute drop of water that appears, clean and transparent, at the end of the stalactite and expands, falls and slips across the sinuous floor, creating numerous features as it goes. Nature is at work here, discretely and silently, and so slowly that the advances of her mysterious work are measured in centuries. The powerful chemical energies and dynamics of the various elements that circulate around the silent enclosures are the invisible architects that raise arcades, porticos, statues and columns, seemingly following preconceived aesthetic ideas, as if wanting to reveal the typical features of diverse artistic manifestations. Next to these magnificent, imposing creations of nature our insignificance is apparent.

location



surroundings

The town of Capdepera is located in the northeast of Majorca, in the Levante district.

A visit to the Artá Caves can be an excellent way to gain a more in-depth knowledge of this region of the island. Capdepera has many of the most beautiful beaches and coves on Majorca's east coast. The areas of Cala Ratjada, Cala Mesquida, Canyamel and Font de Sa Cala are first rate tourist spots. There are also two areas of great natural and scenic value, which have been catalogued as Areas of Special Natural Interest. The first is the Sa Mesquida Valley which stretches down to the beaches of the same name, where one of the island's most important coastal sand dune cordons is located, known as "Munt Gros". The second is the Canyamel Valley, through which a river of the same name flows. The valley stretches to the Canyamel beaches, from where the entrance to the Artá Caves is visible.

Other interesting sites are the Talayotic settlements of Ses Païses, Son Sastres, Son Cabila, Son Favar and the Claper des Gegants. There is also the fortified town of Capdepera along with its Castle, which is one of Majorca's most important historical buildings and dates from the year 1300. The construction of the "Castell" was ordered by King James II of Majorca. It was built at a strategic point, from which the island of Minorca is visible across the sea.

visits

OPENING HOURS

May-October 10AM-6PM

November-April 10AM-5PM

The visit to the caves lasts between 25 and 40 minutes. Only one group can enter at a time, approximately every half an hour. Guided visits in Spanish, French, English and German.

The Artá Caves are located on the coast in the municipality of Capdepera, in the Cap Vermell, surrounded by mountains that tower over the sea. The caves have been visited since times gone by and it is very likely that the island's primitive inhabitants knew of them, as did the various populations that later inhabited the island. Going through the towering entrance, we gain access to the chamber known as the Vestibule or Entrance Hall, where countless stalactites with prodigious shapes and extraordinary proportions hang from the high arched roof. Tall stalagmites rise up gracefully from the floor. They vaguely resemble human forms, mysterious, motionless, rigid visions that are indifferent to human gazes, and have that imposing superiority of nature's marvellous creations.

After descending the long flight of stone stairs that leads to the vestibule floor, we then take the path that leads

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to the Hall of Columns where the formations take on the impression of a Gothic interior, scattered with slender columns, graceful pointed arches, filigreed canopies and a thousand other breathtaking details. As we pass through the multitude of columns until we reach the adjacent chamber the most surprising, magical changes in light take place. After going down the seven or eight steps that lead to the Hall of Columns we cross the chamber following a path that then leads us through an opening into a large ellipsoidal chamber known as the Hall of the Queen of Columns, where a column some twenty-five metres in height can be contemplated. Emerging from the very centre of the chamber it rises up, tapering in elegant festoons until it reaches the lofty roof. On the far side of the chamber there is a fairly small hole surrounded by wide stone curtains. This type of formation is known as a canopy.

Another of the chambers has been christened Hell. It is immense and indeed is one of the caves' largest and most astounding chambers.

Throughout there are columns, rocks, stalactites and stalagmites and on the left, from a great height a wide stone curtain descends,

the folds of which touch the floor. It is closed off on the right by a thick,

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filigreed column that rises up higher than the curtain and on the left by a high face of rock. At the back, a large number of stalactites descend down to the rocks and stalagmites forming a kind of gigantic monument with high arches and narrow columns. There are rocks that resemble monstrous animals and everything has a hellish, magic quality that makes the visitor feel as if they have been transported to a place they had never even dreamed of.

Turning back we can see a thick, black stalagmite which when observed from a convenient distance seems to resemble a lion reclining majestically on the floor and, indeed, our imagination can lead us to see fanciful forms in all the stalagmites (virgin figures, angels, serpents, cockerels, dragons, trees...).

Turning to the right of the lion and climbing a flight of steps we come to a towering space that forms another chamber known as The Glory, where fantastic formations resembling groups of angels against white clouds scattered about the high walls can be made out high up in the roof.

Leaving this chamber behind us we enter a real forest of columns through which the damp, narrow path winds its way until penetrating a rectangular,

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low-roofed chamber, popularly known as The Theatre. From the roof near the back wall hangs a curtain formation resembling a theatre drop and inside are others which reach the floor resembling the wings.

Retracing our path, crossing the Fine Work of Majorca chamber, and taking a narrow passageway closed in between soaring, dark rock faces we come to the last majestic Chamber: the Chamber of Flags.

High up, a wide, unfurled flag with elegant folds and a straight pole can be seen. At the back a wide group of gigantic columns rises up resembling a colossal organ the top of which is lost in the clouds. At the sides the crystallisations hang from the walls like unfolded laces. A twenty metre high column can be distinguished at the back bathed in waves of light. On the left, in the same chamber, another flag descends from above behind some columns supported on the first roof. Next to this chamber is the Chamber of Bells, so called because of the particular sounds that the stalactites in the chamber produce when struck with a stone.

Finally, by retracing the path we have followed from the beginning we return to the Vestibule, where daylight begins to filter through, until we reach the entrance, which affords views of the sea, sky and mountains.

admission



Admission to Caves 11 €



Excursion from
Font de sa Cala 10 €
(entrance aside)



Excursion from
Cala Radjada 12 €
(entrance aside)

Admission to all our facilities for
children under 6 is free of charge.

DISCOUNTS FOR GROUPS
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