

this warm stone mansion offers 23 rooms. The better ones have their own terraces. There are indoor and outdoor pools and a spa. The main restaurant (meal €80), run by Marc Fosh and holder of a Michelin star, is one of the high points. From Plaça dels Hostals, follow the signs down country lanes for about 2km.

A couple of kilometres east of Santa Maria, **Consell** is another wine village that allows itself to be startled into life by its markets on Thursdays and Sundays.

The easiest way to get to stops along this route is by the regular Palma–Inca train. Santa Maria is 18 to 23 minutes from central Palma.

BINISSALEM

pop 6200 / 131m

Two more kilometres on from Consell and you enter the heart of the wine industry in this part of Mallorca, Binissalem (which like several towns in Es Raiguer has retained its Arabic name). Most of its buildings are made of a local white stone, and the central bulk of the **Església de Nostra Senyora de les Robines** is no exception.

From the mid-18th to the early 19th century, Binissalem's prosperity as a winemaking town was reflected in the building of several notable mansions. One that has been well preserved is Can Sabater, a country residence for the writer Llorenç Villalonga (see p37) and now the **Casa-Museu Llorenç Villalonga** (☎ 971 886014; www.cmvillalonga.org; Carrer de Bonaire 25; admission free; ☎ 10am–2pm Mon–Sat & 4–8pm Tue & Thu). The furniture comes from his family and you can see how these manor houses worked, with a bread oven, 18th-century wine vats, a room set aside for the crushing of grapes underfoot, stables and so on. Summer concerts are held in the garden.

A weekly market is staged on Fridays, but much more important is the **Festes de la Verema** (aka Festa d'es Vermar), held on the last nine days of September to celebrate the yearly grape harvest with folk dancing, crafts markets, exhibitions and lots of local tipples. It culminates in a big public supper of *fidews de vermar*, a noodle dish with rabbit, snails and *sobrassada* (local sausage), among other things!

On the central square, sleep in the delightful **Scott's** (☎ 971 870100; www.scottshotel.com; Plaça de l'Església 12; s/d from €142/187; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎), a town house converted into a tasteful, country-style

comfort zone. Beautifully presented rooms and suites, all quite different, are siren songs to the weary, with cotton-percale sheets, goosedown pillows and Persian rugs. The flower-filled courtyards are a joy. They are planning to open a restaurant, but you can eat well at nearby **Singló** (☎ 971 870599; Plaça de l'Església 5; meals €20–30). Despite the cafeteria feel, it offers some enticing dishes, such as *porcella rostida* (roast suckling pig) or *bacallà a la mallorquina* (cod prepared with tomato and potato).

Binissalem is synonymous with wine. You can visit the big winery (launched in 1931), **José Luis Ferrer** (☎ 971 511050; www.vinosferrer.com; Carrer del Conquistador 103; guided tours €5.50; ☎ tours 11am & 4.30pm Mon–Fri, 11am Sat, shop 9am–7pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat), at the west end of the town, but you must call ahead. To step back in time, wander into **Ca'n Novell** (☎ 971 511310; Carrer de Bonaire 17; ☎ 8am–1pm & 3–8pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–2pm Sat), where locals fill their own bottles from huge, 18th-century vats. Made of olive wood and held together by sturdy rings of oak, these grand old barrels were a standard feature of cellars and mansions across much of this part of the island.

Binissalem is another eight minutes on from Santa Maria del Camí on the Palma–Inca train (€1.25).

SOUTH OF BINISSALEM

A 5km tootle south brings you to the town of **Biniali**.

our pick Sa Torre (☎ 971 144011; www.sa-torre.com; Carrer de les Alqueries 70; d €134; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎), located about 1km west of town, is a wonderful haven that rests on the edge of the tiny hamlet Ses Alqueries (now home mostly to Palma commuters). This grand *finca* (manor house) has been in the same family since 1560 and offers five spacious, self-catering apartments. Some of the apartments look right onto a stand of almond trees, which are a treat to contemplate when they're in blossom. The former wine cellar, its high, dark vaults lined by 18th-century vats, is now home to a fine restaurant (meals €40; open Wednesday to Saturday).

Another 2.5km southwest, **Santa Eugènia** huddles up against something that can rarely be found in central Mallorca – a hill. It's worth passing through just to head up that hill (246m) for the views. At the other end of town, three windmills line a ridge that

WE DO IT OUR WAY

Andreu Villalonga's family has been making and selling wine in Binissalem under the label Ca'n Novell since at least 1932. Theirs is one of the few cellars left in Mallorca that sells a *granel* – straight from their giant, 18th-century timber vats into whatever container you bring along. Villalonga – no relation to the novelist, Llorenç (p37), who had his summer house a few doors down – is in the midst of the grape harvest in mid-September.

Is it looking like a good year? We have had to cut down part of the harvest that wasn't good, but the remainder is of excellent quality. The first harvest phase is done. We harvest in three lots, according to grape type, waiting for the right moment – in all it takes a few weeks.

Have things changed since your great-grandfather made wine? Enormously. You don't see anyone ploughing fields with mule and plough anymore! No-one knows how to make those timber vats we have. In the '30s, 50 to 60 houses made wine here. They made and sold it, but by March/April they were out. This was an agrarian society and families made a bit of everything. They didn't just live from wine.

Do you export? About 95% of what we make is for local consumption. In all Mallorca, only about 2000 hectares of grape are cultivated – which is very little.

Is it hard to live from this? It depends. In Mallorca there are many tiny wine-makers who will have trouble surviving... We're a middle-sized business and one of the only cellars to sell direct and a *granel*. We also bottle, but we are not in the Binissalem Denominación de Origen (appellation). We don't want to be told what to do and how. We do what we want: make better wine, and cheaper!

Are you worried about climate change? It's a concern. Spain is becoming a desert. They are making wine in southern England. In some years the wine we make here may be more like that in Morocco or Algeria – higher in sugar and alcohol and with less acidity... If we don't change our ways and use of combustion engines, it's a worry, in the mid- to long term... Nowadays in Mallorca, we have an intermittent summer eight months of the year. There's hardly any winter. That's a fact.

could be the prow of the good ship Santa Eugènia.

our pick L'Escargot (☎ 971 144535; Carrer Major 48; meals €30–35; ☎ dinner Wed–Mon), a delightful Gallic oasis in a two-storey house with a garden, is the other compelling region to visit the area. Indulge in various French cuts of beef, such as *onglet*, and follow with a tangy fruit crumble. The restaurant is just off the main road to Santa Maria del Camí, opposite a curio that could be left over from Arab days – an enormous *aljub* (cistern) that supplied the town with water until 1950. Markets are held here on Saturdays.

A couple of kilometres southwest of Santa Eugènia on the Ma3011 to Palma, kids will like **Natura Parc** (☎ 971 144078; www.mallorcaweb.net/naturaparc; Carretera de Sineu Km15.4; adult/child 3–12 yr/child under 3 yr €7/4.50/free; ☎ 10am–7pm), with every thing from kangaroos to flamingos prancing about in relative freedom.

From Biniali, a 3.5km hop eastward brings you to the straggling rural centre of **Sencelles**, which you could probably skip, although it livens up a bit for the Wednesday market.

Those looking for a country stay should sneak out of Dodge down the Ma3140 and make for the hamlet of **Ruberts**, home to **Son Jordà** (☎ 971 872279; www.sonjorda.com; s/d €87/118; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎). Found just by the 18th-century parish church, it comprises three 16th-century houses with 21 rooms, some of them oozing rustic charm, others a little bare. It has tennis courts and a restaurant. The tiny hamlet takes visitors by surprise on 16 July with its colourful processions for the **Festa de la Verge del Carme**.

The 311 bus from Santa Maria del Camí runs to Sencelles via Santa Eugènia, but only three or four times a day (€1.05, 20 minutes).

INCA

pop 23,030 / elev 130m

Inca is the island's third-largest city – not the most attractive of places, but it's at the heart of the island's leather industry. Spanish shoe-makers Camper and Farrutx started here.

Inca may have known Roman settlement and appears to have once had a mosque. It