

Ride on with Sean Kelly

Cycle Mallorca's most beautiful routes with the Irish champion

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Over the last decades, international pro cycling has produced numerous stars. One of the major ones is undoubtedly the **Irishman Sean Kelly**, who dominated the European racing scene, especially in the 1980s. His **exceptional sprinter qualities and tenacious endurance** not only provided the red-haired son of a farmer from Waterford with quite a few triumphs and stage wins at almost all renowned street races, but also, as the **world's first professional cyclist**, Sean Kelly **lead the world rankings since its launch in 1984** for five consecutive years.

Even today, the 61-year-old Irishman is pedalling along continually. On **Mallorca**, Kelly is on the road for the **British cycling tour operator 'SportActive'** as a prominent tour guide. He still knows the island from the late 1970s, when he participated in one of the first editions of the **'Mallorca Tour'** as a professional. While colourfully dressed cyclists were considered exotic back then, Mallorca today is one of the absolute hotspots for the European cycling tourism industry. According to Sean, this has many reasons. "The island has everything you need. From varied routes for every performance level and ideal weather conditions all year long, up to an almost unequalled offer for specialised accommodation for cyclists."

The fact, however, that last year more than 300,000 two-wheelers alone visited the island, is due to another circumstance, according to Sean. "Cycling has become a kind of 'everybody's darling', especially in today's fitness-and-health-oriented society," he says. Cycling can be practised virtually anywhere, at any age, and even when battered bones, knee or hip joints make other leisure activities such as **tennis** or **golf** impossible. Especially in Great Britain, **cycling** has been booming as a **fitness tool** for everyone for many years." The purchase of a bicycle is subsidised by the government with up to 50% of the price," explains Kelly. In the long term, this investment is paying off for the state. "People who ride their bike regularly stay fit for longer – and are less of a burden for public health care."

Cycling during holidays combines relaxation, sports, and health care in an almost perfect way. "Cycling holidays are also compatible with the holiday interests of other family members," Sean believes. This means that, while in the morning Daddy thrashes about for a few kilometres through the **Tramuntana mountains** or the central plain of Mallorca, Mummy and the kids are relaxing at the hotel pool.

For Sean Kelly there are **two types of cycling tourists on Mallorca**. "On the one hand, there are the experienced cyclists who know what to expect on the island," he says. And on the other hand, those who do not know. "Beginners, particularly, often

exceed their own abilities which can be dangerous.” Therefore, cycling tour operators are always a good choice when you want to cycle on the island. “Experienced tour guides place the bikers right from the start in the group that is appropriate for their level. Then nothing can go wrong,” Sean believes.

However, he does recognize the problem of the **massification of cycling tourism on Mallorca**. “Over the last three years, the number of two-wheeler tourists on the island has increased noticeably. Unfortunately, this has also led to more accidents, some with fatal consequences.” Sean Kelly does not have an answer for how to deal with the two-wheel invasion on the island. “It is difficult to control these kinds of developments.”

Mallorca, however, is **not a dangerous bicycle area** – as often falsely claimed. “It is still more risky to ride a bike through **Dublin** on a weekday, than to tackle the gorge of **Sa Calobra** on a weekend,” Kelly says smiling his typically mischievous smile.

For him, cycling has been pure pleasure since the end of his career in the mid-nineties. Did he never have enough of constantly hitting the asphalt on two wheels? “No,” Sean Kelly answers without flinching. “I keep fit on the bike. And if I really do not want to cycle one day, then I go to the pub.” As simple as that. Cheers!

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