

Think you know Ibiza



Think you know Ibiza? Think again.

The hedonistic clubbing lifestyle of Ibiza is a reality, but to focus solely on the clubs would be like having a holiday in London and spending it entirely in Soho. The Spanish Tourist Office have been jumping up and down to dispel this image of the island, so I recently took them up on the battle cry to see what else the island has to offer.

Founded in 654 BC by Phoenician settlers, Ibiza is the third largest of the Balearic Islands. Its official name in Catalan is 'Eivissa' but is pronounced in Spanish and internationally known as Ibiza. Before the clubs were the hippies, and before them were the Romans and Greeks. It's got a lot of history and don't expect everyone to speak English – it's extremely Spanish.

First off, reset your body clock to Ibiza time. Everything happens three hours later so have a long lay in bed and be prepared to dine after 10pm in the evening. Secondly, look at a map and pick a beach. There are many ranging from white sand, to pebble and salt rock. Secluded, busy, nude or gay, the island has it all and with large areas registered as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the protected natural beauty is stunning.

Es Cavallet and Ses Salinas in the south are popular with the gay crowd and are easily reached by bus. Off the beaten tourist trail is Cale Carbo, a wonderful beach where the view is framed by an almost circular bay. Nearby is the old defence tower Torre del Pirata which is the perfect spot to watch the sunset over the mystical rock of Es Vedra and Ed Vedranell. Bring your camera. I made the most of my day visiting the unspoilt Benirras Bay in the north with its UNESCO protected "God's Finger" rock outcrop, starting with an 8am Ibiza Yoga class on the roof top of Villa Palmes. Informal and friendly, the teachers will push you whilst respecting your limits – you can't help but feel one with nature and a tinge of the spiritual as you stretch your muscles looking over the trees down into the crystal clear bay. Follow up with a walk down to the bay and a visit to Elements. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, this restaurant and lounge bar specialises in freshly caught mixed grill fish and offers a great fresh juice bar. Visit the bay on Sunday to watch the remaining hippies gather to drum as the sun sets against the spectacular natural backdrop.

Accommodation varies to suit the LGBT purse. Hotel Hacienda Na Xamena is the new uber-hotel that has the A-gays salivating. It's like Thunderbirds' Tracey Island plonked on top of a cliff, with swimming pool terraces, spa and restaurant surrounded by breathtaking panoramic coastal views. A truly 5 star experience for those that like to splash the cash. Decidedly modest, Vara de Ray offers charming Ibiza Town accommodation with a view of "D'alt Vila", the beautiful walled historic Old Town. Restored from the 1950's apartment design, it's rather shabby-chic and filled with an eclectic mix of antique furniture and is a

great little find offering single, double rooms and suites. For a wonderful boutique hotel experience visit the Atzaro (see below for further details). I plumbed for somewhere in the middle, staying in the heart of Ibiza Town at Hostel Parque, a clean and modern hotel which was refurbished in 2007 and has 30 rooms to suit a variety of budgets. Located in a leafy pedestrianised square at the foot of D'alt Vila, it's a 2 minute walk to the Port of Ibiza, the shops, restaurants and gay bars.

D'alt Vila deserves to be explored over 2 nights. Winding cobbled streets, the stunning 14th century Cathedral of Santa Maria d'Eivissa and more ramparts and views than you could shake a stick at, the walled city is teeming with LGBT friendly restaurants along Calle de Santa Cruz which can cater for large groups if you book ahead. La Boega is one of the best tapas bars on the island, located to the left of the gigantic stone rampart that leads into D'alt Vila. The food is out of this world with each dish trumping the next. Try the cebiche, spanish omlette, tuna carpaccio and the tastiest padron green peppers in the world. Turn up on the night but make a reservation if you want to secure a table outside. Also don't forget to try the champagne sangria.

D'alt Vila is peppered with gay bars which fill around 1am. The main strips are Calle de La Virgen and the terraces of Calle Alfonso XII. Soap is the bar everyone starts their night at after dinner. With good cocktails and decent music it is frequented by all. Whilst in the area visit Jamel Mesbahi for customised street and beachwear – it's like personal shopping but with the actual designer, and on a completely frank yet friendly basis. The shop is small but the clothing is ahead of the trends and created on premises. If you think you know your style and body shape, think again. Women (and men) have cried. It's a memorable experience.

Take time out for lazy days at a beach or hotel club. You don't have to break the bank and the cost for a sun lounger and a few drinks in return for a whole day are worth it. First up the infamous Blue Marlin. Established 8 years ago and sponsored by Moet, you will need to make a reservation for a lounger at this laid back chic beach club. It aims to be inclusive, but it's advisable to bring your best Speedos, beach clobber and a comb. No entrance fee, open 11am – 3am, free parking, lunch is served from 1-7pm and dinner 9-1pm. Vidal Rodriguez is the resident DJ, playing soul, funk and chill out tunes and has just helped compile the latest Blue Marlin CD series. The busiest day is Sunday and celebs are often spotted taking one of the water taxis from their yacht to the mini boardwalk. Roman Abramovich appeared whilst I was there, in his £300 million mega-yacht complete with its own missile defence system, anti-paparazzi shield, helipads and submarine. All it was missing was a Waitrose. My other recommendation is Atzaro. Opened in 2004 and run by four brothers, the five star Atzaro offers a fabulous day experience including the use of its pools, spa, sauna, hammam, gym, chill out area and a hearty lunch at a reasonable price. The manicured gardens, facilities, and service are impeccable. The family have turned the former orange grove into a chic hotel, blissful spa, and splendid restaurant complete with a champagne bar and chill out areas. It's more of a sanctuary with a wonderful blend of

Ibizencan, Asian and African influences. The music and fashion shows run throughout the summer season and the spa facilities offered are extensive. You will not want to leave.

With a day trip to the beautiful Formentera and a night out at the friendly and funky KM5 (wonderful food, cocktails and ambience), my holiday was up.

Ibiza will always be known as a world clubbing destination but this element doesn't dominate an island that offers a rich history and unspoilt natural beauty. If you're looking for a spiritual, chic, leisurely or even family holiday, Ibiza can deliver. Go with an open mind and be surprised.

The major airports operate daily direct flights to the Island and throughout July and August City Airport in London offers a daily service excluding Saturday.

www.ibizayoga.com

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