

Simon Busch, MSN Travel editor, Updated: 30/11/2009 11:15

The other Ibiza

On the receiving end of a 45-minute foot massage, Simon Busch discovers what happened to the Ibizan hippies who didn't found all those enormous, pulsating clubs

"IBEEFA ROCKS!" The slogan blaring from the T-shirts clinging to the shaven-headed lads on the easyJet flight promised no surprises. A trio of women, already sporting gaudy paper garlands around their necks, might have been heading straight for a club without changing. Ibiza was living up to its stereotype, and we hadn't even arrived.

Heaven for some. A nightmare for me: I hate clubbing. What, then, you might ask, apart from masochism (and by the look of the decidedly risqué tourist brochures, you can probably find a club on the island that caters for that), were you doing in Ibiza?



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Hippy spirit... graffiti in Ibiza old town

Follow me, as the minibus whisks me from the airport past a few of the barn-like nightspots clustered around the coast and straight into the rural interior, and you shall find out. The clubbers, you see, are a mere fluorescent crust upon Ibiza's at least 2,500-year-old human history. Before them - long before - came the seafaring Phoenicians, then the Carthaginians, then the Romans (all of whom would, no doubt, have been deeply weirded out by Ibiza's latest, dance-crazy invaders but also, oddly enough, would probably fit right in at the average Ibizan club night). Then came a long, very long, one imagines, period of subsistence agriculture, followed, in the 60s, by - the bit that interests us - the hippies.

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In Ibiza, pioneering longhairs from all over Europe and beyond found sunny refuge from overwhelming squareness. They settled on the island, practising free love, founding Spain's first nudist beach - all of which, Ibiza being fairly remote, was largely ignored by the then fascist ruler Franco on mainland Spain - and dreaming up a style of loose, white, pic'n'mix clothing called ad lib that is still popular among Ibiza full-timers.

I doubt certain sweet-smelling herbs were ever exactly unpopular in the hippy colony but, at some point, another, less mellow mind-altering substance came on to the scene and, some time afterward, the hippies bifurcated... Sorry: they split. One tranche took the speedy lane, helping to invent the raves that have mutated into the corporate mega-clubs bulging from the island today. The other, well...



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Buddha House silhouette

"This is Lisa, your foot reflexologist." Ibiza Retreats really are retreats. You reached this one, Buddha House, only after crawling up a hill so steep I thought the drive might itself be some kind of risky new age treatment for the spine. The view over the swimming pool to the far-away sea is uninterrupted save for the silhouette of the aforementioned Indian godhead: Ibizan bylaws now sensibly prohibit all building above a certain height.

Buddha House is a getaway possibly even from getaways. Ilona, its hostess, told me she had a bunch of bankers coming soon. Were they in hiding, I asked.

Ibiza Retreats does the whole jingle-jangle panoply of new age treatments, of course. Yoga and foot massages are mere meat and veg (OK: veg) therapies in this world. The resorts also offer crystal healing, craniosacral massage, herbal inhalations, kinesiology, neuro-linguistic programming, qi gong and something called the raindrop technique. You name it, they practise it. (There is even an A-Z of therapies on the website, although with nothing - as yet - under Z.)

Are you scoffing? I was scoffing. At Buddha House you can even fast for five days, eating nothing but vegetable broth. Great, I thought: go on holiday, starve and pay €1,145 (£1,022) for the privilege.

And yet, and yet... the Ibiza Retreat practitioners are their own best advertisement. They all glow with health so much it's virtually radioactive. Even the old ones look young. You know those check-out chicks (and, er, chickos) in natural food stores who don't look like check-out chicks because they're so tanned and healthy? This is what happens when they grow up.



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Beads on sale at the Hippy Market in Ibiza

Apparently Lisa, my foot reflexologist, working from a great, vaulting geodesic dome in the backyard of Buddha House, was opening up my lungs, squeezing my pineal gland and reconditioning my gut - all via my foot. I don't know about that but it felt great. It felt like Jesus bathing the feet of his disciples - for 45 minutes. They treat feet well at Ibiza Retreats. Next mine were vigorously jiggled in a Chi machine, which Ilona said she had bought over the internet.

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And still they came: one slender, dusky tanned, lightly muscled therapist after another, each of whom looked as if she would live comfortably to about 135. Maureen practised musical meditation. We had to sit in a circle and chant, "Ohm", "Ah" and "Nnnnn". Apparently the different vibrations targeted the various major organs, or bad energy or something like that.



Ibiza Retreats

Yoga on the beach with Ibiza Retreats

What Maureen sadly didn't have a cure for was the giggles, which broke out among the group. Maureen didn't mind. She just smiled seraphically and said she often got that. She had been planning some more advanced chanting but thought we would just giggle again and so she played her Tibetan vibrating bowl and sitar while we lay down and tried not to think of England.

England. It's hard to imagine anywhere that Ibiza is less like. We had lunch one day at Restaurant 2000, on Benirràs beach - a platter of freshly grilled local fish so large we couldn't possibly finish it. Beneath someone's very expensive villa nestled in the bush overlooking the bay, families played on the uncrowded beach; the sun reflected off the gentle swell like skipping angels. The scene - in September - was so idyllic I felt like weeping. No wonder the hippies stayed.

GETTING THERE

Simon travelled to Ibiza as a guest of Hotel Can Lluç, Ibiza Retreats and the Ibiza Tourist Board.

The boutique hotel **Can Lluç**, set in the San Rafael valley in Ibiza's interior, has double rooms from €160 (£143) a night, including breakfast. Can Lluç has also recently added six luxury villas to its portfolio, with rates starting at €450 a night.

Ibiza Retreats (info@ibizaretreats.com) offers a range of tailor made spa programmes, including fasting, yoga, massage, meditation, nutritional consultation and reflexology. For information on all the retreat workshops and classes available in Ibiza, visit **White Ibiza**.

For more information on Ibiza, see **Ibiza Travel**.



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The villa at Benirràs beach