

NOTES FROM AN AUTHOR

# Ash Bhardwaj

IBIZA IS THE ULTIMATE HEDONISTIC HOLIDAY ISLAND, BUT ALSO A PLACE OF REFUGE AND RECUPERATION THAT FOSTERS A SHARED SENSE OF WONDER

If holiday destinations had a poster child, it would be Ibiza. The Balearic isle was named for Bes, the Phoenician god of dance, sleep and protection, while its spirit-goddess, Tanit, was supposedly worshipped through sacred orgies.

It's tempting to believe that Ibiza has lived up to those expectations, but to truly understand its evolution you need to start with its history of sanctuary: first for Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition during the middle ages, and later for intellectuals fleeing Franco's fascist dictatorship in the 1930s and '40s.

When tourism arrived in the 1950s, the first visitors were marginalised people like artists, hippies and draft dodgers. The island's tolerant attitude welcomed film stars and rock stars, and it had a thriving gay community when homosexuality was illegal in many countries.

By the time I arrived in 2010, Ibiza had become the apex party island. Most of my travels involve hiking through remote parts of the world, but I discovered something different in Ibiza. An awful lot of fun. I danced in nightclubs, went to yacht parties and bacchanalian after-parties, and lounged on perfect beaches in perfect weather.

Ibiza boomed with the emergence of package holidays and cheap flights. Prime real estate was swallowed up by towering hotels that sucked up resources, and every industry was subsumed into the tourist economy. Music echoed across the countryside and boozed-up visitors behaved atrociously towards locals.

The island is now transitioning towards a different form of tourism. Some of the biggest nightclubs have shut down and the rest have put roofs over their open-air dance floors, reducing noise. Tour operators focus on wellness retreats, hiking or cycling, and the tourist board promotes cuisine over clubs.

This reflects a change in demand from tourists, too, many of whom want to rest and recuperate, rather than rave and intoxicate. Ibiza's ethically conscious consumers want their money to fund tourism that's both environmentally and socially sustainable, and there are plenty of other, less expensive destinations that have replicated Ibiza's sunset-and-DJ-terrace template.

Despite all that, Ibiza retains a unique allure. The shows in the nightclubs are as grand as any festival and they attract the world's best DJs. Its hotels and villas match quality with coolness, and the shops and



restaurants appeal to the world's most discerning visitors. And it's not just the infrastructure that draws tourists to Ibiza.

At the start of 2023, I began to think about my own motivations for travel. The world was coming out of the Covid pandemic, my mum had recently passed away from cancer and my wife was pregnant with our daughter. All of that meant I was travelling less than ever, and I wanted to make the most of it when I did.

So I began a period of research. I spoke to friends and colleagues about their travels; interviewed scientists, philosophers, explorers and athletes; and dug into academic papers and literature. I distilled all this into 12 motivations for travel: curiosity, inspiration, happiness, mentorship, serendipity, hardship, service, empathy, healing, wonder, eroticism and hope.

The first visitors to any place are curious 'explorers' who discover something new. They return home and tell stories about what they've seen, which inspires 'travellers' to visit. Then come the 'tourists', who aspire to the traveller experience, but want services and infrastructure that make travel easier. And whether you're a traveller or tourist, nearly all travel marketing focuses on just one motivation — hedonistic happiness.

As I thought more about Ibiza, I realised that something more was at play. Its appeal lies in its stories: of the gods that look after our often-neglected needs; of its history of tolerance and sanctuary; of its pioneers of creativity and innovation; of the legendary events that changed the course of music; and of the clubs that were ground zero for world-changing subcultures. While Ibiza is a place of hedonism, it's also a place of myth and of inspiration.

That's what distinguishes the island from other destinations that have good weather, gorgeous landscapes and great nightlife. And if you ever find yourself on an Ibizan dance floor — moving as one with thousands of other people, on the island that gave birth to a global subcultural phenomenon — you might just experience that rarest and most subtle of travel motivations. Wonder.

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