

IBIZA: THE REAL STORY OF A GLOBAL UTOPIA

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Anthropologist ANTHONY D'ANDREA, aka TECHNO TONY, has spent recent years investigating club/rave centres around the World researching a PHD thesis on 'Club Cultures'. For the fourth summer Ibiza is under his microscope...

Forget those endless, trashy, sensationalised TV images of cheap West End hedonism. Forget also the usually empty appeals for a 'cultural tourism' of dying folklore. Ibiza has strong elements of both for sure, but also more, much more. As the most important social laboratory of post-modern life-style, the island stands at the cutting-edge between globalisation and counterculture. Amsterdam may cry 'foul', but is there really any contest? Ibiza has sun, liberating nude beaches... and of course is an island – all indispensable conditions for a perfect Paradise-like experience.

After centuries in poverty and isolation, Ibiza now dazzles as a charismatic icon of freedom and pleasure, a golden Utopia for youth. It tops Spanish, Mediterranean and European rankings for per-capita income, economic growth and tourism, as well as those for divorce, AIDS and drug consumption. All are clear indicators of an intense, fast-changing society. With an officially recognised population of 84,000, hosting two million tourists, the tiny island is currently fighting to stabilise an intense period of coastal urbanisation that began in the 1960's. 80% of income derives from tourism and leisure, with the major nightclubs and bars being central to it. Estimates conclude that around 12% of visitors fall directly into the 'club tourism' category. Marketing strategies emphasise the concept of 'sun, fun and sex galore', thus attracting a predominantly youthful, carefree, multinational tourist clientele dominated by a British working class who form around 40%, with German and Spanish middle-classes providing 25% and 15% respectively.

Yet this is only part of the story. Ibiza needs to be understood within a complex logic, linking global and counter-cultural processes. To begin, our focus must lie on the island's foreign resident population: officially 11,000, or 13%, are multinational immigrants (although the real figure may double when irregular 'alternative' and global voyagers are included). In decreasing order the permanent expatriates are German,

British, French, Dutch, Italian, Latin and North American - who, in addition to Spanish cosmopolitans, are generally drawn from middle and upper strata of society, often members of cultural and economic elites.

Many have chosen the island as a place for shaping an aesthetic 'style of life', rather than the usual economic-centred motivations of many African and Spanish immigrants. This aesthetic of existence is expressed through spiritual, creative and hedonistic practices of freedom, tolerance, pleasure and self-exploration – factors that acquire wilder or calmer tones according to each individual or group. Often they've sought to break away from the conventional, oppressive boredom of 'mainstream' society, with its stress, conditioning, and demands.

An extensive segment of this cosmopolitan populace are born of bohemian parents of differing nationalities, hold dual citizenship, with polyglot kids often speaking multiple languages. Having lived in three or more countries, many regard India as a special reference in their lives. Paradoxically, despite fleeing the mainstream, Ibiza's phenomenal global image places these self-marginalized people at the very centre of its creative life, a cultural elite crafting much of its seductive charm. Moreover, it is a global charisma, as these cosmopolitan types overlap with semi-nomadic 'alternatives' who trace nodes of freakiness along an international circuit - luxury traders, therapists, healers, yoga teachers, fashion professionals, DJs, musicians, party-promoters, drug dealers, rich bohemians and Trustafarians. Art and spirituality loom large on this alternative map of Utopian sites – including Goa, Bali, and places of the moment like Thailand and Brazil. On a second level, global cities are included, Ibiza being linked to Barcelona as much as it is to London, Dusseldorf, New York, Amsterdam, Buenos Aires... even Bombay.

History shows the island as host to a high concentration of marginalized lifestyles - gay, bohemian, hippie cultures - since the early 20th century. During the 30s Ibiza proved a refuge for members of German, Italian and Spanish artistic and political circles, escaping the rising tide of Fascism. Spanish dictator Franco consented to Ibiza remaining a distant and isolated escape-valve for such European 'freaks' (there was no airport until 1958). Ibiza proved a pleasurable and receptive space in which to live out personal Utopian dreams - a stimulating community of open-minded cosmopolitans, the embourgeoisé embracing new, unconventional practices of naturalism, nudism, mysticism, psychedelism, and homo-eroticism - experiences inspired by a combination of romantic and scientific ideals culled from the late 19th century. Similarly, during the 60s, US beatniks and hippies arrived, learning of this 'cool place' from the children of vacationing US diplomats. By the early 70s, 20% of Ibiza's foreign population was North American, with hordes of Latin American leftists, alternatives and experimentalists arriving soon after, refugees from the military infernos of Argentina and Uruguay. A decade later, as the island quickly grew and modernised,

Argentine expatriates outnumbered the aging North Americans, many of whom had left after abandoning hippie ideals, or in order to seek them in cheaper, “more primitive” places, like Mexico and India.

Osho *sannyasins* were a crucial bridge between Ibiza’s 60s counterculture and the 90s electronic dance subculture. To simplify a long, and fascinating, story, Osho - aka the ‘Rolls-Royce’ or ‘Sex Guru’ - was an outrageous Nietzschean who sought to combine Buddha with Zorba by celebrating and affirming Life (“I would only believe in a God who danced”, he said). This attracted many youthful, creative and wealthy converts. When Osho’s American commune in Oregon was closed by conservative Reagan-ite forces in 1984, many followers headed to Ibiza, exquisite location for the ‘alternative’ practices of love and liberation. *Sannyasins* enjoyed parties, participated heavily in the nightclub life, and introduced various New Age techniques for self-development brought from the USA, including the use of MDMA for meditation and body-therapies. Although ‘ecstasy’ was already used in the UK’s gay and anti-psychiatric ghettos, it was through the interaction between *sannyasins* and late 80s clubbers in Ibiza that MDMA became an explosive discovery for the European masses then living through the hard times of neo-liberal capitalism. The legendary 1987 ‘enlightenment’ of DJ figureheads like Paul Oakenfold and Danny Rampling upon first trying ‘ecstasy’ in Ibiza was pivotal. From Ibiza to the World... The subsequent explosion of Loved Up 90s rave culture was like an unstoppable march from the underground to the mainstream.

Reflect again upon Ibiza today, with German, North American, Argentine and British expatriates, bohemians, gays, hippies, *sannyasins* and clubbers – the island has assimilated people who share a feeling of discontentment with life elsewhere, here attempting new ways of existence that may unfold away from fashionable and consumerist obsessions. The present transformation of Utopia into commercial commodity displays the ambivalent feelings of desire and repulse by the ‘mainstream’ in relation to the ‘underground’. Each year, millions take a taste and learn if their ‘Ibiza experience’ is ultimately just a functional temporary escape-valve, or a seductive invitation to a long-term personal revolution. Whichever it is, many will still assure you that Ibiza has powerful energies, and transforms whoever comes to the island...