



Ibiza: Time to check in to the rave

A new style of hotel has opened in Ibiza — one where the dancing never ends. Take the party challenge and watch our two videos

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Life can be a drag, can't it? You're on holiday in Ibiza, for example, and the sky is blue. The sun's out. You feel like dancing. Well done, you've come to the right place — the Phoenicians first had a disco here in 654, and named it after their god of dance — but you're in your hotel, by the pool, with a cocktail. Sheesh. Nightmare. What do you do?

If that really is the limit of your troubles this summer, relax: Ibiza's two big hotel openings of 2011, although wildly different, address the same thought: what if you never had to leave your hotel to find the best party on the island? They're not the first places to have this idea — half the hospitality industry of Miami is based on never having to leave the pool for anything; while Ibiza institutions such as Es Vive (with a nightclub in the basement and regular pool parties) and Ibiza Rocks (with a concert venue in the basement and regular poolside gigs) have been doing it for a while.

But the last time I went to the Es Vive hotel, I shared my breakfast with a cockroach, and the Ibiza Rocks hotel in San Antonio is unashamedly aimed at twentysomethings. These two new hotels offer a five-star experience to a five-star (wealthy, 30-plus) clientele. So, are they any cop, and would you go there?

Ibiza Rocks House at Pikes Hotel comes with a first-rate heritage. Pike's, as it used to be known, was a sprawling boutique hotel up in the hills above San Antonio, run by Tony Pike, who fashioned a reputation over the years for two things: a fondness for parties, and an equal warmth towards the girls that frequented them.

It's always been popular with celebrities — guests have included Tony Curtis, Grace Jones and Kylie — but its reputation was sealed after Freddie Mercury's 40th-birthday do, which involved drugs, debauchery and a widespread state of undress. Less salaciously, the video for Wham!'s Club Tropicana was also filmed there. These days, Pike is in his mid-seventies and is usually hanging out at the bar sharing stories.

Andy McKay and Dawn Hindle, half of the foursome behind the notorious Manumission club nights, and, more recently, the brains behind Ibiza Rocks, have taken over Pikes with the intention of turning it into a homely little guesthouse, Ibiza-style. Which means the bands playing at Ibiza Rocks will stay there — so this year that's anyone from Plan B, Johnny Borrell and Tinie Tempah to DJs such as Mark Ronson and Fatboy Slim.

According to McKay, he currently has more rock stars than guests booked in over the summer — but then, that's quite a sexy problem to make public, isn't it? Each of the 25 rooms has been updated — but Freddie's Marrakech suite has been turned into a playroom, with a set of decks

mounted into an overturned chest of drawers, and an honesty bar. The whole place feels as though some kind of carry-on is only ever a drink and a daft idea away — whether that's the kids in the pool trying to use a random stuffed crocodile head as a makeshift float, a naked photoshoot taking place on the bright-pink tennis court, or just a happy bunch of fortysomethings dancing with mojitos in the sunshine.

One of the stars of the show is Sam Letteri, the avuncular British chef and former catering manager to the likes of Elton John and Take That, who is responsible for one of the best Sunday roasts on the island, and more left-field offerings such as bloody-mary gazpacho. He almost didn't take his dream job: "If anyone else had called me to say they were opening a hotel in six weeks, I'd have asked if they were mad," he says. "I actually turned it down, but Dawn and Andy have this strange following in Ibiza. Everyone who knows them is ready to chip in to make things happen. They call it 'family', but it's practically a cult. Charles Manson had the same thing."

The hotel's unusual look is in part down to him. "I didn't want to do yet another MediterrAsian restaurant. It would have been very easy to have painted every wall white, ship in a load of Buddhas and upright everything, but we wanted to keep the character of the place. So I painted some walls blue and we got a dead fox in instead."

And it works. Said fox is the mascot of the restaurant, holding a tray and welcoming you to the dining area, and there are plenty of other antique pictures, battered old mirrors and entertaining statues knocking about the place — but they fit in just as well as the battered and entertaining clientele. For the hoary old raver looking for a new playground, Pikes is still special. Freddie would have approved.

The other big development in Ibiza's hotel landscape this season is 10 times as big and, at £17.5m, about 200 times the cost of Ibiza Rocks House at Pikes. Ushuaia, directly opposite Space in Playa d'en Bossa, is a vast new hotel and beach-club complex, featuring state-of-the-art bedrooms with LED mood lighting, a number of pools and an enormous raised DJ booth that looks as if it's been nicked from Glastonbury. Every wall is white, all the statues and wooden figurines have been imported from Bali, the restaurant serves sushi and teppanyaki, and there's a fair bit of uplighting, too.

It looks... new. And spectacular. That's not the point of it, though. The point is the parties, and I wouldn't be surprised if this becomes one of the island's go-to destinations for those wanting to go "large" — and large is right: there's room for 5,000 people to dance around the pool, and, while this won't be everyone's cup of sangria, the queues for the opening parties suggest it'll be busy.

Because of island-wide noise and licensing regulations, all outdoor sound systems must be turned off at midnight, but that's no problem: the parties either transfer to rooms — the presidential suite is soundproofed and comes complete with decks — or those who have booked the VIP sun loungers will get to retire to their executive boxes, which are like mini bedrooms (without the beds) and have bars, Jacuzzis, sofas and erotic kits, and cost north of £6,000.

What of the normal rooms? Are they soundproofed? No. Which means you can still hear the planes pass loudly overhead until gone midnight (which is unlikely to be a problem for party people) and again when they start up again soon after 7am (which might be). The hotel had only opened a week before I arrived, so I'm sure things will get slicker during the season, but I found the service surprisingly inattentive and the security in the lobby obnoxious. Perhaps Yann Pissenem, the young French owner, will have a word, because small things currently mar the big experience that Ushuaia is striving for. That said, the spa, Equilibrium, is slick and the restaurant, Minami, fantastic. As a hotel/ event space, it's unique on the island. And when you're finally done, there's always Space across the road. Freddie might have approved of that, too.

NEED TO KNOW

Paul Croughton stayed as a guest of Ibiza Rocks House at Pikes Hotel (00 34-971 342222, ibizarocks.com/house; doubles from £155, B&B), and Ushuaia (902 424252, [ushuaia beachhotel.com](http://ushuaia.beachhotel.com); doubles from £115, B&B). There are flights to Ibiza from more than 20 UK airports, as well as Dublin. Airlines include British Airways (, ba.com), EasyJet (easyjet.com) and Monarch (, monarch.co.uk).