

Chills and thrills: yoga on the beach in Formentera. Below, Naomi Campbell has been spotted on the island. Mika, right, and Fatboy Slim, below right, party at Pikes



DETOX to RETOX

Yoga retreat? Not in 2017. This summer it's all about the yoga *pre*-treat. Ex-raver *Laura Craik* joins the modern party people following their zenning out with some serious living it up. Or at least tries to...

I am straddled on a mat, sweating, a stranger's bum hovering several inches from my face, trying to remember why I ever thought it would be a good idea to go on a yoga retreat. What sort of person even goes on a yoga retreat? Brokenhearted divorcees? Judgemental vegans? Brokenhearted judgemental vegan divorcees?

More and more people, it appears. Thanks to the stresses of modern life, wellness tourism is booming, with an estimated global market value of £590bn, up from £343bn in 2012. However freaky the experience turns out to be, at least it's in Formentera, a tiny Balearic island accessible only by boat and known as 'the last paradise of the Mediterranean' for its Unesco world heritage status and quiet beaches.

If Ibiza is a fretful baby, Formentera is its peaceful Buddha counterpart. Bob Dylan and Pink Floyd might have pitched up in the Seventies, and Naomi Campbell, Giorgio Armani and Orlando Bloom might recently have been spotted on its pristine white sands, but Formentera still contrives to feel like a delicious little secret. Kate Moss famously goes to relax in Formentera after partying in Ibiza, but I'm doing things the other way round. After the retreat I'm off to Pikes, a

500-year-old finca where Wham!'s Club Tropicana video was filmed, and an Ibizan institution. I haven't visited since the Nineties but can safely say that back then, it was the wildest hotel I'd ever stayed in. Detox to retox seems to be the hottest holiday trend and Formentera + Ibiza = the ultimate detox/retox.

I am expecting the yoga retreat to offer spartan accommodation that's light on home comforts and heavy on green tea, so am cheered to discover it's held at the Gecko Beach Club, Formentera's only five-star hotel, set right on Platja de Migjorn and gleaming after a refurb. I arrive just as everyone is having dinner — all 24 of them, laughing like drains. There is only one thing worse than going on your first yoga retreat, and that's going on your first yoga retreat and accidentally arriving a day late once everyone else has bonded. On the bright side, I can

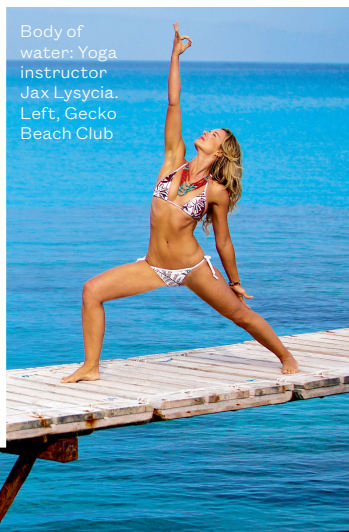
see a bottle of wine. Cleary, the 'detox' part is not too strictly enforced.

The first class is at 7.45am and is taught, like all the others (there are two a day), by Jax, a blonder, bendier version of Elle Macpherson. Part teacher, part shaman, she has a quiet charisma that makes you fall a bit in love with her, and her knowledge is deep. I've done yoga before, but never heard of an internal foot spiral. She also keeps saying 'um, Lola'. I look around for this Lola, who is clearly so bad at yoga that she needs to be corrected all the time. Maybe me and Lola can be friends, united by our cack-handed ability to do a downward dog. It turns out Jax is referring to 'ullola', which means 'flow'.

After the two-hour class, we have a tasty breakfast followed by a three-hour hike. Luckily, Formentera is flat. It's also very beautiful. Our guide explains the stringent planning laws in place that prevent the small island (pop: 12,000) from assuming the built-up appearance of its neighbour, Ibiza.

There is no way to say this without sounding like a wanker, but halfway through the week (bum in the air, legs akimbo, trying desperately not to fart), my thoughts uncoil like a rope and I feel peaceful, blissful, but also tearful. Apparently, this is common: it transpires that several others in my group have been weeping silently on their yoga mats. The type of yoga we are doing might be





gentle, but it is also deep. By day three, I've even stopped cringing at the oms. 'Ommm,' we all chant, sounding like cows, if cows did karaoke. On the final day — day five — we sit in a circle outside, and one by one say how we feel. One man explains that he works in a competitive, corporate environment where people are never kind, and that he has been blown away by the kindness of our group. 'I have hated myself my whole life,' he says. 'But now I want to try to love myself. Thank you for making me feel I might be able to.'

The thing about yoga retreats is that they seem a bit ridiculous — until you do one. The other thing about yoga retreats is that it's not so much about what you lose — weight, cynicism, inhibitions — as what you find. For what you find might just surprise you. Whitney was right: learning to love yourself really is the greatest love of all. But you ain't gonna learn it in the office.

You probably won't learn it at Pikes, either, but you will certainly have a good time trying. The 30-minute ferry trip from Formentera is idyllic, affording Instagram-friendly views of Ibiza Old Town as you draw into the port, from which Pikes is a 20-minute cab journey. Plonking myself on a sunbed by the pool, I'm half-pleased/half-terrified to note that Pikes' hedonism has survived its new owners.

People are on their fourth cocktail by 11am. As the DJ plays Ian Dury's 'Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick', one man is walking round the pool literally hitting sunbathers with a stick. Although, given that Pikes' owners are Dawn Hindle and Andy McKay, the brains behind Ibiza's seminal, legendarily debauched Nineties superclub Manumission, then perhaps this is hardly surprising. The last time I was at Manumission, a couple had sex on stage, the crescendo of a cabaret act featuring dwarves (as they were then called) and a bevy of scantily clad women. In the Nineties, that



was just the way we rolled. Well, some of us.

Over dinner with Hindle, it transpires that Pikes has actually changed a lot. The rooms are more luxurious. The food, which used to be basic, is now five-star delicious, my meal among the most imaginatively cooked I've ever eaten. Pop-ups, featuring chefs from London restaurants such as Hawksmoor, run throughout the summer.

"I'M IN BED, WATCHED OVER BY A NEON 'LUST' SIGN AND A SLIGHTLY DISCONCERTING PHOTO OF FREDDIE MERCURY"

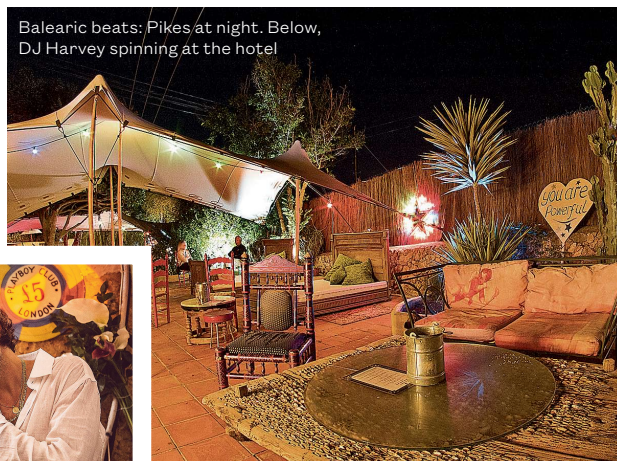
Like its owners (Hindle also designs a jewellery range, True Rocks), Pikes has grown up along with its guests, most of whom are in their 40s, well-travelled and discerning. The walls by reception are still hung with photos of George Michael, Grace Jones, Bon Jovi and Kylie Minogue, each standing beside Tony Pike, its eccentric octogenarian founder. The man Boy George once referred to as 'the Hugh Hefner of Ibiza' still has a stake in the business, as well as a permanent room there. If you're lucky enough to encounter Pike by the pool, he'll tell you anecdotes featuring drugs, celebs and orgies that could never be printed (one story featuring the England football

team was removed from a website last year at lawyers' request). What happens at Pikes, stays at Pikes.

After dinner, Hindle shows me around Freddie's, which used to be Freddie Mercury's favourite room but is now a private club, accessed via a secret bookcase and featuring a bath filled with plastic balls where guests can sprawl and do karaoke. Freddie's is soft play for adults still incensed by the idea of growing up, and Pikes is their ideal playground. By 11pm, madness is in the air. I spot a bevy of superstar DJs in town for the international music summit, a smattering of old ravers who could have been in situ since 1997 and a convoy of 18 year-old Glaswegian girls, dressed in a way that makes Little Mix look bashful. Hindle is not snobbish, and says Pikes is one of the few places left in Ibiza where you don't have to spend a fortune on a bottle of champagne in order to secure a seat at the bar. This makes me happy. When I was young, Ibiza was a rite of passage. You didn't need to be a millionaire to enjoy it.

Being a shade less young now, by midnight I'm in bed, watched over by a mirrored ceiling, a neon 'LUST' sign, and a large and slightly disconcerting black and white photo of Freddie Mercury. However seductive Pikes is, I figure, there's no point in throwing away the hard-won benefits of the yoga retreat.

Especially when BA can do it for me. I arrive at the airport the following day to find my flight home has been cancelled, a casualty of the airline's widespread computer failure. The weird thing is, I'm not even stressed. I calmly make my way to the easyJet desk and book a flight to Southend. I don't really know where Southend is, but it'll be fine. Ommm. *Formentera Yoga retreats taught by Jax Lysycia run until October. Prices from £350-£2,075 (formenterayoga.com). Primal Scream play Pikes on 29 August; DJ residencies this season include DJ Harvey and Paul Oakenfold. Doubles from £163 (pikesibiza.com)*



Balearic beats: Pikes at night. Below, DJ Harvey spinning at the hotel

