

Tides of time

Ibiza has the natural beauty both of the sea and the coast as well as evidence of humankind's long history in the Mediterranean



Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Moors and the Spanish have all lived on Ibiza.

SPOTLIGHT | Managing visits and educating visitors

Ibiza, biodiversity and culture: Teaming life and human history under the waves

Cultural treasures — an old town perched on a hill topped by 16th-century ramparts — are one reason Ibiza was inscribed as World Heritage. Phoenician ruins and burial grounds recall the ancient tribes who colonized this sector of the western Mediterranean ages ago.

The global tourists who occupy the area today come for these attractions. But since Ibiza also has a marine component, the Spanish isle is listed as a mixed site. Most of the vacationers who carpet its beaches every summer miss this wonder, however, though it lies beneath the clear waters that surround them. For between Ibiza and its neighbor islet Formentera seven kilometers (about four miles) away thrive dense seascapes of sea grass. This thick undersea flora of the genus Posidonia generates reefs, and near Formentera it can stand four meters (13 feet) high, the tallest known in any Posidonia fields worldwide.

Other Unesco World Heritage sites include sea grass, but few match the extraordinary Balearic beds. Some 5,000 hectares (12,355 acres) are found at Corsica's Scandola Nature Reserve, and Ibiza has 8,500 hec-

tares. Its aquatic prairies, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which rated the site before its World Heritage inscription in 1999, are the best preserved in the entire Mediterranean basin.

Posidonia meadows are fundamental hatcheries for sea life; IUCN declares that one hectare will produce 21 tons a year of biomass, or living matter. This is on a par with a tropical forest, which generates 22 tons. Their high oxygen content permits Posidonia to support a diverse population of algae, invertebrates and fish.

Ibiza's marine niche, 90 kilometers from the Spanish mainland, also shelters endangered species like the monk seal. And its submerged caves provide glimpses of the geological evolution of the Balearic archipelago.

"Ten underwater archaeological sites related to the Late Bronze Age help understand old trade and interactions in the western Mediterranean," notes a World Heritage Centre report. "Most of these sites are far from adequately researched." Other ecosystems include the salt lakes and marshes of Ibiza and Formentera, which in 1993 were added to the List of Wetlands of International Importance for their value to migratory

birds by the Ramsar Convention, an inter-governmental covenant for wetlands preservation.

This unique oceanic ecosystem faces increasing peril, however, because of pollution. As with other sites that are popular tourist destinations, Unesco is also seeking ways to manage visitation so that Ibiza's submarine riches remain intact. The latest challenge is a possible extension to its harbor, an €80 million (\$90 million) project drafted last year. Its primary goal would be relocation of large ferry and transport ships away from the inner port to where they would have more space.

Arguably, expansion is needed to better manage the fleets of tourist arrivals — Ibiza draws some five million each season. But the additional maritime traffic and security issues that are bound to result will require even more rigorous management. Mechthild Rössler, section chief for Europe at the World Heritage Centre, explains what is at stake: "A harbor enlargement means a lot of digging, which means a great deal of mud would be going into the Mediterranean. That process has to be managed very carefully so as not to affect the Posidonia, because the natural area is inscribed for its ecosystem and its high biodiversity for the Posidonia fields."

Unesco, with IUCN, its adviser for nature, and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (Icomos), its consultant for culture, visited Ibiza in November 2009 to evaluate the waterfront development. Its findings will be reviewed by the World Heritage Committee when it convenes in Brasilia July 25-Aug. 3 for its annual meeting.

"Unesco's task," says Rössler, "is to monitor the site closely, together with the national authorities and our advisory bodies, to make sure that if the harbor extension goes ahead there are no impacts on the natural values of this property."

Meanwhile, Unesco is working with the local powers to devise ways to better manage tourism and its consequences. It urged site officials, for example, to prepare a visitors' center where conservation issues could be showcased. This center is now in the planning stage.

But a mixed site means a local management divided in two teams: those in charge of

Ibiza's cultural wealth and others who administer its natural property. They must all work together if the total area is to be saved.

In modern Spain — really a nation of nations — the regions are "autonomous communities." The Balearic Islands form one of these regions, and both Ibiza and Formentera have their own island councils, tourist boards and other civic entities. Each of the different national authorities, such as the environment ministry, must make common cause with all these local officials. A certain amount of coordination is necessary.

World Heritage status, Rössler says, has helped Ibiza oversee the site. The natural and cultural representatives have drawn closer together. So have the different institutions concerned with the daily management of fallout from tourism and the boat traffic.

"Overall," she says, "I'm optimistic. You can see lots of change. The authorities are doing a lot more to preserve Ibiza than they did before." JJ.

ROBERT HARDING / GETTY IMAGES

Double protection

Of the 890 World Heritage properties, only 25 are mixed sites. "Their relatively small number may be because they have to demonstrate outstanding universal value in both cultural and natural criteria," says Kishore Rao, the World Heritage Centre's deputy director. "This is not easy or commonly possible in many cases."

The 1972 World Heritage Convention is one of the most successful international tools for conservation and the only such treaty that includes preservation of both natural and cultural resources. Unesco World Heritage mixed sites include the historic sanctuary of Machu Picchu in Peru, Mount Athos in Greece, Göreme National Park and the Rock Sites of Cappadocia in Turkey, the Laponian area of Sweden and St. Kilda in Britain. JJ.

EXPLORING | Town and coast

Punic walks and Posidonia sea-grass dives

The Dalt Vila — which means "upper town" in Catalan — was founded 27 centuries ago by the Phoenicians, explains Dominique LaCroix, a tour guide, of the fortified old town that hovers over the Spanish island of Ibiza.

"And on this hill are the remains of all of the civilizations that came after — the Greeks and Romans, the Moors and the medieval Spanish," she says. "Fantastic, isn't it?"

Indeed it is fantastic. Not just the Dalt Vila, but all four elements that comprise Ibiza's Unesco World Heritage Site, which also includes the Punic necropolis of Puig des Molins and the remains of a Phoenician village at Sa Caleta, as well as a marine segment in the strait between Ibiza and Formentera.

Visitors can easily explore the Dalt Vila on their own with a map, guidebook and good pair of walking shoes (those cobblestones can be treacherous). But so much more may be learned walking the old walled quarter with a local-history whiz like LaCroix,

who has a story to go with every nook and cranny. Her walking tour is especially pleasant on a warm summer evening, the streets bustling with locals and tourists alike, the sidewalk cafes filled to the brim, the harbor lights twinkling below.

The walled city is filled with contrasts, from 16th-century townhouses transformed into trendy eateries and boutiques to stout Renaissance fortifications little disturbed over the last 500 years. At the very top of the hill, the hulking cathedral, its ancient other stones bathed in floodlights, sits in a cobblestone plaza surrounded by other historic buildings.

Directly below the citadel is the old Punic cemetery, in active use from the late seventh century B.C. until the late Roman era. More than 3,000 tombs have been discovered among the olive trees and old windmills scattered across the hillside. Stone stairs tumble down into several of the underground tomb chambers, the ancient sarcophagi and skeletons illuminated by eerie lighting.

Whatever the Phoenicians constructed on the Dalt Vila was long ago buried by the urban development of later civilizations. Not so at Sa Caleta, an archaeological site on a rocky peninsula a 15-minute drive outside of Ibiza Town. Some of the Punic stone ruins have been reconstructed, and with just a smidgen of imagination it's easy to picture what life must have been like on the island 2,600 years ago. A visit to the ruins easily combines with an afternoon of beach hopping in the same area, including the rocky Sa Caleta strand right below the peninsula and the pebbly Es Jondal beach nearby.

Visiting the fourth element of Ibiza's World Heritage Site — the Ses Salines d'Eivissa i Formentera Natural Park — takes a bit more planning and effort. It helps having your own boat or access to some sort of water activity (like scuba diving) that includes the strait between Ibiza and Formentera.

At first glance, it looks like a thousand other Mediterranean waterways. But beneath the surface lies one of the world's greatest concentrations of sea grass. Like the coral reefs of the tropical world, the sea grass nourishes and protects an incredible underwater biodiversity.

Vellmari Diving Center (www.vellmari.com) offers half a dozen dives inside or nearby the marine park, including the 40-meter (130-foot) wall at Punta Gavina, the 1955 wreck of the fishing boat Hermanos Florit, the underwater arches of El Arco and Ibiza's number-one dive spot — a fish farm around a sunken platform called Mariana that has morphed over time into a lush artificial reef.

Among the species that inhabit the park are moray eels, groupers, rainbow wrasse, amberjacks and sea horses.

The island and coastal parts of the marine park also deserve a visit, in particular the salt lakes and marshes of Ses Salines (near Ibiza airport). Once the hub of a thriving salt trade that sustained the island economy for thousands of years, the saline basins are home to flamingos (and other migratory waterfowl) that winter on Ibiza.

Together they provide an outstanding example of the long and rich interaction of marine and coastal ecosystems in the Mediterranean.

Official Ibiza tourism Web site: www.ibiza.travel/en/ J.R.Y.

Jaeger-LeCoultre's commitment to the environment

Jaeger-LeCoultre is a committed player in ecological matters, particularly global projects its clients can understand and its staff can be proud of. Participating in an ambitious program like Tides of Time with Unesco's World Heritage Centre and supporting marine sites around the world lets the Swiss watch manufacture communicate its dedication to the environment on a global scale.

This participation has brought even more awareness inside the company to employees who are already sensitive to conservation. Most live in small villages, with nature at their doorstep, and their workplace — Jaeger-LeCoultre headquarters — lies in a secluded valley between an unspoiled lake and wooded hills.

Giving strong values to the brand, such as a concern for nature, is

important for continuing to motivate the work force, says Jaeger-LeCoultre's director for France, Yves Meylan. He adds: "We also believe that our customers want to see that a brand like Jaeger-LeCoultre is giving something back — and for a cause that's important to everyone. The Tides of Time program is a flagship for everything we do. The notion of preserving our natural heritage and passing it on to future generations is vital for us."

Being engaged in green issues requires time and a budget, Meylan admits, and with green issues, one can always do more. "It's a never-ending story," he says. "But we believe that once your people are aware it's important for the brand, and once your customers are aware it's important for the brand, it creates a positive movement that can only be beneficial." JJ.

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Visit the Tides of Time Web site for videos, interviews and more information on World Heritage marine sites: whc.unesco.org/tidesoftime/

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