

Newsweek

BRITAIN

May 12, 1997

MAN VS. MACHINE
The Great Chess Rematch

THE
INSIDE
STORY
OF
TONY
BLAIR'S
BIG
VICTORY

HOW
HE
WON



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TRAVEL

Not Just Sex and Sangría

The popular Mediterranean island of Ibiza is trying to lure a new breed of highbrow tourists

BY STRYKER MCGUIRE

IT'S JUST AFTER DUSK ON A RECENT Friday, a quiet time in the off season on the island of Ibiza. The swimming pool at the nightclub Ku is empty. At Amnesia the machines that spray dancers with foam are shut off. Space is not yet open to revelers from dawn to lunch. The £200-a-week package tours from the north of England have not begun to descend on San Antonio Bay, where the crescent scar of midrise hotels resembles a mini-Miami Beach on the Spanish Mediterranean. But up in the cool hills, behind the thick walls of the Church of San Miguel, a few dignitaries and a couple of hundred Ibizans are gathered for an act of gratitude. With the help of a youth symphony and a choir, they are paying homage to the Getty Conservation Institute of Los Angeles and London's Courtauld Institute of Art for their role in conserving some 17th-century wall paintings in the Chapel of Benirrás. The tourists listening respectfully in the back of the church don't realize it, but they are part of the historical transformation of Ibiza's tourist trade.

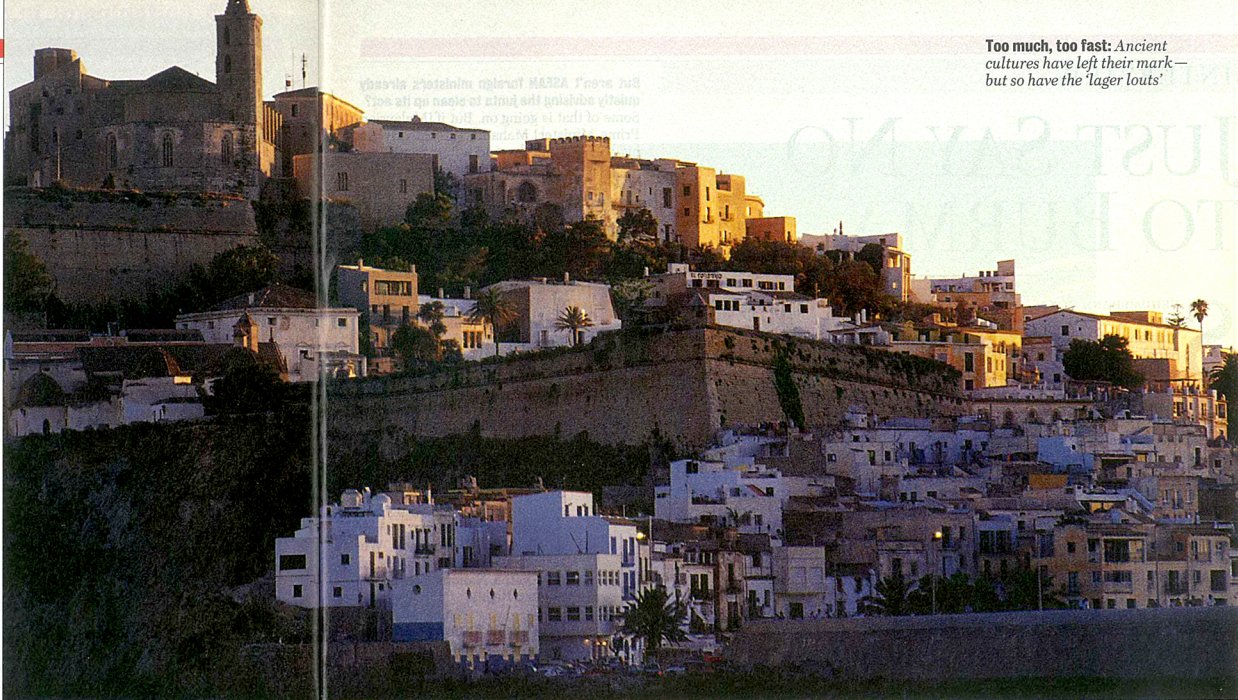
Ibiza owes its life to tourism. When holiday makers from Europe began flocking to the arid and impoverished island 30 years ago, they saved it from collapse. Their dollars helped compensate for the flagging salt, fishing and agriculture industries. But tourism grew too much, too fast. Ibiza—one of the Balearic Islands, along with its sister islands Formentera, Majorca and Minorca—became synonymous with sun, sex and sangria. It began to draw hordes of young, rowdy Europeans who descended upon the island each summer, threatening to obliterate the local culture and turn Ibiza, where rave was born, into a gaudy, raucous Brighton in the Balearics.

Now the island is fighting back. The government is promoting higher-end travel, like the cultural tourism that will be a collateral benefit of the work by the Getty and

the Courtauld in San Miguel. It is also setting higher health and esthetic standards for bars and restaurants, forbidding new construction close to the water and requiring ample open space for each new hotel room that is built. It's about time. "If we had been able to plan our tourist industry," says Pere Palau Torres, Ibiza's tourist minister, "we would not have done it this way."

Two generations ago, planning was the last thing on Ibizans' minds. Many, like Palau Torres's father, were forced to immigrate to Cuba, Argentina and elsewhere in search of work. Their exodus made the island all the more affordable to a new generation of artists and intellectuals following in the footsteps of Camus and Man Ray. They were attracted as much by Ibiza's rich 3,000-year history as by its proximity to Paris and Barcelona. "Hippies with money," as Palau Torres calls them, turned Ibiza into one of the Mediterranean's most prized off-the-beaten-track destinations.

Tourism radically changed the island. Rolph Blakstad, a Canadian documentary filmmaker who came to Ibiza in 1956, remembers the transformation vividly. When he arrived there were 12 cars across all 222 square miles of the island; Ibiza now boasts more cars per capita than most other cities in Europe. When the airport opened in 1959, so did the tourism floodgates. To younger Ibizans, the hardscrabble days of the postwar era are the stuff of ancient lore. Today Ibiza has the highest per capita income in Spain. With few government regulations in place to control the industry's growth, tourism virtually exploded overnight.



RODRIGUEZ LLINAS—COVER



REXHEBART GORLETT—GAMMA LIAISON

Too much, too fast: Ancient cultures have left their mark—but so have the 'lager louts'

"It wasn't here, and then suddenly it was here—en masse," says Los Angeles executive Laurie Smith, a frequent Ibiza visitor who helped interest the Getty and the Courtauld in the Benirrás wall paintings.

The tourists have left their mark. More than 1 million visitors pour into the island annually; last year the number reached 1.3 million, dwarfing the local population of 60,000. Virtually all of them come between May and October. At least a third are on package tours from Britain and end up in San Antonio. There young male working-class Brits get branded as "lager louts," even if they aren't. They've acquired a reputation as carousers who drop most of their money on non-Spanish tour operators and drop their trousers when drunk. "Hooliganismo" has entered the local vernacular to describe their more outrageous behavior in the wall-to-wall-bars section of San Antonio known as el West Side.

The government is desperately trying to take tourism in a new direction. Although deholiganizing Ibiza has become the rallying cry for reshaping the tourist industry, the motivation today is more capital—from more up-market tourists. Ibiza is already popular among Europeans, especial-

ly Germans, investing in second homes. Now the government is eager to lure more highbrow, culture-hungry tourists. The island has plenty to offer them: Phoenicians and Carthaginians, Romans and Greeks, Moors and Spaniards have all left their imprint on Ibiza. Its ancient, hill-perched walled city, Dalt Vila, is one of the best-preserved in the Mediterranean. But even cultural tourism, which seems so respectful of the past, entails risks. "There's pressure to do more with these sites than they can handle," says Giora Solar, director of special projects for the Getty Conservation Institute. "We should be aware of the risks."

Tourism's damaging effects can already be seen around the island. Blakstad, who now runs an architectural firm, says that when industrial-strength tourism was introduced in the 1960s, the water table fell and fig trees stopped bearing fruit. What's left of agriculture isn't always about farming, as evidenced by a sign nailed to a tree on a back road. It points to one of the few remaining working farms on Ibiza and says, simply, AGROTURISMO. The danger is that when the *agro* is all gone, there's nothing left but *turismo*. ■