



## QUEEN OF RETREATS

*"Elating, connected retreats with superior yoga teachings, rambling seascope hikes, delightfully creative vegetarian food and crucially space - to heal, settle and shine. This elegant, yet whole-hearted Ibizan retreat enables you to achieve something you can't at home – whether that is simply abstaining from coffee, alcohol and sugar or healing a deeper wound and accessing a richer sense of self.*

*Enrobed in the most beautiful surroundings, with watchful Poplars, a cool pool reflecting Sun's rise and sets, orchards of Nisperos hanging ripely, cloud scudded skies and a yurt of dreams, it is hard not to unravel with the careful attention to thought, flesh and heart here."*

These elegant, yet whole-hearted Ibizan retreats run five times a year each Spring and Autumn, offering a combination of expert yoga and treatments, rambling hikes, delightfully creative vegetarian food and lots of space to heal, settle and shine. Come to achieve something you can't at home – whether that is simply abstaining from coffee, alcohol and sugar or healing a deeper wound and accessing a richer sense of self. You'll stay in a luxury villa in beautiful surroundings, with watchful poplar trees, a cool pool reflecting sunrises, orchards of Nisperos hanging ripely, cloud scudded skies and a yurt of dreams. It is hard not to unravel with the careful attention to thought, flesh and heart here.

Rebelling against the imminent cleanse, I bought a chocolate croissant at Ibiza airport (cold and barely worth it at 10pm) and headed into the night in the Ford I'd somehow managed to acquire for 4 Euros for the week. Can Almaria is reserved for the most luxurious retreats on the island. Just by the village of San Rafael, it is one of those vast white, stepped behemoths, with two outside pools, the main one lined with wooden sunbeds, and dotted with potted plants, olives and small satsuma trees. The style inside is airy, fresh and elegant, with terracotta tiled floors, heavy linen curtains, and those Mediterranean blue and wood touches that breathe peace. Fires in the kitchen and living room, and a well stocked bookcase, with tomes ranging from something called Bonk to Deepak Chopra, keep it crucially cosy and contained, as let's be honest Ibiza doesn't really know what to do when it rains.

I was greeted by Erin Knowles, Ibiza's super fixer and founder of My Island Retreats. Erin is the kind of sun-kissed yogi you want to swap tips and hang out with rather than

wrestle down from their headstand - like a warm hug, but with humour. Ever present to meet everyone's needs, but retaining an effortless realness that dissolves the boundaries between client and host, she makes it all very easy.

I slept well, under a vast layering of duvets as it was unusually chilled for late April. I was relieved to discover my double room had one of the two baths, and also a door leading directly outside, to a fountain and a sunbed, so I could slip out for a morning run before breakfast, along one of the tracks, through the woods and out into open olive groves, listening to 'Are you alone? Are you alive?' Are you the sun, are you the sky?' Yessssss I am.

The retreat officially began at lunch the next day with the softest aubergine and pesto, a slither of mozzarella, and a quinoa, spinach and beetroot salad from Ali, our Scottish alchemist for the week. The chef is a fundamental ingredient to any retreat and Ali was divine, and disarmingly chilled all the time. 'The kitchen is for sharing' he said at the start, and we all wanted to share it with Ali's ease, fine island tips and inspired rainbow hued deliciousness. With each meal a work of art, I think everyone was Instagramming by the end of the week, if not before, and the kitchen became the centre point of the week, from which we would disperse to then return with our stories. In the afternoon I nipped off to check out Spirit Festival at Atzaro, and bought a black obsidian yoni egg – while in Ibiza....! It felt good to have a car; I love a retreat but feel it's important to be able to carve out some solo wind-in-the-hair-I'm-away time to balance the shared. Later I swear my third eye was fluttering in shavasana after a restorative yoga session with Suzanne Faith, our betwitchingly beautiful and deftly experienced Anusara yoga teacher for the week. With Annabel our co-host, fresh from her travels in Guatemala and radiating additional Sun, I had now met the team and knew I was well held, while our capsule group of seven (Angela, Suzanne, Anna, Rameez, Mona, Simon and Gareth) really co-created the week each one. The guests were there for a variety of reasons – for healing, curiosity, the yoga, recuperation, or a general diet and wellness reboot. We are all still on a whatsapp group, and what is interesting is the staying power of the change – Gareth just messaged to say he'd lost 5kg in the last week, which seems significant.

The simple itinerary set out yoga twice a day, at 8am and 5pm, except on three mornings when we were to go hiking instead. Aside from three Ali-inspired meals, the days were otherwise free for treatments, beach explores or general mooching and pontificating on life, love and yoni eggs. For me the hikes were the jewel in the crown, taking us up and out, and everywhere, and scratching that restless itch I often feel to escape on retreats, however glorious and spacious and calm the surroundings. Toby and his dog Cosmo were our amiable guides, the latter arranging himself in perfect poses for photos, the former knowing just the right amount of detail and anecdotes to keep everyone engaged, and of foremost importance being great company.

The first trek took us through crackling forest and old lime kilns to Heaven's Gate, where there was a slightly perilous scramble to actually get in the gates, and ensure our place to heaven and a hell of a view - phew. We had fifteen minutes silent meditative walking through the trees after, which fortuitously got Rameez off his mobile

phone, where he was forever closing a deal. We started on a gloriously crisp and blue Cala Conte on the second hike and walked along the coast, past billionaire's villas, small chiringuitos, bays with shells called Shiva's door, from snails pushing free to life, a pirate's bay, now home to late night raves, gloriously sweet fishing villages; we learnt about the algae and the weather and various drops of local intrigue, whilst experiencing the healing power of a good walk. Take fruit and water!

Having realised my shoulders were up by my ears, as is the revealing way when you stop to look at yourself, I was excited about my deep tissue massage with Kim Lewis. A true masseuse requires technique, strength, and intuition, and Kim has these three, plus a surprising, imaginative touch, using certain massage tools to really get in there, and even my own body weight at times to untie knots with greater ease. I don't like an airy-fairy massage that you find yourself giving yourself a self-massage after, I like a treatment that can feel like bondage, but ultimately sets you free. I have been waiting my whole life to meet a masseuse like Kim; this is the kind of woman who breaks her leg and drags herself down her mile long camino on her hands and knees, the kind of woman who will knead and pummel, roll and press and niggle your body free of all its aches and woes, instead of skirting the strange muscle buckling between your shoulder blades as most masseurs might.

Cranio-sacral therapy with the ethereally eyed Emanuelle was a lighter touch, and more of a collaborative process in that she talked to me about what she was picking up about my boundaries and self-criticism as she went; she was always spot on, though sometimes I found I didn't want to talk, but to drift off as she manipulated the cerebral fluid around my body. I did feel deeply relaxed and learnt a trick to put my body in the parasympathetic state with two tennis balls in a sock, which I thought would be helpful for my life-long wrestle for that elusive sleep muse, but I seem to be sleeping better now. Perhaps this cleansing week with its gentle regimen, love and laughter was all I needed.

I have been fortunate enough to experience many types of retreat, but a symbol for me that this one really affected deep change is that I have kicked a long-standing addiction to morning coffee. I feel this is symbolic of appreciating the more subtle states of being, instead of supercharging my body with a morning caffeine kick before anything else. The My Island experience enabled me to become kinder and more accepting of myself in all my humdrum glory, to feel more content just being me, without the constant belief that something needs fixing, or the double shot oat latte, hunch of stress and limp croissant. I imagine the returns will be hefty.

Best for

Successful and health-conscious middle-aged singles in need of nurturing and balance, or couples in search of a reboot.

Not for

The restless youth, more into doing than being.

Number of guests taken at any one time  
12 guests maximum

Price.

From €1750 for a shared occupancy room, to €3200 for a suite including all meals, guided hikes, yoga, meditation, and one body treatment.

Dates

Retreats are six days long, in Spring and Autumn.

What's queenly

Aside from Erin's soft and gracious manner that allows everyone to transform under the magic of being truly seen and heard, the magical yurt, moreishly scented and hued, has to be the hotspot.

What's lowly

Little apart from the fact that Ibiza villas can feel cold when the rains come down, so take layers, bed socks, practise your fire-lighting skills, accept the rain that makes the flowers grow.

Retreat Activities

Retreat activities include yoga and meditation, hiking, tennis, sea and pool swimming, and treatments for the body, soul and mind.

Yoga and Meditation

The day begins at 8am in the yurt with an hour and a half of yoga with Suzanne Faith, certified Anusara teacher with over 13 years teaching experience, whose list of impressive accomplishments include having studied with Iyengar himself in India and founded a charity aimed at yoga for cancer prevention. Suzanne reads the room for what is required, sometimes starting immediately with a restorative posture or meditation. There is a focus for the week, such as Shiva's Tandava dance, the vigorous source of creation, preservation and dissolution, beautifully interwoven with the image of seed planting, aptly for Spring; Suzanne describes recently tilling and planting her garden with her children. The classes start with stretching and opening, often with the use of blocks and bolsters, and then gain in intensity with sun salutations, balances and backbends. Focus is on attention to detail, with Suzanne correcting and refining each person's individual stance, and dropping pearls of wisdom, such as 'you are the mother, your breath is the child, you must take your breath by the hand and guide it' the while. The evening's 5pm class is more restorative, holding supported postures for up to five minutes to release from deep in the fascia. Shavasana, or corpse pose, feels especially blessed with Suzanne singing

mantras to the gentle harmony of a soundbox – surely the sign of a good yoga class is how well it enables you to let go? Be prepared to transcend.

In addition to the short meditations in class, Erin will host a guided candle-lit meditation in the yurt if there is interest after supper.

### Hiking

There are two varied hikes, and a tour of Ibiza old town, with a delay for vegan ice-cream at the latter. The first trek meanders through forest to Heaven's Gate, the second is coastal, starting at the startlingly blue Cala Conte, while the tour of Ibiza old town provides a welcome change, and opportunity to stroll warmly and peruse Ibiza's wares. Toby is the perfect walking guide – born in Ibiza, he understands the magic of the island, and the sting in its tail, which is the reckoning it gives most new dwellers, notoriously summoned by the magnetic strength of that legendary rocky island Es Vedra.

### Tennis

There is a tennis court, with equipment provided, and coaching available on request.

### Sea and pool swimming

There are two pools at the villa, the large main one, and a more secluded smaller kidney shaped one amid palms – and also opportunities for sea swims if you love the big blue. San Antonio is the nearest beach for a full immersion, but it is worth the 20 minutes drive or taxi to bathe at Benirras, which is the epitome of Ibiza for some.

### Personal Spaces

#### Bedrooms

The bedrooms are on a sliding cost scale, with the upper large doubles with balcony in the highest bracket, though all the rooms have en suite and are a perfect nest for the week. The style is simple, yet refined, with beautiful wooden chests, wicker chairs, white sofas, carved bedsteads, dome-topped wood-rimmed glass doors and the odd mystical painting. Each room has air conditioning and the bathrooms are fresh and white with a Scandinavian feel.

#### Other spaces to be:

You can stop and sit and be anywhere in the garden and feel at peace – either on the steps down from the villa in the sun, or under a tree with the sleeping geckos.

#### Shared spaces:

##### The sitting-room

This light and capacious, well-sofaed room is perfect for reading, or watching an inspirational late night film in. Fresh and white, with turquoise cushions, a wooden

coffee table holding high candles before a roaring rustic fire, it feels pure and restorative, thankfully free of the clutter that accumulates in one's own home.

#### The yurt

This Mongolian delight homes the yoga sessions, any impromptu late night meditation sessions, the sharing, and various individual treatments, though everyone wants to hang out here all the time. Smelling sweetly of yak hair and frankincense, with beautifully painted door, two little windows and individually placed beams like bones it is reminiscent of stepping into a nourishing womb, if you can recall that, and has an equally calming effect. There is an outdoor yoga platform at the far end of the garden for when the weather permits.

#### The garden

The garden rolls from dark and noble cypresses, potted plants and small trees surrounding the pool into rolling fields of lemon and nispero trees. Towards the yurt there are staggered flowerbeds with succulents, palm trees and flowers, though the blue and yellow haze of wild spring flowers awakening will always steal the show.

#### Spa/treatment spaces

Treatments either take place in the beautifully painted yurt in the garden (which is heated fear not), or the bedrooms, which are all large enough to fit a massage bed in.

#### Sustenance

The kitchen with four doors leading off like arteries to all directions and a long trestle table, dotted with vases of wild flowers, and lit up for supper by the softly departing evening light, is undoubtedly the heart of the house. Meals are eaten inside, or outside on the tiled terrace, at wooden tables with sun chairs and umbrellas, also good for stealing a chai tea in the sun at.

Ali's all vegetarian menu is a sensation for eyes and tastebuds, yet never feels depriving. With locally sourced ingredients, mostly from morning markets, Ali creates everything from scratch. Breakfasts are hearty with anything from banana and oat pancakes to a mouth-watering breakfast burrito, washed down by a colourful smoothie. Lunch might be a large lentil pasta salad, roasted vegetables, tofu and cauliflower rice, while suppers tend towards a more fragrant and light pho soup, Thai curry, intricate sushi platter, or an array of tapas including pardon peppers and tortillas. It is honestly like eating out at an exotic and high end restaurant every meal, but with less of the guilt, there being no refined sugar, gluten or bread, and minimal dairy. Occasional puddings are either fruit based – such as mango with mint, chilli, toasted cashews and soya cream and agave drizzle - or naughtier melting mousses construed of avocado and cacao. Sometimes just a bite of an energy ball, from cranberry and cashew, to pineapple and cacao, will suffice for a collective mmmmm after a meal. What an



absolute privilege it is to be cooked for by such an artist while re-educating the system into eating nutrient and fibre dense meals that stop snacking in its tracks.

Drinks are smoothies for breakfast, teas or water for lunch, and sometimes jugs of Ali's fruit and vegetable infused special teas. There is no alcohol, and caffeine is advised against, though not forbidden.

### Sustainability

Recycling and fresh fruit from the surrounding trees.

### When to go

Ibiza is generally warm, and can be up to 23 degrees in March. That said it has been unpredictable of late. September and October can be among the loveliest days, and are perhaps a safer bet if you want that golden light.

### Insider Tips

- Nothing quite beats picking a lemon off one of the outside trees for a morning refresh.
- If you are a sea swimmer maybe take your swimmers on the Cala Conte hike so you can stay on the beach afterwards and pick up some Sunset Ashram vibes.
- If you're intending to kick the coffee for the week, maybe start a few days prior to the retreat to avoid those fearful headaches.

### Retreat Activities

My Island Retreats are one-of-a-kind retreats, combining group activities with a personally tailored treatment itinerary. There are two types of retreat - Yoga and Hiking, and Mind to Heart with Louka Leppard, weaving in Leppard's unique and transformative Tulamassage, Tulayoga and visualisations. Retreat activities include yoga and meditation, dance, cookery, hiking, kayaking, personal training, star gazing, rock jumping, climbing, tennis, paddle-boarding, sea and pool swimming. Treatments include bodywork/massage, crystal healing, cranio-sacral therapy, breath-work, shamanic techniques, facials, beauty treatments and psychotherapy.

### Yoga and Meditation

Yoga takes place twice a day, apart from hike days, and is predominantly taught by Suzanne Faith, certified Anusara teacher with over 13 years teaching experience, though Anna McColl is teaching a slow yet strong devotional flow yoga at the November retreat. The 8am sessions with Suzanne move from gentle stretching and opening with the use of blocks and bolsters, to more vigorous sun salutations, balances and backbends. She sows and elaborates on a focus for the week, such as Shiva's Tandava dance, the vigorous source of creation, preservation and dissolution, beautifully interwoven with the image of seed planting, aptly for Spring. Suzanne's focus is on the detail and integrity of positions, correcting and refining each person's individual stance, while dropping pearls of wisdom, such as 'you are the mother, your breath is the child, you must take your breath by the hand and guide it'. The 5pm

class is more yin based, holding supported postures for up to five minutes to restore and release from deep in the fascia. There may be a short meditation before shavasana, or corpse pose, but Erin also hosts guided candle-lit meditations in the yurt after supper to demand. Surely the sign of a good yoga class is how well it enables you to let go? Be prepared to transcend.

#### Hiking

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#### Dance

Chris Connors leads a 5 Rhythms style dance - a dynamic movement practice moving through the five different states of flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical, stillness.

#### Rock- jumping and climbing

Take place on the West Coast with expert climbing guide Nick Brewer; expect rugged, rural and exhilarating, with small groups so to ensure maximum learning and rock exposure.

#### Personal training

With local fitness instructor Neil Beechey.

#### Kayaking

Beautiful kayaking expeditions, led by Toby the walking guide, paddle from San Miguel to Benirras at sunset, exploring caves along the way.

#### Tennis

There is a tennis court, with equipment provided, and coaching available on request.

#### Sea and pool swimming

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#### Treatment and Therapies

Treatments and therapies include harmonising Tulamassage and Tulayoga with Louka Leppard, the former of which entails the unique experience of being suspended



weightless in the air to classical music; intense and stimulating bodywork/massage with Kim Lewis, who will courageously make a dent in any tension you have been shouldering; otherworldly crystal healing with Abby Dixon, who works intuitively with large and powerful crystals, and also sings and plays the guitar; cranio-sacral therapy with Emanuelle Passes, a subtle treatment working with the cerebrospinal fluid to help return the body to a parasympathetic state; five rhythms dance and healing movement with Chris Connors; facials and beauty treatments with Marion Stone; and psychosynthesis, which integrates spiritual as well as psychological elements, with renowned practitioner Shan Velveteen.

### Sustainability

Recycling and fresh fruit and flowers from the surrounding trees. Seasonal, organic produce from the local markets. Local staff. The villa owner has also planted a gazillion trees to help preserve, enrich and oxygenate the surrounding ecosystem.