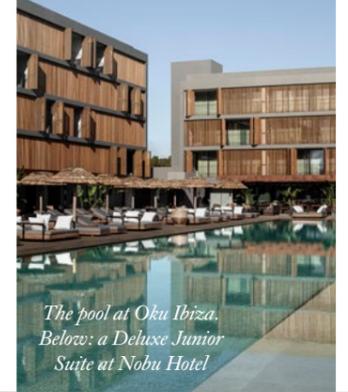


Below and bottom right: Ibiza Town. Below left: Es Vedra



Left and bottom: Sabina Clubhouse. Below right: Ibiza Town's Old Market



The pool at Oku Ibiza. Below: a Deluxe Junior Suite at Nobu Hotel



LA ISLA BONITA

Lucy Halfhead finds peaceful privacy, soothing sea views and luxurious poolside lunches in Ibiza



Left: a sea-view balcony at Nobu Ibiza. Above left: Sabina Clubhouse



PHOTOGRAPHS: ANNAPURNA MELLOR, ANA LUI, SAYANA CAIRO, GEORG ROSKE, ROMEO FELSENREICH AND GETTY IMAGES

Ibiza has long been a refuge for escapists, from the artists and writers who fled fascist oppression in the 1930s to the 1960s hippies seeking enlightenment in Es Vedra, a small rocky island just off its south-west coast, said to have magical magnetic powers, and the dedicated party-goers of the 1990s. Today, with clubbing no longer possessing the same cachet, the island is reinventing itself once again as a place to relax and recharge.

This summer sees a host of exciting openings on the White Isle, including a Six Senses outpost hidden on a 25-acre site, and the launch of a new brand, Oku Hotels, with slow living at its heart. These are following in the footsteps of the already-established Nobu Hotel Ibiza Bay, which my two friends and I were lucky enough to call home for the weekend, during the brief window last year when Covid-19 travel restrictions were lifted.

A swift drive beyond the airport, but far enough away from the neon lights of Playa d'en Bossa and San Antonio to feel secluded and tranquil, the property sits on Talamanca Bay, where the sleekest yachts bob silently on the waves. Nobu has made the transition from restaurants to resorts look easy, with a knack for picking the best locations in destinations such as Barcelona and Los Cabos – and this Ibizan base is no exception. It felt surreal to be in a different country again, but reassuring to see that careful precautions were being taken, with mask-wearing and hand-sanitising de rigueur.

There are 152 guestrooms furnished with artisan leather rugs, bronze cabinets and hand-blown pendant lights, but we giddily checked in to the impressive three-bedroom Nobu Penthouse Suite. Located on the top level of the hotel, this duplex features a living-room, dining-room, kitchen and floor-to-ceiling windows looking out over the sparkling azure water. Complementing this soothing scene was a minimalist design that championed the use of nautical tones and natural materials; the bathroom was crafted out of Persian marble, with a deep-soaking tub, rainfall shower and mother-of-pearl inlay. It was as if we were ensconced in our very own seafront villa, happily sunbathing on not one, but two private terraces, dipping into the hot tub, and enjoying long alfresco lunches of grilled fish and rainbow-hued salads.

Palatial accommodation aside, Nobu Hotel Ibiza Bay had plenty of facilities designed to help us slip into holiday mode, including a serene spa and exclusive-use cabanas by the pool, where we spent the day sipping cold beers and eating paella, cooked right in front of us. At night, we kicked off proceedings with cocktails in the bar as the sun set, before savouring Nobu's signature Japanese-fusion dishes at the eponymous restaurant. The combination of miso black cod, wagyu dumplings and soft-shell crab rolls meant it was easily my best meal of the summer.

While Ibiza's hotel scene has never looked better, we discovered that there is a growing number of visitors who are keen to make their stay even more exclusive. Sabina is a brand-new residential hamlet, nestled among the sleepy, rolling hills near Cala Tarida, to which we were chauffeured in one of its state-of-the-art Teslas. The project is the brainchild of the British developer Anton Bilton, whose own home on the island had become a retreat for a crowd that includes Simon and Yasmin Le Bon, Jade Jagger, James Blunt and the jeweller Stephen Webster. Bilton wanted to build on this feeling of community at Sabina, and has enlisted 18 of the world's top architects, including John Pawson, David Chipperfield and Rick Joy (of Utah's Amangiri), to design 50 private villas. Each one is entirely unique, but all boast sea views and beautifully landscaped gardens; the results are so spectacular that it's no surprise many have already been snapped up.

If you're not in the market for a villa just yet, the good news is that a handful of houses are available to rent – take Can Calabaza, a five-bed modernist sanctuary with stone floors and rattan lampshades by Ibiza's own Jordi Carreno. Or there's the option to reserve a table at the Rolf Blakstad-designed Clubhouse, which is filled with art by Sukhi Barber, Antony Gormley, Marc Quinn and Alex Grey, and is open to the public for dinner. Here, you'll find farm-to-fork food from the chef Shahar Tamir and the kitchen team from Ibiza's legendary restaurant La Paloma – we loved the seabass ceviche and wood-fired pizzas oozing with mozzarella.

Members enjoy additional perks such as a 24-hour concierge, a gym, a bowling alley, tennis courts, a salt-water swimming pool, a non-denominational chapel with quartz built into its foundations to conjure good energy for meditation and yoga, and an amphitheatre for celebrations, so there's little reason to leave. On Ibiza, privacy, it seems, really is the new luxury. □ *Nobu Ibiza Bay* (www.nobuhotelibizabay.com), from £550 a room a night. *Sabina* (www.sabinaibiza.com).

