

The Green Isle

Let peddle power take you around Formentera's green routes. Jane Anderson explores this Balearic isle fighting for a sustainable future

'Bike-friendly Rutas Verdes criss-cross the island'



Ibiza may be the White Isle, but her little sister Formentera is striving to be the Green Isle. Having resisted the temptation to build an airport, happily, the only way to get to this Balearic Island is by water. Gleaming fast ferries bounce over the sapphire blue Mediterranean from Ibiza to reach its mesmerising clear waters, home to precious posidonia (seagrass) - vital for the health of the water and its marine life.

Over recent years, there have been great efforts to protect the fragile posidonia, most effectively by banning private yachts from anchoring in seagrass and damaging this delicate eco system which harbours new marine life and gives the water its iridescence. The island also requests that all visitors pay a sustainable tourism tax which goes towards regeneration projects and asks those arriving with private vehicles in the summer to apply for special authorisation.

Formentera is one of a growing number of places which is deeply aware of the pros and cons of tourism on the environment. This once sleepy island, beloved of hippies and creative souls, is much sought after for its laid-back lifestyle and natural beauty. Talk to locals and they're still shocked by the boom in tourism since the 1960s and 1970s when the first big hotels were constructed, including the Insotel Club Formentera Playa and Riu la Mola. These days, Formentera prides itself on saying no to high-rises, chains and mass tourism with a focus on rural boutique hotels such as Hotel Casbah (hotelcasbahformentera.com) with its white-washed two-storey dwellings, calming and cleverly designed interiors with a hint of the bohemia, and romantic garden restaurant illuminated by fairy lights wound around tall palms.

Local government has also taken care to create 32 'Rutas Verdes' or 'green routes' that criss-crosses the island. With over 100km, they give the impression of a much larger landmass when you slow down the pace. All are bike-friendly, passing lighthouses, beaches and mighty defensive towers by the coast or swinging in land by dry-stone walls next to salt flats, windmills, vineyards and ancient archaeological sites, with bird watching and insta-worthy views at every turn.

Choose an intermediate level such as the 9.7km Green Route 11 and you'll zigzag along country lanes through Es Mal Pas, a pretty area of junipers and pines where you'll pass stone villas, white-washed houses with small blue and green windows and mighty fig trees, often propped to preserve and support their ancient branches. You'll cross



Caring for Formentera

Fish

Artisan fishermen who have come up with the idea of making Formentera's most traditional food 'peix sec' more accessible by selling it jarred in ecological olive oil with no preservatives. The only ingredients are the fish, olive oil, sea salt and sun of the island. This family business enables them to work in the winter when tourism quietens down.

peixsec.com



the Torrent de S'Alga, a flash flood gully that drains rainwater away to the sea. The old dry docks here have been declared an Asset of Cultural Interest. Fish are hung out to dry in the sun on the bare branches of junipers and then used to make a local dish known as 'peix sec'. Catch magnificent views over La Mola and the Migjorn coast, before the route heads southwards to meet the long straight of road towards Es Cap and its lighthouse - Far de Barbaria built in 1967 and star of the film Sex Y Lucia. It's a joy to freewheel the long tarmacked path down to the lighthouse with miles of low-rise vegetation either side and the mighty Mediterranean beyond, letting gravity take you to the most remote part of Formentera, and the most southerly part of the Balearics.

You can rely on old-fashioned peddle power or for more ease, hire an eBike from Rent ebikes with Moto Rent Pujols (00 34 971 322115). If you want an insight into local life and heritage, book an electric bike tour with Formentera EBike Tours (3 hour tour costs €60 per person, formenteraebiketours.com,) run by local Bartolo Torres who will reminisce about the way things used to be and how island life has changed, despite the beauty that is still all around. He'll take you out to Cala en Baster with its stunning sea views and sandy caves, and up to 18th century watch towers used to spy for North African pirates. When spotted, a fire would be lit at the top as a warning signal. The old salt flats are also a must-see. Once harvested in the 1950s and 60s, they're now abandoned, but ethereal in their delicate pink shimmer.

One of the most beautiful cycles is to Playa de Illetes, where a 1 km boardwalk offers epic sunsets and views of Ibiza and its iconic Es Vedra rock, thought to have mystic healing powers. The rich and famous, from footballers to supermodels, come to dine at Es Ministre (restaurantesministre.com).

A Green Route tour shows you the diversity of this precious island. Bartolo brings along sustenance in the form of figs, dried and soaked in water and aniseed. All juicy and squashed together, they come from the 100-year-old plus fig trees on his farmland, owned by his family for over 70 years. Amongst the beauty of his island home he offers a stark climate warning, saying, "It's getting harder to grow crops such as cereals, tomatoes, peppers, potatoes and onions as there is less and less rainfall every year."

The message is clear. Come to Formentera, but respect nature.

Jewellery

Enric Majoral has been making jewellery inspired by Formentera's natural environment since the 1970s. Majoral is now a byword for sustainable jewellers crafting artisan jewellery inspired by the Mediterranean. The new Posidonia collection is inspired by the neptune



seagrass which gives the water its signature bright blue colour.

majoral.com

Clothes

Coser I Cantar is a handmade sustainable fashion label where one-off garments are created from vintage linen, lace tablecloths, slips and soft, old towels. Many are stitched together and coloured using natural dyes such as marigold. Find the Coser I Cantar (Sewing and Singing) stall at Mola hippie market every Wednesday and Sunday from 4.40pm to 10.30pm in summer.

[Instagram: coser_i_cantar](https://www.instagram.com/coser_i_cantar)

