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## **The party's over and Ibiza has a hangover**

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Hordes of young people shove their way onto the dance floor as world-famous DJs warm up at the turntable.

Fire-eaters, trapeze artists and go-go girls vie for attention as techno music booms from the loudspeakers. In Ibiza's nightclubs, the party ends at dawn.

This summer, like every other, the Spanish island is a party capital for young people from all over Europe.

Yet the mood this year is far from upbeat. Tourism -- the lifeblood of the island -- is in crisis and the residents, at least, don't feel like partying.

While neighboring Mallorca is experiencing a tourist boom, visitor numbers in Ibiza are falling. Families are staying away, saying the island is too loud.

What's more surprising is that techno fans are also starting to steer clear of the clubber's Mecca. With some venues charging up to US\$100 for headline acts, many young people are finding Ibiza beyond their budget.

Drugs have also dented the island's reputation. The death earlier this month of a 27-year-old Irish man after consuming a liquid form of ecstasy made international headlines. On the same weekend, 24 other clubbers were taken to hospital and treated for drug poisoning.

The island of hippies and noisy parties it seems is becoming a pill popper's paradise. Doctors complain that drug dealers openly sell ecstasy and other drugs at club entrances, while the police stand idly by.

The Spanish government is at the end of its tether. With tourist numbers down, Ibiza can ill-afford the reputation of drug-fueled hellhole, says Madrid's representative to the Balearic Islands, Ramon Socias.

Socias has published a 10-point plan for Ibiza, providing for, among other things, stricter controls on

the club scene. The narcotics police, disbanded five years ago, is being reactivated and travel companies are being asked not to promote the island as a no-holds-barred hedonistic hotspot.

Above all, the authorities want the revellers to take a rest. When the clubs close at daybreak, the diehard party people continue on to "after-hours" bars. This 24-hour partying is seen as partly responsible for the island's growing drug problem.

"You can't party non-stop into the next day on Coca-Cola alone," notes Ibiza's Mayor Xico Tarres. "You need other substances."

The introduction of a closing time for clubs and bars is expected to help curb drug consumption.

Ibiza is about to go through a difficult transition period, warns the president of the hotelier's association, Perdo Matutes.

The tourist sector is assuming it will take several years for the "Sodom and Gomorrah of the Mediterranean" as it was dubbed by a British tabloid, to get through the current crisis and develop new markets.

"The party is over" said the owner of a half-empty pub in Sant Antoni. "It was both a hellish and a wonderful time. But nothing lasts forever."

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