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DROPS IN THE OCEAN

From an Aeolian retreat to an Aegean sanctum, these European isles are the favoured playgrounds for today's international jet-set

By LUCY HALFHEAD and POLLY JOHNS

- Formentera -

An hour from Ibiza by boat, Formentera is the rising star of the Balearics. Its relaxed, hippie vibe is the much-needed antidote to Ibiza's neon lights and nightclubs, while strict planning regulations mean you won't find any beachfront high-rises here. Instead, it is a haven of rustic tavernas, quaint cafés and lantern-lit bars. Platja de Migjorn, the island's longest beach, is a gorgeous, sparkling white strip beside the glittering water. Gastronomes should book a table at the ocean-facing restaurant Juan y Andrea, where the lobster paella has a list of famous fans, and is served to you alfresco as you sink your toes into the sand.

WHO GOES: Sienna Miller, Jade Jagger, Elle Macpherson, Leonardo DiCaprio.

WHERE TO STAY: Gecko Beach Club (www.geckobeachclub.com).

Gecko Beach Club on Formentera



PHOTOGRAPHS: YANN AUDIC, FRAULÉIN ZUCKERWATTE/SUSANN KOHLER, FRANCO GIOMI, FREDERIC DUCOUT, STEPHANIE HULLER, YUSON SAGLO



Above and right: Hôtel de Toiras on Ile de Ré



- Ile de Ré -

To the west of mainland France, reached via La Rochelle and an elegant road bridge, Ile de Ré is low-key and tranquil. The main appeal for the visiting Parisian elite is the slow pace of life here. By far the best way to explore the island is to rent a bike and cycle blissfully along the flat terrain, past oyster farms, pine forests, banks of wild flowers and historic châteaux. Stylishly weathered buildings line the cobbled streets of the charming St-Martin-de-Ré, the main town, where foodies will find some of the freshest fish and creamiest cheese France has to offer, and art lovers can browse a number of galleries and studios for captivating paintings and sculptures to take home.

WHO GOES: Vanessa Paradis, Christiane Amanpour and James Rubin, Katy Perry.

WHERE TO STAY: Hôtel de Toiras (www.hotel-de-toiras.com).



Below left and right: Belmond La Residencia. Right: the village of Deià, near the hotel



- Mallorca -

From atmospheric Palma, whose pink-hued cathedral stands tall above the old town and cools the maze of streets and designer shops below, to the miles of picturesque countryside, Mallorca's majestic beauty is no secret. But thanks to a starring role in last year's slick BBC One series *The Night Manager*, this Balearic treasure is drawing a new generation of travellers. Head to the pretty hilltop village of Deià, where the poet and novelist Robert Graves lived until his death in 1985, and explore the rugged north coast and the Serra de Tramuntana mountains for a true escape from reality. Mallorca's luxury rentals and chic hotels are as varied as the island itself, so whether you prefer a sophisticated, minimalist villa or a rural retreat, you'll find something to suit your tastes.

WHO GOES: Claudia Schiffer, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Jennifer Aniston, Bill Gates.

WHERE TO STAY: Belmond La Residencia (www.belmond.com).

