

GARDENING



GIFTS OF THE SUN
Chillies thrive in the island's challenging hot weather

Feeling the rhythms of nature on Ibiza

KITCHEN GARDENS

Amid the party music on the White Isle, a quiet organic revolution is taking place. By Jack Wallington

Reaching to pick a perfect fig as the sun set over quiet orange groves, I found it hard to believe I was in Ibiza, party capital of Europe. Harder still to believe that I'd just scurried from the glamorous Atzaró hotel spa – home to celebs, fashionistas and detoxing revellers. Yet the wandering hands of veg lovers may soon be a concern for the hotel, with its launch of a new eight-acre organic plot.

In the heart of the island's northern farmlands, Atzaró is a family-run business based around a 300-year-old farmhouse. Local roads are lined with wild fennel, while gardens brim with zinnias, figs and olives. Suites are surrounded by swimming pools, palm trees, fruiting opuntia, grape vines, pomegranates and, to my delight, beautiful ponds filled with little frogs on lily pads, croaking at each other.

The new vegetable garden marks a transformative change of direction for the hotel – and Ibiza – that takes visitors back to the island's roots. “We wanted to do this 10 years ago,” says Philip Gonda, co-owner of Atzaró, “but we’ve been waiting for the right field, it had to be this field, next to the hotel for guests to experience.”



PARTY ON THE PLOT

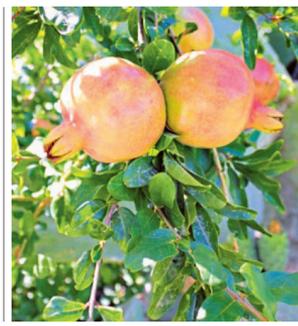
What Atzaró has achieved since taking over the land is impressive. “We bought in February, planted 400 trees and created everything in five months. The heat we had was intolerable,” reflected Gonda over breakfast (a healthy bowl of fresh fruit).

Guests enter the productive patch via arched walkways that in time will

be smothered with climbing vegetables and fruits. Private seating areas are dotted among rows of veg, lanterns hang from trees and, on launch night, people in ball gowns danced to live opera among the lettuces. A kitchen building is planned for preparing produce in the garden and hosting cookery classes for guests.

Important to Gonda – an enthusiast for authenticity – is the quality of the produce and the experience it provides.

“By doing it 100 per cent organic, real and natural, it shows people it can be done. It's not cheap but it can be done – and it does mix well with luxury and glamour.” Everything



HOME COMFORTS

Guests at Atzaró will enjoy scores of varieties of fruit and veg, including pomegranates, from the garden

NATURE TO VISIT

◆ Visit the Ses Salines national park (santjosep.net). The salt industry, based in this area for centuries, has formed a unique wetland landscape famous for birdlife and

beaches; there are also historic churches and watchtowers.

◆ Walk up to the summit of the mountain Sa Talaiassa for views across the island and out to sea.

grown on-site will be used in the hotel's restaurants.

MEDITERRANEAN CHALLENGES

Established palm trees were planted to shade guests and crops in the traditional way, while a vast modern irrigation system helps everything establish. Challenges of the hotter climate are evident, but so are the benefits: rows of watermelon, chillies, sweetcorn and peppers. And in the original kitchen garden, nearer the hotel, tomatoes and aloe vera thrive.

Despite the heat, Ibiza has one thing in common with the UK: the sea. “The earth here is dense and very rich in nutrients but some crops are difficult to grow because of the moisture in the evening,” explains Gonda. “We get a lot of rotting and mould problems, especially with fruit: apples, pears, oranges, lemons, nectarines, peach.” Careful consideration is given to resistant cultivars and strong rootstock.

NURTURING AN ECOSYSTEM

The gardeners use cutting-edge organic practices, the most noticeable a perimeter of sulphur-yellow flowers in midsummer from *Crotalaria juncea*. A tropical member of the pea family, this is grown as dense ground cover to suppress weeds and act as a barrier to pests while attracting beneficial insects. Like other legumes, it also locks nitrogen into the soil and a long tap root reaches deep to draw up nutrients. When it starts to flower, the Atzaró gardeners dig the plant into the soil, where it acts as a powerful natural fertiliser.

A three-layered edible forest harnesses the power of plants to help each other grow. The first layer of shade-giving 25m trees protects the smaller 5m fruit trees in the second level, and beneath these grow the ground-covering smaller plants such as raspberries, mint and strawberries.

The garden began with the chefs: “We asked the kitchen how many kilos of vegetables like aubergines and tomatoes they needed, then we calculated how many square metres per vegetable we'd need to support that,” says Gonda. Plans for the future are exciting – the vegetable garden will eventually grow more than 120 crops, with a fragrant garden, medicinal area, infusions for teas and a number of Bizan crops. In winter there will be broccoli, cauliflower and brussels sprouts.

Growing organic vegetables has been a fast-growing trend among top-end hotels and restaurants in recent years, though many now appreciate the scale required. Atzaró's kitchen garden is comparable in size to the largest in the UK, and its audacious organic approach is an exciting one to match the changing tastes of Ibiza's visitors. Let's hope they grow enough figs.

Jack Wallington was a guest at Atzaró (atzaró.com).

A voyage of discovery in the great British countryside is

SUNDAY DRIVER

If you need to impress your friends or even your neighbours, last-minute luxury car hire services make the right statement, says

Eleanor Steafel

I am sitting at the wheel of a black Land Rover Discovery Sport at the end of a residential road in East Dulwich, peering in my rear-view mirror for any sign of movement in the house at the far end of the street.

Three women emerge, looking around tentatively. I spring into action, whipping the car around and speeding towards them, windows down, speakers blaring Beyoncé's *Crazy in Love*.

You'd be forgiven for finding this a rather odd scene and in most worlds it would be, but I'm afraid this sort of thing is par for the course among my friends – the dramatic entrance, that is, not the £30,000 ride.

Never one to pass up the chance to pull off an elaborate surprise, I

have rented the car (more beautiful than any I've ever sat in, let alone driven) from last-minute luxury car hire service The Out, to transport myself and three friends away on a spontaneous birthday weekend to the country.

Having texted the girls minutes earlier to say I'm outside, they are looking dutifully for my bright red, somewhat knackered, Vauxhall Corsa, not the veritable beast I roll up in. I'll spare you the details of the screaming that ensues when they realise that the anti-social lout blasting their radio is, in fact, yours truly.

I pull up and within minutes the capacity of the large, pristine boot is tested as it is stacked with weekend bags and a hefty Ocado order.

A bit of time fiddling with the Bluetooth and playing with the sunroof (which provokes a lot more excitement than you might imagine it would in four 28-year-old women) and we're off.

We are Leicestershire bound – quite why, no one knows, I seem to recall the criteria on booking it was very much a case of “any cottage or cabin on Airbnb that comes with a hot tub and won't cost as much as the down payment on a flat”.

As we crawl through London, the car feels conspicuously large and luxurious in amongst the Ubers and small city cars, but as soon as we are on the M1 cruising through Bedfordshire, the sheer comfort and smoothness of the Discovery Sport really comes into play.



ARRIVE IN STYLE

Eleanor surprised friends Rosie, Nina and Megan, above, with a trip to the countryside in a Land Rover Discovery Sport

We are already lamenting opting for a weekend jaunt so close to home. “Is this journey really only two hours?!” asks one friend. “I could keep driving for at least five.”

There is nothing quite like the delicious feeling of hopping in the car on a Friday after work, getting on the motorway and heading out of the city. It's that opportunity to vacate your life, but just for a couple of days.

It's a simple formula: throw some clothes in a bag, pack a boot with your favourite food and a few bottles of wine, and head for the coast or countryside.

It's the epitome of hassle-free adventuring. Unless, that is, you either don't have a car, or the thought of sitting in traffic on the M40 in your old banger is enough to put you off the whole enterprise.

Enter: The Out. The latest in a range

