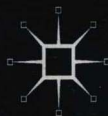


DANIEL BRIGGS

DEVIANCE AND RISK ON HOLIDAY

An Ethnography of
British Tourists in Ibiza



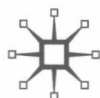
Deviance and Risk on Holiday

An Ethnography of British Tourists in Ibiza

Daniel Briggs

Reader in Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of East London

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First published 2013 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978–1–137–02239–4

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by MPS Limited, Chennai, India.

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Acknowledgements

Numerous people have helped make this work possible. My first thanks must go to the Southside Crew, who let me invade their holiday and let me spend time with them. They also permitted me into the intimacies of their home life and allowed me to go out with them on Southside. In particular, Nathan, to whom this book is dedicated, was always happy to help me clarify my findings. Thanks to my publishers at Palgrave Macmillan, in particular, Julia Willan and Harriet Barker. I am eternally grateful for the assistance from Danielle Kelly, Dimitar Panchev and Dorina Dobre: I hope you learned from the experience and take this forward in your respective careers. JoyAnn Bannon also did a sterling job with transcriptions (again). Thanks to Tim Turner, Professor Keith Hayward, Lauren Holdup, Ruth White, Paul Brindley, Tara De Courcey and Kerri David for their assistance on one of the fieldwork excursions. My thanks extend to my new friend Dr Sébastien Tutenges, who also helped with this project in more ways than one: undertaking fieldwork, collaborating on papers, writing proposals and reading my draft manuscript. I am also grateful for the use of some of his field notes. In a similar vein, Professor Simon Winlow and Emeritus Professor Geoffrey Pearson also made time from their busy schedules to comment on a draft of this work. Geoff, in particular, and who has championed my work for some time, I will miss as he has sadly passed on since helping me. I have made new friends in Ibiza, in particular, across the council and police. A special thanks to Montse Juan, Amador Calafat, and Belén Alvite. I am also grateful to the radio and television networks who helped me broadcast the work. Thanks always to my colleagues at the University of East London who continue to make it a pleasure to work with them: Dr James Windle, Dr John Morrison, Barry Heard, Jennifer Petersen-Schmidt, John Strawson, Paul Kiff and Paul Stott. Thanks also to the Dean, Fiona Fairweather, for taking the gamble on the research.

Lastly, but by no means least, there are the obligatory thanks to those closest to me. I am certainly grateful for the way in which my parents did not force upon me any pressure of what I had to be in life and instilled in me a curious freedom, independence and a sense of exploration. I apologise to my wife for almost forcing upon her my

requests to go to strip clubs and brothels but, at the same time, it was certainly not for the entertainment. I never realised I would be doing this sort of thing with my life and, in some ways, still cannot quite believe it. I am just grateful I have this opportunity and to have been equipped like this to undertake research and show others how the world works.

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1

Introduction

Nathan: It's like, this is it! [Looking around and pointing at the beach and bikini surroundings] This time won't come again so we have to take it, do it while we can. [Looking at me in wonder] We are here, mate, we are living the dream!

Introduction

This book is about the deviant and risky behaviours of a cohort of young, working-class British tourists in a resort called San Antonio on the Spanish island of Ibiza. While it is about these particular behaviours, it also addresses the wider cultural framework which guides aspects of their day-to-day lives, attitudes and lifestyles. When I say 'deviant' and 'risky', I refer to behaviours which encompass forms of substance use, sex, violence, injury and other unconventional acts which can occur on holiday. Collectively, these behaviours have implications for them as individuals but also for other tourists, local Spanish residents/businesses, the holiday resort (local economy, law enforcement, healthcare) and their consular services and home governments. It is likely that some of what I have to say about these behaviours will resonate with what goes on in other tourist resorts, but here I focus in detail on the resort of San Antonio.

The idea for this project stemmed from reading a newspaper article in May 2010 which bemoaned another summer of problems caused by British tourists abroad. After commencing a thorough search of media articles and reports, almost everything I found seemed to pathologise their behaviours as though they were the result of deeply flawed decision-making processes, entirely disconnected from other

subjective, social, cultural and structural indicators which might influence their conduct. When I started to look into the academic literature on the topic, I found very little ethnographic work which sought a lived-experience perspective and insufficient detail on the political economy – or the macro socio-structural forces – and how they may help cultivate these behaviours. Much of the existing material also relied heavily on epidemiological surveys and dated subcultural analyses; the former lacking subjective depth and the latter less consistent given the blurring of class distinctions as a result of access to various economic and cultural resources, and changes to British culture and society more generally. Collectively, I didn't feel these depictions sufficiently explained how and why the behaviours were occurring and felt this gave me sufficient impetus to begin my own investigations using ethnographic methods such as participant observation, focus groups, and open-ended interviewing.

There is something distinctly liberating about the holiday as a social occasion. People say they can 'be who they want to be' as they free themselves from the shackles of home routines, responsibilities and identities: it is a transformation from the ordinary and mundane home to the extraordinary and the hyperreal pleasures on offer in the holiday resort. The resort is therefore a place and the holiday is therefore the occasion – the space and time respectively – where fantasies can be played out; a temporal moment in life in which all the 'experiences' must be seized before the inevitable return to 'normal life' beckons. Yet it is not just simply that the people in this book go abroad and drink, take drugs and go crazy because we are talking about more complex social and structural processes, and my principal arguments in this text are that, for this group of working-class British tourists, these are:

- How their norms, values and attitudes to excessive consumption have come to be shaped over time in the UK and marketed by consumer capitalism only for them to reproduce exaggerated versions of those behaviours abroad (Structuro-culturo);
- In the resort of San Antonio, they are with others doing similar/same things which reinforces that what they do is expected of them (Social);
- When away, restrictions on behaviour are loosened as deviance and risk are endorsed in a landscape designed for their excessive consumption to take place (Spatial);
- And that, related to these transitions, how identity becomes increasingly pliable to seek as much pleasure and self-indulgence in the time available (Subjective-situational).

In this book, I want to argue that these dynamics all play a part in the deviance and risk-taking of my cohort. The first thing I want to suggest is that although this group may think they are liberated from usual behavioural protocols when abroad, really what they are doing is playing out an extension – albeit an exaggerated one – of what they do at home at weekends (drinking, drug-taking, shopping, etc.). The reasons for this, I want to show, are related to what has happened over the last 30 years as we have moved into a neoliberal, free market society based around consumption. Indeed, the social consequences of this transition are visible in most town centres across the UK because attitudes to consumption are excessive as young Brits loosen up for hedonistic weekends (see Winlow and Hall, 2006; 2009). So to some extent, the *habitus* of the people in my book – a set of dispositions such as cultural tastes and life attitudes which they deploy and initiate without conscious thought (Bourdieu, 1984) – are already well secured around weekends on the town, drinking and drug-taking at raves/clubs. As Webb et al. (2002: 36–7) note, it is this predisposition which is ‘*gained from our cultural history that generally stays with us across contexts and allows us to respond to cultural rules and contexts in a variety of ways*’. People say they feel ‘free’ and can do what they want to do in Ibiza but I am asking what ‘liberation’ and ‘freedom’ comes from going to a place only to reproduce what is done at home (drink, take drugs, eat burgers, shop)? This is why in this book I am instead arguing that it is actually *unfreedom* (see Žižek, 2002). When I use this term, I mean to describe how the social system prescribes the ‘freedom’ to choose which club to go to, where to shop and how to fill our lives with consumerables and, in doing so, distracts us from the real issue of our freedom. So the behaviours these young working-class Brits exhibit abroad, to some degree, have been already structurally conditioned, socially constructed, packaged, repackaged and marketed to them – and it is this commercial pressure which is aggressively foisted on them during their holiday in the resort.

Through a process of socialisation, the young British tourists in this book have also come to learn what behaviours are expected of them on holiday. Firstly, they absorb this through news media, popular culture and films which collectively promote the leisure life and holiday destinations where all the celebrities are engaging in deviance, risk-taking and all-out excess. Secondly, many in this sample have also already learned that excessive consumption and self-indulging on holiday is what they should be doing, having visited other resorts around the Mediterranean (such as Ayia Napa, Faliraki, Malia, etc.). Some have therefore developed what I call a *holiday career*. In recent years, however,

global corporations, commercial entrepreneurs, the Superclubs, and the music industry have ratcheted up the marketisation of Ibiza which has made it increasingly 'mainstream'. This has meant that a younger, impressionable group have taken the short cut to Ibiza's shores with little idea of what is expected of them and this makes them more vulnerable to persuasion on holiday: after all, they are also ready to party and do 'crazy things'.

Either way, when both groups arrive in the resort, they are among other people who are behaving the same/similar sort of way so the general social context acts to reinforce the attitudes and behaviours expected of them. However, once most have visited Ibiza, they learn there are 'better places' which with their attendance bring them more social kudos. They could be that 'special person' if they saved up all year round and came back next year or maxed out credit cards just to get a piece of it. But in Ibiza you can become a part of the elite as long as you are willing to part with your money. Here capital buys a very temporary crown to wear and throne on which to sit but it all means very little unless other people can know about it. This is because these days social status is affirmed through the creation of social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984); a process that is driven forward by the institutionalised envy that is such an important feature of contemporary consumer culture (see Hall and Winlow, 2005a; Hall et al., 2008). And this is precisely why some come back because what we also are seeing in San Antonio, and across Ibiza, is the consistent reinvention of space: not only to accommodate the cultural practices of these working-class Brits but also to commodify them, and, in doing so, thereby attaching to them new levels of ideological social status.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the resort seems to offer unlimited hedonism and fun, yet there is next to no regulation on what these young Brits do: anything seems possible. Of course, the question then arises, if everything is possible, why do we consistently see the same kinds of commodified excess? Why does a supposedly boundless terrain of cultural 'freedom' inevitably devolve into excessive drinking and beating the well-trodden track to the island's expensive Superclubs? As the book unfolds, I will try to answer these questions by connecting the immediate experiences of my respondents to the background issues of cultural formation and capital accumulation. This is important because Ibiza is now in competition with other European destinations which can now easily book the same DJs and host the same sort of mega-events. This means what is permissible on behaviour needs to be ambiguous to ensure that money is spent (Calafat et al., 2010). In addition, to make

sure that Ibiza's falling tourism numbers spend as much as possible in the six months in which the island is open for business, new and varied consumption spaces which permit and endorse unlimited spending and excessive consumption need to offer the services that keep the crowds returning. I will show how these spaces inadvertently function and, in doing so, promote deviance and risk-taking.

We also cannot ignore the subjective desires attached to deviance and risk-taking which underpin postmodern life (see Hayward, 2004; Ferrell et al., 2008); after all, many of the people in this book feel home life has become quite boring, quite samey. Detached from the past fault lines of community, work and family, the same group these days are individualised; charged with crafting out a 'successful' and coherent life narrative which will retain life meaning or 'ontological security'. In times of risk, insecure work futures and fractured life narratives, mainstream consumer lifestyles now often include extreme drinking and recreational drug use. These things, it seems, have become part of a broader consumer cornucopia also built around shopping and the incessant search for pleasure. For the people I have spoken to in Ibiza, full commitment to a consumer lifestyle appears to signal genuine *being-in-the-world*; that their lives count for something. To live a decent life these days means to have experienced forms of pleasure and excitement, and our desire to inject these things into our lives provides the market with the energy it needs to continue onwards. The traditional concern with living a happy and fulfilling life, in which happiness is provided by those things that endure, has been replaced by a mere concern with fleeting, and often consumerised pleasures (Hall et al., 2008). Culture now commands us to commit to solipsistic pleasures – even if it becomes painful. If we fail to do so, we appear to be condemned to a shadowy life of 'just getting by' (ibid.). It is hardly surprising that when people have time outside of the humdrum world of work and the daily grind that they place a clear emphasis on excess. Sex and drunkenness, and the adoption of forms of behaviour that are usually external to that normal run of things, come to the fore as consumers attempt to increase their experience of hedonistic abandon before they head home and return to their work in the postmodern factories of Britain's deadening and exploitative service economy.

A holiday in Ibiza is appealing because of the way these young Brits have come to believe the weather, the music and the resort offer a complete 'holiday experience'. However, once memories (or some version of them) start to be associated, stored and reflexively revisited, so then Ibiza is constructed and reconstructed as a place of 'dreams' and

'nostalgia'. And where does one go to revisit moments in which their most prized life's stories were created? The same place year after year, and it is this ideology which connects perfectly with the *habitus* of the bulk of my sample who seek to make the most of their precious leisure time: to seize it. This is also made possible by the in-between commodified and commercial means of Ibiza 'old skool' compilations, reunion parties and the branding of the clubs in the UK which unite it with Ibiza. A visit to the island has become a point of reference in real time ('I'm goin' Ibiza/I work in Ibiza') and then reflexively positioned as one of 'life's achievements'; that one has lived a truly fulfilling life or one has a story to tell when back in the boring tedium of work or to their little ones as the grey hairs sprout or the others fall out. And this is why when the 'good life' is lived in this short period, it is reflexively revisited as a micro-experience of pleasure and/or extreme experience which is accessed through memory, and this is often how it is retained on the return home. A continual pursuit of these pleasures through memory makes home life look incessantly overcast and oppressive; happiness seems far away. This may tempt them further into either returning to Ibiza on holiday or, even more permanently, to work and 'live the dream' by becoming a casual worker in the bars and/or clubs. This is the power of ideology which keeps many of these people returning year on year.

In the end, the determination to have a 'good time' and to have it put before them, often results in deviant and risky, if not fatal, consequences. Of course this is not the case for all Brits who holiday in Ibiza; not all go away to get brain-dead drunk and many do visit and return without problems. However, over the course of researching this work, a significant number of people have suffered a number of life-changing injuries, experienced sexual harassment, made accusations of rape/spiking drinks, and sadly, died out there. It has certainly led me to question the 'fun' which people say they have on the island. Indeed, when I have challenged some people on the 'appeal' and 'fun' of Ibiza, some have struggled to articulate it; instead appearing confused about why they chose to go or what was enjoyable about it even after some said it was 'great' or they had the 'best times' – but, once again, this is the ideology at play.

So the deviant and risky behaviours for which they are blamed, I want to highlight, therefore don't really evolve from an individual pathology or some lone intentions to get wasted/high/have sex with as many people as possible/beat the crap out of anyone: there are other important dimensions to consider and in this book I would like to draw these into the equation. What you are about to read may either surprise/disgust

you in a number of ways, or alternatively the behaviours I discuss may be quite familiar to you; especially given that the gendered foreign holiday has become a veritable 'rite of passage' for large sections of Britain's youth population. Either way, I want to bring you closer to the experience of my participants, and because of this, there are some graphic references to sex, violence, drug-taking and other forms of deviance and hedonistic excess. The way in which I went about this study will undoubtedly cause some upset among some established social scientists because to get some of my data I drank alcohol with my participants, went to strip clubs, brothels, Superclubs, and did most of the things associated with being in a holiday leisure zone (apart from taking drugs, having sex and engaging in the casual sexism that is such a feature of commercial space in Ibiza). At times, I had to do things, which may appear to the reader as if I too was enjoying them, but engaging in these activities was simply part of 'playing the role' in this social context; one cannot simply seek to undertake a participant observation study in a holiday resort without adapting to some degree to the socio-cultural context of the tourists' norms and the expectations which come with the social terrain. For now, please meet these young men from Southside, UK who make up the central narrative of this book and who invited me into their world to experience their holiday during the summer of 2011.

Meet the Southside Crew on a typical afternoon in San Antonio

It is 3 p.m. on a June day in San Antonio. I walk along the bay where sit and sprawl hundreds of young British tourists. I am looking for groups of men to interview and approach a group of four guys sitting in a beach bar. I sit with them, and the music pumps out and reverberates through our plastic chairs as the sun shines down on our half-naked bodies while they cheer and sip cold pints of beer. They seem to be the centre of attention in the bar as a young family leave looking aggravated at their noise. As we commence the interview, they struggle to remember how much they have drunk on the plane, in which bars they have been since arriving and even where they are staying. After some debate, they conclude they had arrived in Ibiza at 10.30 a.m. that day but had been drinking without a break from 6.30 a.m. They had spent less than ten minutes depositing their bags before heading out on their bar crawl up the San Antonio Bay towards the West End 'drinking strip' ('West End' hereafter).

It transpires that this group of friends in their mid-twenties whom I call the Southside Crew – Jay, Paulie, Marky and Nathan – come from a coastal town in the UK. Another, Simon, who was due to fly out with them, was banned from the flight because he joked with security staff that he had a bomb in his hand luggage. They say he will fly out the following day. The Southside Crew have known each other since school and three of the four now work together on various temporary construction contracts while one is unemployed. They relay their experiences in the clubs back home in their teens and early twenties when they used to be ‘*proper on it [drugs]*’ most weekends; ‘*pills, coke, the lot*’. However, since settling down with families and/or partners, they say the opportunity to go out doesn’t present itself as much. At home, they confess to getting into fights and all four have been in trouble with the law: Paulie has served two years in prison for cocaine dealing and Marky three years for GBH. On their return to the UK, Jay and Nathan, who have been arrested before, also face a court case for battering some men outside a nightclub. Last year, two of the four went to Magaluf, Spain together. They tell me they have come to Ibiza for a ‘blowout’, and because of the ‘name’ and the Superclubs – where they can’t really afford to go so end up most nights on the West End.

They concede to needing vodka red bulls to pick them up between moments where their drinking has started to flag since arriving. As another pint arrives, they argue with the waiter, saying that they are owed a ‘free shot’, and eventually seem to bully him into bringing them over. They then recount tales of sex from Magaluf, high five and hug me before we move on to talk about girlfriends:

Nathan: It’s a holiday mate. I love my girl, I love my baby.

Paulie: Clearly not.

Nathan: But I am away, I need to get fucking something. If I don’t have sex on this holiday I am going to go back more frustrated, more angry.

Marky: And he’ll end up taking it out on the missus [then laughs].

Dan: [To Paulie] What do you think of this?

Paulie: Terrible.

Nathan: It’s best to be honest mate.

Paulie: Seriously, your girlfriend is pregnant.

Nathan: But you don’t get a fuck when your missus is pregnant.

Paulie: That’s why I think it’s terrible ... [A young woman in a thong bikini walks past] Cor, look at the tits on that!

The irony of Paulie moralising Nathan for his attitude towards women becomes apparent the moment the semi-naked woman walks past. Despite their home relationships, two concede that there is a little competition to chalk up as '*many shags as possible*'. Some more young girls approach us with make-up and fake tan melting down their faces and legs. They try to sell us club tickets but perhaps because they don't take the boys' fancy, there is little interest. After Marky recounts a tale of being ambushed by a '*black bird*' for a €5 '*blow job*' in Magaluf, we get on to the subject of bodies and they all concede to strict diets prior to the holiday. Paulie, in particular, concedes to using steroids to maintain his figure and this, he says, is why the girls approach him. This is perhaps confirmed for him as we are once again approached by PR¹ girls, vying for us to part with our money to attend their bar party. The Southside Crew all play down drug use on holiday. Despite this, it emerges that Jay just bought weed from an African man; he says '*it don't count.*' When the bill finally arrives, they argue and claim they have been ripped off but the anger quickly diffuses when their mouths drop open as half-naked girls walk past in bikinis. Jay says '*fuck it*' and throws a bunch of euros on the table.

This was my first encounter with the Southside Crew and, over the next five days, I drank with them, spent time with them in their hotel and on the beach to follow their holiday activities. Since arriving home that summer in 2011, I also kept in contact with them through mobile phone texts, Facebook messages, meetings and nights out in their hometown, Southside. They represent typical constructions of working-class British tourists abroad in resorts like San Antonio – young people, drinking and being loud, taking drugs, confessing to intentions for a 'blowout' and perhaps also by creating a headache for the bar staff (Briggs et al., 2011a). For the remainder of this short, introductory chapter, I would like to set the study in context by considering the increased prevalence of tourism across the European Union (EU) and the current literature on British tourists: where they go on holiday, the deviant and risky behaviours for which they are attributed and the extent to which they do it.²

Tourism across the EU

Since the 1960s, a growing number of young Europeans have chosen to spend part of their holidays partying at international holiday resorts. There are several reasons for this which include the advent of cheap air travel; the emergence of package tour operators that target young

people (Hesse et al., 2008); the development of tourist destinations that promote and capitalise on nightlife activities (Briggs et al., 2011a); the increased importance of leisure and pursuit of 'time out' among young people (Measham, 2004); and increased discretionary spending power available to youth in some European countries (O'Reilly, 2000). Today, millions of young Europeans holiday abroad each year with a primary aim of partying, often in southern European destinations. The nightlife and tourism industry have capitalised on this trend, and this is evident in the way these destinations are marketed to young people but also how they are designed to accommodate their leisure pursuit of 'time out'.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, tourism plays a major economic role in Europe, generating over 5 per cent of the EU's gross domestic product and providing around ten million jobs (European Commission, 2010); hence a healthy tourism industry can bring major benefits to local and national economies. However, the kind of economic 'benefits' increasingly include vacuous hyperreal spaces which have next to no resemblance to the rich history attached to some tourist destinations and this has come at the expense of the dissolution of local tradition, culture and community life. This is particularly the case in the tourist resorts of places like Ibiza where between the barrage of hotels sit KFC, Pizza Hut and all the global chains. As we will see, the way in which these chains and brands have settled these resorts has dislocated, if not dismantled, local tradition and culture (Chapter 4). Instead, these kinds of resort tend to have large nightlife scenes which foster high levels of deviant and risk behaviours which tend to cause harm to young people. These harms include elevated alcohol and drug use, unprotected sex (with other tourists, local populations and workers in the sex industry), anti-social behaviour, crime, violence, and unintentional injury, including road traffic injuries. One study calculated that in one year across all ages, injuries sustained by non-domestic tourists in EU countries accounted for approximately 3,800 deaths, 83,000 hospital admissions, and 280,000 emergency department treatments (Bauer et al., 2005).

Deviant and risk behaviours therefore have a major impact on young people's health and wellbeing in both the short and long term, and these effects are often amplified when they occur in foreign countries where culture, language, geography, legislation and service provision are unfamiliar (Bellis et al., 2003). Moreover, the costs of hedonistic holiday behaviours do not only affect young tourists. In these resorts, inadequate policing and limited health resources struggle to manage tourist behaviours and deal with the consequences (Tutenges, 2009). Further, tourism industries can be damaged by bad press when these