



IBI FOUNDATION: SAILING FOR A GREENER FUTURE

Editorials 358 Views

No matter where in the world you are based, it is undeniable that climate change, plastic pollution and sustainability have been some of the most hotly debated topics of 2019. And as the year draws to a close and we look ahead to 2020, it is certain that in the Balearic Islands awareness of these issues is going to continue to grow as the local government is set to implement a ban of single-use plastics in the New Year.

A young nautical company that is already taking big steps to help achieve the region's mission to be completely plastic-free by 2023 is the iBi Foundation. Taking to the seas surrounding Ibiza and Formentera on a custom-built, solar-powered catamaran equipped with a unique plastic waste collection system, the non-profit organisation sets sail five days a week to "clean our oceans". The passionate team's goal is to keep the crystal clear waters that the Balearic Islands are famous for clean, protect the delicate marine ecosystem and the marine life that inhabits it, and educate both island residents and visitors who want to support a greener future.

The idea for the project was conceived in Ibiza back in 2017 when founder Ed and Joke Pronk had a life-changing experience while sailing off the coast of the White Isle. Following a school of frolicking dolphins, they were shocked when they encountered a struggling sea turtle tangled up in plastic waste. They lifted the majestic animal out of the waves and carefully freed the desperate sea creature, which they named

“iBi” after the place where they found it. The sea turtle has since become the official mascot of the organisation and takes pride of place on the sails of the “iBi” catamaran.

Another key element of the Balearic ecosystem that the iBi Foundation is aiming to protect is the rare Mediterranean sea grass “*posidonia oceanica*”. Commonly known as “Neptune Grass” or “Mediterranean Tapeweed”, the organism forms large underwater meadows that are credited with maintaining the coastline of Ibiza and Formentera and protecting the island’s beaches from erosion. With the local meadows believed to be some of the oldest colonies on earth – dating back as far as 100,000 years – the stretch between Ses Salinas and Formentera was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1999. However, with this naturally stunning area also being a firm favourite with island residents and the millions of tourists that fly in and out of Ibiza every season, it is in dire need of protection from plastic pollution and other harmful factors.

Step forward the iBi Foundation! After starting out with simple scooping nets, since August 2019 the team is taking to the seas on their emission-free plastic clean-up catamaran. Ed recalls, “Although we were making an impact, when we started out it was slow and difficult to stay on top of all the waste. We obviously thought this system was taking too long and started to think about a quicker and more efficient way.”

Now the iBi Foundation works with a self-designed and unique waste collection system that can cover an area of 22.224 m² per hour – the equivalent of 3.11 football fields – whilst filtering 11.112 m³ (the size of 4.4 Olympic swimming pools). The filters work at 0.5m below the surface, collecting plastics as small as 2cm up to a maximum of the entire boat’s width. This ensures that larger debris, such as industrial plastic waste, can also be gathered.

The collected rubbish then gets sent off for analysis, so iBi Foundation and its partners can better understand the extent of pollution in the Balearic Islands and its potential impact. The initiative also supports other organisations and charities with the same mission, and works closely with the Ibiza Preservation Foundation [IPF], IPF offshoot projects Plastic Free Ibiza and Plastic Free Formentera, and World Cleanup Day.

To raise funds for their efforts, the young company relies on donations and sales from their sustainable children’s clothing range. Called iBi Free Life, each collection is made solely from organic cotton and ships without any kind of plastic packaging, with 5€ from each sale going back to iBi Foundation. Volunteers are also welcome aboard the “iBi” catamaran and can witness the team’s work firsthand.

After making headlines around the world during their first summer of being fully operational, iBi Foundation founders Ed and Joke are interested in collaborating with like-minded investors to take the organisation to the next level. Plans are already in development to further expand the fleet of catamarans once the cleaning system is working at its most efficient level, with the possibility of expanding into other international tourist destinations. Sailing for a greener future, the project is planning to make waves to protect our oceans for generations to come!

The iBi Foundation is aiming to sail five days a week during the winter months. If you are interested in coming along as a volunteer, please email your name and telephone number to volunteer@ibifoundation.com. If you would like to find out more about investment opportunities please get in touch via join@ibifoundation.com.

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