

BIRD FLYING HIGH



ILONA PANTEL-AYAL BRIDGES THE
PHYSICAL AND ESOTERIC WORLDS FROM
THE HEALING HEART OF HER HOME IN IBIZA





In the mystical realm across cultures, birds take on a significant meaning – often acting as messengers or guides into the depths of the multidimensional spirit world. Whichever their role, birds represent a meaningful connection between the human experience and the otherworldliness of the nominally unknown. There is nothing bird-like about Ilona Pantel-Ayal – she is composed, steady and grounded – and yet under the gaze of her thoughtful blue eyes, one can't help but feel that here stands a conduit to something much bigger, much like the role of the bird in shamanism.

The House of Colours, where Ilona bases her healing work, is also representative of the bird. It's tucked up the top of a mountain, just like a nest, beautifully tended in that seemingly haphazard yet gorgeous natural architecture birds use when creating their homes. It is a well-loved household where the residue of familial connections, gatherings and travels seep through every corner. From this perch overlooking the clouds and valleys of Ibiza's northern skies, Ilona practices the healing arts.

The place where she finds herself now is anything but random, despite a life story filled with adventure and chance meetings. Ilona's fearless individuality was pre-ordained, set up by the gods and inculcated via her father. "My dad always urged me to be free and to make my own choices," she reminisces. "He always encouraged me to find a job rather than look for a husband. It was very unusual for someone of that generation."

Her father worked for Siemens and they moved with the company from Hanover, where Ilona was born, to Erlangen during the war years. "He entered the war at the very end," she says. "He was against it all from the start and didn't want to join them, which was curious because he grew up in a place where everyone thought a certain way." An inner resolve and sturdiness are required to eschew cultural norms. First, you need to know yourself and then stand solidly in your choices. It was a philosophy Ilona would grasp early on in her life.

It wasn't easy, especially as a young German woman in post-war Europe, but Ilona's father had given her a remarkable gift – self-belief. "I went to Paris and London alone at the age of 16," she says. "Being German was not high on the list of people's favourite things at that time." Rather than be perturbed by this, she merely saw this reaction as part of a larger picture. "It's about being part of a tribe," she explains. "I was born into that family, at that time. You have to come to terms with it and deal with it."

This attitude says a lot about how Ilona faces life's challenges. In Paris and London, she was exposed to the so-called counterculture. "It was the hippy era – singing songs and hoping for peace, all that kind of stuff. I was drawn to it." But like her father before her, Ilona was wary. "At that time it was all about gurus in the east," she says. "I stayed away from that. I was influenced by my dad's ideals about not following any mass movements." For Ilona, life has always been more about following the truth in her heart.

It was during this period that Ilona went to see the movie that would play a critical role in her trajectory. It was Barbet Schroeder's *More*. Somehow she managed to overlook the tragic story of two drug-addled star-crossed lovers and focused her attention completely on the location: Ibiza. "I fell in love with the island by watching that movie," she laughs. "I recently watched it again with my older son to show him how I ended up here and I was horrified!" Enchanted by the white houses, the colour and the Pink Floyd soundtrack, getting to Ibiza became her goal.

First, Ilona had to finish school. Studies in art history and theatre were followed by a psychology degree earned in Barcelona. There were travels to Morocco, throughout Spain and across to England, intertwined with love affairs and broken hearts. Ilona's story reads like a classic summer of love coming of age tale, complete with exotic locations, spiritual awakenings and tons of hippy romance. After breaking up with her Spanish boyfriend in Barcelona, she finally made the journey across the Med to the island of her dreams for a holiday.

In the days before mobile phones and the Internet, connections were made through a series of handwritten notes and Chinese whispers and when Ilona arrived back in Barcelona, friends had left word that they were headed to Ibiza. "So, I went back straight away and I found them in San Carlos," she says. "Somehow you always knew what was happening and where the next party was. Houses were left open. You'd come home and find your friends there helping themselves to tea."

After finishing her undergraduate degree in Barcelona – and constantly travelling back and forth to Ibiza – in the early 80s, Ilona decided to pursue a Masters in psychology. Feeling that a qualification from a German university would hold more value, she returned to her homeland. At the time, a Spanish degree was somewhat frowned upon and initially the German institutions balked at granting her entry. Never one to be turned away, she managed to convince them to let her in.

On finishing her Masters, she found the disciplines of conventional psychology lacking. "It was between humanistic psychoanalysts like Fromm or behaviourism like Skinner," she recalls. "I didn't feel it. My studies were all about putting people in boxes and I was tired of putting people in boxes." All around her, people were returning from the east, converts to one guru or another. Like her father, she found it difficult to be a follower. She was searching for something else. It was a search that would put life in Ibiza aside for some time.

Driving back to Germany, her rickety old car broke down in Torre Molinos. While walking the streets she heard reggae music and followed the sound to a concert. There on stage singing was Joel Rice, an American with a rich voice and a glint in his eye. A year later, the couple moved to Ibiza before heading to New York, where they lived from 1988 until 1995 – years of turbulence and intense creativity for the capital of the world. As usual, Ilona was right in the middle of it all.



