

CRUISE SHIPS BRING A RECORD NUMBER OF TOURISTS IN LISBON AND GENERATE POLLUTION

The new maritime terminal has reached record numbers of tourists in the Portuguese capital. But tourist prosperity also causes huge levels of pollution and health hazards, which the local government continues to ignore.

Lisbon's tourism enterprises are going through a fantastic period: revenues are rising with a boom of young Europeans constantly visiting the Portuguese capital, one of the most trending destinations in Europe.

In the last five years, tourists have grown by 81%, reaching 30 million in 2018, partly due to the new cruise port terminal that opened two years ago. 300 of these giant vessels dock annually at the new port. **Forecasts for 2019 point to 600.000 passengers, who will embark or disembark at the port.**

However, mass tourism in Lisbon also has a negative side, according to Francisco Ferreira, of the environmental association Zero: "Unlike other airports in Europe, such as Frankfurt, the Lisbon terminal applies few restrictions to night flights. And the current flight limitations are largely ignored".

Noise levels in urban areas near the airport, assessed by Zero, show that they are well above the legal thresholds. "Airplanes pass only 100 meters above roofs. Those who live in these areas do not have one minute of peace during the summer holidays", says Ferreira, who also regrets the enormous pollution caused by aircraft emissions.

On the other side of the city, on the banks of the Tagus River, the pollution is also high. Especially with the new port terminal, which cost 50 million euros and was inaugurated in 2017. Residents of Lisbon have been suffering from sulfur dioxide emissions, making the port of Lisbon the sixth most polluting in Europe: emissions were 86 times higher than those of all cars in Portugal.

Ferreira says that the huge growth in cruise tourism is creating intolerable levels of noise and emissions, particularly for those living in the historic part of Lisbon. And the authorities ignore the problem: "The government constantly talks about sustainability and neutrality of emissions, but does nothing about it".

He assumes that this inertia is caused by the fact that tourism has become one of the largest sources of revenue of a country in crisis, currently generating more than 15 billion euros in public revenue. The new port receives almost one cruise a day and is a frequent stop for ships from the Canary Islands and the North Atlantic. But, albeit new, the infrastructure does not meet the industry standards.

Unlike many other terminals, the Lisbon terminal does not offer electricity to ships. Authorities only require companies to use diesel oil to generate electricity instead of heavy fuel oil when ships are docked.

The emission monitoring measuring stations will only be installed when EU authorities require them to. And, of course, when they provide investment subsidies, according to the authorities.

In the meantime, local and national governments are doing everything they can to continue to fuel tourism prosperity. At the airport, the limits of pollution and capacity are ignored, Ferreira from Zero says. “Often, the authorities allow more than 26-night flights, it is common for 30 to happen. More and more people are asking for our help to change the situation”.

But the ministries responsible for aviation and maritime affairs are not concerned. The Environment Ministry said that they comply with all laws governing air traffic emissions. The Ministry responsible for the port of Lisbon, on the other hand, does not consider there to be any violation of emission levels by cruise ships.

According to Francisco Ferreira, there is another neglect of the Portuguese government in relation to environmental issues: the plans to build a second airport in the center of the capital, on the south bank of the Tagus River, close to an important nature reserve and birds.

“In its environmental assessment study, the government did not even consider alternative locations. Its goal is to build another airport in the city center, without any public debate”, he says.

Building a second airport in Lisbon is a cheaper option than a new larger and more remote airport terminal in the capital. But it is expected that the second airport will create the same noise and pollution problems for the population as the first one.

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