

BARCELONA IN NEED OF A NEW TOURISM MODEL



model is necessary to develop.

The tourism sector in Barcelona continues to break records. In 2016, the number of visitors reached an all-time high - topping the previous year's record numbers - with 18.5 million nights spent. This performance places Barcelona far ahead of other European cities such as Milan, Geneva, Munich and Vienna. However, mass tourism has caused many troubles to the locals and a new tourism

The perception of Barcelona's residents has been changing. While the great majority still considers tourism to be a beneficial activity for the city, **an increasing number of people is of the opinion that tourism has reached its maximum potential, as per the results of the Tourism Perception Survey for the City of Barcelona.**

What's more, according to a recent study conducted by the consultancy firm CBRE, the capital of Catalonia is still lagging far behind those previously mentioned cities as much in average tourist expenditure as in the percentage of tax free purchases made. These types of purchases, which reimburse the IVA to non-EU tourists for expenditures in excess of 90 euros, are considered to be a reliable measure of the number of tourists with high purchasing power.

Currently, the average tourist to Barcelona is around 36 years old, is already familiar with the capital city and spends an average of 60 euros daily on accommodations and 76.6 euros for other things.

The local authorities discuss the need to change the tourism model of the city. Having arrived at the current situation, how best to tackle the problem of the sector?

According to Josep Maria Cervera, international strategy expert, Barcelona "is living an inconsistent existence", with policies which go against the type of tourism it would like to attract. For Josep Maria Cervera - who is also a Masters program professor in International Business at UPF Barcelona School of Management - the current tourism model needs to be changed, but he also points out that in order to accomplish this, there is a need for a "promotion policy".

Cervera uses Amsterdam as an example and he maintains that this city has managed to turn itself around despite its lack of hotel infrastructure, transitioning from "coffee shop" tourism (places where it is legal to smoke marijuana), to a more family oriented model.

"They did it by accepting the reality of the situation and by developing apartment spaces to be rented out to tourists," the professor stated. He was also critical of Barcelona's practice of contracting "observers" to seek out and expose apartment owners who are renting to tourists without a license.

For the expert, Barcelona's problem is the vagueness of its outlook. "What does this city sell? Services? Barcelona needs a strategy and a commercial department," Cervera emphasized.

"It requires a narrative which will make it attractive to the rest of the world, as much to investors as to students and families. To all the people who would bring added value to the city," he said. He

warned however that in some circumstances, it is necessary to make “social sacrifices in order to go forward”.

“We do not want Valencia's tourism model, but the city's coexistence with tourism needs to be practical, which would require families to have access to reasonably priced apartment accommodations,” the professor concluded.

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