

OVERTOURISM PROTESTS SPREADING AROUND EUROPE



Every year more people can afford to travel and every year the desire to travel goes up. For this reason, major tourism destinations are more and more flooded with visitors, causing a phenomenon labelled “overtourism”. Dissatisfied locals now decided to go to the streets.

Spain, Italy, Greece and other Southern European countries are facing massive crowds of visitors. The truth is, tourism is a big boost for their economies. For example, Spain earns over 50 billion euros annually through tourism. The industry creates a huge number of jobs and Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy even called it “the motor of the country”. In 2016, tourism accounted for 16% of Spain’s GDP. **While the economies prosper the local residents are getting angry about the overtourism difficulties.**

Overtourism Protests in Palma de Mallorca and Barcelona

The fact that some locals oppose tourism is not new, but the vehemence with which they are protesting is. In Palma de Mallorca, there are posters on walls saying “Tourists = terrorists” or “Tourism kills the city”. Locals fear rising rent prices, overcrowding, and the loss of local supply, as supermarkets make way to souvenir shops.

In May, 200 people marched dressed as tourists through the Palma de Mallorca streets. They shouted “paella, paella” and dragged roller-skates behind them. The organizer of the demonstration was the citizen initiative “The city for the inhabitants, not for the visitors”. Protests were also held in the Andalusian city of Valencia.

Barcelona residents are also fed up with the recent developments, as less locals and more hotels and tourists flood the city. They have been complaining that their streets no longer belong to them and that the city is overcrowded with tourists. In May, there were mass demonstrations against the city mayor Ada Colau. There were clashes with the police, people fired garbage containers and smashed windows of shops and threw stones at policemen. But there were also peaceful overtourism protests at the beginning of the year.

Italy, Portugal and Greece No Different

Venice in Italy is another prime example of overtourism. This year protests are getting louder and Italians are complaining about rude tourists. This is what angers the locals most at the moment. Tourists dive from bridges to the lagoon, shower in public fountains, walk half-naked in churches and much more.

A few weeks ago, 2000 people demonstrated here against the “sale of the city”. Venice residents are growingly dissatisfied with the lagoons becoming an “adventure park”, leftover garbage from visitors as well as rising rent prices in the city.

But the anti-tourism moods are not only present in Spain and Italy, but also Portugal and Greece. Not long ago, an Australian tourist was beaten by four men in a shop in Athens. “The men beat me for no reason at all,” the man said. “We’re just tourists, we’ve come here to spend our money on your business, and they’re beating us,” his wife added.

The attack which took place in July is an isolated event, but it is clear that resistance to mass tourism is increasing in Athens as well. Meanwhile, in Lisbon, initiatives such as “People living here” have established themselves and are making a move against overtourism in the city’s old town.

Protests Not a Short-term Phenomenon

Taleb Rifai, Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization, spoke of a “very serious situation” in face of the anti-tourism protests in Southern Europe. It is also highly unlikely that these protests are short-term. “The overtourism protests are not a short term-phenomenon, it is a systematic problem,” says Harald Pechlaner, a professor at the University of Eichstätt. If the politicians do not act in the right direction, these protests may continue in the years to come. Paris, London, Dublin, Rome, Prague – overtourism is gradually affecting the lives of more and more cities

The UNWTO advises tourism regions to distribute the streams better. “Even outside Mallorca or Barcelona, Spain has much to offer,” says Pehlaner. Amsterdam and Copenhagen are good examples that tourists can also be enthusiastic about the surrounding countryside.

Some destinations are already trying to control the flow of tourism. For example, Dubrovnik has installed cameras in its old town to count people and slow down the influx if necessary. Numerous Italian cities have introduced restrictions for tourists. Meanwhile, in the Balearic Islands, a law has been introduced, which limits the number of overnight accommodation on the islands.

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