

# RISE IN CRIME IMPACTS TOURISM IN BARCELONA

The most important commercial area of Barcelona, Passeig de Gràcia, is open for business after months of no activity, following the easing of coronavirus restrictions, and the slow but gradual return of tourism. The Passeig de Gràcia Association, which represents shops, restaurants and hotels, is hopeful about the reopening, but has warned last week that the return of international visitors is being affected by an increase in crime. Luis Sans, president of the association, warns that “the situation is unsustainable” and businesses are “worried” since the crime impacts tourism.

Mr. Sans explains that crime has been on the rise since the beginning of May. **The association calls for a reinforcement of security to prevent theft and robbery in the main tourist areas of the city**, especially in Passeig de Gràcia where 90% of the hotel establishments are located and currently open.

According to official data, hotel occupancy in Barcelona is around 30%, and is expected to reach 60% in July, which will see the return of tourists to the streets and the reactivation of hotels and shops in the center. However, the president of the association fears that the increase in crime could weigh down the plans for this summer.

The association states that the increase in business activity and the wave of new customers on the promenade has led to the resurface of crime “with more intensity and even more violence,” said Luis Sans. “These are people who act in small groups, of two or three individuals. And they do it in the middle of the street, with impunity, stealing watches, jewelry and wallets from tourists, even physically attacking at the exit of hotels and shops,” added the president, sharing the concern of businessmen in the area.

Car theft has increased in parking lots, and the association calls for “a reinforcement of security in the city to prevent criminal activity of pickpockets and repeat thieves on public roads.” Before the pandemic, the city center had fought to increase preventive police in the area, and there was an improvement. But after the health crisis, with no customers in luxury stores and no guests in hotels, crime was also frozen. The return of crime to the streets occurred faster than expected.

**“We cannot allow to put tourism at risk once it finally resumes after the coronavirus crisis,”** said Mr. Sans, recalling that many tourists are expected to come starting on June 7, when borders will be opened for visitors outside of the European Union that have been fully vaccinated, and on July 1, when the EU Digital Covid Certificate should be implemented in Europe. At the moment, the main tourists are French, Germans and Russians.

Tourism-dependent businesses in Barcelona once again stress the urgency of reforming the penal code to increase sentences on repeat offenders, which are the ones that prevail in the most visited areas.

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