

A NEW PHENOMENON: TWO SPANISH TOWNS REFUSED TO BE AMONG THE MOST BEAUTIFUL ONES



Spain is one of the desired destinations for rural tourism lovers. Little Spanish towns and villages that dot the national territory allow us to travel to the past through its streets, be amazed by its popular architecture, discover their culture and traditions, connect with the natural environment that surrounds them ... in short, live a totally different tourism that we will not find in big cities.

Some of these localities struggle to make themselves known, to attract travelers and not fall into oblivion. But on the other side of the scale, we find a totally opposite reality: **the villages that prefer to continue as hidden gems, as places where you can still breathe in peace.**

The objective is not to remain totally isolated from the world, but to flee from overcrowding and opt for sustainable tourism. This is the case of two Catalan villages, Rupit i Pruit and Siurana, which have recently refused to be part of The Most Beautiful Villages of Spain, an association that seeks to spread the beauty of the country's villages. And the main concern was the increasing tourism which would be counterproductive.

Rupit i Pruit (Barcelona)

In the northeast of Catalonia, in the region of Collsacabra, the beautiful municipality of Rupit i Pruit opens its way. This not only stands out for the beauty of its buildings and the natural environment that surrounds it, but also for the huge rock wall that dominates the village of Rupit and where its 10th-century castle once stood. On the other hand, a few kilometers away and 950 meters above sea level, we come across Rupit, a small group of houses presided over by the church of Sant Andreu.

This town does not want to be part of The Most Beautiful Villages of Spain, and as they explain "the reason was that we respected the fact that being part of this brand implied a very important increase in the number of visitors". This decision was not taken in vain, the town has already had to face uncontrolled tourism: "as a result of the pandemic of covid-19, it increased a lot and on weekends we find ourselves with parking problems, overloaded streets ..., we cannot give the service we would like to be able to absorb all the tourism that arrives".

In line with this responsible tourism management, the City Council of Rupit i Pruit has had to take some measures such as "the control of the parking and the regulation of traffic access to the historic center," they detail. All these measures have had great support in the town, even from the hoteliers: "during Easter we did a pilot test to regulate traffic together with the neighboring municipalities and the assessment by the private sector was positive."

Siurana (Tarragona)

On the edge of a precipice, as if it were about to fall into the abyss, stands the idyllic village of Siurana. The Gritella mountain range is home to this charming village that is part of the municipality of Cornudella de Monsant i Albarca and has a valuable heritage marked by the remains of its Arab castle and the Church of Santa Maria.

Of course, we cannot forget the incredible environment that surrounds the town. A blue water reservoir stretches at the foot of Siurana, accompanied by extensive and lush forests. With all these elements, it is normal that the village has become a major tourist attraction.

Like the previous case, Siurana doesn't want to be part of the association either. "It would bring us more cars, more buses and much more influx of people, just now that we are working to regulate this situation," said its mayor to 'Catalunya Radio'. Only 32 people live in the village, a figure that is multiplied in the case of visitors who come to the place attracted by its charms.

Faced with this situation, the City Council has already had to build two parking lots that total 180 spaces and are working on a computer system for drivers to know if there are spaces available, because once they are filled, no one else can go up to the town. "What we want is that the town does not become overcrowded and that people who come to Siurana leave happy," said the mayor.

But the mechanics of making these regulations are difficult. "We have no wifi, or any kind of network to be able to broadcast from Siurana," he explained, so to control the parking spaces we have to communicate with walkie-talkies.

Both Spanish towns, Siurana and Rupit i Pruit, are not looking for more promotion, but to advocate for sustainable tourism. In both cases, priority is given to providing quality service to tourists rather than receiving an increasing number of visitors.

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