

# TOURIST CROWDS CONTINUE TO PLAGUE DUBROVNIK



Dubrovnik's Old Town is experiencing blistering heat, with temperatures soaring to 33 degrees in the shade. Despite the sweltering conditions, tourist crowds can be seen wandering through the town's squares and alleys. The visitors are taking in the sights of Venetian palaces, medieval churches, and imposing city walls. Some tourists are dressed in swimwear or with bare torsos, while others can be seen dragging their wheeled suitcases along the historic cobblestones as they arrive or depart.

Recently, the Mayor of Dubrovnik, Mato Frankovic, made a statement that caused a stir. He expressed a desire first to eliminate the noise of cafes and then possibly ban wheeled suitcases. However, despite rumors circulating on the internet, there is no official ban on wheeled suitcases in Dubrovnik. The city is simply recommending that visitors avoid using them. There is no fine associated with using wheeled suitcases in town.

In 2017, Mato Frankovic began his term in office and faced the challenge of managing the overwhelming influx of tourists in Dubrovnik. At that time, the city would receive up to seven or eight massive cruise ships simultaneously, resulting in overcrowding with as many as 25,000 people in the small old town. The only main route was the Stradun, which is just 350 meters long, while the fortress walls could only accommodate a maximum of 7,000 visitors at any given time. Dubrovnik was listed as one of the top ten tourist destinations to avoid, which served as a wake-up call for the city.

Dubrovnik restricted the number of cruise ships that could dock in the city, allowing only two at a time. Additionally, these ships must now stay for at least eight hours, increasing from the previous limit of four and a half hours. Bus operators must register for a time slot in advance to manage the influx of tourists from other holiday destinations.

The city authority is taking a stand against inappropriate behavior by tourists. To discourage this, visitors cannot wear only swimwear in the old town, with fines imposed for non-compliance. The campaign is aptly named "Respect the City!" However, the mayor clarifies that the goal is not to collect fines but rather to encourage visitors to dress appropriately, with a simple request of "Please, put on a shirt!" being the norm.

Cars are prohibited in the old town; suppliers must adhere to off-peak times in the morning. Here, too, the inspection showed that not everyone adheres to it.

Although the crowd may be significant, the present conditions in Dubrovnik are different from those of 2016 and 2017. During its prime between the 13th and 17th centuries, the former city republic flourished as a skilled trading power amid Venice and the Ottoman Empire. Dubrovnik's medieval town center remains intact and showcases a unique aesthetic with its Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque palaces, churches, towers, cobblestone streets, and narrow paths between the sea and mountains. Following the filming of the popular Netflix series "Game of Thrones" in Dubrovnik's picturesque locations, many young fans of the fantasy series also visit the city to experience its magical ambiance.

The locals recognize the mayor for successfully implementing specific measures, such as restricting the influx of cruise ships and buses and encouraging tourists to act respectfully.

A study by Nebojsa Stojcic, a professor of economics at the University of Dubrovnik, examined the effectiveness of the mayor's measures. According to Stojcic, managing tourist flows led to a more evenly distributed load on the old town, which is a positive outcome. However, there are more sustainable solutions in the long run. When asked about the threshold for tourism, Stojcic stated that he did not have an answer yet. He believes that, eventually, we will have to accept the idea of "de-growth" and bid farewell to the notion of constant growth.

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