

# GREECE SEEKS TO STEM OVER-TOURISM DAMAGE



In response to the struggles faced by the tourism industry, a pillar of the country's economy, the government is promoting sustainable tourism and seeking to regulate short-term rentals amidst issues such as constant tourist influx, rising rent rates, and the invasion of historic sites. Over-tourism has become a serious problem.

During the peak season in Greece, this summer saw a record number of visitors to the Acropolis of Athens. **Up to 23,000 people visit the ruins daily.** However, due to the limited capacity of the ancient site, only 20,000 people have been allowed to visit daily since September 4.

Visitors are required to reserve a specific time slot. This measure aims to distribute tourist flow and avoid overcrowding, a problem during peak hours.

The intense heat, with temperatures regularly reaching 45°C in the afternoon, also led to the closure of the Acropolis during the hot hours to prevent sunstroke. However, overcrowding in the morning created unpleasant conditions for the site, visitors, and employees. The Greek Minister of Culture, Lína Mendóni, defended the measures to manage visitor flow and ensure safety.

## Rent Inflation

Despite the wildfires that ravaged Greece during the summer, the country's tourism industry still profits. Based on a report from ForwardKeys, flights to Greece have increased by 10% compared to 2019. While growing inbound tourism is good news for the country's economy, which relies on the tourism industry for almost a quarter of its GDP, it highlights the need for sustainability in the industry.

Tourists and short-term rentals have caused rent prices to surge in major cities. Between 2018 and 2022, the average rent in Athens has increased by 30 to 40% due to the significant proportion of housing converted into short-term rentals offered through sites such as Airbnb. The tensions between tourists and locals have resulted in Greek anti-tourism groups like the "towel movement," which fights with bars and hotels for free beach access.

## Debottlenecking

Over-tourism can harm the reputation of popular destinations, such as the picturesque islands of Mykonos and Santorini, known for their scenic beauty and vibrant nightlife. Recently, these destinations have witnessed a decline in tourism due to high prices, which resulted in an 8.3% decrease in air arrivals to Mykonos this summer.

Many tourists have expressed dissatisfaction with the exorbitant prices of rentals and restaurants and the constant and overwhelming crowds.

The Greek Government recently announced various measures to control tourism and ensure a better experience for visitors and locals. Apart from the obligation to reserve slots for visiting specific historical sites, which will be extended to the rest of the capital's museums in April, the country

intends to legislate on the status of short-term rentals, similar to Paris' measures, to limit their expansion.

In 2022, the Greek Tourist Board launched the "Sustainable Greece" campaign, promoting off-season travel and exploring less popular regions and islands. **The campaign aims to alleviate congestion in places crowded every summer.** Last week, Tourism Minister Olga Kefalogianni visited Crete and the Ionian Islands to promote "sustainable tourism" based on the importance of "focusing on local communities" and attracting visitors who are more respectful of places and people. This approach may require sacrificing quantity for quality.

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