

SPANISH DESTINATIONS APPLY DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO MASS TOURISM



From an economic point of view, the tourism sector itself never tires of repeating the great importance of this activity in Spain, a country where nearly 13% of GDP depends directly on travel, an industry that directly employs almost three million people, 14% of the country's workforce. In more intensive communities, such as the archipelagos, these figures exceed 30%.

As has been noted since May, the environmental and social aspects of tourism are unsatisfactory for a growing number of citizens, especially in the communities of Catalonia, the Canary Islands, the Balearic Islands, Andalusia, the Valencian Community, and Madrid, which are the most exposed to mass tourism. **The objective is to try to control the disorderly growth of tourism in a successful scenario from a strictly operational point of view.**

The Spanish autonomous communities deal with mass tourism in different ways:

Catalonia: Tax and End to Tourist Apartments

According to the National Institute of Statistics, with 7.9 million inhabitants, Catalonia is the main recipient of foreign tourists (18.2 million in 2023), adding 23.7 million national travelers.

This summer, minor outbreaks of tourismophobia have been seen on Catalan streets, while concern is growing over the increase in theft and robbery.

Barcelona City Council has suspended licenses for tourist accommodation from 2028, a measure strongly criticized by property owners demanding 1 billion euros in compensation.

Since 2012, Catalonia has imposed a tax on stays in tourist apartments, and Barcelona has limited the opening of new hotels in the city center and several areas of the city.

Palma Demonstrated Massively in July

In the Balearic Islands - which in 2023 welcomed 14.4 million foreigners and almost 3.6 million domestic guests with a population of 1.2 million - last July, there was a large demonstration in the center of Palma against overcrowding. Still, other protests have also been, such as the 'occupation' of the most 'Instagrammed' beach in Mallorca: Caló des Moro. The Parliament is considering a law that will penalize holiday rental owners who do not prevent their tenants from partying. Hoteliers are demanding greater control of illegal tourist rentals, which they attribute to problems of coexistence.

The regional government has agreed with major cruise companies to limit cruise ships docking at the port of Palma to three per day (only one can have a capacity over 5,000 passengers), which is in effect until the end of this year.

The Canary Islands Opened the Protests

The Canary Islands—with 13.9 million foreign tourist entries in 2023 and 7.1 million national ones for 2.2 million inhabitants—inaugurated the massive demonstrations against mass tourism last April, with 100,000 people simultaneously on the streets in the capitals of all the islands.

The regional Parliament rejected imposing a tourist tax, and requests for licenses for tourist rentals are accelerating in anticipation of an announced regulation.

Meanwhile, the Tenerife Island Council has implemented access control and fees to the Masca ravine, one of the natural areas most threatened by saturation, and the Gran Canaria Island Council plans to limit access to Roque Nublo.

Seville Will Charge for Entry into Plaza de España

In Andalusia - with 12.2 million foreign tourists in 2023, 31.8 million domestic guests, and 8.6 million inhabitants - most capitals favor the tourist tax, provided it is applied by consensus, while Jaén or Huelva rule it out.

In Seville, the mayor, José Luis Sanz, has decided to cordon off the Plaza de España to charge tourists 3-4 euros. The City Council, through the municipal water company, has carried out the first cuts in the supply to several illegal tourist homes.

In August, the city of Málaga asked the regional government to cancel the registration of 1,120 properties in the Andalusian Tourism Registry because they lacked independent access and services; the Fuengirola registry has revoked 600 applications for the same reason since February 22.

Valencian Community: 'I'm Also a Tourist'

In the Valencian Community (10.5 million foreign guests and 18.5 million domestic tourists, with 5.2 million inhabitants), the authority does not see a problem with tourismphobia and has launched a campaign called 'I am also a tourist,' together with the hotel employers' association HOSBEC.

The Valencian Community has a new tourist apartments regulation that requires the cadastral reference to be communicated to avoid being deregistered and has toughened sanctions.

In November, the current regional government repealed the tourist tax approved by the previous team because it was considered a barrier to tourists' arrival and an "ideological" tax.

Madrid Prepares New Regulation

Madrid was the sixth community to welcome the most foreign tourists in 2023, with 7.84 million foreign tourists and 11.95 million domestic guests for nearly seven million inhabitants. The Community has initiated procedures to tighten the regulations for controlling tourist apartments and sanctions.

Madrid receives more than 10 million tourists annually and has become the third urban destination in the world, but there have been no mass protests over the impact of tourism.

The City Council will suspend new licenses for tourist apartments and increase sanctions for illegal ones while working on a strategic plan that includes the return of Formula 1 or promoting tourism in the summer months, which are the weakest in the capital.

In Galicia, Isolated Protests

This summer, isolated "imaginative" protests have occurred in Galicia, such as those of the residents of the parish of O Hío, in Cangas do Morrazo (Pontevedra), fed up with cars poorly parked on the beaches, or the closure of a bar in Mera during the festivities due to the tiredness of "poor quality tourism" or "fodechinchos" (ill-mannered tourists).

The authority has given the green light to the tourist tax to implement it on January 1. It will allow the town councils that request it—for the moment, only Santiago—to manage, collect, and inspect this tax directly.

In Santiago, a regulation was approved at the end of June that grants licenses for vacation apartments for only 60 days a year, provided that the person renting the property resides in it for at least 183 days.

Cantabria Does Not Want to Be the Ibiza of the North

In Cantabria, last May, thousands of people demonstrated under the slogan 'We do not want to be the Ibiza of the north' in response to a project for a macro-tourist complex between the towns of Loreda and Langre (Ribamontán al Mar).

The Cantabria community has been working for months on a new decree on tourist housing and the regulation of motorhomes.

The Asturian Government will promote the regulation of tourist apartments with stricter requirements and more severe sanctions for offenders.

No Social Reaction in the Basque Country

In the Basque Country, the increase in tourism has not yet generated a social response. It is only perceived as a problem in specific areas, such as the Old Town of San Sebastián, the old quarters of Bilbao or Bermeo, and the area around San Juan de Gaztelugatxe.

The regional government is preparing a regional, not municipal, tourist tax of less than 10 euros, which it wants to have active in 2025. The Bilbao city council is also studying a tax

The City Council of San Sebastián, the most congested capital, has suspended licenses for new accommodation since March 2023. Since this summer, guided tour groups cannot exceed 25 people.

In Pamplona, the council will approve the end of licenses for new tourist apartments in the Old Town this year.

Toledo Wants to Tax Buses

In Castilla-La Mancha, Toledo City Council is considering requiring tour operators who charter buses with tourists to pay approximately 1.50 euros per passenger.

León, there are no currents against tourists in Castilla y León, although **housing prices have increased in university cities such as Salamanca and Valladolid**. No tensions have been detected in La Rioja or Ceuta.

On the other hand, Murcia is working on promotion at national and international fairs to make the destination known. Melilla seeks to attract visitors by subsidizing 75% of the ticket price and partly

the accommodation costs.

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