



## Can Mass Tourism Destroying Local Culture? The Case Of Barcelona

Visiting Barcelona holds many attractions for travelers around the world, yet despite the large volume of tourism that this Spanish city attracts every year, did you know that the capital of Catalonia is experiencing many negative issues associated with this? Barcelona mass tourism is undoubtedly having a detrimental effect, so it's no surprise to hear that the patriotic locals are trying to keep the masses away from destroying the heritage they all love to cherish.

The best way for any outsider visiting a city like Barcelona to be welcomed is to show a certain appreciation for the beauty that lies within, rather than trying to take advantage and spoil the inherent look and feel of it. However, we all know that this doesn't always happen so I wanted to take a look at Barcelona as a perfect case study to see how tourism is impacting this city!

### History of Tourism

According to an article by Duran in the early 21st century, tourism in Barcelona equated to 14% of the overall economy. It's likely that this figure is still a consistent number so it's inevitable that tourism is a huge component of Barcelona's rapidly growing economy.

The history of tourism in Barcelona really dates back to the 1992 Summer Olympics which changed the direction of the city's rapid expansion. But tourism statistics are also

attributed to the well-developed investment legacies of the local governments in recent decades.

So let's take a look at some numbers...In 1990, Barcelona saw only 1.7 million visitors enter the city limits! In 2012, this number had increased to a staggering 7.4 million! We are now seeing over 8 million over the last 3 years making Barcelona the 10th most visited city around the world, and third in Europe behind only London and Paris.

### **Mass Tourism Problems**

It's all well and good having 8 million tourists wandering Barcelona's Ciutat Vella (Old City), but there are clearly a number of drawbacks that Barcelona has recently been exposed to. I recently read a really interesting article by Barcelona local resident, Yara Coelho from Heart of a Vagabond, who discussed this very topic of how [tourism is out of control and destroying the city of Barcelona](#). I think Yara hit some really key points here and certainly voiced what many locals are clearly thinking.

I decided to reflect on our experiences in Barcelona and consider some of the main issues related to mass tourism.

#### **1. Lack of Respect**

I don't care where you are traveling to, but when you enter another country or city you better be respectful of the customs, society and overall environment that you are surrounded by. Unfortunately not everyone follows these guidelines and Barcelona has been experiencing many unruly visitors taking advantage of local ideologies.

During our recent trip to Barcelona, we participated in an awesome food tour of the Gràcia neighborhood by Devour Barcelona, and our tour guide gave us a pretty cool insight into the locals impressions of tourists. As we wandered around the local market, we took several pictures of the stalls and then asked our guide if the stall owners were ok with this. She was pretty open with us when she said, "Honestly, no they are not ok with it!"

Drunken behavior is a typical reflection of tourists visiting the streets of Barcelona. With football being such a huge spectacle in this city, locals are frequently encountering drunken tourists from all corners of the globe enjoying Barça in action both before and after matches. Knock-on effects lead to vandalism and other negative social issues around the city such as drug abuse.

#### **2. Price Hikes**

Increased tourism may help diversify and stabilize the local economy, but at the same time it can have the reverse effect for local communities in that the price of living rise astronomically. The stereotypical multiplier-effect takes place through new money being

brought into the economy leading to the creation of new jobs within these industries. But what we rarely establish is just how much these new jobs are paying. Frequently these new positions reflect in the lowest paying jobs throughout the local economy!

Have you ever wondered when you walk around a ‘touristy’ neighborhood why you are paying extortionate prices for souvenirs or even day to day products? The answer is simply to look at yourself! Increased numbers of visitors leads to an influx of tourism centered industries and this even spreads into local businesses who feel the need to raise their prices simply to survive.

How does this affect local communities? Yet again it is another unfortunate negative response! I recently read an article in the British newspaper, The Daily Mail, that focused on the Barcelona demonstrations that took place in September 2014 around La Sagrada Familia. Price hikes among other reasons are simply making locals fed up with tourism and honestly I don’t blame them.

This was a quote by one of the many protestors during the 2014 events that took place in an attempt for local authorities to see what mass tourism is doing to the local economy. You may think that this is directly related to ‘lack of respect’ which I focused on first, and ultimately you would be correct! But I want to emphasize that this rude behavior is what really irks many of the locals and understandably so.

Could you imagine walking around your home town and seeing thousands of tourists walking around like it is their very own, even wandering around naked? Me either! So why should we take this approach when visiting another country?

I’m completely opposed to this and I hope that when we read posts like this it will encourage all of us to take a look at just how we travel and perhaps ALL OF US could do something a little different to really enhance our reputation.

I want to add a caveat right now that it’s a real small population of tourists that are extremely rude and I am sure most of us are vigilant and respectful. But do we go above and beyond? I will turn this over to you to take a moment and consider your response!

#### **4. Urban Gentrification and Modernization**

Arriving at Barcelona El Prat International airport for the first time, we headed to the train that would take us downtown to the heart of the city. My initial impression saw us pass through almost a rural setting with fields heavily populated with crops and a real

sense of local community as we saw farmers harvesting their products. This didn't last long as we approached the suburbs and soon after central business district of Barcelona.

Walking out of the train station, we were immediately faced with Passeig de Gracia. I will admit that my first impression was just how beautiful it was here. The hustle and bustle of city life was apparent here and I had a real feeling of a modernized society, though fortunately Gaudi's inspiration is still apparent through the upkeep of La Pedrera and Casa Batllo.

From Tiffany & Co. to Valentino, the highest profile designer stores are located along this street and everywhere you look, there is another store opening!

Urban gentrification is a familiar yet controversial concept in many cities around the world.

Many of the local neighborhoods in Barcelona are seeing low-cost housing being replaced with high-rise corporate offices or apartment complexes. A real positive vs. negative comparison has to be realized here when considering the outcome of what we can term 'urbanization' throughout Barcelona.

### 5. Beach City vs Cultural Haven

What is the first thing that springs to mind when you think about Barcelona? The answer to this question may very well depend on the type of traveler or dare I say 'tourist' that you are. Unfortunately, Barcelona is widely recognized as a beach city due to its proximity to the gorgeous Mediterranean and the pristine beaches that are available. With a perfect climate, why wouldn't you want to experience this part of Spain!

However, this is **NOT** what Barcelona is about! There is so much more to see and experience in this city and I am delighted that the Barcelona CVB is making a real push right now at focusing on "Barcelona as a cultural haven". From Gaudi inspiration to the rediscovery of modernism in the aftermath of the 1992 Summer Olympics, Barcelona is hub of cultural flair.

The key point here is that tourists are missing a lot of what Barcelona's heritage is all about. I don't want to stereotype everyone here because clearly Gaudi's leading attractions such as La Sagrada Familia and Park Guell are hugely popular, but what about some of those hidden gems that deserve more attention.

But perhaps this is a Catch-22 situation with some of the aforementioned issues as exposing some of the cultural gems to more tourism would lead to other negative consequences!

### **Summary**

Having visited Barcelona only once, I am by no means an expert on tourism in this part of the world. However, it doesn't take very long to see what is happening to such a beautiful city and I just hope that visitors to this city pay the respect that it richly deserves.

Tourism is a concept that every city strives for because it undoubtedly boosts the overall economy. Without it a city would likely be destroyed, but reflecting on Barcelona's situation it's possible that even with it, a city may be struggle to survive, at least from the locals perspective!

Perhaps this is being a little over-cynical because Barcelona is clearly thriving in many ways, but I hope this post provides a little more thinking material before you take a destination for granted.

Take a step back and think about the locals for a moment and consider how you would feel if millions of visitors walked into your homeland. You may just be surprised at the outcome!

**Source:** A Brit & A Southern



## Nothing to see here

### A number of beauty spots are severely restricting tourism

OTHERWISE law-abiding citizens confiscating drivers' keys, kettles that reek of crabmeat, and twenty-somethings unable to afford apartments; these phenomena seem unconnected. Yet locals see a common culprit: tourists. Troublesome tourists are nothing new. "Though there are some disagreeable things in Venice, there is nothing so disagreeable as the visitors," quipped Henry James. But the volume of tourists in popular destinations is new, as well as the fact that many places are restricting or even banning them.

From October visitors will be turned away from Koh Tachai island, a snorkelling paradise in Thailand, to save the coral from death by a thousand plastic fins. Sun umbrellas will go from three nearby islands, as they curb tourism too. At the height of summer some 10,000 holidaymakers per day trundle off cruise ships into the alleyways of Santorini, a Greek island. The authorities now have a cap of 8,000 a day.

In the Seychelles, the government has banned large hotel developments indefinitely. Both Barcelona and Amsterdam have banned construction of new complexes in the city centre to appease locals. That answers a common complaint of residents, which is that the fruits of tourism mostly go to large firms such as hotel groups, not to small entrepreneurs.

Blocking new Hiltons does little to stop the growth of Airbnb, a room-sharing service, another reason why some destinations have such an influx of visitors just now. Airbnb is making city living unaffordable for residents as well as crowded, many complain. Authorities in Berlin, Barcelona and Iceland have responded with new limits on it. But that is unlikely to satisfy all locals. "Tourist you are the terrorist" can be found spray-painted across a stone wall in Palma de Mallorca. In New Zealand people are confiscating car keys from tourists who (allegedly) drive badly.

This summer in Barcelona, around eight out of ten people on Las Ramblas, a famous street, will be tourists. Many residents say their homes are being “Disneyfied”. The operators of Disneyland might view that as harsh: drunk and naked tourists, a boom in illegal flat rentals, and too many knick-knack shops are bigger problems in Barcelona than in the American firm's theme parks. The city's new mayor, Ada Colau, was elected on a manifesto of clamping down on tourists.

The Chinese come in for particular criticism. One in ten international tourists now comes from China. Seychellois hoteliers are fed up with one of their habits, which is to boil fresh crabs inside the hot water kettles in their rooms. The head of New Zealand's tourism body admitted last year that the growth in the number of Chinese visitors is higher than it would like.

Mark Tanzer, head of the Association of British Travel Agents, has warned that without controls, tourists could kill tourism. But local officials will need to tread carefully when putting them in place. Tourism now accounts for nearly a tenth of global GDP, and is a reliable source of growth for many places that would otherwise struggle. In Barcelona it provides 120,000 jobs, and in the Seychelles tourism was almost two-thirds of GDP last year.

Many problems may in fact be caused as much by inadequate planning by local governments as by a surfeit of day-trippers. They can be slow to build infrastructure that could ease the burden, for instance free public toilets for those tourists who are on a tight budget. Not all are good at crafting rules that protect local ambience without discouraging tourists altogether. They'll need to get better at it. Vast crowds of visitors may be a new challenge, but it's one that is here to stay.

**Source:** Economist , Nothing To See Here, Aug 2016