# Anti-tourism protests in the Canary Islands surge with tens of thousands demanding visitor limits



As anti-tourism protests erupt across the Canary Islands this weekend, the call for visitors to "stop coming" highlights the growing frustration over the impact of mass tourism on local communities and environments. Organised marches, especially in Tenerife, are set to draw up to 132,000 participants, according to activists. These demonstrations are spearheaded by locals who argue that the influx of tourists is straining critical infrastructure and harming the natural landscape.

Ivan, an activist with the local environmental group ATAN, articulated the concerns that resonate deeply within the community. He described the situation as "critical," pointing out that the booming tourism industry, primarily driven by European visitors, has exacerbated issues such as public transport congestion, waste management failures, and water shortages. These challenges stem from the rapid increase in tourist numbers, which reached nearly 16 million in the Canary Islands last year, dwarfed only by the local population of approximately 2.2 million.

The sentiment is echoed throughout Spain, where a backlash against mass tourism is intensifying into a broader movement. Protests in cities like Barcelona, as well as across the coastal regions, have wielded significant media attention. In Barcelona, for instance, demonstrators have resorted to playful yet pointed measures, such as dousing tourists with water pistols while chanting "tourists go home." This reflects a growing trend of dissatisfaction not just in the Canary Islands, but across popular destinations facing similar issues of overpopulation and gentrification. Spanish tourism, which is a critical component of the economy, accounting for 12-13% of GDP, is now at a crossroads, as locals demand a radical overhaul of the tourism model.

Supporting the urgent aspiration for a fairer tourism framework, recent protests have resulted in the formulation of ten definitive demands by residents. These include an immediate halt to what are known as "illegal hotels" and a push for a new tax system targeting tourists. The potential implementation of a controversial tourist tax in Tenerife underscores these calls for change and addresses the critics’ accusations of prioritising profits over local welfare.

Local leaders are increasingly recognising the need for a sustainable approach. The President of the Canary Islands has signalled support for regulations that could protect housing and landscapes while balancing the economic benefits tourism brings. However, the challenge remains substantial, as immediate political action appears reluctance.

Environmental organisations like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth are voicing their support for locals, who remind the public that they are not anti-tourism, but rather advocates for a tourism model that respects and involves local communities. The local population's concerns are compounded by economic data, which reveals that 33.8% of residents in the Canary Islands face poverty or social exclusion—the highest rate outside Andalucía.

As TUI, a leading travel operator, pivots to invest in staff housing instead of further hotel development, the company's CEO, Sebastian Ebel, indicated an awareness of the discontent among residents, though he defended the tourism industry's contributions. Despite such initiatives, many locals remain skeptical. They argue that measures focusing solely on employee housing do not address the underlying issues of overdevelopment and resource depletion.

Amidst this backdrop of unrest, protesters in the Canary Islands hold onto a vision of a more sustainable and controlled tourism framework, hoping to reclaim their islands. Their message resonates beyond the archipelago, connecting with similar movements motivated by the need for sustainable development across other tourist hotspots in Europe. The urgent call for action serves as a stark reminder that while tourism bolsters economies, it can simultaneously threaten the very fabric of local communities if left unchecked.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4
2. Paragraphs 2, 4
3. Paragraphs 4, 5, 6
4. Paragraph 5
5. Paragraph 6
6. Paragraphs 5, 6
7. Paragraph 6

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/2055806/brits-told-stay-away-132k> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/04/24/locals-fear-tourism-is-consuming-the-canary-islands_6669398_4.html> - In April 2024, residents of the Canary Islands expressed growing concerns over the unsustainable impact of tourism on their region. In 2023, Spain welcomed 85 million international travelers, with the Canary Islands receiving nearly 16 million visitors, significantly outnumbering the local population of 2.2 million. This surge has led to rising rental prices, loss of agriculture, and environmental degradation. A significant demonstration took place on April 20, 2024, signaling widespread discontent. Local leaders acknowledge the need for change, pushing for regulated housing sales and introducing an eco-tax to preserve resources. The regional president calls for a tourism model overhaul, yet political leaders seem reluctant to take immediate action. Protests emphasize the urgency of protecting the islands' resources and ensuring sustainable development.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/de15a5a3-941d-4da0-b928-3da70b6e31ac> - In Europe, the backlash against mass tourism has intensified, with protests erupting in cities like Barcelona, Venice, and Amsterdam. In Barcelona, anti-tourism demonstrators doused tourists with water pistols, drawing global media coverage. This incident highlights a broader frustration among locals who feel overwhelmed by the influx of tourists, which has led to unaffordable housing, strained public services, and environmental issues. Spain, the world's second-most visited country, has seen significant anti-tourism protests, particularly in the Canary Islands, Mallorca, and coastal cities. The tourism industry, a vital economic driver contributing 12-13% of Spain's GDP, faces challenges in balancing local needs and economic benefits. Proposed solutions include better regulatory oversight, promoting high-end tourism, expanding infrastructure, and implementing degrowth strategies to limit tourist numbers. While debates continue, the challenge remains in finding sustainable methods to manage tourism without harming local communities or the economy.
4. <https://time.com/6995756/barcelona-protesters-water-pistols-tourists/> - Over the weekend, thousands of Barcelona residents protested against mass tourism, using water pistols to drench tourists in Las Ramblas and chanting 'tourists go home.' Protesters also cordoned off hotels and restaurants and displayed signs saying 'tourism kills the city.' The protests called for limiting tourism, claiming 19,600 participants compared to the police's estimate of 2,800. The city's Socialist mayor, Jaume Collboni, vowed to eliminate short-term rental properties and increase the tourist tax surcharge. The rise in tourism has led to increased expenses for the city and issues like lack of affordable housing. Similar protests have occurred across Spain, including demonstrations in the Canary Islands, Mallorca, and Málaga, where locals demanded action against overtourism and gentrification. Spain is considering a nationwide ban on tourist rentals within residential buildings to address these concerns. Other countries, such as the Netherlands and Greece, are also taking measures to control the impact of mass tourism.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/tui-offers-staff-housing-canary-islands-appease-anti-tourism-protests-2024-05-15/> - In response to anti-tourism protests in Spain's Canary Islands, European travel giant TUI has decided to invest in housing for its staff instead of hotels. Demonstrations in Tenerife and other islands have called for authorities to reduce tourist numbers to ease pressure on the environment, infrastructure, and housing availability. TUI's CEO Sebastian Ebel emphasized that the company proactively addressed the issue by offering to build employee housing, and he downplayed the extent of the protests reported in German media. Despite Ebel's claim that package tourism does not contribute to the housing crisis, TUI will not be investing in new hotels on the islands.
6. <https://www.euronews.com/2024/04/21/thousands-protest-in-spains-canary-islands-over-mass-tourism> - Protestors are calling for a freeze on tourists, arguing that the current model has made life unaffordable and environmentally unsustainable for residents. Thousands of people protested in Tenerife on Saturday calling for the Spanish island to temporarily limit tourist arrivals. Holding placards reading 'People live here' and 'We don't want to see our island die', they're urging for a stem to short-term holiday rentals and hotel construction which are driving up housing costs for locals. The protesters are being backed by environmental groups including Greenpeace, WWF, Ecologists in Action, Friends of the Earth and SEO/Birdlife. 'We are not against tourism, we are against a model that has led us to the deterioration of our land, of our people because the profits and growth of tourism are not reflected in society,' said Rosario Correa, Secretary of the 'Salvar Chira-Soria' platform. Eleven individuals from Canarias se Agota have been fasting for a week in objection to the erection of two expansive luxury projects in southern Tenerife, which they deem unlawful and entirely superfluous. According to the police, approximately 20 thousand people participated in the protests, yet organisers claimed the number to be nearer to 50 thousand as reported by Spain’s TVE public television. Rosario Correo, one of the demonstrators, told TVE, 'Our stance isn't anti-tourism. We simply advocate for a shift from this framework that permits boundless expansion of tourism.' Demonstrators also assembled in Madrid and Barcelona to express solidarity with the protests in the Canary Islands. In 2023 the islands welcomed 13.9 million visitors, while their resident population stands at 2.2 million. Tourism contributes approximately 35 per cent to the archipelago’s GDP, generating €16.9bn in 2022 alone. However, locals argue that the industry is depleting natural resources and driving up rental prices, making them increasingly unaffordable. Data from Spain’s National Statistics Institute reveal that 33.8 per cent of individuals in the Canaries face poverty or social exclusion, marking the highest proportion compared to any region except Andalucía.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/14463c4a-6bd0-4f91-b0bd-e074908c85ab> - Spain saw a record 85 million tourists in 2023, boosting its economy, where tourism accounts for 12-13% of GDP. While striving to surpass France as the top tourist destination, the surge has led to 'tourism-phobia' among locals. Residents protest against the negative impacts like new resorts, high rental prices, bad behavior, and water overuse. In response, local governments are imposing measures such as tourism taxes, holiday accommodation bans, and strict Airbnb regulations. Despite the economic success, Tourism Minister Jordi Hereu emphasizes the need for sustainable quality tourism. Spain attracts visitors for its beaches, culinary scene, and cultural offerings, with Britons forming the largest group. However, experts cite challenges in matching France's diverse attractions, including rural and agritourism.