# UK holidaymakers uneasy as anti-tourism protests escalate in Spain



# Rising Anti-Tourism Protests Cause Unease Among UK Holidaymakers

UK holidaymakers are increasingly apprehensive about anti-tourism protests in Spain, a trend highlighted by Steve Heapy, CEO of Jet2, during a recent event at the Spanish embassy in London. Heapy noted a growing perception that overseas visitors are unwelcome in popular Spanish destinations, with some potential travellers contacting Jet2’s call centre with concerns about safety and hospitality in the resorts.

The protests have been marked by striking banners with messages like “tourists go home,” underscoring local discontent surrounding mass tourism. These demonstrations have predominantly focused on the rising impact of tourism on housing costs, particularly in urban areas such as Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, and Santa Cruz. Protests in these cities have featured residents using water pistols to express their frustrations—an incident that drew significant media coverage and backlash from the Spanish tourism minister, who defended the country's welcoming tradition.

Heapy attributed part of the unrest to the rise of unlicensed tourism, particularly through platforms like Airbnb. He argues that this form of accommodation contributes to local housing shortages and undermines safety standards, stating that "unlicensed tourism needs to be controlled." He suggested imposing severe fines on hosts who fail to obtain necessary licenses and pay tourist taxes, advocating for a coherent regulatory framework to manage short-term rentals.

The situation has provoked a response from the Spanish authorities. Manuel Butler, director of the Spanish Tourist Office in London, insisted on the need to differentiate between local tensions and the overall positive sentiment towards tourism across Spain. He noted that while protests occur in some locales, the majority of the country continues to actively embrace visitors. He highlighted the efforts taken by the Spanish government, such as implementing tourism taxes and legislation aimed at regulating short-term rentals, as steps toward addressing the concerns of residents.

Spain, which significantly relies on tourism as a key component of its economy—accounting for approximately 12-13% of its GDP—welcomes over 18 million UK visitors annually, making it the most popular destination for British tourists. However, the country faces the challenge of balancing economic benefits with the needs and concerns of local populations. The rise in anti-tourism sentiment is not unique to Spain; cities across Europe, including Venice and Amsterdam, are grappling with similar issues.

In the Canary Islands, for example, protests erupted recently, with residents demanding that local authorities impose limits on tourist arrivals. Organised predominantly by environmental groups, these demonstrations reflect a broader concern over the strain mass tourism places on housing and ecological resources. With nearly 14 million tourists visiting the region last year, the implications for local infrastructure and community resources are substantial.

As local governments explore solutions to these challenges, there is a growing recognition that tourism must be managed sustainably. Measures being discussed include bans on tourist rentals in residential buildings, increased tourist taxes, and strategies for promoting high-quality, environmentally conscious tourism.

In this evolving landscape, the dialogue surrounding tourism in Spain serves as a poignant reminder of the need for collaboration between local communities and the tourism industry. The ongoing protests underscore a critical moment in the relationship between holidaymakers and residents, highlighting the necessity for thoughtful planning and regulation to ensure that the vibrancy of tourism does not come at the expense of local livelihoods and community stability.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/anti-tourism-protests-are-a-big-issue-for-uk-holidaymakers-travel-boss-warns-EQKVZLHKKFIK7IYHWRAEKSDVVQ/), [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/anti-tourism-protests-are-a-big-issue-for-uk-holidaymakers-travel-boss-warns-EQKVZLHKKFIK7IYHWRAEKSDVVQ/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://time.com/6995756/barcelona-protesters-water-pistols-tourists/), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/de15a5a3-941d-4da0-b928-3da70b6e31ac)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/anti-tourism-protests-are-a-big-issue-for-uk-holidaymakers-travel-boss-warns-EQKVZLHKKFIK7IYHWRAEKSDVVQ/), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-spains-canary-islands-over-mass-tourism-2024-04-20/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/anti-tourism-protests-are-a-big-issue-for-uk-holidaymakers-travel-boss-warns-EQKVZLHKKFIK7IYHWRAEKSDVVQ/), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spains-tourism-minister-condemns-spraying-barcelona-visitors-with-water-pistols-2024-07-11/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-spains-canary-islands-over-mass-tourism-2024-04-20/), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/de15a5a3-941d-4da0-b928-3da70b6e31ac), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spains-tourism-minister-condemns-spraying-barcelona-visitors-with-water-pistols-2024-07-11/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/anti-tourism-protests-are-a-big-issue-for-uk-holidaymakers-travel-boss-warns-EQKVZLHKKFIK7IYHWRAEKSDVVQ/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/anti-tourism-protests-are-a-big-issue-for-uk-holidaymakers-travel-boss-warns-EQKVZLHKKFIK7IYHWRAEKSDVVQ/> - Steve Heapy, CEO of Jet2, highlighted growing concerns among UK holidaymakers about anti-tourism protests in Spain. He noted that some tourists feel unwelcome due to demonstrations featuring slogans like 'tourists go home.' The protests often focus on issues such as the impact of tourism on rental rates. Heapy emphasized the need to control 'unlicensed tourism,' particularly private accommodations listed on platforms like Airbnb, suggesting fines for hosts lacking proper licenses or tax records. Manuel Butler, director of the Spanish Tourist Office in London, acknowledged local tensions but emphasized Spain's overall enthusiasm in welcoming tourists. He attributed protests in cities like Barcelona and Palma de Mallorca to broader societal issues, including housing pressures and environmental concerns. Spain remains the UK's most popular overseas destination, with over 18 million visits in the previous year.
* <https://time.com/6995756/barcelona-protesters-water-pistols-tourists/> - In Barcelona, thousands of residents protested against mass tourism by using water pistols to douse tourists in Las Ramblas and chanting 'tourists go home.' Protesters also cordoned off hotels and restaurants, displaying signs like 'tourism kills the city.' The protests aimed to limit tourism, citing concerns over housing pressures, rising living costs, and environmental strain in high-density areas. The city's mayor, Jaume Collboni, vowed to eliminate short-term rental properties and increase the tourist tax surcharge. Similar protests have occurred across Spain, including 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. ([time.com](https://time.com/6995756/barcelona-protesters-water-pistols-tourists/?utm_source=openai))
* <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-spains-canary-islands-over-mass-tourism-2024-04-20/> - In April 2024, thousands protested in Tenerife, Canary Islands, demanding limits on tourist arrivals to address rising housing costs due to short-term holiday rentals and hotel construction. Demonstrators highlighted the detrimental impact of mass tourism on local housing and the environment, with tourism accounting for 35% of the region's GDP. Organized by environmental groups, the protests urged local authorities to curb visitor numbers and foreign property purchases. Canary Islands president Fernando Clavijo acknowledged the issue and emphasized the need for stricter controls. The archipelago, home to 2.2 million people, saw nearly 14 million foreign tourists in 2023, highlighting the pressure on infrastructure and resources. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-spains-canary-islands-over-mass-tourism-2024-04-20/?utm_source=openai))
* <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, leading 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. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/de15a5a3-941d-4da0-b928-3da70b6e31ac?utm_source=openai))
* <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spains-tourism-minister-condemns-spraying-barcelona-visitors-with-water-pistols-2024-07-11/> - Spain's tourism minister condemned a small group of protesters who sprayed tourists in Barcelona with water pistols, asserting that their actions do not reflect Spain's culture of hospitality. The protest highlighted growing tension around mass tourism’s impact on housing costs. Jordi Hereu, former mayor of Barcelona, acknowledged the protest was overblown by media but stressed the need for regulations and diversification in the tourism sector. Vice-president of Exceltur, Jose Luis Zoreda, linked tensions to inadequate regulations of holiday rentals. Data from Exceltur showed a significant increase in tourists staying in holiday homes, exacerbating the housing crisis. The Assembly of Neighbourhoods for Tourism Degrowth, organizers of the protest, called for higher tourism taxes and reducing short-term tourist accommodations. Barcelona’s mayor announced a future ban on tourist apartment rentals aiming to manage housing costs. Similar issues are emerging in Lisbon, Portugal, where a referendum on short-term rentals is sought. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spains-tourism-minister-condemns-spraying-barcelona-visitors-with-water-pistols-2024-07-11/?utm_source=openai))
* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/07/22/anti-tourism-protest-majorca-balearics-spain-british-german/> - Thousands of protesters filled the streets of Palma de Majorca to demonstrate against mass tourism, with posters targeting British and German visitors. One banner, written in English, read: 'Take Back Your Drunks, Give Back Our Homes.' Another poster, mocking England’s defeat to Spain in the Euro 2024 final, read: 'The only thing coming home is you,' with a picture of one of the defeated England players. A similar sign targeted Germany, also beaten by Spain in the Euro 2024 championships. Other demonstrators made elaborate paper models of planes and cruise ships and walked through the streets of Palma with signs reading 'no cruises' and 'stop private jets.' Anti-tourism activists have staged a series of protests this year in Barcelona, Palma, Malaga, and the Canary Islands, claiming holidaymakers in tourist flats drive up housing costs and force the eviction of local people who cannot afford to live in their own cities. Spanish police said around 20,000 people took part in the demonstration, and the Melia Palma Hotel in the town put on its lights in support of the demonstration. ([telegraph.co.uk](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/07/22/anti-tourism-protest-majorca-balearics-spain-british-german/?utm_source=openai))