# Canary Islands tourists trapped as anti-tourism protests escalate across archipelago



Holidaymakers in the Canary Islands are facing dire circumstances as they find themselves barricaded within their hotels amid a surge of anti-tourism protests. Local residents, frustrated by the unchecked influx of tourists, have taken to the streets across Tenerife, Fuerteventura, El Hierro, La Palma, La Gomera, and Lanzarote, raising alarm about the social and environmental strains brought on by mass tourism that have been largely ignored by the government.

On a recent Sunday, demonstrators gathered passionately, brandishing banners proclaiming "Canarias tiene un límite" (The Canaries have a limit) and "El dinero del turismo, ¿dónde está?" (Where's the money from tourism?). The atmosphere was charged with the sounds of drums and whistles, as locals expressed their outrage against what many deem an intolerable number of visitors overwhelming their islands.

Tourism undeniably plays a crucial role in the economy of the Canary Islands, contributing a staggering 35% of GDP and employing around 40% of the local workforce. However, this overwhelming dependence on tourism has led to a cataclysmic imbalance. With nearly 18 million tourists descending on the islands each year—far outnumbering the local population of 2.2 million—residents are grappling with issues like overcrowding, infrastructural strain, and sharply rising housing costs. The proliferation of short-term rental properties has only worsened the housing crisis, forcing locals out of their own neighborhoods.

One demonstrator, Paula McKnight Morales, a local swimming instructor, articulated the struggle locals endure: "Tenerife has more tourists per year than Brazil, we simply do not have room." This exasperation reverberates throughout Spain, where anti-tourism sentiment is on the rise, manifesting not just in the Canary Islands but also in major cities like Barcelona and Valencia.

The ongoing protests in Barcelona have mirrored these frustrations, with residents resorting to dramatic tactics, such as using water pistols to douse tourists, signifying their deep-seated discontent. "Tourism kills the city," echoed through the air, emphasizing the collective grievances of communities beleaguered by an ever-increasing number of visitors. Diverse social and environmental groups have rallied behind these movements, highlighting the severity of the situation.

Protesters are demanding a drastic reduction in tourist numbers, a halt on new hotels and vacation rentals, and an eco-tax on tourism that would support conservation efforts for the islands' delicate environments, which are under continuous threat from unregulated development and waste pollution—with one striking placard reading, "tourists swim in s\*\*t," directly pointing to the environmental degradation associated with tourism.

In response to the escalating situation, the government has made vague promises. The Tourism Minister for Tenerife, Lope Alfonso, announced intentions to consult with activists to find a supposed balance between tourists and residents. However, the disillusioned protest movement remains skeptical, insisting that real actions are essential rather than empty gestures.

This unrest has coincided with a notable decline in tourism from Britain, a vital market for the islands. Reports indicate an 8% drop in British bookings year-on-year for summer 2024, as travellers reconsider their plans against the backdrop of rising anti-tourism sentiment.

Activists argue that government inaction has only entrenched the prevailing status quo, with tourists often dismissing local customs and causing significant environmental harm. The demand for stricter regulations on vacation rentals resonates deeply within community dialogues concerning housing affordability and access. With many Canarians facing social exclusion or poverty, the cost of living has escalated to an urgent concern, intertwined with the community's fight for environmental sustainability.

As protests persist, they highlight an urgent call for a tourism model that places the wellbeing of local citizens at the forefront, rather than allowing tourism to dilute the quality of life for those who call the Canaries home. It is increasingly clear: while tourism serves as a vital economic asset, without scrupulous oversight and responsible management, it could risk tearing apart the very fabric of island life.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14724875/Holidaymakers-hiding-hotels-masses-anti-tourism-protesters-storm-streets-THREE-Spanish-cities.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-against-overtourism-spains-canary-islands-2025-05-18/> - Thousands of protesters took to the streets across Spain's Canary Islands and several mainland cities to demonstrate against the negative impacts of mass tourism. Organized under the banner "Canaries have a limit," the protests aimed to pressure authorities to regulate tourist numbers, as the surge in visitors has significantly strained local infrastructure, raised housing costs, and burdened essential services. Over one million tourists arrive each month, overwhelming the islands' resident population of 2.2 million. Protesters highlighted issues such as water shortages, traffic congestion, and healthcare accessibility, particularly during peak tourist seasons. One hotel manager, Juan Francisco Galindo, described how escalating tourism has tripled hotel accommodations since the 1970s but also led to personal hardships, including a forced expropriation of his father's property for a luxury hotel project. Critics argue that government policies prioritize increasing tourist numbers over sustainable development and residents' well-being. In response, Canary Island officials visited Brussels to seek European Union funding for affordable housing. This protest joins earlier demonstrations in other Spanish hotspots like Mallorca, Barcelona, and Malaga, reflecting growing national concerns over overtourism.
3. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/04/24/locals-fear-tourism-is-consuming-the-canary-islands_6669398_4.html> - As Spain welcomes increasing tourist numbers, locals in the Canary Islands express growing concerns over the unsustainable impact of tourism on their region. In 2023, 85 million international travelers visited Spain, with predictions for 91 million in 2024. The Canary Islands have particularly felt the strain, with tourism accounting for 35% of their GDP and 40% of jobs as nearly 16 million tourists visited in 2023 compared to a resident population of just 2.2 million. Rising rental prices, loss of agriculture, and environmental damage highlight the negative consequences. 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.
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.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.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/tui-offers-staff-housing-canary-islands-to-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.
7. <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.