# Oban housing crisis worsens as short-term lets surge with American tourists



As the picture-postcard seaside town of Oban draws in an influx of enthusiastic American tourists each year, local residents face an increasingly complex challenge regarding housing availability and access to essential services. Known for its stunning sunsets and renowned seafood, Oban boasts a population of approximately 8,500, but that number swells to over 25,000 during the peak summer months. The prevalence of tourists seeking a connection to their roots has transformed the town into one of the UK’s hotspots for short-term rentals, creating a double-edged sword for its residents.

Data from Trainline highlights Oban's position as a top destination for British day-trippers, which has led to an explosion in holiday accommodations. Currently, there are 224 registered second homes, alongside more than 1,000 listings on platforms like Airbnb. This surge in short-term lets has had profound implications for the local housing market, as pointed out in a recent report from Argyll and Bute Council. The town's housing landscape has become saturated, prompting significant frustration among residents striving to find housing or even rent a property.

Local shop manager John Cuthbertson expressed his dismay, stating, “The whole town is AirBnB now.” Cuthbertson revealed that the overwhelming number of holiday lets has contributed to a housing crisis, exacerbating the struggles of professionals, including dentists and teachers, who are unable to secure accommodation in the town. His sentiments are echoed by Wendy King, owner of George Street Chip Shop, who lamented the difficulties in attracting healthcare providers due to the lack of rental options.

Oban's healthcare sector has felt the brunt of the housing crisis, with several dental practices unable to take on new NHS patients. Anecdotes from residents illustrate the lengths they go to secure dental care. One woman is reportedly travelling 170 miles from Dumfries to visit a holistic dentist in Oban, reflecting broader accessibility issues within the healthcare system.

In a bid to tackle these urgent challenges, Argyll and Bute Council recently declared a housing emergency, marking a pivotal moment in addressing the acute shortages residents face. The community council in Oban is advocating for restrictions on short-term lets, hoping to curb the trend of landlords converting long-term rentals into lucrative holiday homes. The statistics are staggering: 42% of property sales were made to buyers from outside the Argyll and Bute area, underscoring how external investment is reshaping the local landscape.

The statistics paint a sobering picture. As of November 2024, over 649 households were on a waiting list for housing in Oban, Lorn, and the Isles, compounded by the fact that 3,209 households were registered on the social housing waiting list in 2023/24. The actions taken by local authorities, including a Housing Emergency Action Plan, are an effort to mitigate these distressing trends.

In addition to housing, the town grapples with other infrastructural challenges as tourist numbers swell. Gordon MacGillivray, owner of MacGillivrays Seafood Grill, noted the heightened demand for public facilities, particularly toilets, and the acute shortage of parking spaces. “When that gets packed, the whole town stops,” he remarked, highlighting the pressing need for better traffic and parking management.

Despite these challenges, there remains a strong sentiment among local businesses for the benefits tourism brings to the economy. McGillivray expressed his fondness for the seasonal influx of visitors, stating, “The sunsets we get here are second to none. The scenery is absolutely gorgeous.” He acknowledged the delicate balance between tourism-driven growth and the potential detriment to local quality of life.

The picturesque town’s appeal continues to attract not just tourists, but also those looking for a tranquil escape from bustling city life. Ron and Vera Harrison, visiting from Cheshire, expressed their delight at returning to Oban after 15 years, appreciating its unchanged beauty. Their comments resonate with many long-term residents who have witnessed the town’s charm endure amid evolving challenges.

While Oban’s identity is closely tied to its attractiveness as a holiday destination, the pressing issues of housing and amenities persist as major concerns for local residents. The balance between facilitating tourism and ensuring the well-being of the community is crucial. As efforts to address these challenges unfold, the future of Oban will depend on a collaborative approach that prioritises both its vibrant local culture and the impact of external investment.

### Reference Map

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[[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14667585/We-live-one-Britains-popular-seaside-towns-second-home-owners-DENTIST.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)Paragraph 2:   
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## Bibliography

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