



BEST PRACTICE: BARCELONA, SPAIN



Key Challenge

Displacement and marginalisation of the local population.

Type of Solution

Adoption of a tourism strategy and monitoring framework; Stakeholder participation and management; Laws and regulations; Digital solutions.

Case Classification

Type of Destination | Urban

Territorial Level | < NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 98.21 km²

Population | 1,636,193 in 2022

Type of Tourism | Coastal, maritime and inland water; Sports; Cultural; City; Business; MICE; Gastronomy.

Tourism Organisation | Local DMO is a Public-private partnership.

Main Stakeholders Affected | Local authorities/ government; Local residents; Accommodations; Restaurants and bars; Other tourism service providers; Local businesses.

Additional Challenges Covered | Spatial and temporal concentration of visitors; Increase in the cost of living due to tourism; Deterioration and congestion of infrastructure including commercial gentrification; Insufficient or declining acceptance of tourism

Context & Background

Barcelona recorded 8,278,155 million tourist arrivals and 21,707,960 overnight stays in 2023, of which around 80% were international tourists. In addition, there are around 3.5 million cruise ship visitors and 1.6-million-day visitors. Consequently, tourism is an important part of the economy in the city, accounting for 12-14% of GDP and around 12% of jobs in 2023.

Key Challenge

Since the 1990s, the number of overnight stays by tourists has increased more than fivefold. Despite all the positive aspects of this development, the large number of tourists in the relatively small area of Barcelona is causing problems, and the displacement and marginalisation of the local population has repeatedly led to protests.



Implementation of Solutions: With the aim of maintaining the positive economic benefits of tourism, the city has adopted regulatory and steering measures to mitigate the negative social impacts of tourism in the interest of preserving the quality of life and social equity.

SOLUTIONS

- The establishment of the [*City and Tourism Council*](#) by the city government (2015) – which includes residents, representatives of the tourism industry, environmental associations, social groups and others – ensures that the opinions of residents and other tourism stakeholders is included in decision-making processes, through regular surveys of residents. This has led, among other things, to promotion and funding of local initiatives by the local authorities (e.g., for the renovation of communal spaces).
- The [*Barcelona Tourism Observatory*](#) was created to provide data for continuous monitoring of the tourism situation and fact-based decision-making in the context of sustainable tourism.
- The [*Special Plan for Tourist Accommodation \(PEUAT\)*](#), introduced in 2022, regulates the construction and short-term rental of tourist accommodation, such as short-term student housing, tourist apartments, shared apartments, hotels and hostels to counteract the rise in housing prices. In 2024, Barcelona announced that it would ban the rental of apartments to tourists by 2028 to improve the quality of life of residents.
- [*Increase of the tourist tax*](#) to finance important municipal services such as cleaning, security, public transport and lighting through the additional revenue.
- *Restrictions* have been imposed on some tourist activities, including regulations on souvenir shops, bars and restaurants (especially terraces), take-away shops and lockers. In addition, restrictions have been introduced on cruise ships. Giant ships are no longer allowed to dock at the city's ports and must dock south of the city centre. A limit of seven cruise terminals has also been introduced (previously ten).
- To reduce the pressure on congested areas and the resulting negative impact on the quality of life of locals, several measures have been implemented, including:
 - The [*Check Barcelona app*](#), launched in 2021, consisting of a city guide with real-time information on visitor flows at tourist attractions and ticket availability.
 - [*The Smou app*](#), launched in 2019, which provides residents and visitors with real-time information on road congestion and mobility options, including parking, information on public transport and other mobility services. This app is mainly used by residents.

Replicability potential: High (requires strong political will and stakeholder cooperation).

Cost & funding source: Costs and funding sources (public, private) vary depending on the initiative and project.

Success Factors & Barriers

Success Factors: Raising awareness of the importance of the regulations within the tourism sector; Residents' commitment to improve the situation; Local political leadership's commitment; The provision of good public services (mobility, transport, education, etc.); Communication with the most negatively affected stakeholders.

Barriers: Initial businesses' opposition to the regulations; Protests and aggressive discussions in public, institutional and media settings.

Results and Impacts

- Revenue from tourism tax per capita increased in 2023. The communication of the investments financed through tourism tax has generated positive feedback.
- The share of tourists using public transport to travel within the city increased to 27.7% in 2023.
- Most of the population agreed to the new tourism laws and acceptance of tourism is still high. In 2023, 70.8% of residents believed that tourism was beneficial to the community.
- The tourism market players have changed their perspective on tourism, from a purely economic one to a social one.
- As residents and other organisations were consulted, the intensity of debates gradually decreased – for example at meetings of the Tourism and the City Council – and compromises and understanding were reached.

Recommendations by the Destinations

- Prevention measures are needed to overcome overtourism.
- The implementation of all measures must be seen as a long-term process.
- Coordination and cooperation at all levels, with economic actors, residents and municipal departments are very important.
- Tourism organisations at regional and national level must also be consulted when planning and implementing measures to pursue a common line.
- For the acceptance of tourism, a correct management of tourism activities and its clear communication are of key importance.

Useful Links

[Data and Studies](#) | [Barcelona Tourism & City Council](#) | [Special Plan for Tourist Accommodation \(PEUAT\)](#) | [Observatory of Tourism](#)

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