

## MASS TOURISM: TRENDS AND ISSUES IN SPAIN

by Hilary Edge

TOURISM is the world's largest and fastest-growing industry. In 1950, 25 million people travelled abroad; by 2010 this number had risen to 940 million and generated US\$919 billion in income.

Tourism was once a luxury for the wealthy but in the 20th century, mass tourism developed. To fully understand the term **mass tourism** we need to look at several factors:

- the number of tourists in relation to the ability of the area to cope with this – known as the **carrying capacity**
- how tourists interact with the area they are visiting
- the impact tourists have on the area they visit.

If there is evidence that the local culture, economy and environment of the tourist area cannot survive independent of tourism, then mass tourism can be said to exist. But carrying capacity is very difficult to establish. For example, are 20 tourists a day climbing Ben Nevis more sustainable than 1,000 tourists on the beaches of Ibiza?

**Tourism carrying capacity** is defined by the World Tourism Organisation as 'the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction'. More recently this has been refined into a management strategy called 'Limits of Acceptable Change'. So where does Spain fit into this?

Spain has always attracted travellers interested in its sunny climate, picturesque landscape and local traditions. But the 1960s

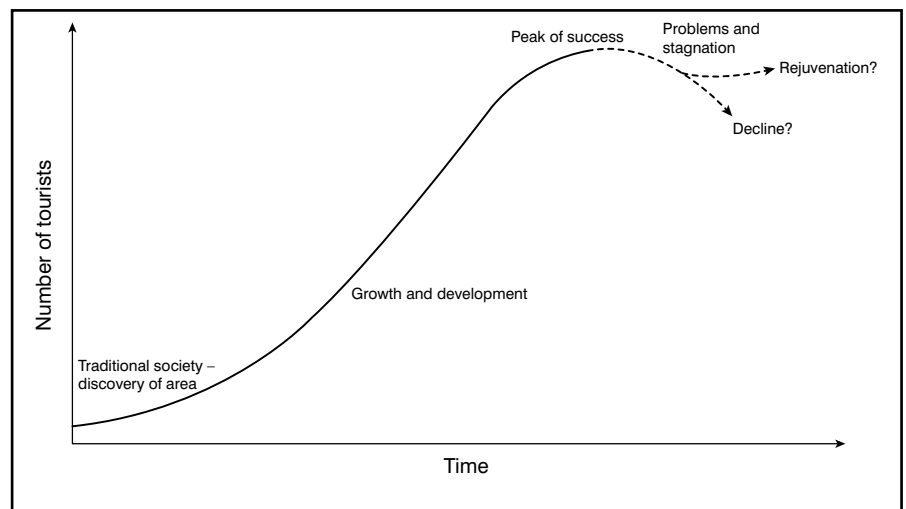


Figure 1: Tourist area life cycle model

Source: adapted from R. Butler, 1980

saw a huge increase in the number of tourists going to Spain. Today tourism makes up 10.5% of Spain's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The development of the tourist industry in the 20th century can be seen in the context of Butler's model of the 'Tourist area life cycle' (Figures 1 and 2).

The boom in tourism between the 1960s and 1980s was due to the following factors:

- a growth in incomes in northern Europe and an increase in the number and length of holidays with pay
- an attractive exchange rate which made Spain a cheaper destination
- active promotion of tourism by the Spanish government
- faster and cheaper flights – flight time London to Alicante: 2 hours
- the development of the package holiday offering 'sun, sea, sand and sangria' at an affordable price (Figure 3).

In 1975 Franco, the Spanish dictator, died, opening the way

to the development of democracy and a liberalisation of the tourism industry. In 1986 Spain became a member of the European Union (EU) and this enabled it to receive funds from the EU Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to help develop its economy. A distinct benefactor of this money has been the road system which is now well developed, and many airports have been built. However, in 2009 it was reported by AENA, the Spanish airport authority, that only 9 out of 45 airports were making a profit. These were to be found mainly on the Mediterranean coast and in the Canary Islands, with the highest income at Alicante airport, gateway to the Costa Blanca and its most famous resort, Benidorm (Figure 4).

### Benidorm, Spain's most famous resort

In the 1950s Benidorm was a small, but declining, fishing village, so the local council decided to promote tourism. However, the

| Date                        | 1960s                                         | 1970s                                    | 1980s                                                                                         | 1990s                                                                    | 2000s                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Number of tourists to Spain | 0.5 million                                   | 34 million                               | 51.3 million (1987)                                                                           | 50.9 million                                                             | 60 million (2007)<br>53 million (2010)                                                                                               |
| Type of tourist and holiday | Independent travellers visited cultural areas | Package holidays from May to September   | British buy houses as holiday homes. Retired people stay in hotels out of season very cheaply | Cheap airlines encourage independent travel using the internet           | Independent travellers including cultural, city breaks, e.g. Granada, Barcelona; golf holidays; rural tourism                        |
| Employment                  | Farming and fishing                           | Hotels, bars, shops, construction        | High % of people employed in tourism                                                          | Employment in tourism falls                                              | 12.7% of Spain's working population in tourism                                                                                       |
| Changes in tourism          | Very few tourists                             | Government encourages tourist industry   | Carrying capacity reached; start of decline in tourism                                        | Long-haul travel becomes cheaper so fewer people come to Spain           | Recovery based on diversification and all-year attractions including festivals, exhibitions, sports events, business and conferences |
| Accommodation               | Very limited – a few small hotels             | Large concrete hotels built very quickly | Apartments, villas and timeshares                                                             | Older hotels looked shabby                                               | Many different types of accommodation including farms and paradors                                                                   |
| Facilities                  | Few amenities and poor-quality roads          | Problems in towns of traffic congestion  | Marinas and golf courses                                                                      | Bars and hotels begin to close but new airports open and new roads built | New theme parks built; resorts concentrate on good-quality facilities                                                                |
| Environment                 | Clean, quiet unpolluted beaches               | Much coastal land being built on         | Dirty beaches, noise, crime                                                                   | Government begins to clean up environment                                | Spain voted country with best-quality beaches                                                                                        |

Figure 2: The development of tourism in Spain in relation to Butler's model

local mayor had the foresight to prevent cramped development in contrast to what later developed in nearby Torrevieja. Even though there are about 330 skyscrapers in Benidorm, each one has its own leisure area around it, and space for gardens, pools and tennis courts. In 1950 Benidorm had a population of 2,726 people. This number had grown by 2010 to 71,197. It is Europe's and Spain's largest holiday resort and receives 5 million tourists a year. It has a climate that is very attractive, especially to north Europeans, with 3,400 hours of sunshine a year, only 577 mm of rain and sea temperatures in winter of 15°C.

All three of Benidorm's beaches have been awarded a Blue Flag for quality and cleanliness by the Foundation for Environmental Education (see foreground of Figure 4). As well as the natural resources, Benidorm has three theme parks, hotels providing cheap, all-inclusive deals, and numerous bars and clubs, many of which provide free entertainment. Although Benidorm had a poor reputation in the 1980s for badly behaved, often drunk, tourists,

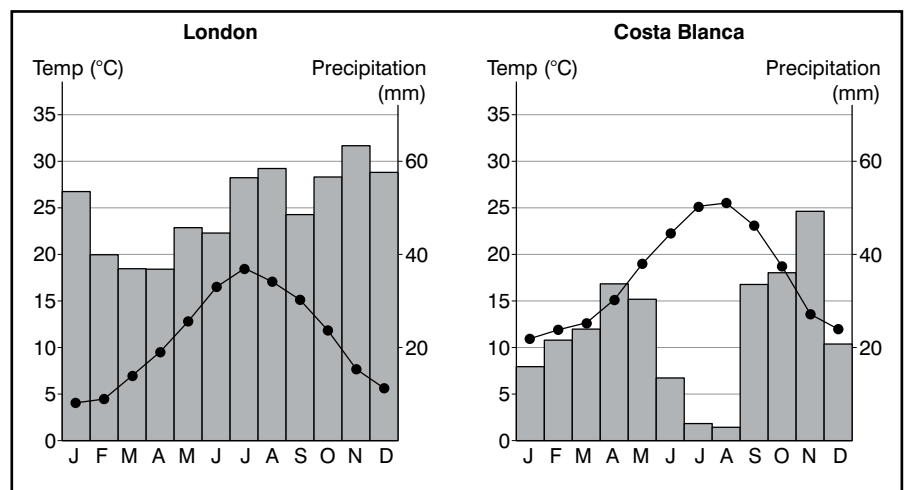


Figure 3: Sun... one reason for the growth of tourism in Spain



Figure 4: Benidorm in December

Source: Hilary Edge

## BENIDORM

### – is this the new face of eco-tourism?

Sandy beach destinations such as Benidorm don't usually attract the independent, environmentally-conscious traveller. But on a trip to this Mediterranean resort, one self-confessed eco-tourist noted that they have much going for them:

'The beach is immaculately clean and visitors can walk, rather than drive, everywhere. Street lighting is low-energy. At my hotel, all the room lights automatically switched off on leaving, and many of the water taps are foot-pump operated, which saves water. A lot of the food is locally sourced. But perhaps most significant is that the sheer volume of tourists has an environmental 'up' side: bringing in thousands of guests to such a small area limits the area on which they're having an impact.'

Figure 5: From a news report on tourism in Benidorm, May 2008

the active police presence now means that it is very popular with families and retired people. Older people report that their health is improved and that they can enjoy a much better standard of living than they could at home. Benidorm has recently tried to reduce its dependence on British and German tourists by actively promoting itself in the emerging Russian market. So Benidorm has been successful in rejuvenating itself since the decline of the 1980s and could even be considered 'green' (Figure 5), although one economy trip from Birmingham to Benidorm leaves 464 kg of carbon dioxide, whereas a trip to Cornwall would be responsible for just 84 kg.

### Some issues facing Spanish tourism

The Mediterranean climate (Figure 3), with its summer drought and mild year-round temperatures, is of course one of the main attractions to tourists. However, the lack of water, especially in the coastal tourist areas, is an issue that Spain continues to try to resolve. It has been suggested that one luxury holiday resort of about 500 hectares, with its three golf courses,

gardens and numerous swimming pools, uses the same amount of water per year as a nearby town with a population of 220,000.

In Catalonia the problem of supplying water to tourist areas has led to considerable conflict between different groups. The Spanish National Hydrological Plan (NHP) proposes the building of approximately 863 different water projects, such as large dams and water transfers. One such scheme involves transferring water from the Ebro basin south into Valencia, Murcia and Almeria (Figure 6) at a cost of €23,500 million, with the European Union, through the Regional Fund, contributing 30% of that cost.

Opponents to the scheme cite the negative, unsustainable effects on the environment, especially in the Ebro delta area. Changes in water flow, temperature and erosion rates could have a major impact on the biodiversity of the area. Their campaigns have tried to block the funding from the EU and they claim it is contrary to the European Water Framework Directive. As compensation, the Spanish government has offered an ecological grant of €0.03 per cubic metre transferred, to be invested in the environment – potentially €30 million a year. An alternative to such a scheme would be to increase the amount of fresh water from desalination plants.

### The future of tourism in Spain

Every year the Madrid Tourism Fair (FITUR) promotes Spanish tourism. In 2012 there were 200,000 visitors from 167 countries at the exhibition showing the food, wine, art, culture, history and nature that Spain has to offer. Advertising campaigns such as the 'I Need Spain' campaign are appealing to all types of visitor. Regional governments also spend large amounts on promoting tourism in other countries – for example, Murcia spent €300,000 in Germany in 2011.

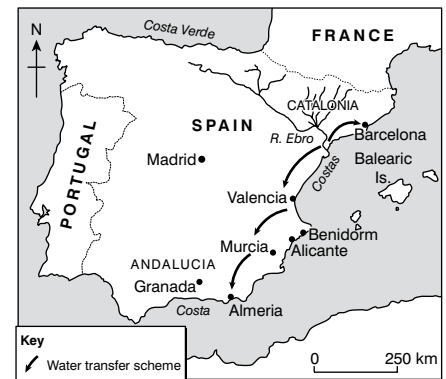


Figure 6: Water transfers in coastal Spain

In 1996, Spain overtook France and Italy in earnings from tourism, with a growth of 12% in tourism receipts as visitors looked for a more upmarket, cultural experience. By 2004, more people visited Spain independently than as part of a package, resulting in several tour companies removing previously popular areas such as the Costa Brava and Ibiza from their brochures. More recently, with the continued economic crisis in the eurozone, holiday costs have increased by a third in Spain, while countries such as Bulgaria and Turkey, which offer all-inclusive deals, are top of the cheap places to go on holiday.

Spain can only hope that new developments such as the proposed Paramount Theme Park and Lifestyle Centre in Murcia, to be built near to the new international airport, will bring in the projected 3–5 million visitors a year and create 20,000 new jobs in the area. Theme parks are very popular in Spain. The Warner Bros Park outside Madrid opened in 2002 and has been a huge success. The new development, which is due to open in 2015 just south of the Costa Blanca, could have a multiplier effect on the south-east of Spain, generating jobs in construction and boosting house prices which have fallen considerably in recent years.

# Activities

1 Using information in the text, explain why tourism in Spain developed so quickly in the period 1960 to 1980.

2 Read the description about tourism in Menorca in Figure 7. Copy and complete the table above to show the variety of attractions of the island.

Menorca is an unspoiled island located to the west of Spain in the Balearics. It has an attractive coastline with sandy beaches and small coves. The interior is hilly and covered with pine forest. The airport is located at Mahon, the capital. As in all of Spain, local fiestas (festivals) are very picturesque. The island is famous for its cheese, wine and leather. There are also plenty of golf courses, shops and restaurants as well as a water park where visitors can spend their time.

Figure 7: Attractions of Menorca

3 Study Figure 4 and identify the following features:

- Blue Flag beach – cleaned every night by tractors raking up all litter
- Litter bins
- Information sign listing local facilities
- Gran Bali Hotel – highest hotel in Europe with panoramic views across the city
- High-rise hotels with facilities around them including pools, tennis courts
- Warm sea – 15°C in winter
- Tree-lined promenade along seafront with many bars and restaurants

Now find a similar image on the internet and annotate it to show tourist-related features.

4 Draw a large copy of the tourism life cycle model, Figure 1. (a) Using Figure 2 to help you, add the years on the x axis when Spain reached the different stages of the model.

(b) Add the following labels to the correct stage on the graph:

- 1 Jane is not going to Spain this year because last year the sea was too dirty.

| Physical attractions | Human attractions |
|----------------------|-------------------|
|                      |                   |
|                      |                   |

- Pierre has taken a long time to get from France to his hotel in Catalonia.
- Jurgen is happy – he can get to his holiday villa more quickly in Andalucia because a new airport has been built.
- Jamie likes to go drinking in the clubs until 4am.
- Jose is not happy because his farmland has been taken to build a road.
- Juan has a good living as a fisherman in Benidorm.
- Olaf loves the Blue Flag beach at Benidorm – it is cleaned every night.
- Vladimir has bought a villa near Torrevieja.
- Manuel (who works for the Murcia local government) has signed a deal with Castilla La Mancha to transfer water from the River Tajo.
- Carmen has left her village and moved to the coast to work in a hotel.
- Chloe loves to stay in the Parador in Malaga and to visit the Picasso museum.
- Frank and Brenda have bought a holiday flat near Nerja on the Costa del Sol.

5 Copy the table below and put the following sentences into the correct column in your table to show the effects of tourism on an area:

- Tourist resorts are very noisy
- Lots of extra water is needed for resorts so farmers do not have enough water for their crops
- More jobs in the tourist industry
- Small villages are turned into large towns and lose their character

| Positive effects |          | Negative effects |          |
|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| Social           | Economic | Social           | Economic |
|                  |          |                  |          |

- More taxes for the Government
- There is more entertainment for people who live in the area
- Some jobs are seasonal
- Better infrastructure is developed, such as roads and airports

6 Look at Figure 8. How has the position of Spain changed since 1995? What reasons could there be for these changes?

|        | Ranking |      | Receipts (\$bn) |
|--------|---------|------|-----------------|
|        | 1995    | 2010 | 2010            |
| USA    | 1       | 1    | 110.0           |
| Spain  | 4       | 2    | 61.6            |
| France | 2       | 3    | 55.6            |
| Italy  | 3       | 4    | 45.7            |
| UK     | 5       | 7    | 36.0            |

Figure 8: Top five countries related to revenue earned from tourism

Source: World Tourism Organisation

7 Choose one area of Spain or one type of holiday in Spain and either design a brochure for it or make up an advert using photographs, music and subtitles or voiceover. Include how to get there, accommodation, activities, pictures and any other relevant information.

## 8 Discussion

The Balearic Islands introduced an eco-tax in 2002 to offset the environmental impact of tourism but it was very unpopular and was abolished in 2003. Discuss what the effects of such a tax would be and whether you think it is viable.