
Cruise ship tourism on the move: differences in Spanish ports

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Abstract

Spain is one of the most important tourist destinations in the world, which has been a reality in the last decades. At the same time, Spain has grown up as one of the mayor cruise ship destinations in Europe, being the second country after Italy. However, this growth has not been accompanied by a mayor participation by the Spaniards, which participation is lower than 1% of the population.

Spanish ports show great differences in attraction capacity that is also reflection of its segregation in two seas: the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. While the second is one of the mayor destinations in the world, for tourism in general and particularly for cruise ship tourism, in the Atlantic, cruise ship tourism has a much lower impact.

This paper analyses the differences between both seas and the differences between ports situated in the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean.

On one hand, Barcelona is one of the world's leading ports and by far the most important cruise ship destination in the Mediterranean and in Europe. This is a good result for the hospitality and tourism segment, but social problems appeared recently that recommend a different way of management. On the other, ports like Tarragona, Valencia, Alicante, Cartagena and others are struggling in their intention to attract more cruise ships to their destination.

The Spanish Atlantic is even in a more difficult position as it is not part of the mayor cruise ship routes, which are the Mediterranean and the European North. Ports like Huelva, in the south, or Vigo, La Coruña and Bilbao in the north, among others, are working hard to attract more cruise ships. Additionally, the Canary Islands are a destination on its own, yet it is complicated to create a route from the continent to this islands ore to combine them with African ports.

As a preliminary result of an ongoing research project about the economic and social implications of cruise ship tourism in Spain, the paper will analyse the different port and destination management of several Spanish ports: Barcelona, Valencia, Cartagena, Málaga in the Mediterranean, Sevilla as a fluvial destination and Vigo in the Atlantic and Santa Cruz de Tenerife at the Canary Islands.

The paper shows that economic, social and territorial impacts are very diverse between the different ports and that destination and port management has to be adapted to this reality.

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