

Barcelona aims to become Airbnb-free zone by 2029

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Tourists crowd Las Ramblas alley in Barcelona.

Barcelona, one of Europe's most visited cities, said Friday it aims to ban apartment rentals to tourists by 2029 to ease the housing shortage in Spain's second largest city.

The licenses for the 10,101 apartments currently approved as short-term rentals which are available on platforms such as Airbnb and Homeaway will not be renewed when they expire in November 2028, Barcelona's leftist mayor, Jaume Collboni, told a news conference.

"The city cannot allow such a large number of flats to be used for tourist activity at a time of difficulty of access to housing and when the negative effects of tourist overcrowding are obvious", he added.

This means that "from 2029", if there are no setbacks, "tourist flats as we conceive of them today will disappear from the city of Barcelona".

Cities like Berlin, Paris and Barcelona say home-sharing websites for tourists deprive locals of apartments for long-term rent and push up prices for homes remaining on the market.

Collboni said the boom in short-term rentals in Barcelona had helped push up rents by 68 percent in the city, and the cost of buying a house by 38 percent.

"We are confronting what we believe is Barcelona's biggest problem," he said.

His predecessor, former housing activist Ada Colau, suspended the issuing of new licenses for tourist apartments and banned the opening of new hotels in the city's most popular areas as part of efforts to curb over-tourism.

But that has not prevented the number of visitors to the city, which is known for its Belle Epoque architecture, museums and beaches, from continuing to increase, especially after pandemic travel restrictions were lifted.

Several local associations have called for a demonstration on July 6 with the slogan: ""Enough! Let's put a stop to tourism!"".

The rally will come on the heels of other similar demonstrations held in recent months in other Spanish tourism hotspots such as the Canary Islands and Palma de Mallorca.

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