

## Activity 5:

### Discussion on Negative Impacts

#### Crowds and cruise ships have 'ruined' Dubrovnik

By Jane Foster, Destination expert

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Dubrovnik, the city once described by the great romantic poet Lord Byron as the Pearl of the Adriatic, is at risk of being blighted by an overwhelming number of visitors, locals have warned.

Sturdy medieval defensive walls, reinforced with 15th century towers and bastions, have protected the Croatian complex against manmade and natural disasters for 800 years, but now the UNESCO World Heritage Site faces another threat: tourist overcrowding. Last August, in one day alone, 10,388 visitors bought tickets to walk the ramparts, a record number. That could be topped this summer.

The situation is similar to that currently being experienced by Venice, where locals have taken to the water to protest the city's soul is being ripped out by wave after wave of day trippers.

“The crowds and the noise are forcing people out,” says Marc van Bloemen, who has lived in the city since the Seventies.

In peak season it can take 40 minutes to walk the Stradun, the city's 300-metre pedestrian thoroughfare, while there remains only one bar left truly frequented by locals. The fish market in the Old Harbour no longer opens. Come the winter, the Old Town is deserted but for film crews - Game of Thrones, Star Wars and Robin Hood have all featured the city.

Last year, UNESCO sounded the alarm bells by warning that Dubrovnik's

world heritage status was at risk, highlighting concern about “the maximum number of tourists in regard to the sustainable carrying capacity of the city” and “management of cruise ships”. In response, in January 2017, the former Mayor of Dubrovnik, Andro Vlahusić, launched a hasty plan to limit number of entrants to the Old Town to 8,000, installing 116 surveillance cameras, to count people entering and leaving the fortified complex.

The statistics do not bode well for this summer. In 2016, 529 cruise ships called at Dubrovnik, bringing 799,916 passengers, up from 475 ships in 2015 and 463 in 2014.

“ Passengers have only about three hours, after docking and disembarkation – 16 hours should be the minimum,” says Marc van Bloemen. Other locals agreed, but asked not to be named. Besides arriving all at once, and thus creating queues, the cruise ship passengers spend very little money ashore. They don't have enough time in the city to do much more than walk the walls and buy an ice cream – very few have lunch as they get all-inclusive meals on their ships. Overheard comments in the Old Town include: “Excuse me, what country are we in?” and “What do you mean, you don't take Euros? The whole of Italy takes Euros.”

“There is a limit of 8,000 cruise ship passengers in Dubrovnik at any one time,” says Sandra Milovčević from the Dubrovnik Tourist Board. “Ships vary in size, so there is no limit on the number of ships, only the number of passengers.” However, on the Dubrovnik Port Authority website, they acknowledge that this number is sometimes exceeded, especially in July and August.

Dubrovnik's status as a World Heritage Site is to be reviewed for several reasons. “The most important ones are the absence of both a city management plan, and a tourism strategy focusing on cruise ship tourism,” explained local councillor Ljubo Nikolić. “The Institute for the Restoration of Dubrovnik (delegated by the City Council) has made a great effort to develop a detailed city management plan, which should be deployed by 2019. The tourism strategy document has stalled and I have no information whether that project is continuing.”

So who is responsible for cruise ship tourism? “The main negotiator with the cruise companies is Dubrovnik Port Authority, governed by the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, Transport & Infrastructure,” said Nikolić. “Since the intention is to let the port management to a foreign concessionaire, with no exact plans to limit the number of visitors, or synchronise the number of visitors with the city management plan, our concerns remain.”

Indeed, the Dubrovnik Port Authority website carries a call for public tender for concessions, dated September 2014: “Given the attractive location and constant growth of the number of passengers, the Port of Gruž foresees the construction of a passenger terminal for embarkation and disembarkation of passengers with accompanying facilities such as shopping mall, commercial garage facility and the construction of a bus terminal.”

Source:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/croatia/dubrovnik/articles/dubrovnik-faces-overcrowding-cruise-ship-visitors-/>