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Barcelona Area Is Latest Tourist Spot Targeted

Las Ramblas attack comes as Spain draws record number of visitors



People react after a vehicle crashed into pedestrians in Barcelona's Las Ramblas area on Thursday. PHOTO: DAVID ARMENGOU/EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

By Pietro Lombardi

Updated Aug. 17, 2017 8:14 p.m. ET

When a terrorist's van rammed pedestrians in Las Ramblas, it struck one of the most popular tourist destinations in Europe.

Las Ramblas, a tree-lined promenade dotted with sidewalk cafes, restaurants and bars that is less than a mile long, is the heart of Barcelona, Spain's second city and a destination for tens of millions of visitors a year. The summer is peak season, when the largely pedestrian boulevard spills over with shoppers, street performers and theatergoers.

But Thursday evening, Las Ramblas was a grim place. Hours earlier, scores of people lay injured on the ground, as police cordoned off sidewalks that had been full of young families, tourists and couples earlier in the day.

"I don't recognize the area," said Zuzanna Smyk, a 37-year-old Pole who has lived in Barcelona for 15 years. "Now it's a ghost city."

The attack in Barcelona comes at a time when Spain—which has emerged from an economic downturn with fresh confidence—is drawing a record number of visitors, as tourists avoid other spots in the Middle East, Turkey and France out of fears of terrorism. This year, Spain is expected to receive about 80 million visitors.



The world was shaken yet again by a terrorist attack, this time in Barcelona, Spain, where a van plowed into a crowd of people. WSJ's Carlo...

For many of those visitors, Barcelona is a must stop, a vibrant city that has been on an upsurge since it hosted the Olympics in 1992.

Las Ramblas is "for Barcelona what Times Square is for New York," said Fernando Baños Lucena, a student who works in a restaurant nearby to pay for his studies.

On Friday, the city will observe a minute of

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plowed into a crowd of people. WSJ's Gerard R. Seib gives us three takeaways on what the attack means about current terror threats. Photo: AP

silence to remember the victims of the attack.

“Barcelona has always been a city of peace, dialogue, democracy, open to the world and

proud of its diversity,” said Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau at a news conference on Thursday. “It is a cosmopolitan city and will continue to be a cosmopolitan city.”

The attack is the latest in a string to hit soft targets in Europe. As Islamic State comes under growing pressure in Syria and Iraq, it has claimed a series of assaults in Western capitals, frequently aimed at people at their most relaxed and using easily available weapons such as vehicles and knives.

In the U.K., which prides itself on its extensive security, three attackers rampaged in early June across London Bridge and through the buzzing bar-and-restaurant Borough Market area in a car-and-knife attack, killing eight, just weeks after a suicide bomber killed 22 at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester.

More on the Barcelona Attack

- [Full Coverage: Assault in Barcelona](#)
- [Barcelona Attack: What We Know](#)
- [Spanish Police Hunting for as Many as Three Terror Suspects](#)
- [Islamic State Claims Responsibility](#)
- [Area Is Latest Tourist Spot Targeted](#)
- [Attack Shows Limits of Security Efforts](#)
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In December, an attacker in a semitrailer plowed through a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12 people. In the wake of the attack, police immediately began stationing police and installing concrete barriers outside large markets—even as politicians noted that it would be impossible to barricade every market in the country.

A truck driver in July 2016, ripped through Bastille Day revelers in Nice, France’s seaside promenade, killing many who had pack in to see celebratory fireworks. That attack came after a series of terrorist acts, including a coordinated

2015 massacre in a Paris nightlife district and soccer stadium that left more than 100 people dead, that put the country on high alert and prompted a national state of emergency that still stands.

Some 7,000 soldiers have been deployed across the country to protect government offices, schools, places of worship and tourist attractions. There have been roughly a dozen attacks in France since the Paris rampage—more than half of those were targeted at military patrols or police.

“These things shouldn’t happen,” said Yi Yang, a 29-year-old Chinese tourist who was visiting Barcelona with her boyfriend.

They heard people screaming and hid until the danger had passed. The couple will probably remain indoors until they leave Spain, she said. “Every tourist area feels unsafe,” she added.

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