



Their Towns Overrun With Tourists, Some Italians Cry, 'Basta!'

Officials squabble over limiting visitors to holiday hot spots like Venice, Florence and Capri

A cruise ship gives passengers a view of St. Mark's Square in Venice. MAURO PICCARDI/ALAMY



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By *Pietro Lombardi*

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In Capri, a squabble between two mayors—who are also cousins—highlights a larger debate throughout Italy. While tourism is an important revenue source, many Italians up and down the Italian peninsula would like tourists—at least some of them—to stay away.

Last year, Giovanni De Martino, the mayor of Capri, was fed up. He watched as ferries arrived from the Italian mainland in rapid succession, disgorging tourists—many budget day-trippers—every five minutes, only to face hourlong waits to board the cable car from the port to the town's center.

Worried that the hordes were endangering the island's charm and exclusivity, Mr. De Martino launched a push to reduce the frequency of the ferry arrivals to every 20 minutes.

But the mayor soon faced a bitter foe: his own cousin, Francesco Cerrotta, mayor of Anacapri, the only other town on the island. Mr. Cerrotta immediately took up the fight against his cousin's attempt to slow the tide of visitors.

"Someone in Capri still dreams of Jacqueline and Onassis strolling along Via Camerelle," Capri's main drag, Mr. Cefrotta told Italian media. "Capri needs glamour. But it also needs to fill hotels, restaurants and shops."





A crowd of tourists at the Trevi Fountain in Rome. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Still, recent incidents, such as two tourists swimming nude in the Trevi Fountain and another diving off Venice's Rialto Bridge, have only strengthened officials' determination to find ways to keep the hordes at bay. The number of tourists arriving in Italy topped 52 million in 2016, up nearly 30% since 2000.

But authorities are finding it devilishly difficult to stop tourists from coming. Efforts to limit incoming visitors are colliding with legal, business and practical challenges.

In Florence, a 2016 city decree raising the cost of entry tickets for tourist buses was, in part, struck down by a regional court. The city appealed the decision, winning a temporary suspension of the ruling.

The Cinque Terre, the tiny fishing villages on the Italian Riviera, drew 2.5 million visitors last year, 500 times the local population. In response, local officials unveiled a plan this spring to cap the number of tourists allowed onto the picturesque walking trails connecting the five towns. Despite protests, the system got under way in June.

Venice, which each year sees 15 million day trippers pour into an area five times the size of New York's Central Park, has heard more calls from locals and some politicians to limit access to the floating city. But the idea has gone nowhere, in part due to legal hurdles.

"We don't want to close the city," said Paola Mar, head of tourism for the city. "And the law doesn't permit it."

Earlier this month, Venetians held a symbolic referendum calling for something to be done about the huge cruise ships that disgorge millions of tourists each year and sail perilously close to St. Mark's Square. They are angry that a 2012 government decree calling for them to be rerouted is so far a dead letter.

Some smaller destinations enjoy a special legally protected status that gives them a free hand in checking the flow of tourists. For instance Pinosa, a small island off the Tuscan coast, accepts only 330 people a day, while its neighbor Montecristo allows 1,000 a year. Video surveillance cameras help authorities to enforce the limits.



In Capri, ferries arrive from the Italian mainland every five minutes, disgorging tourists—many of them budget day-trippers. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

In Capri, Mr. De Martino's plan to limit ferry service was squelched by regional authorities. But the two cousins have continued to fight over everything from limiting the circulation of huge tourist buses to improving the port to accommodate the flow. "Capri has borne the brunt of unchecked arrivals...we need to do something," Mr. De Martino argues.

This spring, when a fresh surge in crowds on the island sparked new calls for a cap on the number of visitors, the two cousins were again at odds. Over a long holiday weekend in June, almost 45,000 people, mostly day trippers, came to Capri, three times the local population.

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