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## Hotels wake up to urban blight as tourists desert Spanish resorts

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By Elizabeth Nash, *The Independent*

Excessive urban development of Spain's Mediterranean resorts is driving away foreign visitors and damaging the vital tourist industry, the country's leading hotel conglomerates have warned.

Over-development of top tourist regions risks alienating holidaymakers, according to Exceltur, which represents Spain's biggest tourist companies.

"Foreign tourists remain for shorter and shorter periods in Spain. This change coincides with the accelerated process of urbanisation along the Mediterranean coast and in the Balearic and Canary Islands," the organisation says in a report.

"To pursue a strategy of tourist growth based on these rates of construction could transform many Spanish resorts into urban areas, with no guarantee of long-term profitability."

This is the first time major players in Spain's biggest industry have echoed criticisms long voiced by environmental campaigners.

If present construction rates continue, Exceltur warns, water and energy consumption in these arid regions will triple, and beaches will become too small for increasing numbers of sunseekers.

The hoteliers, which include big names such as Iberia and Sol Melia, blame regional authorities for promoting mass development of holiday homes. Britons are at the forefront of foreigners snapping up these new homes.

"The authorities give priority to growth by volume. This is beginning to outstrip what the terrain can support." Short-term speculative development is, in other words, undermining the country's most important industry.

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The big operators even share the greens' concerns for the erosion of beaches. In 20 out of 26 tourist spots examined by Exceltur, visitors complained the streets and beaches were now blighted by overcrowding. Nearly 70 per cent of top resorts offer less than six square metres of beach per holidaymaker, "the minimum recommended by the EU", the report notes.

The decline in quality tourism has been a worry for some years now, as cheaper eastern competitors have lured away those who once flocked to Spain.

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