

Majorca Daily Bulletin

Thursday, February 9 2017

1.10€ · Founded 1962 · N.16197 · Passeig de Mallorca 9 A,
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**Top film in English for Valentine's Day:
See What's On Guide, Inside Today.**



FREEZING MAJORCA

- Large amounts of snow fall in mountain areas as the "cold snap" returns with freezing conditions across the island.
- See Page Three.

British tourism to Spain hits record despite pound's post-Brexit fall



THE number of British tourists visiting Spain jumped by the most in over a decade to hit a record in 2016, defying expectations of a slowdown in bookings after June's Brexit vote and the subsequent tumble in sterling.

The trend looks set to continue into this year, with British early bookings for 2017 summer holidays in Spain up 16 percent on last year, according to travel market analysts GfK. Spanish economists and policymakers had feared tourism, which accounts for around 11 percent of economic output, would be hit by sterling's fall in value against the euro after the British vote to leave the European Union.

For years, Britons have been the biggest group of tourists to Spain by nationality. The pound has shed just over 10 percent against the euro since the 23 June referendum and some see it weakening further once EU divorce talks begin. But like predictions of a swift Brexit-led slowdown in the British economy, these concerns appear misplaced.

The number of Britons visiting Spain rose by over 12 percent last year, to 17.8 million people, as security worries in holiday destinations such as Tunisia, Turkey and Egypt led them to seek sun closer to home. That is over six million more than the next biggest group by nationality - the French. "We have been very happy with the

figures - instead of a fall there's been a sharp rise," said Cristobal de la Rosa, vice-councillor of tourism in the Canary Islands, an archipelago and popular winter sun destination off the coast of West Africa.

British tourist Alison Moore, who has been visiting the Canary Islands since the 1980s, said the fall in currency had not affected her decision to visit Tenerife, the largest of the seven islands, this year.

"Tenerife is the place we go back to every year for a January week and a bit of sun," said the 57-year-old garden designer from Cheshire. "It's a short flight and even with the pound it's a relatively cheap destination."

The government of the Canary Islands, the second most visited region of Spain last year after Catalonia, has set up a Brexit committee which meets every couple of months to monitor the progress of Britain's exit from the European Union, vice-councillor de la Rosa said.

Representatives from industries including tourism and agriculture sit on the committee, de la Rosa said. The tourist industry wants to keep travel to Spain as easy as possible once Britain leaves the EU, he said, for instance avoiding any introduction of visas for Britons entering Spain.

The Canary Islands, where more than one in three tourists is British, has worked to reinforce the links with Britain which date back to the 19th century, when Britons stayed at grand hotels on the islands, believing the climate and waters to be beneficial for health.

Tenerife launched a 'Hug a Briton' campaign encouraging locals to embrace British tourists and post photographs of encounters on social media to signal affection towards Britons in the wake of the vote.

"It was absolutely lovely," said Dawn McIntyre, a commercial refurbishment manager from Newcastle and regular visitor to the island.