

Majorca Daily Bulletin

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Inside today: our focus on the north of the island

Tourism industry fears 'no-deal' Brexit will cost it billions

Travel specialists say the overseas tourism industry could lose billions over the next five years if Britain crashes out of the European Union later this month without a divorce deal.

With just three weeks to go until Britain's scheduled departure from the bloc, the two sides have yet to agree a mutually acceptable deal.

Executives at the ITB travel trade fair in Berlin said many holidaymakers were in wait-and-see mode as uncertainty over visas, insurance and whether they will need an international licence to drive in EU countries weighed on sentiment.

"Brexit is a concern," Mark Okerstrom, chief executive of online-book-

ing platform Expedia told reporters, adding it had seen a significant slowdown in people booking flights from and to the UK beyond the scheduled March 29 departure date. Consultancy firm Oxford Economics said a no-deal Brexit could cause a 5 percent fall in overseas travel and tourism trips by Britons in 2020. Market researcher Euromonitor said it would curb overseas spending by \$5.3 billion between 2019-2025.

"We're not seeing that people aren't booking at all, but they are waiting a bit longer to make their decisions," said Christoph Debus, Chief Airlines Officer at Thomas Cook Group, adding Brexit would hit tour operators harder than airlines.

● Spain, the most popular destination for British sunseekers who accounted for 9 percent of foreign visitors last year, is seen as the biggest loser from a

Caroline Bremner, Head of Travel Research at Euromonitor, said tour operators were trying to encourage early booking with flexible payment deals, low deposits and free child places, while some destinations, like Greece, have cut their prices. Spain, the most popular destination for British sunseekers who accounted for 9 percent of foreign visitors last year, is seen as the biggest loser from a no-deal Brexit, which could wipe off more than \$1 billion in spending between 2019-2025, according to Euromonitor. Seeking to protect an industry which accounts for 12 percent of its economy, Spain last week approved a decree guaranteeing British residents and tourists access to health-care for a specific time.

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Turkey, which is rebounding following bomb attacks in 2016, is pitching itself as a value-for-money destination due to the pound's relative weakness against the euro, while Tunisia is sending a delegation to a London travel fair next month.

Britain's tourism industry is also concerned that European tourists could stay away. Visit Britain warned in February of a sharp fall in European flight bookings for after March 29.

"The government needs to do more to improve sentiment towards the UK from visitors from continental Europe, which remain its largest market," Kate Nicholls, chief executive of lobby group Hospitality UK, told a hotel investment forum in Berlin.

"JUST ONE MORE PUSH" TO GET BREXIT, BRITAIN'S MAY URGES EU: SEE INSIDE

