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### World

# Ibiza rises up against blight of tourism

A six-lane highway is the last straw for a holiday island threatened by runaway development

**Dale Fuchs and Giles Tremlett in Madrid**  
**Sunday February 26, 2006**  
[The Observer](#)

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Pere Torres Casetes, a 53-year-old bank director in Ibiza, is not the type to relish sitting on vigil in front of a bulldozer. In fact, the father-of-three says he had never joined a protest rally in his life - until the trucks started to roll for the construction of a €260m freeway on this Mediterranean party isle. For the past three weeks, he has joined thousands of residents on this famously laid-back island who have marched, picketed and even lain down in front of tractors to block the expropriation of hundreds of homes. They see the 25km of freeway as a symbol of the mounting development - golf courses, marinas, hotels, apartments - encroaching on this tiny island, only 14km wide and 42km long.

'The police had to remove us by force,' said the banker, who added that his field of tomatoes and melons has already succumbed to construction crews. 'It's unusual for the people to protest so much here, but it's incredible what's happening. It's not just my house; it's all of Ibiza they're going to damage. I love this island and I plan to defend it until I can't take it any more.'

The outrage over the highway - a necessary infrastructure improvement that will prevent traffic accidents, according to the conservative local government - has mobilised tranquil Ibiza residents like Torres Casetes as never before. An anti-highway rally last week drew more than 20,000 people, nearly 20 per cent of Ibiza's year-round population. Two previous protests also drew thousands. Demonstrators gasped about the six-lane stretches. They groaned about what they saw as a useless expense on a spit of land that can be crossed by bicycle. And they speculated about the politicians, developers and hotel owners who stood to benefit from the road, which would link the airport, the Ibiza capital and the town of San Antonio.

'The highway is the straw that broke the camel's back,' said Hazel Morgan, president of Friends of the Earth in Ibiza. 'It's just horrendous. It has a tunnel and enormous fly-overs and cement walls up to 30 metres high. It doesn't fit the image of Ibiza any way at all.'



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Morgan, 61, left her native Sussex 32 years ago to enjoy 'the almond trees, little white painted houses and all the lovely things that are slowly disappearing' on the Spanish isle. Now, like the banker Torres Casetes, she has spent each morning this month at one of the homes slated for demolition, waiting for word on where the next bulldozer would strike. As news traveled by cell phone at the impromptu headquarters of the anti-highway movement, she and hundreds of volunteers have scurried to the front, placing their bodies before the heavy machines. As many as 80 Civil Guardsmen have been called in to escort the bulldozers, according to press reports. Morgan once said she was physically lifted away by police after five hours.

The angry Ibiza protesters join a growing number of Spaniards and resident foreigners who are publicly venting their anger at planned construction, especially on the sunny, tourist-filled coasts. On Saturday, demonstrators denounced the 'unchecked urbanisation' in front of the city hall in Valencia. And in March, a protest is planned for the small Alicante village of Parcent, where officials have approved the construction of 1,700 new homes. The building spree would swell the population from 1,000 to 5,000 people in three years, 'overwhelming' services like water, education and health care, said Jacqueline Cotterill, member of a group of residents who oppose the plan. 'They have so much power, the builders and the politicians,' she said. 'They are really trying to stamp these plans through. It is hard to fight against, especially in little villages like ours.' Sometimes, residents like Cotterill do win, however. In Alhama de Murcia, a town of 17,000 people, the vote of one rebel politician halted the planned construction of eight golf courses and 60,000 homes - at least for the time being.

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