

## Tourism boom triggers Athens backlash

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Dhaka: Athens' historic Plaka district, nestled beneath the Acropolis, is facing growing strain from overtourism.

Longtime resident Giorgos Zafeiriou, who heads the neighborhood's residents' association, says the area is becoming "unrecognisable" amid crowds, noise, and tourist traffic.

The Greek capital expects 10 million visitors in 2025, up from 8 million last year. Once seen as a transit stop, Athens is now a top global destination. Plaka, often called the "neighbourhood of the gods," welcomed millions last year through its narrow streets, lined with ancient churches, cafes, and relics from Antiquity.

Heritage advocate Lydia Carras warns the area is losing its identity: "We cannot see it lose its soul."

While tourism boosts Greece's economy, locals voice concerns over

rising rents, rule violations, and loss of livability—mirroring protests in cities like Barcelona and Venice.

Mayor Haris Doukas says Athens is among the top 10 most-visited cities globally, but admitted Plaka is “saturated.” An intervention unit has been launched to enforce public space rules and curb illegal practices.

A 1993 decree had restricted nightlife and hotel growth in the area, but lawyer Dimitris Melissas says the rules are now being bypassed. He’s taken 16 properties to Greece’s top administrative court, arguing they operate as illegal hotels. A ruling is due in September.

Plaka’s 2,000 residents are often outnumbered by tourists four to one in peak season. Despite a one-year ban on new short-term rentals in central Athens, Melissas doubts its impact. “The problem in Greece isn’t the laws—it’s enforcing them,” he said.

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