



Councillor of tourism, trade and transport Alejandra Ferrer took the occasion of a recent Formentera Council plenary meeting to summarise her office's work over the last year.

Ferrer opened her address with a report on tourism and the findings of entry and exit surveys given to visiting tourists in 2014. According to respondents, the island's most attractive characteristics were its beaches, natural beauty, nature and climate, though cleanliness and safety were also high on the list.

As for aspects that could be improved upon, respondents pointed out “excessively high prices, noise pollution and excessive commercial development.”

Councillor Ferrer said that the work of local government must be to “regulate, delimit and maintain our natural resources on the island. [We must] ensure that Formentera remains a unique quality destination, but most importantly, we must protect the high quality of life of our residents.” Said the councillor: “The majority of locals share this belief, as we've seen in the last several meetings of the Council of Entities.”

Councillor Ferrer rued her office's lack of resources for tourism-related promotions and said that such resources needed to come from Mallorca, “which also happens to be one of our competitors in this area.” The councillor spoke of work by the administration and local business owners to raise the bar in terms of quality standards at tourist-oriented businesses. She also cited changes that have allowed residents to request permission to accommodate tourists, thus providing the proper channels to legally open and operate such businesses.

In a related subject, Councillor Ferrer also spoke about the initial success of proposed guidelines for tourist accommodations. For the time being the guidelines are temporary, but if the advisory council created to that effect issues a favourable report, the regulations will soon become definitive. Ferrer reported that at the end of October the Citizen Information Office (OAC) had received more than 200 inquiries on the subject.

Ferrer explained: “The goal is to assure a high-quality product for tourists, and for those dwellings that don't meet requirements, our work is to discourage owners from continuing to rent illegally. The goal must be to encourage owners of these other dwellings – those that don't meet the established tourist quality standards – to instead open them up to year-long renters. The demand for year-long accommodation is currently extremely high.”

Ferrer also talked yesterday about two more of the tourism office's recent undertakings: first, the inclusion of a reservations portal on Formentera's official tourism website (formentera.es) and second, continued vigilance to ensure businesses abide by established operating hour and noise regulations – “all part of the effort to make tourism on the island compatible with the repose of local residents.”

Ferrer explained that the goal of Formentera tourism promotion was still “diversifying markets to improve our figures in the beginning and end of the tourist season.” She thanked the local tourism industry as well as local restaurants and other businesses for their efforts and noted the collaboration of these establishments in pre- and post-season cultural programming. At next weekend's World Travel Market tourism industry trade show, representatives from Formentera will present brand-new promotional material that pitches the island as a destination for vacationing families.

Councillor Ferrer also expressed her satisfaction with recently-published figures qualifying the 2014 tourist season. The statistical findings, which place September occupancy on the island at its highest point in six years, also demonstrate clear improvements in the month of May (the rate of occupancy during that month increased by seven points, from 38% to 45%). Another important factor according to Councillor Ferrer: “Market diversification is greater now than it has been in recent years. This is helping us reach our objectives.”

In transportation, the councillor highlighted the details and impact of a recently-revised directive concerning public transport for Formentera's visiting tourists. Revisions to the directive have meant that five new chauffeur permits and one chauffeur permit for a handicap-accessible vehicle have been issued this year, a change Ferrer qualified as “extremely positive”. Councillor Ferrer also reported that “new ad campaigns for buses and an information stand at the port – together with physical changes made to the island's bus stops – have contributed to an overall improvement in the public transport service.” The councillor of transport reported that a reordering of public transport within the limits of the Ses Salines National Park was underway, declaring, “we want to ensure that this natural haven is enjoyed by all – and reduce the reigning

feeling of overwhelming crowdedness.”

Councillor Ferrer also spoke about the Council's current collaboration with electric car rental agencies and the growing size and importance of that niche. She used the occasion to hint at “an upcoming announcement regarding Formentera's nature trails,” called *rutes verdes*. “The *rutes verdes* project aims to collect and compile information on Formentera's network of small country roads into one single place. We hope that such a resource will lead to an increase in the number of people choosing to cycle or walk.”

When given the floor, Cristina Costa of the GUIF praised the local tourism advisory board – el Patronat de Turisme – for its work and effectiveness. Asserting that “tourism here in Formentera works,” Costa outlined a plan “to bring quality” to local tourism, calling for more checks on noise levels in Es Pujols and police stops on the Illetes portion of the highway.” Costa asked for the help of the local administration to guarantee such changes occur.

For his part, José Manuel Alcaraz attributed the recent success of Formentera tourism to “the role played by local business owners.” According to Alcaraz, “Formentera already has what it takes to bring tourists in July and August. The new objective has to be the beginning and end of the season.” Alcaraz recognised the importance of local athletic and cultural programming, saying, “all of our energy needs to be put toward the organisation of such events.”

At different points in the plenary Dolores Fernández Tamargo, representative of the PSOE, and Bartomeu Escandell, of Gent per Formentera, also took the floor to make statements commending Councillor Ferrer and her team for their work.