

CASE STUDY OPEN ACCESS

# Foreign Tourists Still Prefer to Travel to the Andalusian Destination After the COVID-19

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## ABSTRACT

The primary goal of this case study is to examine the reasons behind foreign visitors' visits to the eight provinces of Andalusia between 2007 and 2022 to identify the primary markets with the greatest potential for overnight stays and to create more effective tourism campaigns. Findings revealed that holidays and leisure activities were the most important pull motives for foreign tourists visiting Andalusia. Furthermore, the main five tourist markets for overnight stays in Andalusia were English, German, French, Dutch and Belgian tourists. Although Belgian, Italian, American, Latin American, and Dutch, Portuguese and Swedish tourists also dynamize and encourage the economic development of the eight Andalusian destinations. Indeed, the interrelationship between the number of passenger arrivals and the evolution of the total Andalusia overnight stays has gone hand-in-hand throughout the period under consideration. This remarkable result emphasises the importance of air transport to Andalusian destinations.

## 1 | Introduction

Andalusia's tourism demand is highly dependent on foreign tourism consumption, according to the Institute of Statistics and Cartography of Andalusia (IECA) (IECA 2023a). The National Institute of Statistics (INE) reported that tourism in Andalusia accounted for 13.3% of GDP (INE 2023). Much of this success is due to the Andalusian airports and their air accessibility provided by legacy carriers and low-cost carriers (LCCs) (Florido-Benítez 2024a). Andalusia is made up of eight provinces: Almería, Cádiz, Córdoba, Granada, Huelva, Jaén, Málaga and Seville. This territory is localised in the south of Spain, and it is a recognised tourist destination by tourists worldwide thanks to its beaches, accommodations, restaurants and gastronomy. For this reason, this study focused on Andalusia because this tourist destination provides numerous opportunities for tourists, hotel operators and online travel agencies (OTAs), and where digital channels and communication play a crucial role in tourism supply and demand (Sánchez-Franco and Rey-Tienda 2024).

Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) play a significant role in strengthening Andalusia's brand image coverage through promotion campaigns and digital channels, particularly in England, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Belgium tourist issuing markets (Florido-Benítez 2023a). The identification of these markets for crisis management (e.g., economic-financial and/or coronavirus) can alleviate the vulnerability of tourism and air transport companies at tourist destinations. According to the Spanish Airports and Air Navigation (AENA) organisation, in 2023, passenger arrivals at the airports in Málaga Costa del Sol (IATA 2024, code is AGP) and Seville (SVQ) exceeded pre-pandemic levels, with increases of 12.5% and 7%, respectively, over 2019 (AENA 2024). The AENA organisation manages 46 airports in Spain, including the Andalusian airports.

These data reveal that the Andalusian destination has a high recovery capacity and resilience against adverse situations like the pandemic crisis that paralysed the tourism and air transport sectors in 2020 (Florido-Benítez 2021c). If we add to this

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This study was carried out in Andalusia, the territory where the author lives and works.

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Brexit, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war (Florido-Benítez 2022a, 2022b), greater efforts are needed to establish and empower tourism demand across Andalusia. Florido-Benítez (2024b) argues that DMOs and hotel operators need to better understand the value of target markets to make informed decisions. Tourists' travelling preferences in terms of the choice of destination, mode of transport and accommodation must be analysed by researchers and DMOs to help stimulate tourism demand in Andalusian hotel establishments and tourist destinations after the COVID-19 pandemic (Pai et al. 2024). The main novelty of this research is that it illustrates the importance of the interrelationship between air transport and accommodation to stimulate tourism demand in difficult times, as well as that this study also contributes to highlight tourists' pre-trip motivational information for both companies and DMOs to develop new marketing strategies.

There is a scarcity of research focused on international tourism demand in Andalusia (Florido-Benítez 2023a; Mendieta-Aragon and Garín-Muñoz 2020). For this reason, the main challenge of this case study is to analyse foreign tourists' motivations that visit the Andalusian eight provinces from 2007 to 2022 to detect the main issuing markets that have more potential value in overnight stay terms and develop more efficient tourism campaigns. The number of hotels and rooms is correlated with tourism inflows (Pai et al. 2025). This study also analyses pre- and post-pandemic data in terms of tourism flows, including the financial crisis of 2008. International tourism demand is affected by air accessibility, hotels, amenities, tourist attractions, promotion campaigns and tourists' preferences (Florido-Benítez 2023a). In addition, this research proposes four research questions to support the main goal, which is to provide a better overview of the indicators analysed.

**RQ1.** What are the main reasons why tourists travel to Andalusia?

**RQ2.** What are the main market segments for foreign tourists to Andalusia?

**RQ3.** How important are the airports in the Andalusian destination?

**RQ4.** Can Andalusian airports influence the demand for foreign tourists' overnight stays?

**RQ5.** How relevant are marketing and promotional campaigns to attract foreign tourists to the Andalusian destination?

## 2 | Literature Review

### 2.1 | Foreign Tourists' Travel Motivations in the Tourism Industry

Tourists' travel purpose must be monitored by DMOs, OTAs and hotel operators to design customised tourist products and services, especially when tourists travel for holidays and leisure, visiting friends and relatives and business travel (Liu et al. 2024). The socio-demographic profiles and trip-related characteristics of the visitors enable DMOs and hotel operators to understand how tourists behave at destinations and hotel establishments. To identify different tourist segments based on motivation scales, it also

provides opportunities for them in terms of satisfaction and experience in the destination. For example, many Chinese people find sunbathing uncomfortable because it is more culturally acceptable to keep skin as pale as possible. As a result, they do not like the beach or the sun. For this reason, it is so important to design promotion campaigns by DMOs and OTAs according to tourists' motivations and preferences. Although Uner et al. (2023) suggest that marketing campaigns are internationally standardised through digital channels, they do not significantly contribute to improving the images of tourist destinations.

One marketing strategy is market segmentation, which divides a market into homogeneous groups based on their motivations. This allows for the more successful design of promotional campaigns that meet the needs of both tourists and business objectives (Florido-Benítez 2022c). Dabphet (2024) notes that the tourism supply and travel motivations are linked to attract a greater number of tourists and encourage the intention to revisit the destination. English, German and other European tourists like to visit Spain for reasons of holiday and leisure (Villacé-Molinero et al. 2023). Tourism demand management by DMOs and hotel operators requires consumers to make significant decisions such as choosing a destination, types of transport, accommodation, budget choices, time of travel and locations (Ji et al. 2023). Thus, tourists' preferences through digital channels must be monitored and analysed by DMOs, OTAs and hotel operators as a key variable to segment their main issuing markets in their marketing plans. Armutcu et al. (2023) note that tourists' behaviours and preferences to visit tourist destinations through digital channels have not been adequately explored in tourism studies.

After the pandemic crisis, the competition between tourist destinations to attract the main tourist issuing markets is fierce. Although Lee et al. (2024) note that it is really difficult to promote the tourism industry without local governments to increase tourism demand. Therefore, understanding customers' motivations enables DMOs and hotel operators to create specific marketing campaigns to stimulate tourism demand. Tourists' motivations are related to accommodation consumption and transport, hotel choices, price sensitivity, length of stay, gastronomy and seasonality terms (Florido-Benítez 2023a; Kim and Han 2023). Although the tourism literature provides many segmentation studies on travel motivation, there is a lack of reporting with respect to similarity measures of data and segmentation studies on tourists' motivations (Ernst and Dolnicar 2018). This is another reason why we decided to work on this research; tourism demand and supply must be monitored by DMOs to correct possible errors and make better decisions. Tourists' motivation to visit a tourist destination as a key performance indicator (KPI) for hotel operators and DMOs is a key factor in designing and communicating customised tourism promotion campaigns.

### 2.2 | Airports, Hotels and Rooms as Supply-Side Indicators

Due to the significant impact that air transport connectivity has on tourist flows, the most commonly used indicator of tourism demand is the number of arrivals (Song et al. 2023; Florido-Benítez 2023b). Tourist flows imply the movement of people from where they live to recreational facilities that are localised. To explore overnight

stays at hotels, passenger arrival measurements in space and time help to enhance the destinations' forecasts of tourism arrivals (Pai et al. 2025). Indeed, measuring supply indicators boosts the effectiveness of promotion campaigns based on differing market segments (Florido-Benítez 2024a). The tourist arrivals at touristic accommodations are linked to airports and the air accessibility provided by commercial airlines (Florido-Benítez 2021a, 2021b). According to Florido-Benítez and del Alcázar (2020), 75% of foreign visitors arrive in Andalusia and Spain via plane.

For example, the Málaga Costa del Sol airport (AGP) provides the main gateway of the Andalusia region, providing 65.7% of passenger arrivals and it received 223 million passengers from 2007 to 2022 period (AENA 2023). The city of Málaga is a successful smart destination due to the air accessibility provided by airlines and airports. SVQ (21.9%) airport occupies second place in Andalusia by terms of passenger arrivals, followed by XRY (4.5%), GRX (4.3%) and LEI airport (3.7%). The proximity of Andalusian destinations to European countries through commercial airlines in less than 4 h increases the chances that Europeans want to visit these eight destinations. This was also one of the reasons why we proposed RQ3 and RQ4 questions in this study. Antolini (2022) notes that commercial airlines and airports improve the number of tourist arrivals at tourist destinations and regional economies, and they have directly impact on the number of nights in hotel establishments (Mazzola et al. 2022). Most of the big hotel operators (e.g., Meliá, Marriott, NH, Vincci, Barceló, Hilton, among many others) are concentrated on the Andalusian coast. For this reason, the number of hotels and estimated rooms were also measured in this study from 2007 to 2022. Hotel supply in a destination is measured in terms of the number of hotels and estimated rooms (Pai et al. 2024), and its demand is measured through the hotel occupancy rate (Ampountolas and Legg 2024).

### 2.3 | The Number of Passenger Arrivals, Hotel Occupancy Rate and Overnight Stay Indicators to Analyse the Andalusian Tourism Demand

Tourism demand is the outcome of tourists' motivation, destination features and marketing strategies to attract specific travellers to the destination (Morrison 2022). From the point of view of tourism goods and services, tourism demand is the quantity of products and services consumed by tourists in a specific destination (Kim and Lee 2018), which is related to transport infrastructure, economic size, information and communication technologies, environmental quality and trade openness (Martínez-Roget et al. 2024). Nonetheless, as a consequence of COVID-19, the hospitality, air transport, cruise line and car rental sectors have experienced a substantial fall in the number of customers and an increase in hotel tariffs and airline fares (Florido-Benítez 2022a, 2023a).

Passenger arrivals are the most popular indicator for tourism demand to count the number of tourists at destinations and overnight stays within a defined period of time (Florido-Benítez 2023a). For instance, the UK, Germany, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Ireland and Sweden represent 40% of total stays in Andalusian hotels and around 70% of overnight stays made exclusively by international tourists (Junta de Andalucía 2023). The Andalusian hotel occupancy rate was collected from

IECA (2023a, 2023b) from 2007 to 2022. Payne et al. (2022) emphasise that tourism demand must be monitored with different indicators, such as tourists' motivations and hotels' occupancy rates to attract specific market segments. This manuscript also included the hotel occupancy rate as an indicator to measure the impact of tourism demand at Andalusian hotel establishments. Alam and Nayak (2023) suggest that the number of passenger arrivals and overnight stays at hotels are KPIs that help maximise the economic benefits of tourism spending in India.

Thereafter, to quantify and contrast Spanish and foreign overnight stays and to take into consideration the primary tourism markets by province, we incorporated the number of overnight stays at Andalusian hotels into this study. Florido-Benítez (2023a) and Payne et al. (2022) observed that comparing the results across domestic and foreign tourist arrivals and overnight stays in a tourist destination helps to improve DMOs' marketing plan and promote different promotion campaigns for international and national markets to increase the number of overnight stays at Andalusian hotels. Consumers who use digital channels prior to visiting tend to spend more during their stay; that is, DMOs and OTAs must promote and communicate customised information in the main issuing markets and periods of the year to satisfy them. Moreover, these marketing strategies will help reduce the seasonality at tourist destinations (Florido-Benítez 2024b) because the diversification of customised services and products is a deseasonalisation tool to attract tourists in the winter and autumn seasons. This was also another motivation why we proposed the RQ5 question in this research.

## 3 | The Purpose of Research Methodology

This research employs a quantitative and qualitative technique to analyse supply indicators such as the number of Andalusian airports and the number of hotels and beds in order to assist an analysis of our aims and research questions. The three quantitative indicators of demand analysed are overnight stays at hotels by international and Spanish tourists, hotel occupancy rate and airport passenger arrivals to analyse their interrelationships between them and DMOs to make better decisions in marketing strategies. In addition, from a qualitative point of view, this study also included and examined two variables of demand, such as tourists' motivation and types of accommodation in Andalusia. The approach used here has at least two advantages. First, supply and demand indicators added to this manuscript allowed us to face the main objective and five research questions. A second advantage of our approach was that this study used updated quantitative and qualitative data that helped us to analyse the timeline (2007–2022) with a wide and better vision of the COVID-19 pandemic and financial crisis of 2008, as well as compare data from pre- and post-coronavirus pandemic (2019–2022). The level of an Andalusian province's tourism development determines its level of economic development.

The tourism and air transport data compiled in this study is proof of the efforts made by authors who provided data and information from different statistical sources such as IECA, INE and AENA, among others. For instance, the main indicators of tourism demand and supply (secondary data) were

taken from IECA (2023a, 2023b), INE (2022, 2023) and Junta de Andalucía (2023) to examine the evolution of passenger arrivals, tourists' motivations by Andalusian province, total overnight stays and the main foreign tourist markets in the period analysed. These indicators were used by Perić et al. (2022), Florido-Benítez (2023a) and Villacé-Molinero et al. (2023) authors to tackle their goals in previous studies. Concerning the number of Andalusian airports and passenger arrivals, data were taken from AENA (2024). Quantifying the total number of passenger arrivals is a key factor in DMOs and hotel operators' marketing plans (Florido-Benítez 2023b).

On the other hand, this research project collected information related to hotel, tourist, tourist destination and airport topics from organisations, researchers and expert academics (primary data) to select the main indicators and improve the methodology and data collection of this study, as well as to draw the best possible conclusions regarding the present and future of the tourism industry in Andalusian tourist destinations (Mazzola et al. 2022). Primary and secondary data are significant inputs to solve complex problems in the tourism and air transport sectors, and they help establish better research methods (Lu et al. 2022).

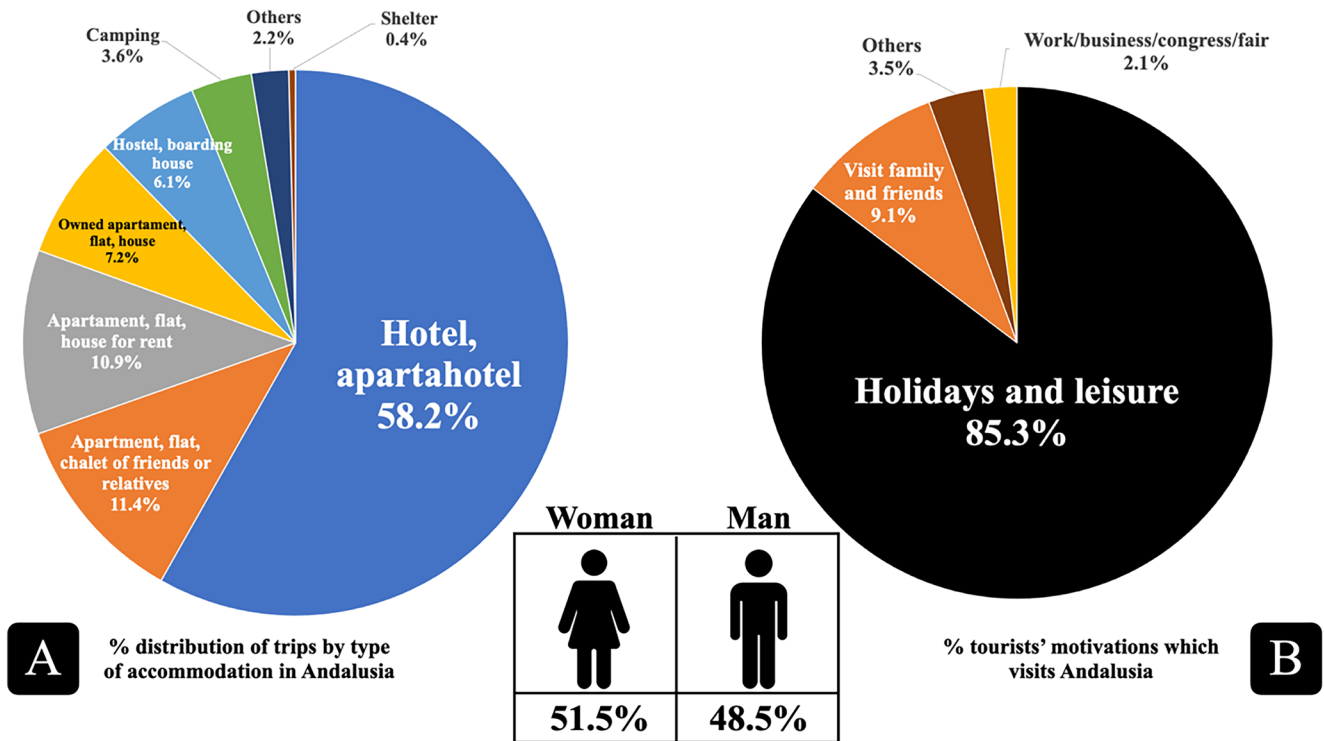
## 4 | Findings

### 4.1 | Tourists' Motivations in Andalusian Destinations

Tourists' motives to travel to cities and enjoy their favourite leisure activities are associated with demographic and situational characteristics (Florido-Benítez 2022d) and the gender

of consumers in their travel motivations. Figure 1B illustrates how most tourists travel to the Andalusia destination for holiday and leisure (85.3%) purposes, followed by visiting family and friends (9.1%), others (3.5%) and work/business/congress and fairs by 2.1%. The hotels are the main establishments selected by tourists (58.2%), followed by apartment, flat, chalet of friends or relatives (11.4%), apartment, flat, house for rent (10.9%), owned apartment, flat house (7.2%), hostel, boarding house (6.1%), camping (3.6%), others (2.2%) and shelter (0.4%), as shown in Figure 1A. Findings revealed that holidays and leisure activities were the most important motives of foreign tourists visiting Andalusia, where 51.5% were women and 48.5% were men. Rojo-Ramos et al. (2023) note that women give more importance to accommodation services when choosing a destination than men do. Notwithstanding, if we compare our results with tourists' purpose to travel to the UK in 2019, the distribution of the UK destination is better distributed and balanced in percentage terms than the Spain destination; the first is holiday and leisure by 41.4%, followed by visit family and friends (30.4%), business (21.2%), others (5.5%) and study (1.5%) (Visitbritain 2019). The diversification of tourist destinations' tourism supply is a determinant of tourists' motivations; in fact, Zach et al. (2021) found that the diversification of tourism supply in the Austrian destination is also a marketing strategy to improve the hotel occupancy rate throughout the year.

These data reveal that tourists' motivations and preferences for Andalusia are indicators of helpful approaches to understanding tourists' behaviours and needs. For this reason, marketing and communication strategies developed by hotel operators and DMOs to attract foreign tourists must be aligned with the demographic characteristics of visitors since they have an association with their travel motives. Regarding the tourists' motivations,



**FIGURE 1** | Types of accommodation and tourists' motivations in Andalusia destination. (A) Category of Andalusian accommodations booked by tourists. (B) The main international tourists' motivations to visit the Andalusia destination. Source: Own elaboration from IECA (2023a, 2023b).

the same pattern repeats itself in the eight Andalusian provinces, but Huelva, Málaga and Granada provinces by 94.8%, 89.2% and 88.7%, respectively, are the most representative of holidays and leisure activities (see Figure 2). Apparently, these data may appear to be a fortress to attract tourists, but nothing could be further from the truth because these three provinces are mainly associated with holidays and leisure activities, and they are not diversifying their own tourist product and service ranges. For instance, in times of uncertainty, such as financial crisis and pandemic crisis, holidays and leisure activities multiply the negative effects on hotels' overnight stays and provoke a massive drop in tourism demand (Florido-Benitez 2023a). Widz et al. (2022) argue that the Polonian hotels localised in tourist and coastal zones are dominated by holidays and leisure tourism, whereas the hotels situated in cities have as their main guests foreign and business tourism. When tourists feel satisfied with the services offered by Brazilian companies or destinations, they tend to be more motivated to visit them (Brogni et al. 2023). Hotel operators and OTAs are giving priority to the main tourist typologies in Andalusia: sun and beach, business and congress, cultural and rural activities (Ji et al. 2023).

Moreover, we must not forget that holidays and leisure activities increase the seasonality of Spanish tourist destinations (Ruggieri and Platania 2024). This weakness requires an urgent correction through marketing strategies and promotion campaigns at digital channels. Conversely, Córdoba (68.9%) and Jaén (78.9%) destinations show less dependence on holidays and leisure activities, and they were the most resilient during the coronavirus crisis in terms of the hotel occupancy rate due to domestic tourism being their main market segment. Florido-Benítez (2024b) emphasises that it is vital to establish a harmonious relationship between DMOs, airports, stakeholders and the local community to improve tourism supply in uncertain times. For example, business travel can recover quicker than holidays and leisure activities after a crisis. Business, congress and fair events must play a greater role in the tourism supply of European cities to diversify tourism products and services, as well as attract potential tourists in low season (Bai et al. 2025).

## 4.2 | The Main Issuing Markets in Andalusian Destinations

Before starting to analyse the main issuing markets of Andalusian provinces, we would like to point out that each Andalusian province has its own charm and characteristics. As proof of this, Almería, Cádiz, Huelva and Málaga are destinations that attract millions of tourists because they like the sun, beaches and gastronomy activities thanks to the excellent beaches and restaurants provided for these four cities. Whereas the provinces of Jaén, Córdoba and Seville's capital are visited by tourists who like urban, cultural and monumental tourism. Parrilla-González (2021) found that Andalusian provinces located on the coasts suffered a greater drop in their indicators of socioeconomic development than Jaén, Córdoba and Seville provinces.

Figure 3 displays the main five tourist markets in Andalusia and its eight tourist destinations. English tourists are the crown jewel of tourism in the Andalusian destination in overnight stay terms, with 85 million in the period analysed; the

second market for hotel operators is German tourists, with 55.1 million. The third tourist segment at Andalusian hotels is French tourists, with 30.5 million. The Dutch tourists take the fourth position with 17.1 million, and the fifth position is occupied by Belgian tourists with 14.5 million overnight stays. These results are linked to the main three market segments at Spanish airports that were English, German and French passenger arrivals in the last 8 years (AENA 2024; Florido-Benítez 2024a).

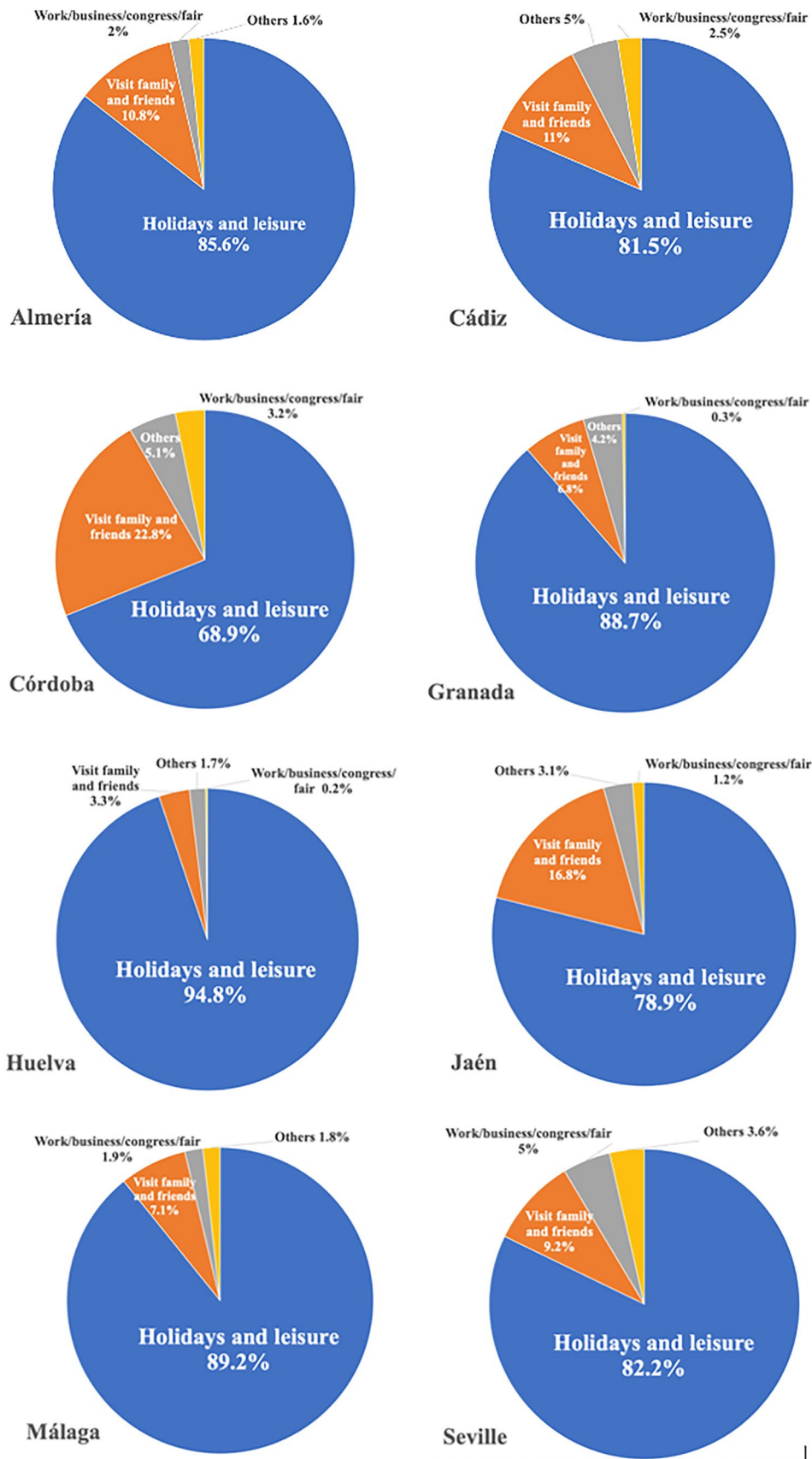
In addition, regarding the metrics of the main five issuing markets by overnight stays, Figure 3 also shows how English tourists represent half of all overnight stays in the hotels of Málaga and Almería, and they are the main market of these two provinces. While German tourists are the main issuing market for Cádiz and Huelva destinations in terms of overnight stays. In the case of Seville, Granada and Córdoba hotel establishments, the French tourists take first place by overnight stay terms. Moreover, French and Portuguese tourists are particularly important niche markets due to their geographic proximity to the Andalusian region.

Considering the dichotomy between airports and hotels effects in Andalusian provinces and their consumption of overnight stay. Belgian, Italian, American, Latin American, Dutch, Portuguese and Swedish tourists are also part of the top five of foreign tourists' overnight stays in Andalusian provinces. Indeed, these market segments dynamize and encourage the economic development of the eight Andalusian destinations. The air accessibility provided by commercial airlines and Andalusian airports plays an important role in attracting millions of tourists across the world. We must not forget that domestic tourism generates 35.1% of the overnight stays at Andalusian hotels and helped to survive the pandemic crisis for the hotel operations in Andalusia when the international tourists were confined to their houses (Arbulú et al. 2021).

The results obtained should be treated with caution, given that we show the first five issuing markets that provided overnights for each province in the period established, but American, Swiss, Russian, African, Polish, Chinese, Japanese, Finns, Danish, Norwegian and Finnish markets are part of the tourism demand of Andalusian hotels and destinations. Alcalde-Giraudó et al. (2021) suggest that attracting international tourists to the Andalusia destination from different backgrounds requires knowledge of their preferences. Although English, German and French tourists monopolise overnight stays at hotels, this does not mean that DMOs and hotel operators are totally focused on offering products and services to these three tourist markets. The wide range of Andalusia as a tourist destination attracts to millions of visitors around the world. For instance, Málaga is the first in the number of foreign overnight stays because it has the greatest number of hotels and rooms in Andalusia, and DMO's Málaga promotes the quality of tourism supply to attract millions of tourists every year.

## 4.3 | Andalusia Tourism Demand Indicators Decomposition

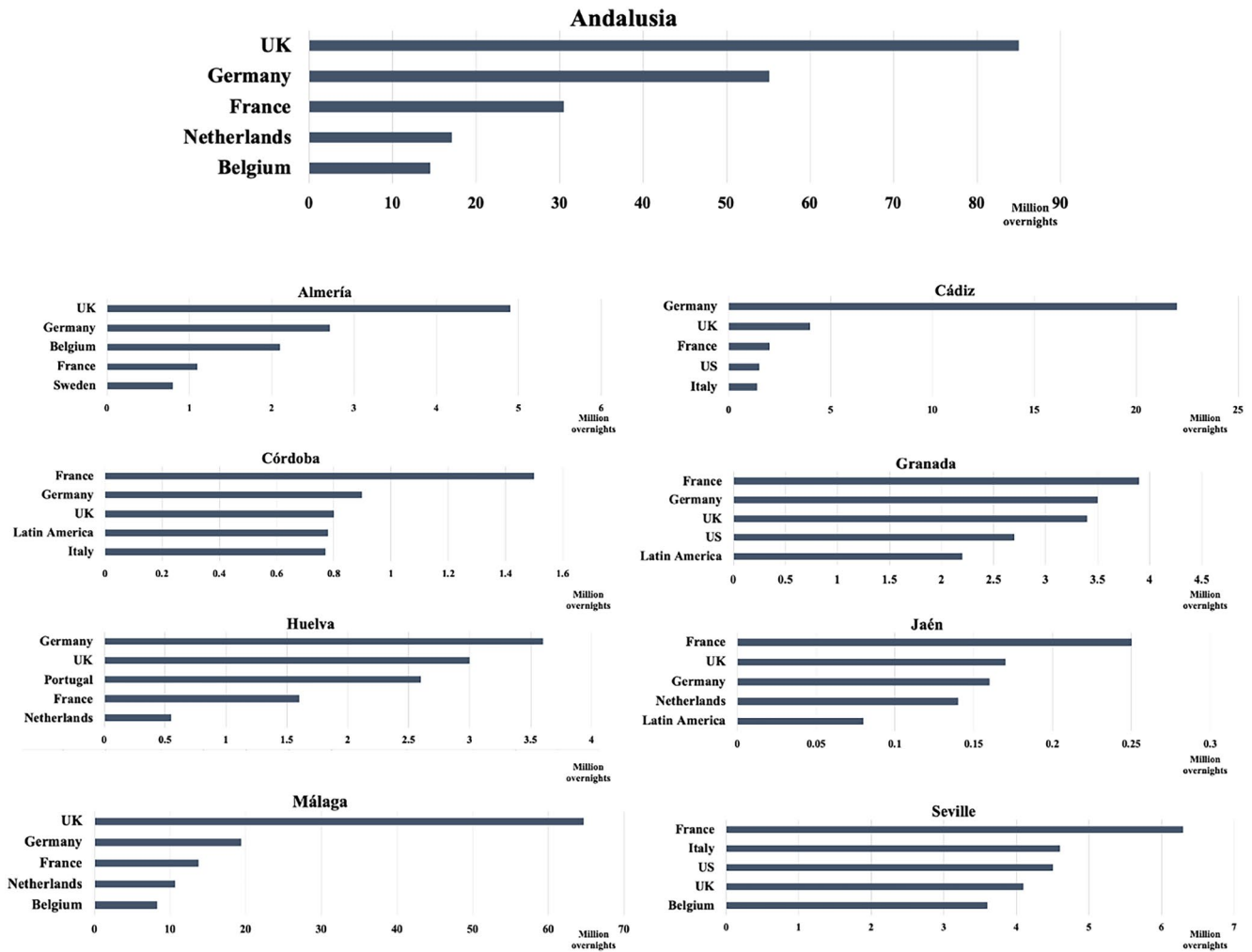
Previously, we tackled the importance of air accessibility by commercial airlines and airports and the number of hotels and



**FIGURE 2** | Tourists' motivations by province. Source: Own elaboration from IECA (2023a, 2023b).

rooms in Andalusian destinations. Figure 4 presents the interrelationship between the number of passenger arrivals and the evolution of total overnight stays at Andalusian hotels. The

trend of growth in overnight stays and passenger arrivals in the period analysed is the same on the timeline. This result emphasises the importance of air transport at Andalusian destinations,



**FIGURE 3** | The five main foreign tourist markets by overnights at Andalusian destinations (2007–2022). *Source:* Own elaboration from IECA (2023a, 2023b).

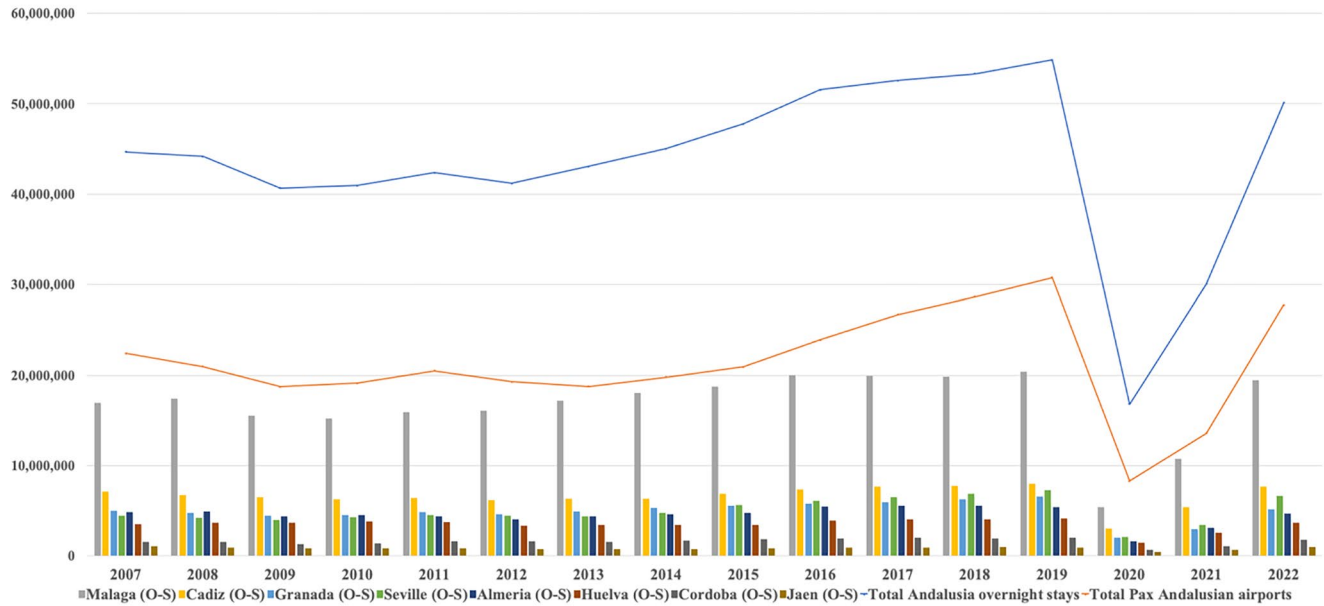
especially in the city of Málaga, where the AGP airport provides the best air accessibility and connectivity in Andalusia with flights to 151 destinations around the world (AENA 2023). Florido-Benítez (2023a) noted that hotels' establishments can enhance the number of overnight stays thanks to airports' proximity. Nevertheless, there is another factor that we must not lose sight of: the same drastic fall in the number of passengers and overnight stay indicators because of the coronavirus in 2020. Although in the years 2021 and 2022, these two indicators were aligned in recovering to pre-pandemic levels. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic had a greater negative impact on all indicators analysed than the global financial crisis in 2008.

As may be seen in Figure 4, the province of Málaga with 267 million overnights is the first in the number of total overnight stays (foreign and Spanish tourists) at the Andalusia destination within the period established, followed by Cádiz (105.8 million), Granada (78.8 million), Seville (79.7 million), Almería (72.5 million), Huelva (56 million), Córdoba (25.7 million) and Jaén (13.5 million). These findings reveal how the number of passenger arrivals affects the number of overnights at Andalusian hotels, as well as their occupancy levels, as is also demonstrated. Revilla-Camacho et al. (2019) found that hotels' overnight stays and occupancy rates are related

to the hotel's location, the type of city, and air and ground accessibility provided by airports and public transport systems. In fact, results show again how the pandemic crisis paralysed considerably air transport and tourism demand in the eight Andalusian provinces.

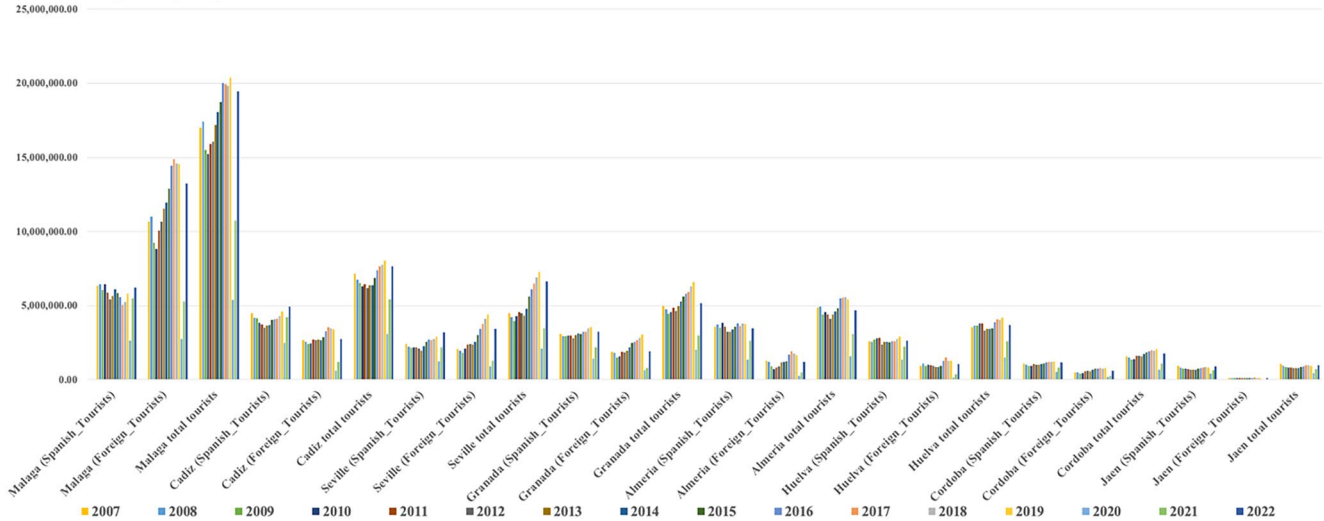
Obviously, each province faces different challenges and new opportunities after the pandemic crisis. Figure 5 presents how Málaga and Seville cities are highly dependent on the number of foreign overnight stays, which predominate over Spanish overnight stays, especially in the hotels of Málaga, where the number of international overnight stays has doubled over the past 16 years with respect to the Spanish overnight stays. For instance, in 2020, the provinces of Seville and Málaga saw the number of overnights reduced by 3.5 and 11.8 million foreign overnights, respectively, both of which were the worst affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the Andalusia region. On the contrary, Spanish overnight stays helped to maintain many hotels in Jaén, Huelva, Granada, Córdoba, Cádiz and Almería provinces during the coronavirus crisis; that is, the hotel establishments in these six destinations were more resilient in terms of overnight stays thanks to domestic tourism. Indeed, domestic tourism enhances the resilience of hotels' overnight stays in tourist destinations. Domestic tourism and the types of hotels

**Million passenger arrivals and overnight stays**



**FIGURE 4** | Total passenger arrivals and total overnight stays by province (2007–2022). *Source:* Own elaboration from IECA (2023a, 2023b) and AENA (2023). Note O-S: Is Overnight-stays. Moreover, the Córdoba airport (ODB) is not examined in this study because it operates only for military flights, aerial photographs and passenger charter flights.

**Millions of foreign overnight stays**



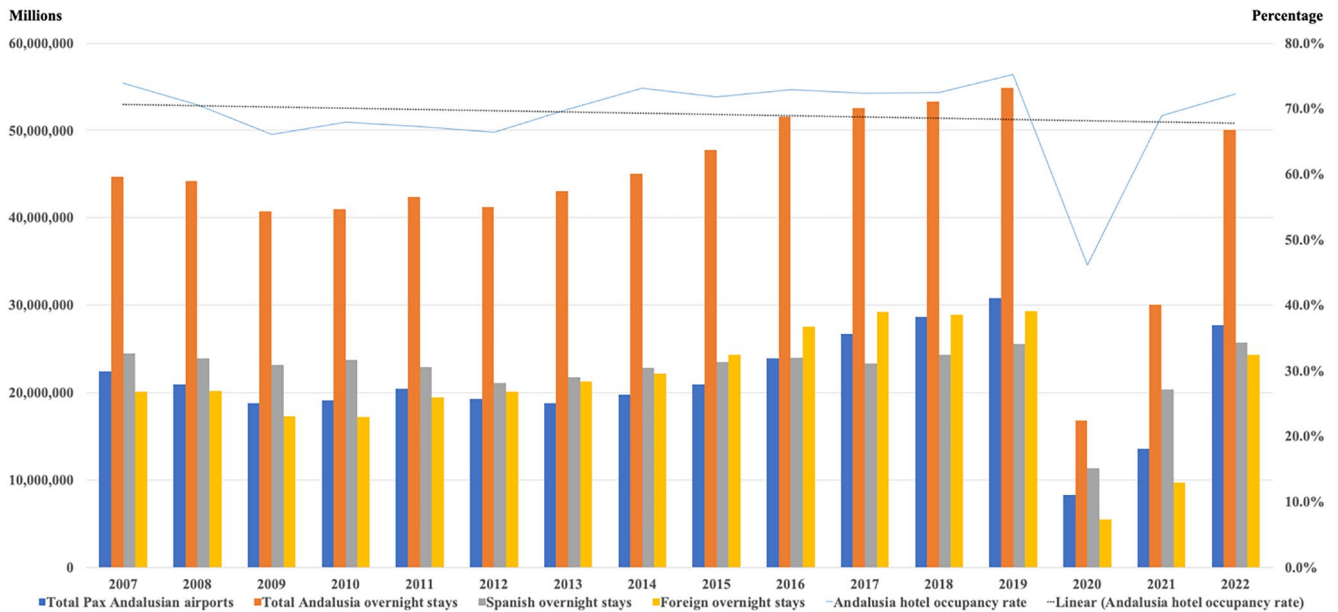
**FIGURE 5** | Total Spanish and foreign overnight stays by province (2007–2022). *Source:* Own elaboration from IECA (2023a, 2023b).

represent an opportunity for tourist destinations in times of crisis and also play a key role in the Spanish tourism industry.

The total number of passenger arrivals, hotel occupancy rate and total number of overnight stays by foreign and Spanish visitors have all been combined to show in Figure 6 how these variables related to tourism demand are aligned during the period under analysis, given the scope of the study that necessitates data from multiple sources. Between 2020 and 2022, the increase in Spanish overnight stays at Andalusian hotels outpaced that of foreign stays. Accordingly, the results show that the sharp decline in passenger arrivals (−73.1%) had a detrimental direct impact on the remaining demand indicators in 2020, including the hotel occupancy rate (−38.7%), the total number of overnight

stays (−69.3%) and the percentage of overnight stays in Spain and abroad (−55.7% and −81.2%, respectively). Figure 6 also displays how the hotel occupancy rate trend decreased in the period examined. Sun (2022) claims that Chinese hotels' overnight stays and occupancy rates decreased due to the number of flights being reduced or cancelled due to the pandemic crisis.

Notwithstanding, Andalusian airports had positive (except for 2020) implications for the number of total overnight stays and hotel occupancy rate from 2013 to 2022. As the number of passengers increased, the rest of the indicators also increased substantially with the previous year. These results also demonstrate that tourist packages (flight/hotel/car hire/tour) sold by OTAs, which pay commissions to hotel operators and commercial



**FIGURE 6** | Total passenger arrivals at airports, Spanish and foreign overnight stays, and hotel occupancy rate at the Andalusia territory (2007–2022). *Source:* Own elaboration from IECA (2023a, 2023b) and AENA (2023).

airlines, help stimulate tourism demand at Andalusian airports. According to Voltes-Dorta et al. (2017), because the majority of visitors staying in Spanish hotels are foreigners, LCCs and legacy carriers favour the number of overnight stays and occupancy rates at Spanish hotels. OTAs and tour operators are the main agents for commercialising holidays and leisure activities among the European tourists who come to the Andalusian destination. As stated by Alegre and Sard (2015) one of the main consequences of the financial and coronavirus crises was the increase in the number of tourists that booked a package holiday. Promoting the establishment of cooperation alliances among airlines, hotel operators, tour operators and DMOs is necessary to develop tourist packages and stimulate tourism demand in Andalusian destinations. For instance, tourist packages provided by tour operators help enhance occupancy rates in Andalusian hotels.

## 5 | Discussion and Conclusions

### 5.1 | Discussion

It is clear from this research that holidays and leisure activities (85.3%) are the main motivations why foreign tourists travel to the Andalusia destination and their eight provinces from 2007 to 2022, followed by visiting family and friends (9.1%), others (3.5%) and work/business/congress and fairs with 2.1%. Furthermore, the main five tourist markets for overnight stays in Andalusia and its eight provinces in the period examined are English, German, French, Dutch and Belgian tourists. Similar results were obtained by Aguilar et al. (2016), where English, German and French tourists are the main issuing markets to Andalusia. These findings respond to the nuclear objective, which was to analyse foreign tourists' motivations that visit the Andalusian eight provinces from 2007 to 2022 to detect the main issuing markets that have more potential value in overnight stay terms and develop more efficient tourism campaigns, as well as RQ1 and RQ2 are also

answered. The results of the current study also prove that foreign tourists are highly dependent on the air accessibility offered by Andalusian airports and commercial airlines in the period examined. Meanwhile, Belgian, Italian, American, Latin American, Dutch, Portuguese and Swedish tourists are also part of the top five of foreign tourists' overnight stays in Andalusia, and they also dynamize and encourage the economic development of the eight Andalusian destinations.

Findings of the current study also indicate the high dependence on air accessibility by foreign tourists to visit the Andalusia destination; that is, the six Andalusian airports are an added value to attract millions of tourists across the world to the Andalusia destination. Indeed, the interrelationship between the number of passenger arrivals at Andalusian airports and the evolution of the total Andalusia overnight stays has gone hand in hand throughout the period under consideration, particularly in the city of Málaga, where the AGP airport provides the best air accessibility and connectivity in Andalusia. This remarkable result emphasises the importance of air transport at Andalusian destinations, and RQ3 is answered. Activities related to travel, business, tourism and leisure involve mobility and air accessibility (Ji et al. 2023; Florido-Benítez 2022d).

Regarding RQ4, if Andalusian airports can influence the demand for foreign tourists' overnight stays, our findings suggest that the number of overnight stays at Andalusian hotels and their occupancy rate are associated with the number of passenger arrivals, and RQ4 is answered. These findings reinforce what has been noted by other studies, such as Álvarez-Díaz et al. (2023) claiming that airports and commercial airlines lead to an increase in tourism demand, which has a positive influence on the number of overnight stays at hotels, the occupancy rate and the revenue per available room (RevPAR) (Silveira et al. 2023). Finally, the results suggest that promotion campaigns and marketing strategies through physical and digital channels developed by DMOs play an important role in the main tourist markets because they

help stimulate international tourism demand in Andalusia, and RQ5 is answered. This manuscript aims to provide valuable insights into the relationship between the number of foreign passenger arrivals at airports and the evolution of overnight stays in Andalusia, which in turn affects the hotel industry. Additionally, it serves as a reference for researchers studying similar phenomena around the globe or similar tourism regions that want to empower tourism demand.

## 5.2 | Theoretical Contribution

The academic literature and practice in the areas of hospitality and airports are greatly enhanced by this case study. First of all, this study adds to the body of knowledge regarding overnight stays, occupancy rates in the hotel sector and the ways in which airports can increase the quantity of foreign visitors who spend the night in hotels. Hence, this research focused on international tourists' motivations as an indicator that boosts the travel and tourism sectors and can improve a region's economic and tourism development. Our results provide a new, different travel and tourism perspective for researchers, tourism academics and practitioners, which should focus on new promotion campaigns that sheet tourists' motivations and preferences to make tourism cities more competitive against their main competitors. Moreover, given the importance of understanding tourists' motivations and the decision-making process of visitors from main source countries by DMOs, hotel operators and OTAs, our findings are very significant. Tourists' pre-trip motivational information is of some interest for both researchers and DMOs to develop new marketing strategies because, according to Soldatenko et al. (2023) this relevant information increases the understanding of the target markets and tourists' preferences and behaviours. For this reason, Andalusian hotel operators need to look for new positioning strategies to attract new market segments and maximise the benefits of tourism promotion campaigns.

## 5.3 | Practical Contribution

This research has practical ramifications as well, as it sheds light on the significance of traveller motivations and the connection between the quantity of international travellers arriving at airports and the quantity of people spending the night in hotels. Also, this manuscript emphasises that DMOs, hotel operators, airports and airlines should design marketing strategies and promotion campaigns to attract new issuing markets and reduce the high dependency of English, German and French tourists on the Andalusia destination. Furthermore, our findings suggest that the hotels situated in urban cities like Seville, Córdoba and Jaén need to promote a differentiated tourism supply from hotels localised in coastal zones (Málaga, Cádiz, Granada, Huelva and Almería) focused on cultural, monumental, gastronomy and business activities to align potential tourists' motivations with tourism promotion campaigns through digital channels such as social media, digital newspapers, TV and DMOs websites and apps, among many others. Another important output of this research was that airports play an important role in the hospitality industry, and it would be interesting that DMOs, airports and

hotel operators have an appropriate tourism demand management plan for both crisis situations and good economic situations. For example, forecasting Andalusian tourism demand is a way of reducing the risk of investments in new tourist products or new lines of business since the tourism service product is perishable. Martínez-Roget et al. (2024) note that the tourism and passenger transportation industry's economic impact is vital for Spanish tourist destinations and their tourism demand.

## 5.4 | Limitations and Future Research

The limitations and future lines of investigation of the present work are closely linked. Data and indicators selected in this study have been selected according to the choice of researchers and previous studies related to this topic. Future studies could implement new indicators or variables to compare and enhance their findings with this research and others shown previously. In second place, hotel operators should provide detailed information related to tourists' genre and the means of transport they used to stay at hotels. For instance, a future line of work should centre on complementing information on the main means of transport and airlines used by tourists when they stay at different accommodations and regions. To close this subsection, it would be interesting to develop future studies that compare the impact of airlines and high-speed railway systems in terms of overnight stays and the occupancy rate in different cities or regions. These future findings could help reduce airports and airlines' carbon footprints in cities. Deng et al. (2021) found that high-speed railway service systems improve hotel occupancy rates in Chinese cities. For example, transportation in Amsterdam, particularly the Schiphol Amsterdam airport, and carbon emissions from arriving and departing planes accounted for 70% of the environmental strain associated with incoming tourism (Peeters and Schouten 2006).

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The author has nothing to report.

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The author has nothing to report.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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