NEWS LESSON

Who Gets to Enjoy a Public Beach?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What should a day at the beach cost?
2. Would you pay for a cleaner beach with better facilities?
3. Can a small fee still stop people doing something?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**concessions**	☐	A	shared out among a group or area
2	**infrastructure**	☐	B	expected before it happens
3	**ecologically**	☐	C	making people less willing to do something
4	**mechanism**	☐	D	a method or process that makes something happen
5	**governance**	☐	E	the way a place or organisation is managed and controlled
6	**anticipated**	☐	F	permission to run a business in a public place
7	**discouraging**	☐	G	the basic systems an area needs, such as roads and drains
8	**distributed**	☐	H	in a way that relates to living things and their surroundings

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Who can reach the sand on a popular beach? In Portugal's Arrábida region in 2026, opposition to development plans made questions of access, conservation and private development unusually visible.

1 Who can reach the sand on a popular beach? The answer depends on access roads, conservation rules, commercial concessions and private development. In Portugal's Arrábida region, opposition to development plans affecting several beaches made those tensions unusually visible during 2026.

2 Protesters argued that stronger private control could undermine residents' ability to enjoy a landscape they regarded as part of their community's identity. Arrábida's clear waters and striking coastal scenery draw visitors from well beyond the region, creating economic opportunities while placing considerable pressure on infrastructure and on sensitive natural areas that were never designed for crowds. The pressure is concentrated into a few months, which makes it harder to manage and easier to underestimate in the planning stage.

3 Those in favour of greater investment may reasonably emphasise improved facilities, better visitor management and employment. Yet the benefits of commercial development tend to be distributed unevenly. A fee can seem small to someone visiting once. A local family going back throughout the summer may see a very different cost.

4 Protected status complicates the picture rather than resolving it. Measures that limit construction or cap vehicle numbers may be ecologically indispensable, yet identical restrictions can function, or at least be experienced, as a mechanism for discouraging ordinary visitors. A great deal depends on who drafts the rules, who is consulted beforehand and whether the resulting inconvenience falls on day-trippers or on paying guests.

5 Precision matters in describing the dispute. Commercially managed facilities, restricted access routes and outright private ownership are not interchangeable concepts, however easily they are conflated in a headline. Nor should fears about a proposed project be reported as though the anticipated restrictions had already taken effect. The underlying conflict concerns how decisions over public access are made, and whose interests carry the greatest weight when they are.

6 There is a broader question of environmental justice here. Attractive landscapes often become commercially valuable precisely because earlier generations preserved or shared them rather than cashing in. If access comes to depend on spending power, a community ends up losing something that is difficult to measure in economic terms: the ability to enjoy a natural place without first having to purchase an experience. Such losses rarely appear in any assessment, partly because nobody has worked out how to price them, and partly because they are felt gradually rather than all at once.

7 Portugal's coastal controversy demonstrates that tourism policy is not only a matter of visitor numbers and revenue. It is also about governance, belonging and the meaning of public space, and about which of those things a council is willing to defend when money is on the table. A successful coastal economy ought to be judged not simply by the income it generates, but by whether the people who live beside it retain a genuine place within it. On that measure, the protests themselves may be the most useful evidence available.

Sources: The Guardian. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer suggests an identical restriction can be experienced as either protection or exclusion. T F NG
2. The text claims that earlier generations made money from the landscapes they preserved. T F NG
3. Residents were consulted before the plans were drawn up. T F NG
4. The writer regards the protests as weak evidence about whether a coastal economy serves local people. T F NG
5. A fixed fee is likely to be felt more heavily by regular local visitors than by one-off visitors. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

conflated **dispensable** **indispensable** **interchangeable** **redundant** **retain** **underestimate** **undermine**

1. Secret deals between the council and developers did much to _____ residents' trust in the process.
2. Critics claimed the report had _____ public access with private ownership.
3. For a fragile dune system, strict limits on footfall may be _____ , not merely desirable.
4. The two terms are not _____ : each has a precise legal meaning.
5. Even after the redevelopment, longstanding residents hope to _____ their right to cross the dunes freely.
6. Planners tend to _____ how quickly a quiet cove can become overcrowded.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The planners' failure to consult residents showed a lack of _____ . (ACCOUNT)
2. Heavy footfall is causing _____ erosion of the dunes. (REVERSE)
3. Commercial _____ of public space often goes unnoticed until access is restricted. (EXPLOIT)
4. A properly _____ survey of residents would settle the question. (REPRESENT)
5. The council's _____ to consult anyone beforehand angered residents. (RELUCTANT)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At this level the preposition is part of a fixed chunk, usually adjective plus preposition. Learn the whole chunk and its usual object.

at by for in on to with

1. Charging locals to reach their own shoreline would be tantamount _____ a tax on belonging.
2. Any plan to limit cars is fraught _____ political risk.
3. The scheme's approval was contingent _____ a satisfactory environmental review.
4. Critics say the profits were made _____ the expense of ordinary visitors.
5. The plan sits _____ stark contrast to the council's earlier promises.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What should everyone be able to enjoy at a beach without paying?
2. Would a local discount solve the problem of repeated entry fees?
3. Who should help pay to look after a popular stretch of coast?

9 Role-play: a fee for the beach car park

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the council officer

Your council wants to charge a fee at the beach car park. The money will pay for cleaning and safety. Explain why, listen to the resident, and decide if you can offer anything.

Student B · the local resident

You take your family to the beach about fifty times every summer. You think a fee is unfair for local people. Say why, and suggest a better idea.

Useful phrases

I understand your point, but we've got to pay for the cleaning.

That's a lot of money for a family like ours.

What if local people got a discount?

I'm afraid we can't make an exception for everyone.

Who'd decide how the money's spent?

Let's try to find something that's fair for everybody.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree on a fee, and who was happiest with the result?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 F · 2 G · 3 H · 4 D · 5 E · 6 B · 7 C · 8 A

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 F · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 undermine · 2 conflated · 3 indispensable · 4 interchangeable · 5 retain · 6 underestimate

6 Word forms

1 accountability · 2 irreversible · 3 exploitation · 4 representative · 5 reluctance

7 Language focus

1 to · 2 with · 3 on · 4 at · 5 in

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