

# INDONESIA CANCELS PLANNED CLOSURE OF KOMODO ISLAND



Indonesian authorities announced that they would not close the Komodo island to tourists, as previously planned. Instead, the authorities will limit the number of tourists and raise fees to better protect the Komodo dragons, giant lizards, which are the main attraction of the island.

The nature park will not be closed to tourists from 2020, as previously suggested, said the Indonesian Minister of Environment, Siti Nurbaya, last week. **“We are only going to transform the site into a world-class tourist destination,” she said in a statement.**

The closure announced by the regional authorities was intended to preserve the giant lizards from the effects of mass tourism. But this initiative was badly received by the tourism sector and would have required the movement of several thousand inhabitants.

The closure should not apply to the neighboring islands of eastern Indonesia where the visitors can also see these lizards, the largest in the world.

Last year, the governor of the region caused some controversy by proposing to raise the fees charged to visitors to see the dragons to 500 dollars, 50 times the current rate of 10 dollars.

The Minister for Maritime Affairs, Luhut Pandjaitan, said a quota system would be put in place to limit the number of tourists to the island.

The decline in the population of wild deer and pigs, which are prey to the dragons, is also a concern, as well as poaching, intended to supply the trafficking of giant lizards.

Some 10,000 tourists visit the islands of the Komodo National Park every month, the only place where Komodo dragons can be seen in their natural habitat. Komodo island is home to around 2900 dragons, which can measure up to 3 meters in length. The adults weigh between 70 and 90 kilograms.

Tourism Minister, Guntur Sakti, said that the nature park would be transformed into a destination of choice. **“It is important to ensure stability so that the tourist industry is not put into difficulty,”** he underlined.

Tour operators selling cruises that pass through Komodo island had expressed concerns over the authorities' indecision.

**Indonesia wants to replicate Bali's success by developing five other tourist destinations across the country, including Lake Toba on Sumatra island, the Buddhist temple of Borobudur (Central Java), or Labuan Bajo, a port on the Flores island near the Komodo island.**

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