

# 'Maximum' security as Philippines readies Boracay shutdown

April 24 2018, by Ayee Macaraig



Tourists and residents walk past a security check at the Caticlan jetty to get to Boracay

Police with assault rifles patrolled entry points to Boracay island on Tuesday just days before a six-month shutdown and clean-up of one of

the Philippines' top tourist attractions.

President Rodrigo Duterte had branded the renowned white-sand resort a "cesspool" fouled by dumped sewage and imposed the temporary ban on visitors that is due to take effect Thursday.

Authorities on Tuesday held a practice run of security measures, asking residents of the tiny island to present identification cards at the gateway port of Caticlan to be allowed entry.

In Boracay, police conducted exercises simulating clashes with protesters, terrorist attacks and a hostage incident even as they said there was no specific threat.

"In any plan we need maximum contingency. We will have an assessment if we need to add or reduce our forces but we now have enough forces," local police official Jesus Cambay told AFP.

Once hailed as one of the world's top holiday destinations by travel magazines, Boracay is among Southeast Asian destinations reeling from decades of unchecked tourism and environmental degradation.

Officials have warned the island's drainage system is being used to send untreated sewage from hotels and restaurants into its turquoise waters.



Tourists at the white sand beach of Boracay before its closure

Duterte has threatened to arrest people who try to block government efforts to rehabilitate the sewage system and demolish illegal structures.

With no sign in sight of resistance to the clean-up, some residents were surprised by the presence of more than 600 policemen.

"I think it's excessive. Why does Boracay have so many policemen?" tour promoter Jessie Ibon told AFP.

"It might scare the tourists, seeing soldiers with long firearms."

Workers said they did not mind security checks, adding they were more worried about their jobs.



Tourists leave after vacationing on Boracay

The closure threatens the livelihood of 17,000 hotel, restaurant and other tourism workers, plus about 11,000 construction workers.

"There's no problem with presenting IDs. It's no hassle. But the income is the huge problem. Of the 100 percent income we used to get, it's now down to 15 percent," resort housekeeper Ernida Jimenez told AFP.

The last remaining tourists went swimming despite the algae-tinted waters near shore, which the government said was due to sewage being dumped into the waters.

"I heard that this beach is supposed to be the most amazing, the most beautiful beach in the world and then when it was all green, it was a bit disappointing," Swedish tourist Malin Palm, 19, told AFP.

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