

Philippine tourist island scrambles as shutdown looms

April 6 2018



Boracay island's shutdown has sent shockwave through the Philippines' tourist industry.

The Philippines' tourism industry scrambled Friday to manage the fallout from the temporary shutdown of its world-famous Boracay island, which

threw into chaos trips planned by hundreds of thousands of tourists.

President Rodrigo Duterte ordered the once-idyllic white-sand resort closed to tourists for up to six months from April 26, after calling the country's top tourist draw a "cesspool" tainted by raw sewage.

Hundreds of Boracay hotels, as well as restaurants, tour operators and business establishments were on Friday undertaking the daunting process of unwinding bookings for rooms, flights, weddings and other events and facilities.

"Some people are cursing us... it's nasty," Hotel Sales and Marketing Association president Christine Ibarreta told AFP.

"I hope (there will be) no mess and no chaos," she added. "We just want it to be orderly."

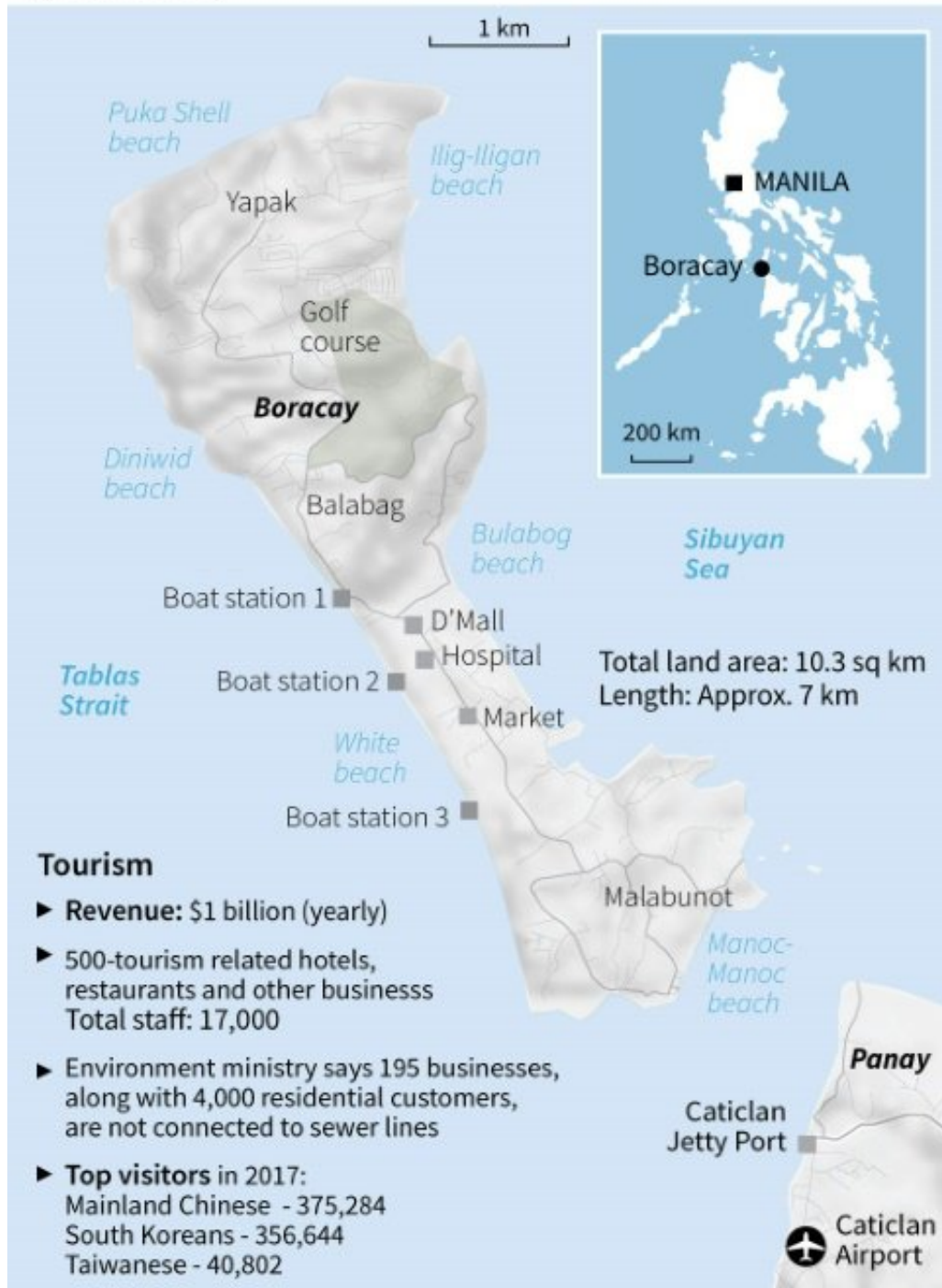
Ibarreta said "hundreds of thousands" of bookings made as far as two years in advance—potentially worth millions of dollars for hotels and other [tourism](#) services—would have to be either cancelled and refunded, or rebooked.

"Some people are okay but some people cannot understand," tour operator Clang Garcia told AFP, adding clients are typically offered a refund or an alternate destination "to save the account".

Domingo Enerio, the retired former head of the government's Tourism Promotions Board, said some of the cancelled bookings contained non-refundable conditions and would have to be renegotiated or credited for future use.

Holiday island Boracay

Philippines' resort island known for its white beaches serves 2 million guests annually



Boracay is the best known holiday island in The Philippines.

Under the government plan police, or even soldiers, will be deployed to keep away tourists from the tiny central Philippine island, while residents will be issued special identification cards to ensure continued access while Boracay is rehabilitated.

Domestic airlines announced on Thursday they would scale back the number of flights to the jumping-off point for the 1,000-hectare (2,470-acre) island.

Industry officials say Boracay accounts for about 20 percent of the country's tourism revenues, and fear a longer-term fallout on the Philippines' image as a tourism destination.

"Overall it looks bleak," Enerio, the former tourism official, told AFP.

"Boracay will definitely take a hit and the Philippine [tourism industry](#) will take a hit," he added.

The threat of closure first emerged in February when Duterte blasted the island's hotels, restaurants and other businesses, accusing them of dumping sewage directly into the sea.

Authorities said Thursday some businesses were using the island's drainage system to send untreated sewage into its surrounding turquoise waters.

Ibarreta, the hotel industry official, said the six-month tourist ban would likely mean the industry will lose some of its 17,000 workers in Boracay.

"So we'll have to retrain people (after the ban is lifted) and that's expensive," she added.

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