

Philippines closes Boracay to tourists under high security

April 26 2018, by Ayee Macaraig



Mock protesters scuffle with anti-riot police in drills ahead of Boracay's shutdown

The Philippines shuttered its most famous holiday island Boracay to tourists on Thursday for a six-month clean-up, which the government has

imposed with a muscular show of its security forces.

Coast guard boats were on patrol and assault-rifle wielding police were posted at entry points to the once-pristine island that has become tainted by heavy commercialisation and overdevelopment.

Regional police head Cesar Binag told AFP the shutdown began past midnight, with tourists barred from boarding the ferry that is the main way onto the island.

"Boracay is officially closed to tourists. We are not closing establishments but tourists cannot enter. We are implementing the instruction of the president," Binag said.

About 600 policemen were deployed, with some performing life-like drills including riot officers battling bottle-hurling protesters and mock hostage taking of sunbathers—all before startled locals.

"It looks like we are at war," Jessica Gabay, a grocery seller, told AFP late Wednesday. "Maybe the authorities are doing this to instill fear so people will follow the rules."

The government conceded on Thursday there was no real threat, with interior ministry assistant secretary Epimaco Densing telling AFP the security presence was "just part of preparing for the worst".

Boracay holiday island

The Philippine resort island known for its white beaches serves 2 million guests annually



Source : maps4news.com/Yumpu.com

© AFP

Map and factfile on the Philippines' best known holiday island Boracay.

President Rodrigo Duterte ordered the shutdown this month after calling the resort a "cesspool", dirtied by tourism-related businesses dumping raw sewage directly into the ocean.

During the closure only residents with ID cards are allowed to board ferries to the tiny island that is home to around 40,000 people.

On Thursday morning, police began patrolling the beach to enforce a rule prohibiting swimming except in one designated area marked by buoys.



A sewage pipe is seen along Bulabog beach as residents transport garbage bags on a boat on the Philippine island of Boracay

Unchecked growth

Boats are barred from sailing within three kilometres (1.9 miles) of the shoreline and only Boracay residents are allowed to fish in its waters.

The Philippines has pledged to use the closure to shore up the island's infrastructure, bulldoze illegal structures and clean up the mess left by years of unchecked growth.

Resistance was light in the run-up to the closure, with no violent protests and most of the criticism focusing on the fate of roughly 30,000 people employed in the island's bustling [tourist](#) trade.



Critics says the sudden closure is a knee jerk response that will put thousands out of work

The workers were drawn by the relatively good wages on the island that has seen the number of visitors roughly quadruple to two million since 2006.

Those tourists, a growing number of whom are Chinese and Korean, pumped roughly \$1 billion in revenue into the Philippine economy last year.

But its growth from a sleepy backpacker hideaway into a mass-tourism hub with fast food outlets on the beach has taken a toll.

Unchecked construction has eaten away at the island's natural beauty, while slimy algae-filled waves in some areas and mountains of discarded drink bottles are problems acknowledged even by critics of the shutdown.



A dumpsite on the Philippine island of Boracay

"I'm all for rehabilitation and preserving it but clearly this is not the way to do it," Philippine politics expert Ashley Acedillo told AFP.

He called the closure an "ill-thought through, unplanned and knee-jerk action" that did not take into account the economic impact on the island's workers and business community.

© 2018 AFP

Citation: Philippines closes Boracay to tourists under high security (2018, April 26) retrieved 30 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-04-philippines-boracay-tourists-high.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.