

Indonesia scraps plans to close komodo dragon island

October 1 2019



A cluster of islands in the eastern part of Indonesia are home to nearly 2,900 Komodo dragons, pictured here at Surabaya Zoo

Indonesia has scrapped plans to ban tourists from an island home to komodo dragons and will instead limit visitor numbers and raise entry

prices to create a "premium destination", officials said.

A plan announced last year would have seen Komodo [national park](#) close from the start of 2020, over concerns that the giant lizard species were suffering from the effects of mass [tourism](#).

But the mooted closure sparked concern in the area's tourism industry and could have meant relocating a couple thousand island residents. It also did not apply to nearby islands where the giant, slaving carnivores are also found.

Indonesian environment minister Siti Nurbaya said Monday that the park would not be closed.

"We will just turn it into a world-class holiday destination," she added in a statement.

Last year, the region's governor sparked a controversy when he proposed charging visitors \$500 to see the dragons, about 50 times the current \$10 entrance fee.

Maritime minister Luhut Pandjaitan said Monday that a new quota system would be introduced to limit the number of visitors to the island, amid concerns that tourism was putting too much stress on the lizards.

There have also been concerns about declining numbers of deer, boars and other natural prey, as well as attempts to smuggle the lizards.

Thousands of tourists annually descend on the cluster of islands in the eastern part of the country—the only place in the world where [komodo dragons](#) can be seen in their natural habitat.

The islands are home to nearly 2,900 dragons, which can grow to around

three metres (10 feet) in length. An adult typically weighs from 70 to 90 kilograms (150 to 200 pounds).

Tourism ministry spokesman Guntur Sakti said Tuesday that the [islands](#) would be turned into a "premium destination", without elaborating.

"It is important to provide certainty so that the [tourism industry](#) is not hampered in its work," he added.

Indonesia has launched a push to replicate Bali's success across the Southeast Asian archipelago, including trying to draw more visitors to Lake Toba on Sumatra island as well as ancient Buddhist and Hindu temples.

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Citation: Indonesia scraps plans to close komodo dragon island (2019, October 1) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-10-indonesia-scraps-komodo-dragon-island.html>

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