

# GALAPAGOS ISLANDS NO LONGER IN DANGER?



The recent decision of UN officials to remove the Galapagos Islands from the list of World Heritage Sites in danger has alarmed many. While scientists confirm the islands are still in serious danger, the politicians remain firm.

In recent months, scientists have been assessing the environmental status of the Galapagos Islands. For many decades, this oasis of unique natural diversity has been admired by thousands and as the number of tourists increases massively each year, there is serious concern about keeping the island and local biodiversity unharmed. While the outcome of the scientific study clearly states the system of control and protection needs to be tightened, **UN officials voted in favor of removing the Galapagos Islands off the list of World Heritage Sites in danger.**

The unique character of the Galapagos Islands, located 600 miles west of the Ecuadorian coast, was first documented by Sir Charles Darwin. It was local indigenous species which inspired his Theory of Evolution. **The islands have become a big tourist attraction in the past fifty years, and as the population grew from 2 000 in 1960 to today's 30 000, there is a reason to worry.**

129,000 tourists come here every year to enjoy diving, exploring local rare animal species thus **bringing in disease and often causing harm to the environment.** Fishing has become a crucial industry as well and while the Ecuadorian government claims the protective measures have been tightened, environmentalists criticize the decision of UN officials as premature and irresponsible.

Mrs. Toni Darton, the Director of Britain's Galapagos Conservation Trust has spoken about her concern regarding the decision; "It suggests the islands are out of danger and they are not. There are forty species on the islands whose conservation status is critically endangered."

**Mrs. Darton is one of a great number of people who strongly disapprove of the recent actions of UN officials.** However, the organization has been assured by Ecuadorian authorities the impact of tourism related activities will be controlled.

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