

Sipadan Island to close next month for 'recovery of ecosystem'

NST 29/10/23 mls 9

OLIVIA MIWIL
SEMPORNA
olivia@nst.com.my

SIPADAN Island, a haven for scuba divers and marine life observers, will be closed next month to provide a "recovery period" for the gem in Sabah's tourism crown.

Sabah Parks director Dr Maklarin Lakim said despite the expected loss in revenue, the temporary closure was necessary to help the island's ecosystem heal.

He said this marked the island's first closure since the Covid-19 pandemic.

He said the renowned diving destination would be closed next month and will reopen on Dec 1.

The closure aligns with the decision of the Management and Supervision Committee of Sipadan and Ligitan islands.

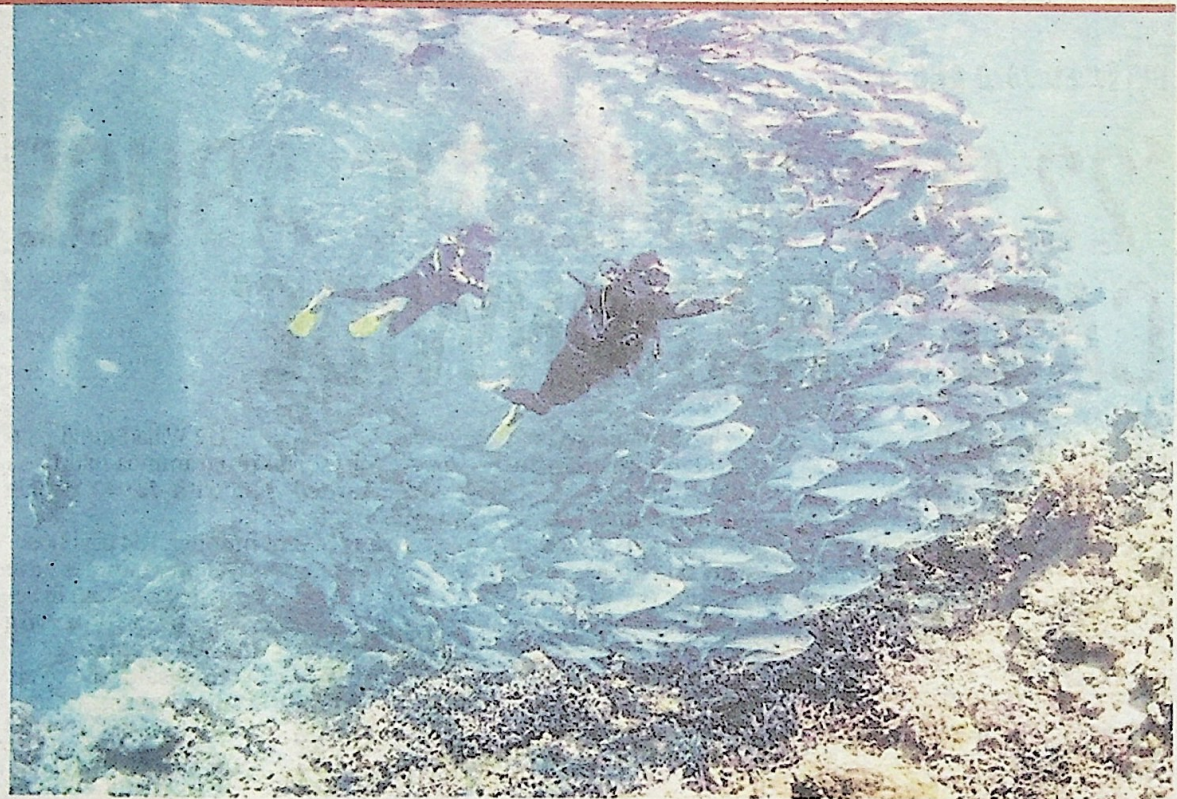
"Its primary goal is to support the health and recovery of the island's ecosystem and marine life, reducing human disturbances — particularly those caused by scuba divers," he added.

Maklarin said that this decision was announced to all operators in March this year, to ease tourist management.

He added that the island permitted a maximum of 237 tourists a day, with a total of 474 dives.

As a result, Sabah Parks will be losing income from 14,220 diving permits.

In 2021, Sabah Parks reported



Sipadan Island is home to more than 3,000 fish species with popular diving spots at Barracuda Point, Drop-Off and Turtle Cave. PIC COURTESY OF UNDERWATER ILLUSIONS

that the 18-month closure of Sipadan Island due to the pandemic had a positive impact on marine resources resulting in coral growth and the presence of rare fish species.

Sipadan Island is home to more

than 3,000 fish species, with popular diving spots such as Barracuda Point, Drop-Off, and Turtle Cave.

Last month, eight individuals had an encounter with more than 100 dolphins near the island.

Given the unique features of Sipadan Island, it was recognised in 2000 as one of the 77 most extraordinary and outstanding natural formations globally by the New 7 Wonders of Nature voting committee.