Coronavirus (COVID-19) Philippines Travel Ban Statement

18th March 2020

Further to our last statement, the global spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) has continued and as you will undoubtedly be aware, travel restrictions have been implemented in a number of countries. As of the 18th March the UK Foreign Commonwealth Office has advised against all but essential travel to any international destination.

The safety of our volunteers and staff is our main priority and we are constantly gathering information in order to provide you with answers but as you can imagine this is a fluid situation that is constantly changing.

Currently in the Philippines, there is both a national and regional quarantine that is restricting localised travel in an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19. As of the 17th March, although nationally there were 187 confirmed cases in the Philippines, in Southern Leyte, where the CCC expedition site is based, there are no reported cases.

What this means for those currently on site:
Due to the current FCO advice, as detailed above, under normal circumstances the site would close, and all personnel would be repatriated. However, due to the national quarantine that has been put in place, moving around the country is difficult and so Coral Cay Conservation feels that if the individuals on site were to attempt travel to Manila or another major airport, there is a very strong chance that they may get quarantined somewhere on route. Ferries have also been stopped and there are a very limited number of domestic flights available, making travel between islands difficult.

With this in mind, and the fact that everyone is safe on site with food and medical supplies, we feel that it is best if they stay put until the quarantine is lifted or further local advice is received. We have asked everyone to check with their travel insurance providers what their coverage is under the current circumstances (so far this has all been positive and people are still covered). We have been in touch with the British Embassy in Manila and are in conversations with them about the best course of action. The national quarantine is set to run for the next month and the FCO advice is most likely a reflection of the travel situation (not down to the number of cases which is currently significantly lower than the UK) and so it is anticipated that once regional travel opens up that the FCO advice will change back to the norm.

The team are safe, housed, have good supplies (with no concerns that these will run short) and are in the best place.

Ultimately, based on the updates that we have sent to the expedition site, we have stated that this is our advice but that it is their decision if they want to leave. However, our company stance is based on national, provincial and local government advice, so if anyone does decide to leave, Coral Cay Conservation cannot be responsible for them.
For those of you due to travel imminently:
We recommend that anyone intending on travelling to the Philippines within the next four weeks, contact their travel insurer/airline provider as soon as possible to discuss options. Insurers may recommend cancellation, in which case please contact our office and we will send you any supporting documentation.

This situation is continually evolving and developing, and we are in constant contact with our Field Team in the Philippines. As such, as new advisories are delivered, we are communicating and acting accordingly. If you have any concerns or queries, please contact our office and we will provide information where possible.

Alistair Cole
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Coral Cay Conservation