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## **ALBANIA DEFENSE MINISTRY OPENS MILITARY ISLAND FOR TOURISM**

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Foxnews (5 April 2017)

Albania's Defense ministry has agreed to open Sazan Island, a military base still under its management, to tourists during the summer.

Defense Minister Mimi Kodheli on Wednesday signed an agreement with her colleague, Economy Minister Milva Ekonomi, to allow visits from May until October.

Ekonomi described the deal "an important event for the Albanian economy" since many tour operators have insisted that visiting the island would be a popular attraction.

She did not explain how the tourists would be taken there or provide other details of how potential tours would be managed.

The island, once a fortified, isolated spot, has bunkers and tunnels designed to withstand nuclear attacks. It remains a mystery to most Albanians although more than 3,000 military personnel once lived there, and officially remains a military base housing only a couple of soldiers.

Sazan, Albania's most western point, first was used by Italy's Fascist regime during the 1930s. Albania's post-World War II communist regime considered it the country's "airplane carrier, the port of defense, the key to controlling the Otranto Strait," according to officers from that era.

"No doubt Sazan Island is a tourist attraction due to its position," Kodheli said, adding the site also boasts a diverse range of flora and fauna that could attract researchers, too.

The island's trenches and tunnels were built by the communist government to stave off a Western invasion. Although communism fell in 1992, ruined buildings still contain old beds, kitchen utensils, school benches and chairs.

The defense minister said the government is considering letting tourists visit two other naval military bases close to the island □ Pashe Alimani and Orikum □ with archaeological sites found there.

Some 4.7 million tourists visited Albania in 2016. Tourism is a main source of income for the cash-strapped Balkan country.

Associated Press

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