

Tourist accused of breaking Easter Island statue

March 26, 2008

A Finnish tourist has been arrested after allegedly stealing a piece of volcanic rock from one of the massive statues

Marko Kulju, 26, faces seven years in prison and a fine of \$US19,100 (\$A21,100) if convicted of stealing piece: statues carved out of volcanic rock between 400 and 1000 years ago to represent deceased ancestors.

A local woman told authorities she saw the theft on Sunday at Anakena beach and saw Kulju fleeing from the scene.

Police later identified him by the tattoos the woman saw on his body.

Kulju used his hands to tear off the earlobe, which fell to the ground and broke into pieces measuring 20 to 30 centimetres, said a park guard. Gonzalez said in a telephone interview. Kulju ran away with at least one of the pieces from the four-metre-high statue.

"Fortunately, this type of thing does not happen every day, but it does happen, and it is almost impossible to control the archaeological value everywhere and the park guards cannot prevent all such incidents," said Easter Island governor.

Authorities are inspecting the statue to see if it can be repaired, Castro said. Damaging Moais is punishable under Chilean law.

While some of the island's 400 Moais are more than 20 metres tall, most have an average height of six metres and weigh up to 15 tonnes.

The statues gaze out on the south Pacific more than 3,700 kilometres west of Chile, which annexed Easter Island in 1888.

The Moais were nominated, but not chosen, as one of the new seven wonders of the world, selected by average of the competition were India's Taj Mahal, the Great Wall of China and Rome's Colosseum.

AP

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ues on Easter Island.

s of the right earlobe from a Moai statue, one of numerous

ene with a piece of the statue in his hand.

entimetres each, Easter Island Police Chief Cristian
Moai, he said.

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rument official Liliana Castro.

r a law protecting national monuments.

id weigh about 20 tonnes.

id in the 19th century.

e citizens in a global poll conducted by a non-profit organisation last year. Among the monuments edging them