

17 Things You Need to Know Before Traveling During Hurricane Season

July 23, 2015 by Kelsey Blodget

Traveling during hurricane season to hurricane-prone locales has its pros and cons -- but if you're going to attempt it, make sure you know these 17 things first. Especially number nine.

1. You Probably Won't Get Caught Unawares by a Hurricane.

Most guests aren't going to be caught completely off-guard by a hurricane, according to meteorologist Jason Meyers. "With hurricanes thankfully we know usually about a week ahead of time if they are going to be coming -- sometimes even more than that," he says.

2. But Occasionally They're Unpredictable.

When Hurricane Odile formed in September 2014, meteorologists originally predicted it would curve out to sea and away from the Baja California Peninsula (home to popular resort destination Cabo San Lucas). Instead, it made landfall as one of the region's worst-ever hurricanes. But these sorts of unexpected turn of events are the exception, not the norm.

Mark Simoes, a Travel Advisor with Balboa Vacations, says he hadn't encountered an emergency situation at that level for his clients before. "Cabo was the worst of it in terms of clients caught off guard a little bit. Normally I always advise clients to alter their dates or find a different destination at the last minute," he explains. "Cabo in particular was an unusual situation and the effects of that storm were still felt this spring as properties took a long time to rebuild. It was quite devastating."

3. Travel Insurance is a Good Idea.

In case you have to cancel or change your plans at the last minute, it's a good idea to protect your investment with trip insurance. Because travelers will often know before they leave if a hurricane is developing, with trip insurance they can avoid a bad situation altogether. "Many travelers may have greater peace of mind with 'Cancel for Any Reason' coverage. This means that they can cancel their trip -- at least 48 hours prior to departure -- even if they simply don't want to worry about the threat of a storm," says Sharon Mostyn, a representative for RoamRight, a travel insurance provider. "This can provide coverage even if the hotel is not affected or an evacuation is not ordered." Make sure to read our breakdown on the different types of travel insurance.

4. As Are Expert Travel Advisors.

If you don't want to deal with the hassle of monitoring the weather or rebooking your flights and hotels, it may be worth considering using a travel agent or travel advisor during hurricane season. "If the weather warrants a change [a travel advisor] can work to alter your vacation by date or find another destination. They will be there for you if you need to get out of the country before flights stop operating," Simoes says.

5. And Maybe an Evacuation Service If You Are Really Worried.



Global Rescue personnel managing an evacuation following the Nepal 2015 earthquake

Not willing to leave anything up to fate? Those who want to be really prepared could consider paying for membership in a crisis response firm like Global Rescue, which provides medical and security evacuations. Membership starts at \$119. It's useful not just for natural disasters, but for injuries while traveling and evacuation during civil unrest -- and the company will deploy critical care paramedics and former Special Ops personnel to save you. The U.S. Ski Team and NASA are clients, and we kind of think James Bond might sign up if he weren't fictional -- or maybe he'd be part of the Global Rescue team.

6. Weather Apps Can Help You Monitor the Situation after Arrival.

One of the easiest ways to monitor the weather after arrival is with a weather app on your phone. Apps like RadarCast, Storm Shield, Dark Sky, and Weather Underground (among others) all provide functionality to closely monitor changes in weather. With RadarCast, "you can bookmark locations and keep an eye on the forecast ahead of time so you know if something is coming," Meyers says. "You can actually see if that hurricane is going to be headed for you. If you are to the left or the right of the hurricane you are going to get the heavy rain and high surf."

7. This is a Slow Hurricane Season in the Atlantic So Far.

Good news for those planning trips along the Atlantic coastline -- this year could be going a lot worse. So far the season is "pretty slow, but that's kind of how last year was as well," Meyers says. "El Niño is in full swing and that usually suppresses hurricanes in the Atlantic." There have been three named storms so far -- Ana, Bill, and Claudette -- and the forecast for the entire season is between six and 11 storms. Three are expected to be hurricanes.



8. But Not in the Pacific.

When it's an El Niño year, the Atlantic is quieter but the Pacific is busier. Luckily, hurricanes in the Pacific don't typically affect the United States. "It's rare when one even brushes up against Hawaii. Dolores brought a little rain to Southern California, but they weren't complaining too much because they needed the rain," Meyers says. Other Pacific Coast destinations also aren't often affected. In Central America, countries can get heavy rains but hurricanes typically go back out to sea. And even though Mexico can get hit, it's usually not a direct hit. "It's not coming straight on and they know it's coming. Oftentimes they just get a lot of rain and it causes flooding," he says.

9. Peak Hurricane Season Hasn't Started Yet.

Though hurricane season runs from June 1st to November 30th, the peak of hurricane season begins around late August and lasts through late October. So the worst is yet to come.

10. If Traveling to the Caribbean, Remember your ABCs.

Those who want to go to the Caribbean but don't want to worry about hurricanes should remember their ABCs -- Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao, which are all located on the southern fringes of the hurricane belt. Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados are also far south (but east of the ABCs) and rarely get hurricanes, although they can.

11. The Deadliest Aspect of a Hurricane Isn't What You Think It Is.

It's not just the fierce winds you have to worry about. "The deadliest aspect of most hurricanes is actually flooding and what is caused by the storm surge," Meyers says.

12. When a Hurricane Hits, Don't Stay in Your Hotel Room.

Ask the hotel staff what to do and listen -- they will likely have a plan in place. During Hurricane Odile, Simoes says that many Cabo hotels moved guests to an interior ballroom area, where they could all be in one room and insulated from the outside storm. In most hotel rooms, you run the risk of getting hit with breaking window glass. If you don't have time to consult with the staff, head to any interior room or stairwell without windows.

13. Prepare to Extend Your Trip.

The hurricane itself likely won't last more than a day -- but it's the aftermath that can be the most problematic for travelers. Getting out of the country after a hurricane is no easy feat. The airport could be closed for a while, and when it reopens, you can expect flights to book up immediately. Guests should prepare to stay put longer than expected; at least the hotel is unlikely to be overbooked as no new clients will be arriving. Another option is to get creative with your exit strategy -- Simoes said after Odile they had clients in Cabo they had to get out by ground to another airport. On a Caribbean island where there isn't another airport, however, there may be no option but to extend your stay.

14. And Forego Creature Comforts.

After the storm, guests will likely have to live for a while without electricity, air-conditioning, and any luxuries they may have been looking forward to on their trip. "It's no fun to be on vacation when you are sitting inside without power and it's just raining outside," Meyers says. Some hotels, such as the Xanadu Island Resort in Belize, have back-up generators -- but you shouldn't count on your hotel having one. You can always call ahead and ask, though.

15. Bring Cash.

If the power is out, so are the machines that process credit card transactions. Have paper currency on hand.

16. Don't Check Your Bags.

If you possibly can, bring a carry-on and that's it. "With canceled and rescheduled flights occurring more frequently during hurricane season, it is easy for your suitcase to be lost in the shuffle," says Mike Kelly, CEO of On Call International.

17. But Don't Skip Hurricane Season Travel Altogether.

Simoes says travelers shouldn't get overly stressed about traveling during hurricane season. "It's a great time to travel in terms of good value and at the end of the day the odds of a hurricane hitting are still very low," he says. "Overall, I still recommend people travel during that period as long as you don't mind the small risk of inconvenience if you have to change your plans. The odds are still in your favor."

So watch the weather and have a great trip!