

Hurricane Irma impacts – Update #3

The Caribbean Tourism Organization, CTO, in partnership with the Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association, has issued another update on the impact of Hurricane Irma that we are sharing with our readers. The impact on some key tourist islands—St. Marten, St. Thomas, the British Virgin Islands and Barbuda in particular, is devastating and may halt tourism – a main source of revenue – for months to come.

Assessments are still coming in from the impact of Hurricane Irma on a number of Caribbean countries in the northern Leeward Islands and the northern Caribbean with warnings and watches still in place for a few countries in Irma's track.

Additionally, the projected path of Hurricane Jose, a category 4 storm, has caused tropical storm and hurricane alerts and watches to be posted throughout the northern Leeward Islands.

Following is an update regarding Irma's impact as well as steps being taken by countries still in Irma's path. Reports from CHTA-member hotels have been included where available and details regarding Jose's projected track are listed.

Antigua and Barbuda

Antigua was not impacted by Hurricane Irma but Barbuda and its

1,600 residents were severely impacted by the hurricane which passed directly over the small island, resulting in one fatality. Ninety-five percent of buildings including private properties and Government facilities were destroyed or extensively damaged. Barbuda's hotel infrastructure was also damaged, but with less than 100 hotel rooms the overall effect on tourism as a whole is minimal.

To speed-up the relief and rebuilding efforts, the Government declared a State of Emergency for Barbuda only and evacuated some residents on a voluntary basis. At the same time, emergency supplies of bottled water, cots, medicines have been purchased by the Government and planes were chartered to fly them in the country. Relief efforts, coordinated by the National office of Disaster Services along with the Red Cross, have started in earnest with multiple relief flights and vessels landing on Barbuda.

The Government of Venezuela has also made two aircraft available to transport goods for Barbuda as well as a medical team of 20 doctors and nurses experienced in disasters.

Hurricane Jose has passed Antigua and Barbuda and warnings have been downgraded to a tropical storm watch.

Anguilla

The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency is reporting the airport runway and most roads leading to the airport have been cleared of debris. The agency is also reporting that 90% of government buildings and business structures were damaged as well as 90% of the electricity infrastructure. There is also significant damage to the main water supply.

The British government has deployed three humanitarian aid experts from the UK to assist with needs assessments and coordination.

The British naval ship Royal Fleet Auxiliary Mounts Bay has arrived on island, with 40 Royal Marines and Army engineers on board. The ship carries a range of equipment to support humanitarian responses including vehicles, tents and facilities to purify water. The UK is also sending the Royal Navy flagship HMS Ocean to its overseas islands.

Hurricane Jose has passed Anguilla and warnings have been downgraded to a tropical storm warning.

The Islands of The Bahamas

The Bahamas Department of Meteorology has issued an "All Clear" for the Southeast Bahamas,

including Inagua, Mayaguana, Crooked Island, Acklins, Long Cay and Samana Cay. However, Hurricane Warnings remain in effect for the Northwest and Central Bahamas. These include Grand Bahama, Abaco, Bimini, The Berry Islands, Andros, New Providence, Eleuthera, Exuma, Long Island, Cat Island, Rum Cay, San Salvador and Ragged Island.

All hotels and resorts throughout The Islands of The Bahamas have activated their hurricane programs and are taking all necessary precautions to protect visitors and residents where necessary.

British Virgin Islands

The destruction caused by Hurricane Irma in the British Virgin Islands has been devastating according to a statement from Sharon Flax-Brutus, Director of Tourism for the British Virgin Islands. With cell phone towers down and power outages, it has been difficult to receive communication from within the territory, and to fully assess the damage. The destination has lost entire structures and many homes are without roofs, or have been diminished to merely foundations.

The Government has begun to coordinate humanitarian relief efforts and an initial clean-up operation. We received word that the UK government is sending Royal Navy flagship HMS Ocean to offer relief and support.

A tropical storm watch is today in place for the country.

Cuba

Hurricane Irma is passing along the northern coast of Cuba, where thousands of tourists were evacuated from low-lying keys off the coast. Hurricane watches and warnings remain in effect.

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Dominican Republic

Punta Cana International Airport has resumed normal operations following the passage of Hurricane Irma after the storm passed through off Punta Cana's coast. The area's hotel sector is reporting no major damages. Damaged homes and flooded streets in Cabarete and Sosua have been reported.

Haiti

Reports indicate that damage and flooding is minor in Haiti but warnings for possible flooding are still in effect.

Puerto Rico

Updated reports indicate that Puerto Rico's electrical grid seemed to take the brunt of the storm as overgrown trees and debris downed power lines. As of late Thursday (Sept. 7), 63% of the island's 1.5 million power clients were still without electricity.

While the assessment of impact across the island continues, the Puerto Rico Tourism Company's preliminary report shows that major tourism infrastructure and attractions are operational and the island can continue to welcome new visitors. Hotels seem to have suffered only minor damage and say they are "open for business."

Flights to and from Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport have resumed.

Puerto Rico's port is operational and should be receiving cruises by September 9.

St. Kitts and Nevis

St. Kitts & Nevis sustained minimal damage overall and both St. Kitts' Robert L. Bradshaw International Airport and Nevis' Vance W. Amory International Airport reopened.

St. Barthelemy

It has been reported that St. Barth's was heavily impacted by Hurricane Irma which destroyed government buildings and badly damaged private homes and resorts including The Eden Rock Hotel.

There is flooding throughout the destination. The French government is sending people and supplies to the country to assist with recovery efforts.

St. Maarten (Dutch) / St. Martin (French)

It has been reported that much of the dual-island nation has suffered significant damage, with hotels, government offices, homes and smaller buildings badly damaged on both the Dutch and French sides of the island.

Reports from industry friends also mention widespread looting concerns.

Nearly all hotels report damage that ranges from significant to severe, but the report from the Sonesta Hotel, especially, bears repeat:

"Sonesta: All guests and staff of Sonesta Maho Beach Resort Casino & Spa, Sonesta Ocean Point Resort and Sonesta Great Bay Beach Resort & Casino are safe and unharmed. Resort damage is severe. Guests are currently in on-property 'safe areas' at the resorts.

All further reservations from now through the end of 2017 will be cancelled. Guests are in comfortable conditions and are provided with security, food, and water. We have diesel fuel for generators to cook food and provide some electricity. Any reports of guests being looted under our care are simply not true.

Sonesta Sint Maarten resorts can confirm that Jonathan Falwell, who was an in-house guest of Sonesta Ocean Point Resort contacted Samaritan's Purse, a nondenominational evangelical, United States-based Christian organization providing spiritual and physical aid to hurting people around the world, to provide a DC-8 with supplies and a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) on Friday, 8 September 2017.

The aircraft also evacuated 27 guests of Sonesta Sint Maarten Resorts, including the elderly, anyone with a medical condition, women and children first.

We would like to thank Samaritans Purse President Franklin Graham and Jonathan Falwell for their efforts.

We can also confirm that 25 United States citizens who were guests of Sonesta Great Bay Beach Resort were evacuated on a United States C130 military aircraft on Friday, Sept. 8 at sundown. We have been advised that another evacuation is imminent but do not have any further confirmation. Today, Saturday, 9 September 2017, we have organized a commercial aircraft to further the evacuation of the remaining guests at Sonesta Great Bay and more guests from Sonesta Maho Beach Resort.

This plane will depart for Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. The Dutch Marines have been able to dock a ship and get flights in from Curacao so more troops and supplies are on the ground in Sint Maarten."

Both the French and Dutch

governments are sending people to the country along with supplies and vital aid.

Incredibly, a hurricane warning is in effect for the island based on projected track of Hurricane Jose.

Turks and Caicos Islands

Director of Tourism Ramon Andrews reported that Turks and Caicos Islands experienced flooding, some structural damage, roofs that have been blown off, downed trees, no loss of life and all visitors are safe.

It has separately been reported that the Islands' emergency management agency issued an "all-clear" shortly before 1 p.m. EST on Sept. 8, but warned that "many roads have been flooded and power lines and transformers are down."

Providenciales International Airport (PLS) is currently closed.

All hotels report that guests and staff are safe.

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U.S. Virgin Islands (St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas)

The U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism has advised that full assessment on the impact of Hurricane Irma is underway and while St. Croix is getting back to business, visitors are being encouraged not to visit the district of St. Thomas and St. John.

According to Commissioner of Tourism Beverly Nicholson-Doty, “The island of St. Croix did not receive the full brunt of the storm, and St. Croix’s Henry E. Rohlsen Airport received its first commercial flight (JetBlue Airways from San Juan) on Sept. 8.”

She reported that communications are still limited, there is significant damage to infrastructure in St. Thomas and St. John, and the Cyril E. King Airport on St. Thomas will not be open for commercial traffic before the next

before the next weather system passes the area this weekend. To ensure everyone’s safety, we are requesting the postponement of all scheduled visits to St. Thomas and St. John.

The storm has resulted in four casualties to date on the island of St. Thomas.

Sadly, a tropical storm watch is in effect for St. Thomas and St. John based on the projected track of Hurricane Jose.

More updates can be found as available on <http://www.onecaribbean.org/cto-storm-watch-centre/> as well as on CHTA’s website <http://www.caribbeanhotelandtourism.com/knowledge-center/hurricane-center/>.

UNWTO emergency meeting at General Assembly to discuss Caribbean Tourism

UNWTO Secretary General Taleb Rifai issued this statement on the impact of Hurricane Irma on the Caribbean yesterday, Sept. 8:

“UNWTO is deeply saddened by the tragic effects brought by Hurricane Irma across the Caribbean.

“On behalf of the international tourism community, UNWTO conveys its heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the victims and stands ready to support the affected countries, where tourism is a pillar in the lives of so many people, to recover as swiftly as possible,” said UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai.

“UNWTO will work alongside the affected countries in all the necessary measures to support them and trust that as in previous occasion the people of these countries will show their resilience as life gets back to normal and they open for business” added Mr. Rifai.

UNWTO is convening a special meeting to address the impacts of Hurricane Irma and the way forward on the occasion of its 22nd General Assembly taking place next week in China.

The Assembly is expected to gather over 1000 participants from around the world, reports eTurbo News.



More updates

St. Maarten—St. Maarten’s director of tourism Rolando Brison, in an update today on the recovery efforts following Hurricane Irma, announces that a number of tourists have been evacuated, Hurricane Jose won’t score a direct hit and efforts are being made to reopen the Princess Juliana International Airport to relief flights tomorrow (Sunday).

The Bahamas- The all clear has been given for Nassau. The all clear for the Central and Southeastern Bahamas was issued earlier today.

At this time only Grand Bahama, Bimini, and Andros remain under a hurricane warning as Hurricane Irma moves away from the islands-nation. Hurricane Jose is not expected to pose a threat to The Bahamas at this time.

Airports. The Lynden Pindling International Airport in Nassau sustained no damage from Hurricane Irma and will resume operations on Sunday, September 10 at 5:00 a.m.

All other airports throughout The Bahamas remain closed, but operations will resume as soon as the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) gives the “all clear” and the airports have been assessed and cleared for opening.

Cruise Ports of entry throughout The Bahamas will also be assessed for clearance to re-open.

