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PANAMA CITY

Hurricane Milton evacuees fully book Panama City hotels

by: Riley Lehman
Posted: Oct 8, 2024 / 07:28 PM CDT
Updated: Oct 8, 2024 / 07:49 PM CDT

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BAY COUNTY, Fla. (WMBB) – Drive through local hotel parking lots and chances are you'll see a number of vehicles from the Tampa Bay area.

Many of those residents have evacuated away from Hurricane Milton, taking shelter here in the Panhandle. Many said they didn't want to take any risks and decided to heed the mandatory evacuation orders.

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Tampa resident David Foutz was in evacuation zone b. He, his wife and their dog jumped in their car Tuesday and headed north.

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"We put everything away inside the house in the garage, got everything ready, got some sleep a little bit last night and got up this morning and had the car packed and we headed out. We just saw that Panama City was probably the best place to go," Tampa Evacuee David Foutz said.

Foutz says Tampa is a ghost town. Lodgings in Panama City are seeing a surge in bookings. Most hotels are at max capacity, like the Hampton Inn and Suites in Panama City.

They are fully booked until Friday, and expect to have extended bookings after that period.

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"If you didn't evacuate, you're really taking a risk with your life and with stuff like that, especially with a storm like this one," Foutz said.

Some guests say they have PTSD from their recent experience with Hurricane Helene. They're nervous about returning home.

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"I'm just nervous, relieved that I'm here now and that I don't have to live through it. But it's the first time I've ever left my house, so it's just I feel very out of control," Sarasota evacuee Courtney Rossler said.

Marc Conrad and his wife arrived at the Hampton Inn Suites yesterday and are trying to turn their stay into a vacation.

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“There’s no sense staying behind. There’s nothing you can do. Go here and see the sun and have a nice three or four or five days. It’s better than sitting at home with no power, no water, no nothing for days,” Punta Gorda evacuee Marc Conrad said.

Most guests checked-in yesterday or today. Most plan to stay through Friday, maybe longer if necessary.

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