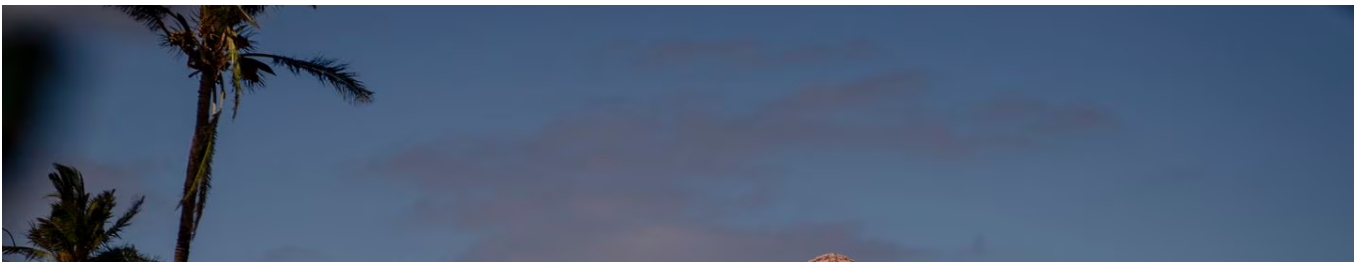


ON BASEBALL

Red Sox facility was spared by Hurricane Ian last fall, but heartbreaking damage in the area remains

By [Peter Abraham](#) Globe Staff, Updated February 13, 2023, 4:50 p.m.





This is just one small section of Fort Myers Beach that was flattened by Hurricane Ian last September. HILARY SWIFT/NYT

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Visitors to JetBlue Park for Red Sox spring training will find little evidence of the Category 4 hurricane that swept through the area in September.

A few tarps were torn from outfield fences and some signs were scattered to the wind. The large grass field used for parking on the west side of the complex was torn up when FEMA used it as a staging area. It was re-sodded last week.

Beyond that, it's business as usual. Single-game tickets are selling well for spring training, season-ticket renewals are at 90 percent, and the Yankees game March 12 is nearly sold out.

Pitchers and catchers report Tuesday, manager Alex Cora will banter with reporters, and baseball season will be under way.



JetBlue Park suffered minor damage from Hurricane Ian but the damage has been repaired and it is ready to go for spring training. RICH FAHEY

But only 16 miles to the southwest, the effects of Hurricane Ian are still being felt and likely will be for years.

Fort Myers Beach, a small town usually swarmed by tourists and spring breakers in February and March, was devastated by high winds and flooding, as were the nearby islands of Sanibel and Captiva.

Driving through those areas is heartbreaking.

In Fort Myers Beach, high winds and flooding damaged virtually every building. Concrete patches that appear to be small parking lots are all that's left of buildings that were swept away.

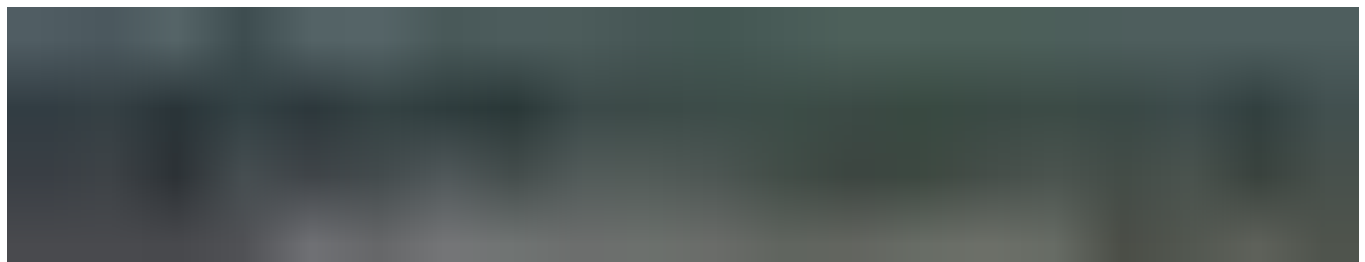
Metal poles holding street signs snapped like dry twigs. In many cases, they've been replaced by hand-lettered signs nailed to wooden posts and sunk into a bucket of dirt and rocks. For now, that suffices.

The library was wrecked and the supermarket is temporarily closed. The kitschy souvenir shops, dive bars, and restaurants are piles of rubble. A large church facing the beach across Estero Avenue appears to be torn in half and the pews are visible from the road.

The few telephone poles still upright are covered with flyers for missing cats and dogs.

Mercifully, the missing people have been accounted for. Of the 61 deaths attributed to the hurricane in Lee County, 33 came in Fort Myers Beach and other areas along the ocean.

When the storm changed course and made land to the north, some people decided to ride it out rather than evacuate. Those decisions proved fatal in some cases as the water quickly rose over the roofs of even two-story buildings.





Cleared lots are all that remains of homes here that were destroyed by Hurricane Ian. JOE RAEDLE/GETTY

The roads leading to the ocean are still littered with boats that broke free from their moorings and floated inland. Several of the marinas adjacent to San Carlos Boulevard have boats the size of fishing trawlers stacked on top of each other like toys.

A trailer park just north of the beach resembles a refugee camp, as large tents and portable toilets aid people who lost their homes or are waiting to have them repaired.

State officials have plans to truck in loads of sand to rebuild the beaches, both public and private. Investors have shown up offering to buy up damaged property. In time, they believe, the area will thrive again.

There are other signs of hope. A few small business owners have set up trailers at their locations to remain at least somewhat viable.

A beach bar with holes in the roof covered by bright blue canvas was still

serving drinks on a sunny day.

Ian was unpredictable. Fenway South escaped damage but the storm crushed the Rays' complex 50 miles to the north in Port Charlotte.

There wasn't enough time to repair the damage to the stadium so the Rays will play their games at Tropicana Field.

Over the years of covering the Red Sox, I've spent roughly a year and a half all told in Fort Myers at various condos and hotels. Like a lot of New Englanders who have flocked here since the Sox arrived in 1993, it feels like a second home.

There's too much traffic and too many chain restaurants, but the beaches are great. It's a lot like Cape Cod in some ways.

Days off here are usually spent on a patch of sand with a good book. And there's almost always a seafood place somewhere close by with a view of the water and cold beer.

That probably won't be the case this year, which is fine. The Red Sox got lucky when the hurricane hit. But many others weren't.

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