

HURRICANE IRMA – THE IMPACT ON THE CARIBBEAN TOURISM DESTINATIONS



The three September days when Hurricane Irma flew through the eastern Caribbean meant enormous change for many peoples' lives. Irma reaching 300kph (185mph) speed completely wiped out several communities. Almost 50 died due to the hurricane in the Caribbean, thousands are left homeless, shortage of food and water is troubling the lives of people at the 13 island territories. Caribbean tourism industry has been naturally affected as well.

Some destinations were left untouched, while most Caribbean islands suffered enormous losses that will greatly affect the travel sector.

Cuba

At the moment, there have been no reports of foreigners being harmed in the north of Cuba, though the overall death toll is at 10. The infrastructure is destroyed in many regions. There are often still power outages and access to mobile networks is somewhat unreliable.

Rebuilding costs and revenue losses may lead to the fact that the country will not be able to keep up with payments to overseas creditors and suppliers, Reuters reports.

This is a big blow for the island which registered a 23% increase in foreign visitors in the first half of 2017. But Irma could represent a huge setback for the industry, as it caused damage to many Cuban four- and five-star hotels.

As reported by the U.S. State Department, large parts of the country are without power and running water. The warning also says that "transportation is difficult and many roads remain impassable due to downed trees and power lines."

Tour operators will not bring any new guests to Cuba until September 25th. Some operators have cancelled all trips to the island, while airlines such as Condor or Eurowings have made additional quotas available for return trips. Tourists on the spot are asked to think about early return journeys.

St. Martin, British Virgin Islands, St. Eustatius and Saba

The Caribbean island of St. Martin has been hit hardest by Irma. It will take several months until the tourist infrastructure is rebuilt here. The hurricane killed 15 people and left the tourism industry

“screwed” for the next tourism season, as noted by Paco Benito, manager of the Riu Palace hotel. He also added that “we’re going to need a total reconstruction and we’re going to start as soon as possible.”

St. Martin welcomes around two million visitors per year. On the Dutch side of the island, four fifths of jobs are tied to tourism and many other industries rely on holidaymakers in the country. But it isn’t only St. Martin suffering from Irma, but also the neighboring islands of St. Eustatius and Saba are equally severely damaged. The British Virgin Islands were also hit very badly by Irma.

Foreign Offices advice holidaymakers to examine the necessity of their trip based on the current situation. In addition, the instructions of local authorities should be followed. Dutch authorities point out that there is currently no civil aviation to the islands.

The supply of electricity and infrastructure will remain restricted for some time, and the sanitary conditions could suffer. Reconstructions and renovations will take a long time, thus destabilizing the islands’ tourism flow.

Dominican Republic

Irma caused no major damage in the Dominican. According to the local tourist office, the infrastructure is intact. Since last Saturday, all airports and hotel facilities are operating normally. This applies even to the main tourist areas such as Punta Cana, Bavaro, La Romana and Santo Domingo.

From now on all arrivals to the Dominican Republic take place as planned, while hotels are operating normally. Travel is carried out without restrictions and normal operation of the sector prevails.

Florida

Residents and guests at Florida Keys were evacuated. According to the German Foreign Office, they cannot return at this time. There have also been major power failures.

Tourists will not travel to Florida until September 18. Affected customers receive the travel price according to organizer’s information. For travel to the Florida Keys, bookings and cancellations are free of charge until September 25th. The land connection is currently blocked.

According to Tui, **Miami Beach is less affected than initially feared.** However, parts of Florida still have locks. According to the Federal Foreign Office, travelers should leave shelters after the official all-clear. Anyone who has already booked a flight should reconsider his travel plans. Tui customers with arrival date to and including September 18 may book or cancel travel to Florida free of charge.

Tui has also cancelled trips to the Florida Keys with arrival until October 31st. For guests in Florida with booked flights or other services via Tui, the operator organizes early departures or alternative travel arrangements.

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