

FLORIDA TOURISM AFTER IRMA – MANY HOTELS REOPENED



In the wake of Irma, some regions struggle with problems – the Florida Keys have even announced a temporary tourist stop. After the storm, Visit Florida spoke with marketing representatives of all the destinations to obtain a detailed assessment of the situation and to revise plans for the promotion of Florida tourism.

While in some smaller Caribbean islands, the devastation caused by Irma and Maria, led to long-term stops for tourism, Florida is working hard to get back into operation as soon as possible.

Florida is largely spared from the second major hurricane of the season – Maria. This will not hinder the cleaning up until further notice. Another lucky fact is that September in Florida is low season. From mid-October, however, tourists will return. In winter, many Americans, as well as Europeans travel for the heat of Florida.

Florida Keys

All the way to the south-west, Key West is slowly becoming normal. Key West itself and Key Largo were not hit by Irma too hard. The Key West International Airport has been reopened, but with limited air traffic. On Sunday, the Port of Key West was open again, as the “Empress of the Seas” of Royal Caribbean Cruises planned a landing here.

The islands between Key West and Key Largo were hit much harder. In Marathon or Duck Key, the damage is immense. The leaders of Monroe County, which covers the entire Keys and south-west tip of Florida, asked the tourists not to travel on the Keys for the time being – not to disturb the reconstruction works.

October 20 was announced as the “reopening date” for tourism. The Monroe County Tourist Development Council notes that hotels can re-open when they are ready. Some hotels should open earlier, especially since they have been closed since the evacuation order on September 6. The Hilton Garden Inn Key West, Hyatt Key West, Sunset Harbor and all hotels within a short drive from the Hilton Garden Inn Key West, will all open again on October 1. On Marathon it will take longer: the Hawks Cay Resort and Tranquillity Bay will re-open in mid-October. The Ascend Collection Hotel will open in November.

Greater Miami

The Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau reported several days ago that the situation was normal again. Pictures of flooded streets of Miami made the rounds, but this is not so unusual in Miami during heavy rain. In any case, hotels were only damaged mildly and functioned normally.

Currently there are special prices offered (a post-Irma marketing campaign in progress), but it is worth consulting with travel agencies or hotel websites. Also, the international airport and port operate normally. In the case of cruises, it is worth checking the situation, because some of the routes are changed due to the continuing hurricane activity. The departures are usually normal.

Naples/Marco Island

The Collier County, in which the popular resorts of Naples and Marco Island lie, was also hit hard. Many hotels, attractions and restaurants remain closed for weeks, even though many companies strive to be ready by the beginning of October. By Wednesday last week, only 31 of the 100 hotels in Collier County were bookable. Among other things, the Naples Zoo is also closed indefinitely. Many docks and boats are damaged, so the excursion offer is limited. The work is hampered by recurring power and telephone failures. After all, the Hilton Naples and the Naples Grande Beach Resort have re-opened last week and the Ritz-Carlton and the Botanical Garden of Naples want to reopen by October 1.

Fort Myers & Sanibel / Cape Coral

The Fort Myers / Cape Coral region has been hit relatively mildly. The structural damage is lower than in Naples. However, there are hygienic problems because the wastewater could not be transported to the sewage treatment plants as a result of a current span and much of it was flushed into the Caloosahatchee River. It is now bacteria contaminated and it is supposed to stink in the region. The beaches were, however, found clean after tests. Individual attractions, such as the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, are currently closed. By the beginning of October, however, the region should function normally again.

Tampa / Orlando

Northwest Florida shivered and received warnings of high winds and flooding, but ultimately it came off lightly. There were comparatively minimum damages (damaged boats/vehicles) and problems due to power outages. The beaches in the St. Pete/Clearwater are open and clean. The tourist attractions in the Tampa region – such as Busch Gardens, Florida Aquarium, Tampa Riverwalk or Lowry Park Zoo – are all open. The airports of the region, especially the Tampa International Airport, have also been open since last week. All the hotels are operational and the last items scattered by Irma will soon be cleared away.

Orlando also had to take some damage from fallen trees and fight the electricity failures. The big theme parks (Disney, Universal, Seaworld) were only closed for two days and are all operational, as well as the hotels. Some hotels like the Walt Disney World Resort stayed open even during the storm.

Florida Overall

Using the example of Tampa/Orlando, it is clear that Irma inflicted severe damage in some regions of Florida, but other regions have been largely spared. **The Florida tourism marketing organization has now established its own website, which provides a detailed assessment of the situation for all regions.** In addition, a “Hurricane Response” marketing plan is to be launched in order to bring visitors back to the Sunshine State. The focus is on the spared areas, while digital information and updates are provided in real time via the affected communities. In addition, videos are uploaded to provide insight into all regions.

Florida tourism industry has recovered in the past from many storms. “I have no doubt that this will be the case for our communities and state after Irma,” said Ken Lawson, President and CEO of Visit Florida.

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