

HOW HURRICANE SEASON AFFECTS CARIBBEAN TOURISM



While the hurricane season has pretty much always affected tourism in the Caribbean in some way, there's been no avoiding the dismal images of pounding rains and thundering winds that created havoc in recent years. Some of those raging storms wiped out entire islands - and on the island of Puerto Rico, nearly half the population went without electricity for months. According to Weather.com, the 2017 Atlantic hurricane season was among the top 10 all-time most active on record.

It's really no surprise that the damage those powerful storms cause can make travelers think twice about visiting during storm season.

Caribbean travelers heading elsewhere

According to a Virtuoso survey of the luxury travel network's members, 26 percent reported that their clients aren't requesting Caribbean or Florida travel for up to six months. Instead, they say many travelers are shifting their plans to places like Mexico, Hawaii, Europe, Southern California, and Central and South America. Fifty seven percent of the advisors told their clients to avoid traveling to hurricane-prone areas altogether during the peak storm period from late August through late September.

In September 2017, associate analyst in travel and tourism at GlobalData told Verdict:

"Tourism in the entire Caribbean region is likely to be impacted by the hurricanes. Puerto Rico has been severely affected and hence, few tourists are likely to visit the country if they were planning on going for a leisure holiday. Expect numbers to fall sharply for the rest of 2017 and most of 2018 as the country recovers. Additionally, tourists may be put off visiting the region in monsoon season in the years to come, as weather is increasingly unpredictable."

The Devastating Financial Cost

As one can imagine, this can be financially devastating. The prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Gaston Browne told Time magazine that the cost to repair the islands after Irma could run \$250 to 300 million. And that doesn't include all the tourism dollars that were lost and even more losses during the upcoming season simply because people are much less likely to travel there.

This beautiful tropical region of the world drew nearly a million fewer visitors after hurricanes Irma and Maria hit last year, with a cost to the region a whopping \$700 million, according to a report by the World Travel & Tourism Council. The report also notes that tourism is something that the Caribbean island destinations rely on heavily, providing 15.2 percent of the region's gross domestic product as well as sustaining 14 percent of the labor force.

Without a job, an increasing number of that labor force may be moving to places that have better infrastructure in place yet still offer a Caribbean feel, like Miami. In fact, from 2009 to 2013, 40.2 percent of people looking for new homes in Miami from abroad were from the Caribbean already, which means that number is likely to be any bigger when more recent statistics come in.

The Benefits of the Season For Travelers

Typically, hurricane season has been a time where hotels and resorts drop their rates in hopes of luring more visitors, and some properties even shut down entirely. But it's also been a time when savvy travelers can take advantage of this less-busy period to save some money and enjoy the tropics without the crowds - though travel insurance is highly recommended.

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