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## HURRICANES

**Hurricanes, also called typhoons and tropical cyclones**, usually occur at predictable times of year in three distinct parts of the world.

- Caribbean, the hurricane season normally runs from June to November, with on average 8 to 15 storms per season.
- Pacific/South East Asia region, the tropical cyclone season normally runs from May to November, with on average 15 to 20 storms per season.
- South Pacific and Australia, the tropical cyclone season normally runs from November to April, with on average 10 to 20 storms per season.

Tropical cyclones also occur in and around northern India, normally from April to June and September to November, and also the East Coast of Africa, normally between November and April.

### What is the difference between a hurricane, typhoon, or tropical cyclone?

There is no difference. The terms "hurricane" and "typhoon" are regionally specific names for a strong "tropical cyclone".

Tropical cyclones with maximum sustained surface winds of less than 39mph are called "tropical depressions".

Once the tropical cyclone reaches winds of more than 39mph they are called a "tropical storm" and assigned a name.

If winds reach 74mph they are designated either a hurricane, typhoon, severe tropical cyclone, severe cyclonic storm or tropical cyclone depending where in the world it occurs.

### How are hurricanes ranked?

The USA uses the Saffir-Simpson hurricane intensity scale to estimate the potential flooding and damage given a hurricane's estimated intensity. This ranges from 1 (Minimal) to 5 (Catastrophic).

#### Category One Hurricane:

**Winds 74-95 mph** Storm surge generally 4-5 ft above normal. No real damage to building structures.

#### Category Two Hurricane:

**Winds 96-110 mph.** Storm surge generally 6-8 feet above normal. Some roofing material, door, and window damage of buildings. Considerable damage to shrubbery and trees with some trees blown down.

#### Category Three Hurricane:

**Winds 111-130 mph.** Storm surge generally 9-12 ft above normal. Some structural damage to small residences and utility buildings. Flooding near the coast destroys smaller structures with larger structures damaged by battering from floating debris. Hurricanes [Jeanne](#) and [Ivan](#) of 2004 were Category Three hurricanes when they made landfall in Florida and in Alabama, respectively.

#### Category Four Hurricane:

**Winds 131-155 mph.** Storm surge generally 13-18 ft above normal. More extensive curtainwall failures with some complete roof structure failures on small residences. Shrubs, trees, and all signs are blown down. Extensive damage to doors and windows. Major damage to lower floors of structures near the shore. [Hurricane Dennis \(pdf\)](#) of 2005 struck the island of Cuba as a Category Four hurricane.

#### Category Five Hurricane:

**Winds greater than 155 mph.** Storm surge generally greater than 18 ft above normal. Complete roof failure on many residences and industrial buildings. Some complete building failures with small utility buildings blown over or away. All shrubs, trees, and signs blown down. Complete destruction of mobile

homes. Only 3 Category Five Hurricanes have made landfall in the United States since records began: The Labor Day Hurricane of 1935, Hurricane Camille (1969), and [Hurricane Andrew](#) in August, 1992. The 1935 Labor Day Hurricane struck the Florida Keys with a minimum pressure of 892 mb--the lowest pressure ever observed in the United States. Hurricane Camille struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast causing a 25-foot storm surge, which inundated Pass Christian. [Hurricane Katrina \(pdf\)](#), a category 5 storm over the Gulf of Mexico, was still responsible for at least 81 billion dollars of property damage when it struck the U.S. Gulf Coast as a category 3. It is by far the costliest hurricane to ever strike the United States. In addition, [Hurricane Wilma \(pdf\)](#) of 2005 was a Category Five hurricane at peak intensity and is the strongest Atlantic tropical cyclone on record with a minimum pressure of 882 mb.

### **The effects of a hurricane**

Hurricanes can cause massive amounts of damage and kill many people. 2004 and 2005 saw a sharp increase in both the numbers and the force of hurricanes in the Atlantic/Caribbean region. 2006 was relatively quiet in the Atlantic/Caribbean region, but there were still nine named tropical storms or hurricanes. On 19 June 2007 the Met Office stated that there was a 70% chance that between seven and thirteen named tropical storms or hurricanes will affect the Atlantic/Caribbean region in 2007, with ten being the most likely number.

The most violent hurricanes to affect the Atlantic/Caribbean region in 2004 and 2005 were Ivan, Stan, Katrina and Wilma. They all wreaked widespread havoc, caused billions of pounds in damage to infrastructure and resulted in hundreds of fatalities. Many British holidaymakers in the region were caught up in the disasters, and some British nationals were killed and seriously injured.

Hurricanes in the Atlantic/Caribbean region can strike the northern coasts of South American countries, through Central America including Mexico, Guatemala and Belize, and northwards through the southern states of the USA. Florida, Louisiana and Texas have all suffered badly from hurricanes in the last two years. Any island in the Caribbean can be seriously affected during the hurricane season.

### **What should you do?**

If you are in a hurricane region during the hurricane season, you should monitor local radio and other media outlets to keep abreast of any developments in your area. You should also keep in close touch with your travel/tour operator. You should also be aware that following a hurricane, there may be widespread damage to the infrastructure of the country you are visiting. Past experience has shown that it can take some time for airports to re-open, and there may be serious shortages of habitable accommodation, food and water, and health facilities. Our ability to help British nationals may be limited (perhaps severely) in such circumstances.

Although it is difficult to predict accurately where and when a hurricane can strike, as they often veer off-course when nearing land, you should follow local advice which in some cases may be to leave the immediate area if a hurricane is heading your way. Airports in the affected areas may shut down as the hurricane approaches and hotels may also close. Some local governments may maintain emergency shelters for those rendered homeless by a hurricane, but these are primarily designed for the protection of the local population and conditions are likely to be very basic. Further information on hurricanes and other tropical storms is available on the following websites:

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Tropical cyclones with [maximum sustained surface winds](#) of less than 39 mph are called "[tropical depressions](#)". When the tropical cyclone reaches winds of at least 40 mph they are typically called a "[tropical storm](#)" and assigned a name.

If winds reach 74 mph they are called:

- **"hurricane"** (the North Atlantic Ocean, the Northeast Pacific Ocean east of the dateline, or the South Pacific Ocean east of 160E)
- **"typhoon"** (the Northwest Pacific Ocean west of the dateline)
- **"severe tropical cyclone"** (the Southwest Pacific Ocean west of 160E or Southeast Indian Ocean east of 90E)
- **"severe cyclonic storm"** (the North Indian Ocean)

- **"tropical cyclone"** (the Southwest Indian Ocean)

<b>Category</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Minimum</b>
Named storms	<b>28</b> (2005)	<b>4</b> (1983)
Hurricanes	<b>15</b> (2005)	<b>2</b> (1982)
Major Hurricanes	<b>8</b> (1950)	<b>0</b> (many times, 1994 last)
USA landfalling named storms	<b>9</b> (2004)	<b>1</b> (many, 1991)
USA landfalling hurricanes	<b>6<sup>+</sup></b> (1916, 1985, 2004)	<b>0</b> (many, 2001)
USA landfalling major hurricanes	<b>4</b> (2005)	<b>0</b> (many, 2003)

### **Places to go at this time of year**

Europe  
 Canary islands  
 Mediterranean  
 N Africa

Indonesia  
 Galapagos  
 Peru

### **Avoid**

Maldives  
 Nepal  
 Cambodia  
 Hong Kong  
 Malaysia  
 Thailand  
 Caribbean  
 Florida  
 Mexico (Yukatan)  
 Costa Rica

Met Office Advisories – Do not travel to:  
 Belize  
 Mexico – Yukatan Peninsular