

**The following information has been provided courtesy of Felipe Martinez Verde  
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Despite hurricanes can form at the beginning of the month of May in the Caribbean Sea or in the Gulf of México, the official hurricane season starts the 1st of June, ending the 30th of November. In the eastern area on the Oriental Pacific, the season officially starts the 15th of May, ending the 30th of November.

During this season, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) keeps a constant control in tropical cyclones over the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of México, as well as the area of the area of the Oriental Pacific. Likewise, the NHC emits hurricane warnings as a public service. In the basin of the Atlantic (the northern area of the Atlantic, the Gulf of México and the Caribbean Sea) the hurricane season comes to its higher peak since August until October.

As soon as the hurricane season begins, the first task in the office everyday, even before going through the infinity of emails receives, is to have a check on the NHC's website and other similar sources. Sometimes it looks like a competition to find out who finds first the arrival of a storm, hurricane, etc.

We, as the big majority of hotels, count with a protocol for these kinds of situations. To be more precise, we count with something called PPA and it includes not only the protocol, but the whole emergency plan in case of fire, first aids, etc. This protocol is elaborated by an authorized engineer by Civil Protection. The protocol must be checked and must count with the authorization of this organism. Evidently, Tour Operators who work with us are aware of this, and we hope to have information on this subject on our website soon.

When we opened our first two hotels in the Riviera Maya, one of the first tasks we scheduled was the elaboration of emergency plans. Of course, we gave priority to the hurricane subject, and due to having a resort in Playa Bávaro, we took their experience as a base to prepare our protocol. Before we encountered our first hurricane as such, we did up to 5 full simulations, using on our favor the proximity of storms and hurricanes to put in practice out protocol. This allowed us to see where we did wrong to take further enhancing measures. Without any doubt, these simulations were fundamental to face both hurricanes we went through on 2005 and the close one on 2007. As a matter of fact, we learned very useful lessons after our first hurricane that helped us with the famous Wilma.

Immediately before the hurricane season starts, our Security and Hygiene Committee meets to check the whole manual. The list of materials needed for the central storage due to the 1st of May is very important. The purchasing department has the task to check the list of thing needed, buying these and keeping them safe. This list includes lanterns, batteries, food, sugar, ropes, hatchets, etc. These materials are not to be used at all unless there is a hurricane alert. Even so, as soon as comes to our notice that there is a chance of a storm hitting us, the list is checked again to avoid the "panic shopping", and in case we are short of anything, we buy it right away.

In this resort, we count with two electric groups powerful enough to provide the energy needed. In fact, we count with 8 groups, keeping one as support. We also count with 5 osmosis plants producing 100% of the water used in the resort and cisterns enough to store water for several days. The resort was already designed to face these kinds of natural disasters and its auto sufficient as mentioned. Before I forget, its important to mention that one of our first tasks before the arrival of a storm or hurricane is to make sure our gas and diesel supply are at a 100% full to face no shortages. As an example, after Emily, we were generating 100% of the electricity used for a month, and after Wilma for something longer than a week, witch was the time the public supply needed to work again. In any way, because of energetic saving, we generate 100% of our electric supply for 3 or 4 hours a day, according to the season of the year, simply because it is cheaper to do it that way instead of paying the bill the electric company charges during that period of time.

In this area the personnel rotation is considerable and this causes that the insole is never 100% ready. The advantage we count with is that both department bosses and heads of department have worked with us for some time, making organizing a much easier task. As many other things in life, it all comes down to organization, the manual and in a big dose, common sense.

These are the antecedents. However, to understand how we work in the hurricane, the best to do is to explain what we do since the very moment we have news of something that might hit us.

As said before, we check on sites like the NHC in Miami and similar websites. In these pages, we check the impact probabilities of any given hurricane. We have two options: we move on, careless like it won't involve us. Personally, I think this would be an unimaginable irresponsibility. Two, we get ourselves busy. Immediately, we summon a reunion of the Committee with the manual in hand, checking it point by point. Everyone has a task assigned and knows what has to be done.

The first and very important tasks are done by the maintenance personnel. They do their job discreetly and quietly. We don't want to scare anyone. However the sensationalism from Spanish televisions won't help. Scaring the personnel is more spectacular than talking about turtles and the Caribbean's coral reefs. Someone in Madrid knows more than we do the ones that are here, in the front row. No big deal. We must continue with our tasks. The priority is the integrity of the guests, our personnel, our families, and of course, inversion.

If nothing happens after all, we undo everything that had been done with the daily routine. However, as the NHC updates every few hours (in shorter times in case of a hurricane) we keep an eye on the evolution of the storm.

Three days before the hurricane strikes us, is the time when we communicate the guests that we have a phenomenon approaching. This is done in three ways: announcements in every information panel in the resort, with a note delivered to the rooms and through the information channel in the TV. Well, this channel is a very useful tool in case of a hurricane. All the electric network, telephonic and TV runs below ground, meaning that the hurricane should not affect any of these services. Through this channel, we keep guests informed, even during the hurricane when we have people inside rooms or in shelters.

Depending on the proximity of the hurricane, we raise the frequency of updates in our bulletins. These updates include maps and graphics, the procedure that the resort has and those that will have depending on the evolution of the phenomenon.

In those 5 times I mentioned earlier, we missed two steps to complete our plan completely. The other 3 we have fully accomplished it. We could say that these two steps are to put all the hammocks inside the pool and evacuating the guests to rooms and shelters. This has been done three times: with Emily, Wilma and Dean.

Of course, tour operators are aware and worry for their customers, however, no operator applies the same measures. Some Canadian operators for example, send planes to evacuate them. I guess legislation in every country has a lot to do with this matter. Others simply give the choice to leave, and in case of hurricane, the customer can't go back to its country, finishing the vacation and susceptible to the price the hotel wants to charge you. When this happens, it is worth mentioning that both times this happened and some customers have not been able to leave, we only charge the amount necessary to reach the cost. We don't do business with someone's disgrace. In fact after Wilma, we could stay open and received other hotel's customers under the same conditions. Ethic is to be kept under all situations.

Before we proceed to room evaluation, every room is informed how the procedure will take place, what shelter they will be headed to, etc. The evacuation must be done with enough time to avoid the need to run in the last minute. Rushes are bad advisors and even worse in risk situations such as these. Even though, we always face a stubborn customer who won't hear any reasons until you set the subject clear for him: do as we say, or leave our resort. We prefer to have a complaint that to risk anyone's life for an irresponsible. It might be hard to believe, but when Emily was about to strike, we had to pull from the beach at 20:00, when the wind almost reached category 1, a German customer with his video camera prepared and disposed to film the arrival of the hurricane. When Wilma came, in a moment of calm, we had to pull personnel to different areas because of some people ignoring information given through the TV channel who decided to have a look at the beach.

Once evacuation took place, and depending on the time of the day, we proceed to supply food. I don't want to

forget to comment that besides evacuating customers to the shelters, we do the same for hotel personnel except those of us remaining on guard. All three cases, and with the hurricane arrival estimated in the afternoon/night, we supplied bags with food for dinner and breakfast. Lanterns are included in the supplies in case light runs out and in case we face problems with our electric plants.

As said before, we count with a TV channel through which we keep guests updated, and two more channels where we play two movies, one in Spanish and one more in another language. In the shelters of course, we count with several televisions and given the case, we even set up some PlayStations.

Conference rooms, the discotheque, the central office rooms of all 4 resorts, all personnel rooms and already designated guest rooms in both Colonial and Kantenah resorts are our shelters.

With Emily, delivering food and drinks for dinner and breakfast was enough because the hurricane hit us in the night and its trajectory was pretty obvious. It didn't move practically since it formed and its arrival was predicted. That means that we could even do the breakfast in the buffets, not counting with the usual service though. Even after a hurricane strikes us, we move on. Wilma was a different story. In these forums it has been spoken about what that monster was, but before it reached land, it did a few feints. First, there was a given trajectory and speed. It slowed down all of a sudden. We even thought that the NHC was wrong, but no. Finally, we were locked for days. Here was no problem with food supply, but with keeping guests inside their shelter would not have been possible without the information channel, and without the comprehension of 99.99% of the guests. I don't think the place and the way Wilma was created are that strange, because hurricane Stan formed in the same place and passed above us as a storm, forming as a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico.

After all this, comes the "day after". First thing to do is an initial evaluation of damages. We must keep the guests informed of what our next moves are going to be. We contact with our central, the travel agencies in case anyone wants to go back with their families, and, of course; never forget to call those who care for us; our family.

I would also like to comment that after Emily, we discovered that we needed a satellite phone because we could not communicate. When Wilma came around, we were ready. Too bad no one knew that the 4500 euros phone also worked with phone cards. Well, we learned our lesson. We have our phone and we make sure it works and it has credit before it is needed.

Once the evaluation is done, we have a meeting with the guests in the fun club theatres. In this meeting, the resort's managing team, and concretely, the General Manager, informs how things are and what's next. So far, the three times we had to do this, we have been congratulated by the majority of guests, but there is always someone who won't understand that we put a lot of effort in guarantying their security and ours. It is comprehensible that one can lose it, but we don't have to stand things like this beyond what we are supposed to. However, having the reason and a bunch of arguments, it's easy to spread your point around. If someone loses the education, we know how to deal with it, or course. All situations are different, but common sense and patience are good friends, as well as guest's collaboration and understanding.

With Dean, the situation was also peculiar. It kept a similar trajectory to that of Emily's. I think that after spending months keeping track of hurricane trajectory, one develops a sixth sense. If we mistake well, as this was the case, even better. This time, as the telephonic wire was not shut down, we still had Internet access and we could keep everyone updated through various forums in several countries. We received calls from several radio and TV stations which I think helped to keep families and future travellers calmed.

We must recognize the help from Agg76 and Falcon who provided us valuable information as well as certain forums specialized in meteorology, with specific posts about hurricanes. The combination of experience, NHC, Agg76, Falcon and these sites didn't go wrong at all.

After that comes the reconstruction, with all you got. Of course, in all our three cases, we kept our full insole. Obviously we have to clean and redo a lot of things, but that's what we need to move forward. Informative bulletins with the current situation at the moment of the resort to all agencies, tour operators and

Internet forums: nothing is kept as secret, which would be stupid. If someone plans on continuing their vacations, they should know our current status. Travel agencies count with updated first hand information.