

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Hurricane Irma leaves the Caribbean travel industry in its wake

September 11, 2017



*Image courtesy of Knight Frank in the Caribbean*

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

Hurricane Irma, the most powerful storm to form in the Atlantic Ocean to-date, has left a wake of devastating destruction in the Caribbean known for its high-end beach resorts and vacation homes which will drastically impact the region's tourism industry.

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Popular luxury travel destinations such as St. Bart's, St. Thomas and the U.S. and British Virgin Islands are just a few of those devastated by the passing hurricane. Unfortunately for homes and business, this will leave the areas forever changed and will impact the tourism that these countries thrive on.

"Hurricane Irma has been and continues to be an unprecedented disaster throughout the Leeward Islands and northern Caribbean," said Taylor Rains, managing partner at [Flugel Consulting](#), Charleston, SC. "The magnitude of the destruction alone has the potential for significant long-term economic implications owing to the effect on tourism."

"For countries like Barbuda, St. Martin and St. Barts - where the majority of structures on the island have seen major damage - funds, time and efforts are going to have to go into rebuilding infrastructure," he said. "Doing so will effectively halt all traditional tourism for the foreseeable future."

To donate and help out with the devastating effects of Hurricane Irma, visit [Convoy of Hope](#).

### Devastation

Now categorized as having the longest lasting strongest winds in history, Irma is coming for Florida after leaving the Caribbean decimated.

Brands all over the world are coming together to help out in times of need in this tragic time. While many larger travel brands may have the capacity to bounce back, the hurricane could be devastating for smaller businesses.

Harrowing video shows devastation in St. Barts caused by #Irma, which may be most powerful

Atlantic storm in decade <https://t.co/FltvWIMuTS> pic.twitter.com/u8wzTVdgFD

ABC News (@ABC) September 7, 2017

"Times of disaster are when brands in the travel sector rally together in support of their community and the greater good," Mr. Rains said. "For international brands with properties in the affected zones, fundraising efforts and investing human capital in the cleanup are a must.

"It's important to demonstrate a commitment to the local community both in word and action," he said. "For smaller brands whose losses may be more trying, they need to be as transparent as possible, informing the market of the current state of things and ask for help if needed.

"All in all, though, there's no single response strategy for natural disasters. Each must be treated with delicacy and respect they're due, knowing that, at the end of the day, it's the people behind the brands that are most in need of help."

1:3 Our immediate thoughts are with the community of Virgin Gorda and the surrounding islands that have been affected by Hurricane Irma.

RosewoodHotels (@RosewoodHotels) September 7, 2017

Many individuals will be affected greatly as well, and big brands are lending a helping hand as well donating resources and funds to the cause.

#### Impacting business

A particularly trying hurricane season shows just how powerful weather can be not just for infrastructure but for individuals and business sectors as well.

Irma comes, unfortunately, after a boom in tourism to the area.

The decline in the euro, used by Caribbean island St. Bart's, has allowed the affluent vacation destination to flourish as a second-home location due to favorable exchange rates.

A report from Knight Frank shows that in October 2016, affluent U.S. consumers who purchased a second home in St. Bart's saw a 21 percent discount compared to those in 2013. The Residential Research report showed that the discounts are due to the dropping euro and has increased demand from consumers in Europe as well as the U.S. ([see more](#)).

After battering the U.S. and British Virgin Islands, the historic storm is a growing threat for Florida and its luxury real estate market in cities such as Miami.

The category-five hurricane is causing catastrophic damage in the Virgin Islands and surrounding Caribbean countries, less than a week after Hurricane Harvey destroyed Houston, TX. The hurricane is likely to greatly impact the luxury real estate industry in Miami, but more importantly Florida's governor urges citizens to heed evacuation orders ([see more](#)).

"Hurricane Irma has had a devastating effect on the Caribbean, but during this difficult time, it's when you see the greatest strength and unity amongst the Caribbean countries," said Tiffany Dowd, president and founder of Luxe Social Media and Luxe Tiffany, Boston.

"It's too soon to understand fully the devastation and impact on hotels in countries such as Turks and Caicos, USVI and the Bahamas, but moving forward, we must continue to support the Caribbean through charitable foundations to help rebuild island infrastructure, support the local people and through tourism, one of the most economically important industries in the Caribbean," she said.

"Now more than ever, the Caribbean needs unity to rebuild together to help countries like St. Martin and Barbuda, which was completely destroyed. People should also know that not all Caribbean countries have been impacted and that hotels are open for business in countries such as St. Lucia, Nevis, Barbados St. Kitts and Grenada, however many are closed in the fall for annual seasonal closures."

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