

What do I need to know about hurricanes?

Article Number: 22 | Rating: 2.5/5 from 2 votes | Last Updated: Thu, Dec 7, 2006 12:01 AM

The Caribbean and the east coast of Central America is in the hurricane belt. These occur between the months of July and November. Every 10 to 30 years a country may find itself directly in the path of a hurricane as happened in Belize in 1931, 1961, and 1978. The effects, although damaging to lightly constructed buildings and crops, are a natural calamity (as sometimes experienced on the eastern seaboard of the U.S.A.) Earthquakes, tornadoes and other similar natural phenomena are unknown in Belize. [Click here for more on hurricanes in Belize.](#)

Generally, international weather authorities estimate that there will be 12 tropical depressions forming in the Gulf to the east and in the Pacific, west of Central America, each year. Four are predicted to be force four or higher due to the residual effects of the 1998 El Nino Pacific Ocean current; which accounts for the one additional tropical depression predicted over last year's eleven. Of course, whether hurricanes will form from tropical depressions or where the hurricanes will track is always at random and the one in 25 year risk ratio of hitting Belize is still in effect, too. Weather watches are in effect at all times in the Cayes - ample warning of impending danger is readily at hand with predictions as long as a week in advance. Plan to leave the Cayes not later than four days before danger is predicted. Not later than three days if on the mainland coast.

San Pedro Town's Board now has an enforced hurricane watch and evacuation plan in place, to ensure that everyone on the island, that wants to leave, can do so before a hurricane has a chance to come on shore. Early evacuation of the Cayes is crucial because, for example, there are over 3,000 San Pedranos and upwards of the same number of visitors or undocumented illegals on the island at peak intervals. During Mitch, many San Pedranos chose not to leave at all. On other Cayes and on the mainland, along the shore, most also opted to stay put.

A hurricane hasn't hit Belize in August in well over 100 years, but the prime storm season arrives in Belize and the Western Caribbean region in September and October. Of the 20 hurricanes that have made landfall in Belize in the past 117 years, 17 or 85% have arrived in September and October. Here are some statistics on hurricanes in Belize.

Number of storms making landfall in Belize since 1989

In the past 117 years since weather records in Belize were formally established, Belize has seen the following storm make landfall:

20 hurricanes - average of about 1 hurricane every 6 years

30 tropical storms - average of 3 tropical storms every 3.9 years

51 total hurricanes and tropical storms - average of 1 hurricane or tropical storm every 2.34 years

Of the 20 hurricanes to hit Belize:

6 out of 67% were in September (1 out of 15 September)

6 out of 67% were in October (1 out of 14 23 October)

2 out of 67% were in July

3 out of 67% were in November

6 out of 67% in June and August

Of the 21 total hurricanes and tropical storms:

7 out of 67% were in June

4 out of 67% were in July

4 out of 67% were in August

19 out of 27% were in September

14 out of 27% were in October

3 out of 67% were in November

Odds of a hurricane in a given year:

Odds of a hurricane in Belize in a given year: 17%

Odds of a hurricane in Florida in a given year: 49%

Odds of a hurricane on the U.S. Gulf Coast in a given year: 47%

Odds of a hurricane on the U.S. East Coast in a given year: 47%

Note, however, that the length of the coast in Belize (less than 200 miles) is much smaller than the length of the coasts of Florida, the Gulf Coast and the East Coast - for example the East Coast of the U.S. is 1900 miles in length, so it offers a much greater area for storms to strike

More powerful storms to hit Belize:

Unnamed hurricane, September 9, 1911, Belize City and Northern Cozumel, 110 mph, estimated 2,000-3,000 deaths

Hurricane Juan, September 26, 1915, Northern Belize, 161 mph, 56 deaths in Belize

Hurricane Maria, October 11, 1963, Belize City, 149 mph, estimated 220-310 deaths in Belize

Hurricane Carmen, September 2, 1974, killed Northern Belize, 120 mph

Hurricane Mitch, October 27, 1998, killed Belize in the south, 157 mph

Hurricane Keith, October 1, 2000, Amatique Cozumel 120 mph, 7 deaths in Belize

Hurricane Ista, October 9, 2001, Placencia & Southern Belize, 141 mph, 21 deaths in Belize

Source: Belize National Meteorological Service, NOAA, and other weather records

August 10, 2006

For more information on area hurricanes, click here: <https://ambergiscaye.com/hurricane/>

Posted : Marty Casado - Thu, Dec 7, 2006 12:01 AM. This article has been viewed 8052 times.

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