

## Everything you need to know for your post-hurricane Caribbean vacation

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**The beach at BodyHoliday in St. Lucia.**

(GINA PACE)

Hurricanes Irma and Maria have done catastrophic damage to parts of the Caribbean — but if you have a vacation planned there, or are considering one, many islands and resorts want you to know they're still open for business.

Here's some advice from travel experts on what to do if you're dealing with a canceled trip, debating if you should still go, or planning travel to the region in the next few months.

### **THESE ISLANDS ARE READY FOR VISITORS**

Several islands weren't affected by the storms at all, or only had cosmetic damage, and economically depend on tourism. Plus, they have beautiful white sand beaches with crystal clear waters and lush tropical scenery. If you're interested in traveling to the region, there are lots of deals to be had during the fall.

Lisa Lutoff-Perlo, CEO of Celebrity Cruises, says it's important for travelers to know parts of the Caribbean are very much open for business. She says Celebrity Cruises has been able to continue service without

disruption, and has altered itineraries so that the closed ports in St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. Martin and San Juan have been redirected to St. Kitts, Jamaica, Martinique and Antigua, through the end of the year and will revert back to original ports of call if they reopen earlier.

Consider deals at these destinations:



A view of the Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa resort in Aruba.

(COURTESY ARUBA TOURISM AUTHORITY)

\* **Aruba** is in the Southern Caribbean and out of the reach of hurricanes. **The Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa** ([manchebo.com/aruba-hotels](http://manchebo.com/aruba-hotels)) is offering four-night romance packages for two people through March that include an ocean view room with a balcony, breakfast in bed, a romantic dinner and a couples massage starting at \$2,579.

\* **Jamaica** was spared damage during the storms and a lot of relief support is being coordinated through the island. **Sunscape Resorts & Spas** ([sunscaperesorts.com](http://sunscaperesorts.com)) is offering early-bird booking offers for several properties on the island, and include savings of up to 55% as well as \$200 and \$400 resort coupons based on the type of room selected.

\* **CheapCaribbean.com** is launching sales of a spring **Rum Tour** on Oct. 17. The tour takes travelers to distilleries in **Antigua, St. Kitts and Barbados**, which are all accepting visitors. Twenty percent of proceeds will go to Tourism Cares ([tourismcares.org](http://tourismcares.org)), which helps hurricane-affected areas.

[Carmel-by-the-Sea is the fairytale escape you've been dreaming of](#)

\* The damage at resorts in **Turks and Caicos** is largely cosmetic. Some are already accepting guests and others will be in October. **Seven Stars Resort & Spa** ([sevenstarsgracebay.com](http://sevenstarsgracebay.com)) is offering 30% off all rooms, and a \$100 resort credit if you book more than seven nights from now until Dec. 21.



Watersport options at Seven Stars Resort & Spa in Turks and Caicos.

(\* **St. Lucia** also fared well. **The BodyHoliday**, a wellness resort, is offering savings of up to 40% for those who want to travel from the end of October through early November ([thebodyholiday.com](http://thebodyholiday.com))

\* Much of **Antigua** only sustained cosmetic damage but neighboring Barbuda suffered heavy devastation. To help, **Blue Waters in Antigua** is giving away a seven-night trip to a lucky winner who donates to its relief fund ([bluewaters.net](http://bluewaters.net) and [justgiving.com](http://justgiving.com)).

#### WHAT TO DO IF YOU ALREADY BOOKED A TRIP IN A DAMAGED AREA...

Call your airline and explain the situation. Alyssa Scheppach, director of CheapCaribbean.com's call center operations, says that many airlines waived change fees during the actual storm, but haven't implemented clear policies about how they're handling tickets down the road to locations that can't yet accept guests.

[It's the best time of year to go to Maine and eat lobster](#)

Airline customer service can be difficult to predict, so you might have to be persistent, says travel expert Valerie Joy Wilson ([trustedtravelgirl.com](http://trustedtravelgirl.com)), who leads group trips.



Blue Waters Resort in Antigua.

(COURTESY BLUE WATERS)

“You can get 10 different responses from 10 different people,” Wilson says. “It just depends on who picks up the phone. If you don’t like the answer you are getting, I strongly suggest hanging up and calling again.

“Ask for a supervisor and you will usually get someone with the authority to make exceptions. Maybe they can give you a credit, or re-book you to a new destination. You likely won’t be receiving a full refund, but it doesn’t hurt to ask.”

As for hotel stays, Scheppach has found that so far, resorts that can’t accept guests aren’t charging for reservations already booked. And most people are rescheduling for different dates or alternative destinations. If a trip needs to be canceled, vendors may waive fees and apply deposits as credits for future travel, she says.

If your trip hasn’t been affected yet by a storm, but you have a vacation planned during hurricane season, which lasts until Nov. 30, consider buying travel insurance. Depending on your age, it usually costs about 5 to 7% of the price of your trip, and can be purchased until a storm has been named (after that, it’s no longer unforeseen).



An aerial view of BodyHoliday resort in St. Lucia.

(ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL/COURTESY BODYHOLIDAY)

### **STAY AWAY FROM...**

The hardest hit areas include Puerto Rico, St. Martin and the U.S. Virgin Islands of St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas, says Scheppach, who receives daily updates from the islands.

Scheppach says the U.S. Virgin Islands are expecting to be able to host guests in October or November (for updates, visit [usviupdate.com](http://usviupdate.com)). Properties in St. Martin don't expect to be able to have visitors until April of 2018. The small islands of Barbuda and Dominica also sustained crippling damage with the majority of populations on both affected, according to United Nations disaster assessment officials.

Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport in San Juan, Puerto Rico is operating on a limited schedule because of safety concerns due to radar operation and many people stranded there trying to get flights out. Some hotels are completely closed, while others are open, but not taking new or existing reservations until late October. Some, like El Conquistador, a Waldorf Astoria resort in the region of Fajardo, have already stated it won't accept reservations until 2018. For updated details on Puerto Rico's airports, ports and hotels, visit [puertoriconow.seepuertorico.com](http://puertoriconow.seepuertorico.com).