

# In Yucatán Peninsula, battening down for hurricane Dean

**Dean, moving west from Jamaica, is expected to hit the east coast of the Yucatán Peninsula early Tuesday morning.**

*The Christian Science Monitor*  
August 21, 2007

**PLAYA DEL CARMEN, MEXICO** - The usually lively Playa del Carmen, on Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, was silent and sober today as authorities evacuated tourists, shopkeepers boarded up windows, and families stocked up on food and water in anticipation of hurricane Dean, a Category 4 storm, making landfall.

Hurricane Dean is the first hurricane of the 2007 Atlantic storm season, and Mexican authorities warn that it could turn into a Category 5 storm upon landfall. After Dean passed south of Jamaica Sunday, it was expected to continue on a westward path and slam into Mexico some 125 miles south of Cancún and Playa del Carmen.

Although Jamaica avoided a direct hit, Jamaican authorities said 300,000 people were displaced by the storm but no casualties had been reported yet. Mudslides were reported across the island, and some main roads were blocked. Electricity remained off. Jamaican Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller declared a monthlong state of emergency and called a cabinet meeting to discuss the potential impact on Aug. 27 general elections.

Here in Playa del Carmen, with 2005's Hurricane Wilma still fresh in thought, local and state authorities are paying close attention to preparedness.

"Alberto taught us to respect the power of Mother Nature, but what really drove it home was hurricane Wilma. We learned that we have to forewarn the population," says an official at the civil protection agency in Playa del Carmen. "That's why, this time, we went around door to door distributing posters with instructions on what to do before, during, and after the hurricane."

Radio bulletins in Spanish, English, and Mayan are updated every three hours to keep people informed. In addition, some 3,000 troops from the Mexican Army have been dispatched to keep order and prevent looting.

Playa del Carmen is noticeably empty – and the Cancún airport uncomfortably full – as tourists have headed for the "ferry" flights designated for evacuation. After two or more days of waiting, in many cases, people are still strewn on the airport floor. But by Tuesday morning, the time the storm is supposed to hit, approximately 60,000 tourists will have been evacuated, according to the governor of Quintana Roo.

Many of the residents here appear to be taking the storm in stride.

Gabriel Villanueva Bojorquez, a taxi driver who lost family members in an earlier hurricane, describes how local fishermen in his town protect their boats. "Here, there's a hurricane culture. In Isla Mujeres [where he lives] the fishermen poke a hole in their boats and sink them partway so that they are under the water. That way, the hurricane passes over them but doesn't wash them away."

He doesn't have a boat, but says he is leaving his car in a high place.

Aldo Flores is a young musician from Mexico City who came to Cancún looking for work but is now leaving. The storm convinced him that Cancún was not for him. "We decided not to stay because if we didn't find work before the hurricane, we're certainly not going to find it after."