

Dean Punishes Jamaica, Takes Aim at Yucatan

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KINGSTON, Jamaica, Aug. 19 -- [Hurricane Dean](#)'s massive eye skidded just south of [Jamaica](#) on Sunday, but its ferocious outer bands still socked the island with 145 mph winds that shredded roofs, shattered windows and toppled trees.

[Kingston](#) lay in eerie darkness after the national power company shut off electricity in hopes of averting fires, while mudslides were reported in several areas of the country. A curfew was imposed to discourage looting.

The hurricane is now taking aim at [Mexico's](#) Yucatan Peninsula, where tourists slept on airport floors hoping to catch the last flights out of [Cancun](#).

Dean, the first Atlantic hurricane of the season, could grow as it crosses the [Caribbean's](#) warm, deep waters, reaching Category 5 strength with winds topping 155 mph, before its expected landfall on [Mexico's](#) Gulf Coast on Monday night or Tuesday morning, according to [U.S. National Hurricane Center](#) projections.

For all its might, Dean steered a relatively low-impact route Saturday and Sunday through the maze of Caribbean islands. The death toll was comparatively low, at eight, and damage was far less than that caused by lesser storms.

Dean's torrential rains flooded neighborhoods in Kingston, where government crews had spent months trying to clear drains that have clogged and worsened flooding in previous storms. Local radio reports said more than a dozen fishermen were stranded on an island off Jamaica's coast. Police and troops patrolled Kingston's streets, urging residents to take shelter.

But many did not heed the advice, and hundreds of tourists decided to weather the storm rather than go home. Only hours before Dean slammed into the island, people continued driving, some grocery stores remained open and pedestrians sauntered along with umbrellas.

Some of the few Jamaicans who were nervous about the storm herded into a downtown arena, where the squeals of children at play could be heard as the first raindrops pelted the island. Bad memories of [Hurricane Ivan](#) in 2004 -- which hit Jamaica as a Category 4 storm that killed 17 people, left 18,000 homeless and was followed by widespread looting -- prompted Patricia Riley to seek shelter with her children, ages 4 and 5.

"During the last hurricane, the roof lifted off my house," said Riley, who is being treated for cancer. "And so I didn't want to be there for that to happen again."

Eliza Rodríguez, who is elderly and struggles to pay her bills, fled to the arena because she feared her house would crumple under the electrical poles in her yard.

"My house is not so strong," she said.

Before slapping Jamaica, the outer edges of Dean killed one person in the [Dominican Republic](#) and two in [Haiti](#), where deforestation has created such an enormous flood risk that a tropical storm in September 2004 killed 3,000 people. Earlier in the weekend, Dean claimed five lives on the islands of St. Lucia, [Dominica](#) and [Martinique](#).

While Dean was gathering strength last week, forecasters were predicting it might turn north, threatening [Texas](#) and portions of western [Louisiana](#) that are still recovering from Hurricane Rita in 2005. But new forecasts predict the storm will barrel straight west, slamming into Yucatan, then crossing into the Gulf and again hitting Mexico, between Tampico and [Veracruz](#), later in the week.

Mexico rushed troops to Yucatan to help with evacuations. [Petroleos Mexicanos](#), Mexico's state-run oil company, began evacuating thousands of workers and predicted that the storm could affect production. In Cancun -- where Hurricane Wilma caused \$2.6 billion in damage in October 2006 -- luxury hotels were emptying out as many of the resort city's estimated 40,000 visitors hopped flights out of the country.

"We are not taking any chances with Hurricane Dean," Félix González, governor of [Quintana Roo](#) state, where Cancun is located, told reporters.

Dean also forced [NASA](#) to shorten the last spacewalk for astronauts aboard the [space shuttle Endeavour](#). The shuttle is now scheduled to return Tuesday -- one day early -- because of concerns that Dean might threaten the [Johnson Space Center](#) in [Houston](#).