

Hurricane Felix Hits Nicaragua as Henriette Slams Baja Peninsula

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GUATEMALA CITY, Sept. 4 -- Hurricanes swept ashore in [Nicaragua](#) and [Mexico](#) within hours of each other Tuesday, the first time Atlantic and Pacific hurricanes have made landfall on the same day since 1998, according to the [U.S. National Hurricane Center](#).

Felix arrived first, punishing sparsely populated northern Nicaragua with 160 mph winds before dawn, then plowing inland across [Honduras](#) and threatening floods and mudslides in a region still recovering from Hurricane Mitch, which killed nearly 11,000 people in 1998. More than 1,900 miles away, Henriette swelled to hurricane strength Tuesday afternoon and roared onto the southern tip of Mexico's Baja peninsula, an area thick with some of [Latin America](#)'s swankiest hotels and vacation homes.

Felix, which is expected to dump up to 25 inches of rain in the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa, and the Guatemalan capital, [Guatemala City](#), slashed through small villages in Nicaragua, turning thin walls into kindling, toppling trees and kicking up a heavy storm surge.

The storm confounded meteorologists. Originally forecast to slam into [Belize](#) on Wednesday, it veered sharply south late Monday and early Tuesday, making landfall in a coastal region of Nicaragua populated primarily by small groups of Miskito Indians, many of whom refused to evacuate as the storm approached.

By late Tuesday, at least three people -- an ill baby being transported to a hospital, a man whose house collapsed and a person who fell off a roof -- were reported dead in Nicaragua, said Gen. Oscar Valladares, who was among the officials overseeing disaster relief. Nearly 80 percent of the roofs in the port city of Puerto Cabezas were torn off by ferocious gusts of wind.

In Honduras, tourists huddled in Tegucigalpa hotels after being airlifted from Roatan Island, where scuba enthusiasts flock at this time of year to the bright blue waters considered among the best in the world for deep-sea diving.

After making landfall as a Category 5 hurricane -- the second in two weeks, following [Hurricane Dean](#)'s landfall on the [Yucatan Peninsula](#) on Aug. 21 -- Felix quickly weakened to a Category 1 storm and was downgraded to a tropical storm Tuesday evening. But authorities were wary because of their experience with Mitch, which also weakened but dropped enough rain in a slow trudge across Honduras to cause devastating floods and mudslides.

"This storm is just as big as the other one," said Carlos C?ceres, civil defense chief in the Nicaraguan state of Chinandega. "With the other one, we never thought anything was going to happen."

Memories of Mitch provoked panic in San Pedro Sula, a major city in northwestern Honduras. Stores were clogged with shoppers trying to stockpile water and other supplies.

"There was collective madness -- it's not common to see this in Honduras," said Margarita Morales, editor of the English-language publication [Central America Today](#). "People were behaving as if there was going to be a war or the end of the world."

Risk Management Solutions, a catastrophic-risk consulting firm, estimated that insured losses in Nicaragua and Honduras will be less than \$200 million. But in remote villages, such as those in the area where Felix made landfall, there are few insured structures.

In [Baja California](#), Henriette reached land as a Category 1 storm with 90 mph winds. There were no reports of serious damage, but Mexican Interior Minister Francisco Ram?rez Acu?a declared states of emergency in five cities, including [La Paz](#) and the high-priced resort of Los Cabos. More than 2,000 people were evacuated on the peninsula in advance of the storm, which also prompted 800 evacuations on the Mexican mainland at [Acapulco](#).