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Hurricane Ian: Orlando tourists face altered vacation, travel plans



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Mr. and Mrs. Marren arrived in Florida on Tuesday night, eager to celebrate their honeymoon and enjoy the warm weather that contrasts their home in Ireland. The next day, Hurricane Ian battered Central Florida.

Anthony Marren said they spent Wednesday, the day Ian moved across Orlando, at the Rosen Inn hotel. He said they didn't lose power or experience major hardship, other than last-minute changes to their long-awaited plans.

"We're not really getting to experience here at all, we're missing out," Anthony said Friday.

The couple are among many tourists in Orlando whose vacation plans were affected by Hurricane Ian. Two days after Ian produced damage and floods across central Florida, some tourists seek to resolve the status of their lost reservations and canceled flights.

The Marrens, who had not made reservations for any Disney parks ahead of time, joined the line outside of the Disney Ticket Center in Disney Springs, where dozens of people were already waiting to buy tickets.

Sabrina Hernandez, from Dallas, Texas., was waiting in line accompanied by her family and friends. She said she knew Ian was set to move across central Florida when she arrived in Orlando on Tuesday, but all reservations had already been paid months ago.

Hernandez said that as she hoped to get a refund for her Magic Kingdom tickets, she also had to deal with her flight to Dallas being canceled.

“They didn’t even tell me like, ‘When do you want to reprogram for?’ No, they said, ‘Wait for another email,’ and I called and called until they told me that [I could not] leave Orlando until the 3rd,” she said.

Hernandez said she could not wait until Oct. 3, so she bought a Friday flight to Dallas from Miami. She said after securing her refund she would travel to Miami by car.

Orlando International Airport resumed operations on Friday after having ceased flights on Wednesday morning due to severe weather brought by Ian. As of Friday, the airport is urging people to contact their airlines to inquire about specific delays.

Gabriela Sanchez traveled to Florida from Brazil. She had planned to join Hernandez in a short vacation in Orlando. Although she was disappointed with the way their plans turned out, she said they both hope to come back soon.

“We haven’t even left and we’re already making plans to come back,” Sanchez said.



Dozens of people lined up outside of Disney Ticket Center in Disney Springs on Friday. After Hurricane Ian moved across central Florida Wednesday night and Thursday morning, some tourists lost park reservations while other face flight cancelations. (Nelly Ontiveros Cervantes / Orlando Sentinel)

While major storms are a fact of life for locals, it was a new experience for tourists like Fernanda Hernandez.

“We were calm but a little scared because it’s new for us, in our country this does not happen ever and we didn’t have much information other than the supermarket was a little empty and the nervousness of people,” Fernanda said.

Fernanda traveled with her family from Chile. She said they spent Wednesday night at a rented house in Kissimmee where significant floods are still affecting many areas.

“In the morning, the roads were a river and, after that, it went away,” she said.

Fernanda said she lost reservations to Disney Hollywood Studios and Universal Studios and that navigating refunds has been hard due to a language barrier. She said it was unclear whether she would use a Saturday reservation for SeaWorld, despite the park announcing it would [reopen](#) on that day.

Carlos Prat, another tourist from Chile, arrived in Orlando on Sunday with his family. He said despite theme parks closing down and having to stay at Disney's Art of Animation Resort for two days, the staff made the environment pleasant for guests.

"The power never went out and on top of that, there were activities for the kids so they could spend those two days without getting bored," Prat said.

Prat said he knew their experience at a Disney residence was different from what many neighborhoods in Orlando fared during the hurricane. He said he was impressed by how quickly Disney reopened operations.

"Everything's working and wonderful and clean," Prat said.

Disney Parks made released a [statement](#) on Thursday announcing they would resume operations on Friday with a "phased approach."

For families like the Marrens, the hurricane's impact on their plans did not affect their perception of Orlando as a leisure destination.

"If anything, we want to come back," Anthony said. "We're thinking next year."

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