

AOTW #2- English 112

After Hurricane Dorian, the Bahamas prepares for another hit — to its crucial tourism industry

By CHABELI HERRERA

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Most of us are aware of the recent Hurricane Dorian. It was an extremely powerful and destructive Category 5 hurricane that battered the northwestern Bahamas, and caused significant damage as it crawled its way over to the Southeastern United States and Atlantic Canada. Although the details of the Hurricane were likely all over your news feed and own backyard, there is a piece to this devastation that needs our attention and this article reveals that crucial piece. Globally we need to better understand the economic impact that this natural disaster is causing to the people of the Bahamas, so that instead of just being sympathetic to the crisis we can actually contribute to the situation. ~Olivia Desharnais

COCO CAY, Bahamas — As tourists zipped down water slides, zoomed along zip lines and zig zagged between bustling shops, crowded pools and cabanas, it would be difficult to say that things at Royal Caribbean International's private island, "Perfect Day at CocoCay," were anything other than the name advertised Sunday, only a week since the passage of Hurricane Dorian.

Ed Sheeran's "Perfect" was even blasting from the speakers at one point.

So is the case in the Bahamas now: In an archipelago that counts the \$4.3 billion tourism industry as king — it makes up more than 50% of its gross domestic product — vacations exist alongside relief efforts.

In Nassau, tourists perused the shops by the port while on the other side of the city, ships ferried in hundreds of evacuees from the Abacos, where Dorian hit, many of them hungry, newly homeless and carrying with them only the shirts on their backs. Even in CocoCay, where all seems in regular order, hundreds of people worked tirelessly after

the passage of the storm to clear the debris, bricks and sand that had washed in with Dorian so that by Saturday, travelers could do what they do best: spend money.

They were doing just that in a straw market run by Bahamians from the island next door, Great Harbour Cay, when *Mariner of the Seas* pulled into port Sunday.

“I really thought we weren’t going to work for at least a month,” said Denise Sawyer, one of the vendors.

But *CocoCay* got lucky. It just missed the worst of the storm, getting tropical storm-force winds. *Royal* brought in 40 contractors from Nassau and hired about another 50 people from the neighboring island to assist with the clean up, in addition to its 300 employees, many of whom are local Bahamians. By Sunday, 70% of the cleanup was done.

Sawyer returned to work sooner than expected, but the ensuing months are more uncertain. Will people skip the Bahamas altogether because they think Dorian devastated the entire chain, when in reality it hit two out of the more than 700 islands in the archipelago? Geography suddenly becomes critically important.

“A lot of persons think all of the Bahamas is gone, the entire thing,” Sawyer said. “You know, something like this, even around the world, when people see devastation like this they tend to hold back ... on what they plan on doing.”

It’s a perception issue that the Caribbean has faced time and again when pelted with hurricanes. And for a region of the world that depends on people thinking it’s safe enough to travel there, getting that message out is in a way a part of the relief effort.

Ellison Thompson, deputy director general of the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism and Aviation, said the ministry is working around the clock to tell the world that top destinations like Nassau, the Exumas, Eleuthera and Bimini are doing fine.

An aggressive message is crucial in the days and weeks following the storm, said Robertico Croes, an expert with the University of Central Florida who studies tourism economics in small and developing countries.



The islands in the Bahamas that were impacted by Hurricane Dorian in September 2019. (Google Maps; NOAA)

“The whole thing here is speed,” Croes said. “The quicker they can convince everybody that the southern part has not been affected and business can go on there and, as a matter of fact, it’s a good thing for business to go there, then [the faster] the south can help the north.”

Working in the Bahamas’ favor is U.S. residents’ familiarity with the region, Croes said. It’s the top market in terms of visitors to the islands, and Americans will still travel there.

In Nassau, tie-dye T-shirt shop owner Yvette Prince is banking on that. She doesn’t expect to see a huge drop in tourism to the capital city, where four cruise ships were docked Saturday afternoon.

But just in case people are confused, “here, that’s why I have this map,” she said, pointing to a booklet with a map of the islands she keeps with her at her port shop,

Treasures by the Sea. “I show people, we have 700 islands, and [Dorian] doesn’t mean the Bahamas are closed.”

Still, Thompson knows that no matter how hard they work, the Bahamas will take another hit — this one financial.

Nassau is the top destination, bringing in 2.6 million visitors between January and July this year, but Grand Bahama and Abaco are the next most visited spots, accounting for about 734,000 visitors between them.

“Because they are out of commission, that is going to have an impact on the economy of the Bahamas,” he said. “Any facilities to host tourists are no longer there, persons who work in the tourism industry have nowhere to live. ... it’s going to take years to recover from this. It’s not an overnight thing.”

The storm has displaced families like the Jarretts, who own 12 vacation villas in Freeport. They got on Royal Caribbean’s Mariner of the Seas when it picked up 261 evacuees in Grand Bahama Saturday and got off in Nassau, not yet sure where to go next.

Their villas, on the south side of Freeport, were battered by the storm. Doors are missing, paint is peeling off, fences and trees are down. The structures survived enough that they can now serve as homes for the company’s displaced employees who lost their homes to Dorian. Owner Emile Jarrett said he let them move in with generators when he heard some of his staff had nowhere to go.

But he and his family left the business behind. They’ll head to Florida to pick up supplies to rebuild at Home Depot because there are no supplies back home. He doesn’t know when they’ll return to Freeport.

“There is no revenue, there is no anchor” he said at the port in Nassau on Saturday. “It comes at a time when tourism is generally down anyway in September. It couldn’t be worse.”

A family member in Florida [set up a GoFundMe](#) for them in the hopes they can rebuild the business. But if travelers don’t return, there is little hope for Sea Breeze Villas.

“Without you guys,” he said, “no us.”

Food for thought Questions

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What's the big idea?

Question #1, Evaluating & Analyzing :

The article states that “the Bahamas prepare for another hit”. After reading, analyze and dissect what the article means by that statement. Support the importance of tourism in the Bahamas in relation to the relief and reconstruction of the suffering islands. Next, determine at least two possible repercussions that may occur in the case that this information stayed hidden from the eye of the public.

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What can we do?

Question #2, Creating :

After evaluating the tourism crisis being faced in the Bahamas and its effects, Explain why this information needs to be globalized. What do you believe can be done to help? Is it up to us to us to make that happen?