

Sizzling summer gives Europe's south taste of the future (Update)

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Sightseers shelter from the sun under an umbrella in front of Trevi fountain in Rome as temperatures reached more than 40 degrees Celsius.

Swathes of southern Europe sweltered Saturday in a heatwave that has claimed several lives, cost billions in crop damage and is, scientists warned, a foretaste of worse to follow in coming decades.

At least five deaths in Italy and Romania have been attributed to the

extreme conditions since the heatwave set in around the start of August.

Unusually high, sometimes unprecedented temperatures, are being recorded across an area spanning much of Spain and Portugal, southern France, Italy, the Balkans and Hungary.

The mercury has regularly risen above 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) across the affected areas, exacerbating the impact of an extended drought and the lingering impact of a July heatwave which sparked wildfires that claimed 60 lives in Portugal.

Hospital admissions have spiked 15-20 percent in Italy, where at least three people have died.

Italians longing for the beach have dubbed the hot spell "Lucifero", or Lucifer, after the biblical archangel said to have been condemned forever to the flames of hell.

The latest victim was a woman whose car was swept away overnight by an avalanche of water and mud as humid conditions near the Alpine ski resort of Cortina d'Ampezzo broke into torrential rain.

That tragedy follows the deaths on Thursday of two pensioners caught up in wildfires in the central region of Abruzzo and near Matera in the south of the country.



Holidaymakers seek to escape the heat taking to the beaches from southern France to Italy

Fountain splashing

In Romania, two deaths were linked to the weather, including a farmworker who collapsed after working in fields in the northeast of the country, while Spanish TV station TVE reported that a 51-year-old man died as a result of the heat on the Mediterranean island of Majorca.

In Italy, humidity and other factors are making it feel much hotter with the so-called "perceived" temperature in Campania, the region around Naples, estimated at a broiling 55 Celsius (131 Fahrenheit) on Friday.

Hospital admissions are running 15-20 percent above seasonal norms and food producers are forecast to suffer billions of euros in losses as a result

of reduced crop yields.

Italian wine and olive production is tipped to fall 15 and 30 percent respectively this year.

In Rome, tourists have been risking recently introduced fines for splashing in the Eternal City's fountains to cool off.

But there has yet to be any sign of visitors to southern Europe's summer hotspots being deterred by the rising temperatures.

Tourists were queuing once more Saturday outside Florence's Uffizi museum, which was forced to close Friday after its air conditioning broke down because of a lack of water from the dried up River Arno.

Health authorities in France have warned citizens to be particularly aware of the risks faced by the sick and the elderly.



People sit next to a water fountain in the centre of Zagreb at night as southern Europe and the Balkans face a heatwave with temperatures reaching more than 40 C (104 F).

The country is still haunted by memories of a 2003 heatwave which resulted in an estimated 15,000 avoidable deaths among pensioners, some of whom had been left on their own by holiday-making relatives.

150,000 weather deaths?

Scientists meanwhile warned that deaths due to extreme weather in Europe could increase 50-fold from an estimated 3,000 per year recently to 152,000 by the end of this century - if global warming is not reined in.

Southern Europe will suffer most and heatwaves would account for 99 percent of the deaths, according to research conducted for the European Commission and published in *The Lancet Planetary Health*.

The conclusions were questioned by Korean peers of the researchers who suggested humans would become less vulnerable to extreme weather with experience of it.

Meteo France forecaster Frederic Nathan said he was sure recent heatwaves reflected global warning.

"We have always had them but their length and intensity has notched up since the 1950s and 60s and they are increasingly coming earlier or later," he said.

"If you look at records for France, the vast majority of new records being set are for high temperatures. Record cold is becoming

increasingly rare."

Scientists warned last week that large parts of South Asia, home to a fifth of the world's population, could become unbearably hot by the end of this century.

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