

Brazil races to clean up oil-stained beaches before peak tourism season

November 4 2019, by Eugenia Logiuratto



Council workers scrape spilled crude off the beach in Itapuama in northeastern Brazil as the country rushes to prepare for the peak tourism season

Months after thick oil began turning idyllic beaches in Brazil into "black carpets," workers and volunteers wearing rubber gloves race against time

to scrape off the remaining fragments ahead of the country's peak tourism season.

Paiva, Itapuama and Enseada dos Corais in the northeastern state of Pernambuco are among hundreds of beaches fouled by an oil spill that began to appear in early September and has affected more than 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles) of Atlantic coastline.

As ocean currents brought large globs of crude to shore near the capital Recife in recent weeks, locals rushed to the normally picturesque beaches and used their bare hands to remove the toxic material coating sand, rocks and wildlife.

"I was shocked, there were people entering the water without gloves, without [safety equipment](#), in the middle of the oil," coconut seller Glauca Dias de Lima, 35, told AFP as she picked up chunks of crude from Itapuama beach.

Thousands of military personnel have been dispatched to help clean up the oil that has killed dozens of animals, including turtles, and reached a humpback whale sanctuary off Bahia state that has some of the country's richest biodiversity.

It is the third major environmental disaster to strike Brazil this year. In recent months fires ravaged the Amazon rainforest and in January a mine dam collapsed in the southeast, spewing millions of tons of toxic waste across the countryside.

Wildfires are still raging across the Pantanal tropical wetlands.



Floating barriers have been deployed to prevent crude spills from hitting idyllic beaches in Pernambuco state in the northeast

While thousands of tons of crude waste have been recovered so far, the space agency INPE said Friday there might still be oil at sea being pushed by currents. It could reach as far south as Rio de Janeiro state, the agency said.

President Jair Bolsonaro warned Sunday that "the worst is yet to come," saying only a fraction of the spilled crude had been collected so far.

The government on Friday named a Greek-flagged tanker as the prime suspect for being the source of the oil slicks.

The ship Bouboulina took on oil in Venezuela and was headed for Singapore, it said. The tanker's operators have denied the vessel was to blame.

Fishing paralyzed

As the southern hemisphere's summer approaches, people dependent on the fishing and tourism industries are nervously waiting for test results to show if the water is safe to swim in and eat from.

Northeastern Brazil is a popular tourist destination all year round, but visitor numbers usually explode in the hotter months.



A boy leaps into the surf at Calhetas beach in the state of Pernambuco in the

northeast of Brazil

Eco-tourism guide Giovana Eulina said the disaster would affect the sector and she called for a campaign to "encourage people to come here."

Fishing in the region also has been largely paralyzed by the oil spill, even in areas where crude has not been detected.

"We still don't have a concrete answer from a scientist who says that (the water) is really contaminated," said Sandra Lima, head of a local fishing association.

Edileuza Nascimento, 63, stands in muddy water near Recife and extracts shellfish that she will sanitize at home, freeze and then sell.

It was already a struggle for fishermen to make a living, she said. But the oil slick has been "too much."

"It has come to finish off the fishing families."

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