

Dangerous Hurricane Delta closing in on Mexico's Yucatan

October 6 2020, by Luis Andrés Henao and Gabriel Alcocer



Fishermen pull in a boat before the arrival of Hurricane Delta in Puerto Juarez, Cancun, Mexico, Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a potentially catastrophic Category 4 hurricane Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then continue on to the U.S. Gulf coast this week. (AP Photo/Victor Ruiz Garcia)

Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a dangerous Category 4 storm Tuesday while on a course to hammer Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula and then continue on to the U.S. Gulf Coast later in the week.

The worst of the immediate impact was expected along the resort-studded northeastern tip of Yucatan, where landfall was expected early Wednesday. The storm's maximum sustained winds were clocked at 130 mph (215 kph) late Tuesday, slightly weakened from a peak of 145 mph (230 kph) a few hours earlier, but forecasters warned it remained a dangerously powerful storm.

From Tulum to Cancun, tourism-dependent communities still soaked by the remnants of Tropical Storm Gamma could bear the brunt of Delta.

In Cancun, long lines snaked from supermarkets, lumber yards and gas stations as people scrambled for provisions under mostly sunny skies. Officials warned that residents should have several days of water and food on hand. Boat owners lined up at public ramps to pull their craft out of the water.

Mexico evacuated thousands of tourists and residents from coastal areas along its Riviera Maya. Some 160 shelters were opened in Cancun alone.

Quintana Roo Gov. Carlos Joaquín said Tuesday night that the government had made preparations, but "it is a strong, powerful hurricane." He said the area hadn't seen one like it since Hurricane Wilma in 2005.



A man removes signs as Hurricane Delta approaches Puerto Juarez, Cancun, Mexico, Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a potentially catastrophic Category 4 hurricane Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then continue on to the U.S. Gulf coast this week. (AP Photo/Victor Ruiz Garcia)

Some hotels that had exemptions because their structures were rated for major hurricanes planned to shelter their guests in place and testing their emergency systems.

When the alarm blared at the Fiesta Americana Condesa hotel, Lizeth Elena Garza Hernandez rushed out of her room carrying her 10-month-old daughter, Hannah. She had arrived Sunday from the northern Mexican border city of Reynosa with her husband, 4-year-old daughter

and her parents-in-law.

"I'm scared because we don't know how it could impact here, because we've never been in a situation like it," she said.

Joseph Potts, a deputy sheriff from Denver, Colorado, took care of his 3-year-old son near a kiddie pool while his wife attended an emergency information session about the hurricane. The hotel offered to shelter guests in a ballroom, but a short time later after the storm intensified the hotel told them they would all be moved to a university in Cancun.



A dock is closed to the public before Hurricane Delta arrives near Playa del Carmen, Mexico, early Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a Category 2 hurricane Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then grow to a potentially catastrophic Category 4 on

approach to the U.S. Gulf Coast this week. (AP Photo/Tomas Stargardter)

"The hurricane kind of popped up overnight and we just want to get it over with and go back to the beach," Potts said.

The official definition of rapid intensification of a hurricane is 35 mph in 24 hours. Delta increased in strength 80 mph, more than doubling from a 60 mph storm at 2 pm EDT Monday to 140 mph at 2 pm EDT Tuesday.

State Tourism Minister Marisol Vanegas said there were 40,900 tourists in all of Quintana Roo, far below normal numbers due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The area's economy was devastated by months of pandemic-caused lockdown.

At the Moon Palace resort just south of Cancun, hundreds of guests from Moon Palace hotels on Cozumel, Isla Mujeres and beachfront rooms were being moved into a hurricane shelter at the resort's large exposition center. Bedding, food and entertainment were being provided, said Cessie Cerrato, the vice president of public relations for Palace Resorts.



Men board up a Telcel phone store as Hurricane Delta approaches Puerto Juarez, Cancun, Mexico, Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a potentially catastrophic Category 4 hurricane Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then continue on to the U.S. Gulf coast this week. (AP Photo/Victor Ruiz Garcia)

"It's massive," Cerrato said of the convention hall. "It's super safe and further away from the water." Given the coronavirus pandemic, the hall will allow safe distancing, and face masks will be required for guests.

The state ordered people off the streets by 7 p.m. and landfall was expected between Puerto Morelos and Playa del Carmen just south of Cancun early Wednesday.

Just south of Puerto Morelos in Playa del Carmen, Zena Koudsi from Charlotte, North Carolina was taking a final walk along the beach before Delta hit.

"Never been to a hurricane area," Koudsi said. "Never been to Mexico. I was expecting maybe more sun, less waves, but, you know, we're trying to make the best of it."

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Tuesday that 5,000 federal troops and emergency personnel were being made available in Quintana Roo to aid in storm efforts.



Tourists rest in a shelter prior to the arrival of Hurricane Delta, at the Technological Institute of Cancun, Mexico, Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a potentially catastrophic Category 4 hurricane

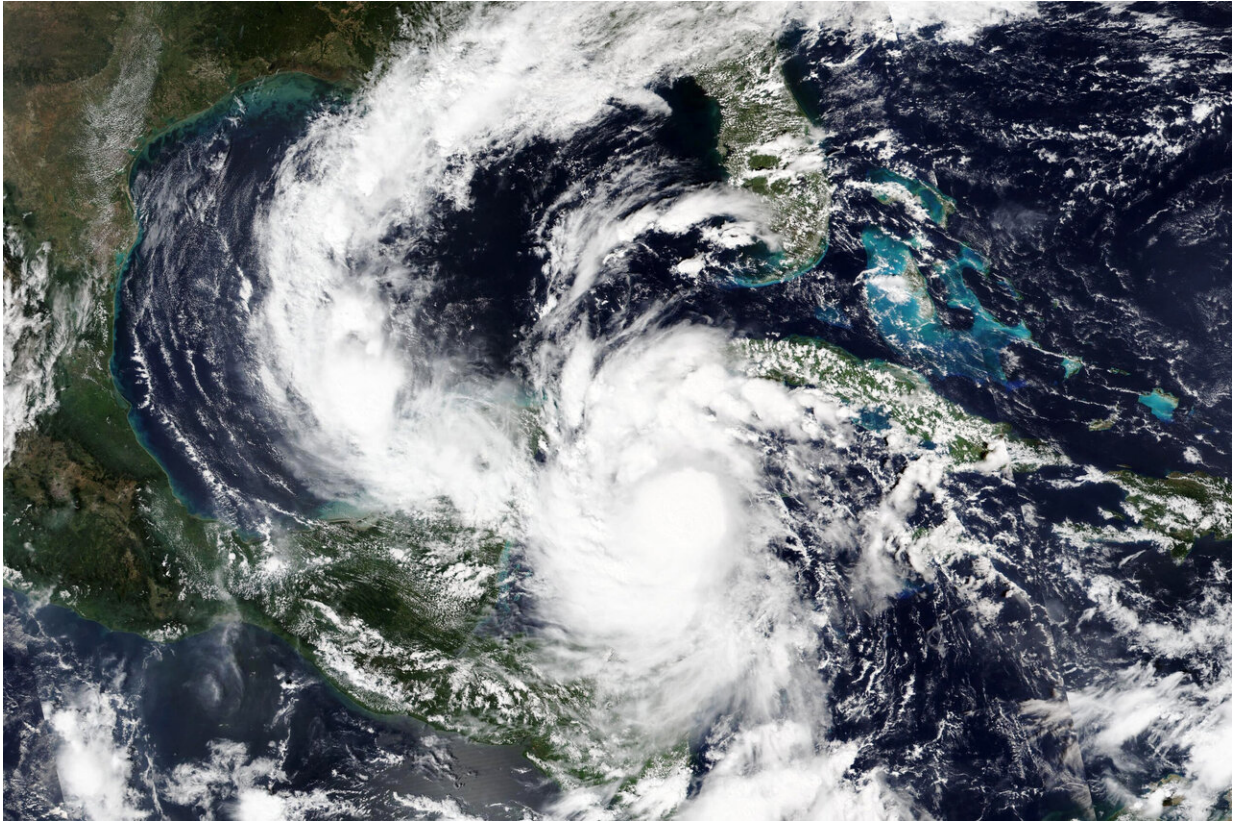
Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then continue on to the U.S. Gulf Coast this week. (AP Photo/Luis Henao)

"I honestly don't see much that will stop it until it reaches Yucatan, due to low vertical wind shear, high deep-layer moisture, and the very warm and deep waters of the northwestern Caribbean," said Eric Blake, a forecaster at the National Hurricane Center.

Delta was predicted to arrive with an extremely dangerous storm surge raising water levels by as much as 9 to 13 feet (2.7 to 4 meters), accompanied by large and dangerous waves and flash flooding inland.

The storm was centered about 135 miles (220 kilometers) east-southeast of Cozumel, Mexico, on Tuesday evening and it was moving west-northwest at 16 mph (26 kph).

Once Delta moves on from Mexico, it is expected to regain Category 4 strength over the Gulf of Mexico as it approaches the U.S. coast, where landfall around Friday would be followed by heavy rainfall across the southeastern United States.



This Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020, satellite image released by NASA Worldview, Earth Observing System Data and Information System (EOSDIS) shows a strengthening Hurricane Delta. Delta rapidly intensified into a dangerous Category 4 storm Tuesday while following a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then continue on to the U.S. Gulf Coast later in the week. (NASA via AP)



Fishermen pull in a boat before the arrival of Hurricane Delta in Puerto Juarez, Cancun, Mexico, Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a potentially catastrophic Category 4 hurricane Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then continue on to the U.S. Gulf coast this week. (AP Photo/Victor Ruiz Garcia)



Tourists play cards in a shelter prior to the arrival of Hurricane Delta, at the Technological Institute of Cancun, Mexico, Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a potentially catastrophic Category 4 hurricane Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then continue on to the U.S. Gulf Coast this week. (AP Photo/Luis Henao)



Tourists rest in a shelter prior to the arrival of Hurricane Delta, at the Technological Institute of Cancun, Mexico, Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a potentially catastrophic Category 4 hurricane Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then continue on to the U.S. Gulf Coast this week. (AP Photo/Luis Henao)



A worker secures a dock before Hurricane Delta arrives near Playa del Carmen, Mexico, early Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a Category 2 hurricane Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then grow to a potentially catastrophic Category 4 on approach to the U.S. Gulf Coast this week. (AP Photo/Tomas Stargardter)



Workers retrieve equipment before Hurricane Delta arrives near Playa del Carmen, Mexico, early Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a Category 2 hurricane Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then grow to a potentially catastrophic Category 4 on approach to the U.S. Gulf Coast this week. (AP Photo/Tomas Stargardter)



Zena Koudsi, from Charlotte, North Carolina, walks on the beach near Playa del Carmen, Mexico before Hurricane Delta arrives, early Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a Category 2 hurricane Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then grow to a potentially catastrophic Category 4 on approach to the U.S. Gulf Coast this week. (AP Photo/Tomas Stargardter)



Boats sit closer to the shore after they were secured by fishermen preparing for the arrival of Hurricane Delta in Puerto Juarez, Cancun, Mexico, Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a potentially catastrophic Category 4 hurricane Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then continue on to the U.S. Gulf coast this week. (AP Photo/Victor Ruiz Garcia)



A couple walks on the beach before Hurricane Delta arrives near Playa del Carmen, Mexico, early Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2020. Hurricane Delta rapidly intensified into a Category 2 hurricane Tuesday on a course to hammer southeastern Mexico and then grow to a potentially catastrophic Category 4 on approach to the U.S. Gulf Coast this week. (AP Photo/Tomas Stargardter)

"While there is large uncertainty in the track and intensity forecasts, there is a significant risk of dangerous storm surge, wind, and rainfall hazards along the coast from Louisiana to the western Florida Panhandle beginning Thursday night or Friday," the Hurricane Center said.

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey and Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards decreed states of emergency for their states Tuesday, allowing officials to seek federal aid more quickly if needed later.

Beach communities on the Alabama coast were still clearing away the damage from Hurricane Sally, which made landfall at Gulf Shores on Sept. 16.

In Cancun, Mexican tourists Stephanie Vazquez and husband Fernando Castillo took one last dip in the pool at the Fiesta Americana hotel with their 2-year-old son, Leonardo.

Vazquez said she was "nervous, worried," about Delta, "because it is the first time I've come here with my son."

"I feel there is a certain safety that the hotel has provided up to now, I know that we will be well protected, but you never can be 100% sure, because it is nature, and you don't know what will happen," she said.

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