

Drenched but alive, Floridians survey hurricane damage

August 31 2023, by Gerard MARTINEZ



A woman squeegees water out of a shop in Crystal River, Florida following Hurricane Idalia.

Residents in the US state of Florida on Thursday cleaned up after rain and flooding caused by Hurricane Idalia wreaked havoc before the storm

weakened and headed out to sea.

Idalia roared into the Sunshine State as a Category 3 storm on Wednesday morning, flooding homes, felling trees and downing [power lines](#) before barreling across neighboring Georgia as well as South and North Carolina.

Keith Randall was clearing dozens of water-damaged items out of his home decor store in the town of Crystal River on Thursday.

"It hit us pretty good inside," the 52-year-old, who lives some 100 miles south of the site of the hurricane's landfall, told AFP.

"Anything on the floors got ruined. We are getting rid of all the cardboard that was in here. Lots of stuff was on the walls, but it's all good, it's just a lot of cleanup," he said.

The town was inundated with approximately 9 feet (2.7 meters) of [storm surge](#) after Idalia plunged into the "Big Bend" region where the Florida peninsula curves into the United States.

President Joe Biden said Thursday he will visit the affected area this weekend.

While there were no immediately confirmed deaths, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis told a press conference that some 40 rescues had been made.

Mass evacuations were ordered earlier for thousands of Floridians—although many defied authorities and hunkered down.



Kayakers and an airboat cruise down a flooded street after Hurricane Idalia passed offshore in Crystal River, Florida.

'Significant damage'

The main task ahead remained assessing the damage and clearing debris.

"There has been significant damage, particularly along Florida's Big Bend, but the community is resilient," DeSantis said.

Around 117,000 customers in Florida and 86,000 in Georgia were without electricity Thursday afternoon, according to tracking website PowerOutage.us.

DeSantis said that 420,000 accounts had already been restored.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency deployed more than 1,000 emergency personnel to the disaster zone.

"Idalia is the strongest storm... to make landfall in this part of Florida in over 100 years," FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell said Wednesday.

Tropical [storm](#) conditions were still being felt in North Carolina as of Thursday afternoon, according to the US National Hurricane Center, as Idalia left the US mainland and swirled outward into the Atlantic.



A motorist passes a downed tree in the aftermath of Hurricane Idalia on August 31, 2023 in Perry, Florida.



A flooded house is seen in Crystal River, Florida on August 31, 2023.

According to the NHC, Idalia was expected to slow further as it approaches Bermuda over the weekend, where residents were advised to monitor its progress.

Before arriving in the United States, Idalia dealt a glancing blow to Cuba before moving over the Gulf of Mexico, which scientists say is experiencing a "marine heat wave"—energizing Idalia's winds as it raced towards Florida.

Record-breaking temperatures off Florida are expected to amplify

Atlantic storms this season, with scientists blaming human-caused climate change for the overall warming trend.

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