

NOAA predicts a near-normal 2023 Atlantic hurricane season

El Nino, above-average Atlantic Ocean temperatures set the stage

NOAA forecasters with the Climate Prediction Center, a division of the National Weather Service, predict near-normal hurricane activity in the Atlantic this year. NOAA's outlook for the 2023 Atlantic hurricane season, which goes from June 1 to November 30, predicts a 40% chance of a near-normal season, a 30% chance of an above-normal season and a 30% chance of a below-normal season.

NOAA is forecasting a range of 12 to 17 total named storms (winds of 39 mph or higher). Of those, 5 to 9 could become hurricanes (winds of 74 mph or higher), including 1 to 4 major hurricanes (category 3, 4 or 5; with winds of 111 mph or higher). NOAA has a 70% confidence in these ranges.

A summary graphic showing an alphabetical list of the 2023 Atlantic tropical cyclone names as selected by the World Meteorological Organization. The official start of the Atlantic hurricane season is June 1 and runs through November 30. (Image credit: NOAA)

The upcoming Atlantic hurricane season is expected to be less active than recent years, due to competing factors — some that suppress storm development and some that fuel it — driving this year's overall forecast for a near-normal season.

After three hurricane seasons with La Nina present, NOAA scientists predict a high potential for El Nino to develop this summer, which can suppress Atlantic hurricane activity. El Nino's potential influence on storm development could be offset by favorable conditions local to the tropical Atlantic Basin. Those conditions include the potential for an above-normal west African monsoon, which produces African easterly waves and seeds some of the stronger and longer-lived Atlantic storms, and warmer-than-normal sea surface temperatures in the tropical Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea which creates more energy to fuel storm development. These factors are part of the longer term variability in Atlantic atmospheric and oceanic conditions that are conducive to hurricane development — known as the high-activity era for Atlantic hurricanes — which have been producing more active Atlantic hurricane seasons since 1995.

2023 Atlantic Tropical Cyclone Names

Arlene	Harold	Ophelia
Bret	Idalia	Philippe
Cindy	Jose	Rina
Don	Katia	Sean
Emily	Lee	Tammy
Franklin	Margot	Vince
Gert	Nigel	Whitney

Cruising Continues To See Surge in Popularity

It was only recently that cruises were blamed, in part, for spreading the COVID-19 virus and many wondered if the industry would survive.

Now we are at the point where some lines are asking customers to rebook their cruises because their ships are so popular.

While the airline industry is just now regaining some of its footing, cruise occupancy rates are surging. In fact, some cruise lines have resorted to the airline practice of overbooking. Almost 40 million people are expected to take a cruise by 2027.



Celebrity Cruises to Alaska

Here we are, the Downs' and the Kunischs at the entrance to Denali National Park on our land and sea tour of Alaska. A highlight of the trip was seeing all of Denali (Mt. McKinley) from our hotel room in Talkeetna. Only a small percentage of visitors get to see the entire mountain. Great weather, great trip, lots of memories.

GROUPS

Take advantage of the groups we have with some special pricing!

February 7, 2024-10th Annual Iceland Getaway

Highlights: Sunrise cocktail at the Blue Lagoon, a visit to Thingvillar National Park (where the tectonic plates of Europe and North America join in a Grand Canyon like sight), a private tour of the Golden Circle with a stop for a spectacular tomato soup lunch. There is also the possibility of witnessing the Northern Lights. Air, hotel, breakfast daily, sightseeing. Rate per person is \$1998.00 double occupancy. Please note that there are only 12 seats left so please book soon if you are interested.

April 28, 2024-Great Trains and Grand Canyons

Highlights: Two rail journeys, Grand Canyon, Sedona, trolley tour and Chapel of the Holy Cross. Five nights at the Hilton Sedona, five breakfast and three dinners, all sightseeing and round trip airfare. Rate per person is \$3399.00 double occupancy.

June 9, 2024-Utah's Mighty National Parks

Highlights: Arches, Capital and Canyonlands National Parks, Monument Valley, Canyonlands by night and wine tasting. Six nights hotel, six breakfasts, one lunch 3 dinners, all sightseeing and round trip airfare. Rate per person is \$3625.00 double occupancy.

September 4, 2024-Black Hills, Badlands, and Mt. Rushmore

Highlights: Mt. Rushmore day and at night, Devils Tower, Crazy Horse Memorial, Custer State Park and Buffalo Jeep Safari. Six nights hotel, six breakfasts and four dinners all sightseeing and round trip airfare. Rate per person is \$3395.00 double occupancy.

September 4, 2024-National Parks and Canyons of the Southwest

Highlights: Grand and Bryce Canyon, Zion National Park, Zion Park Tram and Hoover Dam. Two nights Las Vegas and three nights Mesquite, five breakfasts, one lunch and two dinners, all sightseeing and round trip airfare. Rate per person is \$3395.00 double occupancy.

December 7-14, 2024-Star Clippers Caribbean/Grenadine Islands Cruise

Highlights: Casual and relaxed with no crowds as you sail from Barbados and visit Grenada, St. Vincent, Martinique, and St. Lucia aboard the Star Clipper. Visit ports untouched by larger ships. Climb the crow's nest or visit the open bridge. This tall ship adventure is your ticket. Pre packages in Barbados will be available. Rates start at \$2365.00 per person double occupancy.

Kilauea erupts after three-month pause

After a three-month pause, Kilauea volcano started erupting again on the morning of June 7. The eruption is contained to the summit of the volcano in Kilauea's caldera at a closed area of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on the Big Island of Hawaii.



The eruption started with a burst of light at the surface of Halemaumau Crater, and that was followed by lava fountains that reached 200 feet high. Since then, fountain heights have decreased, but the flow has covered the crater floor and added 32 feet of new lava.

Kilauea volcano's alert level was changed from "watch" to "warning," but no one is in immediate danger so it was changed back to "watch" the next day. Associated safety hazards can include volcanic glass fragments, known as Pele's hair, that can blow in the wind, as well as other volcanic particles that can cause skin and eye irritation. But the U.S. Geological Survey Hawaiian Volcano Observatory says as of now that it's confined to the closed area.

It's never certain how long the eruption will last. It could stop in the next few days or last years. For now, the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park is expecting thousands of visitors. It's asking the public to stay on marked trails, to not enter closed areas and to avoid cliff edges and cracks. The park is open 24 hours a day, but to avoid crowds, visits are encouraged after 9 p.m. or before 5 a.m.

Hawaii tourism officials urged tourists to be respectful of cultural and spiritual meanings when flocking to a national park on the Big Island to get a glimpse of the latest eruption, reported the Associated Press.

"Out of respect for the cultural and spiritual significance of a volcanic eruption and the crater area for many kama'āina, the Hawaii Tourism Authority urges mindfulness when planning a visit to the volcano," the Hawaii Tourism Authority said in a statement Wednesday night, using a Hawaiian word often used for Hawaii residents.

An Underwater World Awaits

After months of renovations, The Audubon Aquarium and Insectarium are now open at the New Orleans Riverfront! Revisit your favorite sub-aquatic creatures in this reimagined experience and discover 17,000 square feet of new exhibit space. Marvel at the breathtaking Butterfly Garden or get up close and personal with the sharks at the 13,000-gallon touch pool.



A Guide to the 8 Hotels Near Universal Orlando Resort

Universal Orlando Resort has eight hotels across four categories — Premier, Preferred, Prime Value and Value — so there's a perfect choice for every traveler.

All on-site hotels offer amenities including complimentary transportation to the parks and Universal CityWalk, early park admission and charging privileges across the resort. Plus, if you book Premier-level hotels you will also receive complimentary Universal Express Unlimited Ride Access, which can add up to \$350 per person, per day, to the cost of park tickets.

Premier Hotels

Loews Portofino Bay Hotel

Loews Portofino Bay Hotel transports clients to an Italian seaside village with an authentic gelateria and waterfront piazza that bustles with water taxis during the day and showcases live alfresco opera performances at night. Portofino Bay also offers an interactive cooking experience where clients can create fresh pasta dishes. And although it's only a few minutes from park gates, the elegant hotel offers a relaxing escape after a busy day.

Hard Rock Hotel

Clients can live like rock stars at Hard Rock Hotel, a California mission-style-designed “mansion” featuring memorabilia, live music and a palm-lined pool with a 260-foot waterslide and kids’ water play area — all less than 1 mile from the theme parks. Clients can also enjoy Americana nostalgia at The Kitchen, a full-service restaurant serving comfort food with a side of rock ‘n’ roll attitude.

Loews Royal Pacific Resort

About a half-mile walk from the parks is Loews Royal Pacific Resort, which is themed as a South Seas oasis with a lagoon-style pool and white-sand beach. On Saturday evenings, the Wantilan Luau takes clients on a journey through Hawaii as they enjoy a buffet dinner, live music and performances from fire and hula dancers.

Suites and Themed Bedrooms

Universal Orlando’s two-bedroom kids’ suites — one king plus two twins in a separate themed bedroom — include Jurassic World Kids’ Suites at Royal Pacific, Despicable Me Kids’ Suites at Portofino Bay and Future Rock Star Suites at Hard Rock Hotel. These suites can also accommodate a rollaway to sleep five.

Preferred Hotels

Loews Sapphire Falls Resort

The Caribbean-themed Loews Sapphire Falls Resort is bright and breezy, with tropical decor, multiple restaurants and an award-winning, tapas-style lobby bar. The resort also features a dedicated walking path to Universal’s Volcano Bay waterpark, which offers nearly 20 water-based attractions such as a lazy river, kids’ water play areas, raft rides and the Ko’okiri Body Plunge that drops the bravest parkgoers 125 feet down the Krakatau volcano into the water below.

Prime Value Hotels

Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort

Perfect for families, the retro-style Universal’s Cabana Bay Beach Resort was inspired by 1950s and ‘60s beach resorts and features with two pools (one with a lazy river), a bowling alley and direct access to Volcano Bay. (Pro tip: Volcano Bay View rooms provide front-row seats to Krakatau’s spectacular nighttime eruption.) Another reason this hotel is excellent for clients with kids or families traveling together: Family suites with kitchenettes that sleep up to six, and two-bedroom suites that sleep up to eight.

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Universal's Aventura Hotel

Universal's Aventura Hotel, meanwhile, features a modern design, a 17th-floor rooftop bar (with views of all three theme parks) and Urban Pantry food hall, which serves made-to-order sushi, burgers and pizza — making it the perfect choice for both clients with teens or college-age kids and adults-only vacations. The tech-heavy hotel also offers cool amenities such as in-room tablets that control the television and temperature, as well as allow guests to order room-service pizza.

Value Hotels

Universal's Endless Summer Resort – Surfside Inn and Suites and Dockside Inn and Suites

The two hotels at Endless Summer Resort are Universal Orlando's newest; the 750-room Surfside Inn and Suites opened in 2019, and the 2,050-room Dockside Inn and Suites opened in 2020. Located between Universal's existing parks and Epic Universe (scheduled to open in 2025), the sister hotels offer quick-service and grab-and-go dining options, family-friendly pools and game rooms.

Theme Park Transportation

One hour before parks open until Universal CityWalk closes, all eight hotels offer complimentary bus transportation. Buses from Endless Summer, Cabana Bay and Aventura arrive every 15 minutes; Portofino Bay, Hard Rock, Royal Pacific and Sapphire Falls buses come every 30 minutes.

Water taxis from Portofino Bay, Hard Rock, Royal Pacific and Sapphire Falls offer an average travel time of 10 minutes to the parks.

The Best Tiramisu

Making this classic Italian dessert is surprisingly easy. We start the custard with a traditional Marsala-flavored zabaglione -- a cooked mixture of egg yolks and sugar. Then we lighten it with tangy mascarpone cheese, which provides just the right creamy, mousse-like texture. Once assembled, the ladyfingers soften sufficiently after 4 hours in the refrigerator, but if you can wait longer, the flavors will meld even more.

Ingredients:

Custard:

4 large egg yolks
1/2 cup sugar
2 tablespoons sweet Marsala
Two 8-ounce containers (16 ounces)
mascarpone cheese

Assembly:

4 tablespoons instant espresso powder
3 to 4 tablespoons sweet Marsala (see Cook's Note)
1 teaspoon plus 1 tablespoon unsweetened cocoa powder, for dusting
One 7-ounce package ladyfingers, such as Savoiardi (see Cook's Note)

For the mascarpone custard: Add the egg yolks, sugar and Marsala to a medium heatproof bowl and whisk to combine. Set the bowl over a medium saucepan of gently simmering water (do not allow the bowl to touch the water). Whisk constantly until the mixture is pale, hot to the touch and has doubled in volume, 4 to 6 minutes, scraping down the sides of the bowl occasionally with a rubber spatula. (This can be done with an electric mixer to speed up the process.) Remove from the heat and continue whisking until slightly cooled, about 1 minute. Whisk in the mascarpone cheese until combined. Refrigerate until ready to assemble.



To assemble: Stir together 1 1/4 cups hot water, espresso powder and 3 to 4 tablespoons Marsala in a liquid measuring cup. Evenly divide the mixture between two medium bowls. Dust the bottom of an 8-by-8-inch baking dish with 1 teaspoon cocoa powder.

Working one at a time, dip half of the ladyfingers into one bowl of the espresso mixture for 2 seconds per side, until soaked but not soggy. Arrange them over the cocoa powder in one layer, breaking up as needed to fill in any gaps. Pour any remaining liquid from the first bowl over the layer of ladyfingers. Spread half the mascarpone custard over the ladyfingers. Repeat the process with another layer of ladyfingers and the remaining bowl of espresso mixture, then spread with the remaining mascarpone custard.

Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or up to overnight. Sift the remaining 1 tablespoon cocoa powder over the top just before serving.