

GVI Hurricane Dean humanitarian relief work

Thousands of local Mayans were left in desperate need of aid last week after Hurricane Dean, among the three strongest hurricanes on record, hit the southern coast of Quintana Roo, Mexico.



Caption: Hurricane Dean, completely covering the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico.

Hurricane force winds, some reaching 200 mph, and a massive storm surge wreaked havoc as they smashed into the coastal fishing village of Mahahual, leaving houses and livelihoods in ruin. The hurricane will also have caused untold damage to the reef of Mahahual, part of the Mesoamerican Barrier reef, which supports some of the highest biodiversity in the natural world.

The area has long been an undiscovered jewel in Mexico's rich tapestry of natural and cultural heritage. In recent years Mahahual had begun to draw increasing numbers of tourists, lured by the clear blue waters, white sandy beaches and coral reef teeming with life. The Mayan community is also a strong presence in this area of Quintana Roo, with hundreds of small communities continuing to uphold Mayan traditions and the way of life in the face of huge development pressures.



Caption: A young Mayan amidst the devastation

In response to the devastation, Global Vision International (GVI), who have been working in Mahahual since 2004 and the GVI Charitable Trust have formed an international alliance of partners. Teaming together GVI's volunteer workforce with local partners Amigos de Sian Ka'an, local ecotours experts Naturama of Xcaret, international NGO Flora, Fauna y Cultura, leading donation website Global Giving and Playa del Carmen's Municipality tourism board, the group is initiating a variety of Hurricane Aid relief projects to help some of the worst hit areas of Quintana Roo.

Working in the 4 Mayan communities of Mahahual, Limones, Nohobec and Emiliano Zapata with local partners Amigos de Sian Ka'an, Expedition Members are now working alongside people affected by Hurricane Dean with the clear up of their homes and vital crops. With governmental efforts focusing on the coastal communities affected, these small inland communities are in desperate need of aid.



Caption: The aftermath of Mahahual. The town is already rebuilding in earnest!

GVI are also assisting in collecting donations from the public and tourists by coordinating a Collection Point in Playa del Carmen to receive items of food, water, blankets, clothes and building materials as part of a larger scheme along the length of the northern tourist corridor of Quintana Roo which will see a convoy of large trucks taking the goods down south to communities in need next week. Already GVI has received a large number of items generously donated by members of the public here, in addition to giving a large amount of food and sheets themselves.

In Mahahual, the long process of rebuilding the town has begun in earnest. Whilst work is being done to re-instate basic facilities such as electricity and water to the town, shelters are struggling to provide for those who have returned to salvage what is left of their homes and possessions. GVI are already actively collaborating

with local authorities with the town clean-up, whilst also preparing a long term programme to help the town's people get back on their feet. Money is being raised through the GVI Charitable Trust and through Global Giving, which will go directly towards the people of Mahahual and Quintana Roo who need it most.

At the time of writing, a second Hurricane, Felix, was gathering strength and heading to the area at a predicted Category 4 or 5. This has now passed further to the south, but still hampered relief work efforts. GVI's Directors are in field and others are arriving to assist in the co-ordination of GVI's relief and rebuilding efforts.

GVI will be continue to work in the region and will run their Marine Conservation Expedition in October. Steve Gwenin, the GVI Director of Programs, said "Expedition Members are needed now more than ever. We need to get people back in the water and assess the damage to the reef, the biggest natural resource of the region, we need to continue to assist in humanitarian relief work as requested by the local groups and local communities, and it seems we also need to do some house keeping at our own base! It will be a busy, adventurous and extremely worthwhile expedition."

To apply to join and offer time to assist GVI's efforts in the region, please click on the links below:

Mahahual marine expedition

<http://www.gvi.co.uk/pages/expeditionDetail.asp?expedition=67>

Pez Maya marine expedition

<http://www.gvi.co.uk/pages/expeditionDetail.asp?expedition=66>

Tulum community development expedition

<http://www.gvi.co.uk/pages/expeditionDetail.asp?expedition=69>

To donate purely financially, please click on the donation links on the GVI Charitable Trust website:

<http://www.gvi.org.uk/pages/mahahual.asp>

To see alternative GVI programs please visit the website on:

<http://www.gvi.co.uk>

All GVI's expeditions can be found at:

<http://www.gvi.co.uk/pages/exp.asp>