"Blowin’ in the Wind” – I was thinking of those haunting 1962 lyrics by folk singer Bob Dylan this week as I kept in touch with members of our ‘ohana in Hawai‘i. This month, they have been challenged by a series of powerful tropical storms that have bracketed and crisscrossed the Hawaiian Islands, producing torrential rains and flooding in many areas.

On O‘ahu, the storm-related overflow of sewage lines near the Hawaii Convention Center this past Monday, August 24, resulted in a three-day closure of most parts of Waikīkī Beach. The central area of the beach, which abuts prime resort properties such as Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort, Outrigger Waikiki Beach Resort, Royal Hawaiian Hotel and Sheraton Waikiki, was probably free of contamination, but was nonetheless closed by authorities as a precautionary measure until tests could be completed.

Waikīkī Beach was reopened on Wednesday, but almost simultaneously, a tropical storm called Ignacio, then still east-southeast of Hawai‘i, grew to hurricane strength. It is currently predicted to track just north of Hilo on the Big Island as early as Monday, August 31.

Scientists believe this year’s increase in Pacific Ocean storm activity is related to “El Niño,” the nickname of the cyclical warming of the Pacific’s waters. Writing for Climate Central, Andrea Thompson postulates that the current El Niño could be the strongest in the historical record, which dates back to 1950. Last month, temperatures in a key area of the Pacific were more than 2°F (about 1°C) above average, second only to the blockbuster El Niño of 1997–1998.

The geographic extent of the higher temperatures is dramatically shown on the accompanying thermal image of the eastern Pacific. The red areas are those with water temperatures during the week of August 10, 2015, higher than the 1981-2010 average for that week. The darkest areas are near the equator, but significantly higher-than-average temperatures extend from Central...
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America all the way north to Canada. The unusually warm water is accompanied by changes in the circulation of the atmosphere overhead, which, in turn leads to changes in the weather like those we are currently seeing.

Hurricane season in the central Pacific lasts from June 1 through November 30 each year. However, Outrigger Resorts’ properties extend from Mauritius in the Indian Ocean to Hawai’i in the central Pacific. It is almost always “storm season” somewhere.

As resort hosts, we are responsible for the comfort and safety of our guests as well as each other, our families and our communities. Let’s keep working together to ensure the safety and comfort of all those for whom we are responsible this year and every year!  

Water temperatures in the Pacific Ocean during the week of August 10, 2015. Red indicates areas with water temperatures above the average for 1981-2010. Note the Hawaiian Islands, which are barely visible near the “11 o’clock” position on the graphic.