



Keeping The Doors Open When There Are No Doors:

My U.S. Virgin Islands Experience



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How I Got There

My Story:

- We were living in Ashland Kentucky, and working in Huntington, West Virginia.
- Our Boys and their families were in Williamsburg, VA, Willoughby, OH and Miami, FL
- We had no family near by and we wondered why we were staying there.
- In November 2016, I started looking for Orthopedic Management Jobs in Florida and South Carolina through the MGMA. There were no Jobs available.
- There was an International Tab which I clicked for the heck of it. It said, “why not live and work in Paradise US Virgin Islands”. I clicked it and up came an orthopedic Administrator position. I applied not really thinking anything would come of it.
- Over the next 2 months after talking with a recruiter and 2 Skype calls with the Physician owner I was asked to come down in late January early February for several days to look at the position. At that point we really weren't sure about the Job but decided to accept their offer for a paid trip to the Islands.





Charlotte Amalie

www.paradise-islands.org







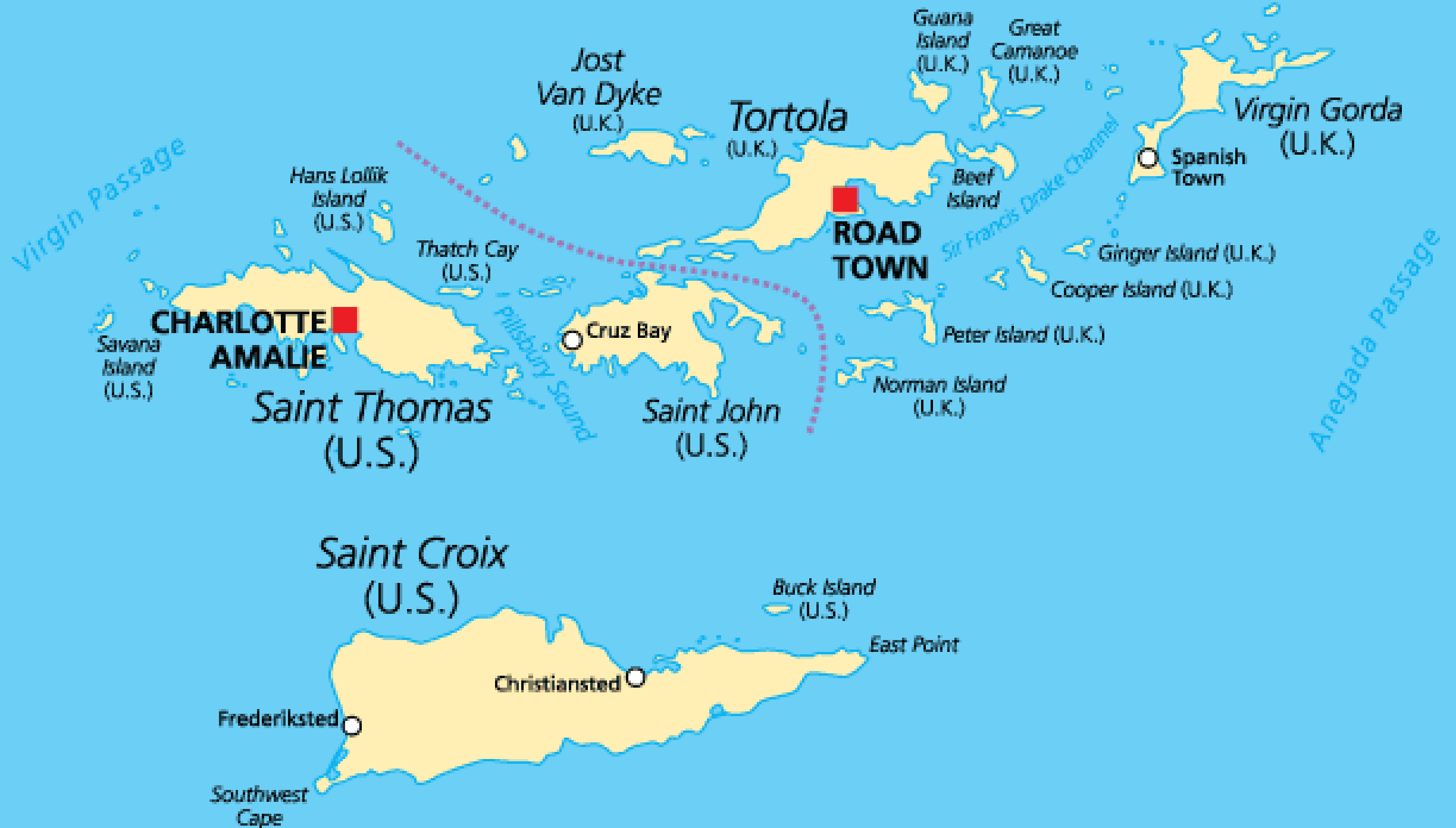
COMPREHENSIVE
ORTHOPAEDIC GLOBAL

My Interview

- When I asked about Hurricanes:
 - “We haven’t had a bad one in over 20 years.”
 - “Most are tropical storms or lower level hurricanes.”
 - “Most storms turn north before reaching the USVI.”

COG Locations

- St. Thomas, U.S.V.I.
- St. Croix, U.S.V.I.
- St. John, U.S.V.I.
- Anguilla. B.V.I.
- Tortola, B.V.I.





Decision Time

- We weighed our decision and decided to finish my career in the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- We had our boys get what they wanted. Wasn't much
- Put our keepsakes in a storage unit in Miami.
- Sold most of the furniture with our house, got rid of our winter clothes, and packed up.
- Arrived in St. Thomas on May 31, 2017





Living in Paradise

- Life was wonderful, it was 3 months of Bliss.
- Every weekend we would visit a different beach.
- Then it became Hurricane Season.



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Staff Reaction to Tropical Storms / Hurricanes

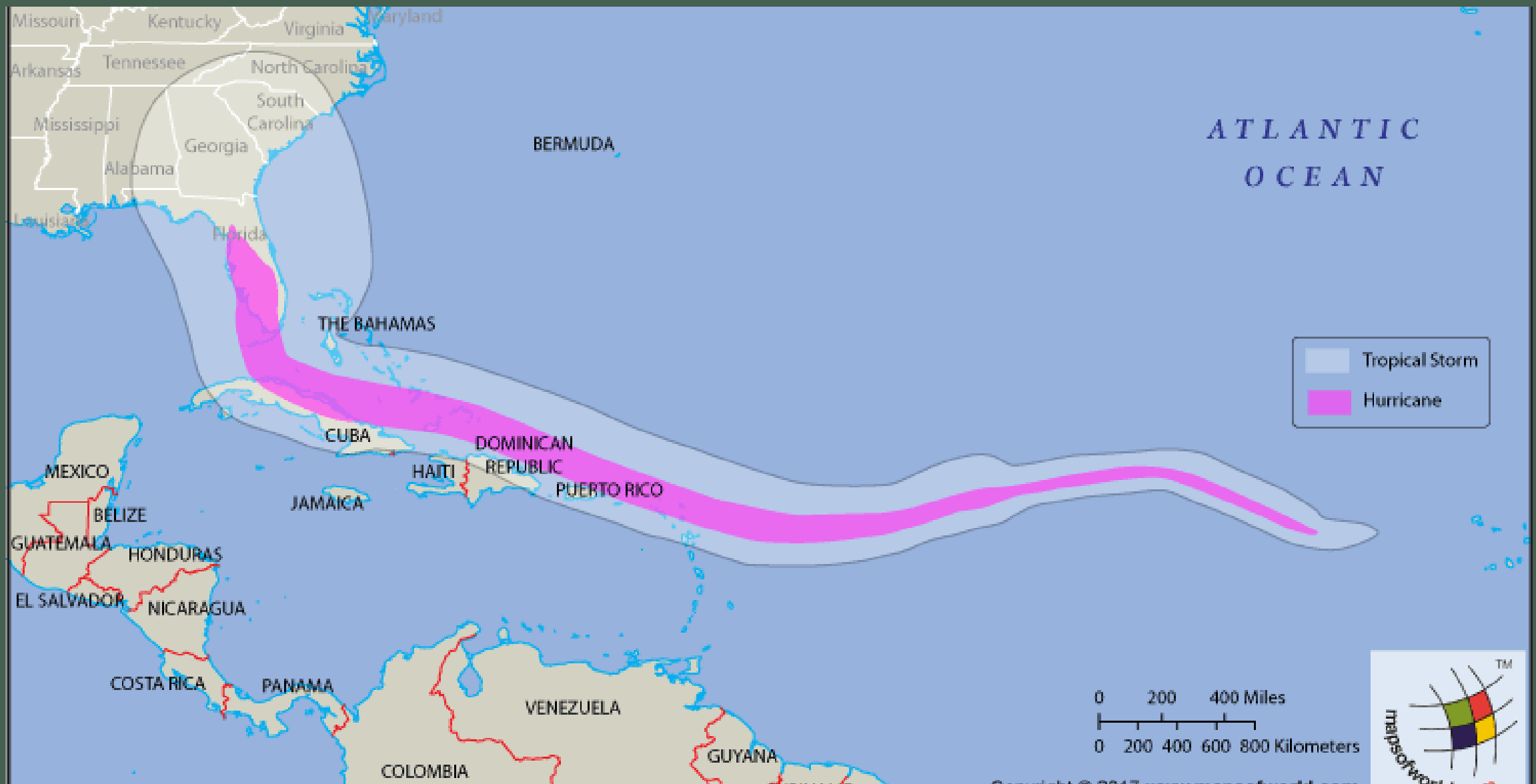
- Most staff who were locals accepted storms as part of life and weren't overly concerned initially.
- Because they hadn't endured a higher Category storm for a long time, they were "confident" it would change course.

Watching the Weather

- My wife kept monitoring the weather on TV and online.
- Tropical Storm Irma became Hurricane Irma.
- Despite weather reports to the contrary, we continued to believe Irma would turn north but she did not.

Hurricane Irma Strengthens

- Hurricane Irma's intensity keeps increasing and is not turning north.
- Estimated Impact to USVI, Wednesday September 6, 2017.



Our Evacuation Plan

- We tried to evacuate on Friday September 1st (5 days before Hurricane hit) but there were no flights or ships available. All were booked.
- We purchased cases of water, non-perishable food, batteries, & flashlights and prepared to ride out the storm.
- We withdrew a large amount of cash from the bank.
- Maintenance at our condo advised us that all condos on 3rd floor with loft bedrooms like ours were severely damaged by Hurricane Marilyn in 1995.

Personal Preparation

- We asked Condo Manager if there was another, safer condo we could stay in during the storm.
- Across the hall from our condo was one which was rented but not being used.
- We moved into the condo across the hallway.

Practice Preparation: Several Days in Advance

- Rolls of plastic used to cover server & equipment in surgery center.
- Make sure we have large trash bags and duct tape.
- Sandbags for outside of doors.
- Make sure staff backed up computer hard drives.

Practice Preparation

- Make 2 digital backup copies of all “important” documents (e.g., insurance & corporate documents).
- Give a copy to 2 separate people.
- Place originals in secure/safe location (safe, safety deposit).
- Make a list of staff contact information (primary & secondary cell phone numbers & address).

Practice Preparation

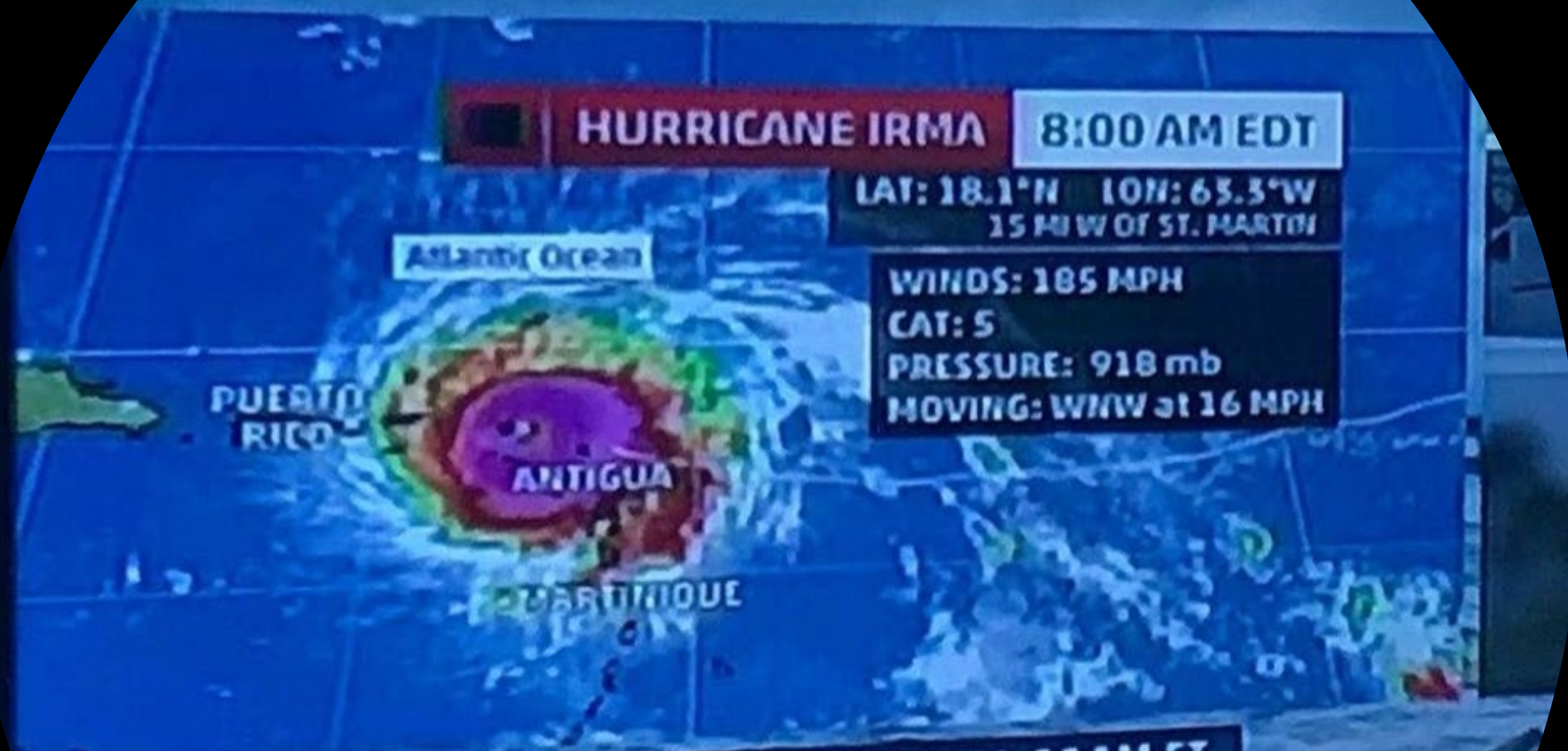
- Give copy of staff list to 2 people, in case one can't reach out. It is their duty to call staff and check on their safety/well-being.
- In most cases with phone lines above ground they will not be working. It is much quicker to provide temporary cell towers than replace lines.
- In December (3 months post-Hurricane), our office phones were still not working.

Practice Preparation

- Your biggest asset is your staff.
 - Their safety & well-being is more important than bricks & mortar.
- Give them time to personally prepare for the storm.

Hurricane Irma – Sept 6, 2017

- On the day of impact, I went to the office at 7:00 AM to make any final preparations.
 - Put computers on top of desks and covered with plastic. Put sandbags in place.
- We closed our office at 10:00 AM and let staff go home to prepare.



NEXT NHC ADVISORY: 11AM ET

IRMA IS "POTENTIALLY CATASTROPHIC"
Hurricane warnings: Puerto Rico, US Virg

HURRICANE IRMA

HURRICANE WARNING

DAY MORNING - WINDOW FOR HURR

79°

FREDERIKSTED

10AM
55%

11AM
65%

12PM
65%

1P

LIVE

1.7k HURRICANE IRMA

abc ACTION WEATHER

	WINDS	PRESSURE	MOVEMENT	LOCATION
MON 8:00 125 m	185 mph	918 mb	WNW at 16	18.2°N, 64.0°W

SUN 8:00 AM
145 mph

4

SAT 8:00 AM
155 mph

FRI 8:00 AM
160 mph

5

5

5

San Ju.



Hurricane Irma – Sept 6, 2017

- The outer bands of the hurricane started to impact the Island around 12:30 PM and lasted 9+ hours.
- Because we had our metal hurricane shutters closed everything was dark & we could not see outside. All we could hear was wind howling & things crashing outside.

Hurricane Irma – Sept 6, 2017

- Winds gust were topping 200 MPH and a gust broke the wind gauge at the airport at 235 MPH.
- The metal hurricane shutters were ripped off the room we were staying in, so we moved to the kitchen area.
- We got over 2 inches of water on the 3rd floor, water was coming in through the sliding glass doors.



Hurricane Irma

- Power went out shortly after the hurricane hit. The Condo Association's backup generator burned up after about 1 ½ hrs.
- It was dark, winds were howling during the storm and you could hear loud sounds of things crashing.
- After the storm passed, it was humid, and we had 2 inches of water on our floor.

Post Hurricane Irma

- Once daybreak came you could see the extensive damage.
- Down trees & power lines prevented us from leaving our complex for 2 days.
- No one had cell service so we couldn't tell our families we were ok for over 24 hours.

Post Hurricane Irma

- The first task was to check on the damage to our own condo and our belongings.
- We sorted through our water-soaked belongings. My wife's clothing rack was destroyed.
- We then started to sweep out the water in both condos.



















POOL AREA RULES

- 1. NO RUNNING OR JUMPING
- 2. NO DIVING
- 3. NO GLASS
- 4. NO ALCOHOL
- 5. NO SMOKING
- 6. NO DRUGS
- 7. NO FIRE
- 8. NO LIFELINES
- 9. NO LIFELINES
- 10. NO LIFELINES
- 11. NO LIFELINES
- 12. NO LIFELINES
- 13. NO LIFELINES
- 14. NO LIFELINES
- 15. NO LIFELINES
- 16. NO LIFELINES
- 17. NO LIFELINES
- 18. NO LIFELINES
- 19. NO LIFELINES
- 20. NO LIFELINES



Post Hurricane Irma

- 70% of structures were damaged.
- Landlines & cell towers were down.
- Roads were treacherous.



Post Hurricane Irma

- National Guard was activated, and curfew was implemented (6 PM – 6 AM).
- National Guard directed traffic and tried to control looting.
- National Guard was at grocery stores & gas stations to only allow a few people in at a time.























People Stepping Up:

- During times of tragedy and devastation, people with great character step up and take charge.
- Brian Bacot, MD is an example of someone who stepped up during this troubling time.
 - He personally drove around the island to check on our staff the day after the hurricane, including myself.
 - He organized receiving supplies from the states after the hurricane.

Post Hurricane Irma

- 2 of the 5 Doctors moved into the office, which had a generator, and spent evenings there because their condos were damaged and had no power.
- We had limited patients and were understaffed for several weeks so they could personally deal with the aftermath.

Post Hurricane Irma

- Initially both landline office phones & cell phones were out of service.
- We had injured people knocking on our office door 2 days after Hurricane Irma.
- Other patients would call our number on their cell which rang to an answering service and would then send a text message to a cell phone at our office.

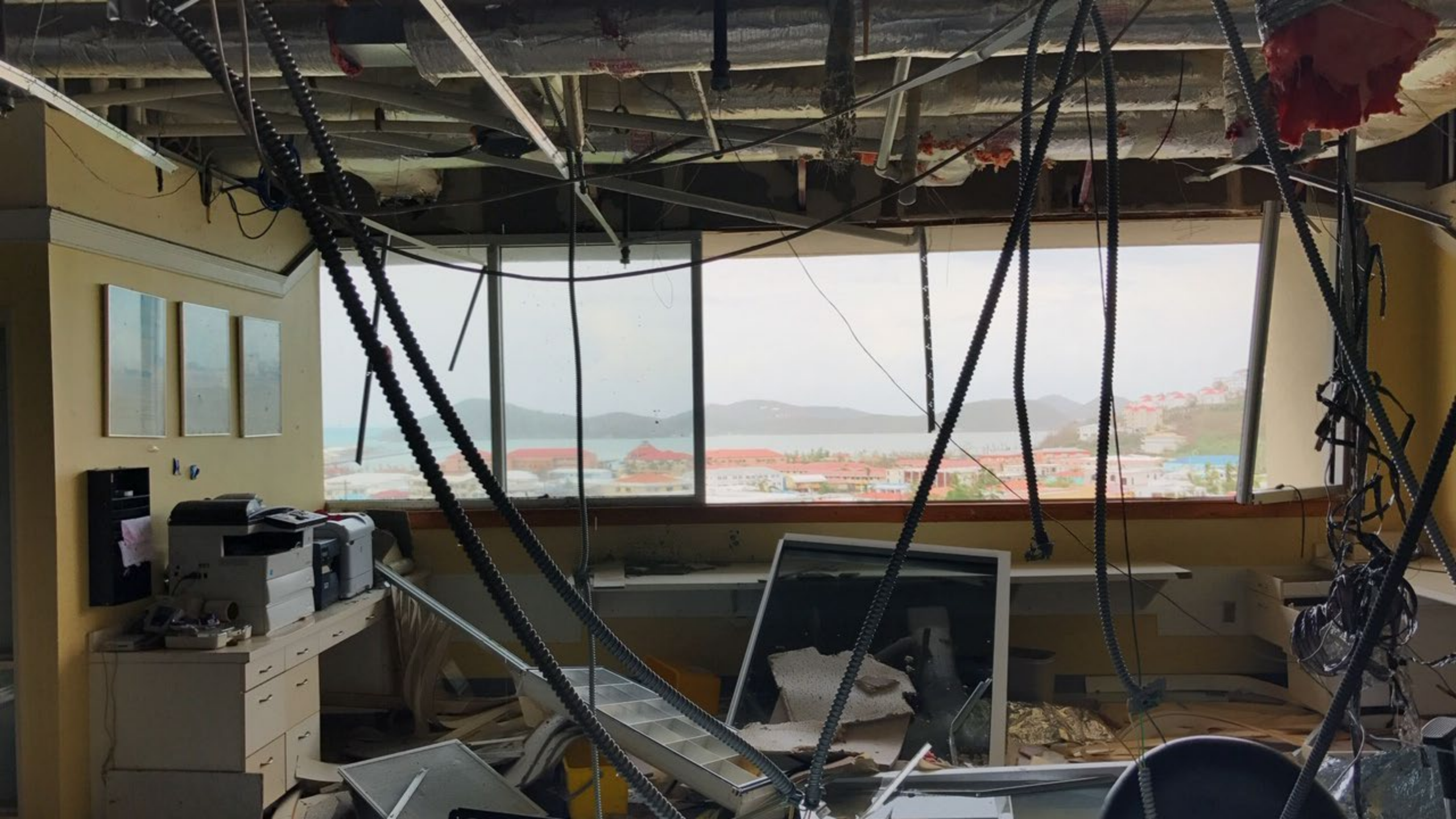
Our Practice Post Irma

- Our office fared quite well due to being relatively new and it had high-impact hurricane windows.
- Our practice utilized a cloud-based PM and EMR which avoided risk to our data if server based.
- Our office complex had a generator, and our surgery center had an additional backup generator.

Our Practice Post Irma

- Several hundred yards away the hospital was severely damaged. Patients had to be evacuated.
- In the British Virgin Islands (Tortola & Anguilla) we rented space 1 day a month from other doctors, so our own personal loss was minimal.
- The B.V.I. offices were severely damaged, and it was almost a year before our practice returned on a regular basis.









My Post Irma Experience

- We had no power, no generator, & no water.
- We had to get water from the condo swimming pool to flush toilets.
- On September 11, National Guard came to our complex looking for tourists & non-residents for an evacuation cruise ship leaving September 13 going to Miami.

My Post Irma Experience

- My first priority was to get my wife off the island.
 - We still had our driver's licenses from the states, so we raised our hand and they put us on the evacuation list.
- We packed up what belongings we could salvage & stored them at my office.
- On September 13 we boarded a Norwegian Cruise Line ship for Miami. This was entirely funded by the cruise line. It took 2 ½ days to arrive in Miami.

My Post Irma Experience

- We spent a week with our son & his wife in Miami.
- We then spent 10 days with another son & his family in Ohio.
- And then 2 weeks with our 3rd son & his family in Virginia.

Hurricane Maria: September 20, 2017

- 12 days after Hurricane Irma, Hurricane Maria hit St. Croix on its way to Puerto Rico.
- The Hospital in St. Croix was severely damaged and patients were evacuated to Miami.
- St. Thomas was spared a direct hit but got 22 inches of rain in 24 hrs and flooding ensued.

Hurricane Maria

- After the 2nd hurricane (Maria), I had a list of our St. Croix staff contact numbers and I reached out to every single one of them to check on their safety.

San Pedro
Macoris

PUERTO
RICO

ISLANDS

SINT
MAARTEN

Basseterre

St. John's

MONTserrat

Cat 5 Hurricane Maria_...
Advisory #11 | Click this balloon to...

DOMINICA

Fort-de-France







My Post Hurricane Experience

- While off the island staying with family, I worked remotely and had daily 7:00 AM conference calls with the MD who owned the practice.
- I also interviewed for a job in Rocky Mount, North Carolina during this time off the island.
- I flew back once the USVI airport opened on October 9 while my wife stayed back in the states with family.

Back to Paradise

- When I returned to USVI, I stayed in my office and slept there for several days until I was able to find an efficiency apartment in the same condo complex where we previously lived.
 - The generator was still down so there was no power.
- In late October, the generator was repaired but it only ran from 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM.
 - It didn't help me because that's when I was working at the office.

Back to Paradise

- Unfortunately, after 2 hurricanes and low patient volumes, we had to layoff half our staff.
- We did pay each staff for 8 days post-hurricane.



Paradise Recovery

- Initially, 2 out of 5 doctors went stateside to work.
- Our office was functional with skeleton staff & our surgery center was functional.
- We had limited patients. They had no insurance. They had no jobs. Most of the hotels were closed.

Paradise Recovery

- One financial saving grace of the practice is that they happened to be renovating a large building in St. Croix for a medical office building and 2 O.R. surgery center prior to the Hurricanes and the building sustained minimal damage.
- Because it was empty with little damage, we were able to rent 2 floors of office space to FEMA & Army Corp for 2 years which brought cash into the practice and enabled it to survive.

Paradise Recovery

- A couple of weeks after Hurricane Maria, a Carnival Cruise ship was docked in St. Thomas to house FEMA & Army Corp of Engineers workers because there were no hotels available.
- Getting building supplies was slow because usually supplies were shipped from Puerto Rico. Now supplies had to come from Miami or Atlanta.

Paradise Recovery

- The major Marriott Resort re-opened in late 2020.
- The Ritz Carlton opened back in Early 2020
- The Westin Resort in St. John had to be completely rebuilt.

Paradise Recovery

- The first tourist cruise ship returned the week of thanksgiving (2+ months post Hurricane Irma).
- Before Hurricane Irma, there could be as many as 6 ships in port at the same time.
- Magen's Bay area was rebuilt before the cruise ships returned.



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IMPORTANT
PLEASE READ INSTRUCTIONS
FOR USE







Paradise Recovery

- Mother Nature is resilient.
 - By the time I left in December, all of the vegetation had returned to pre-hurricane.
- If you didn't see the severely damaged buildings and blue tarps, you would have never known a Cat-5 hurricane devastated the island a few months prior.
- The native residents of the Caribbean are very resilient, and they accept what happened and keep going.

What I Learned from my U.S. Virgin Islands Experience

- PLAN for the Worst Case Scenario.
- HOPE for the Best.
- PRAY for Protection & Luck.

Lessons Learned

1. You can plan but it never will prepare you for a Category 5 Hurricane.
2. Be organized and have duties & responsibilities clearly-defined and written down.
3. Have good communication with staff pre- and post-disaster, and make sure everyone knows their role.

Lessons Learned

4. Again, **your biggest asset is your staff**: their safety & well-being are more important than bricks & mortar.
5. For islands and other remote or rural practices with overhead telephone lines, consider purchasing a satellite phone in case of emergencies.

A tropical sunset scene with palm trees and a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm orange glow across the sky and water. The palm trees are silhouetted against the bright light.

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