Written by Administrator Friday, 30 September 2022 15:10 -



Floridians begin to assess the damage caused by Hurricane Ian

Floridians are returning to their homes to find destruction after lan slammed the state as a Category 4 hurricane.

Cody Godwin, USA TODAY

MICCOSUKEE RESERVATION, Florida – Some passed the time playing blinking slot machines, swimming in the pool and eating at a 24-hour restaurant. Others who fled Hurricane lan in trailers and motorhomes set up camp in the parking lot of the tribal casino on the edge of the Everglades.

"The most important thing is we're safe," said Ping Hu, 46, whose home in Sanibel Island was cut off by the hurricane that had left two fellow residents dead.

The Miccosukee Casino & Resort was just one of the countless hotels, friends' homes and

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shelters across South Florida where evacuated residents, families and retirees temporarily holed up this week.

Thursday night, one group sat on folding chairs and sipped beers to watch the sun dip below the grassy expanse stretching back toward the hurricane-ravaged west coast. They commiserated together, wondering if their homes were ruined. They read news reports, texted friends for electricity updates and debated when to return.

Mostly, they were just glad to have found this unlikely, but welcoming, refuge.

"This is the first hurricane I've been through. They told us, 'We have no power. Don't come back,'" said Greg Deem, 70, who lives in an upscale motorhome resort in Naples and also has a home in Ohio. "I'm very glad I'm here, in a parking lot at a casino."

By Friday, some were checking out to return to asses the damage in coastal cities and residences further inland that had been flooded by torrential rains. Others were still unsure if it was safe and extending their stay, said resort manager Karen Whiting.

"People are worried. They don't know what they're going to find when they go back," said Whiting, who said the 302-room hotel was nearly full.

Lori Kearn, 69, and her husband, Raymond, 75, said they believed their home had survived near Arcadia, about 25 miles northwest of Port Charlotte.

"There's no power, there's no water. Some trailers have been tipped over," Lori Kearn said.

In the elevators, some displaced residents hauled bags of groceries to their rooms.

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Marco Island resident Kathleen Tuttle, 72, said this week marked the first time she evacuated ahead of a hurricane since her husband passed away. Previously, they had weathered such storms together at home.

"I feel very blessed having found this refuge," she said.

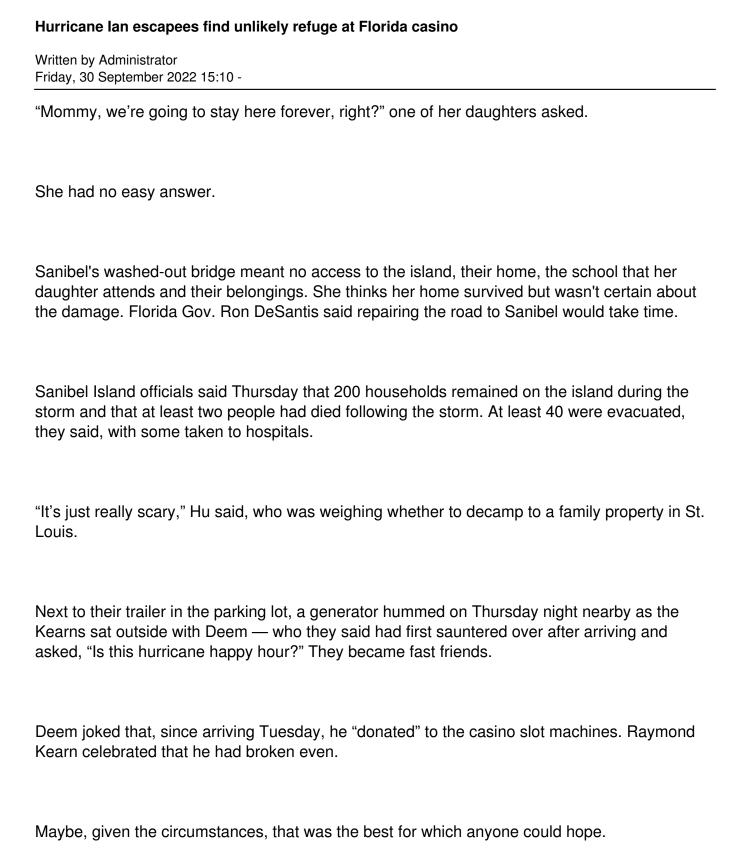
Those who had evacuated knew there was work ahead: Cleaning out condo refrigerators, checking on cars left behind, and navigating cleanup and insurance.

Hu, an accountant who bought a home earlier this year on Sanibel Island with her husband and two daughters, said she considered waiting out the hurricane before heeding calls for evacuation on Tuesday.

With her husband out of town on business, she packed a small bag — figuring she'd be back after a night or two. Hotel rooms were scarce, so she secured one at the casino resort, located on what Whiting said was a parcel of the Miccosukee Indian Reservation.

Her children, ages 4 and 7, loved it. There was a pool, bright colors and lights. It felt like a cruise, she said. Amid displays about the Miccosukee's history, they met other hurricane evacuees. For some, it was simply the first place they spotted after crossing Highway 41 through the everglades.

On Thursday, a sign posted at the front desk said the resort was suspending its policies to allow children at the hotel because of the disaster.



Chris Kenning is a national news writer. Reach him at ckenning@usatoday.com and on Twitter1

@chris kenning

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