

Typhoon Phanfone: at least 16 killed in Philippines on Christmas Day

Toll could rise as internet and mobile phone networks are still cut off in some badly damaged areas

By Agence France-Presse via theguardian.com / Thu 26 Dec 2019



A resident looks at a house damaged at the height of Typhoon Phanfone in Tacloban, Leyte province in the central Philippines Photograph: Bobbie Alota/AFP via Getty Images

A typhoon that swept across remote villages and popular tourist areas of the central Philippines on Christmas Day claimed at least 16 lives, authorities have said.

Typhoon Phanfone, with winds of 195km (120 miles) an hour, tore roofs off houses and toppled electric posts as it cut across the Philippines on Wednesday.

With the internet and mobile phone networks still cut off in some badly damaged areas, a full assessment of Phanfone's damage was not immediately possible on Thursday morning.

But at least 16 people had been confirmed killed in villages and towns in the Visayas, the central third of the Philippines, according to disaster agency officials.

Phanfone also hit Boracay, Coron and other holiday destinations that are famed for their white-sand beaches and popular with foreign tourists.

The airport at Kalibo, which services Boracay, was badly damaged, according to a Korean tourist who was stranded there and provided images to AFP.



Residents walk past a house damaged during Typhoon Phanfone in Tacloban Photograph: Bobbie Alota/AFP via Getty Images

“Roads remain blocked, but some efforts have been made to clear away the damage. It’s pretty bad,” Jung Byung Joon said via Instagram messenger.

“Everything within 100 meters of the airport looks broken. There are a lot of frustrated people at the airport as flights have been cancelled.

“Taxis are still running but it’s windy and still raining so no one wants to leave the airport, including me.”

Though much weaker, Phanfone tracked a similar path as Super Typhoon Haiyan – the country’s deadliest storm on record which left more than 7,300 people dead or missing in 2013.

“It’s like the younger sibling of Haiyan. It’s less destructive, but it followed a similar path,” Cindy Ferrer, an information officer at the Western Visayas region’s disaster officer, told AFP.

Tens of thousands of people in the mostly Catholic nation had been forced to evacuate their homes on Wednesday, ruining Christmas celebrations.

Many others were not able to return to their families, with ferries and plane services suspended.

Among those killed Phanfone was a police officer who was electrocuted by a toppled electric post while patrolling.