

An aerial satellite-style photograph of a tropical storm. The storm's eye is a bright, circular center surrounded by a dense ring of white clouds. The surrounding ocean is dark blue with white-capped waves. The text "EYE OF THE STORM" is overlaid in the center-right of the image.

EYE OF THE STORM

IT'S THE MIDDLE of Hong Kong's typhoon season - which lasts between May and October - and expats wonder what all the fuss is about when the typhoon signal is raised on what seems no worse weather than a normal winter day in the UK. But although Hong Kong's remained relatively unscathed this year, it hasn't always been the case. Britsoverseas looks back at some of the worst typhoons to hit Hong Kong.

The great unnamed typhoon of 1937 is estimated to have killed 11,000 people. Perhaps the most deadly typhoon to hit Hong Kong, it arrived on 2 September 1937 causing a huge tsunami that struck the city in the middle of the night. A great tidal surge swamped Tolo Harbour and many fishing boats and junks were sunk along with their crew members. Twenty eight ocean going ships were caught up in the storm and it was said the wind was so strong that small fish were blown many yards from the sea onto buildings 90ft above the ground. Witnesses also described a wall of water 9m high that struck in darkness, killing many while they were sleeping.

The storm was predicted to pass Hong Kong so people weren't adequately prepared for the catastrophe as the typhoon changed course at the last minute and made a direct hit without a warning. The typhoon wind was so strong that observatory instruments capable of registering winds up to 125 mph broke down.

September 1st 1962 – Typhoon Wanda was the most powerful typhoon recorded in Hong Kong. Again, the typhoon pushed a tidal wave through Tolo Harbour, but this time residents were forewarned and though properties were wrecked, there was far less loss of life, with 127 fatalities in all.

About a fifth of the residential huts at Sha Tin were destroyed during the typhoon, mainly caused by logs or boats crashing into them. Part of the sea wall at Sha Tin collapsed and fields were inundated with salt water. Damage was widespread and it's estimated that 72,000 people were made homeless. Of 132 ocean-going ships, 24 were beached and 12 were involved in collisions. The Number 10 hurricane-force wind signal was raised five times during the early 1960s but only on six occasions since.



September 1st 1964 – Typhoon Ruby (Yoning) developed much further to the north than any other typhoon that's caused gales during September in Hong. Ruby caused over 730 fatalities and catastrophic damage.

August 10th 1971 – Typhoon Rose (Uring) was one of the most intense and violent typhoons to have affected Hong Kong. Tragically, Rose was the worst typhoon in terms of fatalities since Typhoon Wanda in 1962. Over 30 ocean-going vessels were swept aground or suffered collision. About 300 small craft, including 100 pleasure craft, were sunk or damaged. Three of the 14 hydrofoils travelling between Hong Kong and Macau were severely damaged.

Typhoon Rose caused 110 fatalities, most on board the capsized Fat Shan. Of the 92 people on board there were only four survivors. As a result of the typhoon, a large power sub-station in Kwun Tong caught fire causing a blackout in Kowloon and the New Territories. Thousands of people were trapped in elevators during the power cut.

July 28th 1979 – Typhoon Hope was the most severe typhoon to affect Hong Kong since Typhoon Rose in 1971. It passed rapidly over the New Territories on 2 August and caused twelve deaths and injured 260 people. About 2,000 people had to stay in temporary shelters provided by the government and 796 people were made homeless. At the height of the typhoon, eleven collisions involving eighteen vessels occurred in the harbour. Typhoon Hope sank 27 pleasure vessels and damaged another 69. Eighty-five dwelling boats were sunk while another 30 were damaged. Approximately 19,000 telephone lines were damaged and there was widespread disruption to power supplies in the New Territories.

August 29th 1983 – Typhoon Ellen was the worst typhoon to strike Hong Kong since Typhoon Hope in 1979. It passed seven nautical miles southwest of Fan Lau on the south-western tip of Lantau Island, killing ten people. The typhoon signal number ten was hoisted for eight hours with hurricane force winds lasting for five hours at Cheung Chau.

