

# **GEOGRAPHY**

## **WEATHER AND CLIMATE ~ EL NIÑO**

“ Now playing in the Pacific : A barn – burner of an El Niño ! More hurricanes in the Pacific , including Pauline , the bane of Acapulco ? Blame them on El Niño , a gigantic warm spot in the tropical Pacific Ocean . Choking on smoke from torched tropical rainforests ? Blame the immense fires on El Niño induced droughts in Indonesia and the Amazon , where landowners use fires to cheaply destroy forests before planting crops .

El Niño refers to the irregular increase in sea surface temperatures from the coasts of Peru and Ecuador to the equatorial central Pacific . This phenomenon is not totally predictable , but on average it occurs once every four years . Since March of 1997 , sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific have been higher than normal . The sea surface temperature for September 1997 was the highest in the last 50 years .

An El Niño starts every few years when a vast pool of warm water moves eastward in the tropical Pacific Ocean along the equator west of Peru . This affects the distribution of heat in the Ocean , and circulation and rainfall patterns in the tropical atmosphere . Although the abnormally warm region is the first overt symptom of an El Niño , it also includes widespread changes in ocean currents and sub – surface temperature .

Among the upheavals that have been attributed to this cyclic event are droughts in Africa , Australia and Brazil , and floods in California and South America . In case you’ve been hibernation since this strong El Niño began , it has been credited with starting the new fashion of surfing without wet suits in Washington State , not to mention catches of tropical fish off the West Coast of the United States.”

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