

# Outlook for the 2026 Northwest Pacific

May 2026



**Chris Hebert**  
Senior Meteorologist,  
TropicsWatch Manager

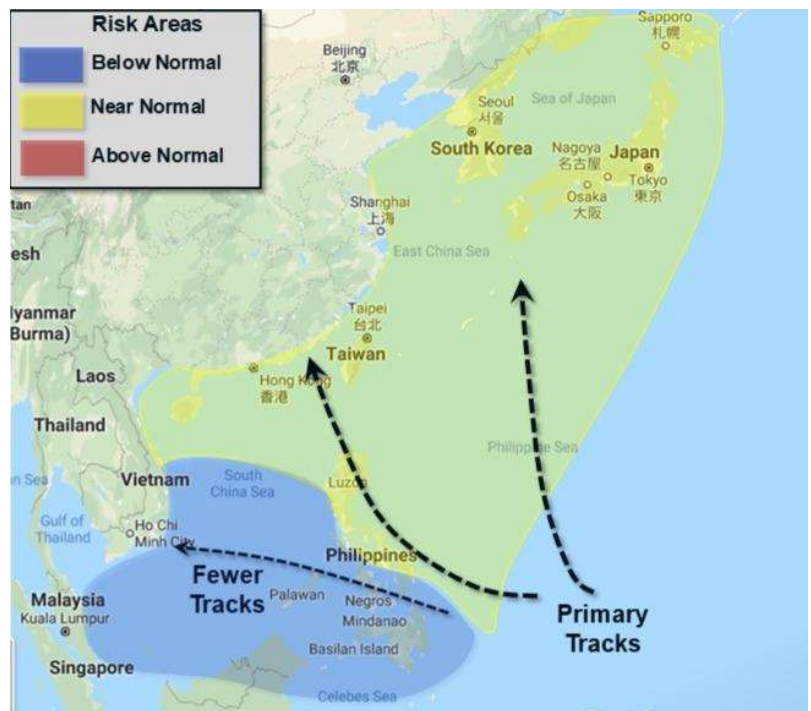
## 2026 Pacific Typhoon Season Outlook: A Return of El Niño

**2026 Season Forecast**

28 Named Storms (+)  
17 Typhoons (+)

**30-yr Average**

26 Named Storms  
16 Typhoons



2026 Risk Areas

### Season Outlook

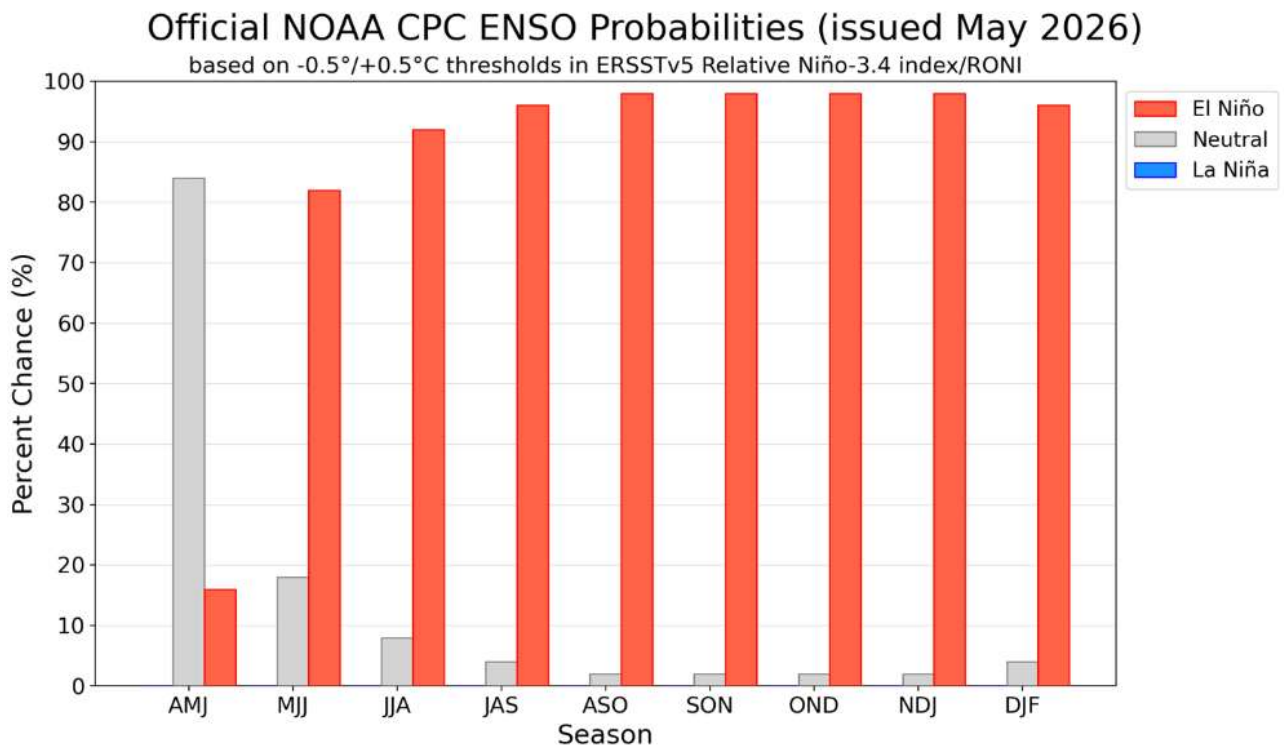
The 2025 West Pacific typhoon season ended with a total of 27 named storms, of which 13 became typhoons. Of the 13 typhoons, 6 became intense typhoons with max sustained wind of 100 kts (115 mph) or higher. The strongest typhoon was Ragasa, which had maximum sustained winds of 145 kts (165 mph). Ragasa formed in the Philippine Sea on the 17th of September and tracked westward north of Luzon on the 22nd of September at its peak intensity. Ragasa made its final landfall in southern China on the 25th of September. The prime impact areas last season extended from central Luzon to Taiwan. No typhoons impacted Japan last season.

So far this season, there have been five named storms, including Super Typhoon Sinlaku, which struck Saipan and the Northern Mariana Islands in mid-April.

## El Niño/La Niña

One primary driver of typhoon activity in the Northwest Pacific is the state of El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO). ENSO is represented by the Oceanic Niño Index (ONI), which is defined as the 3-month average surface temperature anomaly for the Niño 3.4 region in the Tropical Pacific. When the sea surface temperature anomaly is less than 0.5C below normal over a three-month period, it is identified as a La Niña. Conversely, when the average sea surface temperature anomaly is greater than 0.5C for a three-month period, it is identified as an El Niño.

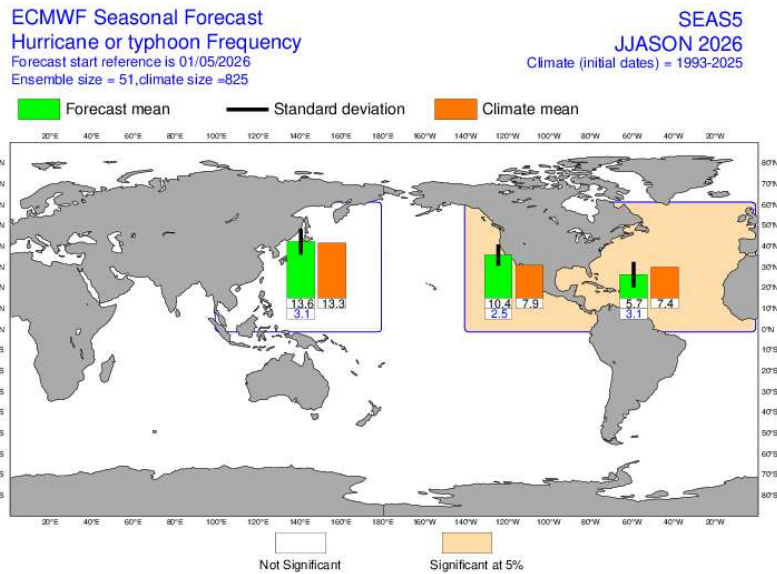
Last season, water temperatures in the Tropical Pacific were neutral to a weak La Niña. For 2026, La Niña has faded away to a rapidly developing El Niño. Currently, all computer models are predicting a strong El Niño through the summer and autumn. The developing El Niño could be one of the strongest on record. This would result in sinking air over the South China Sea and Philippines, reducing activity there. More activity may be concentrated east of the Philippines and northward toward eastern China and Japan.



Source: <https://iri.columbia.edu/our-expertise/climate/forecasts/enso/current/>

## European Model Seasonal Forecast

Each year, the European model produces seasonal tropical cyclone forecasts around the world. For 2026, the European model is predicting a near normal 23 named storms from June through November, and 13-14 typhoons through during that same period. These numbers do not include the 5 named storms and one typhoon that have already occurred.

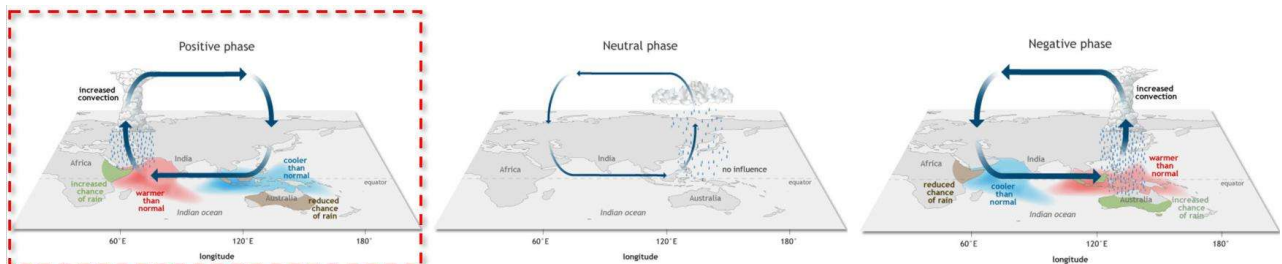


European Model Typhoon Frequency Forecast for 2026

## Indian Dipole (IOD)

Another feature which can significantly influence Northwest Pacific typhoon activity is the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD). The IOD is defined by the difference in sea surface temperatures between the eastern and western tropical Indian Ocean.

The current forecast is for a positive IOD for the coming typhoon season. This would be an inhibiting factor as far as typhoon development this season across the South China Sea and Philippines.



**Positive** – Generally results in sinking air and cooler water across the West Pacific, resulting in decreased activity there.

**Neutral** – Neither enhances or inhibits tropical cyclone activity in the West Pacific Basin.

**Negative** – Generally results in rising air and warmer water across the West Pacific, resulting in increased activity there.

Source: <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/#tabs=Indian-Ocean>

## Water Temperature

Water temperatures in the northwest Pacific are generally not a major issue during typhoon season, as the water is always warm enough for typhoons to form. However, water temperatures so far this season are cooler than average across both the South China Sea and the Philippine Sea. While the water isn't cool enough to prevent typhoons from forming, the cooler water may limit the number of very strong typhoons in these two regions this season. Water temperatures from Taiwan through northern Japan are well above normal, which would provide a favorable environment for stronger typhoons.

## Our May Forecast

The one thing that seasonal predictors agree on is that the central to southern South China Sea will have less activity than normal this season. So far this season, the five named storms all formed in the Philippine Sea or near the Marianas. We expect this pattern to continue in 2026. While the total number of named storms and typhoons may be a little higher than normal, much of the activity may be concentrated east of the Philippines. The region from Luzon through eastern China and Japan will be at normal risk levels this season.

We are predicting a total of 28 named storms this season, which is a little above the 30-year average of 26. As for typhoons, we are predicting a total of 17 this season, which is above the 30-year average of 16 typhoons.

Find our Severe Weather resources at  
[StormGeo.com/weather-intelligence](https://stormgeo.com/weather-intelligence)