



El Nino and La Nina

- **El Nino and La Nina** are complex weather patterns resulting from variations in ocean temperatures in the Equatorial Pacific Region. They are opposite phases of what is known as the **El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO)** cycle.
 - The ENSO cycle describes the fluctuations in temperature between the ocean and atmosphere in the east-central Equatorial Pacific.
 - El Nino and La Nina episodes typically last nine to 12 months, but some prolonged events may last for years.
- **El Nino** is a climate pattern that describes the **unusual warming of surface waters** in the **eastern tropical Pacific Ocean**.
 - It is the “warm phase” of a larger phenomenon called the El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO).
 - It occurs more frequently than La Nina.
- **La Nina, the “cool phase”** of ENSO, is a pattern that describes the **unusual cooling** of the tropical eastern Pacific.
 - La Nina events may last between **one and three years, unlike El Nino**, which usually lasts no more than a year.
 - **Both phenomena tend to peak during the Northern Hemisphere winter.**

El Nino

- El Nino was **first recognized by Peruvian fishermen** off the coast of Peru as the appearance of unusually warm water.
 - The Spanish immigrants called it **El Nino, meaning “the little boy”** in Spanish.
- El Nino soon came to describe irregular and intense climate changes rather than just the warming of coastal surface waters.
- The El Nino event is **not a regular cycle**, they are not predictable and occur irregularly at two- to seven-year intervals.
 - The climatologists determined that El Nino occurs simultaneously with the Southern Oscillation.
 - The Southern Oscillation is a change in air pressure over the tropical Pacific Ocean.
- When coastal waters become warmer in the eastern tropical Pacific (El Nino), the atmospheric pressure above the ocean decreases.
 - Climatologists define these linked phenomena as **El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO)**.

Monitoring El Nino and La Nina

- Scientists, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) collect data about El Nino using a number of technologies such as **scientific buoys**.

- A buoy is a type of an **object that floats in water** and is used in the middle of the **seas as locators or as warning points for the ships**. They are generally bright (fluorescent) in colour.
- These buoys measure ocean and air temperatures, currents, winds, and humidity.
- The buoys transmit data daily to researchers and forecasters around the world enabling the scientists to more accurately predict El Nino and visualize its development and impact around the globe.
- The **Oceanic Nino Index (ONI)** is used to measure deviations from normal sea surface temperatures.
 - The intensity of El Nino events varies from weak temperature increases (about 4-5° F) with only moderate local effects on weather and climate to very strong increases (14-18° F) associated with worldwide climatic changes.

Oceanic Nino Index (ONI)

- The **Oceanic Niño Index (ONI)**, is a measure of the departure from normal sea surface temperature in the east-central Pacific Ocean, is the standard means by which each El Nino episode is determined, gauged, and forecast.

Impact of El Nino

- In order to understand the concept of El Nino, it's important to be familiar with non-El Nino conditions in the Pacific Ocean.
 - Normally, **strong trade winds blow westward** across the tropical Pacific, the region of the Pacific Ocean located between the **Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn**.
- **Impact on Ocean:** El Nino also impacts ocean temperatures, the speed and strength of ocean currents, the health of coastal fisheries, and local weather from Australia to South America and beyond.
- **Increased Rainfall:** Convection above warmer surface waters brings increased precipitation.
 - Rainfall increases drastically in South America, contributing to coastal flooding and erosion.
- **Diseases caused by Floods and Droughts:** Diseases thrive in communities devastated by natural hazards such as flood or drought.
 - El Nino-related flooding is associated with increases in cholera, dengue, and malaria in some parts of the world, while drought can lead to wildfires that create respiratory problems.
- **Positive impact:** It can sometimes have a positive impact too, for example, El Nino reduces the instances of hurricanes in the Atlantic.
- **In South America:** As El Nino brings rain to South America, it brings droughts to Indonesia and Australia.
 - These droughts threaten the region's water supplies, as reservoirs dry and rivers carry less water. Agriculture, which depends on water for irrigation, is also threatened.
- **In Western Pacific:** These winds **push warm surface water** towards the western Pacific, where it borders **Asia and Australia**.
 - Due to the warm trade winds, the sea surface is normally about **0.5 meter higher** and **4-5° F warmer in Indonesia than Ecuador**.
 - The westward movement of warmer waters causes **cooler waters to rise up** towards the surface on the coasts of **Ecuador, Peru, and Chile**. This process is known as **upwelling**.
 - Upwelling elevates cold, nutrient-rich water to the euphotic zone, the upper layer of the ocean.

Previous El Nino Events:

- El Nino events of **1982-83 and 1997-98** were the **most intense** of the 20th century.
- During the **1982-83** event, sea surface temperatures in the eastern tropical Pacific were 9-18° F above normal.
- The El Nino event of **1997-98** was the first El Nino event to be **scientifically monitored from beginning to end**.
- The 1997-98 event produced drought conditions in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Peru and California experienced very heavy rains and severe flooding.
- The Midwest experienced record-breaking warm temperatures during a period known as **“the year without a winter.”**

La Nina

- La Nina means The Little Girl in Spanish. It is also sometimes called El Viejo, anti-El Nino, or simply "a cold event."
- La Nina events represent periods of **below-average sea surface temperatures** across the **east-central Equatorial Pacific**.
 - It is indicated by sea-surface temperature decreased by more than 0.9°F for at least five successive three-month seasons.
- La Nina event is observed when the **water temperature in the Eastern Pacific gets comparatively colder than normal**, as a consequence of which, there is a **strong high pressure over the eastern equatorial Pacific**.

The Conditions of La Nina.

- La Nina is caused by a build-up of **cooler-than-normal waters in the tropical Pacific**, the area of the Pacific Ocean between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn.
- La Nina is characterized by **lower-than-normal air pressure over the western Pacific**. These low-pressure zones contribute to increased rainfall.
- La Nina events are also associated with **rainier-than-normal conditions over southeastern Africa and northern Brazil**.
 - However, strong La Nina events are associated with catastrophic floods in northern Australia.
- La Nina is also characterized by **higher-than-normal pressure over the central and eastern Pacific**.
 - This results in decreased cloud production and rainfall in that region.
- **Drier-than-normal conditions** are observed along the **west coast of tropical South America**, the **Gulf Coast of the United States**, and the **pampas region of southern South America**.

Impact of La Nina

- **Europe:** In Europe, El Nino reduces the number of autumnal hurricanes.
 - La Nina tends to lead to **milder winters in Northern Europe** (especially UK) and **colder winters in southern/western Europe** leading to snow in the Mediterranean region.
- **North America:** It is continental North America where most of these conditions are felt. The wider effects include:
 - **Stronger winds along the equatorial region**, especially in the Pacific.
 - **Favourable conditions for hurricanes** in the Caribbean and central Atlantic area.
 - **Greater instances of tornados** in various states of the US.

- **South America:** La Nina causes **drought in the** South American countries of **Peru and Ecuador**.
 - It usually has a **positive impact on the fishing industry** of western South America.
- **Western Pacific:** In the western Pacific, La Nina increases the **potential for landfall** in those areas most vulnerable to their effects, and especially into **continental Asia and China**.
 - It also leads to **heavy floods in Australia**.
 - There are **increased temperatures** in Western Pacific, Indian Ocean and off the Somalian coast.

La Nina in 2010

- The 2010 La Nina event correlates with one of the worst floods in the history of Queensland, Australia.
- More than 10,000 people were forced to evacuate, and damage from the disaster was estimated at more than \$2 billion.

ENSO and India

- **El Nino:** Strong El Nino events contribute to weaker monsoons and even droughts in India Southeast Asia.
- **La Nina:** The cold air occupies a larger part of India than the El Nino cold air.
- In the 'La Nina year', **rainfall associated with the summer monsoon** in Southeast Asia tends to be **greater than normal**, especially in **northwest India and Bangladesh**.
 - This generally **benefits the Indian economy**, which depends on the monsoon for agriculture and industry.
- It usually brings in **colder than normal winters** in India.
- La Nina influences the Indian subcontinent by piping in **cold air from Siberia and South China**, which interacts with the tropical heating to produce a north-south low-pressure system.
- The **cold air of La Nina** associated with this north-south trough **tends to extend much further south into India**.
 - This is remarkably different from the more northwest-southeast blast of cold air associated with El Nino.
 - The pressure pattern going north-south means lesser impact of western disturbances.
 - The **cold temperature can go down as far as Tamil Nadu**, but **may not affect the North East that much**.

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/el-nino-and-la-nina>