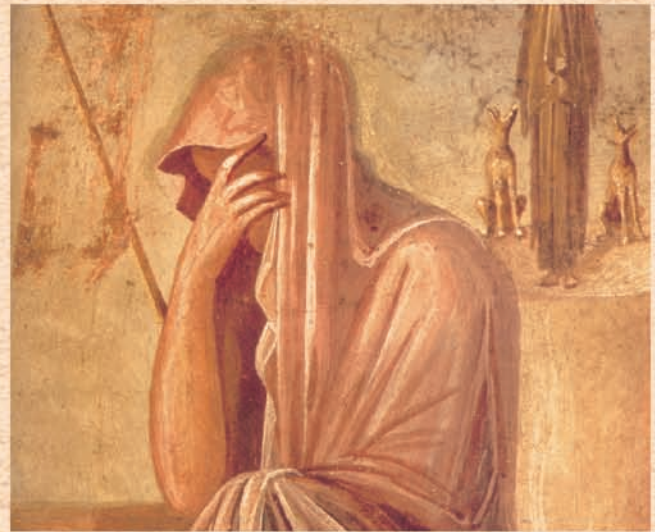


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# ON DANGEROUS GROUND

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# VOLCANOES

Eruption of  
Vesuvius



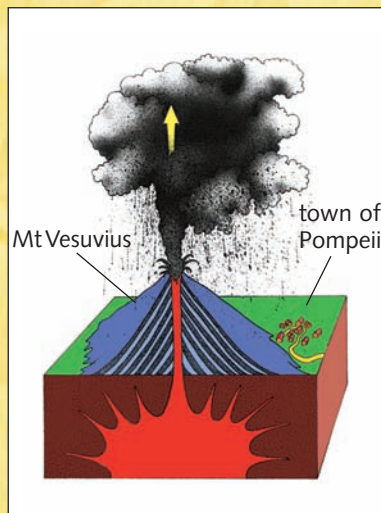
**N**ot far under the surface of the Earth, it is hot. The further down you go inside the Earth, the hotter it becomes. Deep, deep down below our feet, it is so hot that even the rock melts and is nine times hotter than boiling water. In places where the Earth's surface is weak, this liquid rock can bubble up and burst through. These weak spots are the world's volcanoes.

Volcanoes fall into three groups, depending on how active they are. Volcanoes which are erupting are called **active**. Volcanoes which show no signs of eruption are known as **dormant** or sleeping and, if they remain dormant for tens of thousands of years, they may be described as **extinct**.

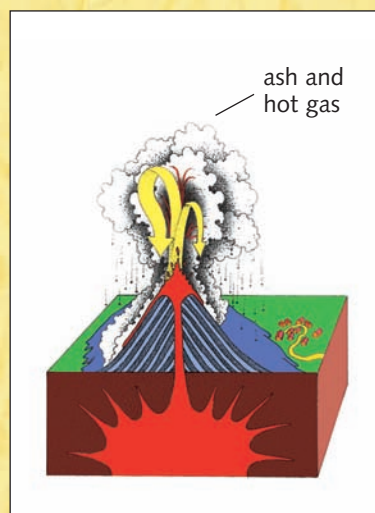
When we hear of a volcano erupting, we think of a tall cone-shaped mountain sending out clouds of ash and liquid rock called **lava**. In fact, volcanoes can be of different types: some are broad and flat, many are under the sea, some pour out streams of red-hot lava, some create an explosion that can be heard thousands of miles away, while others are quieter and 'gentler'.

There are some volcanoes that can cause massive destruction although they produce little or no lava at all. The most well-known of this type is Mount Vesuvius in Italy. This is what happened in the famous eruption of Vesuvius, which destroyed the town of Pompeii over 1900 years ago.

## THE ERUPTION OF VESUVIUS, AD 79



At midday on 24th August, Vesuvius erupted, sending a cloud of ash, pumice and other rock 20 kilometres into the air. This covered Pompeii in 2 metres of rubble but it did not kill anyone.



After midnight, the cloud collapsed. It sent a surge of ash and hot gas mainly down the western slope of the mountain, at a speed of 160 kilometres per hour.



Early the next morning another surge of blistering ash and rock swept down the slopes. This time it covered the town of Pompeii and burnt and suffocated everyone there.

# DISASTER STRIKES

## UNFAMILIAR NAMES

*Pliny* - Plin-ee

*Pompeii* - Pom-pay

*Tacitus* - Tass-i-tus

*Vesuvius* - Ves-oo-vee-us

In the first century AD, in the period of the Roman Empire, Vesuvius had been dormant for hundreds of years. The mountain was green as farmers grew fig and olive trees on the slopes of the volcano and the local people had become used to the tremors of earthquakes from time to time.

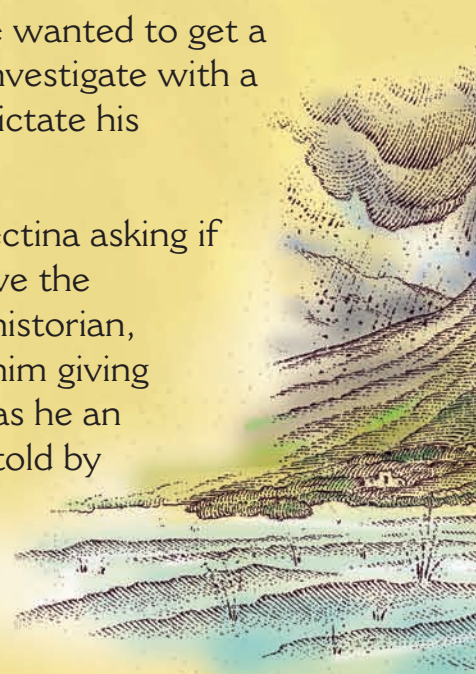
In the summer of AD 79 there had been more rumbling than usual but in the town of Pompeii and in the whole area surrounding the volcano, most people went about their daily business.

One of them, a boy called Pliny, was 17 at the time. When the volcano erupted, he watched from a nearby town as the earth shook and a black cloud descended over the area. Pliny's uncle, the commander of a nearby naval port, also saw the unusual cloud forming above Mount Vesuvius. He was not content to stand by and watch. He wanted to get a closer look and set off to investigate with a scribe to whom he could dictate his observations.

Pliny



As he was leaving, he received a message from his friend Rectina asking if he would help her. So he set out with several ships to observe the volcano and try to rescue the people. Years later, Tacitus, a historian, was collecting information about the event. Pliny wrote to him giving a vivid account of what he had seen and heard. Not only was he an eye-witness to the disaster, but Pliny also heard the stories told by survivors, some of whom had been rescued by his uncle. The following is an extract from Pliny's letter to Tacitus:



As my uncle was leaving the house, he was handed a message from Rectina, whose house was at the foot of the mountain and whose escape was impossible except by boat. She was terrified of the danger threatening her and implored him to rescue her from her fate. He changed his plans, and what he had begun in a spirit of inquiry, he completed as a hero.

He gave orders for the ships to be launched and went on board himself with the intention of bringing help to many more people besides Rectina, for this lovely stretch of coast was thickly populated. He hurried to the place which everyone else was hastily leaving, steering his course straight for the danger zone. He was entirely fearless, describing each moment of the eruption to be noted down exactly as he observed it. Ashes were already falling, hotter and thicker as the ships drew near, followed by bits of pumice and blackened stones, charred and cracked by the flames.

Then, suddenly they were in shallow water, and the shore was blocked by the rubble from the mountain.

For a moment my uncle wondered whether to turn back, but when the helmsman advised this, my uncle refused, telling him that Fortune stood by the courageous ...

translated from Latin

Later in his letter to Tacitus, Pliny records that his uncle died in the eruption.



# POMPEII TODAY

## LOST AND FOUND

**O**n that fateful day in AD 79, the town nearest the volcano was completely smothered under a layer of ash and rock. This unusual blanket protected the remains of the town of Pompeii for hundreds of years. Gradually it has been uncovered and many fascinating discoveries have been made. By studying these remains experts have found out about life in the area near the volcano and about the day the volcano erupted. They found scenes preserved exactly as the people had left them: tables laid for meals with loaves of bread, baskets of eggs and nuts, all now solidified.



On the facing page you can read two different postcards, written by tourists who visited Pompeii on the same day. These were the messages they sent home.

## POMPEII UNDER THREAT AGAIN?

**T**oday, thousands of tourists flock to see the remains of this unique town, trapped in time. People are fascinated by the opportunity to see what life was like two thousand years ago. Many also make the difficult climb up Mount Vesuvius to peer into the smouldering crater.

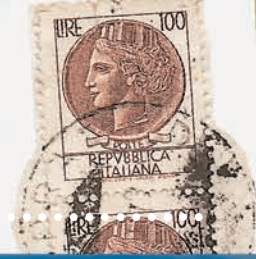
The huge number of visitors who visit Pompeii every year is bringing a large set of problems. Parts of the ruins are being worn away just by the large numbers of people who pass through. Furthermore, not all visitors treat the site with respect. There has been vandalism, some treasures have been stolen and some people just don't realise the danger of clambering over the remains – both to themselves and to the ruins. One archaeologist has gone as far as to describe what is happening now as 'the second death of Pompeii'.



Dear All, Italy, May 18th

Nature peaceful? Forget it! Mount Vesuvius is the most threatening thing I've ever seen. Yesterday, it was huffing and puffing clouds of smoke. So it was closed to visitors. Today we were in Pompeii. The ruins are impressive and feel as though the Romans have only just left. Mind you, I don't think the ruins will be here for ever. I saw an idiot hacking off and stealing a piece of mosaic. I only took photos.

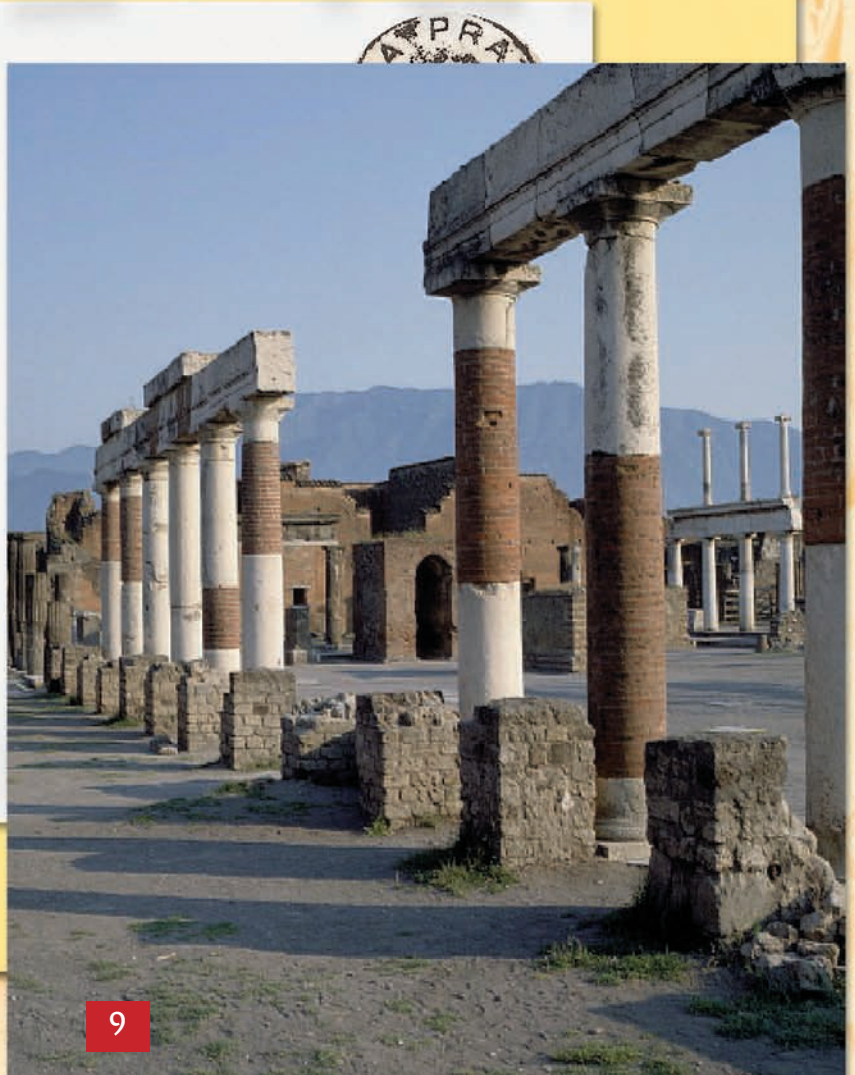
Cheers, Neena



*Pompeii, 19th May*

*Had a great day at Pompeii yesterday. Saw Roman villas, paintings, pots, even food preserved from the day the volcano covered the town. Climbed up one of the walls to get a bird's-eye view – bit wobbly, but worth the effort. Had a great piece of luck – found a loose piece of mosaic tile and slipped it in my pocket as a souvenir – no one noticed. See you soon,*

*Lisa*



# A DAY IN POMPEII

## VISIT VESUVIUS BY RAIL

DON'T MISS THIS UNIQUE JOURNEY, ONLY A SHORT TRIP FROM POMPEII ITSELF!

- \* travel by mountain railway to the very summit \*
  - \* peer into the enormous crater \*
  - \* see the volcano in action \*
  - \* departures every hour from Pompeii town square \*
- P.S. DON'T FORGET YOUR CAMERA!



**Not sure where to go?  
Not sure what to see?**

**Why not try Lucio's all-inclusive guided walking tour?**

We'll show you the best of Pompeii.

### Highlights include:

- Museum visit • The house of the silver wedding
- The central baths • Designing your own mosaic
- Dressing up in a toga • Activities for children

### GOOD VALUE

– discounts for students, senior citizens, children and families!

### Departs:

Main Gate, 10am and 2pm

# BAY OF NAPLES MUSEUM

Mount Vesuvius is the world's most studied volcano! Here at the Bay of Naples Museum, we have combined information about the formation of volcanoes with objects of interest from Pompeii and the surrounding area. Our detailed exhibits show the layers of rock within the mountain, and a small-scale replica of the town of Pompeii.

... bringing the past back to life



## CAFÉ VESUVIO – NAPLES

The best pizzas in town  
We offer a wide selection of pizzas and pasta meals at modest prices.  
Vegetarian dishes available.  
Family business – friendly atmosphere.  
Open 11am to 11pm  
Round the corner from the museum!



