

# Travel Through the History of Mount Vesuvius



Mount Vesuvius is one of the most well-known active volcanoes on the planet, and by far the most famous in Europe. It is about 30 thousand years old, but its most famous eruption impacted human history forever at Pompeii. Since then, it has been grumbling in Italy near Naples for about two thousand years. The results of the famous eruption froze an entire city, a beautiful time-capsule of an early Roman society, has encouraged travel to tourists and historians from all over the globe.

## Mount Vesuvius

Despite its age, Vesuvius is still regarded as an active volcano. It is intensely monitored for activity, as about 3 million people live within range of its eruptions. Volcanoes are created due to irregularities in heat from the earth's mantle. Melting and cracking ensues and bubbles up from the surface. Vesuvius is classified as a stratovolcano, also known as a composite cone, similar to other famous volcanoes such as Mount Fuji in Japan and Mount Saint Helens in the United States. Stratovolcanoes are dangerous due to their highly variable content, and eruptive style. Plinian eruptions, which Mount Vesuvius has produced, result in plumes of ash ascending up into the stratosphere, high above the earth's surface. Mount Vesuvius can produce both eruptions of ash and pyroclastic flows, making it unique. Even though all of this can be dangerous to humans, volcanoes like Vesuvius are important in the lifecycles of rocks on Earth.

- [Mount Vesuvius Image from Space](#)
- [How Volcanoes Work ½ Stratovolcanoes](#)
- [Volcanic Landforms and Plate Tectonics](#)
- [Teacher and Lesson Resources for Vesuvius](#)

## Pompeii

On August 24, 79 CE., an individual nicknamed Pliny the Younger, or Caius Plinius, witnessed the horrible eruption that swept through Pompeii and Herculaneum in a letter to Cornelius Tacitus. He recorded an apocalyptic description, including flame, lightning, earthquakes, waves and death. It's hard to imagine the chaos of the event, which had no scientific explanation at the time, as it was the first volcanic eruption ever described in detail. "Many besought the aid of the gods, but still more imagined there were no gods left, and that the universe was plunged into eternal darkness for evermore" wrote Caius Plinius. His famous description led these types of eruptions to be called Plinian eruptions.

About three meters of ash fell on the city of Pompeii, and its neighbor Herculaneum was buried under about 23 meters. The eruption continued for more than 24 hours. Any who tried to carry their possessions, such as jewelry, with them died clutching these items. It's very hard to tell how many people died in the catastrophe, as the bodies found in excavations since have only discovered a portion of those who died, some being swept away in the waves, have decayed or been looted.

- [Pliny the Younger's Letter to Cornelius Tacitus Translated](#)
- [Pompeii: Portents of Disaster](#)
- [Teacher and Lesson Resources for Pompeii](#)

#### Tourism

Since the eruption, the tragedy was largely lost in history until an excavation in 1748. The volcanic ash, horrible to bear on the day of, had encased the victims, creating the famous casts that froze them in place. The eruption preserved not just the bodies of adults, children and animals, but also artifacts and clues to their ways of life. It was one of the most important archeological finds of its age, and still impacts the way that historians look at Greco-Roman cultures.

This horrific scene created a window into the past. The find affected the western world's perspective of itself. The discovery of Pompeii is said to have helped to inspire the Enlightenment, and other revisitations to Greco-Roman thought. Travel to Pompeii has inspired books like *The Innocents Abroad* by Mark Twain and *The Last Days of Pompeii* by Edward Bulwar-Lytton. It inspired numerous pieces of art that depict a freer, casual Pompeii in the collective imagination.

- [The Last Days of Pompeii Art Exhibit](#)
- [Mount Vesuvius and Pompeii](#)
- [One Day in Pompeii](#)

#### Modern Eruptions

The last known eruption of Vesuvius was on April 4, 1944 during World War II. The war raged on, as Allied planes were temporarily grounded by the eruption. After that activity, the eruptions that took place about every seven years between 1631 and 1944 largely stopped. The cycle seemed to have ended in 1944, however the volcano is still active. It's very difficult to tell when the next eruption will happen, but the city of Naples may be affected. Even though this may be one of the most dangerous volcanoes on earth due to its population density, travel to its famous site, and its neighbor city Naples happens regularly with little concern.

- [Smithsonian Institution Mount Vesuvius Profile and Statistics](#)
- [Will Vesuvius erupt again?](#)
- [Vesuvius' Next Eruption May Put Metro Naples at Risk](#)
- [Eruptions History](#)
- [Mount Vesuvius Profile](#)
- [Mount Vesuvius Details](#)