



# *POMPEII: The Exhibition*

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **When did Vesuvius erupt and destroy Pompeii?**

Mount Vesuvius erupted on August 24, 79 AD, and sent a cloud of ashes, pumice stones, and smoldering hot volcanic gases high into the sky. People could see the eruptions for hundreds of miles. The debris made its way down to the earth as it began to cool. The volcano had been active for millennia before the eruption of 79, but had been dormant generations, and thus caught the ancient Romans off-guard.

### **When was Pompeii rediscovered, who discovered it and how was it discovered?**

Local inhabitants had long been aware of antiquities buried in their midst, and well diggers at Herculaneum, not far from Pompeii, discovered the theater of that city in 1738. A decade later attention shifted to Pompeii, which was not so deeply buried and more easily excavated.

The ruins of the city had previously been accidentally encountered in 1592 by engineers digging a canal, but they were not interested in the antiquities and continued with their project, leaving the ancient city relatively untouched.

### **What happened when the volcano exploded?**

Days before the eruption, tremors shook Pompeii and surrounding cities more frequently. Shortly before noon the volcano erupted, people heard explosions coming from the mountain as hot ash and gas began to surface. By 1pm the dust and ash had completely covered the sky creating utter darkness. By 8pm, the eruptions had grown more violent creating heavy debris of falling ash and pumice that buried Pompeii and its neighboring cities, Herculaneum and Stabiae.

Eruptions and earthquakes continued into the next day (August 25, 79 AD). That morning, the largest pyroclastic flows of hot ashes, volcanic gases and debris made their way through the streets of Pompeii completely destroying the city. In just two minutes, the city streets were covered in almost eight feet of hot ash. On the morning of August 26, 79 AD the eruption finally stopped, leaving almost five cubic miles of pumice and ash covering approximately 186 miles of land.

### **How long did people have to leave the city before it was destroyed?**

Though earthquakes began days before the eruption, most Pompeiians did not know the destruction they foreshadowed. With the eruption occurring just after 12pm, growing more violent by that evening, it is believed residents of Pompeii had only a few hours to evacuate the city.

### **Why did some people choose not to evacuate?**

For many residents, the tremors and earthquakes they felt happened so frequently that they didn't pay much attention to them. Additionally, as there wasn't a word for *volcano*, the people of Pompeii did not view the tremors as potential warning signs. Some residents sought the aid of gods, others felt it was a sign from the gods that they were going to destroy everyone, and still others believed no gods were left and the universe was thrust into eternal darkness.

### **How was the city preserved?**

The large amount of ash that covered the city acted as a preservative, leaving the city of Pompeii and all that reside within it almost exactly how it had been left 1600 years before it was discovered.

**Why did Pompeii remain undiscovered for so long?**

Due to the miles of ash and pumice that covered the city, as well as the first-hand accounts of the event and unsuccessful rescue attempts, Pompeii was thought to be lost forever.

**How many people died during the eruption?**

It is believed that more than 2,000 people lost their lives as a result of the destructive eruption.

**What is the present status of Pompeii?**

Today Pompeii is a world-renowned World Heritage Site by UNESCO attracting more than 2.6 million tourists annually. Though sections of it are currently visible to tourists, much of the city remains protected due to the moratorium on future excavation so that the already exposed buildings can be studied, conserved, and preserved.