Pompeii And The Vesuvius Eruption

When Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD, Pompeii, a small settlement at the base of the volcano, was instantly buried in ash and soot. The ash preserved the town and its people, turning Pompeii into a virtual time capsule of ancient Italian life. Pompeii is essentially a life-size museum, offering a window into the past unlike any other.

Pompeii is located in the region of Campania in the province of Naples, situated along Italy's southwestern coast. Its primary agricultural products were wine and oil, and it was also an important seaport, handling goods imported for distribution in Rome and the surrounding areas.

Mount Vesuvius is recognized as one of the world's most dangerous volcanoes. Surprisingly, several million people currently live in its path, obviously willing to tempt fate by defying the volcano's capacity for destruction. Vesuvius has erupted dozens of times throughout history, the most recent being in 1944. But the eruption that destroyed Pompeii was by far the most powerful, not to mention the most famous. Simultaneously destroying the city and preserving it, the eruption killed anywhere from 15,000 to 30,000 people in Pompeii and the neighboring towns of Herculaneum and Torre Annunziata. Residents fled toward the coast in an attempt to escape the volcano's lava, and approximately ten feet of ash and rock buried the city in its entirety. As well as preserving wall paintings, jars and other artifacts, the lava captured people sitting at tables or frozen in their final act as living beings.

The ruins of Pompeii were first discovered by workmen in 1599, but it wasn't until 1874 that the Bourbon rulers of southern Italy instigated a serious campaign to uncover the

site. In 1863, an important development occurred on the site. When his workers informed the director that they'd discovered bones inside several cavities, he ordered them to stop work and arranged for a mixture of plaster and water to be poured into the holes. When the plaster dried and was removed, it revealed the clearly defined forms of four dead bodies, even capturing the expressions on their faces. From that point on, a large number of plaster casts were made of the Pompeii victims.

Today, visitors come from all areas of the globe to view Pompeii's remains. Despite being 2,000 years old, the streets and buildings give a sharp picture of what life was like many centuries ago. The streets of Pompeii are the original Roman stone, complete with grooves worn by wheeled carts that were used to carry goods. In addition to the artifacts displayed in the city itself, many of the more valuable pieces are on display in the nearby National Museum in Naples.