

# Pompeii

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Pompeii was an ancient city in southern Italy. In ad 79 a volcano called Mount Vesuvius erupted close by. Thousands of people died, and the city was buried. Archaeologists later cleared away much of the rubble. They uncovered ruins that gave historians a look at life in the Roman Empire.



People lived in the Pompeii region in prehistoric times. The Romans took control of Pompeii in about 290 bc. They brought Roman architecture and culture to the city.

In ad 79, Mount Vesuvius began to erupt on August 24. The eruption lasted for several days. Poison gases from Vesuvius choked many people. Then volcanic stones and ashes covered the city. When the eruption ended, Pompeii was buried to a depth of 19 to 23 feet (6 to 7 meters). The debris protected Pompeii from vandals and the weather for hundreds of years. An Italian architect discovered the ruins in the late 1500s. Archaeologists began digging out the city in 1748. The work at Pompeii and Herculaneum, another city buried by Vesuvius, marked the start of modern archaeology.

The early excavations, or digs, were not well organized. Many early diggers were treasure hunters who had no interest in history. After 1860, however, archaeologists made sure that the work was done in an orderly way. By the 1990s about two-thirds of the city had been excavated.

Historians have learned a lot about the Roman world from the excavations. They can walk down streets and look at temples, public baths, houses, and shops. The digging uncovered charred nuts and fruits in market stalls and loaves of bread in bakeries. Historians have also learned about life in Pompeii through statues, paintings, and mosaics (pictures made from tile chips). In 1997 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared Pompeii a World Heritage site.

