

POMPEII IN THE STATE OF EMERGENCY



In AD 79, Pliny the Younger described in his poetry, the biggest catastrophe to Pompeii as Vesuvius, the giant volcano, erupted onto the ancient town and almost destroyed it. The result is seen in the remains of today. Whereas Pliny the Younger described the volcano, ash and lava as great dangers, experts and representatives of the Italian government nowadays describe tourism as a greater danger to the ancient ruins. Ash and lava flowed through Pompeii almost 2000 years ago. Now, tourists flow through the same site, causing gradual rather than instant damage.

The main problem is that the ruins are seriously understaffed and, therefore, tourists are able to ignore requests for photographs not to be taken and some of the least considerate are even able to make graffiti on the ancient walls. Even without the problem of the shortage of supervision, the every day trampling on the ash which destroyed the city 2 millennia ago does nothing to help preserve the site. The situation is now so bad that the Italian government has declared a state of emergency on Pompeii.

Visitors used to have access to 14% of the ruins, which in total make up around one eighth of the size of New York's central park. Now, due to more lenient rules and the shortage of staff, they have access to around 35% of the total area. This, for visitors is good news yet terrible news for those wishing to conserve the area. Experts say that it is important to retain Pompeii's image as a world heritage site and not turn it into something resembling Disneyland. Saving Pompeii physically has become just as important as saving its reputation. As long as the reputation survives, the ancient bricks and constructions will do the rest for themselves.

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