

Living near a violent volcano can be horribly hazardous. It may snooze away for years on end, then suddenly wake up with a start. So what's it like when a vile volcano turns nasty? Hopefully, you'll never find out. The islanders of Heimaey in Iceland were not so lucky. On 23 January 1973, their world was turned upside down.

Here's how an eyewitness might have described the violent events...

HORROR IN HEIMAÆY

It was the middle of the night, I remember. My friend and I were walking home from the harbour after our night-shift at the fish factory. Suddenly, we saw a wall of flames in front of us. The ground was on fire! As we watched, a huge, gaping crack opened up and started to chuck out thick black ash and burning cinders. We ran for it and raised the alarm. The island was evacuated. Most people left for safety on the mainland. Meanwhile, the volcano carried on erupting. The crack grew wider and wider, splitting the island in two. Everywhere, houses were bursting into flames. But worse was to come. A lethal river of lava was heading towards the harbour. Now we were really worried. Without the harbour, we'd have no fishing industry ... and no Heimaey.

A few of us stayed behind to try to save the harbour. We had to act fast. But how could we stop the lava before it blocked the harbour entrance? The situation seemed hopeless. Then someone had an idea. We drove all the island's fire engines down to the harbour and sprayed the lava with millions of litres of sea water. Incredibly, it worked! After weeks of hosing, we stopped the lethal lava in its tracks. Soon afterwards, the crack closed up and people were able to come back home. The eruption was over. For now, at least..."

PLANNING A NICE, QUIET HOLIDAY? WELL, STEER CLEAR OF PLACES AROUND THE EDGES OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN. IT'S NOT CALLED THE 'RING OF FIRE' FOR NOTHING. HERE THE SEA FLOOR IS BEING DRAGGED BENEATH THE LAND, TRIGGERING OFF VIOLENT VOLCANOES AND EARTHQUAKES. INDONESIA'S PARTICULARLY RISKY WITH ABOUT 125 PERILOUS PEAKS.

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WICKED WORLD FACTS

The name 'geyser' comes from an old Icelandic word which means 'to rush up'. So now you speak Icelandic!

You'll get a crick in your neck watching Steamboat Geyser in the USA. It regularly gushes up to 115 metres into the air. That's over ten times as tall as your house.

In Iceland and New Zealand, hot underground water is used to make electricity. It's clean, cheap and it won't run out.

WHAT ONE SATISFIED CUSTOMER SAID:

'I'VE GOT ONE IN THE MIDDLE OF ME LAWN AND IT'S A BLAST.'

CALLING ALL YOU GREEN-FINGERED GARDENERS...

In places where volcanoes erupt, hot rocks sizzle away under the ground. The red-hot rocks heat up underground water until it reaches boiling point. Then the scalding hot water and steam shoot into the air as a ghastly, gushing geyser. Fancy one in your back garden?

SPECIAL OFFER! SPECIAL OFFER! *

Fed up with fountains that keep fizzling out?
Had enough of boring hanging baskets?
Gone off gormless garden gnomes?

For a water feature that really lets off steam, check out this week's special offer. You too can be the proud owner of a gushing geyser.

It'll really get up your neighbour's nose.

- Hot volcanic rocks. Forget boring barbecues. You can fry an egg on these sizzlers.

- Sensational sound-effects. Geysers hiss, gush and roar as they blow.

***HURRY WHILE STOCKS LAST!**

HORRIBLE HEALTH WARNING

Don't stand too close to your gushing geyser. Four people were killed when whopping Waimangu Geyser in New Zealand gushed up in 1903. The boiling blast was so powerful that their bodies were blown 800 metres away.

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