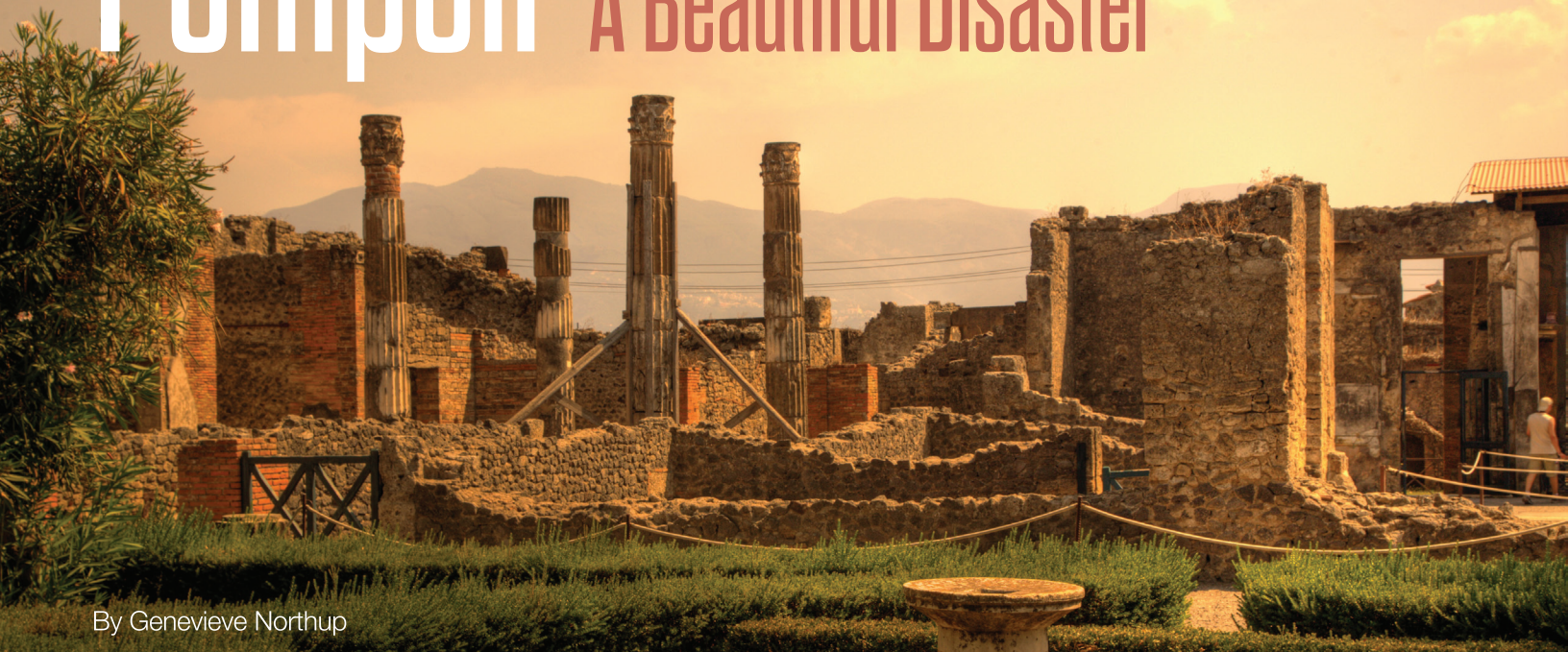


Pompeii

A Beautiful Disaster



By Genevieve Northup

In August A.D. 79, thousands of residents were going about their daily routines when a torrent of volcanic ash from Mount Vesuvius buried the city of Pompeii. Shrouded in hardened ash 30 feet deep, the people, animals and buildings were suspended in time. Excavation of the missing city began in 1748, providing a detailed portrayal of life in the Roman Empire.

ROMAN LIFE

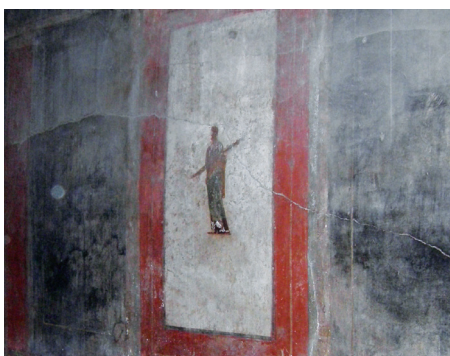
Travel back in time as you walk through the streets of Pompeii. You can almost hear people chatting, dogs barking and carriages clattering over cobblestone. Grooved tracks in the roads from chariots and steps worn from constant use are evidence of the city's bustling past. Buildings, frescoes and graffiti chronicle work, play, worship and the more provocative aspects of Roman culture.

Enter Pompeii from the main information office and pass through the Porta Marina just as visitors did 2,000 years ago, when the gate was the city's entrance from the sea. The Forum was the grand city center, a boulevard with buildings that supported trade, religion and politics. At one end are several partial pillars and steps which are all that remains of the Temple of Jupiter, a place for worship of the Roman god. You'll also see remnants of the city hall, or *curia*, and the basilica, used as a courthouse in ancient times. Mount Vesuvius — the only active volcano on mainland Europe — can be seen from the Forum.

Other attractions include a public bathing house, the Baths of the Forum. There's also the brothel, complete with stone beds and frescoes illustrating available escapades. The amphitheater is the oldest still in existence in the world, dating from 80 B.C. And don't miss the many interesting villas: the House of the

Vettii, which has the site's most impressive frescoes; the Villa of Mysteries, home to a number of odd frescoes; the House of the Ancient Hunt with its open floor plan and murals depicting hunting stories; and the House of the Faun, where valuable artifacts were recovered. The bronze faun and renowned Alexander Mosaic there today are replicas.

While wandering, discover the ingenuity of the Romans. Aqueducts brought fresh water to the city, and arches from this system still exist. Elevated sidewalks and stepping stones, like crosswalks, kept pedestrians safe from traffic and protected their feet from running water as the streets were cleaned each day. Foot paths were inlaid with tiles that reflected moonlight to guide those walking after dark. Additionally, because the Romans preferred not to cook in their small homes, numerous restaurants offered informal and quick meals. You can still see long counters with holes



Fresco - Photo by Genevieve Northup



Amphitheater - Photo by Genevieve Northup



Sidewalks and stepping stones - Photo by Genevieve Northup

that once held pots of food and beverages; these pots regulated the temperature of their contents to keep drinks cool and meals warm.



A restaurant counter with pot holders - Photo by Genevieve Northup

And a mosaic at the front door of the House of the Tragic Poet warned that a dog lived in the home, much like the “beware of dog” signs used today.

THE PEOPLE OF POMPEII

Pompeii gives new meaning to the term “ghost town,” as three-dimensional casts of covering residents capture the terror of their

final moments. The casts were created by pouring plaster into imprints left in the ash by corpses. Walk to the Garden of the Fugitives, where 13 men, women and children have remained since the disaster.

Pompeii provides a glimpse into the story of a great ancient civilization. But more than that, Pompeii is a vivid reminder of how fleeting life is — and how it can be extinguished in a moment. It’s no wonder that the forgotten city of Pompeii is now one of Europe’s top destinations. ■



A resident's final moment - Photo by Genevieve Northup

QUICK TIPS FOR YOUR TRIP:

- The archaeological site spans more than 100 acres, so plan several hours for exploration. If you book a group tour, ask how much time you will have at the site to avoid disappointment. If you’re up for a long day, you can day-trip between Rome and Pompeii; the shortest route is 150 miles along the A1. Pompeii is just 15 miles from Naples, so you can also overnight there.
- Though Pompeii was well preserved, you’ll still need a bit of imagination and a guide to enrich your experience and ensure that you don’t miss the highlights. You can join a guided tour or rent an audio guide at the Porta Marina entrance. Another option is to purchase a detailed guide book or download an audio tour, such as Rick Steves’.
- Temperatures soar in southern Italy during the summer months, and there is little respite from the sun at the archaeological site. If you will be visiting Pompeii during the summer, bring sunscreen, sunglasses, hats and plenty of water. Travel during the fall or spring for moderate temperatures and a less-crowded visit.
- Entry is 11 euros per person. Bring plenty of cash; cards are not accepted at the site, and

ATMs are scarce. Beware of pickpockets drawn to the throngs of tourists.

- Pompeii is open to the public daily year-round. To aid in planning your trip, visit www.pompeiturismo.it or www.pompeisites.org.
- If you’ve worked up an appetite but aren’t done exploring, visit the restaurant inside the excavation site for a quick bite and break. In modern Pompeii, you’ll find Pizzeria Alleria and Ristorante Lucullus for nice pizzas and pasta dishes. For fine dining, head to Ristorante President. Enjoy delectable fish — with the ocean in sight, it doesn’t get fresher than this!

IN THE AREA:

- After your visit to Pompeii, journey to Herculaneum, a smaller, wealthier city nearby that was also bombarded by the eruption and has since been excavated. If you have time, visit the ruins of the Roman resort towns of Oplontis, Stabiae and Boscoreale.
- Do not miss a trip to the Naples National Archaeological Museum to view more artifacts found at Pompeii, including the original discoveries from the House of the Faun.

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