

# Scientists say magma building up in Mayon volcano

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Lava flows continuously from the crater of Mayon volcano in a continuing mild eruption as viewed from Sto. Domingo township, Albay province, about 500 kilometers southeast of Manila, Philippines, Friday Dec.25, 2009. Tens of thousands of evacuees spent their Christmas in different evacuation centers after the country's most active volcano began spewing ash last week and coupled with continuing lava flow. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez)

(AP) -- Fewer earthquakes have been recorded in the Philippines' lava-spilling Mayon volcano, but magma continues to build up inside and any lull in activity could be followed by a bigger eruption, scientists said Saturday.

A hazardous eruption remains possible within days, and residents who live near the volcano's slopes should not be misled into leaving the evacuation centers that they spend Christmas in and venturing back to

their homes, volcanologist Ed Laguerta warned.

"The number of volcanic earthquakes has gone down, but this is just part of the eruptive cycle of Mayon," he said.

The number of quakes decreased from 871 recorded during the 24-hour period ending Friday morning to 406 recorded during the next 24 hours, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said.

Laguerta said instruments showed the volcano remained inflated despite having spilled more than 26 million cubic yards (20 million cubic meters) of lava over the last two weeks. That means the [lava](#) being released is being replaced by magma coming from beneath the volcano.

"We are looking at not only at what Mayon is presently exhibiting, because that fluctuates. We are also looking at its past characteristics," he said, recalling that in 1984, a four-day lull was followed by Mayon's sudden, big eruption.

More than 47,000 people living within a 5-mile (8-kilometer) danger zone around the volcano have fled to evacuation centers. But soldiers are still trying to evacuate several hundred residents who have refused to leave their homes despite the danger, said Capt. Razaleigh Bansawan, a military spokesman.

The 8,070-foot (2,460-meter) [volcano](#) known for its perfect cone has erupted nearly 40 times over 400 years, sending people packing for months at a time. But never has it happened during the all-important Christmas celebration, when Filipinos gather with family and friends for traditional meals and songs.

Evacuation centers have been the scenes of daily entertainment for the past week as officials try to keep frustrated residents from sneaking back

to their homes. Food, clowns, gifts and games brought cheer to evacuees who spent Christmas in the cramped centers.

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