

# Volcanic eruption in Tonga creates new island

January 21 2015, by Nick Perry

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In this photo, taken Jan. 14, 2015 and released by New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, a volcano erupts near Tonga in the South Pacific Ocean. A volcano that has been erupting for several weeks near Tonga has created a new island in the ocean. (AP Photo/New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade)

A volcanic eruption in Tonga has created a new island—although one

scientist said Wednesday it could soon disappear.

The [volcano](#) has been erupting for a month in the ocean about 65 kilometers (40 miles) northwest of the capital, Nuku'alofa. Last week it disrupted international air travel to the Pacific archipelago for several days.

New Zealand volcanologist Nico Fournier said he traveled by boat to within about a mile of the new island on Saturday to take a closer look.

He said it's made mainly of loose scoria and its dimensions are about 1.8 kilometers (1.1 miles) by 1.5 kilometers (0.9 miles), and that it rises about 100 meters (109 yards) above the sea.

"It's quite an exciting site, you get to see the birth of an island," he said. "Visually it was quite spectacular, but there was no big sound coming with it, no boom. It was a bit eerie."

He said that once the volcano stops erupting, it will likely take the ocean no more than a few months to erode the island entirely. He said it would need to be made of lava or something more durable to survive.

Fournier, who works for New Zealand agency GNS Science, said he was able to establish that the volcano was mainly belching steam into the atmosphere, and that the small amount of ash it was sending out was rising no more than about 2 kilometers (1.2 miles).



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That will come as a relief to airlines, as it is the ash that can be dangerous to planes.

Fournier said the [ocean](#) around the island is likely fairly shallow, perhaps only about 100-200 meters (328-656 feet) deep. He said there is no name yet for the new island, and he has been told that any naming rights will fall to Tonga's king.

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