

Photos: Rivers and fountains of red-gold volcanic lava light up the dark skies in Icelandic town

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Scientists of the University of Iceland take measurements and samples standing on the ridge in front of the active part of the eruptive fissure of an active volcano in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco

Rivers of lava spewed from a fissure in the mountainside, snaking downwards and erupting in fountains of red and gold molten rock when [the Fagradalsfjall volcano](#) erupted this week near a small fishing town in southwestern Iceland.

The fiery liquid illuminates the smoke-filled sky in Grindavik, just 50 kilometers (30 miles) from the capital, Reykjavik.

The [eruption](#) began Monday night, but [it was no surprise](#): The area has been active for two years, with thousands of small earthquakes heralding the near-certain awakening of the volcano.

Civil defense personnel are on high alert, blocking access to the road leading to the mountain, and flying in a helicopter over the lava flows to monitor [volcanic activity](#).

As Friday's winter solstice nears—when Iceland sees just three hours of sunlight a day—residents gather, watching from a [safe distance](#), to see the natural spectacle lighting up the long-dark sky.



An aerial view of volcanic activity on the active volcano in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



A close up of the Southern active segment of the original fissure of an active volcano in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



A close up of the Southern active segment of the original fissure of an active volcano in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



Aerial view of the Southern active segment of the fissure of an active volcano in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



This image made from video provided by the Icelandic Coast Guard shows magma flow on a hill near Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula sometime around late Monday, Dec. 18, or early Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. A volcanic eruption started Monday night on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, turning the sky orange and prompting the country's civil defense to be on high alert. Credit: Icelandic coast guard via AP



People watch as the night sky is illuminated caused by the eruption of a volcano in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



Lava fountains are seen as volcanic eruption started, turning the sky orange, in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



The police vehicle is parked at the entrance of the road to Grindavík with the eruption in the background, near Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. A volcanic eruption started Monday night on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, turning the sky orange and prompting the country's civil defense to be on high alert. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



A close up of the Southern active segment of the original fissure of an active volcano in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



The night sky is illuminated caused by the eruption of a volcano on the Reykjanes peninsula of south-west Iceland seen from the capital city of Reykjavik, Monday Dec. 18, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Brynjar Gunnarsson



A volcanic eruption is seen, turning the sky orange, in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



The road is blocked at the entrance of the road to Grindavík with the eruption in the background, in Grindavík on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. A volcanic eruption started Monday night on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, turning the sky orange and prompting the country's civil defense to be on high alert. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



A close up of the Northern active segment of the original fissure of an active volcano in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



This image made from video provided by the Icelandic Coast Guard shows its helicopter flying near magma running on a hill near Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula sometime around late Monday, Dec. 18, or early Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. A volcanic eruption started Monday night on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, turning the sky orange and prompting the country's civil defense to be on high alert. Credit: Icelandic coast guard via AP



Lava fountains are seen as volcanic eruption started, turning the sky orange, in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



The night sky is illuminated caused by the eruption of a volcano in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco



Aerial view of the only two segments of the fissure still active of an active volcano in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco

The lava is about 1,200 degrees Celsius (2,200 degrees Fahrenheit). The Icelandic Meteorological Office estimates that hundreds of cubic meters of [lava](#) per second escaped the volcano in the first two hours of the eruption, though the activity had significantly subsided by Tuesday afternoon.

The volcano last erupted in March 2021, but before that had been dormant for 6,000 years.

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