

Residents of Iceland village near volcano that erupted are allowed to return home

December 22 2023, by MARCO DiMARCO



A view of the still steaming fissure from above, in Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Thursday, Dec. 21, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Di Marco

Residents of the small Icelandic fishing village near where a [volcano erupted](#) were told Friday they could return home.

The regional police chief said residents, business owners and employees could enter Grindavik beginning Saturday and could stay overnight.

The town of 3,800 near Iceland's main airport was evacuated Nov. 10 when a strong swarm of earthquakes led to cracks and openings in the earth between the town and Sýlingarfell, a small mountain to the north. The [volcano](#) finally erupted Monday, spewing semi-molten rock in a spectacular show that lit up the night sky.

Scientists said Thursday that the eruption had stopped, though pressure could start building far beneath it once again. They said the lava flow spread across an area of 3.7 square kilometers (1.4 square miles) on the Reykjanes Peninsula, about 50 kilometers (31 miles) southwest of the capital, Reykjavik.

"The stress that has built up over centuries now has been released by ripping the crust apart. That opens a pathway for the magma that's coming from below to the surface," Magnus Tumi Gudmunsson, a geophysicist at the University of Iceland, said Thursday. "We had this event where magma reached the surface and we had this very quick and powerful eruption, short lived and the lava formed."



The lava field produced by the recent volcanic activity can be seen in the top background above Grindavik on Iceland's Reykjanes Peninsula, Thursday, Dec. 21, 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



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

The area known broadly as Svartsengi volcano had been dormant for around 780 years. The volcano is just a few kilometers west of Fagradalsfjall, which was dormant for 6,000 years before flaring to life in March 2021. The latest eruption was larger and more powerful than those in recent years.

When residents were allowed to return for several hours Thursday, Ingibergur Thor Olafarson, president of the local basketball team, took an Associated Press journalist to his home to show damage in his neighborhood.

A crack from the earthquake had left a large scar in his yard and he pointed to damage to a nearby home, where the wall outside was uneven.

Inside the home, artwork was on the floor from the swam of earthquakes.

"A lot of things dropped to the floor, pictures went off the wall, but still I think the house is leveled and not damaged," Olafarson said as he held a level against a wall and found a spot slightly off.

"It's nothing compared to other houses that are completely ruined or done," he said. "The water is running and everything works, electricity, I can take a shower. I think my hot-tub in the backyard ... I think it works! It should be hot."

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