

SOLACE GLOBAL

LATEST

# TRAVEL ADVISORY





TRAVEL ADVISORY • 04 JUNE 2018

# Deadly Eruption of the Fuego Volcano, Guatemala

## KEY POINTS

- At least 25 people have been killed after the Fuego volcano in Guatemala erupted on 03 June 2018.
- Guatemala's main airport, La Aurora International Airport, was initially closed on 03 June before reopening.
- President Jimmy Morales has declared three days of national mourning.



## SITUATIONAL SUMMARY

**Environmental:** On 03 June 2018, the Fuego volcano in Guatemala erupted, spewing rock, gas, an ash into the air, killing at least 25 people. Hundreds more have been injured and dozens of people remain missing. Fast-moving lava flows accounted for the majority of fatalities, killing people while they were in their homes. La Aurora International Airport, the primary gateway into Guatemala, was closed on 03 June before reopening on 04 June, though operations have been disrupted due to the ongoing backlog. President Morales has declared three days of national mourning and a state of emergency in the departments of Chimaltenango, Escuintla, and Sacatepequez.



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This is the deadliest volcanic eruption in Guatemala since the Santa Maria volcano erupted in 1902, although Fuego is one of the region's most active volcanoes and less serious eruptions occur frequently. It is located around 40km south-west of Guatemala City, the country's capital. In 2015, 100 people living near the volcano were evacuated after an eruption; La Aurora International Airport was also closed on this occasion. In 2012, 33,000 were evacuated from 17 villages near the volcano after lava and pyroclastic flows of about 600 metres were reported, while a smaller eruption was also reported earlier this year. In this most recent eruption, hot rock mixed with gas rushed down the mountainside, engulfing villages and ash reached more the six kilometres; ash has even been reported in the capital city. Officials report the town of El Rodeo has been buried, while Alotenango and San Miguel los Lotes have also been impacted. While rescuers from the police, military, and Red Cross have been mobilised, the death toll is expected to rise; a total of 1.7 million have been impacted by this eruption.

## SOLACE GLOBAL COMMENT

Guatemala is located in the Pacific 'Ring of Fire'; the world's most active seismic zone. The Ring of Fire runs from New Zealand around to Chile in South America and it is estimated that 90 per cent of all of the world's earthquakes, which often lead to volcanic eruptions, occur in this area. Countries which also sit on or near the Ring of Fire include the United States, Canada, Chile, Peru, Japan, Philippines, Indonesia, New Zealand, and Mexico. The Ring of Fire is also home to at least 25 major active volcanos according to the US Geological Survey and contains more than 75 per cent of the world's active and dormant volcanoes. Future volcanic activity is notoriously difficult to accurately predict.

Volcanoes bring a series of potential hazards. Lava flows are significant risks due to intense heat and can destroy everything in their path but can be slow moving, allowing people to move out of the way. Acidic gases and ash produced by volcanos can cause respiratory issues to children primarily, but also to adults. Volcanic ash can also damage machinery and, once mixed with water, can collapse the roofs of buildings. Ash produced by volcanos can have an impact hundreds of kilometres from its origin. Volcanic eruptions can cause 'lateral blasts' in which large pieces of rocks are shot at high speeds for several kilometres. Lateral blasts can kill by impact, burial, and heat. Eruptions often occur together with fires, landslide, acid rain, flash floods, mudflows, or earthquakes.

## SECURITY ADVICE

## HIGH ENVIRONMENTAL RISK



Authorities in Guatemala have advised that ascending the Fuego volcano is strictly prohibited and that all exclusion zones should be adhered to. Travellers should expect checkpoints within the vicinity of the volcano and should adhere to instructions in case of a forceful reaction from police.

There are a number of steps that those in an active volcanic area should consider:

*Before an Eruption*

Have an emergency supply kit prepared. This should include non-perishable food, water, breathing masks, goggles, and torches with extra batteries. An emergency plan should also be in place so that all people in your family or group know what to do in case of an emergency.

*During an Eruption*

Most importantly, travellers should follow any evacuation orders issued by local authorities and immediately evacuate. It is also important that during an eruption, caution is paid to the threat of mudflows. Look upstream before crossing a bridge and do not



cross if a mudflow is approaching. All river valleys and low-lying areas should be avoided if possible.

If unable to evacuate, it is vital to protect oneself from ash. It is important to stay inside with doors and windows shut until the ash settles unless there is a threat of the roof collapsing. Listen to radio or tv transmissions for the latest emergency information. Wear long-sleeved shirts and trousers, wear goggles but avoid wearing contact lenses, use a dust mask to help with breathing, stay away from downwind areas, clear heavy ash from roofs and gutters (if possible), and be aware that car engines may be clogged up by ash.

#### *After an Eruption*

Go to a shelter if told to evacuate or you feel unsafe. Continue to follow television and radio transmissions on what is happening and what to do next.

Travellers visiting Guatemala are advised to consider the use of enhanced security measures. This is due to the high rate of criminal activity, especially in the capital city. Solace Global recommends the use of pre-arranged airport meet and greet services, in addition to a locally-vetted driver and vehicle when staying in most areas of Guatemala. For certain locations and traveller profiles, it would also be advisable to employ a close protection officer. Furthermore, the use of travel-tracking technology, supported by a live intelligence feed, is recommended in order to keep abreast of security developments whilst in country and to notify others in case of emergency.



Solace Global remains available to provide the full range of Travel Risk Management services to clients. Solace Global is also able to provide comprehensive crisis management, in-country journey management, tracking, response, and evacuation services.

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