

Earthquakes: Tremors from Below – A Tsunami in the Pacific

This text is provided courtesy of OLogy, the American Museum of Natural History's website for kids.

Earthquakes are happening all the time. Most are so small that people don't even feel them. But some can be very powerful. If they occur near towns and cities, they can make buildings and bridges sway or even collapse.

Earthquakes can also occur along the seafloor and cause it to move. And if the quake is powerful enough, it can trigger waves that travel across the ocean. These waves grow taller as they approach land, becoming a tsunami. Tsunamis can have devastating effects on people.

A Tsunami Sweeps the South Pacific

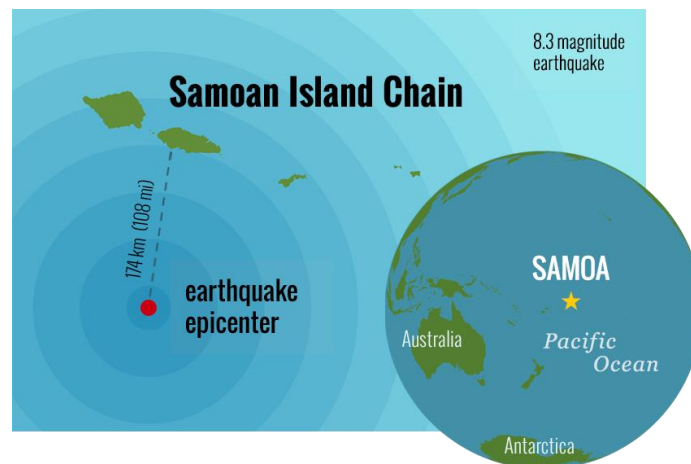


Illustration Credit: AMNH

On the morning of September 29, 2009, a strong undersea earthquake occurred near the Samoan island chain in the South Pacific. It happened as children were getting ready for school and adults were dressing for work.

“The ground shook from side to side and then swayed as if one was sitting on a boat on the water.”

- TSUNAMI SURVIVOR, recalling the earthquake before the wave



Tsunami evacuation sign
Photo Credit: AMNH

When the shaking stopped, people noticed the sea was rough and bubbly. Then it drained rapidly away from the shore. Within minutes, a tsunami swept over the islands. In some places, its height reached around 40 feet (12 meters). The earthquake had triggered the tsunami.

Coming Together

The people of Samoa helped each other rebuild homes and lives. They also held ceremonies to strengthen the connections within their community.

One ritual is for the leaders to pass a cup of the ceremonial drink called *áva*. The daughter of a high chief prepares *áva* by mixing pepper roots in a wooden bowl. During the ceremony, *áva* is passed around the group in a communal cup. Before drinking, each person pours a few drops on the ground, returning the *áva* to the earth.



drinking cup

Photo Credit: AMNH



During a ceremony, a drink called *áva* is passed around the group.

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áva bowl

Photo Credit: AMNH