

Geotourism: The Tourism of Geology and Landscape



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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

7 **Reconsidering the boundaries and applications of Geotourism – lessons learnt from tourism at Mount Vesuvius**

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Introduction

Active volcanic regions and a vibrant tourism industry may at first consideration seem to be an unlikely combination. However, even just a cursory search on the Internet brings up a whole range of tours, experiences and accommodation from Hawaii to Iceland, Ethiopia to Japan. The attraction extends beyond the dramatic landscapes of perfect cone shaped peaks, as rich volcanic soils often produce wide arrays of flora and fauna. Equally, the promise of plentiful harvests has long drawn dense human habitation around the world's volcanoes. Thus further layers of cultural, religious and agricultural patrimony can be seen to draw tourists in to visiting these potentially dangerous sites.

As documented across eruptions over the centuries, a very thin line exists between natural drama and disaster. Hence a burgeoning body of research has evolved, from the geological understanding of when and how eruptions occur, to risk management and prevention for the populations living around active volcanoes. More recently multidisciplinary teams have emerged to create bridges between the volcanologists, emergency managers, social scientists and community representatives to ensure effective transferral of information alongside the construction and implementation of robust crisis plans. However, little has been written with respect to how destinations near to active volcanic sites may mitigate often much needed economic growth through sustainable tourism development with the demands required for effective risk management.

This chapter addresses these issues using the example of Vesuvius, its national park and the surrounding municipalities, since tourism to active volcanic regions represents one of the most significant facets of geotourism (Figure 7.1). Furthermore, the juxtaposition of geological, archaeological, agricultural and other elements around Vesuvius itself, presents an opportunity to explore how a more mature geotourism destination might be defined and developed. An introduction to the general principles that currently guide volcano hazard management is first of all outlined, followed by a focusing in to explain the specific strategy constructed for the region around Vesuvius. Based upon results from two phases of qualitative field research, a description of the present structure of tourism around the volcano is then given alongside perspectives on how future forms of tourism development might be shaped in the region, as presented by some of the princi-

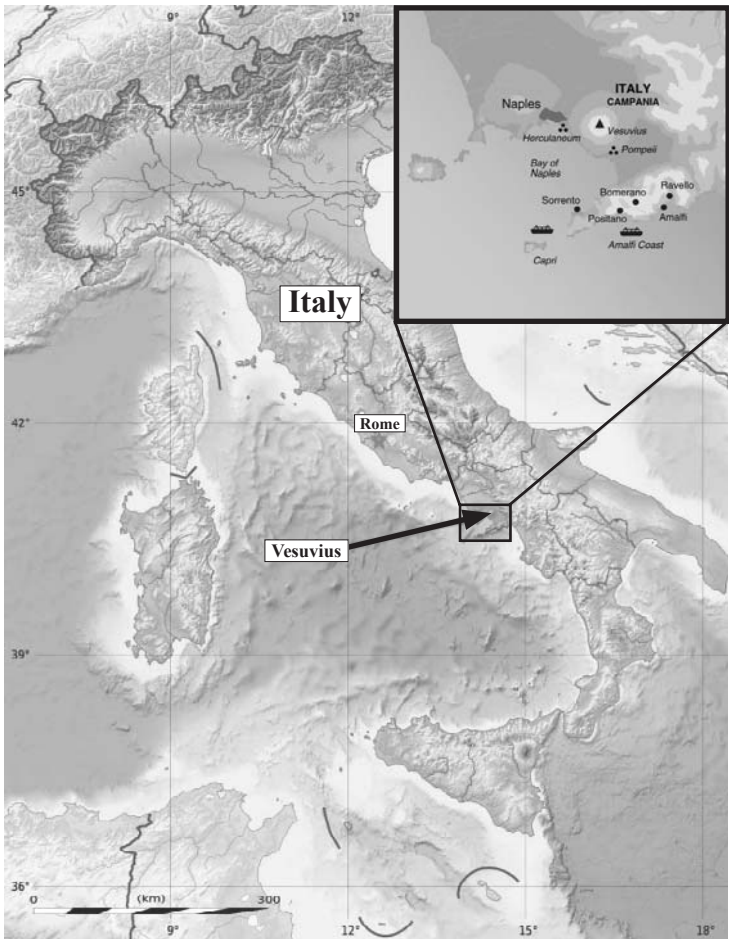


Figure 7.1: Location of Vesuvius and sites around Bay of Naples. Inset map source: <http://www.exodus.co.uk/holidays/avg/itinerary>

pal stakeholders involved. Subsequently we examine how a diverse geotourism product if woven into multi-stakeholder strategies may allow the crucial balancing act between development and risk management needs, to happen. Whilst making closer observations of the interconnected interests around the volcano, a more substantive understanding as to what actually encompasses geo (geological) tourism starts to emerge. In so doing, what transpires is a sector that may demonstrate considerably greater potential and possibilities than the narrow specialist tourism niche that geotourism is currently defined as representing.

Volcano hazard management

Over the latter decades of the 20th century, there has been a growing interest and understanding regarding the risks that volcanoes pose for the populations around them. As the world population has grown, urban growth particularly in developing countries, has led to a greater exposure to volcanic hazards (Chester *et al.*, 2001). The recognition of this increasing danger has been re-focused by the occurrence of numerous emergen-

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