



DAY-TO-DAY LIFE IN ANCIENT POMPEII

FACT SHEET

About 20,000 people of all classes and their slaves lived in Pompeii around the time of the cataclysmic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. It was a prosperous commercial center with a thriving economy, rich culture, and powerful spirituality. *A Day in Pompeii* gives visitors a rare glimpse into the day-to-day life of the people of this vibrant city. Following, find just a few examples of the facets of life that the exhibition's precious artifacts reveal.

Climate and Location

- Pompeii was situated on the Sarno River near the Bay of Naples in the Campania region. It had a mild climate and very fertile volcanic soil to support a successful agricultural industry.

Business

- Pompeii's proximity to the Bay of Naples and its position on the Sarno River made it a **bustling port** and an ideal place for the **process and sale of fish and other seafood**.
- The merchants of Pompeii **sold produce and seafood, olive oil, wine, wool, millstones, and garum**, a fish sauce that was sought after and exported throughout the Roman world.
- Pompeii's **pottery business** also thrived, as potters worked to create the amphora, or shipping containers, that were necessary for the import-export trade. Pompeii's unique red-colored pottery, owed to the volcanic elements in the soil from which the clay came, helps trace the flow of goods from the city.
- The city was also abounding with **bakeries, laundries, hotels, and baths**.

Food and Dining

- The people of Pompeii ate many of their meals in **taverns**, or *thermopolia*, the Pompeian equivalent to today's fast-food establishments. They opened to the street so that patrons could walk up to the counters, order, and either take their purchases with them or eat on the spot.
- The **main meal of the day, or cena, consisted of at least three courses**: an appetizer of oysters or eggs, a main course of meat or fish and vegetables, and a dessert of dried fruit and honey or baked custard. Slaves prepared the meals in the kitchens of private residences and in restaurants around town.

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- **Garum**, one of Pompeii's most prized exports, was considered a delicacy throughout the Roman world. It was a **fermented fish sauce** made from mackerel or anchovies. When mixed with wine, vinegar, pepper, oil, or water, garum was served as a condiment with a wide variety of dishes, including pear and honey souffle, boiled veal, and steamed mussels.
- **Bread was a staple in the Pompeian diet.** Because of the quality of the available flour, it was generally very hard. Therefore, the people of Pompeii usually dipped it in water or wine before eating it.
- Pompeians drank **wine**, usually watered down, with all their meals.

The Pompeian Home

- The **size and quality of a home in Pompeii directly reflected the social rank and wealth** of the family that owned it.
- Most homes had a fairly simple **rectangular floor plan**.
- Furnishings were sparse, so as not to take away from the beautiful wall decorations. Evidence from the ruins tells us that **furnishings included beds, tables, couches for reclining upon during meals, and chests and cupboards** for storage.
- Many of the decorative elements of Pompeian homes survived the Vesuvius eruption. Excavations have revealed **brightly colorful frescoes and complicated floor mosaics**.
- Many upper-class homes included a **garden area**. Some Pompeians used these spaces to grow produce, and some adorned their gardens with greenery, fountains, and ornate statues of Roman gods and goddesses. If a home was too small for a garden, homeowners would often opt to have the back wall painted with lush plants and garden imagery to create the illusion of a peaceful garden.

Beauty

- Artifacts uncovered from the site reveal clues about the styles and beauty rituals to which the women of Pompeii adhered. Marble busts show that **formal, elaborate hairstyles** featured full crowns of curls or added hairpieces. **Simpler hairstyles** involved middle parts, upswept buns and braids.
- **Combs were common hairdressing tools** and were usually made of bone, ivory, metal, or wood.
- **Jewelry indicated the wearer's social status.** Earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and rings were commonly made of gold or precious stones.

- Women used **oils and perfumes mixed with very fine sand** to cleanse their bodies. They'd apply the mixture to their skin and scrape it off with a tool called a *strigili*, which was made of bone or metal.

Religious Beliefs and Burial Practices

- The people of Pompeii **worshipped numerous gods and goddesses**, including Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, the three principal deities of Rome, as well as Apollo and Venus, the patrons of the city of Pompeii.
- In addition, many Pompeians also participated in a **“mystery cult,”** so called because followers were initiated during secret rituals. Devotees believed the chosen deity was a savior figure who promised followers a fulfilling life after death. The cults of Isis and Bacchus, were among the most prominent.
- Most households had a *lararium*, or a **shrine devoted to the gods who held a place of honor for the family**. Some took the form of a painting on the wall, some were small cupboards or niches that held statues, and some resembled small temples.
- Roman law did not permit the citizens of Pompeii to bury their dead within the city. For this reason, the **cemeteries were located outside of the city walls**.
- Women traditionally prepared bodies for burial. They **placed coins over the eyes and mouth of the body**, to ensure that the deceased would have money to pay for the ferry ride to the Underworld.
- Once the bodies were prepared, they **went on display in the home of the deceased person** so that friends and family could pay their respects.
- The dead were cremated, and their remains were contained within a vase or urn made of earthenware or, in rare cases, marble. They were then **buried or placed in tombs, along with cherished items that would accompany them into the afterlife**.
- Some upper-class tombs were adorned with **funerary statues** that the people of Pompeii would purchase while living and engraved with their facial features.

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