

The Boxing Day Tsunami, 2004

Sunday 26th December 2004. An earthquake measuring 9.1 on the Richter scale shook the earth off the West Coast of Northern Sumatra in the Indian Ocean, sparking a tsunami of unfathomable proportion. Due to where the tsunami hit, there was little to no warning of its presence – warning systems are expensive and the epicentre of the earthquake was close to land. All that was seen was a retreating of the waterline right before the tsunami struck...

The facts

- 7:59am – one of the largest earthquakes ever recorded roars through the Indian Ocean
- The earthquake lasted 10 minutes moving the ocean floor approximately 30-40metres
- A tsunami was thrown towards the unaware nearby shores
- Banda Aceh (a city on the northern tip of Sumatra) was closest to the epicentre – the first waves arrived just 20 minutes after the earthquake struck
- The wave was approximately 100 foot tall
- Thailand was next, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours later
- Chennai, India was hit an hour after that
- Many more places were hit until...
- The last place hit, nearly 8 hours later, was South Africa (5000 miles from the quake's epicentre)
- Tsunamis of this level of devastation are rare because there isn't usually such a strong earthquake that causes them.

The impact

- 13 countries were affected
- An estimated 230,000 people died
- 1.7 million people became homeless
- Buildings were annihilated
- Trees and cars were swept away
- 5-6 million people needed emergency aid
- There was a big threat of disease
- Ports were ruined
- The fishing industry was hit hard – boats and equipment were lost/destroyed
- Tourism interrupted – hotels damaged/destroyed
- Communications damaged – roads, railways, bridges
- Crops were destroyed.

Why it was so devastating

- The epicentre of the earthquake that caused the tsunami was really close to some densely populated coastal areas (Indonesia).
- There was little warning – locals only saw the waterline retreating revealing hundreds of metres of beach and seabed, which happened just before the tsunami struck.
- There was no Indian Ocean warning system in place.
- Unfortunately, there is not a lot of money in the countries that were most affected, meaning that they weren't well prepared for such an event.
- Some coastal areas had been made into destinations for tourists, but this meant that forests had been chopped down which would've been an element of natural protection from the tsunami.