

What is a tsunami?

A tsunami is a huge destructive ocean wave. It is nothing like an ordinary wave. As ocean waves move into shallow water, their narrow foaming tips curl over and 'break' (collapse). A tsunami hits land as a dark, fast-moving ledge of water that rarely breaks as it nears shore. Most tsunamis are barely noticeable in deep parts of oceans, but they get bigger as they approach land.

TSUNAMI ⚡ FACTS

- ! The biggest tsunamis are the most destructive waves on the planet.
- ! The fastest tsunamis in the world can reach speeds of 800 kilometres per hour.
- ! Tsunamis have reached heights of 40 metres above the normal level of the sea.

Big tsunamis may move towards the land at hundreds of kilometres per hour. This photo, of a first tsunami wave, was taken by a tourist on the island of Penang, Malaysia, in December 2004.



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Awesome force

Big tsunamis are like huge walls of water. They can be tens of metres tall and several kilometres wide, containing millions of tonnes of water. The water smacks hard onto land with the same force as a wall of concrete.

Anything in the way of a big tsunami – from people to giant ships or lorries – may be swept away, crushed or buried under water. Trees and telegraph poles are snapped like matchsticks. Homes, schools and lighthouses may collapse as if made of cardboard. Over the past 100 years, tsunamis have killed tens of thousands of people and caused millions of pounds' worth of damage around the world.

Harbour waves

'Tsunami' is a Japanese word that means 'harbour wave'. It was given this name because of the great devastation caused around the coastal harbours of Japan by many tsunamis.

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami caused flooding on Koh Racha Island, in Thailand. This shows one of the three large waves that destroyed a luxury hotel.

