

The Indian Ocean, 2004

On the morning of 26 December 2004 a huge earthquake shook the seabed off the Indonesian island of Sumatra. A tsunami sped away across the Indian Ocean, travelling at speeds of 480 kilometres an hour. The thousands of people who were working, playing and relaxing on the coasts of eight countries had no idea the tsunami was coming. Their only warning was when the sea suddenly pulled back hundreds of metres from the shore. The first wave caught most people unawares. Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and India were hit the hardest and about 250,000 people died.

'A great wave came rushing in to the shore, destroying everything and sweeping away everybody who was in the way. Everyone vanished in a second. The whole town was destroyed, along with people at the bus stand and vehicles on the road.'
Deepa, Sri Lankan survivor



The circles on this map show how the earthquake that began near Indonesia caused a tsunami that travelled as far as the coast of East Africa.

Damage

Many people were injured and thousands of homes, hotels and businesses were destroyed. Countries as far away as the Maldives and Somalia were affected. The costs of aid, clearing up and rebuilding were in the region of US\$6 billion. The rest of the world was shocked by the scale of the disaster and money flooded in to help victims and restore basic services.

After this disaster, scientists called for a tsunami early warning system around the Indian Ocean, like the one in the Pacific Ocean. Next time warning sirens could be sounded to give people a chance to escape to a safer place.

TSUNAMI FACTS

- ▶ The 2004 tsunami took fifteen minutes to reach Indonesia and seven hours to reach Somalia.
- ▶ Many victims drowned picking up fish flung on to the beach by the first waves.

People ran for their lives when the tsunami hit the shore of Koh Raya, Thailand, in 2004.

