

0. TSUNAMI-CAUSED DESTRUCTION - Story Preface

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Damage on the island of Sri Lanka, caused by the Indian Ocean tsunami on 26 December 2004. Image online, courtesy NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration).

On the morning of December 26, 2004, people throughout Sri Lanka were preparing to celebrate a holiday. Leaving Colombo, a train - filled with people who had the day off - pulled out of the station at about 7:30 AM.

The journey to Galle - a beach resort on Sri Lanka's southern shore - usually takes two hours. Traveling a few-hundred yards inland, along the island nation's western coast, the train - called the *Samudra Devi* ("Queen of the Sea") - was about 15 miles from its destination.

Soon after picking-up passengers at Peraliya station, near the village of Telwatta, the packed train encountered rising waters. The initial tsunami wave had reached its tracks.

Believing the train was high-enough to protect them, local villagers began climbing aboard. Passengers helped them to reach the top of the now-stopped train.

About ten minutes later, another wave - vastly more powerful than the first - roared ashore on the Indian-Ocean island, smashing into the train and pushing the carriages off the tracks. Although water was washing into the train cars, there were few casualties.

Some of the passengers - like Shenth Ravindra, who had never heard of a "tsunami" - also sought safety on the train's roof. Thirty minutes later, as the people waited for help, something very unusual happened.

Shenth tells us that the water around the train carriages suddenly receded, only to return as a "shear cliff of water." This wave was far bigger than the first two and was moving extremely fast.

The third wave crashed into the train, scattering all the rail cars in different directions and treating them like toys. Shenth's car was thrown at a house, enabling him to get out - and reach higher ground - just before the third wave would have carried him away.

Even the train track was not spared. After pulling the rail line out of the ground, the powerful wave threw it into the air about 25 feet. Converted into a twisted metal wreck, the track looked like it belonged to a roller coaster.

Almost everyone on the train - estimated to be around 1700 people - died. Some were swept out to sea; their bodies were never found.

Because the third wave had destroyed more than the train, the wreck-scene became a chaotic debris field. Helpers, looking for victims, had to endure impossible conditions. The village of Peraliya and Telwatta were both completely ruined.

By the time many bodies were located, they were badly decomposed. Anguished friends and families, unable to recognize their loved ones, had to identify them by other means.

The wreck of Samudra Devi remains the worst train disaster in the world.

It was not the only catastrophe to descend on the Indian-Ocean island that day, however. Officials provide the following Sri Lankan statistics:

- Deaths: 35,322
- Missing: 19,000 (approximately)
- Injured: 21,411
- Displaced: 516,150

Despite incredibly difficult conditions, including the loss of so many homes, survivors in Sri Lanka - like survivors in Thailand and twelve other countries - did what they could to help those in desperate need.

Because many people had "smart phones," when the tsunami struck, they were able to record what happened in real-time. Let's take a look at what they have shared online.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/TSUNAMI-CAUSED-DESTRUCTION-The-Impossible>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/TSUNAMI-CAUSED-DESTRUCTION-The-Impossible>

Questions 2 Ponder

What Is the Worst Train Disaster in the World?

After the December 2004 tsunami struck Thailand, a massive wave reached Sri Lanka where it swept-away a train loaded with beach-going passengers.

Even the train track was not spared when a massive wave crashed into a train, known as the Samudra Devi ("Queen of the Sea"), scattering all the rail cars in different directions and treating them like toys.

Almost everyone on the train - estimated to be around 1700 people - died.

What gives a tsunami so much power that it can treat a train, and its tracks, like toys?

A disaster, like the "Queen of the Sea," could cause massive despair in a community. How do you think people recover from such a terrible event?

Before you read this story, did you have any idea that a tsunami caused the world's worst train disaster?

Media Stream



Peraliya Station - Map Locator

Map image online, courtesy CIA.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Peraliya-Station-Map-Locator>



Sri Lanka - Scene of World's Worst Train Disaster

Image of the wrecked "Queen of the Sea," by Green Hope. Online, courtesy Green Hope.org.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Sri-Lanka-Scene-of-World-s-Worst-Train-Disaster>



Tsunami Damage - Twisted Train Track in Sri Lanka

Image of the rail track, involved in the 26 December 2004 Sri Lankan train disaster, online courtesy Sri Lankan *Sunday Times*' [article from 27 December 2009](#).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Tsunami-Damage-Twisted-Train-Track-in-Sri-Lanka>



Peraliya, Sri Lanka - Destroyed by Tsunami

Image of Peraliya, Sri Lanka - after the devastating tsunami of 26 December 2004 - by Brian Pinheiro, online via Flickr. Copyright, Brian Pinheiro, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

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Telwatta, Sri Lanka - Destroyed by Tsunami

Image of Telwatta, on the 3rd of February 2005, online courtesy Not2Panic.com.

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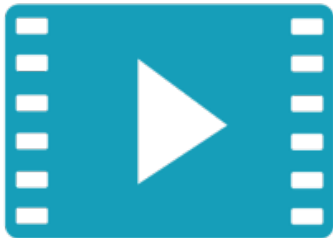


Tsunami Damage - Destroyed Home in Telwatta

Photo of ruined Sri Lankan home by Stefaan & Eric, online via Flickr. Copyright, Stefaan & Eric, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

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Tsunami-Caused Rail Disaster

Clip of "Sky News Flash," reporting on the wreck of the "Queen of the Sea," online via YouTube. Copyright, [Sky News](#), all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

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