

Beat: Travel

Strong earthquake strikes Pacific Ocean off Vanuatu, no damage

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USPA News - A strong and shallow earthquake struck the Pacific Ocean near the island nation of Vanuatu on late Sunday morning, seismologists and witnesses said, but there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties. No tsunami warnings were issued.

The 6.2-magnitude earthquake at 10 a.m. local time (2300 GMT Saturday) was centered about 17 kilometers (10 miles) southwest of Toga, a tiny and mostly uninhabited island in Vanuatu, or about 109 kilometers (67 miles) west-northwest of Sola, the capital of Torba province on the island of Vanua Lava. There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties following the earthquake, but the United States Geological Survey (USGS) estimated some 2,000 people on nearby islands may have perceived moderate to strong shaking. The agency said as many as 34,000 others may have felt light shaking, according to computer models which showed serious damage or casualties are unlikely. Neither the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center nor the Vanuatu Meteorology and Geo-Hazards Department issued a tsunami warning following Sunday's earthquake, which struck at a shallow depth of about 35.6 kilometers (22.1 miles). Vanuatu is on the so-called 'Pacific Ring of Fire', an arc of fault lines circling the Pacific Basin that is prone to frequent and large earthquakes. On average, the island nation and the surrounding waters are struck by about three powerful earthquakes every year. Volcanic eruptions also occur frequently in the region. In August 2011, two powerful earthquakes measuring 7.1 and 7.4 on the Richter scale struck about 63 kilometers (39 miles) south-southwest of Port-Vila. Tsunami waves of up to 1.05 meter (3.4 feet) were observed on the island of Efate, but there were no reports of damage.

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