

Seething, milky white water hints at deadly gas beneath Vulcano

Italy

Tom Kington Vulcano

The fine sandy beach on the Italian island of Vulcano boasts sunbeds, life-guards and a café as well as — a few yards out into the shallows — a startling natural phenomenon.

A small patch of water seethes and bubbles like a Jacuzzi as volcanic gas hits the surface after rising about two miles from magma chambers.

Long a tourist attraction, the out-pouring of gas — mostly carbon dioxide — is alarming scientists after increasing fourfold to ten litres a second since October. Sulphur in it intermittently turns the surrounding sea milky white.

The last time Franco Italiano, a volcanologist, saw such a large patch of white sea was off the neighbouring island of Panarea in 2002, when a sudden volcanic gas surge released one billion litres of gas in a day, blowing a crater 60ft wide and 30ft deep in the sea bed.

“That would have destroyed boats and suffocated people if they had been



close so we are concerned about Vulcano, even if levels there are currently lower,” said Italiano, who is the head of Italy’s National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology (INGV) in Palermo.

Vulcano, in the Aeolian islands north of Sicily, was named by the Romans after Vulcan, the god of fire, and gave us the word volcano. The island’s active crater last erupted in 1888. Its neighbour Stromboli, a volcanic island fed by the same magma chambers, regularly sends lava sizzling into the sea.

The alarm was raised on Vulcano in November when a leap in the quantity of carbon dioxide seeping from the ground forced night-time evacuations of the port for a month. Odourless and heavier than air, CO₂ can form a suffocating layer at ground level and kill people in their beds.

“It was densest near the campsite,



The seemingly tranquil waters around the island north of Sicily bubble as volcanic gas hits the surface

where a cat died — all the grass dried up and cigarette lighters lit a metre from the ground stopped working for lack of oxygen,” Alessandro Gattuso, an INGV expert based on the island, said.

Rising above the port, the crater was shut to tourists as it spewed out clouds of acid-tinged gas and vapour that made the eyes water. Eight months on, emissions at the port are mostly down with the exception of the Levante beach, where a row between scientists and local businesses is getting more heated. Riccardo Gullo, the new mayor

of Lipari, has won over residents by ending a previous total closure of the beach and now claims that he is “evaluating” reopening the crater. “Any fear that things will get worse is unfounded,” he said. “Phenomena like the white water appear from time to time.”

Cristian Quadara, a lifeguard, was nonplussed at the buoys that stop people swimming to the bubbling water. “People used to use it as a Jacuzzi and never felt ill but now I have to whistle at swimmers to keep them away,” he said.

Quadara also needs to enforce a new rule that sunbathers must stay 30cm off the ground to avoid any lurking, low-level CO₂. “That means you can lie on a sunbed, but not on a towel on the ground,” he said.

The alarm has reduced tourism by 30 per cent, according to a local committee that is planning to throw a

party on the beach on Monday to show that it is safe.

“People cancelled holidays when journalists wrote about an ‘imminent eruption’ here but the white water is beautiful and sulphur is part of us,” said Tiziana Aiello, 54, a committee member. “Volcanoes created these islands and we want to show there is no need to be afraid.”

However, during a hike up to the crater this week, Gattuso pointed to another sign that things had not returned to normal after the surge.

As he reached the rim of the crater he put on a gas mask. White gas and vapour emerged with a hiss. “Last September this gas was 320C; since November it’s been about 400C so something has changed,” he said. “Is the white water a warning of an under-sea explosion? We just don’t know. All we can say is the emissions have risen.”

Dying mother left baby son ten years of life lessons

Philip Willan Rome

In her final days, Laura Lonzi determined to demonstrate that a mother’s love can live beyond the grave.

Knowing she was dying of cancer, the Italian primary school teacher, 37, agonised over a way to influence the life of her three-year-old son.

Trying to pack a decade of motherhood into nine months, she chose presents for his next ten birthdays, selecting ten books to accompany her boy, Tommaso, through childhood. Lonzi also recorded four ten-minute videos for him, to explain the importance of school, friendship and love.

“She even anticipated the inevitable sentimental disappointments, telling Tommaso how to deal with rejection and come back stronger than before,” her husband, Alberto Salerno, 37, told *Corriere della Sera*.

“She asked him to study hard, so perhaps one day he could become a doctor and save other mothers like her

Life is just a breath, Laura Lonzi wrote in a letter to family and friends



who weren’t able to defeat the illness.”

Salerno said his wife had been told she had cancer last September.

“In the preceding months she had bubbles on her skin, which the dermatologist treated with cortisone. Then her face started to swell and the doctor prescribed urine tests, which showed where to look.” Lonzi died of an adrenal carcinoma on June 28.

The couple met at a beach resort eight years ago and married on June 7, when it was clear that she had little chance of survival.

Salerno said his young son used to bring his mother a flower every day, “to help her to get better”. He has told the child his mother is now a star in heaven.

“He asked me why there were so many of them and I answered that they were the mothers of other children. He says he has recognised Laura. He says she is the brightest star.”

Lonzi also penned a moving letter to friends and family to be read at her funeral, pointing out that laughing was what she did best.

“I’m happy with the life that I lived. I enjoyed myself so much,” she wrote. “Don’t waste time on foolishness. Life is really just a breath ... And remember to fill Tommaso’s emptiness — not with presents but with words, magical words of love.”

Cocktail barmen shaken up by invention of mixology machine

French

Adam Sage Paris

On a recent holiday, Vincent Guilbert ordered a cocktail. By the time the barman got around to making it, his meal had been served.

Guilbert, 43, from Montpellier in southern France, responded by abandoning his job as a PR consultant to create a machine that has been dubbed the “Nespresso of cocktails”. His Mixo-two can churn out mojitos, piña coladas, Cuba libres and other such drinks at the press of a button.

Not everyone approves. On his local radio station, Guilbert was accused of killing the art of mixology, as cocktail makers describe their trade. He denies any such intention, saying that mixologists are short on the ground in France and that if the nation wants to quench its thirst, it will have to embrace automation. In practice the machine is a timely invention in a country striving to reconcile the growing demand for cocktails and the struggle to get anyone to make them. With several hundred thousand jobs vacant in the hospitality sector following Covid-19 lockdowns,

bars and restaurants are having difficulties in attracting chefs and waiters. Few can afford to post a member of their staff behind a bar to indulge in time-consuming mixology.

John Houssou, joint founder of the Villa Maasai, a popular African restaurant in the centre of Paris, asked Time-Shaker, Guilbert’s company, to install its Mixo-two this month. “It’s really taken away a great worry for us,” he said. “We’re going to be able to have 200 cocktails on the menu, instead of 20 at the moment, and get them to people as soon as they order.” Staff only have to

select the right drink on a touch screen and put ice in the glass.

The Mixo-two, launched last September, is already installed in more than 250 restaurants, bars, campsites, bowling alleys and other such places. It can hold ten alcoholic beverages on top of it, and ten drinks in its refrigerated lower compartment and costs €11,900 to buy, or €300 a month to rent. The machine can memorise more than 300 cocktail recipes and turn them out at a rate of 120 an hour, according to Guilbert. He is convinced that his invention has a bright future and he believes that

changes in French drinking habits prove this. A 2018 study found that 82 per cent of French people, who used to consume little other than wine or anise-flavoured liqueur before a meal, had now taken to downing cocktails on a regular basis.

There are, however, signs that inflation may curb this boom, with sales of spirits falling 7 per cent since January compared with the same period last year. Rums and other beverages used in cocktails have been particularly badly affected, according to *Les Echos*, the financial weekly.