



## Thousands evacuate Santorini as earthquakes strike island



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About 9,000 people have left the island since Sunday, with additional emergency flights scheduled to leave on Tuesday.

More than 300 earthquakes have been recorded in the past two days near the island, and some experts say tremors could continue for weeks. Authorities have closed schools and warned against large indoor gatherings, but Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has urged calm.

Santorini is a popular tourist destination but most of those leaving are locals, as February is outside the peak tourist season

Dozens of tremors have been recorded in the Aegean Sea north-east of Santorini so far on Tuesday, with a large earthquake measuring magnitude 5 striking mid-afternoon.

Several days of continuous seismic activity has led some residents to sleep in their cars - afraid to spend the night in their homes in case walls or ceilings cave in.

No major damage has been reported on the island so far, but emergency measures are being taken as a precaution.

Hundreds of people queued at a port in the early hours of Tuesday morning to board a ferry leaving for the mainland.

"Everything is closed. No-one works now. The whole island has emptied," an 18-year-old local resident told Reuters news agency before boarding the vessel.

Local media reports around 6,000 people have left the island by ferry since Sunday, and a further 2,500 to 2,700 passengers will have flown from Santorini to Athens via plane on Monday and Tuesday.

The carrier said it had added nine emergency flights to its schedule following a request from the Ministry of Climate Crisis and Civil Protection.

In recent days, an estimated 9,000 people in total have fled Santorini - a small island with a population of just 15,500.

The island welcomes millions of tourists annually, but bookings this time of year are minimal, so local residents and workers make up the majority of evacuees.

Kostas Sakavaras, a tour guide who has lived on Santorini for 18 years, left the island with his wife and children on Monday.

"We considered it's a better choice to come to the mainland as a precaution," he told BBC News.

"Nothing has been falling, or anything like that," he said, adding that the worst part had been the sound. "That's the most scary part of it," said Mr Sakavaras, who plans to return home once schools reopen.

Schools are scheduled to stay closed on the island until Friday. Authorities have also warned people to avoid certain areas of the island and empty their swimming pools.

Santorini's Mayor, Nikos Zorzos, said the island was prepared for seismic activity that "may last many weeks". The island must approach it "with patience and calm", he said on Tuesday.

He added that plans were in place to build shelters and provide food for the population should larger tremors emerge

The prime minister will chair a similar meeting on Wednesday