

Reading

Heat Beneath My Feet

Read the text below, choose the correct answers (A, B, C, D).

I've spent the last five years travelling from one volcano to another, and the question people ask me most is always the same: "Why would anyone choose to live near something that could burn, shake, or bury everything?" I used to think it was stubbornness or a love of dramatic landscapes. But after meeting hundreds of people who call volcanoes home, I realised the truth is much deeper.

My journey began in Iceland, where the ground hums beneath your boots like a quiet engine. I visited a small geothermal pool outside Hveragerði, where locals bathe in water heated directly by volcanic energy. A woman there taught me how her grandmother used to cook rye bread by burying the dough in warm volcanic soil overnight. Later, a farmer showed me rows of tomatoes, bell peppers, herbs, and strawberries growing inside steaming greenhouses powered entirely by geothermal heat. "Without the volcanoes," he told me, "this island would freeze, and nothing would grow." He wasn't exaggerating: even blueberries and bilberries grow sweeter in the cracks along old lava fields because the ground stays slightly warm. All of it came as a shock.

Japan was where everything became emotional for me. Near Mount Aso, I met Ren, a teenage boy from a farming family. He led me across fields with soil as black and soft as velvet. Their carrots, daikon radishes, and cabbage grow unusually large because volcanic ash breaks down into minerals that plants love. Ren told me that his grandmother always said the mountain "feeds the earth and tests the people," and their village still holds an annual festival thanking the volcano for good harvests. He also showed me places where tiny mosses and fragile flowers were growing directly on cooled lava. "These are the first plants that return after destruction," he said. "Pioneer species." I wrote that phrase down. Even small birds nest inside the warm cracks, and Ren told me there are rare insects that exist only on those lava slopes because the ground stays warmer there than anywhere else.

Then came Italy. Standing near Vesuvius, I visited the famous San Marzano tomato fields, where the fruit tastes sweeter because the soil is full of volcanic minerals. On Sicily, people spoke proudly about Etna's pistachios, which grow deep roots into the old lava and are considered some of the best in the world. Houses there are often built with volcanic rock, dark and porous, giving entire villages a warm, earthy look. I also learned how the "red zone" around Naples operates: families practise evacuation drills, schools teach children how to recognise warning sirens, and many people can pack their essentials in under five minutes. I interviewed a guide whose father survived the Stromboli eruption decades ago. She described ash falling "like warm snow" and said that despite the danger, their family never considered leaving. Their ancestors had lived there for centuries, passing down land, music, stories, and the belief that the volcano was both a threat and a protector.

Across the world, I kept seeing the same thing. Volcanoes create jobs: tour guides, researchers, drone photographers, geothermal technicians, café owners, rangers, observatory workers, boat operators who take tourists to see old lava flows. In Hawaii, I met a young man who spent his weekends at a volcano observatory, explaining how scientists predict eruptions. He showed me the signs: rising levels of sulfur dioxide, tiny earthquakes called tremors, changes in the shape of the mountain, new cracks in the ground, and sudden heating of groundwater. "It's not magic," he said. "It's listening." I asked him whether the stories about animals sensing eruptions were true, and he nodded. "Sometimes birds disappear from the slopes before the instruments show anything. We don't rely on it, but we don't ignore it either." As for the famous flower blooming before earthquakes, he told me that's more myth than science, although some plants do react to temperature changes when magma rises closer to the surface.



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But the moment that stays with me came from a fisherman in Iceland. After a minor eruption closed the harbour, he told me, "We don't stay because it's safe. We stay because our families are rooted here like those plants growing on lava. The land raised us."

After five years, I've learned that people don't live next to danger. They live inside a story written by time, soil, fire, memory, and love. Volcanoes give warmth, harvests, identity, work, festivals, traditions, and a sense of belonging that eruptions cannot erase. Once you see that, the question isn't why people stay. It's how they could ever imagine leaving.

1. What did the narrator originally believe motivated people to live near volcanoes?

- A. *the hope of earning more money*
- B. *a lack of understanding the real dangers*
- C. *a desire for a quieter lifestyle*
- D. *admiration for striking sceneries*

2. What surprised the narrator most about daily life in Iceland?

- A. *people rarely used natural hot water*
- B. *residents relied heavily on volcanic heat*
- C. *the ground was completely cold year-round*
- D. *fresh produce was hard to grow there*

3. What did Ren's grandmother believe about the volcano near their village?

- A. *that it should be avoided completely*
- B. *that it nourishes the land and challenges the locals*
- C. *that it brings only destruction to the people living there*
- D. *that it has no real effect on farming*

4. What does the guide say about her family's attitude toward their home?

- A. *They haven't seriously thought about moving away.*
- B. *They plan to relocate once the next eruption happens.*
- C. *They would leave if tourism became less profitable.*
- D. *They stay only because they have no other options.*

5. Which statement is NOT true according to the text?

- A. *Some birds leave volcanic slopes before people notice anything unusual.*
- B. *Scientists monitor early clues such as small quakes, shifting gas levels, and warmer ground.*
- C. *A well-known flower always blossoms right before an earthquake, proving an eruption is coming.*
- D. *When magma moves upward, certain plants can show changes because the soil becomes warmer.*