



Earthquakes Strike Abruzzo, Avalanche Buries Hotel

Kayla Pantano (January 20, 2017)



Amidst heavy snowfall, Central Italy suffered further devastation when four quakes and a fatal avalanche hit the tragedy-stricken area all on the same day.

Four strong earthquakes struck snow-covered Central Italy on Wednesday, a tragedy the area is all too familiar with—recalling the three quakes in and around the towns of [Amatrice](#) [2] and [Accumoli](#) [3] five months ago that killed nearly 300 people and caused significant damage to infrastructures. Following the most recent tremblers, an avalanche swept over a small resort hotel, trapping more than 30 people inside.

Four earthquakes strike Central Italy

The first tremor hit [Monte Reale](#) [4] in Abruzzo with a magnitude of 5.3 just before 10:30 a.m., at which point the town had already been buried under more than 3 feet of snow for days. The heavy snowfall cut off electricity and cell phone service, with the quakes only worsening the situation for the residents. Fortunately, no deaths have been reported, though, as Premier Paolo Gentiloni described, it was a “difficult day” nonetheless. Now thousands of commercial, industrial, and agricultural enterprises throughout the four central Italian regions are experiencing further setbacks.



The quakes had their epicenters in the city of [L'Aquila](#) [5], Abruzzo, and were felt as far away as Rome, Lazio, and throughout the coast of [Marche](#) [6]. Officials registered more than 100 aftershocks on Thursday.

Following avalanche buries hotel, killing 4 with up to 20 still missing

At nightfall on the same day the earthquakes hit, a powerful avalanche swept over a small mountainside hotel, only adding to the devastation. The roof collapsed on the four-star Hotel Rigopiano, weighed down by 16½ feet of snow, trapping more than 30 people inside. The force was so strong that the resort was also pushed more than 30 feet of its foundations. [Farindola](#) [7] Mayor Ilario Lacchetta believes the hotel had 24 guests, four of them children, with 12 employees onsite. It is still unclear if the quakes triggered the avalanche.

The snow piled 10 feet high matched with fallen trees and rocks hampered search and rescue teams tremendously. It took hours for only 25 vehicles and 135 rescue workers to arrive. The first rescue team traveled four miles by cross-country skis in a two-hour journey, proving their relentless efforts in a desperate search for survivors. Firefighters were dropped in by helicopter and snowmobiles were also mobilized. Emergency units are still continuing their search.

Upon arrival, the Alpine rescue team found two people who were able to escape the avalanche. Guest Giampaolo Parete and maintenance worker Fabio Salzetta both went to their respective cars, the former to get something. There were no other signs of life until Friday afternoon.

To cheers of joy rescue crews pulled nine survivors from the debris. This was an incredible discovery after two days of what seemed to be a hopeless quest. Two children were among the nine found alive. This news was particularly uplifting, as four people have been reported as dead.

One of the survivors reported that at the time of the 5:30 p.m. avalanche all of the guests had been checked out and were waiting for the roads to be cleared to be able to leave, as they were frightened from the tremors. However, the scheduled snowplow never arrived.

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