

Greece: Quake kills two, sends island tourists into panic

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Rubble outside a bar where two people have been killed after an earthquake in Kos on the island of Kos, Greece Friday, July 21, 2017. (AP Photo/Michael Probst)

Greece: A powerful earthquake sent a building crashing down on tourists at a bar on the Greek holiday island of Kos and struck panic on the nearby shores of Turkey early on Friday, killing two people and injuring more than a hundred. Rescue authorities said two men from Turkey and Sweden died in the collapse as the 6.5 magnitude quake about 1:30 am Friday rattled Greek islands and the Turkish Aegean coast in a region where quake are common. The dead vacationers were not named. At least five other people were seriously injured on Kos as tourists and local residents scrambled out of buildings, some even leaping from balconies.

Five of the injured were being transported by helicopter to a hospital on the island of Crete, officials said. "There was banging. There was shaking. The light was swinging, banging on the ceiling, crockery falling out of the cupboards, and pans were making noise," Christopher Hackland, a Scottish diving instructor, told the Associated Press. "There was a lot of screaming and crying and hysterics coming from the hotel. It felt like being at a theme park with one of the illusions, an optical illusion where you feel like you are upside down."

Tens of thousands of tourists spent the night outdoors on Kos, many sleeping on sunbeds along beaches as a quake-related sea swell subsided. The quake damaged churches, an old mosque, and the port's 14th century castle, along with old buildings in the town. In nearby Turkey, ensuing panic caused minor injuries, according to Esengul Civelek, governor of Mugla province. In Bitez, a resort town about 6 kilometers (4 miles) west of Bodrum, the quake sent frightened residents running into the streets.

Hotel guests briefly returned to their rooms to pick up their belongings but chose to spend the rest of the night outside, with some using sheets and cushions borrowed from nearby lounge chairs to build makeshift beds. Several Greek government ministers, as well as rescuers with sniffer dogs and structural engineers traveled to Kos overnight to coordinate the rescue effort. Authorities said there were no reported injuries of refugees and migrants at camps on the island.

A seafront road and parts of the island's main town were flooded for several hours, and the rising seawater even pushed a boat onto the main road and caused several cars to slam into each other. Ferry services were canceled until further inspection, with passengers rerouted to nearby islands. Greek officials said the quake was 6.5 magnitude and the numerous aftershocks were weaker but still could put at risk the buildings that were already damaged.

The epicenter was 6 miles (10 kilometers) south of Bodrum, Turkey, and 10 miles (16 kilometers) east-northeast of Kos with a depth of 6 miles (10 kilometers). "The damage on the island (of Kos) is not widespread. The airport is working, and the road network and infrastructure are in good shape," Greek government spokesman Dimitris Tzanakopoulos said. "The damage was at the bar and the old part of the town and we had the very unfortunate deaths of the two people." The collapsed building dated to the 1930s, according to Kos Mayor Giorgos Kyritsis. "There are not many old buildings left on Kos."

Nearly all the structures on the island have been built under the new codes to withstand earthquakes,â€• the mayor said. Rescuers were checking for trapped people inside houses across Kos at dozens of villages and other sites, but said the damage was confined to the islandâ€™s main town.

- AP