



EDITORS: High-res images, interviews, and complete press kit available. Contact Hallie Shere at 619.255.0189 or hshere@sdnhm.org.

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Media contact: Delle Willett, Director of Marketing
619.255.0244, dwillett@sdnhm.org
OR
Hallie Shere, Marketing Specialist
619.255.0189, hshere@sdnhm.org

**San Diego Natural History Museum Visitors Will Spend *A Day In Pompeii*
San Diego 5th City to Host Exquisite Pompeian Artifacts**

San Diego, November 2007—Beginning on Friday, February 15, 2008, the San Diego Natural History Museum will transport visitors back 2000 years in time to experience life and death in the ancient Roman Empire. A new exhibition, *A Day in Pompeii*, will reveal daily life in a city steeped in legend and mystery. Dr. Joseph A. Smith, the chair of the Department of Classics and Humanities at San Diego State University, will curate the exhibition in San Diego.

Pompeii and its neighboring cities were buried—and frozen in time—after the fateful eruption of Mt. Vesuvius on August 24, 79 CE. After being forgotten for nearly 1700 years, the city was accidentally rediscovered by well-digging shepherds in 1748. Since then, its excavation has yielded extraordinary artifacts—from the rarest of art objects to the most common trinkets of daily use—and provided a comprehensive portrait of the life of a city at the height of the Roman Empire.

Amazingly, archaeologists have also been able to piece together the final moments of the people of Pompeii. By pouring plaster into cavities in the volcanic ash left by the victims' bodies, archaeologists were able to create molds of the final moments of life in this once-thriving seaport. *A Day in Pompeii* features more than 250 artifacts uncovered from beneath 30 feet of volcanic material in this once-cosmopolitan city. The 10,000-sq.-ft. exhibition brings these priceless artifacts, along with body casts of eight of the victims of Vesuvius' fury, across the Atlantic to the west coast for the first time.

Many of the artifacts have never been on public display before 2007, including a stunning large-scale garden fresco, gold coins, jewelry, marble and bronze statuary, and other dazzling examples of ancient Rome's artistry and craftsmanship.

"Rarely do we see such stark and dramatic evidence of people's final moments. But the exhibition goes far beyond that. The casts of human bodies certainly provide a personal connection with the victims of this natural disaster," says Jim Stone, Museum vice president of public programs. "However, the startling level of preservation of the objects in the exhibition transports the visitor almost two millennia back in time and captures the essence of daily life in ancient Pompeii. It's absolutely remarkable.

“These artifacts were preserved in a virtual time capsule beneath the layers of volcanic ash that covered Pompeii. Museum visitors will see the jewelry that the women wore, the beautiful frescoes and statuary they commissioned, the gold coins they used as currency. They’ll even see a cast of a loaf of bread that had been baking at the time of the eruption. It’s startling evidence that the city was frozen in a moment in time.

“What’s really beautiful, though, is that these different objects, which are amazing on their own, also work together to paint a very rich portrait of what life was like in ancient Italy 2000 years ago,” continues Stone.

The Exhibition

The exhibition takes visitors through an average day in Pompeii; visitors will walk a Pompeian street complete with storefronts and ambient sound, step into a tavern and see samples of food items carbonized by the eruption, explore a home and garden setting from Pompeii, and see how the people of Pompeii expressed their spirituality.

In addition to an extensive variety of artifacts—from beds to lanterns to hairpins to an exquisitely preserved 15-foot-long garden fresco from the House of the Gold Bracelet—*A Day in Pompeii* also features hands-on build-a-mosaic and build-a-Roman-arch activities.

The showpieces of the exhibition are the body casts, made from the cavities left in the ash after the bodies of those buried decomposed. These figures are caught in their last moments, shielding their faces, clinging to each other. Even a dog impression was preserved.

In addition to rare and precious artifacts, *A Day in Pompeii* will also give visitors an opportunity to discover volcanoes from around the globe. A 12' x 21' floor map, featuring a satellite image of Earth, will map out the locations of all of Earth’s active volcanoes. A photo gallery will transport visitors to 20 notable volcanoes where they will discover the stories of famous eruptions. Visitors will learn what creates volcanic activity, as well as experiment with seismic activity.

The San Diego Natural History Museum partnered with several other museums around the country and received special permission from the *Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei* (SAP), the official archaeological authority that governs the archeological site, to display these invaluable artifacts. San Diego is only the fifth city in the United States to host an exhibit of authentic Pompeian artifacts.

Admission to *A Day in Pompeii* is not included in general Museum admission. *A Day in Pompeii* tickets are \$22 for adults, \$19 for seniors, and \$14 for children 3–12. Members receive more than a 50% discount on tickets. Tickets are timed and dated—visitors will choose a date for their visit and a specific entry time for *A Day in Pompeii*. During the exhibition, the Museum will be open seven days a week from 10 AM to 5 PM. An audio tour of the exhibition, available in English and Spanish, is included in the ticket price. All other exhibitions and films in the giant-screen theater are included in admission. Purchase tickets at www.sdpompeii.org or 877. 946.7797. For information regarding groups 10+, call 800.290.4616.

Volunteers are needed to help Museum visitors (especially school groups) in the exhibition. Those interested in volunteering for the Museum should contact Janet Morris, Director of Volunteer/Interns at jmorris@sdnhm.org or 619.255.0245.

SAP is a branch of the *Ministero per i Beni e le Attivita Culturali*, which oversees the safeguarding and enhancement of Italian cultural heritage. The SAP has responsibility for a territory made up of 23 municipalities in the Vesuvian area and runs four archaeological sites (Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae, and Oplontis). *A Day in Pompeii* is a collaboration of the *Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei* and the host American institutions: the Gulf Coast Exploreum Science Center, the Science Museum of Minnesota, the San Diego Natural History Museum, and Discovery Place.

Celebrating its 133rd year, the San Diego Natural History Museum is the second oldest scientific institution in California; third west of the Mississippi. A binational Museum, its mission is to interpret the natural world through research, education, and exhibits; to promote understanding of the evolution and diversity of southern California and the peninsula of Baja California and to inspire in all a respect for nature and the environment. Located in Balboa Park at the intersection of Village Place and Park Blvd., the Museum is open daily except for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Phone: 619.232.3821. Website: www.sdnhm.org.

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