



ISS005E19016

Image credit: NASA

[Download Image Here](#)

Mt. Etna Eruption, 2003

Located on the Italian island of Sicily, Mt. Etna came to life about a half million years ago and has been acting up ever since.

Look closely at the source of the smoke in this ISS photo from January of 2003 and you will see two distinct plumes. The much larger and darker plume is volcanic ash spewing from Etna's interior; the smaller, whiter plume to its left is the smoke produced by wildfires that were ignited by the eruption.

While the volcano is considered to be among the world's most active, only 77 deaths have been definitively attributed to its behavior throughout all of recorded history. Still, Etna's almost constant productivity is both a blessing and a curse. Tourism and agriculture in and around Etna form the basis of Sicily's economy, in spite of the risks. Sure, a lava flow may destroy a town once in a while, but unlike the fast-moving pyroclastic flows from Mount Vesuvius that killed thousands in Pompeii, it's not too hard to get out of the way of a lava flow.

Never been to Sicily but swear you've seen this volcano before? Footage of the 2002 eruption was integrated into scenes depicting the surface of the fictional planet Mustafar, in the 2005 movie *Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith*.

