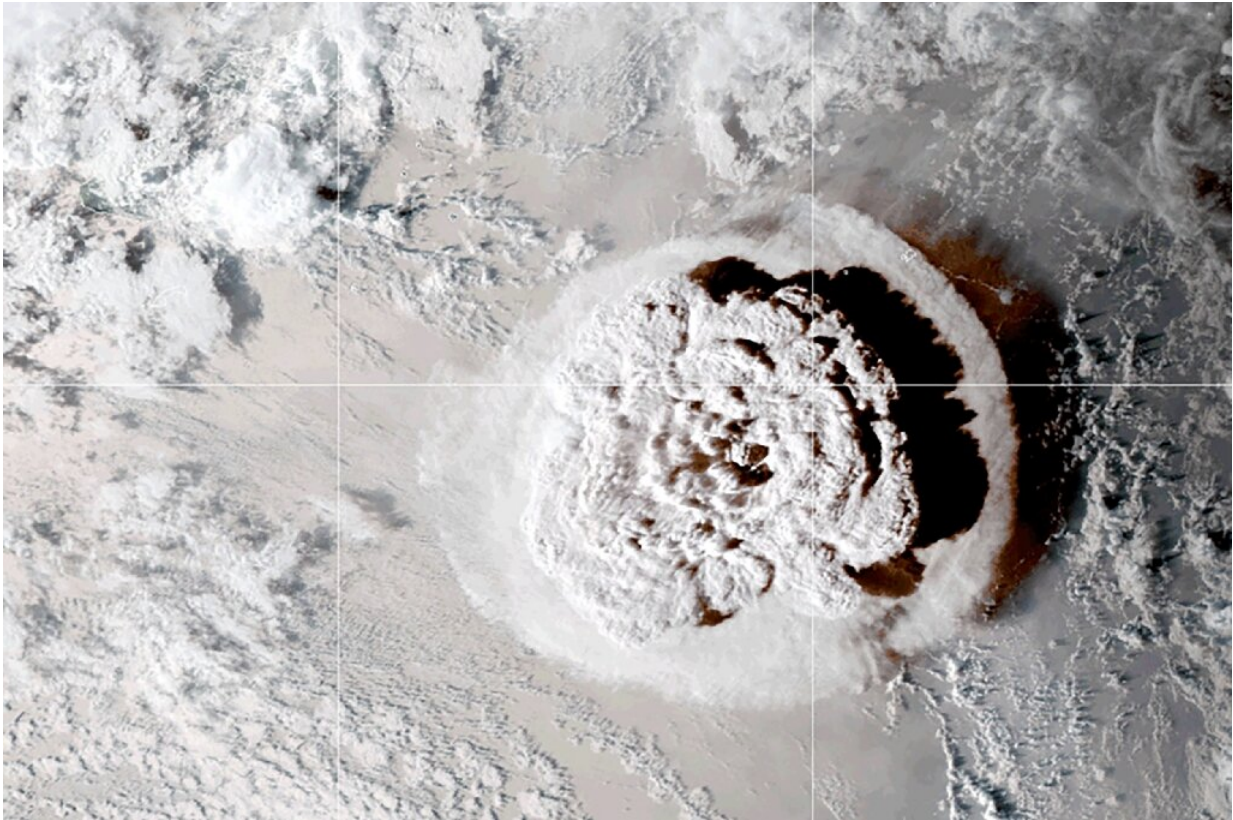


Tonga back online as undersea cable repaired

February 22 2022



The January 15 eruption was so powerful it was heard as far away as Alaska and caused a tsunami that flooded coastlines around the Pacific.

Internet connection was restored in Tonga on Tuesday, five weeks after a massive volcanic eruption shredded the undersea cable that connects the Pacific nation with the rest of the world.

Telecom providers Digicel and TCC said data connectivity had been restored to two main islands, after breaks in an 80-kilometre (50-mile) stretch of the cable were finally fixed.

Residents reported services were quickly coming back online, email seemed blazingly fast after 38 days in the internet doldrums and a slew of calls from family overseas were coming in—their voices now heard loud and clear.

"YES! TCC is restoring fibre cable internet services," the company said in a message to customers.

The January 15 [eruption](#) was so powerful it was heard as far away as Alaska and caused a tsunami that flooded coastlines around the Pacific.

It covered Tonga with ash and mangled an 80-kilometre stretch of the [undersea cable](#) that proved more difficult than expected to fix.

Immediately after the disaster, contact with Tonga was only possible via a handful of satellite links. Although some connectivity was later restored, connections were limited.

Digicel said "data connectivity had been restored" to two islands, after "multiple faults and breaks" were repaired.

"We are delighted to see that our customers are connected to the outside world again," said Digicel Tonga chief executive Anthony Seuseu.

Earlier this month Tonga Cable Limited chief executive James Panuve said a repair ship had located the severed ends of the 840 kilometre-long cable linking Tonga to Fiji that was cut in the blast.

'Major havoc'

But rather than a clean break, Panuve said the ship found the eruption tore an 80 kilometre section of cable into numerous pieces as it pummelled the seabed with the explosive force of a nuclear bomb.

"It is obvious that the eruption, shockwaves, (and) tsunami caused major havoc underwater," he said.

Panuve said that after contending with poor weather, the cable repair ship "Reliance" had to retrieve sections of [cable](#) in waters up to 2.5 kilometres deep.

He said one section had been moved five kilometres by the undersea blast and another was buried under 30 centimetres (a foot) of silt.

The eruption of the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano, which lies about 65 kilometres north of the capital Nuku'alofa, killed three people.

According to UN agencies, the dual disaster also damaged 293 houses and displaced 1,525 people.

About 85 percent of the [total population](#) were affected by the disaster, with fresh water difficult to come by and [arable land](#) covered with six centimetres (two inches) of ash in some places.

Despite Tonga receiving aid under strict "no-contact" protocols, the international relief effort prompted a Covid-19 outbreak in the previously virus free nation.

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