Earthquake Trivia: Questions, Answers, and Facts
Printable Trivia Pack

Earthquake trivia brings together surprising, family-friendly facts about the ground-shaking events that have shaped landscapes, cities, and scientific understanding across history. From ancient attempts to explain tremors to modern seismology and famous quakes around the world, it offers a quick way to learn how earthquakes happen and why they matter.

HARD EARTHQUAKE TRIVIA
1. Moment magnitude is derived from what underlying quantity that itself depends on fault area, slip, and rock rigidity?
Answer: Seismic moment

2. What is the name of the dipping plane of earthquake foci within a subducting slab?
Answer: The Wadati-Benioff zone

3. Which technique uses earthquake waves to create images of structures inside Earth, essentially giving the planet a CT scan?
Answer: Seismic tomography

4. Name the boundary between Earthâ s mantle and outer core.?
Answer: The Gutenberg discontinuity

5. Which discontinuity marks the separation between Earthâ s crust and mantle?
Answer: The Mohorovicic discontinuity

6. What observational feature helped scientists infer that Earthâ s outer core is liquid?
Answer: A seismic shadow zone

7. Before moment magnitude became dominant, which older scale based on one class of seismic waves was important in earthquake measurement?
Answer: Body-wave magnitude

8. Which named relation models how aftershock activity decays with time after a mainshock?
Answer: The Omori-Utsu relation

9. In fault behavior, what term means the average time between similar large ruptures?
Answer: Recurrence interval

10. What field studies prehistoric earthquakes by examining geologic evidence such as trench exposures?
Answer: Paleoseismology

11. Which segment of the San Andreas Fault became especially famous for earthquake prediction experiments?
Answer: Parkfield

12. What kind of map estimates the probability of different levels of ground shaking across

a region?
Answer: A seismic hazard map

13. Engineers commonly use what measure to describe earthquake shaking strength at a site?
Answer: Peak ground acceleration

14. The 2011 Tohoku earthquake reached what magnitude?
Answer: Magnitude 9.0

FUNNY EARTHQUAKE TRIVIA
1. What everyday phrase do people still toss around for earthquake size, even though scientists now usually report moment magnitude?
Answer: Richter scale

2. Which word comes from the Greek â seismos,â meaning â shakingâ â basically the most honest branding imaginable?
Answer: Seismology

3. True or false: The biggest earthquake ever instrumentally recorded happened in California.?
Answer: False

4. Which country gets the bragging rights, or maybe the anti-bragging rights, for the largest instrumentally recorded earthquake?
Answer: Chile

5. In earthquake gossip, which household creatures are often rumored to predict shaking even though strong scientific proof is limited?
Answer: Dogs and cats

6. What do we call the many tiny earthquakes that happen so often worldwide that most people never notice them?
Answer: Small earthquakes

7. On many USGS earthquake maps, what usually changes with the size of the circles?
Answer: Magnitude

8. Which scale uses Roman numerals from I to XII, as if earthquake damage needed to look extra classical?
Answer: The Modified Mercalli Intensity scale

9. If a report mentions an aftershock, is that name about when it happens or about it being a different kind of seismic wave?
Answer: It refers to timing after the mainshock.

10. True or false: A very large earthquake must always badly damage a city if the magnitude is big enough.?
Answer: False

11. Which 1989 earthquake famously put the World Series on pause in the San Francisco Bay Area?
Answer: The Loma Prieta earthquake

12. What major sporting event got an unwanted earthquake intermission during the 1989 Loma Prieta event?
Answer: The World Series

13. Which 1971 California earthquake helped push stronger seismic building rules, giving building codes a very serious wake-up call?
Answer: The San Fernando earthquake

FUN EARTHQUAKE TRIVIA
1. During a large earthquake, which kind of seismic waves often deliver the strongest shaking people actually feel at the surface?
Answer: Surface waves

2. Which surface seismic waves are named after mathematician A. E. H. Love?
Answer: Love waves

3. If the ground seems to move like a slow-motion ocean swell during an earthquake, which wave type fits that rolling motion?
Answer: Rayleigh waves

4. How many seismology stations are typically needed, at minimum, to triangulate an earthquakeâ s epicenter?
Answer: At least three stations

5. What is the name of the earthquake-packed belt that rims the Pacific Ocean?
Answer: The Ring of Fire

6. Which U.S. state was rocked by the 1964 Good Friday earthquake, a magnitude 9.2 event?
Answer: Alaska

7. The epicentral region of Alaskaâ s 1964 Good Friday earthquake was where?
Answer: Prince William Sound

8. Which Colombian volcano erupted in 1985 after earlier seismic unrest?
Answer: Nevado del Ruiz

9. What major subduction zone lies off the Pacific Northwest coast?
Answer: The Cascadia subduction zone

10. Which prominent American seismologist is especially associated with earthquake communication in California?
Answer: Lucy Jones

11. What do seismologists call a smaller quake that sometimes happens before the main event?
Answer: A foreshock

12. True or false: Deep-focus earthquakes can happen hundreds of kilometers below Earthâ s surface.?
Answer: True

13. Which fault type is basically Earth doing the sidewalk shuffle, with blocks moving mainly sideways past each other?
Answer: Strike-slip fault

EARTHQUAKE FAMILY TRIVIA
1. Which scientist is often called a founder of modern seismology?
Answer: John Milne

2. Who discovered the crust-mantle boundary now called the Moho after studying seismic waves in 1909?
Answer: Andrija Mohorovicic

3. Beno Gutenberg helped identify the boundary between the mantle and which part of Earth?
Answer: The outer core

4. After the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, who proposed the elastic rebound theory?
Answer: Harry Fielding Reid

5. Omoriâ s law describes how what changes over time after a big quake?
Answer: Aftershock frequency decreases over time

6. Which scientist showed that deep-focus earthquakes happen far below Earthâ s surface?
Answer: Kiyoo Wadati

7. Which scientist was a key figure in developing the idea of plate tectonics?
Answer: Tuzo Wilson

8. The New Madrid earthquakes happened in 1811 and 1812 in what part of the United States?
Answer: The central United States

9. What name is given to the earthquake sequence that struck the central United States in 1811 and 1812?
Answer: The New Madrid earthquakes

10. In what year did the Charleston earthquake strike South Carolina?
Answer: 1886

11. Which earthquake devastated the Tokyo-Yokohama area in 1923?
Answer: The Great Kanto earthquake

12. The Great Hanshin earthquake hit which Japanese region in 1995?

Answer: The Kobe region

EASY EARTHQUAKE TRIVIA

1. What do we call the shaking of the ground caused by a sudden release of energy in Earthâ s crust?
Answer: An earthquake.

2. Which instrument records ground motion during an earthquake?
Answer: A seismograph.

3. What is the name for the point inside Earth where an earthquake starts?
Answer: The focus, also called the hypocenter.

4. What is the point on Earthâ s surface directly above an earthquakeâ s focus called?
Answer: The epicenter.

5. Which travels faster through Earth: P waves or S waves?
Answer: P waves travel faster.

6. Which kind of seismic wave cannot travel through liquids?
Answer: S waves.

7. What famous fault runs through California?
Answer: The San Andreas Fault.

8. Who helped develop the Richter scale in 1935?
Answer: Charles Richter.

9. Who created the scale that describes earthquake effects rather than size?
Answer: Giuseppe Mercalli.

10. What is the modern standard for reporting large earthquake magnitudes?
Answer: The moment magnitude scale.

11. In what year did the famous San Francisco earthquake strike California?
Answer: 1906.

12. Which earthquake is the largest instrumentally recorded, with a magnitude of 9.5?
Answer: The 1960 Valdivia earthquake in Chile.

13. The 2011 Tohoku earthquake occurred off the coast of which country?
Answer: Japan.

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