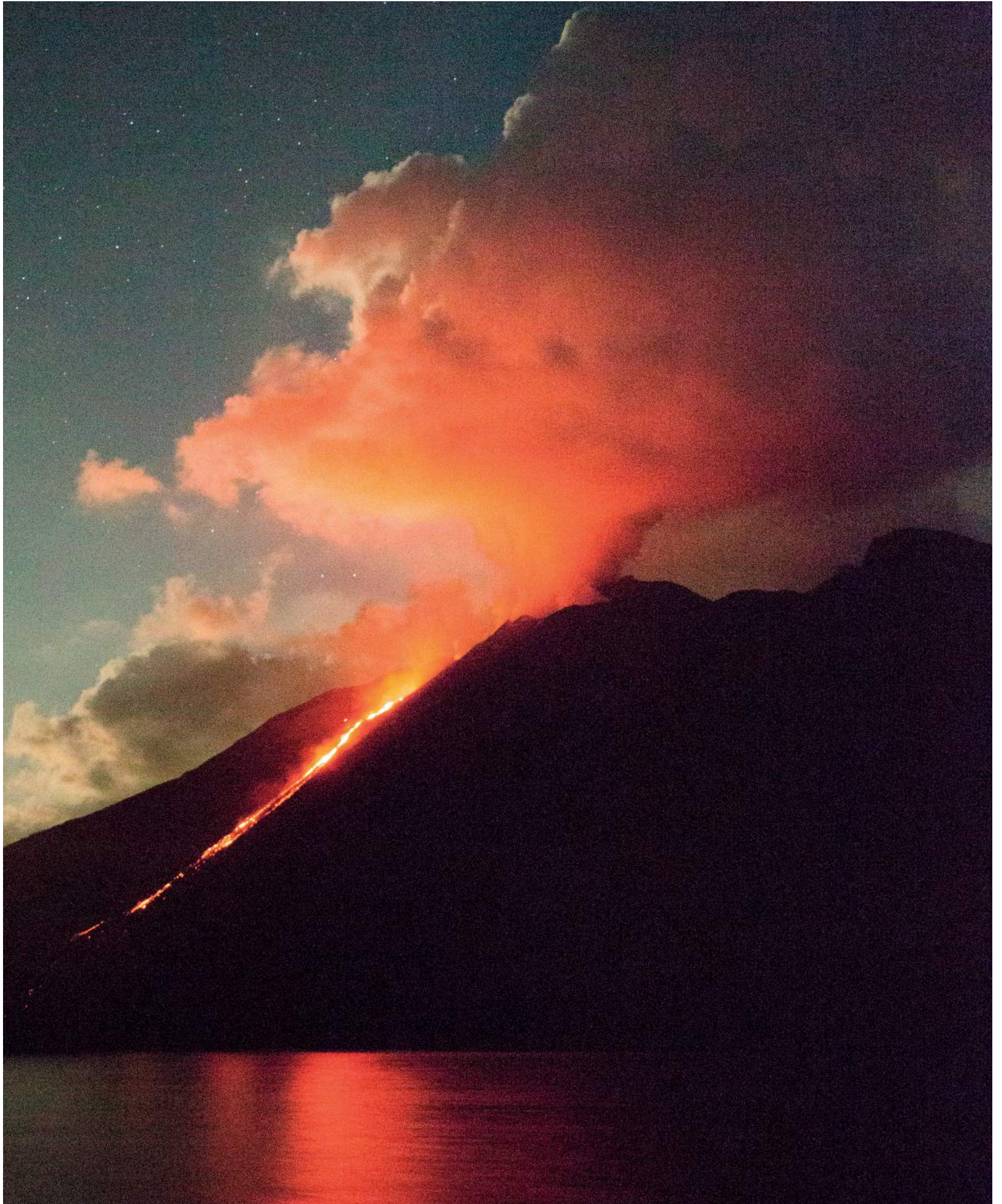
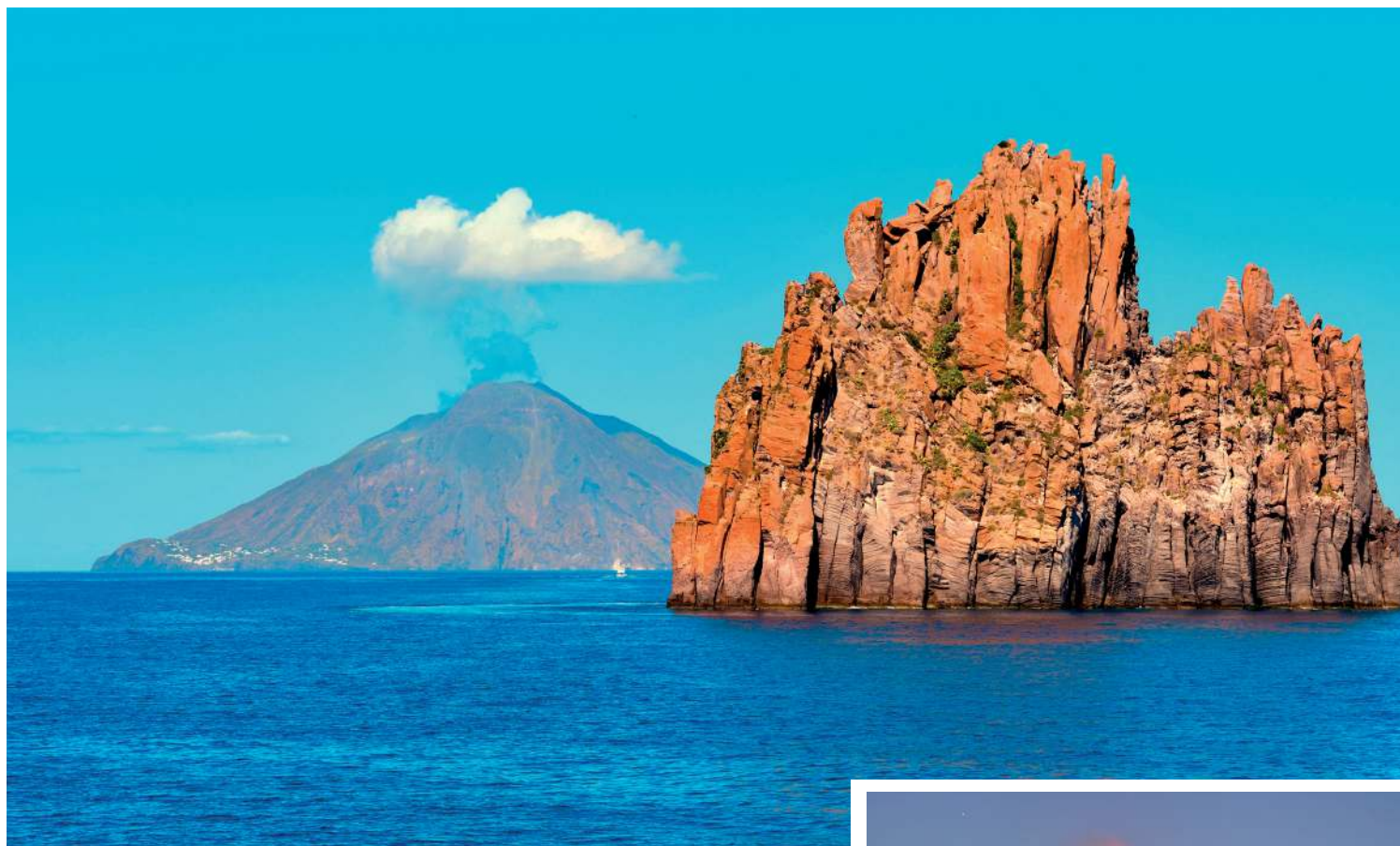






LIGHT FANTASTIC

For thousands of years, Stromboli's glowing eruptions have illuminated the Mediterranean, creating one of nature's most extraordinary nightly performances

WORDS **REBECCA HALL**

Silence isn't something I usually associate with a ship full of passengers, yet that's exactly what settles over the top deck as dozens of us stare towards a dark outline rising from the Tyrrhenian Sea, off Sicily's north coast. From a distance, Stromboli looked like a mountainous island. It's only as we draw closer that I realise the cloud hovering above its summit isn't a cloud at all, but its volcanic plume.

On my sailing, we're lucky to have volcanologist George Kourounis on board. An explorer and broadcaster who has spent decades studying volcanoes and other extreme natural phenomena, he offers fascinating insights throughout the evening. As the volcanic plume drifts above the summit, George explains that what looked so calm from a distance is actually a volcano constantly releasing pressure beneath the surface. It's this process that has kept Stromboli erupting with remarkable regularity for more than 2,000 years, earning it the nickname "the

Lighthouse of the Mediterranean". Recent activity has seen Stromboli erupt roughly every seven minutes, turning the island into one of the Mediterranean's most remarkable natural spectacles.

Conversations fade as we wait for the first eruption. Then, without warning, a brilliant orange flash lights up the summit before molten lava streams down the mountainside. From our position offshore there is no deafening roar or smell of sulphur, only a chorus of "oohs" and "aahs" as we line the rail of the ship, phones and cameras capturing the moment.

What surprises me most is just how often Stromboli erupts. Rather than one dramatic explosion, another burst of orange illuminates the summit every few minutes. Back inside, there is only one topic of conversation. We'd spent dinner wondering whether we'd be lucky enough to see a single eruption; none of us had expected to witness it repeatedly.

Variety Cruises sails past Stromboli on its eight-day La Dolce Vita voyage,



Clockwise from far left

An evening cruise-by shows off Stromboli at its dramatic best; the volcano looks tranquil by day; as daylight fades, it becomes 'the Lighthouse of the Mediterranean'; volcanologist George Kourounis

with regular departures from April to October. An evening cruise-by is included in the fare, and selected 2027 Volcanoes of Italy cruises will be accompanied by volcanologist George Kourounis. varietycruises.com

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