



Day Trip to Volcanoes National Park

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Note: This area of the island is subject to high concentrations of sulfur dioxide in the air. If you have breathing problems, you may want to take a helicopter tour of the area instead of driving to the National Park.

There is the chance of rain on this day trip, so prepare accordingly. Bring a travel umbrella, lightweight waterproof jacket (the park is at 4,000 feet elevation), water bottle, and compact binoculars.

There is a \$10 per vehicle admission fee to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park (free for Senior Pass holders), Volcano Winery closes at 5:30PM

Background

The Big Island is made up of the remains of 5 volcanoes--Kohala (now considered extinct), Mauna Kea (last active about 4,000 years ago), Hualalai (last active in 1801), Mauna Loa, and Kilauea. The latter two are part of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

An average of 2.6 million visitors per year pass through the gates of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park to stand on the edge of Kilauea, the world's most active volcano. Kilauea Volcano has erupted lava almost continuously from its east rift zone since 1983 (we saw it the night it first erupted). These lava flows have added about 500 acres of new land to the southern shore of Kilauea and covered 8 miles of highway with lava as deep as 115 feet.

There is no guarantee you will see flowing lava during your visit. It is best to contact the park headquarters (808) 985-6000 for a volcano update before scheduling your day trip.

Restrooms Along The Way

On this trip you will find restrooms throughout Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, in Volcano Village, and at the Volcano Winery.

1. Hawaii Volcanoes National Park

The park entrance fee is \$10 per car (free with the Interagency Senior Pass). **Save your receipt.** You will need it later in the day. It entitles you to reenter the park for up to seven days after purchase.

Loop Road Notice: Because of recent eruption activity in the Halema`uma`u Crater the loop road may be closed from the Jagger Museum to the Chain of Craters Road. Check at the park entrance for the latest updates.

2. Visitor Center, Volcano House, and Volcano Art Gallery:

Located near the park entrance, the visitor center is your next stop. Clustered near the visitor center are the Art Gallery and Volcano House Hotel.

The park recently revamped the visitor center to give the public a better overview of the park's environmental, historical, and cultural features. There are exhibits on island formation; the arrival of life by wing, wind, and wave; ecosystems from sea to summit; the sights and sounds of the rain forest; invasive species; and those who make a difference in resource protection. Interwoven throughout are the wisdom (mana`o) (wisdom) and stories {mo`olelo) of Hawai`i's indigenous people.

Informative movies are shown throughout the day at the visitor center. And be sure to take a look at the giant topo map of the big island located near the

restrooms. The map will help you understand how Kilauea fits into the epic landscape of the island. You can also refill your water bottles with filtered rainwater from a tap near the topo map.

To the left of the Visitor Center is the Volcano Art Center. Housed in a building that was formerly the Volcano House Hotel, built in 1877 and later moved to this site, the Art Center features evocative art by local artists and is worth a stop.

Across the street from the Art Center is the Volcano House Hotel, which is currently closed while it undergoes renovation. The hotel sits on the edge of Kilauea crater and its back deck is a delightful place to stop and have lunch. Phone the park service at (808) 985-6000 for a construction update and the date of its reopening.

3. The Hawaiian Volcano Observatory and Museum

The next stop on the trip is the observatory and museum located on the rim of Kilauea Crater. As you drive towards the observatory look on both sides of the road for active steam vents. The steam is formed when rainwater percolates through porous lava and until it reaches hot lava just below the surface. (If you stop at the parking lot on the left, you can get up close and personal with volcanic steam.)

The observatory is a working scientific installation that constantly monitors volcanic activity within the park. Its museum describes the formation of volcanoes and the historical and cultural significance of Kilauea.

4. Kilauea: The Home of Madam Pele

Kilauea crater is miles across, but the most active part of the crater is Halema`uma`u, a crater located within the larger caldera. According to the traditions of Hawaiian mythology, Halema`uma`u (which in Hawaiian means 'House of perpetual fire') is considered the home of Madam Pele, the Hawaiian Fire Goddess, making it a sacred place to Hawaiians who practice the ancient religion.

Because of recent eruption activity, access to the rim of Halema`uma`u,, which is nearly a half mile wide and 300 feet deep, is prohibited. Because of the venting of toxic fumes, the road from here to the Chain of Craters road is closed to traffic, making this your turn around point.

5. Lunch in Volcano Village

By now you should be famished. The only restaurant within the park was within the Volcano House Hotel. Since there is no official opening date for the renovated hotel, the nearest place to eat lunch is in the nearby town of Volcano Village.

Exit the park and turn right onto Hwy 11. In about a half mile turn left onto Old Volcano Road. If you miss the turn, then turn left on Haunani Street about a quarter mile further towards Hilo. Eateries in Volcano Village are clustered along Old Volcano Road between Haunani Street and Lanihuli Street. We recommend The Lava Rock Café and Café Ohia.

Rather than returning to the Park after lunch, consider walking off lunch with a stroll in the park - a bird park, that is.

6. Visit the bird park at Kipuka Puauulu

A kipuka is an open area of vegetation within a lava flow. It forms when lava flows around a small hill leaving the vegetation unharmed. As a result of this process, Kipuka Puauulu remains a small patch of old growth vegetation in a sea of black lava. By visiting early in the morning, it is possible to see and hear a variety of native birds.

To reach the kipuka, drive west past the main entrance to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park and turn onto Mauna Kea Road, which is on the right side of the Highway 11 between mile markers 31 and 32. Follow the signs to the 'Bird Park' about a mile down Mauna Kea Road.

A gentle one-mile-long loop trail meanders through this part of the National Park with benches strategically placed to encourage bird watching. The parking lot is unsupervised, so leave nothing of value in your vehicle. The weather in this area is unpredictable, so besides your binoculars, take rain gear and drinking water on the walk.

7. Wine in Hawaii?

Yep. The Volcano Winery, located between the bird park and the entrance to the National Park, produces tropical fruit wines, honey wines, grape wines, and exotic black teas which all are available for tasting and purchase.

To get to the winery, exit the bird park and turn left on Hwy 11. Look for Pii Mauna, Drive a short ways ahead on the left. Turn left onto Pii Mauna Drive and continue straight ahead a few blocks to the winery visitor center.

When you are ready to move on, reverse course and return to the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park (your ticket is good for a return visit).

8. Walk Through a Lava Tube

Re-enter the park and turn left almost immediately. Follow the signs to the Thurston Lava Tube parking lot. A lava tube is created when super hot lava flows

entirely through a natural channel leaving the walls of the channel intact and the interior of the tube empty.

This lava tube was discovered in 1913 by Lorrin Thurston, a local newspaper publisher. At that time the roof of the tube was covered with lava stalactites, but those soon disappeared to souvenir collectors.

Park in the designated lot and look both ways before crossing the road. A 10 minute 1/4 mile walk through a tree fern forest leads you to the opening of the lighted lava tube. Think 'Jurassic Park' and stop to listen for the calls of exotic birds as you descend. The downward sloping trail is steep in some places and there are stairs along the way. If steep trails and stairs are not to your liking, follow the directions in the next paragraph.

If you are physically challenged, turn left at the T intersection on the trail from the parking lot. The left-hand trail passes the restrooms and continues on a gentle downward slope to a short of set of stairs that will deposit you into the back back of the lava tube. Back, front, it's the same. After exploring the tube, reverse course and take the trail back to the parking lot.

As you walk through the tube consider that several hundred years ago a river of molten lava rushed through it, and that same thing is happening as lava from Pu'u O'o flows to the ocean in a labyrinth of lava tubes much like the tube you are walking through. Watch your head and feet inside the tube - there are some spots with a low ceiling, and there are always puddles of cold water ready to soak your slippers.

9. Kilauea Iki Overlook

Reverse course and drive back towards the park entrance. The parking lot on the left lets you stop at the overlook view Kilauea Iki crater (in Hawaiian, 'iki' means small).

In August 1959, a swarm of deep earthquakes was detected by the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory. In October it was indicated by seismographs that Kilauea summit was filling with magma. This formed a new cinder cone at Kilauea Iki, named Pu'u Pua'i (gushing hill). Eruptions at this site sent fountains of lava as high as 2,000 feet in the air, forming the cinder cone at the end of the crater.

3. Finis

This ends the day trip. Exit the park and drive carefully on the way home. If you would like to comment on it or suggest additions, please email us at theorchidisle.aol.com

Aloha.