

HAWAII

A VOLCANIC ACTIVITY

Exploring the islands' explosive geological history up close

By BEKAH WRIGHT
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On my first visit to Hawaii, I expected to be wowed by the islands' lush, tropical beauty. The majority of my photos, however, were focused on something entirely different — sprawling acres of dark, rutted lava draped with a curtain of steam that seemed to rise endlessly from beneath the earth's surface. To this day, I equate Hawaii's beauty with its awe-inspiring volcanoes.

Whether delving into the legends that surround them or exploring their anatomy up close on an ecological adventure, it's easy to become enchanted with these miracles of nature.

HAWAII VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK

There are 333,000 acres within this International Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Site lo-

cated on the Big Island of Hawaii. Perhaps the best way to acclimate yourself to the scale and grandeur of the park is by embarking on a Blue Hawaiian helicopter tour. Two different tours offer aerial views of Kilauea (the world's most active volcano), as well as areas of current volcanic activity not accessible by foot or vehicle. The "Big Island Spectacular" tour flies above the world's most massive volcano — snow-capped 13,677-foot Mauna Loa. Captivating, too, is watching the island grow as lava sluggishly flows into the ocean.

A great way to experience the park's numerous terrain changes — from tropical to desert, volcanic to rainforest — is by driving the 11-mile loop of Crater Rim Drive that encircles the Kilauea Caldera. Begin at the Kilauea Visitors Center with time spent at the Volcano Art Center Gallery. Plan a stop at the Thomas A. Jag-

gar Museum to check out the seismometers and tiltmeters hard at work monitoring current geological activity.

Other scenic locales highlighted by the drive include Sulphur Banks, Steam Vents, Devastation Trail and the Kilauea Iki Crater. Also en route is an overlook for Halemaumau Crater, the legendary home of Pele, Hawaiian goddess of volcanoes. Further along is another great opportunity for a pit stop — a hike through the Thurston Lava Tube and the surrounding rainforest.

Allot time, too, for a drive down the 20-mile stretch of Chain of Craters Road that leads into the East Rift and coastal area of the park. After a 3,700-foot descent the drive comes to an abrupt and dramatic end at a section of road crossed by a 2003 lava flow.

There are 150 miles of trails within the park, allowing visitors an up-close peek at these geological wonders. Both day hikes and overnight wilderness hikes are available in a range of difficulties. The Pu'u Loa Petroglyph hike — one of the Chain of Craters Road trails — is a moderate two-mile roundtrip trek past one of Hawaii's older flows of *pahoehoe* lava. More challenging is the Kilauea Iki hike — one of the Kilauea Summit trails — that descends into a rainforest, crosses the crater floor and passes cinder and spatter cones, active steam vents and a 1959 lava lake.

More knowledge about the area can be gained through a guided hike such as those offered by Native Guide Hawaii owner Warren Costa, who once worked as an archeologist and natural re-



PHOTO BY RON DAHLQUIST

Riders descend into the Haleakala Crater with Pony Express Tours' "Ka Moa O Pele Junction Ride."

sources manager at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park and as a ranger on Mauna Kea. During his comprehensive, seven-hour "Volcano Adventure," participants explore the ruins of ancient Hawaiian villages, wild lava tubes and red lava flow from Pu'u O'o while learning about the park's ancient legends, natural history and geology.

HALEAKALA NATIONAL PARK

The island of Maui was formed by two shield volcanoes, East Maui and West Maui. In West Maui, evidence of this cataclysmic birthing process can be seen in the local mountain range, called Mauna Kahalawai. In East Maui, there's Haleakala, otherwise known as "House of the Sun." Each mile of the drive up to the 10,023-foot summit offers spectacular views. Upon reaching the top, it's as if the road has pushed past the clouds, erupting into the

heavens. This is the highest point on the island, perfect for gazing down into the volcano's cauldron and catching dazzling sunrises and sunsets.

There are three regions within the 30,183 acres of the Haleakala National Park — the Summit, the Kipahulu and the Wilderness areas. An ideal way to explore all three is by means of 38 miles of public trails. The visitor center happily equips guests with maps and helps them make the best trail choices. Depending on the route, hikers can traverse cinder deserts, cloud forests or landscapes brimming with rare native plants and animals.

Another way to experience the crater is through a Maui Eco-Adventures "Heli-Hike." After flying above the island and crater via helicopter, participants are dropped off at a private landing zone before embarking on a hike across the veritable moonscape

of Haleakala.

Taking visitors along the Sliding Sands Trail on horseback is the "Ka Moa O Pele Junction Ride" from Pony Express Tours. Riders travel down into the crater, passing old lava flows, cinder cones and endangered native plants, like the radiant silversword.

Legend has it that after her fatal battle with sister Namakaokaha'i, Pele's bones were buried near Kipahulu, the park's coastal area. This verdant, tropical side of the park with its waterfalls and archeological and cultural sites stands in stark contrast to the barren summit areas of Haleakala.

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