

Volcanoes and More: A Visit to Two National Parks in Hawaii

AP
A 2004 eruption of
Kilauea in Volcanoes
National Park in
Hawaii



MARIO RITTER:
Welcome to the
VOA Special
English program
EXPLORATIONS.
I'm Mario Ritter.
Today, Steve
Ember and Sarah
Long tell us about
two of the most
unusual national
parks in the United States. They are Volcanoes National Park and Haleakala National Park, both in Hawaii.

(MUSIC)

STEVE EMBER: Let me ask you a question: What is the tallest mountain on Earth? Most schoolchildren will say the answer is Mount Everest near the border between Nepal and Tibet.

There is something that is three hundred four meters taller than Mount Everest. However, it is mainly underwater. It begins at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, and rises more than seventeen kilometers from the ocean floor.

Its name is Mauna Loa. In the Hawaiian language, Mauna Loa means "Long Mountain." Mauna Loa is more than half of the island of Hawaii, the largest of the Hawaiian Islands.

It is also the largest and most active volcano on Earth. It has produced liquid rock called lava more than thirty times since records were first kept in eighteen forty-three. Today, Mauna Loa is quiet. It is not producing lava. However volcano experts say it is only a matter of time before this happens once again.

SARAH LONG: Mauna Loa is not the only volcano on the island of Hawaii. There are four others. Three of them are no longer active. One of them still is active. It is named Kilauea.

It has produced lava more than fifty times in the last one hundred years. At this moment, red hot lava is pouring out of Kilauea. It has been doing this since nineteen eighty-three.

Sometimes the lava moves slowly. At other times it pours out very fast as huge amounts of pressure force it from the volcano. During these times, it moves almost as quickly as water moving down the side of a mountain. Sometimes Kilauea produces large amounts of lava that seem like rivers of fire.

STEVE EMBER: When the lava from Kilauea reaches the ocean, its fierce heat produces great amounts of steam that rise into the air. The lava is so hot it continues to burn underwater for some time. The lava from Kilauea continues to add land to the island as the volcanoes of Hawaii have always done. It is these volcanoes that formed the islands of Hawaii.

Most of the time the lava of Kilauea seems to move peacefully toward the ocean. Yet it is not as peaceful as it seems from a distance. In recent years the lava destroyed one small town on the island. The liquid rock slowly covered the town. It blocked roads and destroyed them. Nothing can stop the lava of Kilauea. Experts say the volcanoes of Mauna Loa and Kilauea are a serious threat to property on many parts of the island.

Experts say the volcanoes of the island of Hawaii are proof that the changing environment of Earth is, and will always remain, beyond human control.

(MUSIC)

SARAH LONG: Mauna Loa and Kilauea together form Volcanoes National Park in Hawaii. But another national park has a huge volcano. It is on the island of Maui. It is the Haleakala National Park. Haleakala in the Hawaiian language means "House of the Sun."

Haleakala is another huge volcano. Together with a smaller, much older volcano it helped form the island of Maui. It is no longer considered to be active. In about seventeen ninety, two areas in the side of the huge volcano opened and lava

came out. The lava moved down the mountain and into the sea. That was the last recorded activity at Haleakala.

The volcano that contains Haleakala National Park rises three thousand fifty meters above the sea. We would like to take you for a visit to Haleakala. For a few minutes, sit back while we drive the road up to the top of the volcano.

(MUSIC)

STEVE EMBER: Our trip begins near the ocean today. We drive through the city of Kahului. We see businesses and homes, the buildings you find in any American city. There are more flowers than in many American cities. The Hawaiian Islands are famous for their flowers.

Soon the road begins to go up. The road moves back and forth and around corners as it moves up the face of the mountain. At times our driver must slow the vehicle and turn very sharply. Soon, there are no more homes or stores.

From the city of Kahului to the top of Haleakala is about fifty-five kilometers. We will be three thousand fifty meters higher at the top of the mountain.

Very soon, we no longer see trees. We have traveled too high for them to survive. Soon there are only a few plants. Then there is nothing but black lava rock. At one place, we begin to enter the clouds that hang close to the mountain. Our driver turns on the headlights of the vehicle. Ten minutes later, we are above the clouds in the bright sunshine.

The road is good, so the trip takes only about an hour.

SARAH LONG: The national park headquarters is about two kilometers from the top. Park officials at the information center tell you about the history of the volcano. They say that it is very safe -- today. They also tell you that it could very well become active again. The experts just do not know.

We soon leave the park headquarters and travel up again, this time to the top. There is an area here to leave our vehicle. We walk the last few meters to the top.

As we reach the top, almost everyone says similar things. How strange! Did the violence of a volcano form this? This is so beautiful!

STEVE EMBER: We are on the top looking down inside what was the most active part of the volcano. The shape is almost like a circle except the sides have been stretched -- almost the shape of an egg but longer.

There are only a few plants here and no trees. However the volcano has left thousands of different shapes of lava stone. Hundreds of years of rain and bright sun have cut long paths in the stone.

Time has turned the oldest lava to a soft sand. There are huge mountains. There are also smaller hills that seem to be made of ash or sand. The place is a riot of color.

One big mountain seems to be a deep, dark red. Another area seems almost yellow. Another is green, and still another is a beautiful brown color. One area is colored gray that seems to move into a deep black. It looks as if someone has spilled many colors of paint over the huge area. The volcano produced these colors because the lava is very rich in many kinds of minerals.

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SARAH LONG: The area we are seeing stretches for a long distance. This morning, high on the mountain in the bright sun, we can see almost forty kilometers of the park. And this is only part of it. There are eleven thousand five hundred ninety-six hectares of land in the park.

Some of the park is closed to visitors. Scientists do research in those areas. Experts are trying to learn how to grow and protect some of the very unusual plants that live in Haleakala.

One of these plants is called the Silver Sword. It grows only in Hawaii. It has long, thin, silver leaves. It is very beautiful and unusual.

The Hawaiian nene goose also lives here. It is a large bird. Visitors are asked not to come too near the nene. Experts are helping both the Silver Sword plants and the nene geese to reproduce so they will not disappear from the Earth.

(MUSIC)

STEVE EMBER: Thousands of visitors each year enjoy Haleakala National Park on the island of Maui, and Mauna Loa and Kilauea on the island of Hawaii. Ships stop at the two islands and buses take the groups of visitors to see these huge volcanoes.

Many people also fly over the volcanoes in airplanes or helicopters. This is a safe and popular method of watching Kilauea's lava moving slowly toward the ocean. Other people see it from ships.

Visitors also may walk into the rain forest created by the volcano thousands of years ago. Here they can see Waimoku Falls where water drops one hundred twenty meters down the face of a mountain.

Both parks offer visitors a sight of nature that most people never have the chance to enjoy. Visitors can see how an active volcano adds mass to the island.

And they can see inside a volcano that has been silent for hundreds of years.

The United States Park Service is responsible for both Haleakala and the Hawaii National Volcanoes Park. It works hard to keep both these areas as nature created them.

(MUSIC)

MARIO RITTER: This Special English program was written and produced by Paul Thompson. Your announcers were Sarah Long and Steve Ember. I'm Mario Ritter. You can read transcripts of this and other stories on our website, voaspecialenglish.com.

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