News
EarthBeat



In this photo provided by the National Park Service lava spews from the Kilauea volcano in Hawaii, Wednesday, June 7, 2023. (AP/National Park Service/Janice Wei)

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Hawaii tourism officials urged tourists to be respectful when flocking to a national park on the Big Island to get a glimpse of the latest eruption of Kilauea, one of the world's most active volcanoes.

Kilauea, Hawaii's second-largest volcano, began erupting Wednesday after a three-month pause.

The U.S. Geological Survey's Hawaiian Volcano Observatory on Thursday lowered Kilauea's alert level from warning to watch because the rate of lava input declined, and no infrastructure is threatened. The eruption activity is confined to the closed area of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

"Out of respect for the cultural and spiritual significance of a volcanic eruption and the crater area for many kamaʻāina, the Hawaiʻi Tourism Authority urges mindfulness when planning a visit to the volcano," the agency said in a statement Wednesday night, using a Hawaiian word often used for Hawaii residents.

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For many Native Hawaiians, an eruption of a volcano has a deep yet very personal cultural significance. Some may chant, some may pray to ancestors, and some may honor the moment with hula, or dance. Hawaiians ask that people keep a respectful distance.

"Don't just get out your camera and take photos. Stop and be still and take it in," said Cyrus Johnasen, a spokesperson for Hawaii County who is Hawaiian. "It's something that you can't pay for. In that moment, you are one with Hawaii."

In recognizing the sacredness of the area, he also urged visitors to not take rocks, refrain from horseplay and leave plants alone.

"A lot of plants up there are native," he said. "Just be mindful that you will leave a footprint. The idea is you leave one that's small as possible."

Word of Kilauea's lava fountains spread quickly, bringing crowds to the park. "Expect major delays and limited parking due to high visitation," said a warning on the park's website Thursday.



Visitors line the side of an overlook to view the Kilauea eruption in Hawaii on Wednesday, June 7, 2023. Hawaii tourism officials are urging tourists to be respectful when flocking to a national park on the Big Island to get a glimpse of the latest eruption of Kilauea. It's one of the world's most active volcanoes and began erupting after a three-month pause. (AP/Hawaii Tribune-Herald/Kelsey Walling)

There was no exact count available, but officials estimated the first day and night of the eruption brought more than 10,000 people, which is more than triple the number of visitors on a normal day when Kilauea isn't erupting, park spokesperson Jessica Ferracane said.

Several thousand viewers were watching the USGS's livestream showing red pockets of moving lava Thursday morning.

"We were on social media, and we saw that it was actually going off while we're here, so we made the drive from the Kona side," Andrew Choi, visiting with his family from Orange County, California, told the Hawaii Tribune-Herald. "This feels so ridiculously lucky. We've never seen anything like this."

Park officials suggested visiting at less-crowded times before 9 a.m. or after 9 p.m.

Scientists expect the eruption to continue and remain confined to the Halemaumau crater in the park.

Early Wednesday, lava fountains were as high as 200 feet (60 meters) and decreased to 13 feet to 30 feet (4 meters to 9 meters) in the afternoon, according to the observatory.

"People here on Hawaii Island are getting a spectacular show," Mayor Mitch Roth said. "And it's happening in a safe place that was built for people to come view it."