

# Highly active volcano erupts on Reunion amid media frenzy

August 1 2015, by Andrew Meldrum

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Lava erupts from the Piton de la Fournaise "Peak of the Furnace" volcano, on the southeastern corner of the Indian Ocean island of Reunion Saturday, Aug. 1, 2015. Spewing red-hot lava, one of the most active volcanoes in the world is currently erupting on this Indian Ocean island, where the world's attention has been focused since a wing fragment believed to be from the missing Malaysian jet was discovered washed up on a beach. (AP Photo/Ben Curtis)

Journalists arriving this week to the Indian Ocean island Reunion to report about the discovery of a jet wing fragment were met with another spectacular sight: the eruption of one of the Earth's most active

volcanoes.

As the [volcano](#) spewed red-hot lava high up in the air in Reunion's southeastern corner, some excitable reporters thought a large-scale emergency evacuation would take place and that the search for airplane wreckage believed to come from the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 would be called off.

That didn't happen. Instead awe-struck tourists and fascinated scientists climbed the mountain to enjoy the display, which is a common occurrence at the tropical island east of Madagascar.

"It is a spectacular sight. The [molten lava](#) shoots up into the air like a fountain," said Yannick Parrel, 30, a helicopter pilot who flies tourists over Reunion's captivating landscape culminating in a circle around the volcano's caldera.

The Piton de la Fournaise volcano—French for Peak of the Furnace—is more than 530,000 years old and is one of the world's most active, with more than 150 eruptions recorded since the 1600s. It ranks with other active volcanoes in Hawaii, Italy and Antarctica.

This is the third eruption this year for the volcano. The earlier ones happened in February and May.

"This is a long eruptive fissure because at the surface it is about 1 kilometer (0.62 mile) long," said Aline Peltier, a scientist at the Piton de la Fournaise Volcano Observatory. "After 24 hours we still have five eruption sites. Usually after a day we only have one. So this is very interesting."



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The lava fountains are shooting as high as 40 meters (44 yards) and are creating cones that are about 20 meters high after only one day of eruption, said Peltier. The volcano is in the Reunion National Park—a [world heritage site](#).

The volcano is not seen as dangerous because the lava flows down the east side of the mountain through an uninhabited area called the Grand Brule, or the Big Burned, toward the sea. The last times the volcano threatened the population was in 1977 and 1986.



A helicopter flies over as lava erupts from the Piton de la Fournaise "Peak of the Furnace" volcano, on the southeastern corner of the Indian Ocean island of Reunion Saturday, Aug. 1, 2015. Spewing red-hot lava, one of the most active volcanoes in the world is currently erupting on this Indian Ocean island, where the world's attention has been focused since a wing fragment believed to be from the missing Malaysian jet was discovered washed up on a beach. (AP Photo/Ben Curtis)

Far from being frightened, hundreds of people drove up the mountain to get a better look at the volcano's fireworks. Tourists and Reunion residents watched from vantage points, while volcanologists hiked closer to the [eruption](#).

"Piton de la Fournaise is very interesting because we have so many eruptions and we can study it," said scientist Peltier. "We have many monitoring tools measuring things like seismic activity, volcano deformation and gas emissions. It's a natural laboratory where we can better understand volcanic eruptions."



Volcanologists take photographs of themselves and the volcano as they stand in a field of cooled volcanic rock, as lava erupts nearby from the Piton de la Fournaise "Peak of the Furnace" volcano, on the southeastern corner of the Indian Ocean island of Reunion Saturday, Aug. 1, 2015. Spewing red-hot lava, one of the most active volcanoes in the world is currently erupting on this Indian Ocean island, where the world's attention has been focused since a wing fragment believed to be from the missing Malaysian jet was discovered washed up on a beach. (AP Photo/Ben Curtis)

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