

Hawaii officials plead for visitors to keep travel plans

May 11 2018, by Audrey Mcavoy And Jae C. Hong



The entrance to Volcano Inn is photographed in Volcano, Hawaii, Thursday, May 10, 2018. The village is located on the border of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, just a few miles east of Kilauea's summit crater. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

Warnings that Hawaii's Kilauea volcano could shoot boulders and ash out of its summit crater are prompting people to rethink their plans to visit the Big Island.

But most of the rest of the island is free of volcanic hazards, and local tourism officials are hoping travelers will recognize the Big Island is ready to welcome them.

Rachel Smigelski-Theiss is among those who have shifted gears. She had intended to visit Kilauea's summit with her husband and 5-year-old daughter and stay in Volcano, a town a few miles from the crater. Now they've cancelled their trip. She's worried potential flight disruptions would strand them on the island.

"My equivalent of this—and I'm from South Florida where we have hurricanes—is driving quite literally into a hurricane," she said.

Hawaii officials have had a busy month pleading with travelers to keep their plans even as dramatic images of natural disasters afflicting the [islands](#) have bombarded televisions and social media feeds.

In April, floods on Kauai Island made travelers nervous. Then last week, it was Kilauea [volcano](#) sending 2,200 degree (1,200 degree Celsius) lava bursting through cracks into people's backyards in the Leilani Estates neighborhood. Then as Kilauea's magma shifted underground, a magnitude-6.9 earthquake rocked the Big Island.



Steam and gas rise from Kilauea's summit crater in Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii, Thursday, May 10, 2018. The park is closing Friday due to the threat of an explosive volcanic eruption. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

Since the quake, there have been frequent aftershocks. More than a dozen fissures oozing lava have opened in the ground. Adding to the distress, of the 36 structures destroyed, 26 were homes.

And now, scientists are warning that an explosive eruption may occur at the summit crater within weeks.

Tina Neal, the scientist-in-charge of the U.S. Geological Survey's Hawaiian Volcanoes Observatory, said geologists don't expect the summit eruption to be life-threatening so long as people stay out of the [national park](#). Volcano and other nearby communities may be showered by pea-sized fragments or dusted with nontoxic ash but they aren't

expected to get hit by large boulders, she said.

Robert Hughes, the owner of Aloha Junction Bed and Breakfast in Volcano, said he's had "tons" of cancellations since Wednesday when geologists first warned of the explosive eruption.



Visitors are reflected in the window of the Jaggar Museum as they view Kilauea's summit crater in Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii, Thursday, May 10, 2018. The park is closing Friday due to the threat of an explosive volcanic eruption. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

But Hughes, a 45-year resident of the village of some 2,500 people, suspects he'll soon hear from adventurers and photographers who want to see the eruption up close.

"I'm not too worried about it because I've lived here so long and I've seen it go through lots of different episodes," Hughes said.

The town, which is nestled in a lush rainforest a few miles from the crater, is a popular overnight spot for park visitors.

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park's decision to close Friday due to the risk of an [explosive eruption](#) will discourage travelers, said Janet Coney, the office manager at Kilauea Lodge, an inn in Volcano. The lodge, which has 12 rooms and 4 cottages, has had a handful of cancellations. Coney is anticipating more depending on what happens.



Steam and gas rise along the edge of Kilauea's summit crater in Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii, Thursday, May 10, 2018. The park is closing Friday due to the threat of an explosive volcanic eruption. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

The CEO of the Hawaii Tourism Authority, the agency that markets Hawaii to the world, said Kilauea is being monitored around the clock to provide the public with the best information. But George Szigeti noted that the Big Island is "immense" and there are large parts of the island unaffected by the volcano.

Like the town of Kamuela which is home to vast cattle ranches and Hawaii's own cowboys, called paniolo. The coffee farms on the Kona side of the island, which is more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) away from where lava is erupting. There's also the night sky visible from the 13,803-foot (4207-meter) summit of Mauna Kea, the island's tallest peak and the location of some of the world's most advanced telescopes.

Ross Birch, the executive director of the Island of Hawaii Visitors Bureau, said officials "walk the fine line."

"We know what people are going through in Leilani Estates. And we don't want to seem callous and inconsiderate in our messaging and our promotion of the island," he said. At the same time, tourism is the island's biggest industry and people's livelihoods are dependent on visitors coming, he said.

"We want to make sure that everybody is still working and people have jobs to go back to," Birch said.



Visitors view Kilauea's summit crater outside the Jaggar Museum in Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii, Thursday, May 10, 2018. The park is closing Friday due to the threat of an explosive volcanic eruption. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



People visits the Jaggar Museum located near Kilauea's summit crater in Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii, Thursday, May 10, 2018. The park is closing Friday due to the threat of an explosive volcanic eruption. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



People stand outside the Jaggar Museum overlooking Kilauea's summit crater in Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii, Thursday, May 10, 2018. The park is closing Friday due to the threat of an explosive volcanic eruption. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



Raindrops sit on the plastic cover of a park ranger's hat outside the Jaggar Museum overlooking Kilauea's summit crater in Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii, Thursday, May 10, 2018. The park is closing Friday due to the threat of an explosive volcanic eruption. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



A visitor stands outside the Jaggar Museum overlooking Kilauea's summit crater in Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii, Thursday, May 10, 2018. The park is closing Friday due to the threat of an explosive volcanic eruption. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



Vehicles wait in line to enter Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii, Thursday, May 10, 2018. If Hawaii's Kilauea volcano blows its top in the coming days or weeks, as experts fear, it could hurl ash and boulders the size of refrigerators miles into the air, shutting down airline traffic and endangering lives in all directions, scientists said Thursday. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



Restaurant worker William Kauhane, 20, moves chairs at Lava Rock Cafe in Volcano, Hawaii Thursday, May 10, 2018. The village is located on the border of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, just a few miles east of Kilauea's summit crater. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



Students play volleyball at the Volcano School of Arts and Sciences in Volcano, Hawaii, Thursday, May 10, 2018. The village is located on the border of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, just a few miles east of Kilauea's summit crater. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



This Wednesday, May 9, 2018, photo shows an aerial view of the East Rift Zone, along which the Leilani Estates neighborhood sits, from the ongoing Kilauea eruption, as seen from a helicopter flying around Pahoehoe, Hawaii. Hawaii County Civil Defense official reported Wednesday morning that lava has spread across 104 acres, destroying 36 structures, most of them homes. (Cindy Ellen Russell/Honolulu Star-Advertiser via AP)



This Wednesday, May 9, 2018, photo shows an aerial view of the East Rift Zone, along which the Leilani Estates neighborhood sits, from the ongoing Kilauea eruption, as seen from a helicopter flying in Pahoehoe, Hawaii. The Puna Geothermal Venture power plant is seen at lower right. If Hawaii's Kilauea volcano blows its top in the coming days or weeks, as experts fear, it could hurl ash and boulders the size of refrigerators miles into the air, shutting down airline traffic and endangering lives in all directions, scientists said Thursday. (Cindy Ellen Russell/Honolulu Star-Advertiser via AP)

© 2018 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Hawaii officials plead for visitors to keep travel plans (2018, May 11) retrieved 4 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-05-hawaii-visitors.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is

provided for information purposes only.