

Slopes of volcano offer lush, affordable piece of paradise

May 7 2018, by Caleb Jones



This May 6, 2018 photo provided by the U.S. Geological Survey shows the lava lake at the summit of Kilauea near Pahoehoe, Hawaii. Hawaii's erupting Kilauea volcano has destroyed homes and forced the evacuations of more than a thousand people. (U.S. Geological Survey via AP)

As lava crawled down Leilani Road in a hissing, popping mass, Cheryl Griffith stood in its path and placed a plant in a crack in the ground as an offering to the Native Hawaiian volcano goddess, Pele.

Griffith lives in Leilani Estates, a subdivision on the Big Island where

molten rock from the Kilauea [volcano](#) has burst through the ground, destroying more than two dozen homes and resulting in evacuation orders for nearly 2,000 people. But the 61-year-old did not leave.

"I love this place, and I've been around the volcano for a while," Griffith said. "I'm just not one to rush off."

For many people outside Hawaii, it's hard to understand why anyone would risk living near an [active volcano](#) with such destructive power. But the slopes of Kilauea offer affordable land and a lush rural setting that attract a hardy breed of independent Hawaiian. The landscape contrasts sharply with the state's more expensive real estate on Oahu and Maui, and the bustling capital of Honolulu.

Amber Makuakane, a 37-year-old teacher and single mother of two, lost her three-bedroom house to the [lava](#). She grew up here and lived in the house for nine years. Her parents also live in Leilani Estates.

"The volcano and the lava—it's always been a part of my life," she said. "It's devastating ... but I've come to terms with it."



Lava burns across a road in the Leilani Estates subdivision on Saturday, May 5, 2018, near Pahoa, Hawaii. Glowing plumes of lava have shot hundreds of feet into the air at points, officials said, and black-and-orange ribbons of rock have curled into roadways. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones)

On Sunday, some of the more than 1,700 people who evacuated were allowed to return briefly to gather medicine, pets, and other necessities. They will be able to do so each day as long as authorities believe it is safe.

The subdivision lies within the Puna District, a region of mostly unpaved roads of volcanic rock about a 30-minute drive from the coastal town of Hilo. Everyone in the district lives on the volcano.

The people here are largely self-sufficient and understand the risks of their location. Many cannot get homeowner's insurance.

Griffith said that is the hardest part of this lifestyle—they won't be able to recoup losses. Moments later, an explosion came from a nearby burning house.



This photo shows some of the 1990 lava flow from Kilauea, one of the world's most active volcanoes, Sunday, May 6, 2018, in Kalapana, a town south of the Leilani Estates subdivision, Hawaii. Hawaii officials said the decimated homes were in the subdivision, where molten rock, toxic gas and steam have been bursting through openings in the ground created by the Kilauea volcano. (AP Photo/Marco Garcia)

Puna has thick jungle as well as dark fields of lava rock from past eruptions. The gently sloping volcano dips from its summit to Puna's white sand beaches and jagged sea cliffs.

The region has macadamia nut farms and other agriculture along with

multimillion-dollar homes with manicured lawns. Other houses are modest, sitting on small lots with old cars and trucks scattered about.

Homeowners use rainwater-catch tanks and cesspools or septic tanks. Many rely on solar power, and some live entirely off the electrical grid.

Sam Knox, 65, who was born in Hawaii and now lives just a few hundred feet from a volcanic fissure, said he decided not to leave, despite the nearby explosions and the lava being hurled into the sky and flowing across his neighbor's property.



A line of traffic is seen going towards Pahoehoe town, Sunday, May 6, 2018, near Pahoehoe, Hawaii. Scientists reported lava spewing more than 200 feet (61 meters) into the air in Hawaii's recent Kilauea volcanic eruption, and some of the more than 1,700 people who evacuated prepared for the possibility they may not return for quite some time. (AP Photo/Marco Garcia)

"It was roaring sky high. It was incredible. ... Rocks were flying out of the ground," he said. Much of the area filled with lava in just four hours.

Kilauea (pronounced kill-ah-WAY'-ah) is one of the world's most active volcanoes and has been erupting continuously since 1983. There's no indication when this particular lava flow might stop or how far it might spread. Scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey expect the flow to continue until more magma is drained from the system.

Knox has some belongings packed in case he has to make a fast escape.

"I decided to stay because I wanted to experience this in my life," he said. "I'm ready to actually evacuate, but if I don't have to evacuate, I'm just going to keep staying here because I don't have no other home to go to."



In this Sunday, May 6, 2018 photo provided by the U.S. Geological Survey, a Hawaii Volcano Observatory (HVO) geologist collects samples of spatter for laboratory analysis in the Leilani Estates subdivision near Pahoa on the island of Hawaii. Kilauea volcano has destroyed more than two dozen homes since it began spewing lava hundreds of feet into the air last week, and residents who evacuated don't know how long they might be displaced. The decimated homes were in the Leilani Estates subdivision, where molten rock, toxic gas and steam have been bursting through openings in the ground created by the volcano. (U.S. Geological Survey via AP)



In this Sunday, May 6, 2018 photo provided by the U.S. Geological Survey, a lava flow moves across Makamae Street in the Leilani Estates subdivision near Pahoa on the island of Hawaii. Kilauea volcano has destroyed more than two dozen homes since it began spewing lava hundreds of feet into the air last week, and residents who evacuated don't know how long they might be displaced. The decimated homes were in the Leilani Estates subdivision, where molten rock, toxic gas and steam have been bursting through openings in the ground created

by the volcano. (U.S. Geological Survey via AP)

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