

National park in Hawaii reopens after monthslong eruption

September 23 2018, by Caleb Jones



In this Saturday, Sept. 22, 2018, photo released by the National Park Service, park rangers hoist a flag on the first day Hawaii Volcanoes National Park reopened after volcanic activity forced the park to close for more than four

months in Hawaii. (Janice Wei/National Park Service via AP)

A national park in Hawaii has reopened after being closed for more than four months because of Kilauea volcano's latest eruption, which caused widespread damage to park infrastructure and dramatically changed its landscape.

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park officials said there were no lines or waiting for visitors to catch a glimpse of the volcano that made headlines across the world when it began erupting in May. Admission is free Saturday.

The eruption destroyed hundreds of homes outside the park while changing the popular summit [crater](#) inside the park.

The national park—normally the state's most-visited tourist attraction—had been closed for 135 days as volcanic activity caused explosive eruptions, earthquakes and the collapse of the famed Halemaumau crater. Ash clouds shot skyward from the summit crater and blanketed the region in volcanic debris.

Kilauea has been active for decades. But the eruption that began in May has transformed both the park and the rural Big Island coastline that surrounds it.

Outside the park, lava flows consumed entire neighborhoods, filled an ocean bay and created miles of new shoreline with fresh black sand beaches and jagged rocky outcrops. Inside the park, molten rock drained from the summit lava lake and vanished from view as the landscape underwent a monumental change.



In this Saturday, Sept. 22, 2018, photo released by the National Park Service tourists visit Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on the first day the park reopened after volcanic activity forced the park to close for more than four months in Hawaii. (Janice Wei/National Park Service via AP)

The summit crater floor sank 1,500 feet (460 meters), and the overall Kilauea caldera widened—expanding more than 1 square mile, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. It quadrupled in size as lava drained out of the active vent.

"This eruption was really unprecedented in the historic record," Ingrid Johanson, a research geophysicist at the U.S. Geological Survey's Hawaiian Volcano Observatory, told The Associated Press in a telephone interview. "The changes we've seen at the summit are much more

dramatic than anything that's happened in the last 200 years."

The crater looks "completely different," Johanson said. "I think people are going to be really awestruck when they see it."

However, one of the park's biggest draws—the radiant red light from the lava lake that has been a Kilauea hallmark for over a decade—is completely gone.



This Saturday, Sept. 22, 2018 photo released by the National Park Service shows tourists on the first day the park was reopened after volcanic activity forced Hawaii Volcanoes National Park to close for more than four months in Hawaii. The eruption destroyed hundreds of homes outside the park while changing the popular summit crater inside the park. (Janice Wei/National Park Service via AP)

"There is no glow at all," said Shanelle Saunders, the park's acting spokeswoman. "You can't even see your hand in front your face it's so dark in a lot of these areas. I mean, the stars right now are incredible, but there's actually no flowing lava."

The park will be open 24 hours a day, but visitors should be careful at night because of new cracks in trails and walkways. "Even if people are really familiar with those trails, they may have changed since they've been here," Saunders said.

Public access to the volcano remains limited because of damage to its infrastructure. But visitors can once again hike around some parts of the summit area and see the aftermath of the historic eruption.

"The crater rim trail is open to a certain point," Saunders said. "And from there, they can see down into the crater itself."



In this Saturday, Sept. 22, 2018, photo released by the National Park Service shows tourists get directions on the first day Hawaii Volcanoes National Park is reopened after volcanic activity forced the park to close for more than four months in Hawaii. (Janice Wei/National Park Service via AP)

The theme of this year's National Public Lands Day is "resilience and restoration," said Hawaii Volcanoes National Park spokeswoman Jessica Ferracane, who noted that [park](#) repair work had been pointing toward a late-September reopening.

"We really wanted to invite visitors back without them having to pay on that first day," Ferracane said. "The theme was so uncanny that we thought it would be a real good fit."

While [volcanic activity](#) has slowed significantly in the past month and no lava is reaching the surface at Kilauea, scientists aren't ready to declare the latest eruption over.

"There is still material that could feed into an [eruption](#)," Johanson said. "I definitely expect that [lava](#) will return one day."



In this May, 9, 2018, file photo, visitors take pictures as Kilauea's summit crater glows red in Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii. The Hawaii Volcanoes National Park will reopen its main gates Saturday, Sept. 22, 2018, welcoming carloads of visitors eager to see Kilauea's new summit crater and the area where a longstanding lava lake once bubbled near the surface. The park has been closed for 135 days as volcanic activity caused explosive eruptions, earthquakes and the collapse of the famed Halemaumau crater. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)



These 2018 images released by the United States Geological Survey, USGS,

shows past, left, and present views of Kilauea's summit in Hawaii. At left is a photo taken on Nov. 28, 2008, with a distinct gas plume rising from the vent that had opened within Halemaumau about eight months earlier. At right is a photo taken on August 1, 2018, to approximate the 2008 view for comparison. Hawaii Volcanoes National Park will reopen its main gates Saturday, Sept. 22, 2018, welcoming carloads of visitors eager to see Kilauea's new summit crater and the area where a longstanding lava lake once bubbled near the surface. The park has been closed for 135 days as volcanic activity caused explosive eruptions, earthquakes and the collapse of the famed Halemaumau crater. (USGS via AP)



In this May 10, 2018, file photo, visitors view Kilauea's summit crater outside the Jaggar Museum in Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii. The Hawaii Volcanoes National Park will reopen its main gates Saturday, Sept. 22. The park has been closed for 135 days as volcanic activity caused explosive eruptions, earthquakes and the collapse of the famed Halemaumau crater. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong, File)



This Sept. 1, 2015, file photo shows volcanic gas rising from the lava lake in Kilauea's Halemaumau Crater in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on Hawaii's Big Island. Hawaii Volcanoes National Park will reopen its main gates Saturday, Sept. 22, 2018, welcoming carloads of visitors eager to see Kilauea's new summit crater and the area where a longstanding lava lake once bubbled near the surface. The park has been closed for 135 days as volcanic activity caused explosive eruptions, earthquakes and the collapse of the famed Halemaumau crater. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones, File)

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