

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park – Kilauea Visitor Center

Located on the island of Hawaii, the exhibits in this 2400 square foot facility focused on the geological history of the volcanic islands, the flora and fauna, and the deep traditions of the native Hawaiian people.

In addition to designing the graphics for these exhibits, I provided copy direction as well as material and color selection.

Above: The appearance of white-tailed tropicbirds (kōle lea) indicated to Polynesian voyagers that land was near. These seabirds nest in steep cliffs at Kilauea's summit but fly to the ocean to feed. Look for them soaring above the caldera.

Wings transported most life to Hawai'i

Migratory birds carried live cargo
For thousands of years, plovers, curlews, tattlers and other migratory birds have flown across the Pacific Ocean to spend winters on the Hawaiian Islands. These feathered cargo-carriers transported seeds in their bellies or on their bodies. Small snails and insects may have also hitched rides on birds.

Surviving a trans-oceanic flight was not easy, but thriving on a still-growing volcanic island was perhaps even more difficult. Only a few fortunate species found suitable habitats and were able to reproduce. Those hardy pioneers were the ancestors for most of Hawai'i's native flora and fauna.

Seabirds brought some life
Seabirds, like this sooty tern, also carry life to Hawai'i from their nesting grounds on other Pacific islands.

Did Hawaiian hoary bats ('ōpe'ape'a) fly here on wing power alone – or were they blown off course by a storm?
Ancestors of Hawai'i's only native land mammal came from the Americas, but how they got here remains a mystery.

Hard-to-digest seeds survive long flights
Oleane Hawaiian raspberry (ʻŌleane)

Plovers fly from Alaska in two days
Pacific golden plovers (kōlea) leave their arctic nesting grounds each August to winter in Hawai'i. Navigating by sun and stars, they fly at 60 miles (100 km) per hour.

Ancestral stowaways hung on with barbs, bristles and glue
Kōkōku Bush clover

Large insects reached Hawai'i on wings and wind
Kamohāuli butterfly (Kamohāuli) Giant Hawaiian dragonfly







Mauna Loa and Kilauea erupted out of the sea and gave rise to extraordinary communities of plants, animals and people.

It takes everyone to care for them.

Spending 4 hours or more? Add these to your park tour



Drive the Chain of Craters Road
36-mile (58 km) round-trip

Hike amazing trails

1 First 4 miles (6 km)
View pit craters, cinder cones and lava tree molds.
Stop at viewpoints along the Chain of Craters Road to see spectacular volcanic formations.

2 From Mauna Ula to the sea
Explore vast fields of lava erupted from 1969 to 1974.
See Mauna Ula, an 1880-striking volcanic vent, and drive through rivers of lava that cascaded over Kilauea's steep-pill (cliffs) during its frequent eruption.

3 End of trail
View recent lava flows and Kilauea's newest land.
Witness Kilauea's changing landscape. Since 1983, when there was no rim around the Pu'u 'Ō'ō vent, more than 500 acres of new land have been added to the island.
If no hot lava is flowing in the park, this is where you'll see it. For daily updates, go to the "Witness a volcanic eruption" exhibit.

4 Ripukekahua
Wander through a peaceful native forest.
Enjoy the serene beauty of plants and birds found only in Hawai'i. This kōpaka, an island of native forest, grows on fertile volcanic ash surrounded by Mauna Loa lava flows.
Easy 1-mile (1.6 km) loop trail.

5 Pu'u 'Ō'ō
Climb a forested cinder cone.
Turn 360 degrees at the top of Pu'u 'Ō'ō for a panoramic view of craters, flows, and 360° lava flows. On a clear day, you can see a distant herring gull.
Pu'u 'Ō'ō, the active vent for Kilauea's ongoing eruption.
Moderate 3-mile (4.8 km) round-trip hike begins at Mauna Ula parking area.

6 Pu'u Le'a
Join one of the largest petroglyph fields in the world.
Follow a trail walked by generations of native Hawaiians to a sacred petroglyph, where thousands of 'Ōi'opaka (petroglyphs) have been carved in the volcanic rock.
Easy to moderate 1.5-mile (2.4 km) round-trip trail.