

# VOLCANO TOURISM AND SAFETY CONCERNS



Volcanoes can be both wonders and dangers. They provide tourists with a unique encounter with nature, but they can also disrupt air travel, coat the land with ash, and devastate towns. Volcanic eruptions are potentially lethal. Is volcano tourism safe?

It is estimated that there are approximately 1,500 active volcanoes worldwide. With the worldwide growth of tourism, **the chances of travelers being impacted by volcanic eruptions have increased significantly.** Bali, previously a destination for independent travelers, attracts more tourists.

## Over a Hundred Active Volcanoes in Indonesia Alone

Approximately 450 active volcanoes are in the Pacific Ring of Fire, with 127 in Indonesia alone. In 2010, Mount Merapi, situated on Java, spewed eruption clouds up to 18 kilometers into the sky. Fortunately, the area around the volcano had been evacuated days before the eruption, preventing the loss of many lives. Despite this, Mount Merapi remains one of the most dangerous volcanoes in the world.

But volcanic activity risk isn't limited to faraway places. Mount Etna in Sicily is one example of a volcano that threatens Europe. In December 2018, the volcano experienced several small eruptions and quakes. Despite this, Mount Etna still attracts many travelers for volcano tourism, who can easily reach the site through hotel bus tours. During outbreaks, volcanologists have the critical task of informing tourists and keeping them away from the volcano. However, some holidaymakers still want to witness the lava fountains at night, which can be dangerous.

## Italian Volcanoes Are Popular with Tourists

Mount Etna can cause unexpected explosions, as was the case in 2017 when lava flowed over snow, resulting in vapor gas explosions that caused injury to tourists. Stromboli, located north of Sicily, is another popular attraction that can be easily accessed by ferry from Naples. Climbing to the top is allowed. However, a guide and a good fitness level are required. Additionally, experts have warned that Vesuvius and the neighboring Phlegraean Fields are active volcanoes that could erupt at any time.

## Responsible Volcano Tourism

Responsible volcano tourism is crucial, according to experts. Vacationers should take the time to educate themselves on the subject. Experts emphasize the dangers of volcanic activity and provide travel and security advice for their respective countries.

It is important to note that the level of risk varies depending on the specific location within a region. For instance, the recent Kilauea volcano eruption resulted in lava flows and damage on the Big Island. However, tourists who planned to travel to other islands in the archipelago could do so without restrictions.

In reality, the risk of tourists getting hurt during a volcanic eruption is relatively low compared to other dangers. People often underestimate the risks posed by high altitudes and bad weather.

## **Volcano Trekking and Lava Lakes**

Volcanoes can cause disruption not only to locals but also to travelers from other regions. For example, the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland (2010) led to several days of air traffic suspension in northern and central Europe. Despite this, Iceland tourism remains popular.

If you're interested in exploring these geological wonders, experts recommend doing so with a knowledgeable guide who can provide insight into their history and fascinating details.

Volcano trekking is also popular outside Europe, especially in Central and South America. In the Andes, majestic volcanoes are over 5000 or 6000 meters high. Chile alone has 80 active volcanoes. Cotopaxi in Ecuador, which is occasionally active, is one of the most picturesque volcanoes in the world. Its ash has even reached the nearby capital, Quito.

### **Eruptions remain unpredictable despite improved monitoring. Less than 20% of active volcanoes receive proper monitoring.**

It is rare to find volcanoes with open lava lakes, but Nyiragongo in eastern Congo is an exception. It has the largest open lava lake and stands at 3470 meters high. The volcano is in Virunga National Park, also home to mountain gorillas. Visitors to the crisis area can hike up the volcano and spend the night in simple huts on the crater rim. During the night, the lava glows, reminding one of the mountains of fate in "The Lord of the Rings." Once you witness this ancient spectacle, it leaves an unforgettable impression.

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