

# The volcano burning through homes in Hawaii

Would you live near a volcano? In Hawaii, 26 homes have been destroyed by molten hot lava spewing from the ground near the mighty Kilauea. Around 1,700 residents have been forced to flee.



**Go with the flow:** Scientists do not know when it will end; it could be days, or months. © Getty

When school teacher Amber Makuakane closed her door on Friday, she knew she may never return. She took her two children, a bag of clothes and some important documents — and said goodbye. Later, her fears were confirmed; she spotted her home in ruins in aerial footage of Hawaii.

The **Kilauea** volcano has been erupting on the island since Thursday. At least 26 homes have been destroyed so far, with hundreds more at risk.

Kilauea is one of the most active volcanoes in the world; technically, it has been erupting for the last **35 years**. “It’s always been a part of my life,” Makuakane said.

That is because Kilauea sits above a hotspot of molten rock a few miles under the ground. The **magma** needs a way out; normally, it bubbles up in the surrounding national park. However, last week there was “a major readjustment with the volcano’s plumbing system”, according to one scientist. The **lava** began erupting in a new area to the east —

right beneath people’s homes.

“Lava is extremely gassy,” one scientist explained; it is like shaking a can of Coke and waiting for it to explode. As the pressure built up underground, **fissures** cracked open in the streets. Elsewhere, **vents** spat out toxic **sulfur dioxide** and “lava fountains” taller than the Statue of Liberty.

It’s not over — there has been about one earthquake an hour since Thursday, and there is still more magma waiting to burst free.

Luckily, no one has lost their life yet. But they have lost other things. Some people were forced to leave behind pets. Corey Hale wistfully recalled a compass belonging to her great-grandfather. “At this point, I’ve got what I’ve got on my back,” she said.

And yet, some residents are surprisingly relaxed. “The land doesn’t really belong to us. It belongs to **Pele**,” said Jordan Sonner, a Hawaiian resident, referring to the Hawaiian volcano goddess. “We get to live on it while we can, and if she wants it back, she’ll take it.”

crater collapsed, pushing the magma back down under the ground and forcing it to emerge elsewhere. So far, no one has been killed or even injured. However, yesterday, Hawaii’s governor requested emergency help from the federal government.

**Q: What do we not know?**

Would you live near a volcano?

## Hothouse

Of course not, cry some. Knowing that your home could be destroyed at any moment sounds terrifying. Even if you outrun the lava, there is a risk of toxic gas killing you instead. And losing a home is devastating; the best insurance still cannot replace items with sentimental value. It is better to stay far, far away.

There are surprising upsides to volcano life, argue others. The views are fantastic. The soil is the most fertile in the world. The tourism is great for jobs and the local economy. But most of all, it’s a reminder that nature is far more beautiful and powerful than anything humans create. “It’s just awesome to see the Earth alive right in front of you,” one Hawaii resident explained. What’s a little risk compared to that?

**A:** How long the eruption will last. When a similar eruption happened in 1955, it went on for 88 days. It is also difficult for scientists to predict where and when new vents might open up in the ground, which is why so many people had to evacuate the area.

## Q & A

### Q: What do we know?

**A:** It is relatively easy to predict when a volcano might erupt. Scientists first noticed something was up with Kilauea on April 30, three days before the eruption. This is when the floor of a

## YOU DECIDE

1. If you had to flee your house, which three things would you take with you? (Not including people and pets.)
2. Would you live near an active volcano?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Draw and label a diagram which explains how volcanoes erupt.
2. One of history's most famous volcanic eruptions happened in 79 AD, when the Italian town of Pompeii was wiped out by Mount Vesuvius in a single afternoon. "Darkness fell, not the dark of a moonless or cloudy night, but as if the lamp had been put out in a dark room," wrote a witness at the time. With this story in mind, write a short story or poem which expresses how it might feel to live near a volcano.

## SOME PEOPLE SAY...

*"Men argue. Nature acts."*  
Voltaire

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

## WORD WATCH

**Kilauea** – The island of Hawaii's youngest and most active volcano.

**35 years** – It has been slowly erupting since 1983, but not with the kind of dramatic lava fountains seen in recent days.

**Magma** – Molten rock beneath Earth's surface.

**Lava** –

This is the name we give to magma once it is above the surface. This lava is over 1,000C, but it moves at less than one mile per hour.

**Fissures** – A long crack in Earth's surface which lava escapes through. New fissures have formed around Kilauea since Thursday.

**Vents** – Anywhere that lava erupts. The central vent is found in the crater of the volcano, but lots of secondary vents can appear nearby.

**Sulfur dioxide** –

A life-threatening gas which can burn the nose and throat.

**Pele** – One of the most famous Hawaiian deities, Pele is the goddess of fire and volcanoes. In legends, she lives below Kilauea's main crater. She is also the creator of Hawaii's islands.

## BECOME AN EXPERT

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