

Visiting a volcano? A guide to keep you safe



Before your visit

Know before you go, regardless of whether you are taking a guided tour or are on your own. Volcanoes can be a dangerous place and lives endangered due to lack of preparation, inadequate communication of risk and unexpected events. Most countries have volcano observatories and emergency management offices that will be the official source of information and advice. **Look for information on their website and social media, along with the local tourism office.** Information to look for and questions to answer include:

- ❑ **How active is the volcano?** Alert levels may be used to convey the level of activity.
- ❑ **What restrictions are in place?** Stick to authorized or recommended areas.
- ❑ **What hazards are possible?** For example, pyroclastic flows, flying rocks (ballistics), lahars, noxious gases, and volcanic ash are especially hazardous.
- ❑ **Check tracks and routes carefully:** which ones are providing the best views while limiting exposure to volcanic hazards? Do you have the required level of fitness to move fast on these routes if needed?
- ❑ **Check the weather forecast and pick a good day:** rainfall can trigger mud flows (lahars). High humidity will create steamier environments, which reduce visibility and safety.
- ❑ **What Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) or clothing is needed?** These might include a helmet or a gas mask

During your visit

- ❑ **Respect all restrictions set by authorities.** They are in place **for your safety.**
- ❑ **Limit your time in areas close to the volcano.** PPE will only be of limited help in an eruption.
- ❑ **Keep your eyes on the active vents.** Shelter or turn back if an unexpected eruption occurs. Look up to locate flying rocks and take shelter (e.g., behind boulders, with your pack on top of you). Some of the deadliest volcanic hazards (pyroclastic flows, which can include extremely hot gas and volcanic matter, and lahars) tend to be ground hugging and follow valleys, but energetic flows may extend into adjacent areas. **Do not go if these hazards are possible.**
- ❑ **Stay upwind from the crater.** This reduces risks from noxious gases and ash, avoids the risk of getting lost due to poor visibility and allows for vastly better photography!
- ❑ **Closer is not always better for photographs:** the best way to capture the grandeur of volcanoes is from some distance to provide a sense of scale.
- ❑ **Stay on the trails:** Even when not erupting, volcanoes can present serious hazards: for example: suffocating gas ponding in low-lying areas, unstable hot ground that could collapse under your weight, steep terrain, boiling water and steam. **Always remain in well-ventilated areas.** Do not venture unguided into caves: most lethal gases cannot be smelled.
- ❑ **Wear appropriate PPE and clothing:** for example: mountaineering helmet with chin strap, N90 mask for ash and dust, gas mask with appropriate filters if in areas with noxious gases, goggles/sunglasses to protect your eyes from ash and steam. Wear long sleeves and long pants and suitable footwear, even in warm weather. Gloves if you will walk over uneven/sharp terrain (such as old lava flows).

After your visit

- **Volcanic environments are tough on people and gear.** Corrosive chemicals and abrasive ash particles (i.e., minuscule shards of broken glass) need to be carefully washed away.
- **Wash yourself thoroughly** to limit skin and eye damage by acid gas and ash
- **Thoroughly clean your equipment**, especially cameras, glasses, and watches; volcanic particles (ash) are incredibly abrasive; wash carefully to avoid damage. Various metals, including silver will tend to rust or stain. It is best not to wear or carry any exposed metal when you visit volcanoes.
- **Share these good practices** (for example, on social media) and include what you did to mitigate risk, ensuring a safer and memorable experience.

Learn more about Volcanic Hazards



OTHER USEFUL LINKS

Volcanic Health Hazards: <https://www.ivhhn.org/>

Volcano Observatories around the World: <https://wovo.iavceivolcano.org/members/>

The International Association of Volcanology and Chemistry of the Earth's
Interior (IAVCEI)

<https://iavceivolcano.org>