



Go With the FLOW

Feel the heat of the earth's most extraordinary, natural infernos. Enter the arcane world of magma, lava, and ash-spewing craters on these five adrenaline-inducing volcano adventures. ▶

by PAUL RUBIO

Matthew Kuhn/Tandem Skills + Motion



KILAUEA, Hawaii

LEVEL EASY

DESCRIPTION Within the volcanic island chain of Hawaii, no natural spectacle wows more than Kilauea Volcano on the Big Island. This shield volcano is the most active of the five volcanoes that compose the island, and though its current eruption began back in 1983, Kilauea has been spewing some of its most lust-worthy lava fireworks in 2016. The spectacular lava curtains fountain high above the volcano's eastern rift zone at Pu'u 'Ō'ō crater, bubbling toward the skies and flowing south toward the ocean at Kamokuna, generating new real estate daily. Meanwhile, the active Halemaumau Crater within the summit caldera continues to smoke and glow through the vent of a boiling lava lake.

JOURNEY While possible to view Kilauea's activity from a distance at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, the only way to truly immerse in its power is by helicopter. Take off from Hilo airport, gateway to Hawaii's above-air volcanic adventures. Hover just 500 feet above the lava on the "Volcanoes & Waterfalls Extreme" tour with **Paradise Helicopters** and prepare to sweat big-time—your door-less Hughes 500 helicopter eliminates all boundaries between you and Kilauea. Aspiring and professional photographers and filmmakers should consider a private photography charter.

EXPERIENCE Feel the extreme heat wafting up from 1,500-2,000-degree molten rock below, and capture some spectacular imagery. You'll get a chance to cool down when this 45-minute air tour later hits the awesome tropical rainforests of Puna and waterfalls of north Hilo before returning to Hilo airport. According to Calvin Dorn, owner of Paradise Helicopters, this tour is ideal for both beginners and volcano experts. Even the novice will gain "a sobering perspective of unbelievable geothermal energy at the core of our earth" while devotees will appreciate the "nuances of the type of volcano, composition of the lava, type of flow, and minerals produced, coming away with a newfound appreciation for the subtle differences of the Hawaiian volcanoes." Dorn adds, "If you fly the eruption site 10 times in a day you will see something different each time." And each time falls nothing short of mind-blowing.

From \$282 for the 45-minute tour; paradisehelicopters.com.



AMBRYM, Vanuatu

LEVEL MODERATE TO INTENSE

DESCRIPTION Most volcanologists will tell you Ambrym is the Holy Grail of volcanoes. The volcano comprises a large tropical island in the South Pacific Ocean with minimal infrastructure, where traditional villages miraculously remain untouched by the outside world and volcanic activity is woven into local custom and folklore. While rainforests dominates much of this basaltic volcano, its center is marked by an immense 7.5-mile-wide caldera, a lunar landscape of sand planes, palm and grass oases, old and young cinder cones, a labyrinth of erosion gullies, and two highly active craters, Marum and Benbow. There, the lava boils like cauldrons of fire, splattering the terrain like wet paint and illuminating the night sky.

JOURNEY Since 2009 Dr. Tom Pfeiffer of **Volcano Adventures** has been conducting group trips to Ambrym with a maximum size of 10. Three times per year, Pfeiffer's French volcanologist colleague, Yashmin Chebli, leads "Volcanoes of Ambrym—the Grand Traverse," an eight-day peregrination that indeed traverses the Ambrym caldera and includes three days of exploring the active lava lakes of Marum and Benbow and three days of immersing in the traditions and culture of the Nivane people of Endu. Conditions permitting, you'll even get the chance to abseil (or rappel) into Benbow crater. The trip demands a high level of physical fitness with long hikes over treacherous terrain.

EXPERIENCE Expect daily trekking and climbing through the slippery jungle and steep ascents and descents. Sometimes reaching Benbow or Marum mandates trekking over exposed ash ridges, often engulfed in clouds and rain. Other times, an abundance of volcanic gas requires the use of a proper gas mask (don't worry Volcano Adventures has you covered—literally). However, the rewards are handsome for taking this dangerous road less traveled. Even Dr. Pfeiffer, who's seen countless eruptions across the planet, still gains inspiration from his first trip to Ambrym. On that trip, he vividly recounts, "I abseiled to the first terrace of Benbow, where I watched an active vent in awe. It was splattering wildly, like the mouth of a breathing monster."

From \$2,960 for eight days; volcanoadventures.com. ▷



Opposite: Top left, David Moskowitz/Random Stills + Motion; top right, G. Brad Lewis/Getty Images; bottom right, Vicki Jaaron/Babylon and Beyond Photography/Getty Images.



ERTA ALE, Ethiopia

LEVEL MODERATE

DESCRIPTION At the Danakil Desert, one of the hottest landmasses on Earth, daytime temperatures easily rise to 125 degrees Fahrenheit daily. The ethereal landscape—characterized by acid ponds, fumaroles, geysers, and blanketed in mounds of sulfur and salt—reflects these harshest of harsh climatic conditions. At the center of this natural inferno lies the mammoth boiling lava lake of the broad, domed Erta Ale volcano, one of the world's five continuously erupting lava lakes, and the one which can be accessed the closest on foot.

Tom Pfeiffer

JOURNEY Under the guidance of professional German volcanologist Dr. Tom Pfeiffer and his scientific team, outfitter **Volcano Adventures** runs multiple, 14-day “Desert, Salt, and Volcanoes” tours per year during the relatively cooler months of mid-November to mid-March. As part of this expedition, you'll traverse the vast no man's lands bordering Ethiopia and Eritrea, witnessing unimaginable geothermal formations and phenomena. The highlight is camping out for three days and three nights around the caldera of Erta Ale, exploring the vicinity and working on capturing prize-worthy shots of the lava's glow. This hardcore group experience (maximum size of 11) is tailored to those serious about volcanoes, photography, and straying far off the beaten path.

EXPERIENCE Volcanoes err on the side of unpredictability, but Erta Ale is an exception. You're pretty much guaranteed the glowing, red-hot lava that volcano dreams are made of. You can go as far as you can stand the heat, getting as close as a half-dozen feet from the caldera's edge, with lava bubbling up and breaking through the crust just a few feet below. Expect early mornings and late nights when the temperature is most bearable and volcanic glow is most photogenic.

From \$4,860 for 14 days; volcano-adventures.com. ▷



MOUNT BROMO, Indonesia

LEVEL EASY-MODERATE

DESCRIPTION The island of Java houses 45 of the archipelago's 130 active volcanoes, none more picturesque than Mount Bromo, which rises 7,545 feet toward the heavens, surrounded by three wide hills, together so perfectly framed by an empty, vast caldera. Tucked into Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park in East Java, Mount Bromo periodically erupts every 1 to 6 years; and since late 2015 continuing to press time, high levels of activity and excessive spewing of ash and rock have mandated the demarcation of an exclusion zone 1 km from the crater rim.

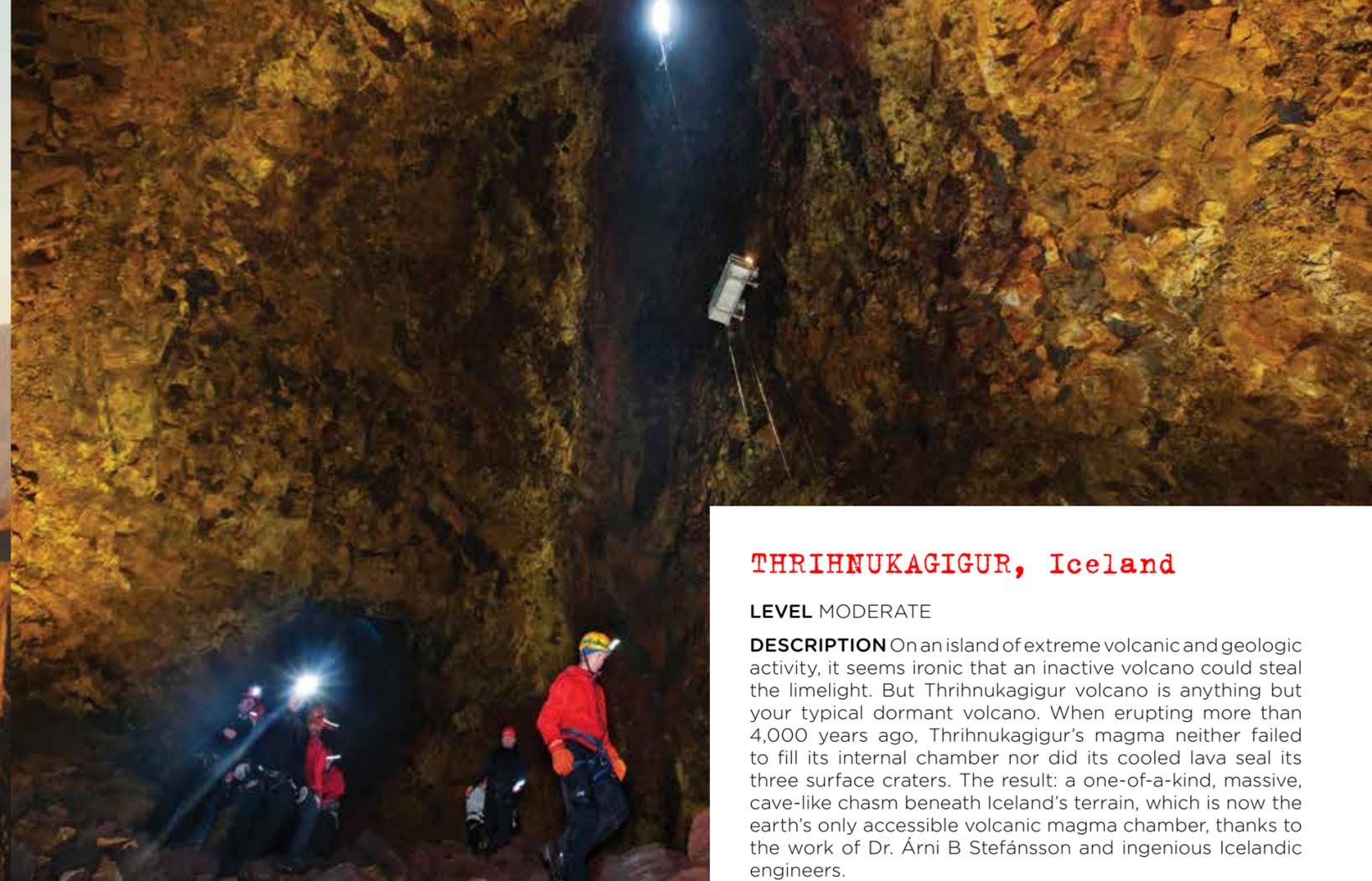
JOURNEY Thanks to the infrastructure in Java, Mount Bromo is easily accessible as a day tour. However, the most comfortable and hassle-free way to experience this natural marvel is with luxury outfitter **Remote Lands** on its three-day "Volcanoes of East Java" program. This trip is an easy

add-on when visiting Bali, with direct pickup from your Bali hotel. A journey by land and sea takes you to Java's volcano-strewn lands. In Java, you'll not only hike and horseback ride up to Mount Bromo but also visit another renowned volcano in Java, Mount Ijen, which is crowned by a blazing blue acid lake—in fact, the most acidic on Earth.

EXPERIENCE Rise and shine at 4 a.m. for a predawn horseback ride to the summit of Mount Bromo in time for sunrise. Listen for the eerie sounds of rumbling and degassing, often followed by spewing ash surging from the crater. Wear layers—it's remarkably cold here in the early morning hours—and carry a tripod. The ultimate landscape shots unfold as the sun swallows the cloud cover above the volcano and neighboring Mount Semeru appears in the distance, emitting chains of steam into the sky.

From \$930 for three days; remotelands.com.

Kyle Hammons/Handem Still + Motion; Opposite: Top, K. Maack; bottom, Evelina Kremsdorf.



THRIHNUKAGIGUR, Iceland

LEVEL MODERATE

DESCRIPTION On an island of extreme volcanic and geologic activity, it seems ironic that an inactive volcano could steal the limelight. But Thrihnukagigur volcano is anything but your typical dormant volcano. When erupting more than 4,000 years ago, Thrihnukagigur's magma neither failed to fill its internal chamber nor did its cooled lava seal its three surface craters. The result: a one-of-a-kind, massive, cave-like chasm beneath Iceland's terrain, which is now the earth's only accessible volcanic magma chamber, thanks to the work of Dr. Árni B Stefánsson and ingenious Icelandic engineers.

JOURNEY Your access pass into the heart of Thrihnukagigur volcano is a day trip from Reykjavík with **3H Travel**, the sole operator offering the "Inside the Volcano" tour. From a starting point at Blue Mountains Country Park, it's a moderate, 45-minute hike across lava fields to reach the crater. Once atop the volcano, don your helmet and harness and enter an innovative metal cage of sorts (think: a contraption that lowers window cleaners along a skyscraper), descending for six minutes under the earth to reach the chamber's nadir. Once inside, gawk and roam for 30 minutes through the multihued, cavernous interiors with your tour guide and fellow group members (typical size is 18-20 people, though private tours can be arranged).

EXPERIENCE Don't let Thrihnukagigur's convenience daytrip accessibility fool you—the experience is challenging. You'll likely be white-knuckled during the descent, but the rare opportunity to stand inside a volcano truly merits the overused "once in a lifetime" label. So far, nobody has been able to completely explain how this empty chamber phenomenon occurred. The main hypotheses include the theory that magma atypically solidified in the volcanic walls or the magma actually retreated or drained deeper into the earth. Create your own theory trekking inside the volcano or simply revel in the inspiring beauty of one of Mother Nature's greatest enigmas.

From \$360 for a 5-hour tour; insidethevolcano.com. ♦

