

Hawaii Shows Us What it's Made Of

Lest we forget how the Hawaiian Islands came to be there in the first place, Kilauea volcano seems eager to demonstrate the process. A volcanic hotspot in the earth's mantle has left a 3,600 mile-long trail of islands and submerged mountains in its wake as the Pacific Plate migrates slowly above. While the other 7 islands in the Hawaiian chain are ancient artifacts of long-extinct volcanoes, the Big Island itself is still under construction.

This image from May 13, 2018 reveals just one of the problems generated by the 85 million-year-old hotspot beneath the eastern tip of the Big Island - a plume of smoke and ash penetrating thousands of feet into the atmosphere. Aircraft engines breath air, and even a little volcanic ash can gum up the works and cause them to seize right up.

The youngest of the Hawaiian volcanoes to have breached the ocean's surface, Kilauea's latest outburst has also produced hot lava-spewing fissures that have obliterated whole neighborhoods, and deadly clouds of sulphur dioxide gas that threaten to poison any people or wildlife that might wander too close.

Although Kilauea's latest eruption has been a nightmare for residents of the island, there's a strong argument to be made that it is also quite beautiful in an "Ain't nature AWESOME!" kind of way.



Image credit: NASA

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