



The Burning Island: Myth and History of the Hawaiian Volcano Country

Pamela Frierson

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Westerners—from early missionaries to explorers to present-day artists, scientists, and tourists—have always found volcanoes fascinating and disturbing. Native Hawaiians, in contrast, revere volcanoes as a source of spiritual energy and see the volcano goddess Pele as part of the natural cycle of a continuously procreative cosmos. Volcanoes hold a special place in our curiosity about nature.

The Burning Island is an intimate, multilayered portrait of the Hawaiian volcano region—a land marked by a precarious tension between the harsh reality of constant geologic change, respect for mythological traditions, and the pressures of economic exploitation. Pamela Frierson treks up Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano, and Kilauea to explore how volcanoes work, as well as how their powerful and destructive forces reshape land, cultures, and history. Her adventures reveal surprising archeological ruins, threatened rainforest ecosystems, and questionable real estate development of the islands. Now a classic of nature writing, Frierson's narrative sets the stage for a larger exploration of our need to take great care in respecting and preserving nature and tradition while balancing our ever-expanding sense of discovery and use of the land.

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