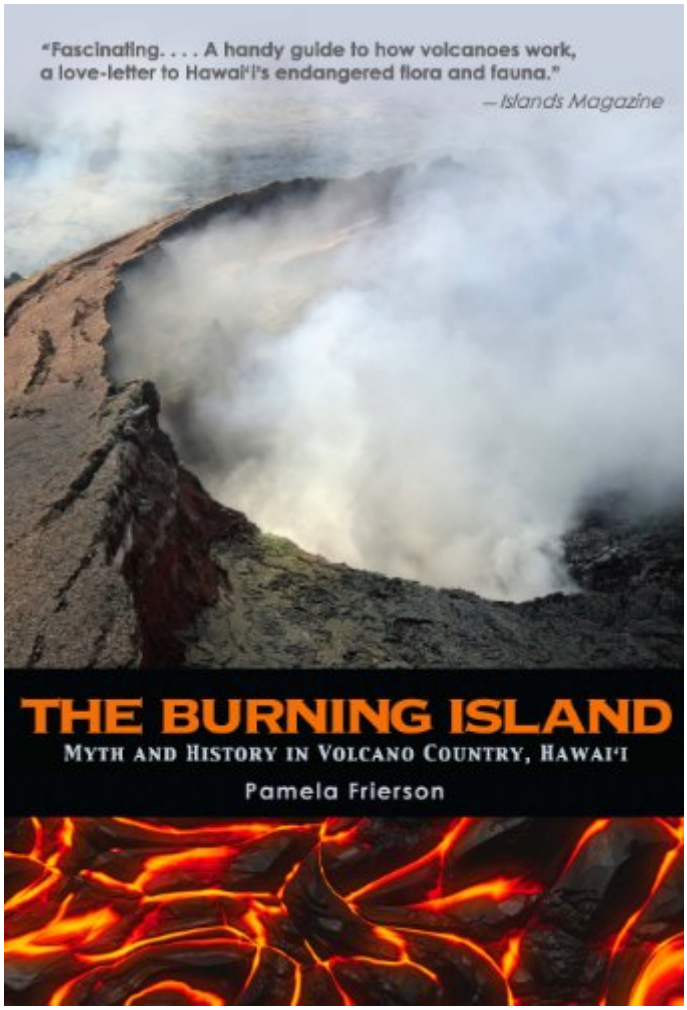
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The Burning Island: Myth And History Of The Hawaiian Volcano Country



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Synopsis

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 worldÃ¢â ¬â„¢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, FriersonÃ¢â ¬â„¢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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Customer Reviews

Although I have been to the Big Island many times as a tourist, pleasantly brushing up against Kilauea and Mauna Loa, I always felt a need to come back to stay for awhile, to be present. Pamela Frierson’s Preface to the Burning Island describes my feeing perfectly: "I had lived all that time in a place I had never really seen, or seen only dimly, with a vision clouded and distorted."In this one volume the author gathers together a great deal of background information about the volcanoes; their origin, formation and eventual wearing down and returning to the sea; the dynamics of an active volcano with its cinder cones, calderas and mighty rift zones; the historical and scientific exploration by the west starting with the arrival of whaling ships; the flora and fauna of the surrounding country side and the losses to invasive exotics and abuse by humans.And I think most importantly the inclusion of Hawaiian archaeology and mythology gives the story depth. Pele, goddess of the volcano and the myths surrounding her give the reader a sense of the Hawaiian’s way of explaining and finding a place in the unknown and unknowable.It is difficult for me to understand and empathize with a native culture but this book takes me a good way along in that journey. To me it is a guide book.

I was hoping to read something insightful about this fascinating place, but unless you’re a vulcanologist or professionally interested in the history of vulcanism on the Big Island, I’d give this book a pass. The author talks about hiking the volcanoes, and it’s obvious she’s interested, but I never was. She goes here and she goes there, but it doesn’t add up to much. The book can’t decide if it’s a memoir, journalism, history or ?.Maybe the problem is, when you strip the myth away from Pele, there’s nothing left but a bunch of black rocks.I couldn’t finish it.

I found this book at a museum in Hawaii and finished it before my trip was over. It’s clear that Frierson loves the islands and did her research. If I was going to write a book about the islands, it would cover the same things Frierson did; in other words, she touched on everything on wanted to know -- volcanology, biology, Hawaiian legends, culture -- and did so in a very seamless way, weaving it all into a comprehensive story. She does tend to go off on philosophical tangents, but they are usually so brief and fleeting that if you don’t particularly relish this sort of thing, it isn’t overly distracting. Her anecdotes about her experiences in the area only serve to improve the book, and

she further consults a number of experts and locals for a unique perspective. Although I am educated in geology, I believe that unlike the first reviewer, most people will find the book accessible. I found her writing style to be thoughtful and engaging.

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