

Aloha Adventure

Sizzling lava, hidden waterfalls, dramatic waves... unimaginable beauty awaits in Hawaii. Four photographers divulge their best secrets for capturing the islands' majestic landscapes.

By Jennifer Chen

KALAPANA, THE BIG ISLAND
Kory Lidstrom captured lava hitting the ocean using a Canon EOS 5D Mark II with a 70–200mm f/2.8L Canon EF IS lens set to 100mm. Exposure: 1/160 sec at f/2.8, ISO 800.

WAIPIO VALLEY, THE BIG ISLAND
Lidstrom photographed this waterfall with a Canon EOS 5D Mark II and 16–35mm f/2.8L Canon EF lens set to 20mm. Exposure: 1.3 sec at f/16, ISO 200.





Imagine visiting a place where you could photograph untouched snow-capped mountains and only a few hours later capture a sunset over a black sandy shore with a sea turtle as your photo assistant.

Sure, Hawaii is known for its sunny beaches, tropical breezes, and relaxed vibe. But its unusual microclimates allow you access to some of nature's best beauties. The crystal blue waters are home to fascinating underwater subjects, chirping native birds live in the forests, active volcanoes spew out glowing molten earth, and, if you're lucky, you can watch the red-hot lava pour directly into the ocean for an unparalleled sight.

We spoke with four photographers who are experts on the islands to learn what makes Hawaii's diverse environments so intriguing. They shared their tips for uncovering gems in one of the world's most photographed places.

Getting Around

The main airport in Hawaii is Honolulu on Oahu, but there are direct flights to the Big Island, Maui, and Kauai as well. All four photographers agreed that the Big Island is the best place for photographing Hawaii's varied microclimates; Kory Lidstrom counts it as his personal favorite. "You've got snow-capped mountains, lava, rain forests, and desert areas all in one place," says Lidstrom. In particular, he encourages photographers to explore the Puna region of the island, which he deems "the Wild West of Hawaii." The region is the least populated, and, he adds, "it's undiscovered."

The photographers recommend flying to Kona on the Big Island and then heading over to the Hilo side, which is rainier and offers more ready access to volcanoes, waterfalls, and rainforests. "Staying in the same hotel the whole time is easiest," says Lidstrom. "Since it's

OCEAN IN KILAUEA, KAUAI
Jon Cornforth captured this ocean scene using a Sony Alpha 7R and 16–35mm f/4 Canon lens (mounted using Metabones adaptor) with a Singh-Ray 3-stop reverse graduated ND filter. Exposure: 1/2 sec at f/18, ISO 50.

KAMOAMOA, HAWAII VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK
G. Brad Lewis captured ferns growing out of lava rocks on Fujifilm Velvia 50 film using a Pentax 6x7 camera. Exposure: 1/30 sec at f/22, ISO 40.

an island, you're never more than a few hours from anywhere." Jon Cornforth advises taking a week-long trip, focusing on one island, and renting a car to hit all the sites. "You really need to rent a 4x4," says Lidstrom. "Some of the best locations are only reachable by 4x4."

Lookout points abound on the islands, but getting off the beaten path is one way to photograph images that are unique. "If you have your camera with you all of the time and go along the little side trails or spend the day on the beach wandering, it's incredible what you can get," says Varina Patel. Cornforth, who recently made Kauai his home, pokes around on Google Earth for potential shoot locations, and admits that perusing postcards at the grocery store will give him ideas of places he should check out. Lidstrom adds, "For landscape photography, scouting is always crucial. Some of my mentors have

said that for every hour you spend shooting, you should spend four or five hours scouting."

When venturing out to shoot hot lava, Lidstrom recommends taking a boat tour. "A boat is actually the safest way to shoot it. Nothing is going to happen to you." Guidebooks and researching locales online are some ways to find the right spots, but when Lidstrom wants the inside scoop, he asks the locals.

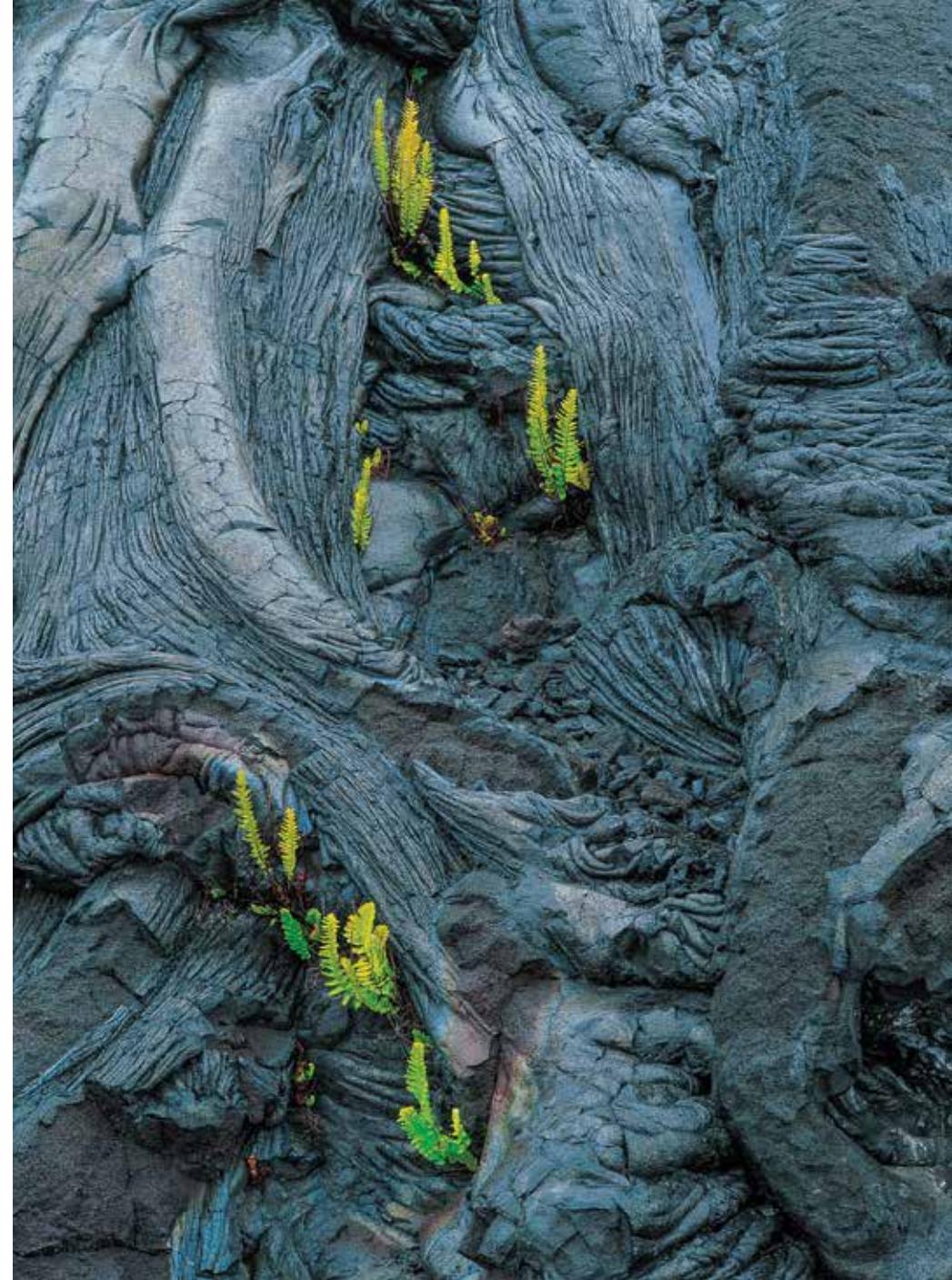
What to Bring

With such varied terrain, you want to bring the best equipment you can while still packing sparingly. That means light-as-possible tripods, an array of filters, zoom lenses, and durable bags.

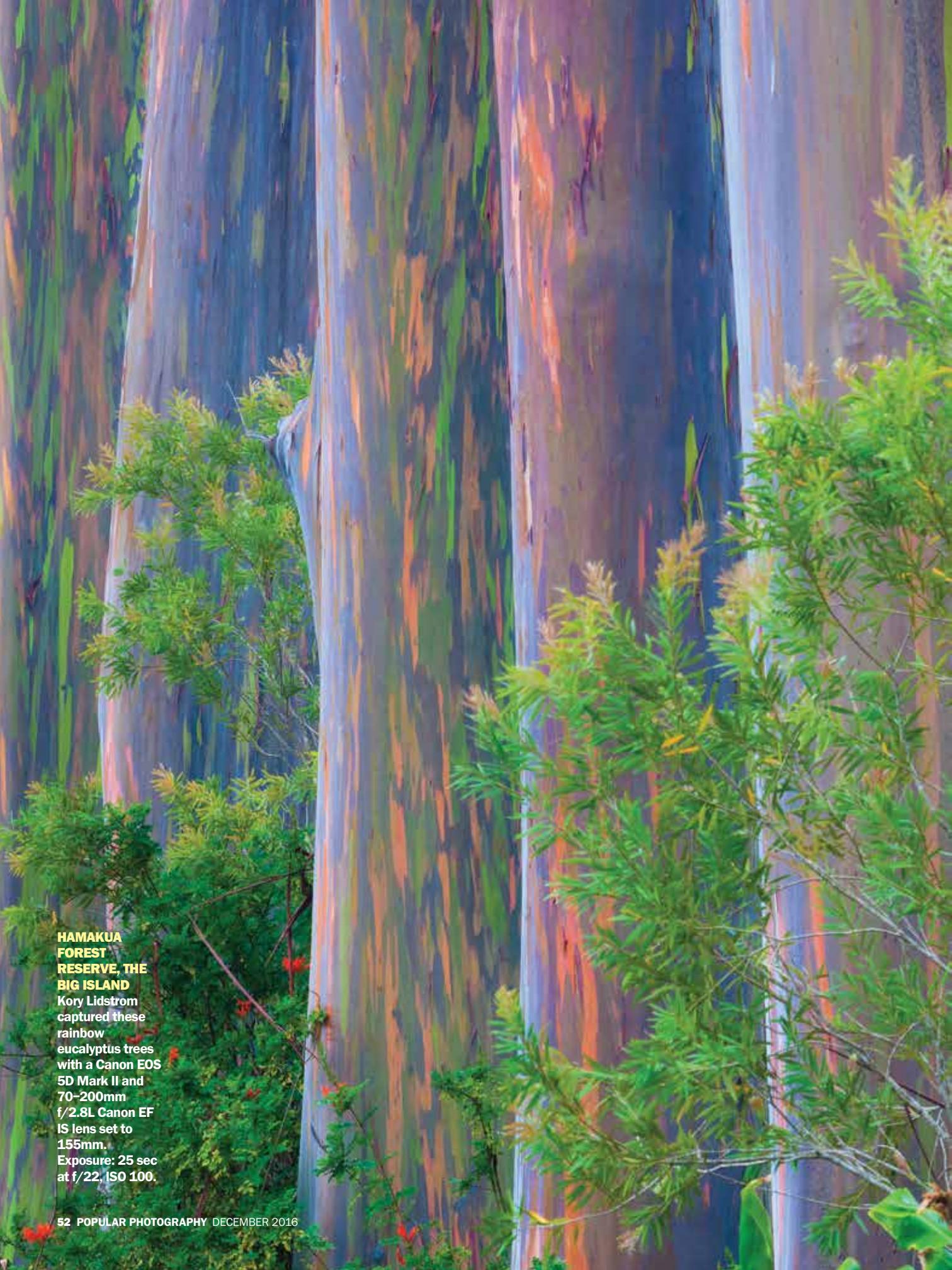
Lidstrom likes zoom lenses for their versatility. He shot Kalapana on the Big Island using his image-stabilized 70–200mm f/2.8 lens. "I was at the widest aperture you can get, f/2.8. A lot of experts on lava will say not to bring a fast lens, but when you're shooting on a boat, you need to keep that shutter speed up," Lidstrom explains.

For his waterfall image on page 49, Lidstrom opted for his Canon 16–35mm f/2.8L because he wanted a classic wide-angle landscape shot. Lidstrom waited until the mist in the background was in the right position before he pressed the shutter. "In landscape photography, you're always trying to create depth out of a two-dimensional medium," says the photographer.

Varina Patel, who captured the bluff and wave on pages 53 and 54, respectively, advises using graduated neutral-density filters. For the Steaming Bluff image, Patel used one to reduce the amount of light coming in through the upper half of the frame without affecting the lower half. She also used a graduated filter for the wave on Cape Kumukahi to balance the bright sky with the turquoise ocean.



WAIPIO VALLEY, THE BIG ISLAND
Lewis photographed this eroded beach stone on black sand using his Nikon N90 and Fujifilm Velvia 50 film. Exposure: 1 sec at f/16, ISO 40.



HAMAKUA FOREST RESERVE, THE BIG ISLAND
Kory Lidstrom captured these rainbow eucalyptus trees with a Canon EOS 5D Mark II and 70–200mm f/2.8L Canon EF IS lens set to 155mm. Exposure: 25 sec at f/22, ISO 100.



Lidstrom recommends carrying standard neutral-density filters, too, especially when shooting moving water like waves or streams in bright light. “It allows you to increase your shutter speed to capture the level of texture in the water that you prefer,” he says.

And a polarizing filter is a must. Lidstrom adds, “Polarizers are incredibly useful for making jungle greens look lush and they take the glare off of the water, which one is constantly shooting in Hawaii.”

For toting equipment, Conforth uses a rugged camera backpack, a waterproof duffel bag, and he packs a small umbrella and paper towels, too. “These are all essentials in wet conditions, and it can be very wet in Hawaii,” he says.

Island Secrets

The untouched snow Cornforth captured at the summit

MAUNA KEA, THE BIG ISLAND
Jon Cornforth photographed this pristine snowfall with a Canon EOS 5D Mark II and 28mm f/2.0 Zeiss Lens with Singh-Ray LB Warming Polarizer. Exposure: 1/20 sec at f/16, ISO 100.

CAPE KUMUKAHI, THE BIG ISLAND
Varina Patel caught this wave using a Canon EOS 5D Mark III with a 70–200mm f/2.8L Canon EF lens and a 1.4X multiplier and Vu graduated ND filter. Exposure: 1/1600 sec at f/8, ISO 200.



of Mauna Kea (above) was an image 10 years in the making. He waited for a storm to dump a ton of snow on the summit and then ventured out. The radical elevation change—going from sea level to 13,500 feet—isn’t for the faint of heart. It took Cornforth 30 minutes to walk

a few hundred yards. “I could only take five or ten steps in the soft snow before I was out of breath,” her recalls. He hiked to a section of snow where nobody else had stepped, looked around for the kind of composition he wanted—clean and simple with no distracting elements—and



shot it with his Canon EOS 5D Mark II, a Zeiss 28mm lens, and a Singh-Ray LB Warming Polarizer.

Near Cornforth's Kauai home, there's a sinkhole that fills with incoming waves. Sometimes it can be a dangerous spot, particularly during the winter, because of wave heights, and other times of the year, the area has no waves at all. "Look at the weather

KILAUEA CALDERA, VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK
Varina Patel captured Steaming Bluff using a Canon EOS 5D Mark III with a 24–70mm f/2.8L Canon EF lens. Exposure: 1/160 sec at f/18, ISO 400.

and surf forecast. If there's going to be 30-foot waves crashing, do not go there. If you're contemplating going, ask some locals what they think. I've set the gold standard for myself that if I don't see local people in the area, it's probably not safe for anybody."

Chatting with native Hawaiians can lead to wonderful, hidden areas otherwise unknown

to tourists. Lidstrom's image of Monet-esque rainbow eucalyptus trees on page 52 came about after a local saw him setting up his tripod. "He mentioned to me that there is a cool spot where there are a whole bunch of these trees right in a row."

For the photo, Lidstrom used his Canon EOS 5D Mark II and a telephoto lens (70–200mm f/2.8L Canon EF IS lens) to compress the depth of field. He used an f/22 aperture to make sure all of the trees were in focus. He shot it at 25 seconds with a tripod.

Hawaii offers a huge variety of terrains to explore, from rocky beaches to rainforests. While you might not be able to capture every single thing on your bucket list, with the right equipment and a sense of adventure you can surprise yourself with the number of different images you can get. Just keep an open mind, and take the roads less traveled. 🌿

Hot Spots

Our four photographers reveal the best places to photograph in Hawaii.

• **Volcanoes** Hawaii Volcanoes National Park is a must for capturing amazing lava. Varina Patel shares, "It's the only place on any of the islands where the lava is flowing. Go online and find out when and where the lava is flowing each day." Take special note of when the lava is flowing directly into the ocean. "Without question, it's the most incredible thing you will ever see in your life," she says.

Jon Cornforth suggests hitting the lava flows at twilight to see them glowing. Brad Lewis, who has spent 30 years photographing Kilauea, the most active volcano on Earth, warns that shooting volcanoes can often damage camera equipment because of the acid steam, which can fry electronics and ruin lenses.

• **Rainforests** Lewis also encourages photographers to check out Molokai. "It's an incredible rainforest like none other on the planet," says Lewis.

On the Big Island, you'll want to head to the rainier east side of the island, which contains several tropical rain forests. "Find the waterfalls, such as Rainbow Falls and Akaka Falls—they are breathtaking," Patel advises.

• **Beaches** Cornforth suggests hitting Secret Cove, a famous beach on Maui whose local name is Paako Beach. With pristine, clear water, panoramic views, and lava rocks, this is a picturesque destination for a reason. Cornforth recommends visiting the not-so-secret Secret Cove at sunset, particularly after a storm has passed, for dramatic cloud formations.

Patel says that all beaches in Hawaii are public land. "It doesn't matter how fancy the hotel is, there has to be beach access so you can get to any beach."

Hawaii's beautiful beaches vary from black-and-white sand to rocky areas, and black lava. On Kauai, Cornforth suggests exploring Ke'e Beach, looking down the Pali coast. "It's usually the best during the winter time because the sun is further to the south, so the sun sets closer to the coast," says Cornforth.

• **Mountains** The snowy summit of Mauna Kea on the Big Island that Cornforth shot was not one that comes around often. The road to the summit is often closed because of adverse conditions after a storm. But if it is open, Cornforth suggests making the trek there, though he warns that the steep elevation gain is "really difficult for a lot of people." He adds, "I've managed to tough it out a few times, but there are health concerns people need to think about before going up there." At the summit, Cornforth found quite a crowd, so he hiked around a crater rim to the other side to find a clean patch of snow.