

# Let's go watch some lava!

When we are Kid, we all learn (more or less) what a volcano is. How it erupts, the lava, the cooling and even the times when a volcano has done great damage. We all have a few concepts and vocabulary related to volcanoes in our heads. Many of us must have thought "Wow, it would be so cool to see an active one", well not like Vesuvius, but still, even lava and all that.

When you live on the Reunion's Island and for a long time, well it's a chance you can have. And I had this chance. Well, I don't really like the word chance (or luck), because we make our own choices and they lead us to live experiences, but if the volcano decides not to be active for 10 years... there's not much you can do. Reunion Island has one of the most active volcanoes on our planet, the Piton de la Fournaise. I lived on the island for two years and was lucky enough to have that it erupts three times. When this happens, we say "le volcan la pété" (means the volcano explode but in French is like a joke to say "the volcano farted" – and it's funny because this volcano is not an explosive volcano).

And yes, when it erupts, you can see everywhere "the volcano la pété". The first time I was crazy! I had already been there for 4-5 months, and I had already climbed it with my friends during the Van's trip! I had just started my job in Saint-Pierre and had a new gang via the hostel where I was staying. So, everyone said yes to go up there! Here we go, on December 7th, 2020, to live an extraordinary experience!

The second time, I must admit that between the health restrictions and the weather...even if the eruption lasted two months, I didn't go... But the last one, it was at the end of December 2021, my uncle was there, and he wanted to do it so much, that with my cousin we warmed up to do it with him at night! And that's how we went to see some hot lava on December 23rd in the evening!

Well, you can imagine that I'm not going to give you every detail of these two expeditions... Well, some of you know me well, but that wouldn't make sense and it would be very long. Even if, as you can imagine, I want to share everything, the ride, the excitement, the encounters, the sensations, this incredible show... I'm going to make it a bit more constructed and more generalized, in the sense of a global experience and not a particular one.

When we learn on the island that the volcano is erupting, we have already been informed for several days that this could happen. They even close the enclosure. This is the top of the volcano, where the Dolomieu Crater is located, I already told you about it. It's here at the Pas de Bellecombe that the entrance to the hikes to walk on the top of the volcano and thus to go to the Dolomieu Crater is located!

Why closes the enclosure? Because it is in the enclosure that the faults are generally created and the lava comes out, so that the ground becomes unstable and above all that it becomes very dangerous. It's quite common for people to defy the ban and go into the enclosure as close to the fault as possible to see the lava even more intensely. Some come back with nice

pictures and memories, others fall and die. Yes, I know, this moment is awkward, but it must be said.

Photo already seen in one of my articles. You can see an old lava flow and especially this wall around which shows where the name enclosure comes from.

So here we are, for several days everyone has been waiting, we close the enclosure and Bam one morning the headlines in the regional newspapers (I'm nice to linfo.re...) "The Volcano la pété".

The first thing to know is: Where is the fault and therefore the lava stream located? (You can also put them in the plural) By chance, the two I am talking about were located on the south/southwest side! For people who don't know what it's mean, this means that the show is visually accessible from the Piton Bert! What is it? This is part of the "cliff" that makes up the enclosure! There is a long hike all the way to the top which gives a view of the enclosure and the various craters. So, on the fresh flows. You must start from the Parking Foc-Foc, just after the "Plaine des Sables".

I haven't lost you yet? This information may be useful to all the people who will be there at the time, so I am including it in the article.

Imagine now, the volcano erupts, and there, between the native people or those who have been living on the island for a very long time, who have seen a few eruptions but think "well it's been a while, I'll go and have a look"; those like me who have been here for a short time or who simply love these experiences and jump at the opportunity, and finally, the best for last, the tourists! Those who chose the perfect time to come, who are "lucky" enough to be there at an incredible moment! Imagine, all these people going up to the volcano! That's a lot of people, isn't it?

I add a detail, if for example the last eruption lasted a good month, the very first one went out after a very short time. In my memory, it was 24 hours. So, if you say to yourself "I'll go this weekend", it might be too late... so you usually go quickly.

The first time, we went up before sunset, at about 4.30 pm we were there. The second time I was there at 10:30-11pm (the time I was on the start line the first time). Why am I telling you all this? Because you have to earn the piton! I'm telling you. All these people in the same place, only one road and a big car park but not huge either, and above all a lot of stupid people. Yes yes, I dare to say it.

Now imagine that on this straight-line people are double-parked... on both sides! So just leaving room for one car to pass... as long as it fills up it's fine (and still), but when the first ones start to leave, and the ones who come for the night arrive... then it's a problem, and a little. I remember for the first time we were stuck for an hour in the car park, not being able to move. And some people had already been waiting for a while. The second time was no better as we couldn't move at the straight line of the plain. And yes, we had arrived at the very moment of the crossroads. Impossible to move, and the police don't necessarily come to regulate the traffic.

So, if you go, pay attention to the time and especially to where you park. And the "no big deal, everyone else is doing it" attitude may turn out to be completely stupid...

The hike to admire the spectacle: Not very difficult, even at night with a good headlamp. It's flat and rather easy to access. Depending on the axis of the fault, you will have to walk, but go to the end of the path, generally an even more stunning view awaits you there.

When? If the noise made by the magma is impressive during the day as well as at night, for the visual spectacle, night is the best time. Some people go as far as to bivouac at the top! And it's a very good idea! It can (or even will) be cold but with the right equipment, the right friends and above all the desire, it will be perfect! Like that, a Sunset (if we arrive early) and especially a Sunrise/lave, a pretty cool combo! I was working too early to be able to do it the first time, and for the second one we came back at 4am already, and it was the 24th of December and we had to do something! Hihi

And what do we see?

As always, there's no need to mince words, you can see some crazy photos thanks to professional photographers who are authorized to go down into the enclosure, or via the helicopters, or even those from the Piton Bert which are very well equipped! The Internet is great for that because you can see all that. Our photos are obviously more amateurish, but we now manage to take some pretty nice pictures. And if you have a good pair of binoculars, you can see some details! Because yes, we are far enough away to be safe, but close enough to really see something! From the formation of the flow when the sun goes down, to the explosion in the crater(s) in formation, that bright orange red! I remember our joy and wonder the first time. I think all the little worries of life...gone for a few moments!

What I remember about the second expedition? My uncle's amazement at the sight. Because yes, even at sixty years of age, we still have our children's eyes, and we remember that we wanted to see a volcano when we were little and were shown photos at school.

The return is often late, tired, in the cold, but with a lot of memories (and the camera). When will the next time be?

You should know that the Piton de la Fournaise is one of the most active on our dear planet! So, plan your visit to Reunion Island and maybe you will create your own luck by seeing "le piton la pété" on arrival!

In the meantime, I say,

Kiss kiss Bang bang