Nine Must-Have Volcano Books

By Dana Hunter

Alien Volcanoes by Rosaly M.C. Lopes and Michael W. Carroll

So you've got an astronomy buff on your list, and you want to entice them into the earth sciences, yeah? Perfect. All they need is this book. Lots of folks don't even know astrogeology is a thing, but this excellent tome says it with extraterrestrial volcanoes. It covers a wide range of volcanism, from lunar basalt flows to cryovolcanoes and beyond. Photographs of volcanic worlds like Io are accompanied by photos of earthly examples (when there's even a parallel), and rounded out by lovely artists' impressions. All of that visual candy is complemented by Rosaly's clear and informative prose. This is a beautiful gift. And you know what? Don't be afraid to get it for your kids. They may not understand all the words, but it's exactly the kind of visual feast that got so many of us into science.

The Burning Island: Myth and Mystery in Volcano Country, Hawai'i by Pamela Frierson

Kindle Nook

Do you know someone who needs a book that is equal parts science text and literary feast? The kind of book that will immerse you in history, mythology, volcanology, and travel all at once? The kind of book that not only tells you how the volcanoes work, but how they feel and smell and taste and profoundly affect you? This is that book. It's that rare kind of book that can speak to scientists and enthusiasts, but also literary sorts and those who really want to get to know the earth spirits. You utterly cannot go wrong with this book. It's a beautiful tribute to Hawai'i's volcanoes, Hawai'i's first peoples, and the scientists who have diligently learned Pele's secrets.

Earth on Fire: How Volcanoes Shape Our Planet by Angelika Jung-Huettl (author) and Berhard Edmaier (photographer)

Would you like to leave a hefty present under the tree? Do you need that spectacular, showy centerpiece of a book that will make jaws hit the floor when the wrapping paper is ripped away? This is that book, beyond any doubt. This is the kind of book you need a table to read on. It begs for a display stand. It wants its own room.

Inside, enormous photographs catch the world's volcanoes in the act. Many of the images are gorgeous. Some are terrifying. Most will leave the viewer struggling to arrange sounds into actual words rather than disjointed collections of random syllables. And each one is accompanied by a marvelous informational paragraph or few, so it's not just eye candy, it's educational! Get this book if you want to make everyone in the room drop everything to turn the pages together.

Island on Fire: The Extraordinary Story of a Forgotten Volcano That Covered a Continent in Darkness by Alexandra Witze and Jeff Kanipe
Okay, so we can all agree that Iceland is freaking awesome, yes? I mean, it's a bit of the Mid-Atlantic ridge above the sea; of course it's awesome. And we know it's had many famous eruptions within the last century, including Surtsey, Heimaey, and the spectacular mess of Eyjafjallajökull (or The Volcano Which Shall Not be Pronounced). But before all those, there was Laki, which erupted back in the late 18th century and makes all the rest of these volcanoes look like mere firecrackers. This marvelous book frames the dramatic tale with chapters on Heimaey before taking us back in time to when Laki pretty much made it look like the European world might end. Along the way, Iceland's volcanology is lovingly explored, and we're introduced to many other volcanoes that either have caused or will cause Very Bad Days for the people in their shadows. If you know someone who'd love to know more about Iceland, this is absolutely the book to get them.

Resurrecting Pompeii by Estelle Lazer

This is the must-get book for that Pompeii-obsessed person on your list who relishes the forensic details of grim death and adores hard science. This is an intensely-researched, informatively-illustrated, clearly-written, unflinching look at how the victims of Mount Vesuvius died. It says a lot about archaeology, pathology, volcanology, geology, and history, among other sciences. It's the definitive work on those haunting victims whose forms were forever preserved in ash. It's brilliant.

And the paperback cover is velvety-soft. It's fancy enough to make an impressive gift, and a pleasure to read inside and out.

Pele: Goddess of Hawai'i's Volcanoes by Herb Kawainui Kane

This book is especially for two people on your list: those who love volcanoes, and those who love myths. It's also great for people who love art - Kane's Pele paintings are exquisite. It's also for people who like Hawai'i, or cultural anthropology, or – look, pretty much anybody should like this book.

I didn't even mean to start reading it when I got it, but I looked at the first painting and read the first sentence, and then oops, I was many pages in. I had to force myself to get back to what I was supposed to be doing! It draws the reader straight in. This book is a definite win. Get it.

Vesuvius by Gillian Darley

This is a fascinating book about our fascination with one of Europe's most deadly volcanoes. Darley explores what people have thought about Vesuvius from ancient times through the Romantics and now. You'll meet some fathers of geology, some incredibly dedicated amateur volcanologists, and a family of science-minded 19th century women who risked life and limb to explore Vesuvius during some of it's many eruptions. The chapter on geology is more of a geologic history, but it's solid and satisfying. And the writing throughout is superb: solidly researched and vividly detailed. This is about the closest thing to a time machine we've got. So if you know someone on your list who would love to be transported
through the centuries to explore Vesuvius through many eyes and attitudes, this is the book to get them.

*Volcano: Nature and Culture* by James Hamilton

*Kindle  Nook*

Do you have an artist on your list? Get them this book. The geology inside is merely rudimentary, but the art is spectacular, and the impact of volcanoes on artists makes for fascinating reading and viewing. From paintings to woodcuts, etchings to mixed media, from ancient to modern times, from natural to religious to political art, a lot of ground is covered. And the photographs are gorgeous, too. This makes a handy little present that will keep any art lover enthralled for hours – and sneaks in some volcano science to boot.

*Volcanoes in Human History: The Far-Reaching Effects of Major Eruptions* by Jelle Zeilinga de Boer and Donald Theodore Sanders

*Kindle  Nook*

This book is so smooth, people. It's like cognac. And it covers a lot of ground regarding the impacts volcanoes have on people. Along with the familiar Hawai'i, Iceland, and Vesuvius, the book covers Thera, Tambora, Krakatau, Pelée, Tristan da Cunha, and our own Mount St. Helens. Sidebars touch on Toba, Merapi, and how Pelée affected the Panama Canal. If there's someone on your list who would really enjoy sinking in to tales of volcanic mayhem told in rich, restrained prose, this is a great choice. It's also essential for that person on your list who may be wondering why the heck we should spend money on volcano monitoring. Heck, send a copy to Bobby Jindal and Trump's Cabinet if you're feeling petty. It is a really excellent exploration of the reasons why it's important to understand and watch our beautiful, dangerous fire mountains.