

FAQs – Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park Air Tour Management Plan

What are the provisions of the Air Tour Management Plan?

The plan provides for the continuation of air tours at reduced levels over the park and within a half-mile of its boundary to protect natural and cultural resources, the integrity of Native Hawaiian sacred sites and ceremonial areas, visitor experience, and wilderness.

Specifically, the plan:

- Authorizes up to 1,548 air tours per year on three specific routes within the established boundary. This is a significant reduction from existing levels of more than 11,300 flights per year.
- The air tours can occur between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. local time on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Qualifying air tours using quiet technology may fly from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on those days, as well as on Wednesdays.
- Designates three air tour routes that avoid the summit of Kīlauea and protect key cultural and natural resources, visitor use areas, and park wilderness. Air tours will be limited to these routes.
- Identifies no-fly days to include:
 - Sundays
 - Six traditional Hawaiian holidays:
 - End of Makahiki (typically in January)
 - Zenith Noon (typically in May)
 - Summer Solstice (June)
 - Zenith Noon (typically in July)
 - Start of Makahiki (typically in October)
 - Winter Solstice (December)
 - Two dates that honor and acknowledge important Hawai'i Island ali'i, people of traditional nobility:
 - Ruth Ke'elikōlani (February 9)
 - Bernice Pauahi Bishop (December 19)

What is the purpose of the Air Tour Management Plan at Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park?

The objective of the Air Tour Management Plan, under the National Parks Air Tour Management Act, is to establish acceptable and effective measures to mitigate or prevent significant adverse impacts, if any, of commercial air tour operations on the park's natural and cultural landscapes and resources, Native Hawaiian sacred sites and ceremonial areas, wilderness character, and visitor experience.

What commercial air tours are subject to the Air Tour Management Plan? And where?

Commercial air tours subject to the plan are powered flights for compensation or hire for the purpose of sightseeing over Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park or within a half-mile outside the park's boundary at altitudes below 5,000 feet above ground level. Additionally, the plan establishes three air tour routes

that avoid the summit of Kīlauea and protect key cultural and natural resources, visitor use areas, and park wilderness.

Does the Plan require that air tours follow specific routes and/or fly at certain altitudes?

Yes, the plan specifies routes and altitudes. If pilots are on or entering a route and encounter weather that does not allow them to proceed further along the route at the prescribed altitude, they must safely exit the route and either follow another route where weather conditions allow or exit the plan boundary.

Operators may not deviate from the designated routes and altitudes except as necessary for safe operation of an aircraft as determined under Federal Aviation Regulations requiring the pilot-in-command to take action to ensure the safe operation of the aircraft. The pilot-in-command should return to designated route and altitude as soon as safely possible after the hazard has passed.

Does the Plan specify when commercial air tours could occur? Why are specific operating conditions recommended?

Yes. Sections 3.4, 3.5, and Appendix A of the Air Tour Management Plan specify proposed days and times when air tours may occur. The plan for Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park includes conditions designed to protect natural and cultural resources, Native Hawaiian sacred sites and ceremonial areas, Wilderness character, and visitor experience. These conditions include an annual limit on number of authorized air tours, designated routes, minimum altitude, specific types of authorized aircraft, day and time restrictions, and restrictions for particular events. Section 3 of the draft ATMP sets out the operating conditions for authorized air tours .

Will park visitors be able to hear commercial air tours from the ground?

Whether a visitor on the ground can hear a commercial air tour depends on a number of factors, including proximity to the flight path, type of aircraft, other sources of noise, and surrounding landscape features. Visitors near an aircraft's flight path are more likely to hear the aircraft passing overhead, but other noise sources such as vehicles, people, insects and other wildlife activity, wind, and precipitation can mask the sound of an aircraft. Terrain features and buildings, which block the direct line-of-sight between a noise source and a visitor also may have an effect.

How does the Air Tour Management Plan protect cultural resources in the Park?

The annual flight limits and designated routes in the ATMP are intended to protect cultural resources and related cultural landscapes and ethnographic resources throughout the Park by limiting the number of potential disturbances caused by commercial air tours. The plan includes conditions identified during consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

How would the plan protect Native Hawaiian sacred sites and cultural practices?

The measures outlined in the plan (routes, altitude, day of week, time of day, annual number of flights) are designed to protect culturally significant lands, properties, ceremonies, and

practices. It allows restrictions for particular events, time-of-day, and day-of-week, which are intended to prevent noise interruptions of cultural Native Hawaiian practices and Park events.

What factors were evaluated in establishing the ATMP?

The -EA analyzed each alternative for its potential impact on park resources, including:

- Soundscapes (e.g., noise or noise pollution);
- Native wildlife, including federally listed species;
- Cultural Resources including sacred landscapes and Traditional Cultural Properties;
- Wilderness character; and
- Visitor experience.

How are air tours regulated outside of the plan boundary?

Applicable regulations that govern aviation safety are found at [14 CFR § 136](#), [Appendix A](#) (formerly Special Federal Aviation Regulation 71), and any FAA exceptions issued to individual operators as outlined by the [Hawai'i Air Tour Common Procedures Manual](#).

How many comments were received during the public engagement period in developing the Plan?

The FAA and NPS received 5,447 correspondences, including two different form letters, which comprised 97%, or 5,290, of the total number of correspondences. Copies of the comments are included in the Record of Decision for the Air Tour Management Plan.

What, if any, are the differences between the draft and final Plan?

A summary of the changes as published in the Air Tour Management Plan:

- The number of tours per year authorized under Alternative 3 was reduced from 1,565 to 1,548 because two operators are no longer conducting commercial air tours over the Park.
- The Pu'u'ō'ō Route was clarified as a counterclockwise route. Time limits on hovering, loitering, and/or circling were clarified as being permitted for no more than one minute in a given location for up to five minutes total per air tour.
- The lateral offset for the Coastal Route was clarified as requiring a 2,000 foot (ft.) lateral distance from shore at all times. The ¼-mile buffer on either side of a route that indicates the acceptable range of deviation that would not trigger enforcement action was clarified to not apply to the Coastal Route.
- The altitudes for the Coastal Route were changed to require a minimum altitude of 2,000 ft. above ground level (AGL) when flying southwest-to-northeast and a minimum altitude of 3,000 ft. AGL when flying northeast-to-southwest.
- Route deviation procedures were clarified to specify that the pilot-in-command should return to designated route and altitude as soon as safely possible after a hazard has passed.
- Six no-fly days per year based on the Hawaiian Moon Calendar and Makahiki Season, and two no-fly days per year to honor and acknowledge important Hawai'i Island ali'i were added as restrictions for particular events. Daily air tour limitations were added for each operator.