Nyiragongo Volcano, a New Tourist Attraction in Congo DRC

In recent years the Nyiragongo Volcano has been one of the most voluminous lava lakes. This is precisely what has created so much tourism in the area as it is not often one gets the opportunity to see an active volcano. Hakuna Matata Tours is one place visitors can go to get details and information while planning to hike Nyiragongo volcano. Tours begin at 8:00 a.m.

Washington, DC (PRWEB) July 22, 2010 -- Lakes of hot lava are one of the most spectacular forms of volcanic activity, but they are very difficult to see since there are only a few of them in the world at any given time. So, if you want to see a really impressive lava lake, you have only one option left: Nyiragongo.

Nyiragongo is a stratovolcano located in the east of Congo (DRC), at around 19 km from Goma in the Virunga Mountains, which are associated with the Great Rift Valley, and is the most active volcano in the world. It is most well known for its location with Rwanda, which is just west of the border.

The main crater of Nyiragongo Volcano is around two km wide and contains a lava lake. There are currently two distinct cooled lava benches within the crater walls. One of the lava benches is around 10,400 feet while the lower one is approximately 9,800 feet. In addition, while the depth of the lava lake has varied, its maximum elevation was recorded at 10,700 feet just prior to the January 1977 eruption.

In recent years it has been one of the most voluminous lava lakes. This is precisely what has created so much tourist attention in the area as it is not often one gets the opportunity to see an active volcano. Hakuna Matata Tours is one place visitors can go to get details and information while planning to hike Nyiragongo volcano for themselves.

Nyiragongo Volcano and Nyamuragira are actually responsible for 40 percent of Africa's historical volcanic eruptions. This gives an idea of its intense history and what kind of damage it has done in the past.

Following a major eruption in 1977, lava lakes actually began to reform in the crater with eruptions in 1982-1983 and in 1994. Another major eruption took place on January 17, 2002, after a great deal of seismic and fumarolic activity had taken place. Lava did reach the outskirts of Goma town and streamed from three spatter cones. Over 400,000 people were evacuated from the city and across the Rwandan border.

As a result of the volcano, around 45 people died from asphyxiation by carbon dioxide and buildings collapsed. Around 15 percent of the Goma and 45,000 buildings were destroyed and around 120,000 people were left homeless by the lava and earthquakes. It has been considered as the most destructive effusive eruption in modern history. The eruptions temporarily drained the lava lake in the summit crater while volcanic gases suffocated the heather forests on the upper slopes. Now the forest is recovering, and the wildlife is beginning to return.

However, there is still a close eye on Nyiragongo Volcano today as it did erupt six months after the start of the 2002 eruption. Activity is ongoing, but it is currently confined to the crater. This is where another lava lake has begun to form around 250 meters below the level of the 1994 lava lake. And while the goal is to keep the city and the people safe from any devastating eruptions again, it is a terrific tourist destination with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see a live volcano.
Hiking Nyiragongo Volcano Program:

The hike up to and down from Nyiragongo is strenuous and takes about 4-5 hours in often hot conditions. However, the path is relatively easy and not excessively steep; there are a lot of rare birds and small mammals along the trail. The tour starts at 8:00 a.m. A guide from Hakuna Matata Tours will meet hikers at their hotel either in Goma/Congo or Gisenyi/Rwanda and transfer at the supermarket where they can shop for packed food for lunch and dinner. At 9:00 a.m. transfer from Goma town to Kibati village where the climb starts and where hikers will be briefed by their guide. At 11:00 a.m. start climbing and arrive at the top late in the afternoon at around 3:00 or 4:00 p.m. Visitors will admire the lava lake all the evening/overnight in tents on the rim of the giant crater high above the violently active lava lake.

Next day after breakfast at 7:00 a.m., back down and arrive in Kibati village at around 10:00 or 11:00 a.m. Meet your driver and transfer to Goma or Gisenyi at 12.00 p.m.

Equipment to Bring:

Walking boots, a day backpack, light dressing, waterproof clothing, sunglasses, and warm clothes for the upper region of the volcano where hikers will spend the night and walking poles for hiking.

The Facts:

Permits to hike Nyiragongo Volcano cost $200. You can hire camping equipment, book permits and arrange transportation to Nyiragongo through the tour company Hakuna Matata tours.

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