

Delayed by volcano

 By [Rod Baker](#)

29 Apr 2010

The eruption of Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull volcano had a massive impact on many spheres - from the airlines, to events, to travel, to health, import and exports, and more, and its impact is likely to be felt for a long time - and that's even should the eruption cease completely - which it hasn't!

"Sorry Darling, won't be back tonight - I've been delayed by a volcano," is not a line you will often be able to use, but it probably was - more than once, recently in Europe when Iceland's "Big E" - Eyjafjallajökull volcano, erupted - and promptly brought northern Europe to a virtual standstill, in the air, anyway.

I was in Valencia, Spain, for the Festival of Media (www.festivalofmedia.com), organised by London-based C Squared Events, and the volcano's impact was apparent to all but the blind.

Initially something like 500 delegates were expected to register on Sunday, 18 April, and the balance of 200 or so between 8am and 9.30am on Monday morning. By the time I had landed in Valencia, the festival's organisers, Cream, were sending out messages to all and sundry to confirm who might make it or not.

When I registered on the Sunday, I had about another 70 or so hopefuls with me. Come Monday morning, and a further group had managed to make it - by flying via who-knows-where, by means of hired cars, buses and what-have-you. Wikipedia's Jimmy Wales, for example, had spent 24 hours on a bus in order to get to Valencia.

Usually delegates also stay for the end of an event, particularly, as in this case, when awards are handed out and there's a gala dinner with an after-party of note planned thereafter.

Not this time. True, many of those who managed to make it decided to bite the bullet and stay on for the finale, but others headed for the hills; eager to take advantage of any gap in the ash cloud that would allow them to make it back home in reasonable time.

So, what's the likely impact on...

Exhibitions and events?

As you can see from above, when delegates cannot get through, you have a problem. In the Festival of Media's case, instead of 600 or more delegates, there were far fewer than that. Direct result of that was that instead of two auditoriums being used, only one was necessary, and even that was more than half empty.

The other hassle was the non-arrival of speakers; so that meant reorganising the agenda, cancelling some speakers, trying to substitute them with delegates who had made it and who would be able to contribute good presentations...

As it turned out in the end, the festival, though far smaller than planned, was as good as it gets in the circumstances.

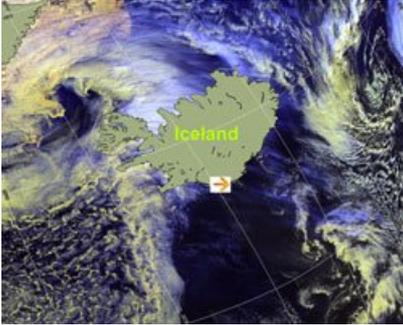
We even got a T-shirt...

Affect on air travel

By this time, that's pretty obvious... not only were some 28 000 flights cancelled across affected parts of Europe itself - ie. most of it - but there was a knock-on affect in flights into the closed airspace from other parts of the world. According to

Bloomberg, more than 100 000 flights were cancelled following the April 14 eruption.

Passengers were stuck in New York and other centres in North and South America as well as all other continents. Tourists returning to Europe were stuck at the airport or, in some fortunate cases, locals did the rounds and offered accommodation.



It doesn't look that dangerous, does it... The MetOp- A satellite imagery from April 20 showed Eyjafjallajökull's ash plume as a very small, faint area (yellow arrow points to plume) of brown on Iceland's southern tip. (Image: NASA/NOAA/EUMETSAT)

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Airlines claim to have lost something in the order of US\$200 million or more a day, and according to Al Jazeera, the International Air Transport Association (Iata) has put the overall cost to the airline industry at US\$1.7 billion (about R12 billion). Giovanni Bisignani, the head of Iata is quoted as saying, "For an industry that lost US\$9.4bn last year and was forecast to lose a further US\$2.8bn in 2010, this crisis is devastating."

Affect on imports and exports

Perishables don't take kindly to travel delays, and one glaring example is that of Kenya's fresh flower and vegetables export industry. They [were hammered](#) and have lost millions - between both industries, losses are claimed to be around US\$5 million (about R35 million) per day. The impact will be felt down the chain as well, with many thousands of workers facing redundancy.

Affect on health sector

A polio vaccination campaign in West Africa [has been delayed](#) when stocks of vaccines could not be flown out from Europe. There could well have been other impacts on health issues, such as, for example, the transport of donor organs to where they are needed.

Affect on the tourism industry

Quite apart from the impact on air travel per se, cruiseliners awaiting passengers, tour companies also awaiting passengers and hotels and other accommodation establishments not close to airports, and expecting tour groups for overnight stays, would have had to revise their plans.

The knock-on effect down the line - from the cruiseliners themselves, to the hotels etc - would have seen those in the supply chain being affected, in having to adjust deliveries and/or store product until it could be shipped, or was needed at its destination.

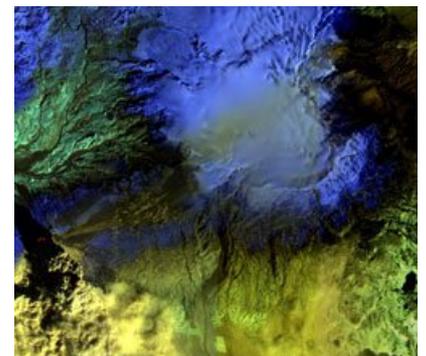
Not all losers

Eyjafjallajökull's eruption has been bad news for many people and businesses, but not for all... Kenya's fresh flower and vegetable have had to meet the cost of trucking their produce to their ultimate destinations after managing to get it to Spanish airports - so the trucking industry probably has no bad thoughts about the volcano.

Likewise, for hotels, B&Bs and other establishments near airports in Europe and the UK, and near airports in other parts of the world, Eyjafjallajökull has brought them a bonanza of bookings and occupancy rates are probably among the highest they have been in ages.

Tour bus companies, train services, as well as car-hire firms have enjoyed a spin-off from the volcano as people have had to find alternative means to get home.

In some cases, some have resorted to extreme measures... such as hiring a taxi to take



them home to Oslo, if I recall correctly - at a cost of something like €4000 (about R40 000).

Frankly, it would have been cheaper to have bought an old clunker of a car, driven it home, and then dumped it - or flogged it off to someone else trying to get home in the other direction.

And all of this thanks to a volcano with a name unpronounceable to anyone but an Icelander.

The *Boston Globe* newspaper had some [dramatic images](#) of the eruption.

False-colour infrared image of Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull volcano acquired Sat., April 17, 2010, by the Advanced Land Imager (ALI) instrument onboard NASA's Earth Observing-1 (EO-1) spacecraft. Strong thermal emissions, shown in red, are visible at the base of the ash plume and above and to the right from earlier lava flows located at Fimmvorduhals. This ALI image is 38km wide, and has a resolution of 30m per pixel. Up is north-northeast. (Image: NASA/JPL/EO-1 Mission/GSFC/Ashley Davies)

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ABOUT ROD BAKER

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