

Joining Forces: Inspired by Iceland

On 14 April 2010 a volcanic eruption started under the Eyjafjallajökull glacier in Iceland, generating considerable news about the country, some of it inaccurate. The eruption's impact and the ash clouds that it caused are now infamous in the tourism industry worldwide. Within days of the eruption, a wave of cancellations began across all sectors and tourist arrivals shrank by 22% in April alone. Had the situation been ignored, it would have had a disastrous impact on the important tourism industry in Iceland, one of the most important sectors of the economy. Yet the way in which the Eyjafjallajökull eruption was tackled by the small nation's tourism professionals and other interested parties led to a more successful peak season than even the most optimistic had thought possible.



Joining forces, the Icelandic government, the City of Reykjavík, airlines Icelandair and Iceland Express, Promote Iceland and about 80 other tourism-related companies took quick actions to address challenges and misconceptions about travel to Iceland during and after the eruption. These actions began as an offensive crisis management effort to counter the worldwide impression that travelling to Iceland was dangerous.

A primary dimension of the strategy was the launch of the successful campaign Inspired by Iceland. The campaign encourages people to travel to the country with the argument that “Iceland has never been more awake and there has never been a more exciting time to visit the country.” Its main focus is to allow individuals to share their stories and memories of Iceland, and hopefully turning a negative event—the fear caused by the volcano—into a positive result—changing the focus of international attention on Iceland into a chance to showcase the island's many unique and appealing attributes. The campaign's website, Inspiredbyiceland.com, is its main platform.



The campaign was launched on 3 June with “Iceland Hour” – an hour during which the entire nation became involved by sending tens of thousands of messages to family and friends all over the world.

These messages included links to a video promoting Iceland as a travel destination, using the upbeat song “Jungle Drum” by Icelandic singer–songwriter Emiliana Torrini. The video shows people joyously dancing to Torrini’s song in various locations (both rural and urban), demonstrating that Iceland is still full of life and unaffected by ash. Iceland Hour was a huge success, with one–third of the nation taking part. As of November 2010, the website with the video has been visited over three million times.

Celebrities also joined the campaign by sharing their stories; among them are Yoko Ono, Eric Clapton and Viggo Mortensen. Over 500 stories from friends of Iceland have also been shared on the website. Stephen Fry, the British television presenter, tweeted: “Despite what you might think, Iceland is as alive and charming as ever.”

And he’s right. The newest figures evaluating “Inspired by Iceland” indicate a strong global impact. Although the full effects of the campaign will take some time to register, a survey conducted in the UK, Germany and Denmark indicated increased interest in Iceland as a destination. The objective of saving the high season was also achieved, with figures for travellers coming to Iceland equalling the number for 2009 with only a 0.6% decrease, and with a 12% increase in incoming travellers in October.

Iceland has never been more awake – its rough landscape and ever–changing weather is an important part of the attraction and leisure of this Iceland in the North Atlantic. The Icelandic music scene is alive, with Iceland Airwaves being the highlight, and from the spring of 2011 Icelandic music and events will have a new home in Harpa, the breathtaking concert hall and conference centre being built at Reykjavík harbour.



Iceland, with its unspoiled nature and Scandinavian infrastructure, is also a perfect health and wellness destination, taking visitors far from the madding crowd and welcoming them in peaceful and tranquil surroundings. Come and be active, be inspired.

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