

“Inspired by Iceland”

H.E. Thórir Ibsen, Ambassador of Iceland

Milano 24 May / Barcelona 25 May 2010

Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you to this information meeting. Icelandic tourist authorities are fully aware of the concerns of tour operators and tourists about the volcanic activity of the glacier with the difficult name of Eyjafjallajökull. The good news are that the eruption has stopped. Nevertheless, it is understandable that one asks the question will I be safe? Are there poisonous fumes? Can floods or lava flows pose risks? Will I be able to travel to Iceland on the day of my vacation, and even more importantly will I be able to return on planned time?

This is why the Government of Iceland, in cooperation with the City of Reykjavik and the Icelandic travel industry, decided to hold information meetings for key tour operators and the media to clarify the situation. This meeting is part of a special promotion campaign entitled “Inspired by Iceland” aimed at the major markets for travelling to Iceland.

With me here to day is Dr. Ari Trausti Guðmundsson, geologist who will inform you more about volcanic activity in Iceland. With me is also Mr. Davíð Jóhannsson, Director continental Europe, the Icelandic Tourism Board who will provide you with information assuring that it is fully safe to visit Iceland.

Travelling restrictions can of course remain in certain areas around Eyjafjallajökull glacier. However for tourist that wish to see the site of the volcanic eruption they can in full safety get sufficiently close to experience this impressive natural phenomena. No casualties have been reported due to the eruption.

As for those that wish to keep distance from the volcano it should be kept in mind that Iceland is 103.000 km² but the eruption affected only a small area around the volcano, in the neighbourhood of 300 km², or around 1% of the country

There are few points I would like to emphasise:

- *First*, the situation is fully under control. The Icelandic Civil Protection authorities constantly monitor the situation around the volcano and give regular updates on the situation.

- *Second*, travelling in Iceland is perfectly safe. There are have not been delays or restrictions concerning domestic transport between different parts of the country. All tourist services are functioning as normally as are the health services. The land of ice and fire welcomes you to enjoy adventures beyond imagination.
- *Third*, we expect a great increase in geo-tourism this year, and the Spanish newspaper El País, recommends Iceland as one of the best places to witness the forces of nature at work.
- *Fourth*, in spite of the eruption, Iceland ranks as the cleanest country in the world according to Forbes magazine, and we look at the eruption as an ideal opportunity to further promote Iceland and encourage visitors to explore the unique nature we have to offer.
- *Fifth*, Icelanders are used to the geothermal wonders of the island and have learned how to make the best of it produces all its electricity from emission-free and sustainable natural resources in the form of geothermal and hydro power.

The latest eruption has even proven to be an inspiration to designers.

- *Finally*, the entire infrastructure in Iceland (roads, transmission of electricity, communication) remained intact and secure. Icelandic infrastructure and buildings are prepared for earthquakes and volcanic activity so all systems are designed to withstand natural calamities. Scientists have been measuring and monitoring water quality in the vicinity of the volcano as well as air quality in general; both have proven to be well within health and safety limits.

Considering these facts travelling in Iceland is safe. Moreover, the risk of all airports closing in Iceland is very slim. There are four international airports in Iceland. These airports are never all closed at the same time. Air traffick to and from Iceland continued all through the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull.

Again I thank you for coming to this meeting.