



Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull volcano erupts

In the end it was enjoyable

U3A TRAVEL groups appear to have emerged relatively unscathed in the 'volcanic ash' crisis that brought flights to and from the UK to a halt in April.

Inquiries by *U3A News* found just two groups that had been trapped overseas as a result of the volcano eruption, from Chepstow and Perth U3As. The 28 strong Chepstow group were on a seven-day holiday in Dubrovnik organised by **Tailored Travel**.

The group was due to fly back to the UK on 18 April, three days after the ban on flights over Britain began. "At that time the experts were saying that the all-clear to fly would not come until the wind direction changed at the end of the week," said **Tailored Travel's** John English.

"So we liaised closely with the group organiser and that afternoon we arranged for a coach to take them to Austria for an overnight stay and then onto Calais for a Channel crossing with P&O Ferries.

"We then arranged for another coach to meet them at Dover and take them back to Chepstow. All of this was done at our expense. The whole experience was fraught, tiring and expensive, but the thanks we have received has been very rewarding."

Among the Chepstow group were Tony and Sheila Nechvatal. "When I see all the problems other travellers had, we realise how lucky we were," said Sheila. "The coach was comfortable, the drivers excellent and the overnight accommodation was very good.

"I had been wondering how we would cope with pulling all our cases onto the ferry, so it was a great relief to see the coach from Dubrovnik coming onto the ferry."

Another passenger commented: "Initially I was rather worried about travelling across Europe on a bus. In the end it was an enjoyable experience – but I don't want to do it again."

Members of Perth U3A on a cultural exchange with Biala Podlaska U3A in eastern Poland found a trip that

TIME	DESTINATION	GATE#	STATUS
12:00	COPENHAGEN	---	CANCELLED
12:15	PARIS	---	CANCELLED
12:25	LONDON	---	CANCELLED
13:20	FRANKFURT	---	CANCELLED
13:45	ZURICH	---	CANCELLED
14:35	BRUSSELS	---	CANCELLED
15:00	MILAN	---	CANCELLED
16:25	KYIV	---	CANCELLED

usually takes two and a half hours by air turned into a day-long excursion round Newcastle, Amsterdam and Warsaw.

The exchange, funded by the European Union Fund for Social Cohesion, still proved a triumph. Singers and dancers in traditional costumes entertained at a welcome dinner. The rest of the trip focused on cultural activity with an in-depth tour of the Lublin region. The group was also taken to the museum of Majdanek concentration camp.

A finale of singing, games and feasting set a high standard of entertainment for when Perth Biala Podlaska in the return leg scheduled for July.

Several U3A members were in another group of mature single travellers who spent three days at Heathrow in the hope of being able to fly to St Petersburg for a six-day holiday organised by One Traveller.

"We were due to fly on the day the ban on flights came into force," said One Traveller's Ian Darkin, who was escorting the group.

"Mature travellers tend to be more patient and philosophical when there is a delay, and the lack of young children also means there is less pressure, but this occasion tested everyone's patience.

"BA staff did their best, but nobody could tell us when the ban would be lifted, and the time was continually put back. The group gradually became smaller as one after another they called it a day. By the third day it became obvious that the flight would not be going ahead, and the few remaining members finally gave up hope and returned home."

One Traveller insists on all its clients having adequate travel insurance, but some insurers are attempting to shift responsibility. "We have decided to give members of the group a substantial refund together with a voucher for use on any of its 2010 holidays," said Ian Darkin.

Tailored Travel also had two U3A groups which had been due to fly out during the ban. It has organised new dates for these holidays and has given a full refund to anyone who is unable to travel on the rearranged dates.

Tour affiliates commended for volcano decisions

The ash cloud from Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull may have caused travel chaos, but members on visits with Tour NADFAS affiliates have been impressed by the way the situation was handled.

One example was the April 12-16 visit to Istanbul by Tailored Travel. After the eruption, a speedy decision led to a coach trip across

Europe and a ferry home. The Director in England, Michael English, and the local guide, Ibrahim, were able to coordinate the alternative route home with one of the tour group, Chris Bruce, who assumed the role of group leader. "The entire group was most impressed with your care and generosity in providing us

with accommodation and food when our official visit had expired," said Mr Bruce. "It was selfless gestures like this that kept our morale up and made us realise we were not alone."

He went on to say: "I can assure you that you have some 32 fervent fans dotted about the country, including one in Holland, who will

be singing the praises of Tailored Travel long and loud." Among the many glowing letters received by other members of the tour came the following quote: "I do not know how to thank you for your excellent arrangement for our exodus from Istanbul. How you managed to plan it all was a miracle."

