

## Volcanic ash

As the volcano in Iceland continues to erupt, so flying continues to be disrupted. Are we entering a new phase of business travel?

**1** Have any of your travel plans been affected by delays and cancellations due to volcanic ash? If so, what happened? Discuss your experience with a partner.

**2** Skim the article and match the headings below (a-d) with the correct paragraph (1-4).

- (a) Future of business travel (b) Insurance risks (c) The cost of the ash cloud (d) Volcanic eruption

[1] Eyjafjallajökull. We have read the name many times now, although most of us still do not know how to pronounce it. Who would have guessed that the eruption of a volcano in Iceland would cause so much travel chaos in so many countries, make the phrase 'volcanic ash' so popular, and move the business world into an entirely new era? The volcano began erupting in March. For a week in April, there were no flights across much European airspace with airport closures caused by the ash cloud, which can clog jet engines. Safety is, of course, of utmost importance.

[2] The cost to the aviation industry of last month's cancelled flights has been huge: reports put the financial loss to global airlines at over one billion pounds. Over 100,000 flights were grounded and millions of passengers were left stranded. The cost to other businesses could be even higher. Apart from people not being able to get back to work, the businesses worst affected were those which rely on the airlines for transporting components for production, and those selling perishable goods like foodstuffs.

[3] This month, after further disruption, we now have new safety rules. Although this means that passengers will be less affected by future volcanic ash, bitter arguments continue to rage. Were governments right to impose a blanket ban on flying? When it comes to insurance, who is responsible for what? While passengers in Europe have the right to a refund, or, if they are re-routed, to claiming expenses such as hotel accommodation and food, some airlines argued they could not be held responsible for an event which is beyond their control.

[4] One aviation expert believes that the disruption caused by future eruptions could continue for many years. Many businesses may start to think twice before authorising employee travel. What happens if there is another eruption and key staff are stuck abroad? Can your next face-to-face meeting be replaced by a video-conference? Can your next flight be changed for a trip on the EuroStar? Welcome to the new, post volcanic ash era of business travel.

**3** Read the complete article. Summarise the key points.

**4** Find words in the article which mean:

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| (a) a situation where everything is confused and in a mess              | (Paragraph 1)        |
| (b) left somewhere with no way of going anywhere else                   | (Paragraph 2)        |
| (c) a situation in which something cannot continue because of a problem | (Paragraphs 3 and 4) |
| (d) an official statement ordering people not to do something           | (Paragraph 3)        |
| (e) money that was yours that you get again                             | (Paragraph 3)        |
| (f) held in a position so that you cannot move                          | (Paragraph 4)        |

**5** Work in small groups to discuss the questions. Be ready to report back to the class.

- (a) Will you change your own travel plans in any way because of the continued disruption? If so, how?  
 (b) Do you think all meetings can be replaced by video conferencing? If not, which ones must be face to face?  
 (c) How will the aviation industry change in the future, given the possibility of further eruptions?