

Making Traveling Enjoyable Again

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If there's only one good thing we could take from the global grounding of planes all over Europe, it might as well be the possibility to enjoy traveling again. Even recognizing that the airline industry has been able to dramatically cut costs and times of travel, one can't deny the fact that it has done nothing to increase the pleasure of traveling. Quite the opposite, as a matter of fact.

To put it elegantly, traveling by plane is a pain in the neck. In the 90's it wasn't better, but at least the Twin Towers were still standing in their place and there wasn't a new "terrorist threat" every year or so, making the life of the rest of the travelers an ongoing misery.

Taking a plane exposes you to a staggering amount of things that can go wrong, from the most complex to the most ridiculous. They keep on telling us that traveling is the most secure way to travel, but they say nothing about the ever smaller and more uncomfortable seats, about the shitty food they keep on serving and the increasing number of destinations they keep on sending our luggage, more often than not exactly the opposite one we are going to. Without mentioning the amount of cancelled flights without warning, the non-guaranteed connections, the unbelievably ridiculous schemes of ticket pricing (why a return ticket is cheaper than a one-way is beyond me) and the oh so many other things that make air travel an utterly miserable experience.

Oh, but it is the most secure way of traveling. Yeah, right.

Disclaimer: I've been a Swissair employee in the 90's, so I know a bit of how an airline can go every year a bit worse, until it disappears completely from the face of Earth.

So now the ashes of Iceland have grounded the planes of a whole continent, generating losses of around 300 million dollars per day. Ups (and, by the way, what an irony and a colorful way Iceland has found to return Britain the favor of an incredible economic disaster, of which it was the biggest victim but not the most important contributor... I do think nature has a sense of irony after all.)

What I find interesting is that, if the ashes keep on clearing the sky from those shitty winged artifacts filled with unhappy travelers, we will have a chance to

slow down, and we might as well have a chance to start enjoying traveling again. And by that I mean having the time to take a long distance train, and even better, to ditch those bad imitations of birds with nicer long distance, transatlantic boats taking 10 days to take us over the oceans.

Imagine boarding in Genova or Hamburg, Le Havre or Cadiz, and taking your time to go through the Atlantic again. Let's be clear, this is not 1920; with email, Skype or iChat you won't miss much in terms of meetings or anything, but you'll get to New York or Boston without jet lag, relaxed, sipping a margarita on the main bridge while waving to the people on the shore.

I would enjoy it for sure. And if the Eyjafjallajökull (somebody please tell me how to pronounce this) keeps on spitting ashes, at least until the Jet Stream cleans up the stratosphere a bit over the northern Atlantic, we won't have any other option, anyway.

In the meantime, let's relax and enjoy the first spring with a really, really blue sky, without airplanes or long white smoke trails, in a long, long time.