Challenging, Freezing Days For Travel & Tourism
By Dr. Richard Kelley

For those traveling across the northern hemisphere and, perhaps even more so for those working in Travel & Tourism in that half of the globe, the past two weeks have been very challenging. An unusually wide “knuckle” of Arctic air has pushed snow storms and extremely low temperatures down across Canada and the continental United States, causing flight delays and cancellations in almost unprecedented numbers. I want to tip my hat and say thanks to all the employees throughout the Travel & Tourism industry who have worked around the clock to keep the systems running and safe.

The graphic above produced by NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) shows the freezing Arctic air covering most of Canada and the continental United States on January 6, 2014.

More than 7,741 flights were canceled in the United States on the previous day, Sunday, January 5, according to TravelMole, reporting data from Flightware.com, a website that tracks air travel. Airport lobbies were jammed. Lost and misdirected luggage piled up. Many schedules were disrupted, flights missed, appointments postponed. A Maryland-based aviation operations firm, masFlight, estimates that over 8 million fliers have been directly affected by canceled flights and delays since January 2.

At our affiliate property, Hilton Garden Inn Denver Airport, the staff worked together to house and feed as many stranded travelers as possible, according to General Manager Gian Gandolfo.

I think it is a wonderful testament to the airline industry in the United States and Canada that there were no commercial airline crashes, injuries or deaths during this very challenging period. Sadly, there was a fatal accident at Colorado’s Aspen Pitkin County Airport on January 5, when a privately owned Canadair CL-600 from Mexico was making a second landing attempt. It went off the right side of the runway, flipped over and burst into flames, killing the co-pilot.

By contrast, during this past week it was business as usual at Outrigger properties across the Pacific. Our staff at Outrigger’s Reservations Center in Denver efficiently handled changes in hotel bookings caused by flight delays and cancellations.

That’s not to say that at our Pacific properties we do not sometimes face difficult weather conditions. I am just pointing out that during this past week in Hawai’i, while there may have been some snow and freezing temperatures on top of Mauna Kea, 13,796 feet (4,205 meters) above sea level, at Waikīkī Beach, the temperature was around 77 to 80 degrees F (25 to 27 C), making it almost certainly the warmest place of the 50 United States of America!

Wouldn’t you rather build a “sandman” in Hawai’i?

My thanks to all those in the Travel & Tourism industry who work so hard, particularly in times like this past week in the U.S. and Canada, to keep travelers as safe and comfortable as possible in spite of extremely challenging conditions. Given the way the year seems to be going, you might want to tell your friends to make their Hawai’i winter reservations quickly before travelers from places with names like Bangor, Minneapolis, Yellow Knife and Winnipeg have us fully booked for the rest of the season.