Massive Flight Cancellations Continue
By Dr. Richard Kelley

Winter travel in the Northern Hemisphere can always pose a problem, but it looks as if 2014 will go down in the record books. Europe, Asia and North America have all experienced unbelievable numbers of flight cancellations and delays due to unusually severe weather conditions, and that is having a ripple effect on the hotel industry.

As I write this article on Thursday (February 20), urgent travel alerts keep popping up in the corner of my computer screen:

- “Southwest Airlines halted all flights at its Chicago/Midway hub.”
- “Minneapolis/St. Paul some arriving flights are delayed by upwards of three hours.”

The Washington Post reported that according to information provided by flight tracking site FlightAware, U.S. airlines have canceled more than 75,000 domestic flights since December 1, 2013, the highest number of flight cancellations in more than 25 years.

To keep travelers informed, there are numerous Internet sites with the latest data on delays and cancellations. Check out “Misery Map” by FlightAware (below) and you will see the current delay-and-cancellation situation around Chicago and Minneapolis.

Flights in Europe and Asia have also been disrupted. Several members of the Outrigger ‘ohana, including Danny Ojiri, Kevin Aucello, David Carey and Bitsy Kelley, spent an extra 24 hours in Okinawa where they were caught by the weather last week when the “worst snow storm in 45 years” closed down many airports in Japan and snarled all forms of travel in the Tokyo area. Elizabeth Cambra and John Neeley were also significantly delayed on their way home after visiting Outrigger’s offices in Thailand.

Business travel columnist Joe Brancatelli asks, “Why is air travel so much worse when bad weather hits?” He feels that the decision by the major airlines to eliminate many “hubs” and funnel flights through fewer and fewer airports near major cities is largely to blame. Since 1978, when America’s airlines were “deregulated,” the nation’s four remaining “legacy carriers” have closed down at least 18 hubs around the country, says Brancatelli. With more and more flights going through fewer and fewer major cities, when Mother Nature brings on severe weather, there is a heavy price to pay. When several airports are simultaneously involved, “the entire air-travel system is in danger of grinding to a costly halt,” he adds.

This past Tuesday, United Airlines had the additional burden of its passenger-service computers acting up. As reported by the Los Angeles Times, “Computer systems for United Airlines shut down briefly Tuesday, delaying takeoffs and frustrating passengers. The system problems that began Tuesday morning represented the
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latest malfunction for the nation’s third-largest carrier since United switched over to the computer systems of its merger partner Continental Airlines, starting in 2012. 2

What can be done to make air travel more reliable and safer during the winter months? “Hey, let’s just heat the runways,” says Scott McCartney in an article this week in the Wall Street Journal. 3 The rich and famous don’t worry about snow accumulating on the driveways of their homes in Vail, Colorado’s high-end ski resort. They have pipes embedded in the asphalt through which heated fluids are circulated when the snow is falling.

The same thing could be done to airport runways and taxiways, but it would have to be on a much larger scale. In fact, it has been done to a limited degree at some airports such as Chicago’s O’Hare, where “two taxiway bridges over roadways have embedded pipes that carry heated oil, keeping the surfaces free of snow and ice for planes,” according to McCartney.

It’s worth a study but in the meantime, remember that when guests arrive at any of our properties, they probably have had a long, tiring journey almost any day of the year. Especially during the winter, their flights may have been significantly delayed or even cancelled. Upon arrival, all they want to do is go up to one of our beautiful hotel rooms, have a mai tai and relax.

At this moment, the first five “Golden Minutes” as they check in at the front desk are our opportunity to welcome them with genuine warmth and aloha, and make the kind of strong impression that sets a positive tone for the rest of their stay with us. The hospitality we extend means the world to them. It is something they will never forget. So put on your warmest smile and make friends who will always remember how nicely they were received. It will pay off in return visits and new business from friends and family members they send our way. 4

1 http://www.joesentme.com
2 http://tinyurl.com/kbgblef
3 http://tinyurl.com/mtwdnsp
4 http://flightaware.com/miserymap/

On Feb. 3, 2014, snow cover over the contiguous US expands to 57.1%

highest coverage since Dec. 12 (58.6%)

Snow and ice cover much of the northern hemisphere

on Feb. 19, 2014