

New Swedish website helps stranded travelers get organised

April 23 2010, by Nina Larson



Stranded travelers use laptop computers while sitting on cots at JFK's Terminal 4 on April 18 in the Queens borough of New York City. In addition to helping organise transportation, a new website also offers a forum for stranded travelers looking for a free or cheap place to stay while they wait for a car, train or flight out.

"Searching ride Madrid-Amsterdam or Belgium or Germany": people stranded due to a giant flight-halting cloud of volcanic ash this week were not too picky, and just glad that a new website was helping organise the long journey home.

Last weekend, as ash from an [erupting volcano](#) in Iceland grounded flights across Europe, two Swedish university students were so moved by the stories of despair from travelers stuck around the world that they decided to do something to help.

"The biggest problem seemed to be that there was no organisation," said economics student Maans Gaardfeldt, who co-built the www.volcanohelp.eu website that went online Sunday.

"Some people were paying extremely expensive [taxi](#) trips, and many people had no way to get home at all," he said, adding that he started thinking about ways to help people "split rental cars or find a driver willing to pick them up."

Searching Facebook, Twitter and other online social networks, Gaardfeldt found a "lot of people trying to find each other, but there was no organisation."

So Gaardfeldt and his friend, computer programming student Jonas Larsson, quickly built their website, offering discussion threads for people looking to share rides to their destinations.

"Word spread really quickly. We checked Sunday after being up for five hours and found we had had about 1,400 visitors per hour," Gaardfeldt said.

After just three days online, the website had registered around 30,000 individual visitors and approximately 140,000 page hits, he said.

"First and foremost, the page helps people ... somehow arrange transportation home by car or bus," he said.

Many of the posts bore witness to the desperation felt by stranded travelers across Europe over the past week.

"Hi, I am stuck in Madrid and need desperately out from here," one post from early Wednesday reads, under the headline "Madrid to UK or France."

"Hey, is there someone who planes to drive from Bucharest, or any other cities of Romania, or even Hungary to Berlin, or Germany?" another poster queried on Tuesday.

The calls for help are interspersed with ride offers, at a variety of prices, to destinations across Europe.

"It's very hard to know how many people have received help through the site, since people are mainly in a big hurry and post their emails or telephone numbers and organise what they need off the site," Gaardfeldt explained.

He had however received confirmation of several cases where the site had helped people find a ride to where they needed to go.

"We have around 1,000 posts, so there are a lot of people who have been on the site and organised their [travel](#) together," he said.

In addition to helping organise transportation, the site also offers a forum for stranded travelers looking for a free or cheap place to stay while they wait for a car, train or flight out.

"There are a lot of people who have already gone in and offered stranded people, whole families, to stay with them for free," Gaardfeldt said, adding that there were especially many offers for free accommodation in North America, where the flight chaos had stranded many Europeans.

One woman in Philadelphia for instance informs people stuck there that "I can offer a couch or even the floor in our small house located just outside of Philadelphia. I know it's not a an attractive offer but we would be happy to help anyone who needs it."

Another poster in Russia said Tuesday, "People if you stuck in Moscow

airports and need any help (water, food or bed) please contact me."

Although flights across Europe began getting back to normal Thursday, Gaardfeldt said he believed there would still be a need for the site for a while to come.

"There are around 100,000 flights that have been cancelled since Thursday (last week), which means there is a huge flight queue ... I think it's obvious that the transportation trouble will last for weeks," he said.

And once all returned to normal, the two students, who so far have covered the costs of the project themselves, had even bigger plans.

"We are planning a new website to help people facing catastrophes around the world get organised," Gaardfeldt said.

(c) 2010 AFP

Citation: New Swedish website helps stranded travelers get organised (2010, April 23) retrieved 18 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-04-swedish-website-stranded-organised.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--