Flights disrupted as Bali volcano shoots towering ash column

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The Mount Agung volcano on Bali shot ash 2,000 meters (6,600 feet) into the atmosphere Thursday, disrupting the travel plans of thousands as several airlines canceled flights from the Indonesian tourist island.

The regional volcanic ash advisory center in Darwin, Australia, said winds could carry the ash southwest toward Bali's international airport and Java, Indonesia's most densely populated island.

A duty manager at Ngurah Rai International Airport, Darta Pande, said many flights were continuing to operate.

The airport's online flight information board showed Australian airlines Jetstar, Virgin Australia and Qantas had canceled flights to and from the island. Korean Air and AirAsia also canceled some flights.

Its public relations department said 26 international inbound and outbound flights had been canceled, affecting nearly 5,000 travelers. Some 10 domestic flights were also canceled, affecting more than 1,700 passengers.

Agung, about 70 kilometers (45 miles) northeast of Bali's tourist hotspot of Kuta, last had a major eruption in 1963, killing about 1,100 people. It had a dramatic increase in activity last year, forcing the evacuation of tens of thousands of people, but had quietened by early this year. Authorities lowered its alert status from the highest level in February.

Indonesia, an archipelago of more than 250 million people, sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire" and is prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Government seismologists monitor more than 120 active volcanoes.

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