

Tourism Industry of Alaska Is Growing Steadily

When Americans think of Alaska, the top industries that they will mostly name are sure to be fishing, oil and natural gas because this is the image that has stuck with the state and they remain the highest earners. Tourism has, however, been a dominant force since the creation of the Division of Tourism in the late 1960s and Alaska has warmly welcomed large numbers of American and international tourists, with a steady growth being seen over the last decade.



With the impact of 2012 now plain to see and 2013 drawing to an end, what do we know about the current climate? Is this familiar pattern of growth continuing or has there been an unexpected decline?

Recent statistics show that the Alaska's tourism industry appears to be in good health. The basic statistics for the last year and the start of 2013 show that, once again, there is a lot to be proud of within the Alaskan tourism industry: approximately 45,000 people are being employed in related posts during the peak season, local and state governments have seen a revenue of \$179 million and 1.82 million tourists arrived in 2012.

Forecasts predict that this number will be even higher for 2013 thanks to figures for the summer season and tourism campaigns such as the Facebook “Dream of Alaska” initiative. If these predictions are true, the state of Alaska could be on course for a fourth consecutive year of growth, a notion that is undeniably positive but that also leads to questions over transport links and capabilities. Sea and air links are clearly vital to the success of this industry but how well are they coping?



Alaskan cruises continue to play a big part in the state's tourism industry but the airlines are catching up. The cruise lines of Alaska have always been vital to the local economy and helped to shape tourist destinations – ever since the first Pacific Coast Steamship Company started tours in 1884 – and that is because they provide a simple link to the Pacific Northwest and bring enough visitors to significantly increase a town's population.

Over the last few years, these cruises have played a crucial and steady role and it is important to note

that one in three travelers are said to be repeat visitors that enjoyed a previous voyage, which means something must be working. In 2010, an impressive 58% of all visitors to the state came via one of these ships, a trend that continued in 2012.

While the percentage remained roughly the same, the Alaska Journal of Commerce reports there was a 7% increase in travelers to 940,000 and a further increase is expected to be seen in the results for 2013.



The traditional cruise may be the transport method of choice for a large number of tourists coming to Alaska but the other 42% are clearly arriving via other forms, the old, fashionable railroad of the 1920s no longer being one of them. Returning to those statistics from 2010, only 5% come over via the highway but 37% flew in, a figure that has not escaped the attention of industry experts today.

Over the last decade, Alaskan officials have acknowledged the importance of its air links by renovating and improving the International Airport in Anchorage to cope with the demand and there has been a steady increase in flight options. In the summer of 2013, this section of the industry was given a boost by the announcements of new routes from Russia, Iceland and daily, non-stop flights between Chicago and Fairbanks; however, passenger numbers were already on the rise – particularly from international travelers – thanks to increased business from Chinese, Japanese and Korean airlines.

What does the future hold for the Alaskan tourism industry? Will the 2013 and 2014 figures be as favorable as those from 2012?

The statistics on passenger numbers, the increased revenue and the campaigns and initiatives all paint a positive picture of the current state of the industry and offer a sense of optimism about the future; if trends continue then visitor numbers and revenue should, theoretically, rise again.

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