

WILD REVIEW

A VISITOR INDUSTRY UPDATE PUBLISHED BY
VISIT ANCHORAGE

February 2022



REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

Visit Anchorage presented the Report to the Community on Feb. 3, 2022. President and CEO Julie Saupe recapped the 2021 travel and tourism year, and outlined 2022's prospects, opportunities, and challenges. Didn't make it to the event? There's a recording of the entire presentation, and we've summarized five key takeaways:

Up-front investment in 2021 marketing and promotions was key for Anchorage.

Anchorage made gains last year largely because state and local grant relief programs kept tourism businesses on their feet through tough times, and also fueled a robust domestic marketing program during travel's rebound. Funds from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) packages flowed to Alaska. Through state and locally-directed grants, Anchorage was able to field a big marketing push and foster travel recovery.

Saupe recognized the importance of work done by Alaska's federal, state, and local lawmakers to invest in travel and tourism and lay the foundations of 2021 gains.

2021 beat all expectations.

COVID loomed large at the start of 2021, with intent to travel rising and falling with surges. In February of 2021, Canada banned cruise ships from its waters, effectively eliminating the 40% of visitors Anchorage typically sees from cross-gulf cruises in a year.

And yet, because of the up-front investment in marketing, and the summer rebound in domestic independent travel, Anchorage far outpaced 2020 performance, even nearing – but not equaling – 2019 benchmarks. Airport arrivals increased dramatically year over year. Length of stay increased as more travelers used Anchorage as a base of operations. Hotel demand neared 2019 levels for some months of the summer. As a result, 2021 bed taxes are expected to reach \$30 million, more than double 2020 and 97% of 2019 collections.

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



The big picture for jobs and employment is much improved since the early days of the pandemic. But as employers, it certainly doesn't feel that way right now. Finding and keeping talented employees is tough. Almost 75% of the respondents to our annual member survey said hiring in 2021 was very or somewhat challenging. A significant number also support the idea of Visit Anchorage assisting with recruitment.

We are launching an enhanced effort to help with hiring. In the months ahead, we will put added emphasis into filling jobs in Alaska tourism. We'll target Alaskans who know the place best and have a vested interest in community success, as well as high school and college students looking for an enjoyable and enviable summer job, and mid-career professionals looking for new and rewarding experiences along their career path. There are a couple things you can do to help us lay the ground work.

First, read up on what candidates want, and the landscape for hiring. We know perceptions of tourism jobs vary. Among those that won't consider a job in tourism or aren't sure it's the right fit, many assume the pay is too low or the benefits aren't there. There are some positive perceptions we can capitalize on: those that are open to tourism jobs know it's fun-filled, interesting work. Second, if you have open positions, please post them to Anchorage.net/jobs. It's free and easy to do. As we step up our campaign, it will be the place we direct candidates to search for jobs – whether they are hoping for a summer job or a permanent position in one of the best places and industries (I'm far from impartial, I know). Make sure potential candidates in Alaska and the Lower 48 see your company's opportunities and get a jump on hiring for 2022.

Nationally, job gains have been solid in recent months, with first-time unemployment filings at their lowest point since 1969, and continuing claims reaching their lowest level since before the pandemic. However, U.S. Travel data shows tourism jobs took one of the biggest hits from the pandemic, and while leisure and hospitality nationally added the most jobs of any industry in recent months, the rate is slow. At this pace, industry employment wouldn't fully recover until November 2022.

There is an unprecedented shift occurring in the nature of work. Experts are struggling to parse what it all means, but it doesn't look like there's a lone cause of the challenges we face in hiring. Jobless benefits boosted during the pandemic have returned to normal levels, and according to the Alaska Department of Labor new claims for benefits are back below the long-term average. The "Great Resignation" suggests that people are thinking differently about their day-to-day work, and their careers as a whole. The limited availability and high cost of childcare keeps a vast pool of potential job seekers at home caring for their kids.

Through sales and marketing, we already make a compelling pitch to attract customers. In such a competitive labor market, we should present a similarly attractive case when it comes to building out our teams. Stay tuned and engaged in the months ahead and make sure that your job postings are accurate, up to date, and provide a clear path for applicants.

Thank you,

Julie Saupé
President & CEO



REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY (CONT.)

2022 could be a huge year, but there’s also a high degree of uncertainty.

The number of airline seats into Anchorage is expected to increase again, up 6% compared to 2019. Cruise passengers should return to Southcentral Alaska communities. Local businesses say they are gearing up for a big year. And Anchorage has already launched its largest travel marketing and promotion campaign. Despite all the positive signals, the prospects for tourism are ultimately dependent on national and global conditions.

“After two long, hard years, we might be beyond the toughest of this,” Saupe said. “But at the same time, there’s a great deal of lingering uncertainty. COVID remains the looming threat that – depending on developments – could erode enthusiasm for travel and threaten our community’s hard-fought gains.”

Anchorage is deploying its biggest marketing and promotion push yet.

In part because of research and testing done last year, Anchorage is poised to sharpen its pitch to prospective travelers. And because of gains in 2021, it heads into the new year in a strong position. Provided demand for travel remains high, Visit Anchorage will deploy \$6.2 million directly in promotions and marketing, an even bigger push than was possible pre-pandemic.

“We intend to make the most of interest and enthusiasm,” Saupe said. “We anticipate a more competitive environment from other destinations this year. [Last year] many of our competitors were relatively quiet. We don’t expect that luxury this year.”

COVID accelerated several longer-term challenges.

COVID is not solely responsible for supply troubles, a difficult hiring market, or the increasing focus on sustainability needs, but COVID brought these challenges into sharp relief. These broader concerns have big implications for Alaska travel in future years.



“Focusing on these now will ensure continued success in years to come. I’ll add that most of these aren’t tourism-specific issues, or solely found here in Alaska. They are everywhere, affecting us all. And that means they require attention at the highest levels,” Saupe said.

NEIGHBORHOODS + VISITOR GUIDE

The new Anchorage Neighborhood Guide and refreshed Official Guide to Anchorage are now available online and on racks at local visitor information centers. Created with the help of the Municipality of Anchorage’s American Rescue Plan Act funding, the publications help showcase every corner of the city and its myriad activities and attractions.

While the latest Visitor Guide offers a high-level view of Anchorage itineraries and other trip-planning information, the inaugural Neighborhood Guide provides a deep dive into the distinct communities that make Anchorage so unique. See more at Anchorage.net/Neighborhoods.



The refreshed Official Guide to Anchorage and the new Anchorage Neighborhood Guide.

ANCHORAGE IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Recent grant funding supported a wide range of sponsored content, ads, and other marketing elements designed to showcase Anchorage to as many potential visitors as possible.

Messaging highlights the city’s year-round allure, amplifying its appeal as a winter destination. Feature articles, dedicated emails, and print placements reached hundreds of thousands of potential travelers and included the following publications.

- Sunset Magazine
- Lonely Planet
- Northwest Travel + Life
- Travel Zoo
- Fodor’s Travel

For a full list of recent sponsored content, visit Anchorage.net.



2021 WEB PERFORMANCE EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

When Visit Anchorage launched an updated website in spring 2021, the effect was immediate – website performance experienced significant growth, and Anchorage.net ended the year with improved metrics across multiple measurements.

In the fourth quarter of 2021, website traffic grew by 66% over 2020. The site saw session growth across paid search, email, organic, and social channels: Organic visitors are staying on the site longer and viewing more pages than they were a year ago. Year-over-year search ranking positions improved by nearly 10%. Anchorage.net continued to perform above industry averages, exceeding 2021 goals as well as its 2019 performance. This means more exposure for member businesses, more eyes on Anchorage, and deeper benefits for our entire community.

USABILITY STUDY SHEDS LIGHT ON ANCHORAGE.NET

So what do visitors think about the new-and-improved Anchorage.net? A website usability study, supported via the Municipality of Anchorage’s ARPA funding, helped share insight regarding the visitor experience – from positive first impressions to areas in need of ongoing work. Highlights included:

- Overall, website users shared a positive first impression of the refreshed homepage and new “urban and wild” theme.
- Visitors find the new website user-friendly and inspirational, with beautiful imagery and diverse experiences.
- Visitors are interested in learning more about winter travel and Alaska Native cultures.

As we prepare for the seasons ahead, we’ll continue to update and expand the site in line with user feedback, improving the visitor experience to the advantage of all.

ALASKA MEDIA ROAD SHOW

Held Oct. 24-26, 2021 in Las Vegas, Nevada, the annual Alaska Media Road Show provided the opportunity for Visit Anchorage staff and members to meet one-on-one with dozens of prolific, established U.S. travel journalists.

Writing for outlets ranging from Travel + Leisure to Lonely Planet and beyond, these journalists gathered information on upcoming events, new products, and unique Alaska stories. This plants the seeds for ongoing future coverage of Anchorage and all it has to offer. Find recent news at Anchorage.net/media/anchorage-in-the-news.

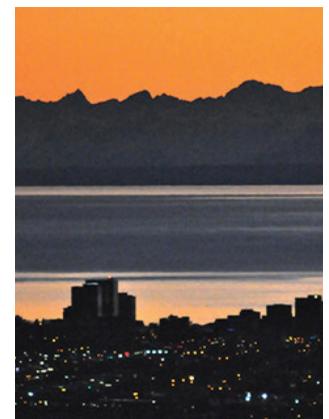
NEWS FROM THE VIC

- Fur Rendezvous and the Iditarod are right around the corner, and it’s the perfect time to restock the visitor information centers with your latest brochures. Bring your 2022 rack cards to the Downtown Visitor Information Center, or mail them to Visit Anchorage at 524 W. 4th Ave., Anchorage, AK 99501.
- Recent insight from Destination Analysts shows the value of guest engagement via visitor information centers: According to the market research firm, “Over 60% of American travelers feel that it is ‘important’ or ‘very important’ for a destination to have a Visitor Information Center and another 48.9% report that they are likely to use this resource in the next 12 months.”
- In 2021, Anchorage’s visitor information centers assisted 70,000 guests.
- Looking for an opportunity to educate VIC volunteers about your products and offerings? Sign up for a presentation at an upcoming volunteer in-service: To learn more and reserve your spot at a future event, email Visitor Services Director Linda Brandon at LBrandon@Anchorage.net.



DECEMBER HOTEL REPORT

Expanded marketing efforts and a host of other factors combined to carry Anchorage hotel performance to new heights in December 2021. This was the first month to show double-digit improvements in occupancy, rate, demand, and revenue comparing against the same month from 2019, likely making it the best December for hotel performance of any year on record. Dive into the numbers (and catch up with more member news) at Anchorage.net/for-businesses/members-only/member-news.





Visit Anchorage sales staff meet with the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors while conducting annual holiday calls in Washington, D.C. and the surrounding areas. The organization will be returning to Anchorage in 2022.

THE LATEST FROM SALES

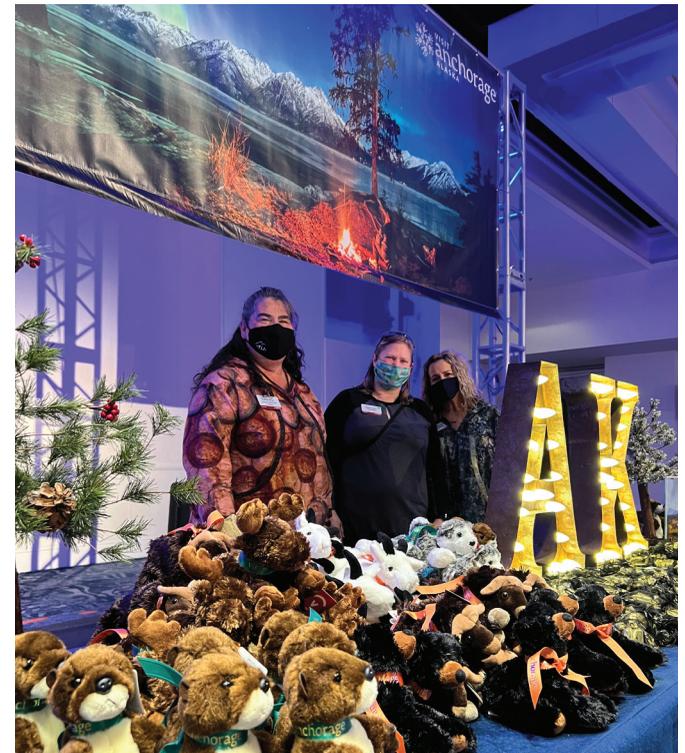
Visit Anchorage’s sales team stayed busy throughout the fall and into the winter, and the fourth quarter of 2021 saw dozens of showcases, sales calls, training sessions, and other outreach activities. The momentum continued into the new year, cultivating valuable connections with meeting planners and travel advisors around the country. Here are a few highlights from the final quarter of last year.

- Sales team members provided destination training to 2,233 travel trade partners.
- Meeting sales staff submitted 46 Requests for Proposal representing \$19,278,468 in potential estimated direct attendee spending.
- Site inspections for five different organizations resulted in event bookings promising to bring more than 2,000 attendees to Anchorage in summer and fall 2022.
- Sales staff engaged over 18,000 consumers via five different shows and event platforms.

Interested in learning more about future trade show opportunities with the Visit Anchorage sales team? Email Sales@Anchorage.net.



Visit Anchorage sales managers Andrea Schmidt and Cherise Arola join Visit Anchorage member Darren Hubbard of Hotel Captain Cook at the 2021 Holiday Showcase in Chicago. This popular trade show attracts over 900 meeting professionals.



Visit Anchorage members Kathy Hedges, Tanya Carlson, and Heather Dudick at the United States Tour Operator Association’s World Bazaar event in San Diego, where Visit Anchorage co-hosted 700 delegates for a two hour evening reception promoting Anchorage winter travel, including aurora chasing, wildlife viewing, and snow adventures.



A Visit Anchorage table at the Greater Seattle ASTA Showcase, a trade show and networking event with about 40 travel advisors who sell Alaska packages.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

As the summer season approaches, building a strong workforce remains a central focus for Alaska's visitor industry. Here are a few of the steps Visit Anchorage is taking to help member businesses find the employees necessary to thrive:

- A free job board is available at Anchorage.net: Post your open positions, and we'll share with jobseekers across Alaska and around the country, spreading the word through paid ads, e-newsletters, social media, and more.
- Need help making your job listings shine? We have a few tips. Visit Anchorage.net/for-businesses/members-only/member-news for five pointers on polishing your "help wanted" ads — and getting results.
- We're putting in time at local job fairs (like the recent ANC Job Fair at Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport), helping connect potential candidates with dozens of member job listings.

CONTACT YOUR MEMBER REPRESENTATIVE

Enjoy an empowered start to the new year with the help of your Visit Anchorage member representative. Whether you need one-on-one assistance optimizing website listings, visitor guide listings, and account settings, or you're searching for additional promotion opportunities, information on upcoming events, or insight from fellow members — we're here to help. Contact Membership@Anchorage.net to get started.

MORE MEMBER EVENTS

After returning to in-person Monthly Membership Luncheons at the Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center in 2021, Visit Anchorage has hosted a variety of industry experts and community leaders who've shared valuable insights on everything from economic trends to seasonal marketing to citywide development. Did you miss a presentation or two? They're all just a click away. Luncheon presentations are recorded, archived, and easily accessible via Anchorage.net/for-businesses. Recent presentations include:

- **December:** Neal Fried, an economist with the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, addressed current economic trends and indicators.
- **November:** Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport Manager Jim Szczesniak shared updates on future routes, airport amenities, and impending initiatives.
- **October:** Anchorage Mayor Dave Bronson joined Anchorage Community Development Authority Executive Director Mike Robbins to offer updates on economic priorities and upcoming development projects.

Don't miss out: Bookmark Anchorage.net/RSVP to learn about and register for future member events.

TANIA HANCOCK MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Visit Anchorage continues to honor and celebrate the memory of Tania Hancock, our dear friend and valued colleague, with the Tania Hancock Memorial Scholarship administered through the Alaska Travel Industry Association Foundation. Throughout her career, Tania worked to share the beauty and spirit of Alaska with people around the world. This scholarship helps continue Tania's legacy of supporting Alaskans and mentoring newcomers to our local visitor industry. We encourage all who are able to consider making a donation to the scholarship fund in her memory.



To donate, visit Alaskatia.org/foundation/donate.

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

Get to know these new members; they could be your next business partners!

- [Alaska Sundog Guiding LLC](#)
- [Alaska Zipline Adventure Park](#)
- [American Red Cross of Alaska](#)
- [BlueWater BaseCamp](#)
- [Chugach Chocolates](#)
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