



Explore Fairbanks Annual Progress Report January 1 – September 30, 2021

Introduction

After enduring one of the most devastating years on record in the visitor industry in 2020, Explore Fairbanks approached 2021 with cautious optimism through implementation of its COVID-19 Remarketing Plan with a goal of moving along the road to recovery both in terms of maintaining the destination's presence in the marketplace as well as pursuing and securing the necessary funding to execute those marketing endeavors. Explore Fairbanks also assisted its business partners by providing leadership in helping to create an environment in which those businesses could recover as well as informing and educating on various business recovery funding sources.

While January and February were behind 2020 in every trackable visitation statistic (Fairbanks International Airport arrivals/departures, hotel occupancy rates, hotel/motel bed tax collections) those data points began to surpass 2020 in March and in some cases even exceeding 2019 going into the second quarter. Examples of those statistics can be found through the accompanying department narratives.

The Fairbanks market performed remarkably well given the circumstances and obstacles in place. The 2016 Alaska Visitor Statistics Program found that for Fairbanks, 41% of summer visitors arrive by way of Cross Gulf of Alaska cruise/land tours; 10% by way of highway traffic, and 16% are international. There were no Cross Gulf of Alaska cruises for summer 2021, and highway traffic as well as international visitation were both minimal at best. The lack of those markets was somewhat made up (though not to pre-pandemic levels) with a surge of domestic independent leisure travelers, largely last minute in their travel and booking decisions. Contributing to those visitation numbers were an increase in air service with new carriers and destinations, as well as exceptionally low fares.



An unexpected challenge for 2021 that came to fruition in the spring and carried forward throughout the summer had to do with shortages, both in terms of workforce and disruptions to the global supply chain. The inability of many visitor industry business partners to hire employees led to some businesses actually having to turn away clients as they didn't have the workforce to meet the demand. On the supply chain issues, one of the more significant challenges was the nation-wide rental car shortage which led to anecdotal reports of visitors canceling their trip to Fairbanks. Explore Fairbanks intervened in both of those matters, to include hosting a pre-summer season job fair to address the workforce issue, and surveying partners to identify and promote alternative transportation options to visitors.

Internally, 2021 has been a year of substantial change within Explore Fairbanks with Deb Hickok resigning at the end of May after 22 years as President and CEO. Director of Tourism Scott McCrea was selected by the board of directors to take her place. After 2020 saw significant reductions in staff due to layoffs as well as attrition, the organization managed to rebuild its team (thought not to pre-pandemic levels) and fill all of its vacant positions by the end of summer.



Administration Department

Department Staff

President and CEO: Deb Hickok (through end of May); Scott McCrea (beginning in June)

Director of Finance and Administration: Dawn Murphy

Executive and Finance Coordinator: Alanna McBrayer (through July while also working as manager of Visitor Services and Partnership Development); Francine Zannou (beginning in July)

Continued COVID-19 Impact

COVID-19 continued to have an impact on the administration department throughout the first three quarters of 2021, primarily in the areas of staffing as the department went without a full-time executive and finance coordinator until July. The department also spent a significant amount of time pursuing and applying for funding relief through programs such as the State of Alaska DCCED COVID-19 Safety Travel Grant. The President and CEO, through the first part of the year, also engaged in advocacy efforts related to the ongoing pandemic and impact on the visitor industry.

Year-to-Date Progress Report

- Bed Taxes to Date significantly over 2020**

With figures in for January through August, preliminary reports show significantly increased collections when compared to the same period last year. Both the months of April and May showed increased collections over the same time period in 2019. The FNSB adjusted June and August 2021 to accrue bed tax receivables for FY21 year-end, and may continue to make audit adjustments for the June 30 fiscal year end.

Bed Tax Year To Date Dollar Change through August 2021								
Government Bed Tax Collections	Month				Year-to-Date (YTD)			
	Month 2020	Month 2021	Month Net Gain/Loss	Month % +/-	YTD 2020	YTD 2021	YTD Net Gain/Loss	Year % +/-
*FNSB (other than cities)	94,820	-81,217	-176,036	-185.65%	673,511	1,048,032	374,521	55.61%
City of Fairbanks	184,528	547,775	363,248	196.85%	1,049,759	2,195,449	1,145,690	109.1%
**City North Pole	7,822	28,402	20,580	263.10%	36,439	102,678	66,240	181.8%
Totals	287,170	494,961			1,759,709	3,346,159		
	Month Net Gain/Loss		207,791.68	72.36%	YTD Net Gain/Loss		1,586,450	90.15%

Prior to 2020, the Fairbanks region had five record breaking years of bed tax collections. 2020 started with the hopes of being another record-breaking year but then in late February and early March the cancellations started. With travel restrictions, health mandates, port, and border closures by late March it was clear that the tourism industry was facing a rough year.

The total hotel/motel tax collections (combined total of the Fairbanks North Star Borough, including the cities of Fairbanks and North Pole) year-over-year:

- 9.0% increase in 2016 when collections broke the \$5 million mark for the first time
- nearly 3.0% increase in 2017
- nearly 6.0% increase in 2018
- 2.0% increase in 2019
- 54.51% decrease in 2020



- **Securing COVID-19 Related Funds to Help Maintain Stability, Enhance Marketing Efforts**

- Explore Fairbanks applied for and successfully received the following COVID-19 related relief funds:
 - Payroll Protection Program (PPP) First Draw: \$285,915
 - Payroll Protection Program (PPP) Second Draw: \$285,915
 - DCCED COVID-19 Safety Travel Grant: \$348,460
 - Royal Caribbean Alaska Support Grant: \$1,000
- Explore Fairbanks is poised to receive \$350,000 from the Fairbanks North Star Borough American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for 2021 as well as an additional \$350,000 in 2022.
- Explore Fairbanks also worked closely with the City of Fairbanks on the distribution of \$1.5 million of its ARPA funds to local leisure and hospitality small businesses by promoting the program to its partners.

- **Engaging in Infrastructure Development, Public Policy, and Advocacy**

Explore Fairbanks was involved in the following issues regarding infrastructure development, public policy, advocacy and education.

Infrastructure Development:

- Explore Fairbanks works closely with the Fairbanks International Airport (FAI) to develop air service and better serve visitors. In summer 2021 FAI increased its overall passenger capacity from 2019 by 26% with new carriers to include American Airlines with flights from Dallas Fort-Worth and Chicago and Sun Country with weekly flights from Minneapolis. Delta Air Lines added a new direct service to Salt Lake City
- Explore Fairbanks is actively involved with and facilitates meetings of the Polaris Working Group, which is working on identifying solutions to demolish the Polaris Building in downtown Fairbanks. Working with members of the group, Explore Fairbanks took the lead on conducting outreach and communicating to Alaska's congressional delegation to try and identify federal funds that could be used towards this endeavor. These communication efforts included:
 - A virtual briefing with members of Sen. Murkowski's staff on May 6.
 - An in person briefing and presentation with Congressman Don Young on May 5 at the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center.
 - In conjunction with the City of Fairbanks Engineering Department, PWG Chair David Pruhs, and the Downtown Association of Fairbanks, conducted a site visit of the Polaris Building with two members of Sen. Murkowski's team on August 3.
- Explore Fairbanks is actively involved in the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the FNSB Downtown Fairbanks Working Group.

Public Policy, Advocacy and Education:

- In conjunction with the Fairbanks Chapter of the Alaska Travel Industry Association, Explore Fairbanks coordinated a Visitor Industry Local Government Candidate Forum on September 24.
- Explore Fairbanks initiated and coordinated a letter to Alaska's elected officials sent on behalf of the state's destination marketing organizations discussing the impact of the decision by the Canadian government to extend the ban on cruise vessels until February 2022 as well as the CDC protocols of "Healthy Sail", urging elected officials to pro-actively take actions to directly assist the industry per priority items listed in the letter.
- Explore Fairbanks hosted a listening session with Lt. Governor Kevin Myers at the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center on April 27 along with a group of EF business partners to provide the Lt. Governor feedback on ARPA funding relief for the visitor industry.



- Explore Fairbanks provided letters of support to Senator Murkowski to support a Senate version of the Securing Access for Venue Equity (SAVE) Act and to Congressman Don Young to support H.R> 380 to replenish the Restaurant Revitalization Fund.
- **Working on Building and Improving Internal Operations**
 - Explore Fairbanks conducted a nationwide search for the position of President and CEO to replace Deb Hickok who resigned at the end of May. Close to 700 applicants applied for the position, which was narrowed down to 10 qualified candidates to present to the transition team. The team narrowed it down further to five candidates to proceed to the interview stage. The board interviewed two finalists at their retreat on April 21 and selected Scott McCrea, EF Director of Tourism and Convention Sales, for the position.
 - Explore Fairbanks hired Bill Wright, previously working as the organization's Internet Marketing Manager, for the position of Director of Tourism and Meeting Sales. For cost savings and efficiencies, the once separate departments of Tourism and Meetings and Conventions are now combined into one.
 - Explore Fairbanks successfully hired all vacant positions, to include Visitor Information Specialist, Meetings and Conventions Sales and Services Manager, Internet Marketing Specialist, and Executive and Finance Coordinator. The organization now stands at 14 full-time employees and three part time employees, compared to pre-pandemic levels of 19 full-time employees and around seven part-time/seasonal.
- **Providing Leadership and Community Support**
 - **President and CEO Deb Hickok** (January through May) served on the board of directors for the U.S. Travel Association and the Alaska Travel Industry Association. She advised and participated in numerous community projects and organizations and presented to various community groups throughout the year.
 - **President and CEO Scott McCrea** was appointed to Deb Hickock's seat on the ATIA Board of Directors in June and was elected to a three-year term in September. He serves on the board of director of the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club of Fairbanks and actively participates in the GFCC Military Affairs Committee and the FNSB "Tiger Team" group.
 - The **Director of Finance and Administration Dawn Murphy** serves on the Finance Committee for the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce and as Treasurer on the Board of Directors and Finance Chair for the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center. She serves on the Fairbanks North Star Borough Career and Technical Education Advisory Committee, Alaska Travel Industry Association Workforce Development Committee, and works with other organizations to provide academic pathways and highlight the varied career opportunities with the tourism industry.

Communications Department

Department Staff

Director of Communications: Amy Geiger

Assistant Director of Communications: Kasey Gillam

Public Relations Manager: Jerry Evans

Internet Marketing Manager: Bill Wright (through July 5)

Internet Marketing Specialist: Amalia Phillips (since September 27)

Branding and Production Coordinator: Angie Cerny (part-time)

Continued COVID-19 Impact

Going in to 2021, the Communications Department continued to place emphasis on the multi-pronged campaign started in 2020 aimed at local and statewide audiences. As the year has progressed, the department started shifting back to a more traditional marketing mix, focusing on the national audience more than local and statewide, and have now started to add international marketing back into the mix.

Messaging continued to incorporate the “Imagine Yourself Here” and “Explore Fairbanks Responsibly” themes, though that is being phased out as COVID messaging wanes. Due to an increased advertising budget, a COVID-19 Safe Travel Grant from the State of Alaska, and a concerted shift to more digital marketing methods, the department has been able to reach significantly more people than ever before. This has resulted in a record number of website sessions and pageviews as well as video views.

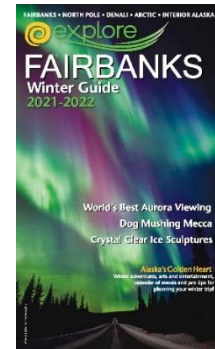
While the department has continued to host media tours, the amount of time spent with media on the ground has adjusted to help keep staff and media safe. This often results in Explore Fairbanks renting cars for media to explore on their own instead of having a staff member drive and accompany them throughout their trip.

Additionally, the department kept busy with social media and content creation, crafting the Aurora City Sweepstakes as well as other promotional endeavors.

Year-to-Date Progress Report

- **Designed and Produced Key Collateral and Promotional Materials**

- Revised and produced 40,000 copies of the *2021-22 Fairbanks Winter Guide* which maintains branding and highlights the aurora. The guide incorporates many local photographers discovered on Instagram.
- Working diligently on the *2022 Fairbanks Visitors Guide* with new photos and updated content.
- Designed icon for Explore Fairbanks Responsibly pledge.
- Worked with Tourism and Communications departments to create various virtual tradeshow booths and presentations.
- Designed and produced many promotional and organizational materials such as business cards, programs, report covers, ads, flyers, digital and print invitations, table displays, profile sheets, and envelopes. *Highlights include:*
 - Program for Interior Tourism Conference
 - Mask with Explore Fairbanks logo
 - Invitation and program for Deb Hickok's celebration event
 - Invitation and awards for Annual Partner Banquet
 - Scavenger Hunt and Photo Contest flyer
 - Spreadsheet for transportation options
 - Banners for Sun Country and American Airlines inaugural flights



- **Hosted 19 Media Tours with 29 Participants**

Highlights include:

- **Bailey Berg** – Working on numerous stories, including a *National Geographic* story about historic roadhouses, a feature travelogue for *Good Beer Hunting* about visiting Fairbanks in the winter, an article about the Thai food scene for *Atlas Obscura*, an article about the Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum for *Fodor's Travel*, a feature story tentatively titled "Borealis or Bust – Seeing the Northern Lights in Fairbanks," also for *Fodor's Travel*, a story about Running Reindeer Ranch for *Roadtrippers*, a story about the ice sculpture contest, and a story tentatively titled "How to spend a perfect long winter weekend in Fairbanks, Alaska."

- **Hudson Lindenberger** – Working on a book about hiking in Interior Alaska. He focused on meeting locals for background information and hitting as many trails as possible.
- **Artem Shestakov** – World-class photographer and influencer who traveled to Fairbanks with his videographer Kristofh Pozo. As part of his agreement with Explore Fairbanks and ATIA, he will be sharing his photographs for us to use.
- **Summer Rylander** – Wrote a piece for *Conde Naste Traveler* titled “Where to See the Northern Lights.” She also has a story coming up in *Travel + Leisure*'s print December issue introducing Fairbanks and four distilleries, titled "A 'Spirited' Journey Through Alaska's Golden Heart."
- **RAI-Italian National Television** – Were here producing a 60-minute news special about today's America, focusing on the US regions that are located at the edge of the country. They came to Fairbanks to cover a story about archeological artifacts that are among the oldest European-made items ever discovered in North America. In addition to this story, they profiled Fairbanks as one of the most iconic and spectacular regions in the US.
- **Lucy Sherriff** – Here to write stories for *Discovery.com* and *The Daily Beast*. She also gathered information to produce a piece on Geothermal Energy at Chena Hot Springs Resort.
- **Maggie Lehmicke** – Was on assignment for *Travel + Leisure* for a story about the mushing school at Last Frontier Mushing Co-Op.
- **Niaz Uddin** – His Instagram (@neohumanity) has over 319,000 followers and he typically gets 6-18,000 likes per photo. Not only did he post to his social media, but he also gave us dozens of photos to use in our photo bank, website, social media and publications.



- **Explore Fairbanks Issued 13 Press Releases to 25,100 Media Contacts**

Highlights include:

- Announcing Explore Fairbanks 2021 Board of Directors
- Promotion of the 2021 Charity Walk
- Announcing the 2021 Explore Fairbanks annual awards winners
- Aurora Trackers video release
- Aurora City Sweepstakes contest
- 2021-22 Winter Guide release

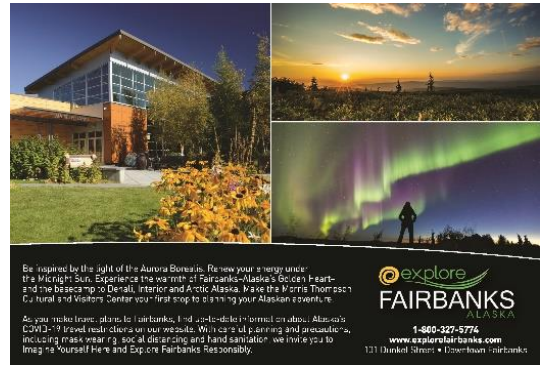
- **Public Relations Actions and Initiatives**

- Answered 300 media inquiries requesting photos, regional information, fact checking, potential filming questions and more.

- Conducted 25 media interviews.
- To add to our growing band of images to use on the website, for social media and in our collateral pieces, Explore Fairbanks continues to actively seek out visiting and local photographers.
- Due to an influx of bloggers and social media influencers, Explore Fairbanks continues to vet numerous potential traveling media.
- Worked with the North American Travel Journalists Association to postpone Fairbanks-hosted Annual Conference and Marketplace from March 2021 to May 2023.
- Public Relations Manager was the featured guest on Dan Schlossberg's syndicated radio show "Travel Itch Radio."

- **Advertising Placements and Promotions**

- Year-to-date inquiries for Visitors Guides are down 14% from the same period in 2020. The largest decreases are due to *Travel 50 & Beyond*, *National Geographic Traveler* and *Where to Retire* ceasing publication as well as a large reduction in the number of leads from Travel Guides Free and ATIA. Conversely, Facebook leads are up 127% over 2020 through the end of September.
- Continued to advertise the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center as an information resource to residents and visitors through the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, iHeartMedia and various Alaskan guidebooks.
- In May, ran first-ever OTT (streaming television) ads in the Seattle market featuring a new 30-second spot.
- Provided support for new and existing direct flights to Fairbanks to and from Chicago, Dallas, Minneapolis, Salt Lake City and Seattle. Social media ads were created in each market promoting the flights to/from the respective city and directed traffic to dedicated landing pages for each location. Radio ads were also used in Fairbanks, Minneapolis and Seattle.
- Digital marketing has contributed significantly to increased traffic to the explorefairbanks.com website. *Highlights include:*
 - ATIA Audience Extension Program: 7,127,875 impressions; 8,081 clicks; .11% click through rate (CTR)
 - Facebook/Instagram: 9,310,915 impressions; 43,147 clicks; .46% CTR
 - Google Display: 12,481,520 impressions; 217,792 clicks; 1.74% CTR
 - Google Search: 1,810,641 impressions; 61,294 clicks; 3.39% CTR
 - Sojern: 7,166,345 impressions; 8,068 clicks; .11% CTR
 - TravelAlaska.com: 4,481,748 impressions; 8,290 clicks; .18% CTR
 - Travel Spike: 3,663,708 impressions; 5,378 display ad clicks; .15% CTR; 31,450 contextual ad clicks



- **COVID-Safe Travel Promotion Grant Assists in Remarketing Efforts**

- In June, Explore Fairbanks was awarded \$348,640 from the COVID-Safe Travel Grant Program through the State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development. The purpose of the grant was to create marketing campaigns promoting Alaska as a COVID-safe travel destination for the summer of 2021. The



awarding of this grant allowed Explore Fairbanks to greatly expand current campaigns as well as add new programs through the summer months. The results of the grant ads are as follows:

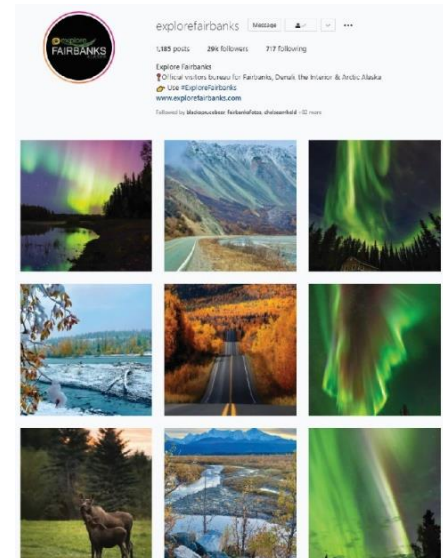
- Created three new (national, statewide and local) video advertisements promoting COVID-safe travel and the availability of COVID-19 vaccines.
- OTT (streaming television) in Chicago, Dallas, Minneapolis, Salt Lake City and Seattle: 5,991,820 impressions; 3,133,167 reach; 9,328 visitors to explorefairbanks.com
- National YouTube: 7,500,830 impressions; 1,353,897 views; 22,212 clicks
- National Facebook/Instagram: 1,365,736 impressions; 1,330,591 video plays; 3,458 clicks
- Statewide broadcast and cable television: 4,326 spots
- Statewide YouTube: 317,203 impressions; 62,825 views; 647 clicks
- Statewide Facebook/Instagram: 209,673 impressions; 194,866 video plays; 659 clicks
- Statewide radio: 982 spots
- Local broadcast television: 1,062 spots
- Local YouTube: 211,526 impressions; 38,896 views; 392 clicks
- Local Facebook/Instagram: 100,280 impressions; 94,175 views; 346 clicks
- Local radio: 600 spots
- Throughout the course of the two-and-a-half-month campaign, Explore Fairbanks was able to generate a total of 15,697,068 digital impressions, 6,878 radio and television spots and 37,042 visits to the explorefairbanks.com website that would not have been generated without the funds from this grant. In comparing explorefairbanks.com website traffic between June 15-August 31, 2021, to the same time in 2020, the total number of sessions grew by 109% (247,468 vs 118,536). With 37,042 of those sessions being generated through grant-funded ads, 29% of the growth in visitation to the website can be attributed to the grant. Grant-funded ads accounted for 15% of total website sessions throughout the time of the campaign.

- **Online Messaging Essential to Marketing**

- The explorefairbanks.com website has hosted 677,835 new visitors to date, a 120% increase over 2020. Total page views to date are 1,613,723, a 92% increase over 2020.
- Number of returning visitors to date to explorefairbanks.com is 123,330, a 96% increase from 2020.
- Continued to work on the website including updating content, refreshing blogs, meta-tagging pages, cross-linking to additional content and other maintenance as necessary.
- Continued to regularly update the COVID-19 page on the website with relevant updates and information.
- Uploaded and regularly updated spreadsheet featuring transportation options in response to the rental car shortage. Also wrote a blog post.
- Created six custom, dedicated landing pages for airline development advertising.
- Released “Aurora Trackers” video in February featuring local area photographers sharing their experience chasing and photographing the northern lights. The video was put on YouTube and Facebook and was promoted through a press release and advertising.
- Continued creating “Explore Local” videos for use in the Fairbanks market including dog mushing, ice art and outdoor winter activities.
- Created “Explore Fairbanks Responsibly” video featuring Charity Gadapee and various partners.
- Continue to place emphasis on posting blogs and promoting them through social media channels. Through the end of September, page visits to blog pages are up 35% over 2020.
- Continued JackRabbit booking solution integration on the website which allows visitors to search for accommodations, activities, attractions and tours with availability during a specified time. Through the end of September, 18,877 searches were run (an increase of 101% from 2020) and generated 8,760 referrals to partner websites (an increase of 103% from 2020).
- Facebook “likes” are currently at 36,813, a 25% increase over September 2020, and continue to grow with quality content and Facebook advertising.
- Twitter followers are at 6,902.



- Instagram followers are at 28,722, a 34% increase over September 2020, and continues to grow steadily through organic means via quality content and engagement.
- Continued e-news titled “The Explorer” that is sent to consumers, partners, media, travel agents/tour operators and meeting planners. Through the end of September, four e-news have been published for a total of almost 176,000 sent with an average open rate of 15.6%.
- Coordinated and hosted three Facebook live events from the World Ice Art Championships, World Eskimo-Indian Olympics and the University of Alaska Museum of the North bowhead whale skeleton exhibit.



- **Aurora City Sweepstakes kicked off the start of Aurora Season**

- Put together an aurora viewing and winter adventure package featuring lodging at five aurora viewing facilities, a variety of winter activities, a gift card for beverages and food as well as a rental vehicle to be won by one lucky winner and a guest to travel to Fairbanks in March 2022.
- Entry period ran from August 19-31, 2021.
- Created a variety of graphics, website landing pages and entry forms.
- Wrote blog post that was featured on explorefairbanks.com and travelalaska.com.
- Press release was sent to almost 7,800 journalists, publications and media outlets.
- A total of 16 social media posts were made across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest that combined for a total reach of more than 652,000 people, 43,225 likes and 1,445 comments.
- The contest gathered a total of 13,840 eligible entries.
- The entry page on the website had over 19,800 pageviews during the contest period.



- **Land Acknowledgement Pays Respect to Alaska Natives**

- Worked with Denakkanaaga to create a Dena Athabascan Land Acknowledgement that will be incorporated into publications, the website, local meetings and more.
- The Land Acknowledgement reads: “We respectfully acknowledge the Dena people on whose traditional lands we reside. We honor the Dena who have been the stewards of Interior lands and waters for centuries, the Elders who lived here before, the Dena people of today, and future generations to come. We also recognize that Alaska Native people would traditionally gather here and harvest Native foods.”

- **Active Participation in Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center (MTCVC)**

- Integrated MTCVC visits to travel writers' itineraries.
- Promoted MTCVC as the "first stop" for visitors in Fairbanks with photos and copy in guidebooks as well as advertising placements.



- **Providing Leadership and Community Support**

- Gave multiple updates to City Council, Borough Assembly and other local groups.
- Weekly 2-minute call-ins to KIAK radio on related tourism topics.
- The Assistant Director of Communications served on the ATIA Website RFP Committee.
- The Director of Communications serves on ATIA's Marketing Committee as well as the Website, Cultural Enrichment and Public Relations subcommittees.

Tourism Department

Department Staff

Director of Tourism and Meeting Sales: Scott McCrea (through June 30); Bill Wright (beginning in July)

Tourism Senior Sales Manager: Ed Malen

Contractors

European Contractor: Elke Brosin

China Contractor: EastWest Marketing (*social media only*)

Continued COVID-19 Impact

Going into 2021, COVID-19 continued to have an impact on the tourism department's marketing efforts, as in-person trade shows and sales missions, both domestically and internationally, were non-existent until later in the summer months. The department did see a return of hosted familiarization (FAM) tours beginning in February, though the number of tours was significantly less than it was in pre-pandemic times.

With the absence of the in-person trade shows and sales missions, the department greatly enhanced its virtual presence that it implemented in 2020, to include not only the continuation of the Fairbanks Aurora & Midnight Sun (FAMS) destination training webinar and supplemental webinars, but also in market-specific webinars in conjunction with other Alaska visitor industry colleagues. Additionally, the department participated in a number of virtual trade shows and consumer shows.

Also significant on operations for 2021 was the continued merger with the meetings and conventions department, which, moving ahead will be one department. The combination of the two resulted in increased responsibilities for the Director of Tourism and Meeting Sales and the Tourism Senior Sales Manager.

- **Familiarization (FAM) Tours**

From January to September 2021 the department hosted 11 domestic FAM tours and two travel prize winners that were attended by a total of 21 attendees. Explore Fairbanks partners provided \$28,686 of in-kind support towards the FAMs. The department hosted these groups and individuals:

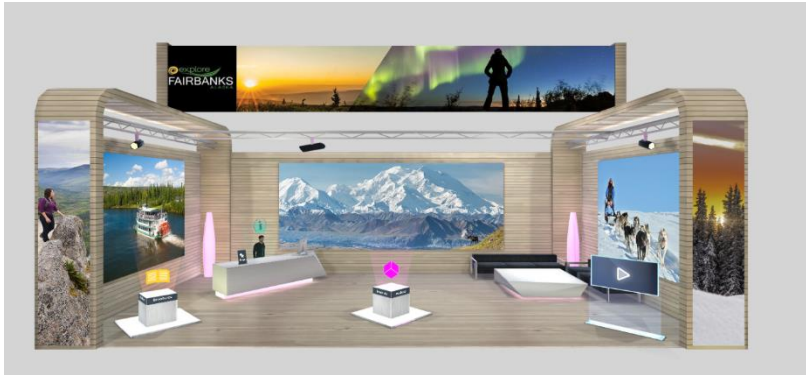
- **Prestige Travel FAM from February 10 – 15:** Richard Petric came up to Fairbanks from Tampa, Florida to research winter products in the Fairbanks area. In addition to spending time in the Fairbanks area Richard also traveled south to Denali National Park on the Alaska Railroad, spent time at Chena Hot Springs and took a trip above the Arctic Circle. Richard was accompanied by one (1) companion.



- **CruisingCo.com FAM from February 27 – March 1:** Steve Shadle, Vacation Travel Consultant came to Fairbanks from Seattle, Washington to research tour products that fall outside of the usual cruise itinerary due to the severe reduction of cruises to Alaska. The majority of time was spent in Fairbanks and the Chena Hot Springs Road area to experience winter tours and products. Steve was accompanied by one (1) companion.
- **Cruise Planners FAM – Betty Sedia from February 28 – March 3:** Betty Sedia, Luxury Travel Specialist came to Fairbanks from Louisa, Virginia to research winter products to sell outside of the cruise season. Did many site inspections to meet with owners and vendors in addition to doing tours and activities in the Fairbanks area. Betty continued on to Anchorage to do the same in South Central Alaska.
- **Travel By Design FAM from March 11 – 14:** Elizabeth Walton, a tour operator with Austin-based Travel By Design, came to Fairbanks to research products and tours for a 2022 winter package. Activities included aurora viewing, dog mushing, Chena Hot Springs Resort, a trip to the Arctic Circle and local site inspections.
- **Scenic Roads FAM from June 7 – 8:** Emmanuelle Vaugeois founder of Scenic Roads (based in Las Vegas) did a self-drive FAM tour all throughout Alaska, beginning in Anchorage. Drove from Anchorage to Fairbanks to better understand self-driving options on Alaska's highways. In addition to activities/tours in the Fairbanks area, she also took a trip above the Arctic Circle. After spending her last morning in Fairbanks, Emmanuelle drove on to Valdez and back around to Anchorage to complete a full loop around the state.
- **Cruise Planners FAM – Jen Henriksen from June 9 – 24:** Jen Henriksen (an agent with Cruise Planners) came to Alaska for an extended FAM tour to experience as many products outside of the typical cruise itinerary to expand her product selection for her clients. Jen spent over one month in Alaska researching potential products and meeting with various vendors. In addition to Anchorage and Fairbanks, Jen also traveled along the Richardson Highway, Chena Hot Springs Road and beyond to the Arctic Circle.
- **CruisingCo.com FAM from June 12 – 14.:** Steve Shadle returned with his companion to experience summer products that he has sent guests to experience in the past. Also took a quick trip down to Denali National Park to observe operations to better understand the logistics of sending guests to that region.

- **Travel Age West Prize Winner from August 11 – 13:** Mary Doyle with Harmon Travel attended a series of three (3) webinars that was organized by Travel Age West organization and was awarded the prize of a trip to Alaska. Mary and her husband Gary enjoyed a number of Fairbanks tours and restaurants in the immediate Fairbanks area. They continued to Denali National Park and beyond with support of other participating Alaska organizations/companies.
- **Cruise Planners Summer FAM – Betty Sedia from August 22 – 26:** Betty Sedia returned to Alaska to learn more about the summer products that are offered throughout the state. In addition to spending time in Anchorage and Denali National Park, she took time to visit Fairbanks to experience a number of tours/activities that were not available during the winter. Betty was accompanied by her sister, Linda Combs-Fina.
- **Affordable Vacation Station FAM from September 2 – 5:** Jay Paul, Luxury Cruise Specialist was intrigued by the FAMS Online Training Program and decided to travel to Fairbanks to better understand products that are not typically included in cruise itineraries. Spent time at Chena Hot Springs Resort as well as various locations around Fairbanks.
- **VTN Travel FAM from September 5 – 10:** Representatives from three different travel agencies met up in Anchorage to travel throughout Alaska to better understand summer products. Cori Wiesel with Voyages Terra Natura (VTN) Travel, Cecilia “Cessy” Fiestas Meacham with Anytime Travel Solutions and Carol Costa Marshall with Marshall’s World of Travel traveled from Anchorage to Denali National Park and up to Fairbanks on the Alaska Railroad and experienced a large portion of summer tour products as well as site inspections with potential industry partners.
- **San Francisco Prize Winner from September 11 – 18:** Adriana and Monica Pedraza were announced the winners of a 2019 promotion to encourage travel through the then-new San Francisco direct flight to Fairbanks. Although the flight no longer exists, Explore Fairbanks decided to honor the award in 2021 as travel was not allowed during the original planned time of the visit. They were able to travel between Fairbanks and Denali National Park in addition to taking a trip above the Arctic Circle.
- **Cruise Planners FAM – Judith Zavala from September 13 – 24:** Judith Zavala participated in a Visit Anchorage FAM in the week prior to coming to Fairbanks to continue researching summer products. Unfortunately, Judith tested positive with Covid-19 on the second day of the FAM and had to cancel all activities and remain in quarantine for 10 days after first symptoms manifested. Explore Fairbanks coordinated payment and discounts for accommodation services to accommodate the quarantine period. After quarantine, Judith was able to do a number of site visits before returning home to Minnesota.
- **European Contractor International Trade Shows/Sales Missions**
Explore Fairbanks’ European-based contractor Elke Brosin attended and participated in a total of four virtual and one in-person international trade shows that resulted in appointments and contacts made and exposure with tour operators and travel agents. Elke also continued to maintain contact with points of contact in Europe by way of emails, brochure mail-outs and various presentations. Highlights included participation in:

- **AVIAREPS Virtual D-A-CH Roadshow was held on February 9 & 10:** Explore Fairbanks has a virtual booth for participants to “stop by” to view online content as well as ask questions and drop off their business cards. During the show, the booth saw 106 visits with 304 clicks to content. There were also 64 chats with consumers and 24 direct chats with Travel/Trade (19) and Media (5). A total of 162 business cards were left/sent to the booth.
- **ITB Berlin was held virtually this year from March 9 – 12:** Of the 34 appointments taken, 25 were Travel/Trade points of contact and nine (9) of which were media representatives.
- **AVIAREPS Nordic Virtual Trade Show was held on April 20 & 21:** A total of 21

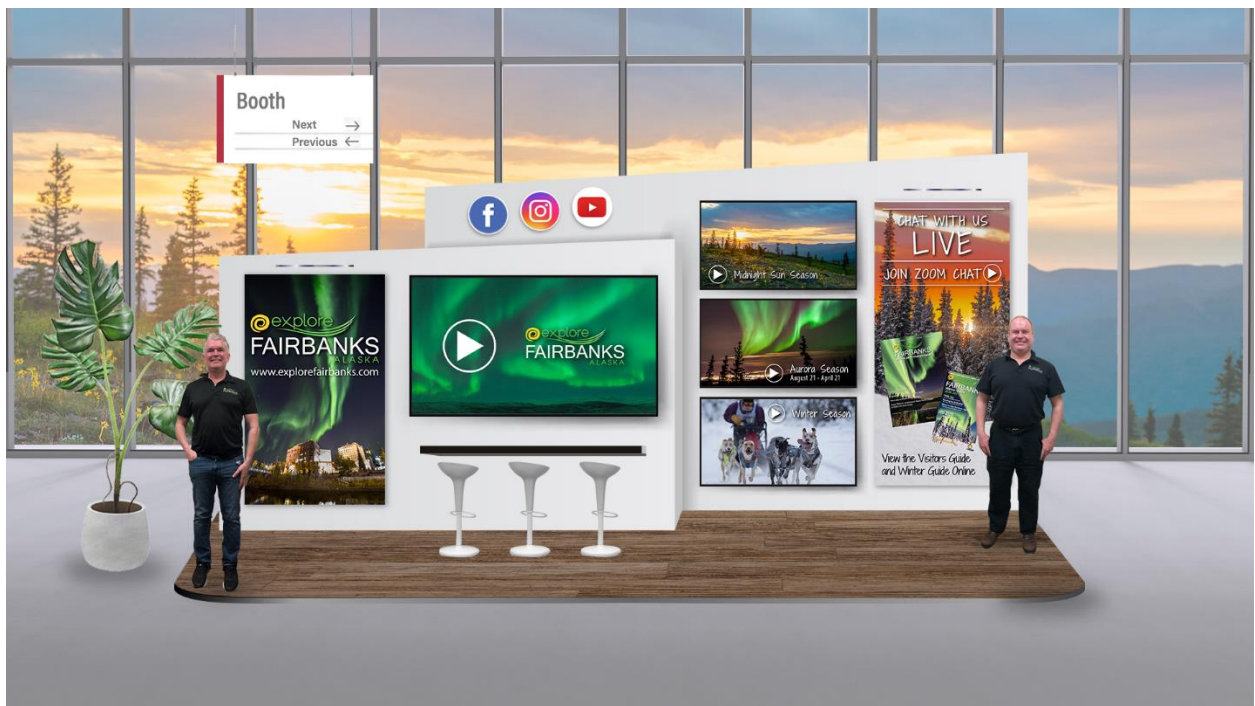


Travel/Trade (13) and Media (8) representatives were met during the show. A virtual booth was also included in the show which saw 30 booth visits, 65 clicks and 22 chats. 72 business cards were left/sent to the booth.

- **MATKA Workshop Digital Trade Show was held on May 20:** A total of 12 interactions were recorded with 11 Travel/Trade and one media representative.
- **USATravel Belgium Travel Show was held in Brussels on June 26:** This is the first in-person travel show that has been attended since the Covid-19 pandemic began in 2020. Met with 11 representatives to include nine travel trade and two media.
- **EastWest Marketing**
 - Focused entirely on social media postings on WeChat and Weibo and provided Explore Fairbanks with monthly market and Covid-19 updates.
- **In-Person Domestic Travel Trade Shows** - The Tourism Department participated in two in-person domestic travel trade shows in 2021 with American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA) and International Pow Wow (IPW).
 - Wright traveled to Chicago, IL to attend 2021 ASTA Global from August 22 – 26. A total of 35 Travel/Trade representatives were met during the annual convention.
 - Wright and Malen traveled to Las Vegas, Nevada to attend 2021 IPW (International Pow Wow) from September 18 – 23. A total of 42 Travel/Trade and nine (9) media representatives were met during the course of the show



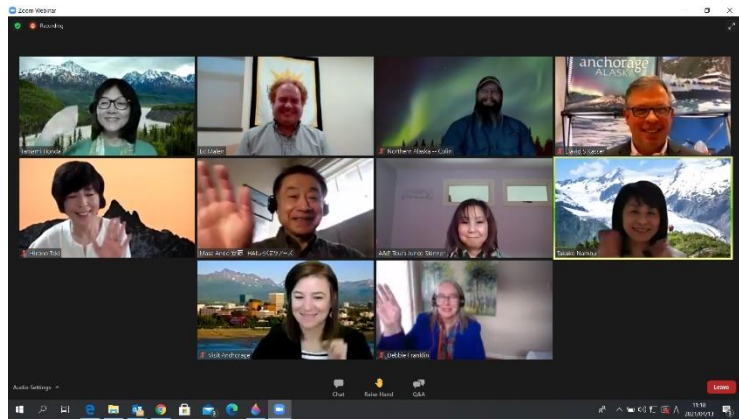
- **Virtual Travel Trade and Consumer Shows** – The department participated in the following virtual domestic consumer and travel trade shows:
 - Malen and McCrea conducted virtual one on one meetings during GoWest Summit from March 1 – 5. 52 scheduled appointments were held for 30 minutes each with attendees to include travel trade from countries such as UK, Germany, Canada, Australia, Mexico, Costa Rico, Saudi Arabia, Japan, China, Philippines, and others.
 - McCrea conducted 16 b2b appointments with domestic motor coach operators for the American Bus Association virtual trade show on March 16. The event was an add-on for exhibitors who had registered for the ABA Marketplace event to be held in June.
 - The department attended the Travel & Adventure Expo AAA Return to Travel Tradeshow on April 14. The virtual booth was visited by 614 travel/trade, media and consumers. 169 consumers requested additional information and 22 representatives from the travel/trade and media sectors also left their contact information for future follow-up.
 - The department attended the “Live from Alaska” online event held by ATIA on April 20. A virtual booth space was created to facilitate interactions. 42 travel/trade/media representatives stopped by to ask questions and enter their contact information for future communications.



- The department participated in the “AAA Road Trips/National Parks” virtual tradeshow on May 12 which was attended by a total of 453 consumers, travel trade and media.

- **International Virtual Sales Mission:**

- Malen coordinated with US Commercial Services in Japan and Visit Anchorage to create the Alaska Virtual Sales Mission to Japan that was held on April 12 (April 13 in Japan). HAI Shirokuma Tours, A&P Tours and Northern Alaska Tour Company also presented in the hour and a half



presentation and assisted answering questions from Japanese participants. 180 individuals signed up for the training; 138 of which attended the live presentation. A recording was sent to those that did not attend the live presentation. Explore Fairbanks and Visit Anchorage did a lucky draw for four participants (two for the live presentation and two for those that watched the recording).

- **Travel Trade Destination Training Webinars**

- **Fairbanks Aurora and Midnight Sun (FAMS):** In January, the department resumed the Fairbanks Aurora and Midnight Sun (FAMS) online destination training program to continue outreach with travel trade in the absence of in-person trade shows and sales missions. The one-hour webinar covers the highlights of what Fairbanks has to offer as a year-round destination. The department also launched a series of supplemental training webinars to go more in-depth on the main topics covered in the FAMS webinar.



Explore Fairbanks industry partners were invited to participate by presenting during the supplemental training programs. Through September, the department conducted a total of 11 trainings (six general trainings, 5 supplemental) with 498 total domestic and international participants.

- **Additional Webinars:** The department also participated in the following market/company specific webinars:
 - In conjunction with Condor Airlines and European Contractor Elke Brosin, conducted a destination training webinar for VUSA Germany Committee on January 27 that was attended by 333 travel trade, a record number of participants for VUSA Germany webinars. A round trip ticket from Frankfurt to Fairbanks from Condor and a one-week fully hosted familiarization tour with

Explore Fairbanks was offered as an incentive to participate; attendees also have to participate in upcoming supplemental training webinars in order to be eligible for the prize.



- Co-presented with Visit Anchorage for a webinar for Cruise Planners travel agents on February 9 which had an attendance of 324 agents. The focus of the webinar was on how to sell land tour packages to Alaska.
- Presented to the New Jersey Chapter of American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA) on March 15, along with Visit Anchorage and the Alaska Railroad. The presentation was attended by 44 chapter members.
- Presented in the Travel Age West Webinar on April 28 along with Visit Anchorage, Alaska Airlines, and the Alaska Railroad. A total of 709 individuals attended the live presentation as well as watched the recording after the fact.
- Malen participated in a consumer educational webinar along with Visit Anchorage to Cruise Planners clients on May 20.

• **AAA, Travel Agent, and Tour Operator Contacts**

The Tourism Department had a total of 519 separate travel trade contacts via email or phone through September:

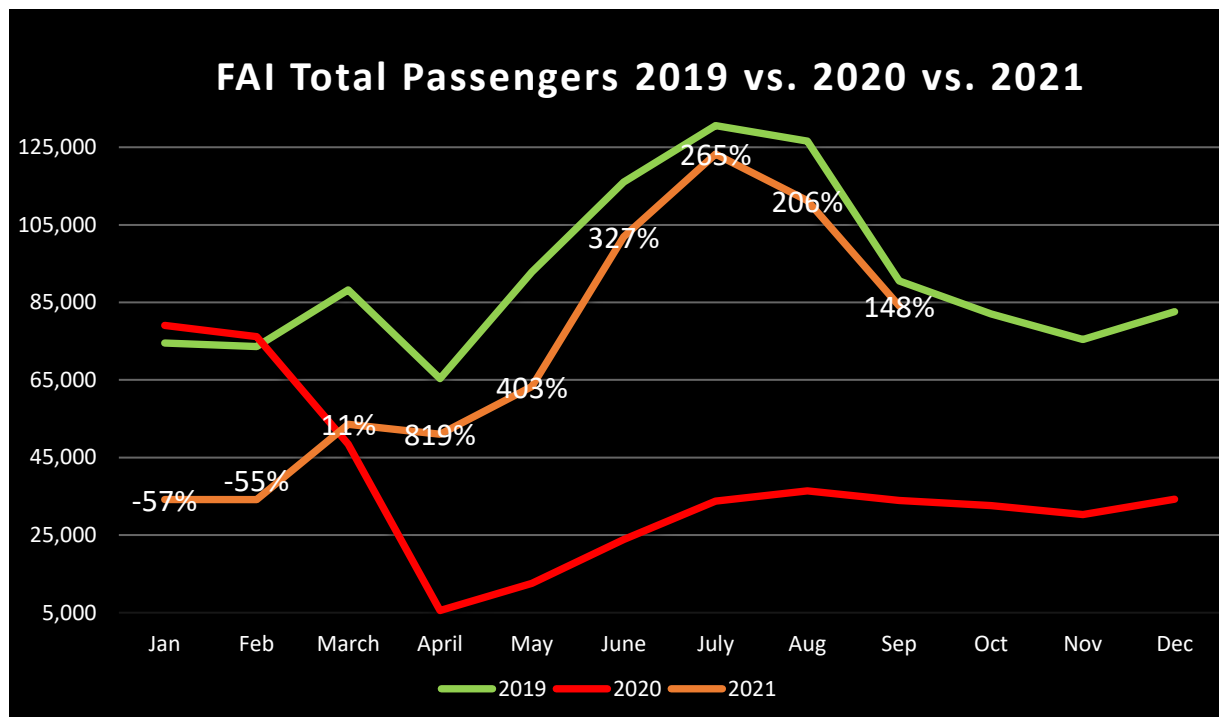
- 38 contacts with AAAs
- 394 contacts with domestic and international travel agents
- 87 contacts with domestic and international tour operators

• **Airport Numbers**

Summer 2021 saw a record for passenger capacity at the Fairbanks International Airport with new carriers such as American Airlines (daily direct flights to Dallas-Fort Worth and Chicago) and Sun Country (weekly service to Minneapolis), and a new route with Delta Air Lines (daily direct flights to Salt Lake City).

The tourism department tracks FAI enplaning and deplaning passengers. Passenger numbers include travel by Fairbanks residents and business travelers; therefore, the numbers are not reflective of only visitation.

The numbers in the graph below compare 2021 to 2020 and 2019. Year to date combined arrivals and departures are up by 91% over 2020 and down by 22% from 2019. For the May to September summer season, combined arrivals and departures are up by 244% over 2020 and down by 15% from 2019.

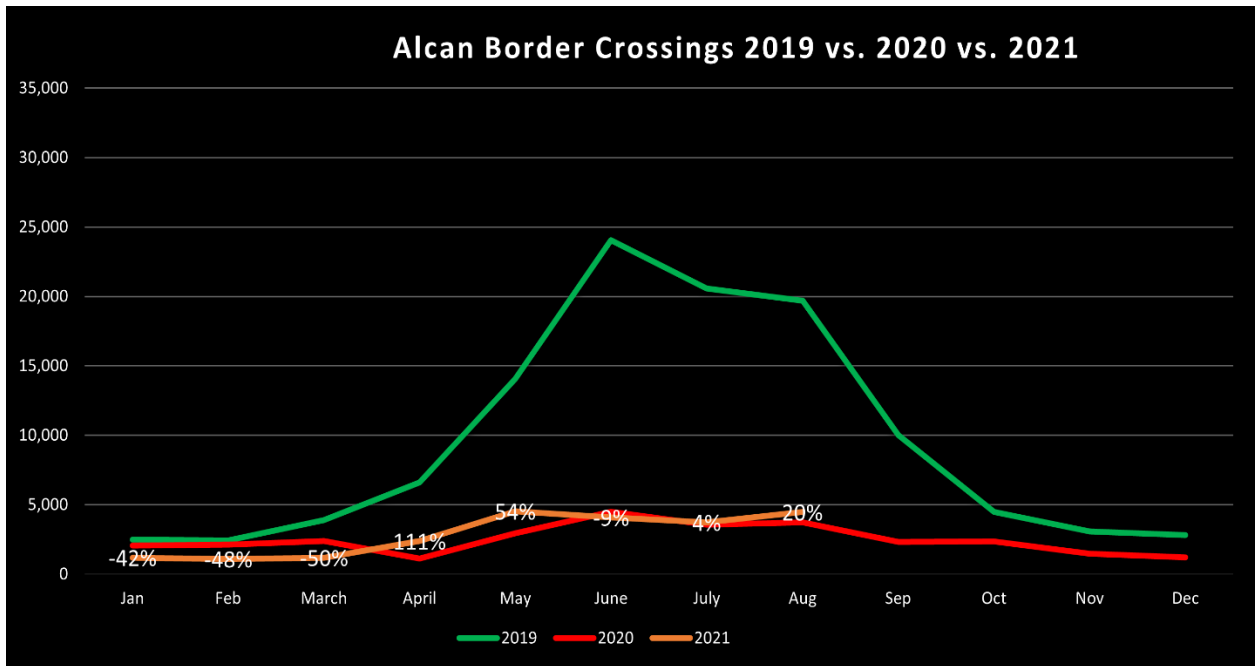


- **Cruise**

Alaska's Cross-Gulf of Alaska cruise industry was non-existent for summer 2021 due to the ongoing pandemic and the Canadian ban on cruise ships from entering Canadian ports. The Alaska congressional delegation was successful in getting a temporary waiver to the Canadian ban, but it only pertained to roundtrip Inside Passage cruises. Holland America Princess (HAP) Alaska did provide land only group tours throughout the summer, and other group land tour operators such as Collette, Globus, Trafalgar and others offered programs with Interior Alaska in their itineraries.

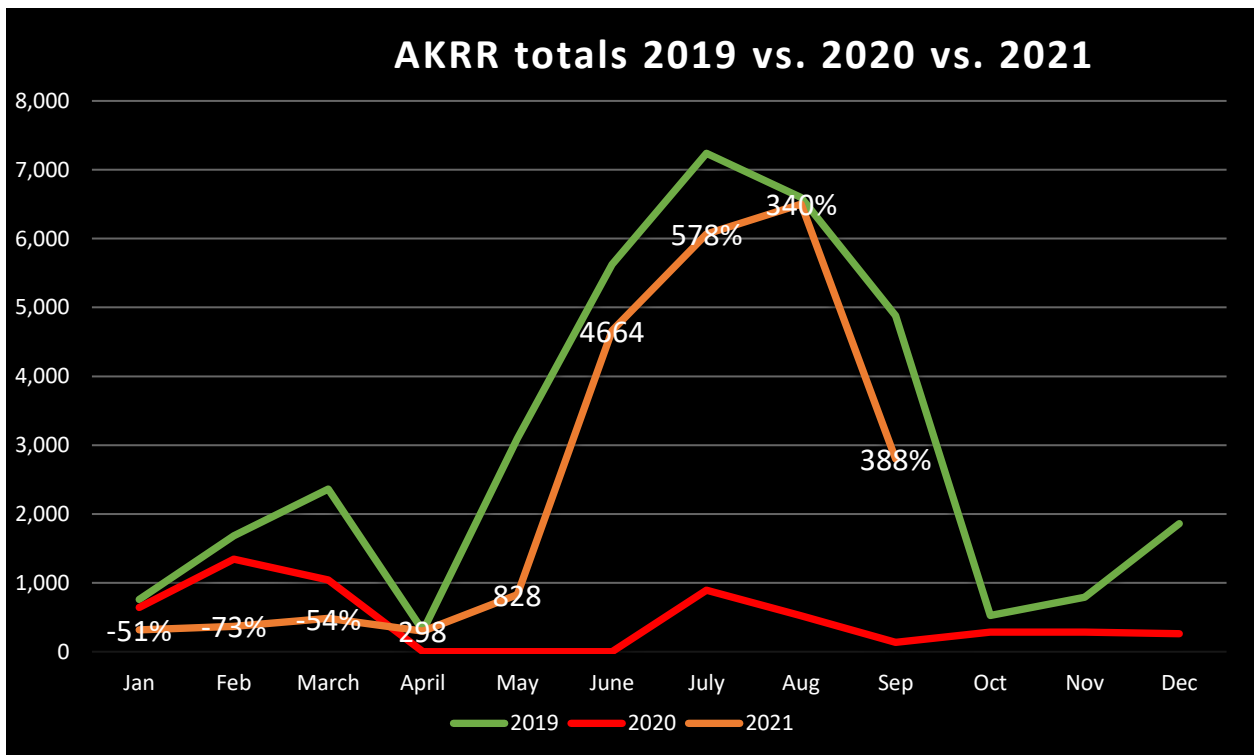
- **Highway Traffic**

With the U.S./Canada border closed to non-essential travel, highway traffic continued to be severely impacted by the pandemic. The Canadian border opened to U.S. citizens in early August. September dates were not available at publication date.



- Alaska Railroad**

The Alaska Railroad offered its train service between Fairbanks and Anchorage at 75% capacity throughout the winter and summer months. Summer service was cut back from its normal daily Southbound/Northbound service to four times a week in either direction. The railroad resumed its weekly Aurora Train in mid-September. The below graph compares 2021 to 2020 to 2019; note that for 2020 there was no train service from April through June.



- **Providing Leadership and Community Support**

For the first six months, the Director of Tourism and Convention Sales Scott McCrea served on the board of directors of the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce (GFCC) and the GFCC Military Affairs Committee as well as the Transportation Committee. He was also a board member of the Rotary Club of Fairbanks and an adjunct faculty for the University of Alaska Fairbanks Community and Technical College Applied Business Program. In conjunction with previous Explore Fairbanks CEO and President Deb Hickok, he conducted a number of presentations on the visitor industry to various community and civic groups.

Current Director of Tourism and Meeting Sales Bill Wright serves on the board of directors Midnight Sun Council Boy Scouts in Fairbanks and is a member of the Rotary Club of Fairbanks.

Meetings and Conventions Department

Department Staff

Director of Meetings and Conventions: Scott McCrea (through June)

Director of Tourism and Meeting Sales: Bill Wright (beginning in July)

Tourism Senior Sales Manager: Ed Malen (assisted with department through June)

Meetings & Convention Sales & Services Manager: Leslie Young (beginning in July)

Contractor: Helen Renfrew

Continued COVID-19 Impact

COVID-19 continued to have significant impact on meetings and conventions with the first meeting of the year that Explore Fairbanks played a role in bringing to Fairbanks not transpiring until the end of April. Similarly to the tourism department, marketing initiatives such as trade shows and hosted meeting planner events did not take place. Work continued, however, on maintaining contact with organizations such as the Alaska Federation of Natives and the Alaska School Activities Association to keep Fairbanks in their minds for future events.

Going into the third quarter, inquiries from meeting planners who were looking ahead to host meetings and conferences in 2022 and 2023 began to transpire. Operationally, work continued on merging the department with the tourism department; the two will operate as one department moving forward.

Year-to-Date Progress Report

- **In-State Sales Missions**

Due to COVID-19, the department was not able to participate in any sales missions.

- **Meetings, Conventions and Conferences**

The Meetings and Conventions Department issued 13 sales leads to business partners for upcoming meetings and conventions and assisted with 8 service requests. The department played a key role in bringing the below eight meetings to Fairbanks or provided hands-on assistance to help make them successful.

- Knights of Columbus 2021 Annual Convention
- TOPS 2021 Convention
- Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB)
- 2021 Alaska Defense Forum
- Fairbanks North Star Borough 2021 Summer Legislative Conference
- Alaska Youth Soccer Association 2021 Alaska State Cup
- Are We There Yet? LLC 2021 Fairbanks Tour
- International Circumpolar Remote Sensing Symposium 2021

Convention Sales

Detail Summary through September 30th:

<u>Line Item</u>	<u># of Groups</u>	Attendees*	Rooms*
Sales Leads:	11	2,245	4,550
Bureau Generated Bookings:	9	2,955	2,010
Lost Opportunities:	5	915	2,060
Cancelled Events due to COVID:	2	600	1,243
Completed Events:	8	2,995	2,060

**Attendee and Room numbers are lead generated. Pickup not calculated due to gap in M&C department positions. Due to this limitation EDF not calculated.*

- **Site Inspections/Familiarization (FAM) Tours**

- 2022 Intertribal Timber Council
- 2023 American Fisheries Society

- **Association of Defense Communities and Alaska Municipal League Return to Fairbanks.**

In August of 2021 the Alaska Municipal League (AML) joined the Association of Defense Communities (ADC) to host their meetings simultaneously at The Westmark Fairbanks Hotel & Conference Center.

AML hosted their Summer Legislative Conference while ADC hosted their Alaska Defense Forum. Combining these meetings not only brought together two excellent organizations but also allowed leaders in these fields the space and time to share ideas, goals and problem-solving solutions.

ADC focused on the important mission of building Alaska's defense communities, Alaska's increasing role in the arctic mission, local military quality of life issues and the impact of defense spending on the Alaskan economy. These were important topics for AML attendees since their meeting goals included an update on legislative action that may have impacted local governments and a review of outstanding issues found in bills or the budget.



Explore Fairbanks was behind the scenes assisting ADC and AML during their planning process, as well as offering information, collateral, volunteer assistance and more. The Golden Heart Greeters came out the first day of the conferences and assisted with badge distribution and welcome desk assistance.

- **Polaris Working Group**

The Meetings and Conventions Department continues to participate in meetings and provide administrative support of the Polaris Work Group, to include assisting the President and CEO with federal advocacy efforts with Alaska's congressional delegation.

The environmental impact of this project is at the top of mind for every member of the Polaris Working Group. Experts on health and safety, waste management, grant work and more have joined the group in their meetings to educate and provide solutions for the disassembling of Polaris. While Explore Fairbanks has conducted studies to demonstrate the economic impact a Convention and Arts Center would have within the Polaris space as well as the adjoining lot, efforts for now have been concentrated solely on the demolition of the building.

- **Providing Leadership and Community Support**

For the first six months, the Director of Tourism and Convention Sales Scott McCrea served on the board of directors of the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce (GFCC) and the GFCC Military Affairs Committee as well as the Transportation Committee. He was also a board member of the Rotary Club of Fairbanks and an adjunct faculty for the University of Alaska Fairbanks Community and Technical College Applied Business Program. In conjunction with previous Explore Fairbanks CEO and President Deb Hickok, he conducted a number of presentations on the visitor industry to various community and civic groups.

Current Director of Tourism and Meeting Sales Bill Wright serves on the board of directors Midnight Sun Council Boy Scouts in Fairbanks and is a member of the Rotary Club of Fairbanks.

Visitor Services and Partnership Development Department

Visitor Services Staff

Director of Visitor Services and Partnership Development: Charity Gadapee

Manager of Visitor Services and Partnership Development: Alanna McBrayer

Visitor Information Specialists Full-time: Bob Eley, Katy Cagwin

Visitor Information Specialists Part-time: Iwalani Lauver

Visitor Information Specialists Seasonal – Pioneer Park: Julia Parzick

Golden Heart Greeter Volunteers: 17 year-round

Continued COVID-19 Impact

At the start of the summer season, the world was 13 months into a global pandemic which influenced an industry-wide workforce shortage. Visitor Services and Partnership Development struggled to find a full-time employee to replace the position eliminated at the start of the pandemic. The Visitors Center returned to operating seven days a week beginning Memorial Day weekend but with reduced hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. versus being open until 9 p.m. in the summer months. We were able to return to regular hours at Pioneer Park for the summer and the Golden Heart Greeter volunteer program experienced a slow return to assisting with meetings and conferences in late summer.

Year-to-Date Progress Report

- **Greeting Our Guests**

Explore Fairbanks Visitor Services staff greeted and provided customer service to 49,594 visitors at the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center for the first nine months of the year. This is a year-to-date increase of 58% in visitation from 2020.

- Staffed the information kiosk at Pioneer Park throughout the summer with help from the Fairbanks Alaska Public Lands Information Student Conservation Association intern. Stocked and maintained brochure centers at Fairbanks International Airport and Alaska Railroad Depot.
- The Fairbanks Golden Heart Greeter program returned to conducting personal greets and assisting at conferences in late summer. Greeters were a big help volunteering throughout the summer at Visitors Center as foot traffic was more than was expected for the summer. Seventeen greeters donated 131 hours of service through September with the bulk of volunteering being at the Morris Thompson Center and at Pioneer Park. As there was no greeter activity in 2020 we did not host the Golden Heart Gala to honor our volunteer ambassadors.
- Distributed Visitors Guides, Winter Guides, and Fairbanks maps at Pioneer Start/Newcomer's Orientation Information Fairs at Eielson Air Force Base in late summer attended by 135 newcomers. Provided a directory of 72 Explore Fairbanks partners offering military discounts.

- Continued the Fort Wainwright Newcomer's City Tour orienting in-processing soldiers to downtown, the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus, and surrounding community. This is a partnership with the U.S. Army Garrison Alaska Fort Wainwright, Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce and University of Alaska Fairbanks. Staff from both the chamber and Explore Fairbanks provide step-on guides to narrate the tour. Through September, 892 soldiers have taken part in the tour—a 175% increase over 2020.
- Distributed Visitors Guides, Winter Guides and Fairbanks area maps to Fairbanks hotels and downtown businesses several times throughout the year.



Partnership Development Staff (Shared with Visitor Services)

Director of Visitor Services and Partnership Development: Charity Gadapee

Manager of Visitor Services and Partnership Development: Alanna McBrayer

Continued COVID-19 Impact

The continuing effect of the pandemic still altered most in-person partner networking and community events. Explore Fairbanks modified the Fairbanks Visitor Industry Walk for Charity on May 13 to a self-guided historical walking tour along the riverfront and handed out snack packs to all participants, thus eliminating food stations for another year. A return to in-person partner networking events was kicked off with the annual awards banquet done in a hybrid format for both online and in-person attendance. The department reduces in-person partner networking events for the foreseeable future, more webinars are being hosted to communicate with partners and stakeholders about the status of travel and tourism throughout the state.

Year-to-Date Progress Report

• Events

Listed below are some of the events that took place in 2021:

- Organized and coordinated the Annual Interior Tourism Conference in Fairbanks in January as an online educational summit. In attendance were 57 participants from across the state. Topics covered included state of the industry, returning to cruising, American travel sentiment towards returning to travel, and social media insights for getting the most out of Google, Yelp and TripAdvisor.

- The Explore Fairbanks Annual Banquet was our return to in-person events with a hybrid in-person/online event at the Westmark Fairbanks Hotel & Conference Center.



The Golden Heart

Award was presented to Karen and Buddy Lane. The Aurora Award was presented to Colonel Christopher J. Ruga and Danny Wallace, U.S. Army Garrison Alaska Fort Wainwright. The Jim and Mary Binkley Award was presented to Aurora Bear. The Raven Award was presented to Condor Airlines. Vivian & Bill Bubbel, proprietors of Pump House Restaurant and Saloon and Deb Hickok, then President and CEO of Explore Fairbanks, were inducted into the Tourism Hall of Fame. Staff recognized for service were: Amy Geiger and Ed Malen (10 years) and Charity Gadapee (20 years).

- Hosted the Visitors Industry Walk for Charity as a socially distanced, self-guided historical walking tour along the riverfront from Pioneer Park to downtown. 131 participants strolled along the waterfront to raise \$5,000 for 36 local non-profits. To maximize resources, Explore Fairbanks hosted the Tourism Works for Fairbanks job fair at the same location on the same day with 15 partners participating.

• Webinars

Continued hosting online webinars allowed more of Explore Fairbanks' partners to participate effectively from anywhere in the world. In hosting online webinars, ease of recording presentations made the content more accessible to partners via the partner extranet on the following topics:

- Tour Operator Panel Outlook on Summer Season 2021
- Denali National Park Update
- Department of Transportation Construction season outlook
- Coffee Talks
- Visitor Industry Local Government Candidate Forum co-sponsored with the Alaska Travel Industry Association Fairbanks Chapter