
Section II: Introduction

The Alaska Visitor Statistics Program is a statewide visitor study periodically commissioned by the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development. The study provides the state government and the tourism industry essential information on one of Alaska's major economic engines: out-of-state visitors. Previous AVSP studies were undertaken in 1985, 1986, 1989, 1993 (all by McDowell Group), and 2001 (by Northern Economics). The project consists of two main components: an estimate of visitor volume, and a survey of visitors.

Visitor Volume

The Visitor Volume estimate is a count of the number of out-of-state visitors exiting Alaska, by transportation mode, during the study period. The estimate is based on traffic data (for example, highway border crossings, ferry disembarkations, airport enplanements) and visitor/resident ratios obtained at each exit point. Ratios are applied to the traffic data to arrive at the total visitor volume.

Visitor Survey

The Visitor Survey is administered to a sample of out-of-state visitors departing Alaska at all major exit points. The survey includes questions on trip purpose, transportation modes used, length of stay, destinations, lodging, activities, expenditures, satisfaction, trip planning, and demographics.

The study is undertaken in two stages: Summer 2006 (May 1-September 30) and Fall/Winter 2006-2007 (October 1-April 30). This report addresses the summer period.

Project Team

The AVSP V project team was lead by the McDowell Group, Inc., a research and consulting firm with offices in Juneau, Anchorage, and Kodiak. The McDowell Group was the contractor for AVSP I, II, and III and has coordinated several other statewide visitor research projects, including the *Alaska Travelers Survey* in 2001, 2003 and 2005. For AVSP V, the McDowell Group was responsible for a majority of the study tasks: survey design, sample design, surveyor training, survey implementation, traffic data collection, and data analysis, among others.

Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall (DHM) is a market research firm based in Portland, Oregon. In addition to serving clients throughout the Pacific Northwest and California, the firm participated in AVSP I, II, and III. DHM had several roles in AVSP V. The firm set up and maintained the online survey, maintained the database for both intercept and online surveys, and managed the data processing. DHM also served in an advisory role during survey design, sample design, and data analysis, drawing on their previous experience with AVSP.

DataPath Systems, based in Whitehorse, Yukon Territories, is a full-service market research firm. The firm managed survey fielding and visitor/resident tallies in the four highway locations: Fraser Border Station (Klondike Highway), Pleasant Border Station (Haines Highway), Beaver Creek Border Station (Alcan Highway), and Dawson City (Top of the World Highway).

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Alaska Airlines
Alaska Marine Highway System
Alaska Marine Highway Ketchikan Terminal
Yukon border stations on the Alcan, Klondike, Haines, and Top of the World highways
Yukon Department of Tourism and Culture
Cruise Line Agencies of Alaska

Report Organization

The following section in this report (**Section III: Visitor Volume**) presents the visitor volume estimates. **Section IV: Visitor Profile** presents the results of the visitor survey. Survey results are organized into the following categories:

Trip Purpose and Packages	Previous Alaska Travel
Transportation Modes	Trip Planning
Length of Stay, Destinations & Lodging	Demographics
Activities	Expenditures
Satisfaction Ratings	

Section V: Trends provides AVSP V survey data alongside results from the last two AVSP studies.

Section VI: Selected Summary Profiles provides additional analysis based to over 50 subgroups, organized into the following chapters:

Trip Purpose	Southeast Communities
Highway and Ferry Users	Interior Communities
US Regions & Canada	Southwest and Far North Communities
International	Sportfishing
Alaska Regions	Selected Visitor Markets
Southcentral Communities	

Section VII: Methodology presents the methodology used in both the visitor volume estimate and visitor survey.

While AVSP V collects much of the same information as in previous generations of the study, several significant methodological changes were incorporated: an exit (rather than entry) methodology, the consolidation of three survey instruments into one instrument, and the use of online surveying. These are described in more detail, below.

Exit Methodology

All previous AVSP studies employed an “entry” methodology – that is, visitors were counted and administered surveys as they entered the state. AVSP V instituted an “exit” methodology. The visitor volume estimate was derived from exiting traffic data, and surveys were administered as visitors were exiting the state. The exit methodology has several advantages.

The response rates are significantly higher in an exit methodology

Previous AVSP studies involved three surveys, two of which were administered upon visitors’ arrival into the state: an intercept survey (Random Arrival Survey) and a diary survey (Visitor Expenditure Survey). The third survey (Visitor Opinion Survey) was mailed out after visitors returned home. While this method was generally effective in the early days of AVSP, entering visitors became more time-sensitive and less willing to agree to be surveyed. This problem was compounded by new security rules in airports and on cruise ship docks that barred surveyors from disembarkation areas. With each subsequent AVSP study that used the entry methodology, visitors became less and less likely to agree to the intercept survey. They also became progressively less likely to return the VES diary and VOS mail-out survey. Between 1985 and 1993, VES response rates dropped from 70 to 55 percent, and VOS rates fell from 83 to 61 percent. In 2001, rates dropped to 19 percent for the VOS and 15 percent for the VES.¹ The 2006 exit survey, administered when visitors have completed their trip and are more willing to participate, earned a significantly higher intercept response rate (85.6 percent) – and eliminated the need for the diary and mail-out surveys. Higher response rates lead to larger sample sizes and increased fielding efficiencies.

An exit methodology allows for larger sample sizes

The advantages associated with the exit methodology allowed for much larger sample sizes than ever before. For AVSP IV Summer 2001, there were 3,722 RAS surveys, 714 VOS surveys, and 547 VES surveys. AVSP V (which combined the RAS, VOS and VES) included 2,703 intercept surveys and 2,956 online surveys, for a total sample size of 5,659. Larger sample sizes allow for greater statistical reliability and in-depth sub-sample analysis.

Exit surveys collect the most accurate trip information

A large portion of the data collected in previous AVSP studies, including trip activities, destinations, planning behavior, and satisfaction ratings, was filled out by the visitor well after the trip was completed. The exit methodology allows for visitors to share this information right as they are leaving the state, while their recall is

¹ These low response rates were likely compounded by added complexity of the instruments, the lack of prepaid cash incentives (used in 1985-1993), and changes in personal intercept methods.

strongest. In addition, the *intended* trip behavior information collected upon visitors' arrival in past AVSP studies becomes *actual* trip behavior data with the exit methodology, further improving the accuracy of the data.

An exit methodology allows for a single survey instrument

Because information is collected at the end of the trip, the previous multiple-instrument methodology was changed to allow for a more efficient, more effective single survey instrument. This issue is discussed in further detail, below.

Single Survey Instrument

Previous AVSP studies employed three instruments: Random Arrival Survey (RAS), Visitor Opinion Survey (VOS), and Visitor Expenditure Survey (VES). The RAS was a short intercept survey administered at entry points when respondents arrived into the state. This survey gathered information on trip purpose, transportation modes, type of trip (package versus independent), expected length of stay, demographics, and name and mailing address. RAS respondents were given an expenditure diary to carry with them, mailing it in at the end of their trip. The VOS (asking about destinations, activities, satisfaction ratings and other data) was mailed to their home to be filled out after returning home from their trip, often weeks later.

Surveying visitors upon exit allows all this information to be collected at the same time. Besides greater efficiency and increased sample sizes, combining the instruments has another important advantage over the multiple-instrument methodology: all survey respondents are asked the same questions. In the past, different kinds of visitor data referred to different survey samples. For example, trip purpose came from the RAS sample, while expenditure information came from the VES sample, and satisfaction ratings from the VOS sample. With a combined instrument, more information is available on each unique visitor, allowing for more extensive data analysis.

Online Component

AVSP V included an online survey component for the first time in 2006. Surveyors distributed "invitation cards" to out-of-state visitors who were exiting Alaska. Online respondents were targeted at the same time as intercept respondents: cards were distributed to visitors departing on the same flights, ferry voyages, cruise sailings, etc. as intercept respondents. The careful attention paid by surveyors to target online respondents in the same manner as intercept respondents resulted in parallel surveys (intercept and online) of virtually the same visitor population.

The card directed respondents to a web address, each card with its own unique password. As an incentive, respondents who completed the survey online were entered into a drawing to win one of several prizes. (See the Methodology section for further details on online survey methodology.)

The primary purpose of the online survey was to increase sample sizes, allowing for greater sub-sample analysis. This goal was achieved: in addition to 2,703 intercept surveys, the Summer 2006 sample includes 2,956 online surveys. The online survey also introduced a new alternative to the traditional AVSP intercept

methodology – one that could be replicated in the future, and allow for more frequent, and more affordable, AVSP studies.

Issues Associated with Methodology Changes

While the changes instituted in AVSP V were justified, and successful, it is important to acknowledge the concerns inherent with such changes.

Elimination of the spending diary

Previous AVSP studies employed “diaries” where respondents would record their spending as they traveled: where the money was spent, and each specific purchase. In 2006, respondents were asked to recall spending information after their trip was completed. While every effort was made to identify the type and location of spending, it can be difficult for respondents to remember what they spent days afterwards when compared to the diary methodology. There is an important trade-off, however: AVSP V expenditure data is based on information collected from all 2,703 intercept respondents. This compares to 547 expenditure diaries in AVSP IV (and between 1,200 and 1,600 diaries in AVSP I, II, and III). Even considering the less detailed data collection, the increase in sample size compensates for the loss of the expenditure diary.

Self-selection bias among online respondents

Self-selection bias occurs when the characteristics of respondents who choose to answer a survey differ from those of the overall target population. The risk of bias exists in the online sample: it had a response rate of 17.5 percent, in contrast to the intercept response rate of 85.6 percent. To address this issue, the study team compared a wide range of demographic variables between the two samples, including gender, origin, age, income, and education. Only origin presented a potential bias: international visitors were less likely to complete the online survey, and visitors from certain regions of the US (South, Midwest) were slightly more likely to participate. To adjust for this bias, the online sample was weighted by origin so that it reflected the intercept sample. Another bias was apparent in trip planning sources. Online respondents were more thorough trip planners, using most sources at a higher rate than intercept respondents. For trip planning sources, only intercept data is presented in the report.

Analysis of trend data

- In terms of the visitor volume estimate, the switch from entry to exit methodology, by itself, does not affect the overall visitor number. Virtually the same volume of traffic, and the same number of visitors, entered and exited Alaska during the sample period. The estimate for AVSP V should actually be more accurate than in previous years, because the visitor/resident ratios are more precise – 49,703 tallies were completed in Summer 2006, compared to 21,907 in Summer 2001. However, there were several refinements of the methods used to count visitors – including, for example, specific data on the elimination of double-counting among highway visitors; usage of Alaska Marine Highway reservations data to determine actual, rather than estimated, visitor volume; and refining the exit mode categories to be more user-friendly. These refinements, while improving accuracy, make it difficult to compare the data directly to previous volume estimates.

- The survey data will differ somewhat from previous AVSPs. Some questions were modified, some were eliminated, and new questions were introduced as state and industry data needs evolved over time. The survey methods were changed – from a combination of intercept, diary, and mail-out methods – to a combination of intercept and online. Despite these many changes, a large portion of the data is comparable. Any inconsistencies are noted in the report.

The most important change between the survey data from previous AVSP studies and the latest generation is that, due to greatly increased sample sizes, there is significantly more data on significantly more visitors. Users of this report can have more confidence than ever before in the validity of the data.

The study team examined several known variables to test the accuracy of the survey sample and the visitor volume estimate. One was cruise ship visitation. The number of cruise passengers to each port is measured by Cruise Line Agencies of Alaska. These figures were tested against the percentage of the cruise market that said they visited each port in the survey, and the percentages were consistently within the margin of error or matched exactly. The data on visitor activities allowed the study team to make two additional verifications of survey results. According to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 331,075 non-resident fishing licenses were sold in calendar year 2006.² As a percentage of total summer visitors, that represents 20 percent of the overall market, matching the 20 percent of survey respondents who said they went fishing. The second verification is of White Pass and Yukon Route passengers. WP&YR reported passenger volume of 428,874 in summer 2006, representing 26 percent of the overall market – within 1 percentage point of the survey result of 27 percent.³

² 2006 Calendar Year License Sale Statistics, State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game, www.admin.adfg.state.ak.us/admin/license/licstats.html. Virtually all non-resident sportfishing occurs between May and September.

³ www.whitepassrailroad.com/news/september272006.html