

Tourism Summary

Strengths *Internal attributes that contribute to success*

Natural Resources & Environment

- Access to outdoor recreation (trails, parks, fishing)
- World-renowned location for aurora viewing
- Beautiful landscapes, abundant wildlife
- Midnight sun in summer
- Proximity to Denali National Park and the Arctic Circle
- Guaranteed winter season

Businesses, Organizations, & Government

- Explore Fairbanks
- Thriving mix of small businesses
- Identified source of destination marketing funding through hotel/motel bed tax collections

Education & Workforce

- Quality outfitters, guides and hospitality operators

Infrastructure

- On the road and railroad system

Other

- Year-round museums, festivals, and arts/culture opportunities
- Alaska Native culture
- Authentic Alaska experiences, such as dog mushing, gold panning, etc.
- Year-round air service to Lower 48 with expanded offerings during summer season

Weaknesses *Internal barriers to success*

Businesses, Organizations, & Government

- Misunderstanding from government and citizens of the purpose and use of the bed tax
- Homelessness in downtown Fairbanks, with insufficient services to meet demand
- Government per diem rate for accommodations the lowest in the state

Education & Workforce

- Reduced days/hours of operation due to staffing issues
- Challenges recruiting and housing seasonal employees

Funding & Markets

- Limited year-round direct flights from Lower 48 to Fairbanks

Infrastructure

- Aging infrastructure: roads and sidewalks in disrepair, limited sidewalk snow removal in winter
- Challenge of getting from Fairbanks to Denali
- Not enough venues for hosting events
- Transportation sector is understaffed
- Winter roadside facilities are limited; winter road closures

Opportunities *External forces that contribute to success*

Businesses, Organizations, & Government

- Increased collaboration between neighboring destinations (Denali Borough, City of Nenana, Tok, Delta Junction)

Funding & Markets

- Growing interest in Arctic tourism
- Increasing year-round tourism
- Emerging international markets to include Southeast Asia, Latin America, and India

Infrastructure

- Alaska Long Trail
- Expanding rail service to connect with Canada

Threats *External forces that could be barriers to success*

Natural Resources & Environment

- Air quality challenges, especially in winter
- Climate change, including increased wildfire risks
- Light pollution (threat to aurora viewing)

Businesses, Organizations, & Government

- Land use conflicts at recreation and aurora sites
- Increased commercial usage of public highways

Funding & Markets

- Dependence on cruise lines for businesses
- COVID-19 and ongoing impacts to health, travel, workers
- Supply chain shortages (e.g., impacts on rental car supply)
- Inflationary costs and potential recession could be a deterrent to future travel

Where We Are (2019 as pre-pandemic baseline)	What measurements can we use to track progress? Where do we want to be in 5 years?	2027 Targets
5,991	Jobs – FNSB residents employed in leisure & hospitality <i>10% of total workforce in 2019; this sector saw the greatest losses in 2020</i>	6,290
\$70.5 Million	Visitor Spending – Hotel/motel annual room receipts <i>Increased 8% from 2016 to 2019, then declined 55% between 2019 and 2020</i>	\$80 Million
\$143 Million	Wages – Annual wages to FNSB residents employed in leisure & hospitality <i>Only 4% of total wages, indicating these jobs pay less than other industries</i>	\$150 Million
596,066	Passengers – Fairbanks International Airport passenger arrivals <i>2020 passenger arrivals were half the 2019 number</i>	625,869
11.7 days (2016)	Trip Length – Average stay for visitors whose Alaska trips include Interior Alaska <i>Visitors to Interior Alaska stay longer than the statewide visitor average of 9.2 days</i>	12.5 days (increase of ~1 day)

Sources: Employment & wages from 2019 Bureau of Economic Analysis; Hotel receipts from FNSB Community Research Quarterly (as reported by Cities of Fairbanks & North Pole, FNSB Financial Services), Passenger data from FNSB Community Research Quarterly; trip length from the Alaska Visitor Statistics Program.



“We are in a good opportunity right now with the independent travelers. We are looking ahead to the increase in cruises, and we are thinking about who we want to be as a destination going forward. Look at what Hawaii is doing.”

“A new convention center could help meet multiple objectives. It could help bring more visitors during shoulder seasons.”

“We need to move away from the concept of a ‘tourism season’ – our visitors are not just tourists, and we are a year-round industry, not just seasonal.”



Tourism Objectives – Long term improvements and changes we want to see in five years or more



1. Interior Alaska is a year-round, world-class, adaptable visitor destination.



2. Fairbanks is a prominent international hub for military, arts, energy, resource development, Indigenous, and Arctic-focused conferences.



3. Interior Alaska is recognized and celebrated for its outdoor access and opportunities.

“The Alaska Railroad is involved in a major Seward project...the Seward dock is being rebuilt, which will allow for more passengers. That means more visitors to Fairbanks.”

“The J1 program is critical to tourism because they work many of the seasonal service jobs. During the pandemic, participation in the program dropped, causing businesses to close or limit hours.”

Strategies & Actions – Activities we will implement over the next five years to accomplish objectives & targets. See Chapter 3 for a detailed action plan.

Icon Key:  Capital Project  Military-related




1. Coordinate Marketing and Planning – Consistently fund destination marketing and planning efforts of Explore Fairbanks. *(Objectives 1, 2, 3)*

- Promote Fairbanks as an in-state destination for Alaskans.
- Promote Interior Alaska as a road trip destination for Canadians and Lower 48 visitors.
- Promote Interior Alaska as a destination to domestic and international markets as identified by Explore Fairbanks and the Alaska Travel Industry Association.
- Create a collective marketing strategy for aurora viewing, including international promotion.
- Promote summer solstice travel.
- Work with neighboring regions to promote Arctic tourism.
- Identify long-term placement for Ice Alaska venue.

2. Conduct Visitor Research – Conduct visitor research to better inform marketing efforts. *(Objectives 1, 2, 3)*

- Collaborate with neighboring destinations (Denali Borough, Nenana, Tok) on marketing.
- Advocate to the Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA) to conduct the Alaska Visitor Statistics Program (AVSP) annually and better capture winter visitation trends.
- Create a local data collection strategy better capture year-round visitation trends.
- Conduct visitor capacity planning to determine realistic targets for future visitation based on local resources and to ensure visitors enjoy quality visits without negative impacts to local quality of life or the environment.

3. Become a Top-Ranked Meeting Hub – Develop a convention and arts center. *(Objective 2)*

- Construct a convention and arts center.  
- Maintain the Carlson Center as a community event space. 

4. Increase Access – Advocate for reliable, regularly scheduled transportation services to and from Fairbanks. *(Objectives 1- 3)*

- Support long-term rail connectivity to the Lower 48. 

- b. Expand cooperative marketing programs with airlines to gain access to new visitor markets.
- c. Expand flight options in winter.
- d. Increase transportation options to destinations near Fairbanks (e.g., Denali National Park).
- e. Implement the GFCC Committee for Restoration of Alaska Potties (CRAP) Plan. 🔑

5. Expand Recreation Opportunities – Expand indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities that appeal to residents and visitors alike. (*Objectives 1, 3*)

- a. Complete and implement the FNSB Recreational Trails Plan. 🔑
- b. Support establishment of the Alaska Long Trail. 🔑

See Recreation, Retail, and Entertainment for related actions, including the Carlson Center, Pioneer Park Master Plan and North Star Athletics Complex.

6. Maintain Quality Infrastructure & Effective Policies – Implement infrastructure and policy recommendations from regional plans that help create livable, vibrant communities and destinations. (*Objectives 1-3*)

- a. Maintain and implement the Chena Riverfront Plan.
- b. Complete and implement the Fairbanks Downtown Plan.

See Communication, Health Care, and Land Use for other quality of life related and infrastructure improvements.

Other Relevant Resources

- **Alaska Visitor Statistics Program.** Alaska Travel Industry Association. [View here.](#)



- **Chena Riverfront Plan.** Fairbanks North Star Borough Chena Riverfront Commission. Amended 2016. [View here.](#)
- **Comprehensive Recreational Trails Plan.** Fairbanks North Star Borough. Est. completion spring 2022. [View here.](#)
- **Explore Fairbanks 2022 Strategic Marketing Plan.** Explore Fairbanks. 2021. [View here.](#)
- **Feasibility Study & Market Analysis for the Management Options of the Carlson Center.** Fairbanks North Star Borough. 2020. [View here.](#)
- **Fairbanks Downtown Plan.** Fairbanks North Star Borough. Est. completion Fall 2022. [View here.](#)

Tourism Action Plan

See Appendix A for a list of acronyms.

Strategy #1: Coordinate Marketing and Planning – Consistently fund destination marketing and planning efforts of Explore Fairbanks.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
	a. Promote Fairbanks as an in-state destination for Alaskans.	Explore Fairbanks	ATIA	TBD	Varies
	b. Promote Interior Alaska as a road trip destination for Canadians and Lower 48 visitors.	Explore Fairbanks	ATIA	TBD	Varies
	c. Promote Interior Alaska as a destination to domestic and international markets as identified by Explore Fairbanks and the Alaska Travel Industry Association.	Explore Fairbanks	ATIA	TBD	Varies
	d. Create a collective marketing strategy for aurora viewing, including promotion in international markets.	Explore Fairbanks	ATIA	TBD	Ongoing
	e. Promote summer solstice travel.	Explore Fairbanks	ATIA	TBD	Ongoing
	f. Work with neighboring regions to promote Arctic tourism.	Explore Fairbanks	North Slope Borough, Tundra Tours, Ukpeagvik Iñupiat Corporation, Simon Paneak Memorial Museum, Inuit Circumpolar Council	Varies	Ongoing
	g. Identify long-term placement for Ice Alaska venue.	Ice Alaska	Explore Fairbanks	TBD	TBD

Strategy #2: Conduct Visitor Research - Conduct visitor research to better inform marketing efforts.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
	a. Collaborate with neighboring destinations (Denali Borough, Nenana, Tok) on marketing.	Explore Fairbanks	Denali Chamber of Commerce, Alaska Public Lands Information Centers, Interior Trails & Parks Foundation, Nenana Native Council, North Pole Chamber of Commerce, Tok Chamber of Commerce	Varies	Varies
	b. Advocate to ATIA to conduct the AVSP annually and better capture winter visitation trends.	ATIA	Explore Fairbanks	TBD	Annual
	c. Create a local data collection strategy to better capture visitor trends.	Explore Fairbanks		TBD	TBD
	d. Conduct visitor capacity planning to determine realistic targets for future visitation based on local resources and to	Explore Fairbanks	FNSB	TBD	TBD

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
	ensure visitors enjoy quality visits without negative impacts to local quality of life or the environment.				

Strategy #3: Become a Top-Ranked Meeting Hub – Develop a convention and arts center.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
✓	a. Construct a convention and arts center.	Explore Fairbanks	FNSB, Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, Fairbanks Arts Association	TBD	TBD
✓	b. Maintain the Carlson Center as a community event space.	FNSB	Explore Fairbanks, Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, FEDC	TBD	Ongoing

Strategy #4: Increase Access – Advocate for reliable, regularly scheduled transportation services to Fairbanks.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
✓	a. Support long-term rail connectivity to the Lower 48. Learn more here .	Alberta Railway Development Corporation	Alaska Railroad	\$17 billion (\$5.5 billion in Alaska)	TBD
	b. Expand cooperative marketing programs with airlines to gain access to new visitor markets.	Explore Fairbanks	Airlines, ATIA	Varies	Ongoing
	c. Expand flight options in winter.	Explore Fairbanks	Airlines, ATIA	Varies	Ongoing
✓	d. Increase transportation options to destinations near Fairbanks (e.g., Denali National Park).	Explore Fairbanks	Denali Chamber of Commerce, Tok Chamber of Commerce, Alaska Railroad, transportation providers, FEDC	TBD	Ongoing
	e. Implement the GFCC Committee for Restoration of Alaska Potties (CRAP) Plan.	GFCC	DOT&PF, Explore Fairbanks	TBD	TBD

Strategy #5: Expand Recreation Opportunities – Expand indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities that appeal to residents and visitors alike.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
✓	a. Complete and implement the FNSB Recreational Trails Plan.	FNSB	Interior Trails & Parks Foundation, Alaska Trails	TBD	Plan to be completed in 2022
✓	b. Support establishment of the Alaska Long Trail. Learn more here .	Alaska Trails, Long Trail Coalition	Interior Trails & Parks Foundation, Explore Fairbanks, state and federal agencies, landowners	\$13.2 million for phase 1	TBD

Strategy #6: Maintain Quality Infrastructure & Effective Policies – Implement infrastructure and policy recommendations from regional plans that help create livable, vibrant communities and destinations.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
	a. Maintain and implement the Chena Riverfront Plan.	FNSB	Downtown Association of Fairbanks, FEDC	TBD	TBD
	b. Complete and implement the Fairbanks Downtown Plan.	FNSB	Downtown Association of Fairbanks, FEDC	TBD	TBD