Appeal of the Aspen Brand

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- *Economic Impact of Visitors*
- *Visitor Median Age*
- *Satisfaction Level of Visitors*
- *Visitor Retention Rate*

> *Aspen is the destination of choice for an international blend of businesses, home and condo owners, and short-term visitors. It is an economic engine with global reach. Visitors and residents expect and receive the very best of recreational, educational, cultural and business amenities. The resort is rated highly in comparison with its competitors due to a unique blend of offerings that anticipates and meets evolving customer expectations.*

The importance of tourism as a sector in the economy is well established. It provides an essential contribution to economic prosperity and by extension to the host community.[2] But in order to attract and sustain tourist visits to a place there must be a certain appeal.

The *Aspen Brand* promises a distinctive mountain town with global appeal. This brand combination developed over time is perhaps best understood from the historical perspective. Aspen has its settlement roots in the silver mining boom days of the late 1870s. While the mining industry ultimately languished, the town persevered. In the 1940s, Aspen reemerged as a ski town and cultural center.[3] Chicago industrialists, Walter and Elizabeth Paepcke introduced their ***"Aspen Idea."*** Their conception envisioned that a community should seek to nourish the ***Mind, Body,*** and ***Spirit*** of its citizens. [4] This has remained a core value and unique brand image of the Aspen community ever since. Even then, there was something unique about this place that made people come, prevail, and thrive. It is this ***'capacity to endure'*** that forms the basis of Aspen's sustainability today.

Over the years, Aspen continued to beckon visitors to experience the *Aspen Idea* through the unique qualities that the community and surrounding area had to offer such as:

- *Place identity & character*
- *Scenic landscapes & wildlife*
- *Outdoor recreation*
- *Wellness philosophy*
- *Culture, history, art*
- *Festivals: music, food, ideas*
- *Restaurants & lodging*
- *Businesses & shops*

Figure 1. Maroon Bells[5]

Figure 2. Downtown Aspen[6]

As an internationally renowned resort destination, Aspen strives to continuously deliver on its brand promise. It not only aims to attract an optimal number of visitors for year-round activities and events, but to also satisfy their expectations through unique, high quality offerings. In order to support visitors

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[2] *Travel and Tourism Economic Impact World Report 2016. Via link: http://www.wttc.org/research/economicresearch/economic-impact-analysis/. Retrieved April 2016*

[3] *City of Aspen website/Exploring the Valley/History. Via link: http://aspenpitkin.com/Exploring-the-Valley/History/. Retrieved April 2016*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Giudice, Linda. 2012.*

[6] *Babbie, Sheila. 2016*

from other places, an infrastructure of services must be in place to support their needs including different modes of transportation, accommodation, restaurants, recreation, entertainment, as well as, other services. In short, the right measure of tourism (*supply*) is linked to the right level of visitor consumption of goods and services (*demand*).

From an economic prosperity point of view, the sustainability of a visitor-based economy is not just important for visitors but also for the community as it generates a number of benefits. First, an optimal number of visitors contributes directly to local enterprises through spending. Second, much of the revenue from visitor spending is reinvested back in to the local economy leading to employment and job creation. Third, tax revenues are used for investment in public works (roads, parks, and public spaces), programs, and services. Better facilities and infrastructure brings in more visitors but also benefits the local community by adding to an overall better quality of life.

The key performance measures that offer a relatively good indication of how well a visitor based economy is doing include:

- *Total Number of Visitors [*]*
- *Economic Impact of Visitors*
- *Median Age of Visitors*
- *Satisfaction Level of Visitors*
- *Visitor Retention Rate*

[*] As there are no borders for domestic or interstate travel visitor flows, total visitor numbers are not always available. According to Longwood International's *Colorado Travel Year 2014 Final Report (May 2015)* produced on behalf of the Colorado Tourism Office there are an estimated 71.3 million overnight visitors to Colorado each year. Of these, 29.4 million or 41% fall under the overnight/leisure category. There is no further break down specific to the Roaring Fork Valley/Aspen area.

The measures listed above are presented on the respective dashboards at the end of the section. Below is a brief summary of current / proposed actions around these measures.

Current & Proposed Actions

The Aspen community aims to attract visitors through its small town character coupled with its international brand appeal. Some of the current and proposed actions as relates to both of these aspects are briefly summarized below. Note the web links highlighted for each for more detailed information.

- **The Aspen Area Community Plan's Implementation Steps** summarize actions that could be or are being taken to enhance the Appeal of the Aspen Brand. See Appendix – Implementation Steps (p. 64).

- The **Aspen Chamber Resort Association (ACRA)** aims to brand, market, and promote Aspen to domestic and international visitors.

- **Aspen Skiing Company** attracts visitors to 4 mountains in the Aspen area for world class skiing and outdoor activities year-round.

- In support of the Aspen Idea: Mind, Body, Spirit there are a wide range of offerings and initiatives that engage this principle such as:
    - **Aspen Music Festival**
    - **Aspen Ideas Festival**
    - **Food & Wine Festival**
    - **X-Games**
    - **Pro Challenge**

- There are a number of initiatives and organizations dedicated to protecting and preserving the natural environment such as:
    - **City of Aspen / Canary Initiative**
    - **Aspen Center for Environmental Studies (ACES)**
    - **Wilderness Workshop**

These are but a few of the organizations, programs, and initiatives that support *Appeal of the Aspen Brand* outcomes and associated key performance measures.

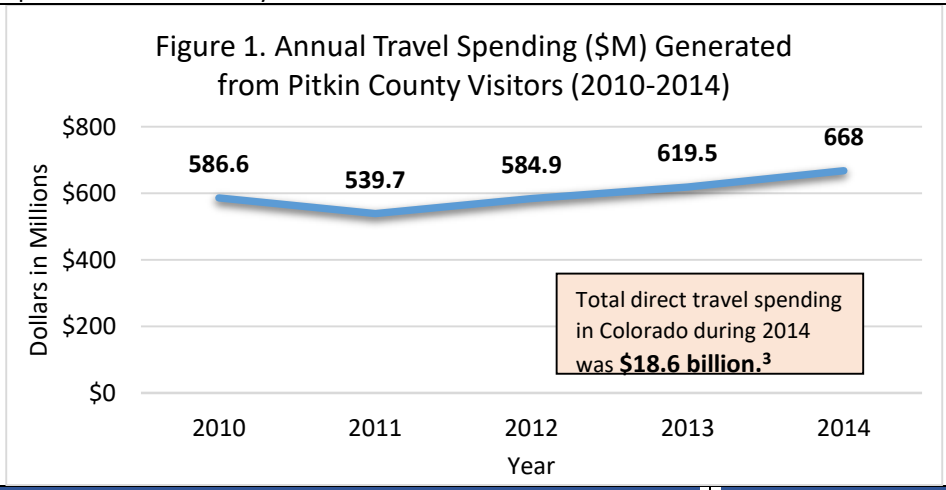
Economic Impact of Visitors

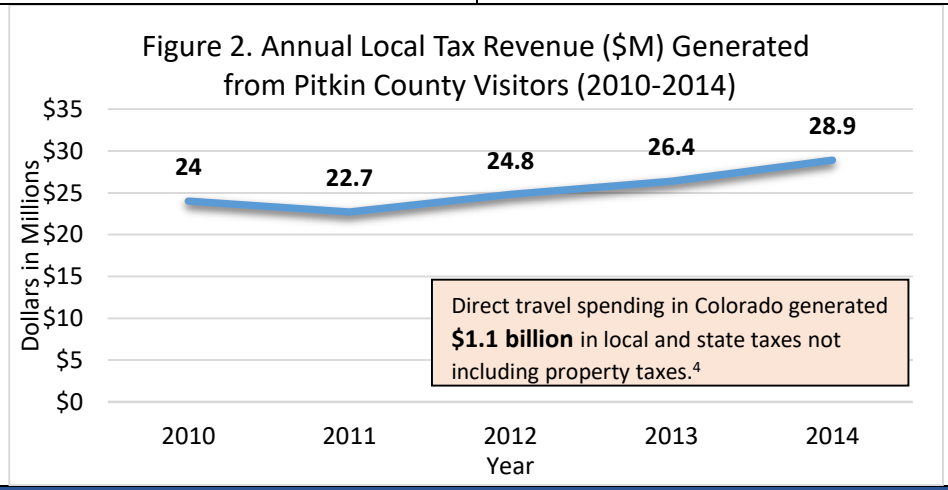
What is it? Why is it important?

According to a report entitled *Colorado Travel Impacts 1996 – 2014 p* (prepared for the Colorado Tourism Office), the economic impact of visitors is defined as "*the level of overnight international and domestic visitors travelling to and through the state and the impact this spending had on the economy in terms of earnings, employment, and tax revenue*"[1]. For the purposes of the local economy, this same definition applies when using the Pitkin County data found in the report. Understanding the impact of visitors on Aspen's economy is important as it underscores the relative significance of a visitor based economy. Businesses, local governments, and communities can then plan how to support and maintain this visitor based economy at optimal levels including the provision of adequate infrastructure (lodging and mobility), restaurants, shops, and venues for events and entertainment.

What does the data/trend say?

According to the report, visitor spending in Pitkin County increased steadily from $586.6 M in 2010 to $668 M in 2014 (Figure 1)[2]. This represents a percentage increase of approximately 14%. To put this in context, the total direct travel spending in Colorado during 2014 was $18.6 billion dollars. Figure 2 shows that local tax revenue also increased during the same period. From 2010 to 2014, there is a steady increase in local tax revenue resulting in approximately 20%. Both demonstrate a corresponding increase in visitor economic impact over the last few years.





Targets

There is currently no target set for this measure.

Data Sourcing & Considerations

Dean Runyan Associates prepared the *Colorado Travel Impact 1996 – 2014p* report for the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) in June 2015. According to the CTO, the data in the report is due to be updated by June 2016. The data is based on a Regional Travel Impact Model (RTIM), a proprietary computer model for analyzing travel economic impacts at the state, regional and local level. [7] While the methodology is described in the report, the inputs (reported results) are not verifiable.

Sources: [1] Colorado Travel Impacts 1996 – 2014p. Dean Runyan Associates (Commissioned by Colorado Office of Tourism). June 2015. Via link: http://deanrunyan.com/doc_library/COImp.pdf Retrieved March, 2016. [2] Ibid p. 48 [3] Ibid p. 6 [4] Ibid. p 6 [5] Ibid. p. 54 [Photo] Babbie, Sheila. 2016.

Median Age of Visitors

What is it? Why is it important?

Traveler demographics are impacting tourism and its growth.[1]The demographics of traveler groups is important in understanding who is visiting a place and why. The median age of visitors gives an indication of the age of a population of visitors. Understanding what the median age of the Aspen visitor is allows it as an international resort destination to plan what the appeal is for attracting key visitor age groups now and in the future.

What does the data/trend say?

According to the Aspen Chamber Resort Association (ACRA) Summer Survey conducted every second year (2006-2014), the median age of Aspen summer visitors was consistently 48 or 49 years of age[2]. Figure 1 below shows the distribution of age groups among those summer visitors surveyed in 2014. The largest age groups represented were 45-54 and 18-24 with 22% each. The age group 35-44 had 19%. Both age groups 25-34 and 65+ had 15% each. Meanwhile, the youngest age group 18-24 had only 6%[3]. According to Aspen Snowmass (Ski Company) 2015/2016 survey results, "*for the past three years average age during winter season of surveyed guests was in the range of 41-44*." The detailed age distribution is depicted in Figure 2 below (right)[4].

Figure 1. ACRA Summer Survey Results
Visitor by Age Group (2014)

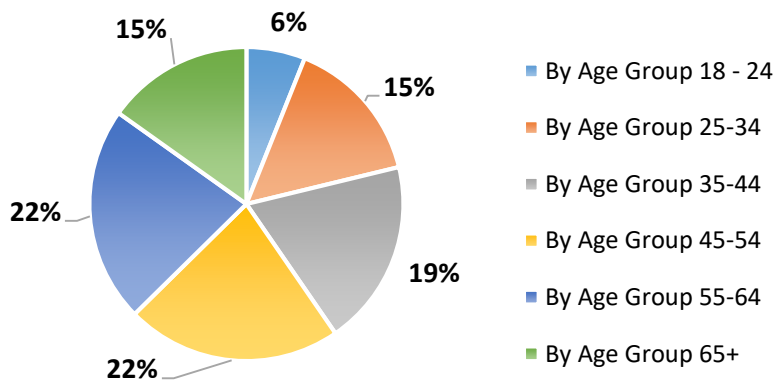
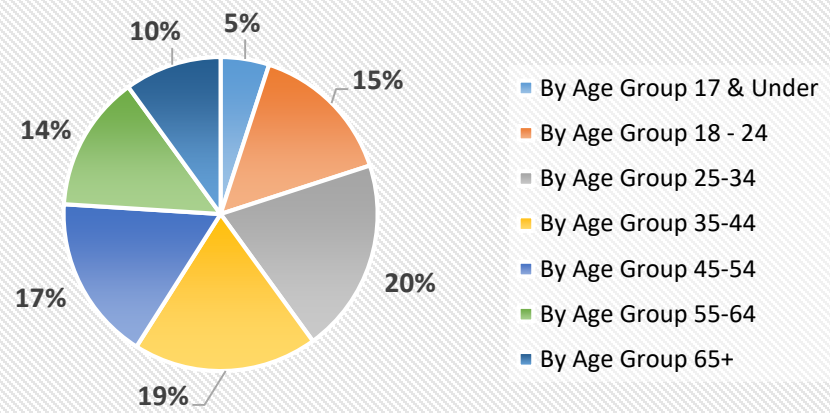


Figure 2. AspenSnowmass Survey Results
Visitor By Age Group (2015-2016)



Targets

There is currently no target set for this measure.

Data Sourcing & Considerations

ACRA surveys summer visitors every second year. The sample population of those surveyed represents a limited number of the total summer visitor population. While the same survey data for winter is not readily available it is expected to follow a similar demographic pattern. The data in Figure 2 was reproduced from a graph provided by Aspen Skiing Company in order to display in a comparable way with the summer data.

Sources: [1] World Travel & Tourism Council. Session 2 Economics Politics and Demographics. Video Via Link: http://www.wttc.org/errors/95e1dba1-c749-4f67-8f2b-807618e391d0. Retrieved April 2016 [2] Aspen Chamber Resort Association (ACRA) Summer Survey (2014). Retrieved April 2016. [3] Ibid. [4] Aspen Skiing Company. Email from J. Jacobi (05.12.16) [Photo 1] Courtesy Kolacek, Zbynek.

Visitor Satisfaction Levels

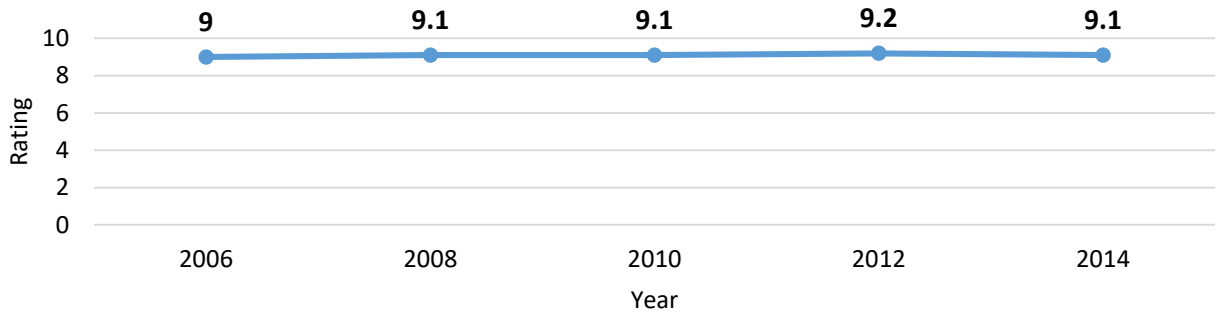
What is it? Why is it important?

Visitor satisfaction level is a measure of how pleased an individual is with destination in terms of their expectations and overall experience. This often starts with the general impression of a place, its character, and environment (natural and built). More specifically, this might include the relative appeal/quality of nature, culture, lodging, restaurants, transportation, recreational activities, entertainment and events, shopping, among other goods and services. Visitor satisfaction levels for these attributes (individually and collectively) are important as people have high expectations in how they spend their resources and time. If visitors are satisfied with a place they will return and influence others to do the same. If not, they will go elsewhere. For Aspen, visitor satisfaction levels are critical for sustaining its visitor based economy at optimal levels.

What does the data/trend say?

Every two years the Aspen Chamber Resort Association (ACRA) conducts a Summer Survey on a sampling of Aspen visitors. Among the questions, it asks visitors on their level of trip satisfaction and overall experience. ACRA uses an *Intercept Survey* with a possible follow-up survey after the trip. The individuals surveyed rate attributes based on a scale from 1 (*poor*) to 10 (*excellent*).[1] From 2006 to 2014, the average ratings for Overall Experience was 9.1. During the same period there was a slight increase in the rating from 9 in 2006 to 9.1 in 2014.[2] While this data represents a limited sample of the overall visitor population, it is somewhat representative of how visitors rate their overall experience and level of satisfaction.

Figure 1. ACRA Summer Survey: Average Ratings for Overall Summer Experience (2006 - 2014)



WORLD GUIDES

"Aspen, Colorado is home to a number of exceptional ski resorts and features some truly spectacular mountain scenery and many summer activities. Aspen has become a major tourism destination throughout the year....."[3]

POWDERHOUNDS

"Aspen Snowmass offers a brilliant all round ski resort experience with world-class facilities."[4]

Targets

There is currently no target set for this measure.

Data Sourcing & Considerations

ACRA surveys summer visitors every second year. The population of those surveyed represents a limited sample of the summer visitor population.

Sources: [1] Aspen Chamber Resort Association. Summer Survey (2014). [2] Ibid. [3] World Guides. Aspen Tourist Information and Tourism. Via link: http://www.world-guides.com/north-america/usa/colorado/aspen/. Retrieved April 2016. [4] OnTheSnow 2016. PowderHounds. Via link: http://www.powderhounds.com /USA/Colorado/Aspen.aspx.. http://www.powderhounds.com/USA/Ski-Resorts-Ratings.aspx Retrieved April 2016.
[Photo] Courtesy Kolacek, Zbynek.

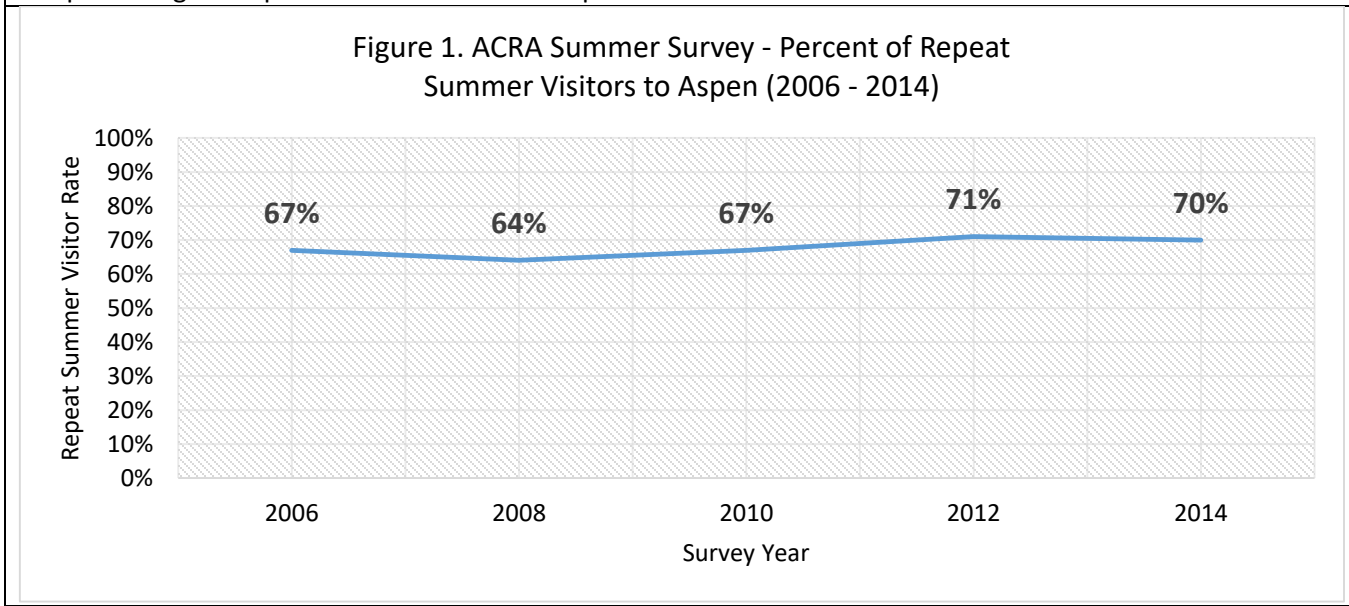
% of Repeat Visitors to Aspen

What is it? Why is it important?

The percent of repeat visitors is the number of people within a given visitor population that have returned to a place and/or destination. Repeat visitor rates are important as they give an idea of the level of satisfaction in a place. This, in turn, is a relative indication of visitor "demand" for a place on which the tourist based economy can depend and develop its infrastructure and offerings "supply" on a sustainable basis.

What does the data/trend say?

Every two years the Aspen Chamber Resort Association (ACRA) conducts a Summer Survey on a sampling of Aspen visitors. Among the questions, it asks visitors on whether they are a repeat visitor to Aspen. ACRA uses an *Intercept Survey* with a possible follow-up survey after the trip. From 2006 to 2014, the percent of repeat visitors averaged 68%. During the same period there was an absolute increase from 67% (2006) to 70% (2014).[1] While this data represents a limited sample of the overall visitor population, it is somewhat representative of the percentage of repeat summer visitors to Aspen.



Targets

There is currently no target set for this measure.

Data Sourcing & Considerations

ACRA surveys summer visitors every second year. The population of those surveyed represents a limited sample of the summer visitor population.

Sources: [1] ACRA Summer Survey (2014). Retrieved in April 2016. [Photo 1] Courtesy Kolacek Zbynek. [Photo 2] Babbie, Sheila. 2016