



Meilani Schijvens, owner and director of Rain Coast data and former executive director of Southeast Conference, gives a presentation on Southeast Alaska By the Numbers at Elizabeth Peratrovich Hall, Tuesday. (Ben Hohenstatt | Juneau Empire)

Juneau could clear 1.5 million cruise ship tourists by 2021

Visitor industry continues to grow, state jobs decline

By Ben Hohenstatt

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New projections show the number of cruise ship tourists visiting Southeast Alaska clearing the 1.5 million mark in 2021.

Meilani Schijvens, owner and director of Rain Coast data and former executive director of Southeast Conference, said Tuesday 1.54 million cruise ship visitors are expected to come to Southeast Alaska next year. This year, 1.44 million tourists are expected.

“We’re seeing ships becoming bigger, and we’re also seeing the total number of weeks that we call the visitor industry is growing,” Schijvens said during a presentation. “So we’re expanding the time that we’re having a strong visitor economy here in Southeast Alaska.”

The presentation was part of the Southeast Conference Mid-Session Summit at Elizabeth Peratrovich Hall.

Schijvens said of the total number of visitors to the region, 1.51 million are projected to come to Juneau. That compares to 1.36 million to Ketchikan and 1.19 million to Skagway. This year, 1.42 million tourists are expected to come to Juneau, 1.28 million to Ketchikan and 1.1 million to Skagway, according to [past Southeast by the Numbers](#) data.

[\[Read live coverage from the conference here\]](#)

“If we look from 2019 to 2021, we’re going to increase cruise ship passengers by 16%,” Schijvens said.

That’s actually a bit of a slow down. The total number of visitors to Southeast Alaska grew by 23% from 2018 to this year’s projected total, according to Southeast Alaska by the Numbers.

While the number of tourists coming to Southeast Alaska continues to swell, Schijvens said the number of state government jobs in Southeast Alaska are doing just the opposite.

“This is our most important story,” Schijvens said. “State job losses are continuing.”

Schijvens said over the past eight years Southeast Alaska lost 999 state government jobs, and most of the losses have come out of Juneau.

“This is a huge number,” she said. “If you look at the number of state jobs we had eight years ago, this represents 18% of them are gone. They’re gone from our economy. The rest of Alaska has lost 9%. We’re being pummeled here in Southeast Alaska on the state job losses.”

However, Schijvens said tourism-related jobs are on an upswing. In the last seven years, 2,000 tourism jobs have been added, and the industry accounts for a significant share of all jobs and wages in Southeast Alaska.

“The visitor industry now accounts for 18% of all annualized jobs in Southeast Alaska and 11% of all wages,” she said.

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