

# Los Angeles Daily News

## Here's What's Driving California's Strong Travel, Tourism Business

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Southern California's travel and tourism industry was a powerful driver for the region's economy in 2015, according to a report released Monday.

Visit California's report shows that travel and tourism generated nearly \$51 billion in visitor spending and sustained about 441,000 jobs for the five-county area, which includes Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside and Ventura counties.

Broken out by region, Orange County saw the biggest increase, with tourism spending rising 4.1 percent to \$11.3 billion.

That was followed by Riverside County (\$7.4 billion, up 3.3 percent), L.A. County (\$25.9 billion, up 2.6 percent), San Bernardino County (\$4.6 billion, up 2.5 percent) and Ventura County (\$1.6 billion, up 1.7 percent).

Those numbers speak to the broad array of Southland attractions. And there are plenty, ranging from Disneyland in Anaheim and Six Flags Magic Mountain in Santa Clarita, to the Rose Bowl in Pasadena and the annual Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in the Inland Empire.

And that's not counting Southern California's beaches, mountains, museums and other attractions.

On a bigger scale, California's travel industry expanded for the sixth consecutive year following the 2007-2009 recession.

"We are looking at an industry that is about 2.5 percent of the state's economy," Visit California President and CEO Caroline Beteta said. "This tremendous growth indicates that growth in the industry will continue through 2016 and beyond."

Total direct travel spending in California hit \$122.5 billion in 2015, according to preliminary figures.

"That could cover the state's general fund for a year," Beteta said.

The \$122.5 billion represents a 3.4 percent increase over the previous year. The re-spending of travel industry income by businesses and employees also produces secondary effects. Last year that generated 727,100 jobs with earnings of \$41.9 billion.

Total direct and secondary employment amounted to 1.8 million jobs with earnings of \$83.2 billion, according to the report.

Additional figures from the report show that visitor air travel on domestic flights to California destinations hit \$34.4 million last year, up 5.4 percent from 2014. And six out of every \$10 spent at California destinations came from residents from other states or countries.

Beteta said the Chinese market has become particularly important for California's tourism industry.

"That's the fastest growing market I've seen in my career," she said. "When we entered that market we saw 899 percent growth in 10 years, and between 2014 and 2018 we're looking at 65 to 70 percent growth. There's about \$2.6 billion in overall spending coming out of that country."

Ed Fuller, president and CEO of the Orange County Visitors Association, said his region hosted 47.4 million visitors last year, 4.3 million of which were international visitors. That was up 5 percent over the previous year.

“Being in the heart of Southern California, we’re very much involved in travel and tourism,” he said. “Looking back to 2015, we had an exciting year.”

Meetings, trade shows and conventions account for a sizable chunk of tourism dollars and Fuller noted that Anaheim Convention Center — the largest on the West Coast — is being expanded.

“We have been able to increase our involvement in the global markets,” he said. “We have offices in Shanghai, Beijing, the Middle East, Mexico, Japan and India.”

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