



Palm Springs airport has busiest January on record

By Skip Descant ; 9:34 p.m. PST February 20, 2014



(Photo: Desert Sun file photo)



Not only were the planes flying fuller in January, but there were more seats to fill, as airlines serving [Palm Springs International Airport](#) helped to make the month the busiest January on record.

Passenger activity at Palm Springs International was up 5 percent in January compared to January 2013, according to airport statistics, which show 199,582 passengers used PSP.

"We had about 4 percent capacity increase over prior years," Mark Kiehl, deputy director of aviation, marketing and development at Palm Springs International Airport, told the airport commission Wednesday. Airlines have also increased capacity for February, March and April.

"Capacity" is airline industry speak for not only the number of flights serving an airport, but the number of seats available. For example, during the region's high tourist season, there are three daily nonstop flights to Chicago — two on American Airlines and one on United Airlines. (There are no summer nonstops from Palm Springs to Chicago.)

"That's very important for this market, not only for the local passengers, but for the people connecting through Chicago," said Kiehl.

"January was an all-time record, for the month of January," Kiehl added. "Certainly, 2014 is looking like to be starting another good year."

It's safe to say nearly all of those airline passengers were staying in hotel rooms and vacation rentals, pushing January hotel occupancy to 63.7 percent in the Coachella Valley, an 8.4 percent increase from a year before, according to Smith Travel Research, a hospitality industry analysis firm.

Average daily rates climbed to \$138.65 in January, a 6.7 percent increase, while revenue per available room — another sign of the health of the tourism economy — was up 15.6 percent.

"It wouldn't surprise me if our TOT (Transient Occupancy Tax,) is up 25 percent in January," remarked Tim Ellis, general manager for the Palm Mountain Resort in Palm Springs and the chair of the Hospitality Industry and Business Council with the Greater Palm Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The [Palm Springs International Film Festival](#) was easily the largest event in January, attracting more than 135,000 participants, with at least 70 percent of them being from out of town, festival officials said.

