

business

Denver conventions near record in 2010

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Students enjoy a rafting trip last summer on Clear Creek. (Denver Post file photo)

Two more signs of a resurgence in Colorado's recession-pinched tourism industry were revealed Tuesday.

Visit Denver announced that the city's meetings and convention business logged its second-best year ever in 2010. The 75 conventions at the Colorado Convention Center and 423 other meetings around town drew 371,000 conventioneers who stirred an economic impact estimated at \$653 million.

The total was 7,000 visitors short of the record set in 2008, the year Denver hosted the Democratic National Convention.

Nine conventions booked in the fourth quarter of 2010 — traditionally a slow time — helped boost Denver to its near-record year. No mega-conventions visited, but several brought significant dollars to the local economy.

The SnowSports Industries America Snow Show was the largest booking in the city's history, with 19,000 people.

A separate report Tuesday showed that Colorado's 48 rafting companies hosted 507,000 paying rafters in 2010, 16,500 more than in 2009. While still below the 2007 record of 544,000 user days, those rafters in 2010 generated an estimated \$150 million in economic impact.

That's the second-highest economic impact ever — behind 2007 — according to the Colorado River Outfitters Association.

Rafter spending in 2010 is nearly double that of 2002, when drought and wildfire combined with travel angst from the 9/11 terrorist attacks to drive the state's rafting industry to what now ranks as a 20-year low.

Tuesday's reports follow other news from last month that the state's tourism engine is fueling an economic rebound. Metro Denver hotel occupancies climbed 8.4 percent in 2010, up from a near-record low in 2009.

Visitation to Colorado's 26 ski areas is up about 10 percent through the early season, according to January reports from Colorado Ski Country and Vail Resorts.

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