

53.1 Million Visits Reveal the Growing Economic Scale of U.S. Skiing

Manuel Herrejón, who is currently enrolled in Harvard Business School's GMP, identifies rising Latin American forces in the winter economy

CIUDAD DE MÉXICO, CIUDAD DE MÉXICO, MEXICO, September 22, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The U.S. ski industry closed the 2025-26 season with an estimated 53.1 million skier and rider visits, even after snowfall finished 33% below the 10-year average. The Rocky Mountain region accounted for 20.1 million visits, nearly 38% of the total, while reporting ski areas committed \$569.3 million to capital expenditures, including 45 new lifts and 52 upgrades.



Herrejón analyzes Latin America's role in the U.S. ski economy

Among ski areas responding to the National Ski Areas Association survey, capital reinvestment averaged \$22.24 per skier visit. The final figures, released in August, quantify an industry already preparing for another winter.

A new analysis by economic analyst Manuel Herrejón Suárez, currently enrolled in Harvard Business School's General Management Program, uses those figures to examine a less visible part of that business. Latin America reaches the U.S. mountain economy from two directions, with Mexico supplying winter travelers and Argentina contributing seasonal workers and snow-trained talent.

"What matters is not only how many people reach the mountain, but how many layers of spending each trip activates. Ski tourism concentrates lodging, transportation, food, retail, instruction and recreation in the same destination," Manuel Herrejón said.

Mexico's role is clearest on the demand side. The U.S. National Travel and Tourism Office

recorded 13.4 million Mexican visitors arriving by land in 2024, with average spending of \$986, and another 3.5 million arriving by air, spending \$1,379 on average. Together, those categories represented roughly \$18 billion. The data do not isolate ski travel, but they show the size of the market U.S. mountain destinations compete for.

Colorado offers the clearest connection to snow tourism. A Colorado Tourism Office presentation reported four consecutive seasons of record ski-area visits from Mexico through 2023-24. California provides another measure of purchasing power. In 2025, Mexican travelers made 8.4 million visits to the state and spent \$5.4 billion, accounting for 53.8% of Mexican visitor spending in the United States, according to Visit California.

"Mexico matters because it contributes the kind of demand mountain destinations want to capture: family travel, multi-day stays and spending that extends far beyond the lift ticket," Herrejón Suárez said.

Under U.S. trade accounting, money spent by foreign visitors on lodging, food, recreation, transportation and other travel services is counted as a service export because the customer crosses the border instead of the product. The International Trade Administration says international visitors spent more than \$250 billion on U.S. travel and tourism-related goods and services in 2025.

Argentina enters the same economy from the labor side. Ski centers including Bariloche and Las Leñas have produced generations of workers familiar with snow operations, while opposite seasons create a natural window for temporary employment in the United States. The State Department's BridgeUSA program has documented ski resorts employing Summer Work Travel participants from Argentina and other South American countries because their availability aligns with the U.S. winter.

The value of those skills can extend beyond entry-level seasonal work. Beaver Creek is recruiting certified ski instructors for 2026-27 at a published base range of \$21 to \$64.34 an hour, depending on experience and certification. The range does not measure Argentine participation specifically, but it shows how technical snow skills can command significant value in another labor market.

"Argentina enters from the opposite side of the transaction. Mexico exports demand; Argentina exports knowledge developed over decades of winter sports. The U.S. mountain economy has found a market for both," Herrejón Suárez said.

His analysis does not assign a single dollar value to either country's contribution because the available data do not support one. Instead, it identifies two measurable cross-border channels around the same resorts. Mexican visitors bring demand that feeds hotels, restaurants, retail, transportation and mountain services, while South American seasonal workers help resorts meet winter labor needs.

As resorts enter the 2026-27 booking and hiring cycle, those flows are becoming easier to see. The U.S. ski business is not only selling lift access; it is converting international travel, specialized labor and seasonal mobility into economic activity across mountain communities.

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