

Sitka Collaborative Tourism Project (continued)

Question #3 “What training and information do we provide to guides for accuracy?”

A substantial number of local guides, park rangers, museum technical assistants, seasonal workers receive quite extensive training both on-the-job and early in the tourist season. The Alaska Naturalist Program, training provided by UAS provides a good general training for anyone involved in tourism. Several government agencies and private entities have their own training programs sometimes combined with government agencies and in other cases augment on-the-job training with 3-ring binders obtained from the Alaska Naturalist Program.

Individuals queried stated that the most challenging questions for guides are not the cultural and natural history questions, but the questions about local, regional or state issues involving such topics as fishing, Permanent Fund, Alaska taxation policies, subsistence, ANWR, gas pipeline, the impact of the oil industry and general questions about the local economy. Answers to these questions should be accurate, consistent & based on research.

One other category of questions from tourists involves very specific issues involving directions to a specific destination suggesting (typically) “the best place to eat.” The most challenging question; “I have three hours in town, what should I do with my time?” The issue is how do local guides/rangers get trained to answer this type of question.

1. Sitka National Historical Park does one or two week training in spring for all seasonal rangers & selected permanent staff members. This training is opened up for members of the community. Contact SNHP if you wish to participate.
2. Sitka Tours has information sheets, does driver training - veteran guides share information and safety training. They also share training with other entities in town. Guides are experienced and knowledgeable about local/state issues and history.
3. Sitka Tribal Tours does intensive training & shares some training with Raptor Center, SNHP and USFS. Tonia Rioux - contact @ 747-3207 (2006 training over 3 weeks/evenings – 70 hrs. training. All employees are Alaska Host Certified.
4. Allen Marine hires knowledgeable, trained guides/naturalists for tours.
5. The State Park Ranger in Sitka has limited time for historical cultural training and most of that time is focused on maintenance of parks and park grounds.
6. Sitka Historical Society – Isabel Miller Museum trains volunteers and staff.
7. Harris Air flightseeing uses audiotapes when doing flightseeing tours
8. Alaska Marine Hwy has USFS rangers aboard doing interpretation... Training for USFS interpretive rangers is intensive & involves both on-the-job training & about two weeks of formal training.
9. Various guiding services/kayaks/charters do their own training – draw on their own backgrounds
10. There are a few walking tours conducted by tour guides who work on cruise ships. Conversations with these guides and queries of these guides by this park ranger over the past fourteen summers (1992-2005) presented the following anecdotal information. The best guides had Ph. Ds or specialties in the field and had visited Sitka often. Others had visited Sitka often, but had done rather modest research of the natural, cultural history and Russian period history.
11. Alaska Raptor Rehabilitation Center --- Typically: Orientation, 3-ring binder, scripted presentations and on-the-job training
12. Budget constrains and budget cutbacks are impacting all federal training and some other training programs. All parties consulted listed budget cutbacks as their most serious concern.

Note: In recent years walking tours conducted for tourists in Sitka were typically done by Sitka Tours employees and by National Park Rangers. The SNHP Rangers received two weeks intensive training and had designated research time during the work day. Sitka Tours guides do substantial research to master the natural and cultural history of Sitka. These guides typically have an excellent background on various local issues.