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## Airport busts holiday traffic record

Dennis Gaub, Staff Writer Dec 28, 2018



Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport.

Chronicle file photo

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Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport again set records for holiday passenger traffic this week – and crowds at the terminal will grow this weekend.

The airport, located immediately east of Belgrade, logged about 2,800 outbound passengers and about 2,900 inbound passengers on Monday, Christmas Eve, Airport Director Brian Sprenger said Wednesday.

“That’s probably up 20 percent over last year’s number, which also was a record,” he said.

Passenger counts dipped slightly on Christmas Day when there were about 2,400 departures and 2,600 arrivals. Those totals also represented about a 20-percent increase over 2017, Sprenger said.

The local airport tends to see less of a Christmas-Eve-to-Christmas-Day dip than other airports because Bozeman is a destination. That results in more passengers who fly here for recreation and then fly back home a bit later.

If the airport seemed busy earlier this week, though, wait until Sunday.

Sprenger and his staff anticipate that will be the peak day of the holiday with a projected 4,000 outbound passengers.

The passenger type changes around New Year's Eve, when skiers and other tourists headed home make up the bulk of plane loads. In contrast, in the days before Christmas, a large share of the terminal crowd is made up of Montana State University students going home, Sprenger said.

On an average winter day between mid-December and the end of March, the airport boards about 2,000 passengers, and about the same number disembark, Sprenger said. Weekends are busier, and passengers can choose from extra flights.

The airport's paved parking lots were full this week, so overflow lots to the west side of the terminal were put in use. At times, about 600 vehicles were parked in the auxiliary space, Sprenger said.

"We're pretty fortunate. We have a lot of land near the terminal," he said.

Sprenger said the airport's location also is a plus because "Belgrade has a great base" for surface parking. The town is situated on what once was a river bed, so rocks and gravel lie near the soil surface, thus minimizing muddy conditions in the extra lots.

People concerned about leaving their cars in the airport lots for an extended period, only to return and find their battery is dead or they've locked the vehicle and misplaced the key, can put their minds at ease. Sprenger said the airport staff is set up to jump batteries and help people with lockouts.