



VISIT BATON ROUGE

COVID-19 Recovery Marketing Plan

The Mission of the Hospitality Recovery Task Force is to assist by providing input, promoting and supporting Visit Baton Rouge's recovery marketing plans and efforts due to COVID-19. The Recovery Task Force will actively engage hospitality industry representatives, stakeholders and political leaders of the importance and significance of this industry to the economy and wellbeing of our community.

Visit **BATON
ROUGE**

AN AUTHENTIC LOUISIANA EXPERIENCE

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Behind the Plan & Beyond the Matrix

Facing one of the greatest disruptions of all time, global pandemic COVID-19—known as a global pandemic will change the way we do business and the way people travel.

This plan is a working document to help during the recovery phases of this pandemic. As with other crises that our area has experienced, this is unprecedented and so many unknown changes yet to come.

As it stands, this was written with the thought that the State of Louisiana and East Baton Rouge Parish will reopen from a nearly two-month Stay At Home Order, issued by Governor John Bel Edwards. With the understanding that this could be lengthened or restarted, this plan covers our proposed efforts *to* recover the tourism industry in East Baton Rouge Parish given what we know today and can anticipate without further disruption. As the situation changes, this plan will be revised as needed.

Travel and tourism to East Baton Rouge Parish generates an-average \$950 million annually in visitor spending, an impact that supports our Parish's local needs and services. The businesses that visitors support employ over 13,000 locals. Travel and tourism also reduce taxes paid by household to the tune of an estimated \$680, annually.

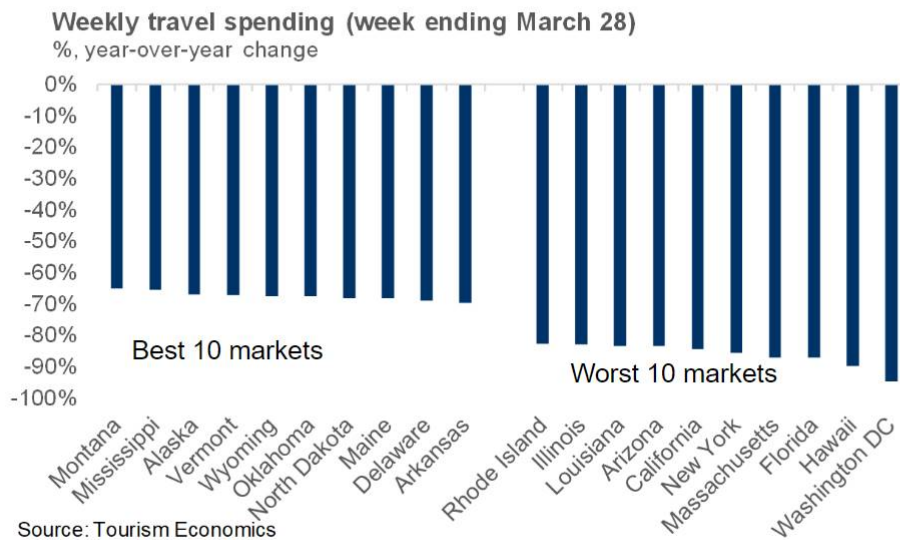
This plan outlines our goals, objectives and strategy to return to these figures within the proposed three to five-year recovery period. However, with our industry operating on the Hotel Occupancy Tax, a tax placed on hotel and short-term rental stays, our budget will be adjusted as directed by Visit Baton Rouge's Board of Directors. The impacts and adjustments made may change the recovery plan and will be noted in this document.

Visit Baton Rouge Proposed Recovery Plan, COVID-19

Timeline

The proposed timeline for a full recovery as touted by multiple tourism related organizations, suggests that the tourism/hospitality industry can expect and plan for a three to five-year recovery plan. The timeline below, shared by Tourism Economics (an Oxford Economics Company), considers the best and worst cities impacted due to COVID-19 and offer an outlook on the ability to recover either at a faster or slower pace.

The more remote, the better



Marketing/Advertising Plan

When it comes to marketing and advertising, outlined below is a high-level overview of Visit Baton Rouge’s primary audience segments defined by five broad categories:

Audience

- Meeting Professionals/Planners (includes sports event organizers and tour operators)
- Leisure/Consumer
- Local
- Medical Tourism

Reach

- Local
- Statewide
- Regional (cities located within a six-hour drive distance)
- National
- International

Anticipated Recovery Plans by Audience Segment

Meeting Professionals/Planners

Articles and research show that from the meetings side, Corporate and Business Travel will resume immediately with essential business travel coming back online first, followed by non-essential business travel.

Conferences and conventions are primarily being rescheduled for fourth quarter of 2020. Conferences/conventions that were scheduled but postponed in 2020 due to the pandemic are rescheduling to dates to 2021. This impact is causing meeting planners to shift 2021 meeting location and dates that were planned for 2020, therefore, conferences/conventions that were secured for Baton Rouge in 2021 are being rebooked in 2022.

Full recovery for conferences is expected to take the longest time to return to pre-COVID 19 figures. Social distancing is having considerable impacts on meeting sizes, which we are hearing from meeting professionals/planners and hotel sales reps, that this is a positive for the Baton Rouge area since we have hotels that can accommodate the needs. Another positive is that meeting planners are looking for safer cities to host their meetings in and Baton Rouge fits this perception.



2020 Media Strategy – Meetings & Tour Planner Journey

	TASK	CONSIDERATION	PLANNING	EVENT	RESULTS
THINKING	<p>I've been tasked with planning a group event, trip, conference, tour...</p> <p>What is the 'level' of this event? Do we have a budget, expectations?</p> <p>What happened in the past?</p>	<p>What location, activities could set this event apart, be fun, unique?</p> <p>What dates, seasonality, other factors make xyz a great location?</p> <p>Room count & space size?</p> <p>Where have other planners found success with similar projects?</p>	<p>Where does my budget go farthest AND make for a great event?</p> <p>Where will we be most accommodated? Ease of Travel?</p> <p>What are others saying?</p> <p>Where will I get the most help with planning, when we arrive, during?</p>	<p>What support do I have when we get there, how involved will my support be throughout our stay?</p> <p>If x happens who, what will help?</p> <p>If we have last minute changes what is the process and who can assist?</p>	<p>What are attendees saying?</p> <p>What is getting posted online, in social media?</p> <p>I should survey for feedback - good, bad, great experiences?</p> <p>I should let our DMO rep know</p>
ENTER COVID	<p>I've been tasked with researching the state of group travel, guidelines, information. Where is best, safest, most flexible group travel options in new world.</p>	<p>Lots of Ads out there – what is best for us? Which locations have everything we want/need open?</p> <p>Which locations are safest for groups? Where are health centers? Who will give me the most options, refunds for changes to our plans?</p>	<p>How much flexibility do we have? What are the cancellation policies, refund arrangements?</p> <p>Do they have enough, safety and health standards at key areas - hotel, conv. center, group event locations.</p>	<p>2x the concerns listed above PLUS assistance for safety and health issues that arise in group locations/settings or with group individuals</p>	<p>How was the event – were individuals safe, comfortable, taken care of? What are they saying?</p> <p>How are they feeling, how is their health post event?</p> <p>I should let EVERYONE know!</p>
TOUCHPOINTS	<p>Display Ads</p> <p>Pre-roll</p> <p>Word of Mouth</p> <p>Print</p> <p>E-Blasts</p> <p>Advertorials</p> <p>Content Marketing</p>	<p>Search</p> <p>Blogs Review Sites</p> <p>Content Marketing</p> <p>Tourism Sites Print</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>Video</p> <p>E-Blasts</p>	<p>Social Media</p> <p>OTAs</p> <p>DMOs</p> <p>Travel Pubs Sites</p> <p>In person calls & meetings</p> <p>Search</p>	<p>Social Media</p> <p>Local Sites</p> <p>Local Apps</p> <p>DMOs</p> <p>Reviews Sites</p> <p>Experiential Media</p>	<p>Word of Mouth</p> <p>User Generated Content</p> <p>Post Ratings Reviews</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>Experiential Media</p> <p>Digital Retargeting</p> <p>CRM Remarketing</p>

Remarket through CRM, Digital Retarget for future travels

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Immediate recovery efforts will focus on reaching statewide meeting planners and professionals to book meetings/conventions and sports groups

Extended recovery plans for this audience segment will include messaging that showcases Baton Rouge as a city that can handle statewide and regional meetings. Visit Baton Rouge's staff are working closely with our hospitality industry partners to understand the best practices and standards that they're applying to meeting the needs and demands of providing a safe and clean environment.

Visit Baton Rouge will also continue to focus on making sure that the experiences that meeting professionals/planners have is well thought-out prior to their arrival with an understanding of what there is to do in a safe and clean environment.

Virtual Tours were expedited during the pandemic and can be a great way to showcase the city and the Baton Rouge Brand to entice and show what the Baton Rouge area has to offer. We would like to see these continue as a way to expand our reach of give clients a virtual site visit to guide them in making their final decision on a host city.

Leisure/Consumer

Our website analytics and a current sentiment study broken down by generation [Source: TravelPulse, April 2020] shows that people surveyed April 5-9, 2020 are continuing to plan and book trips. The study shows that an overwhelming 77% of those surveyed are keeping their travel plans between June and December of this year, as long as their hometowns or travel destinations are not under a Stay At Home order. Smaller cities are more favorable according the survey, which is something that we're hearing from other sources as well, while domestic travel is trending upward compared to international destinations. More importantly, the costs associated with travel plans are extremely important and the fact that Baton Rouge was considered an affordable city prior to the pandemic is a positive for our area.

Sporting Events are a major draw for visitation to our area and any decision made that may impact the fall sports schedule will alter our marketing and advertising plans.

Immediate recovery initiatives include offering staycation packages and initially pushing these to a statewide audience. Also, we'll be working extensively with regional Destination Marketing Organizations across the state to offer visitors itineraries, Baton Rouge will tout visiting Louisiana's Capital City and taking in an affordable destination that offers more than a daycation visit.

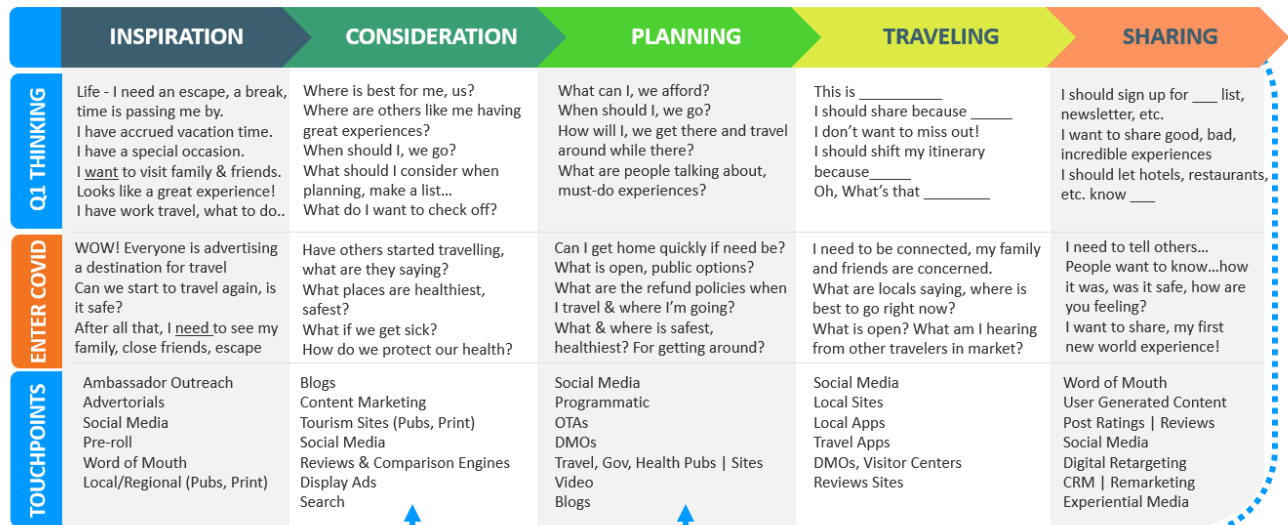
As we see that visitors across state lines are looking to travel, our advertisements and package offers will be promoted to entice visitors to enjoy a smaller city with plenty to do and a great summer vacation spot.

Given that a football season is inclusive of fans in the stadium, this along with fall events and visiting family and friends will be a focus of our marketing efforts through the remainder of the year.

Baton Rouge is also in a great position to promote both a safe city for enjoying Mardi Gras and spring festivals in early 2021.



Media Strategy Then & Now – Consumer Journey



Source: Morgan & Co.

Remarket through CRM, Retarget for future travels

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Locals

According to a Visitor Profile Study commissioned by Longwoods International in 2018, Visitors travel to Baton Rouge primarily to visit Family and Friends and to attend events. Making sure that we reach locals with messaging was achieved prior to the pandemic and continues to be the primary audience during the Stay At Home order.

Medical Tourism

Baton Rouge has positioned the Capital City as a statewide and regional health district. Visit Baton Rouge has created a patient resource website, a site that hospitals can share with patients that provide services and experience that patients can use while in the Baton Rouge area for medical needs and services. While this isn't a site for the pandemic, Visit Baton Rouge will share this resource with the hospital community to share with patients who choose to come to Baton Rouge for medical procedures and services.

Anticipated Recovery Plans by Category

Outlined below is a summary of our initiatives to market to the following categories:

Local Campaign

Immediately following the Stay At Home order issued by Governor John Bel Edwards in late March 2020, Visit Baton Rouge quickly adjusted our strategy and developed messages that were geared to locals. Given that locals are a main reason that visitors come to the Baton

Rouge area, we want to make sure that we're in front of them with messaging, letting them know what there is to do, what virtual experiences are happening and what's open as the Stay At Home order is lifted and we begin to enter the reopening phases.

Partnerships are also in place to work with local businesses and agencies to collectively put together ideas that provide fun and entertainment for locals and visitors.

Statewide

As soon as Governor John Bel Edwards lifts the Stay At Home order, we'll begin promoting to residents, statewide. Being Louisiana's Capital City is something that only Baton Rouge can claim and as travel begins to enter the minds of people, we want to have a presence and share why a trip to Baton Rouge is worth the drive and showcase all that we have to do here. We also know that costs of a trip or vacation will be more important to people and Baton Rouge is a city that if affordable, small enough to feel safe and large enough for a multiday visit. Staycations will be promoted to the statewide audience and daycations will be promoted to our nine-Parish audience.

Statewide Marketing Co-Op Initiatives

Visit Baton Rouge believes that working cohesively with cities around the state will bring more recognition to our visitors and what there is to do in the Capital City. This state is more culturally diverse than many others and this is a great time to capitalize on that and work together to promote what our destinations have to offer—encouraging travel within the state and visitors traveling from outside of the state to visit more than one City or Parish.

Regional

For years, Baton Rouge has excelled in attracting visitors within a six-hour drive range. Pre pandemic, Visit Baton primarily reached this audience with statewide audience being secondary. Relying on sentiment and analytics, we'll continue to monitor data to determine the appropriate time frame for reaching this audience. Our goal is to reach this audience as soon as it's appropriate and the data shows it's safe to do so.

National

Over the last few years, we've been attracting visitors from destinations beyond the six-hour continued to maintain more of a permanent presence through our data and analytics sources, we've expanded advertising efforts in these cities. It is expected that it will take time to see more of a national audience to return. As we continue to analyze the data and track emerging cities, we will add these locations or look alike audiences back into the marketing and advertising plan.

International

The last segment of travelers that we expect to see reach pre pandemic figures is international visitors. We will continue to work with the state's international representatives through our work with the Louisiana Office of Tourism (LOT) to provide information on what's opening and taking place in Baton Rouge so that they can continue to share this information with their

contacts. As for marketing and advertising initiatives, limited efforts will continue to keep a presence and brand awareness in the main markets that we see visitors from annually: Canada, Germany, France, United Kingdom.

Media/PR

Mid-year 2016, we as a community faced multiple tragedies over the summer, Baton Rouge capitalized on the need of earned media to share the positive stories. Going back in time in the first quarter of 2016, prior to that summer, Visit Baton Rouge engaged in a partnership with the Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC). We worked to commission a study reaching a national audience. The results then, prior to the summer of 2016, showed neither a positive or negative view of Louisiana's Capital City or the surrounding region. The Baton Rouge brand was basically unrecognizable.

PR Firm Collaboration

Due to the survey and results and the series of tragic events in 2016, in 2017, Visit Baton Rouge partnered with BRAC, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation (BRAAF), Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport and the City of Baton Rouge to utilize the services of a national Public Relations Firm, Development Counsellors International (DCI) that specializes in both Economic Development and Tourism.

Over the last three years, we've seen tremendous success and interest from journalists writing for national and regional publications—ranging in a variety of interests, resulting in stories that cover the gamut, featuring industry and lifestyle stories.

During this recovery phase we feel that continuing this partnership is more important than ever to continue to utilize earned media to carry the Baton Rouge brand forward, while enhancing the marketing and advertising placements. We also feel that the power of partnerships is more important now as budgets are facing significant cuts but the need for brand awareness is competitive.

Media Missions

In addition to the earned media efforts through the national PR firm, Visit Baton Rouge also partners with the Louisiana Office of Tourism (LOT) on Co-op Media Missions. Beginning in 2020, it was our plan for Visit Baton Rouge to lead our own media missions to strategic statewide, regional and national markets. We also planned to optimize our budgets to partner with key cities for a joint Media Mission, if the opportunity was timely and advantageous for both destinations.

It is our plan to continue these efforts throughout the recovery phases to continue to promote the Baton Rouge Brand and experiences that the city and area have to offer.

Travel Writers

Authenticity is what today's travelers are showing more of an interest in. A segment that has continued to grow and produce articles, stories, blogs, video blogs, podcasts, radio shows, etc. have and will continue to be a marketing channel that we rely on for media placement and brand awareness.

Visit Baton Rouge pitches stories to and vet requests from travel writers, which consists of journalists, writers, bloggers and the like. This initiative has resulted in numerous international, national, regional and statewide pieces that we promote locally.

In addition to the earned media being worked on by the national PR firm our efforts to connect with travel writers are producing stories that tend to be more tourism driven to specific and targeted audience.

We will continue to invest in pitching to the writers to enhance the overall strategy to gain earned media.

Influencers

Social media entered our business model nearly 10 years ago and we continue to use and social media channels to expand our content distribution, using each to effectively speak to their defined audience.

In 2014 Visit Baton Rouge created [Krewe de Rouge](#), a social media ambassador program, where we utilize local influencers to help share their passion for Louisiana's Capital City. A program that not only garners attention locally but impacts the reach to past and potential visitors.

With people looking for creative ways to share what they love and have missed during this time, Visit Baton Rouge will be looking to ramp up efforts during the stages of our recovery phases with local influencers to share the positive messages, events and creative ideas and programs that Baton Rouge is displaying.

Data & Research

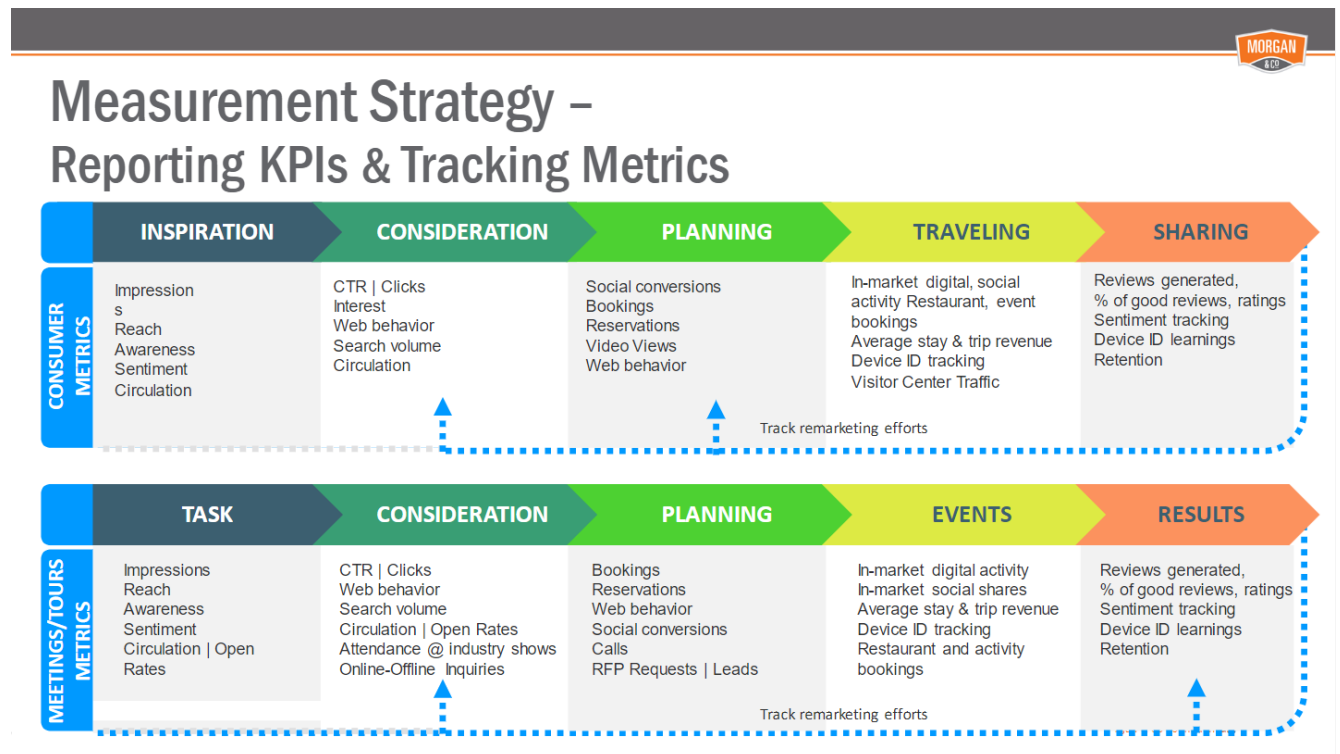
Investing in data and research—both tourism-based research and outside data—has been a major focus for Visit Baton Rouge. It is also the guiding principle behind our efforts of planning, making changes and validating our media plans and marketing decisions, from creative to content and audience and placements.

This is an initiative that we will strive to continue to invest in throughout the recovery phases as metrics that we can depend on to measure our marketing and advertising placements, drive our plans and show economic impact and value.

Visit Baton Rouge also relies on third parties for data and during the recovery phase we will continue to depend on this heavily. This includes research available to Destination Marketing Organizations, such as Visit Baton Rouge, provided by the Louisiana Office of Tourism (LOT).

Type of data collected and analyzed:

- Smith Travel Research (STR): Hotel data
- AirDNA: Short Term Rental Data
- Google Analytics: Website Data
- Longwoods International: Visitor Profile Study



Tourism Economics, an Oxford Economics Company, which specializes in global forecasting and qualitative analysis of the tourism industry recently presented the following information in a webinar held in April 2020. The information was gathered using data from two of the industry’s most reputable research firms, Tourism Economics and Smith Travel Research (STR), a company that tracks data gathered from hotels.

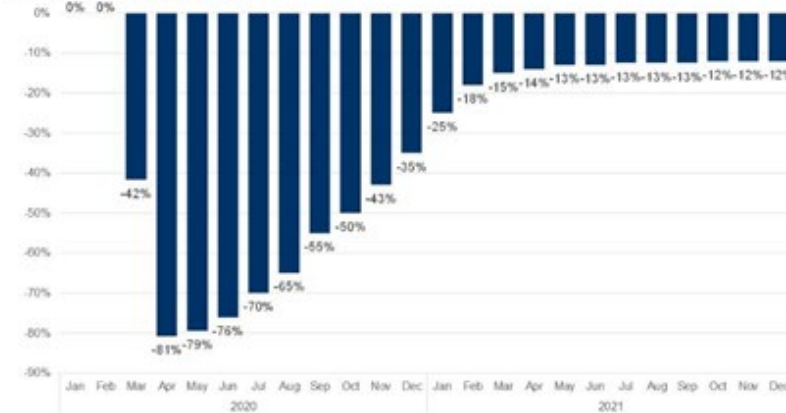
The information shared in the following slides give more concrete reason to believe that the recovery timeline will take the estimated three to five years to return to 2019 figures.

Demand for hotel rooms has experienced drastic declines, and while April 2020 is expected to be the lowest projected month, we can expect a steady increase throughout the year and into 2021.

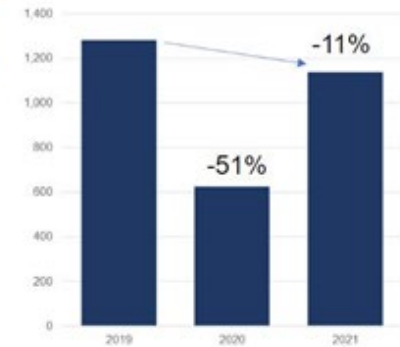
Profile of latest TE / STR forecast

Covid-19 scenario losses: Demand

Percentage difference from counterfactual



Demand (million room nights)

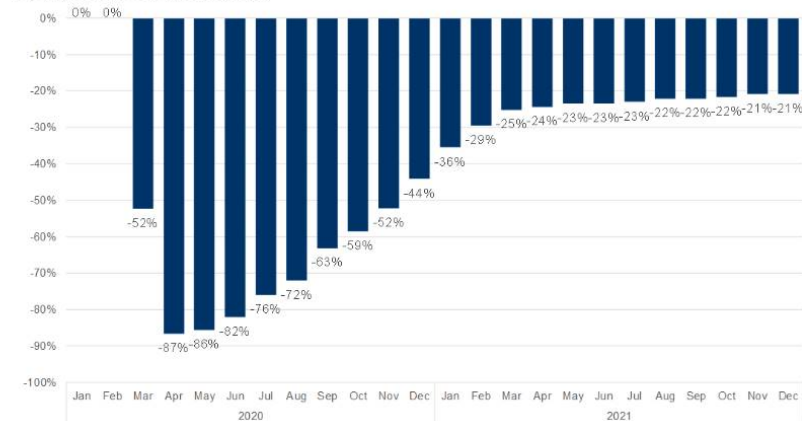


Revenue generated from hotel bookings follow a similar pattern to the demand, indicating that we can expect April 2020 to include the largest losses with incremental increases through 2021.

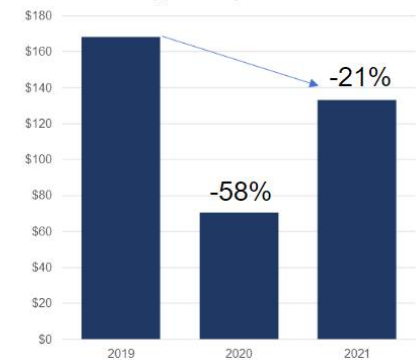
Profile of latest TE / STR forecast

Covid-19 scenario losses: Room revenue

Percentage difference from counterfactual

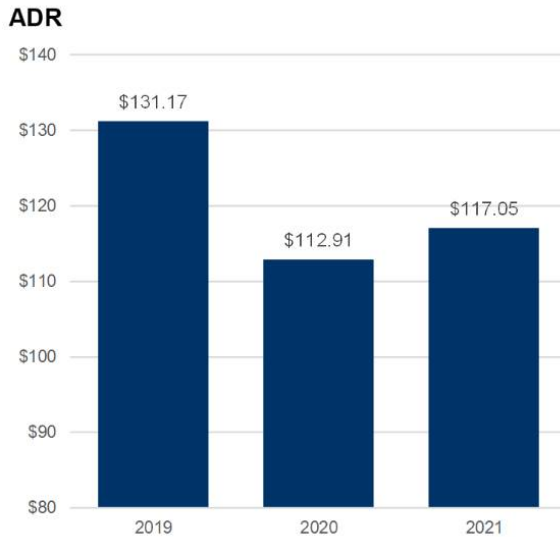


Room Revenue (\$ billions)



Lastly, Average Daily Rate (ADR), the average cost of a hotel room per night, will be significantly lower throughout 2020 and will gain slight increases by end of 2021.

Hotel rates will remain suppressed into 2021 (TE / STR forecast)



 TOURISM ECONOMICS

Marketing Tools

Website

Launched in 2016, Visit Baton Rouge's website, VisitBatonRouge.com, is the official tourism website for East Baton Rouge Parish.

This is not only our main marketing channel, but this also serves as Visit Baton Rouge's 24-hour office for visitors, meeting professionals/planners and tour operators to find information and plan their trips to the Baton Rouge area.

Since 2016 we have made considerable investments in the website. During all phases of the pandemic and throughout our recovery phases, the website will be an investment that we must maintain and strive to enhance as it is critical to our marketing and advertising efforts, content distribution client, visitor, stakeholder and hospitality industry partners initiatives and communications.

Visit Baton Rouge staff will also be relaunching the [Meetings](#) section of the website, an enhanced section that helps meet the needs of meeting professionals/planners needs.

We will also continue to digitalize collateral materials and experiences (brochures, guides, virtual tours, etc.) that visitors and clients request as a way to offer information to them that will help them in making plans to choose Baton Rouge as their next destination to visit.

Social Media

With social media channels continuing to invest in travel and tourism and consumers looking to these marketing channels for inspiration, Visit Baton Rouge will continue to invest heavily in promoting the Baton Rouge area on multiple social media sites. This allows us to reach targeted audiences utilizing creative content, such as [User Generated Content](#) (UGC) to targeted audiences or reach beyond and create “look alike” audiences based on the data utilized through the social media channels.

Given that there are five generations traveling, we are promoting across generations and using data to help us determine the audiences looking at or coming to the Baton Rouge area. We’re also looking to expand coverage on social media sites and to reach primary and emerging audiences. In doing so, we’re using data to track who our potential and actual visitors are and using social media to create “look alike” audiences to further our reach.

Blogs

While Visit Baton Rouge’s website is the primary location to store the content that we produce, our social media sites and email marketing efforts serve as content distribution channels.

Visit Baton Rouge creates custom content for our leisure blog, [The Red Stick Blog](#), which has been a key part of our marketing plan for years. Through the analytics that we follow for this content that is maintained on our website, the desire for blog content has significantly increased over the last year and we expect this to trend to continue as visitors are looking for stories and authentic content to inspire them during their research phase of travel planning.

With the increased desire for long-form content, similar to stories or articles, the need to create an additional blog with content created for meeting professionals/planners has been present. Pre pandemic, the work to launch a second blog was completed. The blog will launch in May 2020 and will serve content that is part our recovery plan to deliver content directed to meeting professionals/planners.

Visit Baton Rouge’s digital ad placements link back to the blogs that we’re writing in the ads that we’re placing. As long as the data shows that this is a successful way to reach visitors, this will continue to be a part of our recovery plan.

User Generated Content (UGC)

One of the newest features that we added, in 2019, was the incorporation of User Generated Content (UGC). As we continue to reach multiple generations, our plans must speak to the visitors that we reach them through our various marketing channels, serving them with content that entices them to visit—as each generation requires personalized messaging. As mentioned above when outlining [Travel Writers](#), authenticity is not only required but a major factor when trying to reach visitors that are defined as the Millennials and Generation Z.

UGC allows us to use a person’s social media images and videos to promote our city, which allows us to use the images of memorable experiences that locals and visitors have captured.

While this was something that was crucial to our marketing and advertising efforts pre pandemic, we see this as being more impactful among the assets we use during our recovery phases to define the authenticity Louisiana’s Capital City from the eyes of those that live, work, play and stay here.

Email Marketing

This continues to be another marketing and content distribution channel that has been effective is communicating with leisure travelers. For a number of years now, Visit Baton Rouge has invested in an email marketing platform software that connects with our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software and tracks interests and their journey through a potential visitor’s views and clicks on our website.

The main focus since launching this marketing automation platform has been marketing to leisure contacts, however, pre pandemic we were at a point to utilize the meeting professionals/planners contact information to strategically communicate with them as a way to generate leads, gauge interest and expand the Visit Baton Rouge’s sales managers touchpoints and communications initiatives.

Our goal through the recovery phases is to continue to use this as a tool, shifting efforts from using only third-party data to accomplish this to using our own database to connect and drive business through meetings/conventions, sports groups and tour groups.

Hospitality Industry Partner Relations

An area of focus over the last several years is to build and retain better connections with the owners of local businesses that rely on tourism to impact their overall budget. While Visit Baton Rouge does not own any products, it is crucial that we are in touch and staying connected with the owners for the products/businesses that we promote, from restaurants to hotels, attractions, retail outlets, etc.

As we enter the recovery phases, now more than ever, it is crucial that we are staying connected and mastering the art of partnering with one another. A city is defined by the businesses and people that make the culture vibrant, innovative and an enticing place to live, work play and stay.

During the pandemic, throughout the recovery phases and beyond, Visit Baton Rouge will strive to continue to make advancements in connecting with the businesses in Baton Rouge that have a connection with the tourism industry.