



RELAUNCH MOUNTAIN MARYLAND

TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN: NAVIGATING THE COVID-19 CRISIS



**ALLEGANY
COUNTY**
THE
**MOUNTAIN SIDE
OF MARYLAND**



THINKING AHEAD

RECOVERY

How do we rebuild destination demand during and post-crisis? Short-term leisure hospitality will play a vital role as we strategize our marketing campaigns and targeted audiences. We must keep a watchful eye on the restrictions and reopening announcements within our potential target markets as well as the managing of each markets' health crisis.

We will rely upon the sustainability of our natural resources, access to outdoor recreation, and our previously-developed tourism office branding, which leaned into mountain getaways. Ultimately, we must remain mindful that a 'safe' experience is what the traveler will desire. Recovery will be unknown and different than any past crisis that has impacted the tourism industry. The great unknown will be the state-by-state COVID-19 recovery measures and traveler attitudes towards travel, public spaces, social gatherings, and their ability to financially purchase.



RECONVENING

What can destination marketing do to encourage future social gatherings after recovery? The audience will be reluctant and fearful given our restrictions and social distancing practices. How will this impact the safety of travel and individual businesses' ability to rebound as travelers begin making travel decisions? Education will play a vital role as it relates to our stakeholders and our travelers. We must be willing to transform, adapt, and reinvent ourselves to meet safety concerns when it comes to travel buying.



PREPARING

What will be different? The COVID-19 health crisis is a pandemic and our ability to learn from this experience is critical to improving future management of crises. Unfortunately, shutdowns and travel restrictions may become more commonplace, and our ability to combat a future pandemic is imperative to the lessons learned through COVID-19.

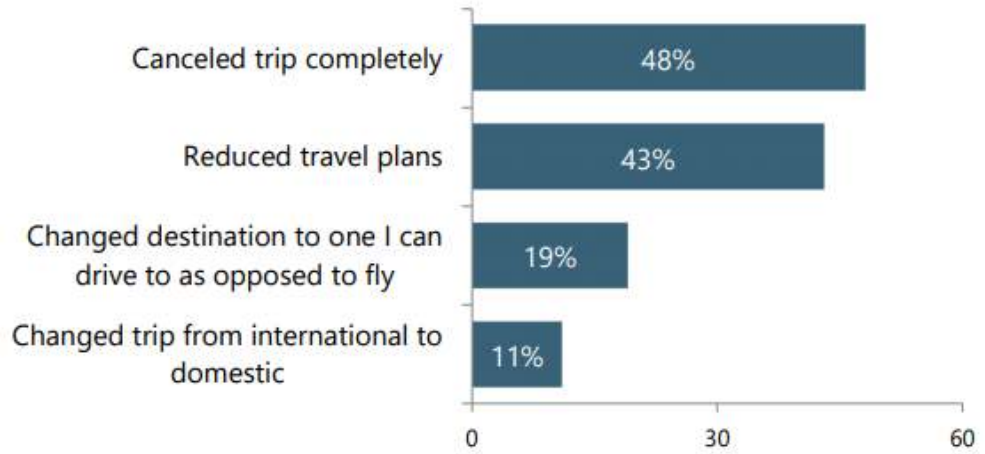
This document will serve as a crisis' communication tool/plan moving forward.



TRAVEL SENTIMENT

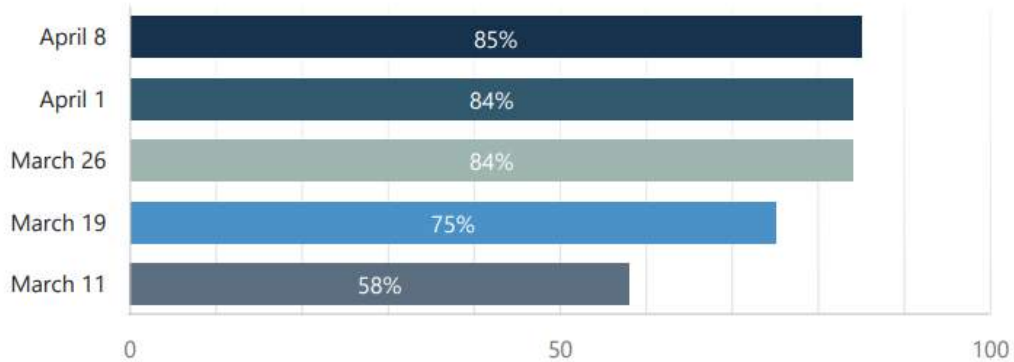
82%

Of travelers planning to travel in the next six months will change their travel plans due to COVID-19.

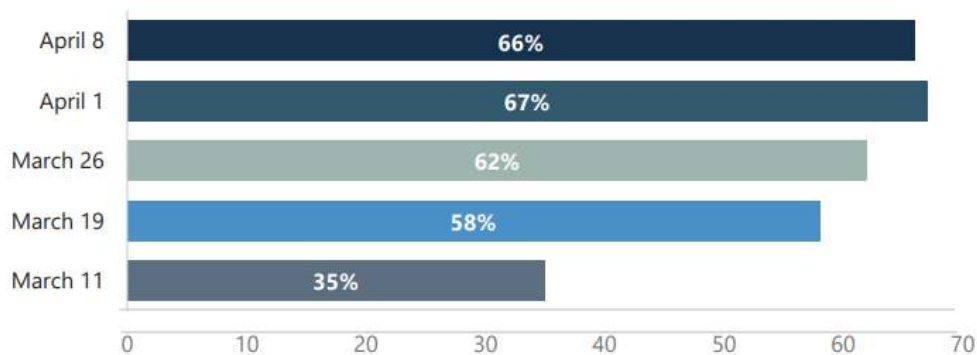


Base: Coronavirus Changed Travel Plans

Travelers Planning To Change Upcoming Travel Plans Due To COVID-19 Comparison

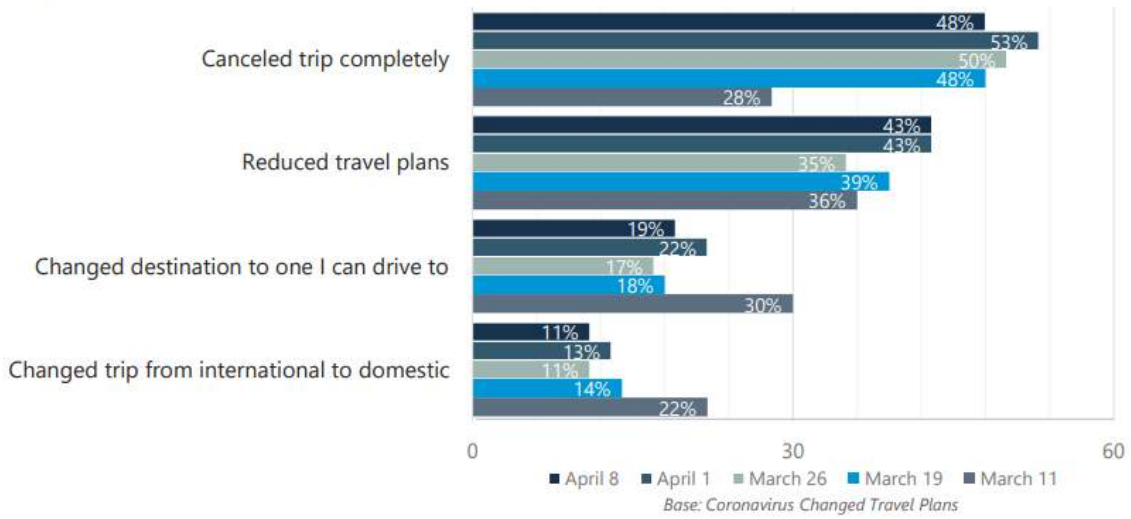


Indicated That Coronavirus Would Greatly Impact Their Decision To Travel In The Next Six Months

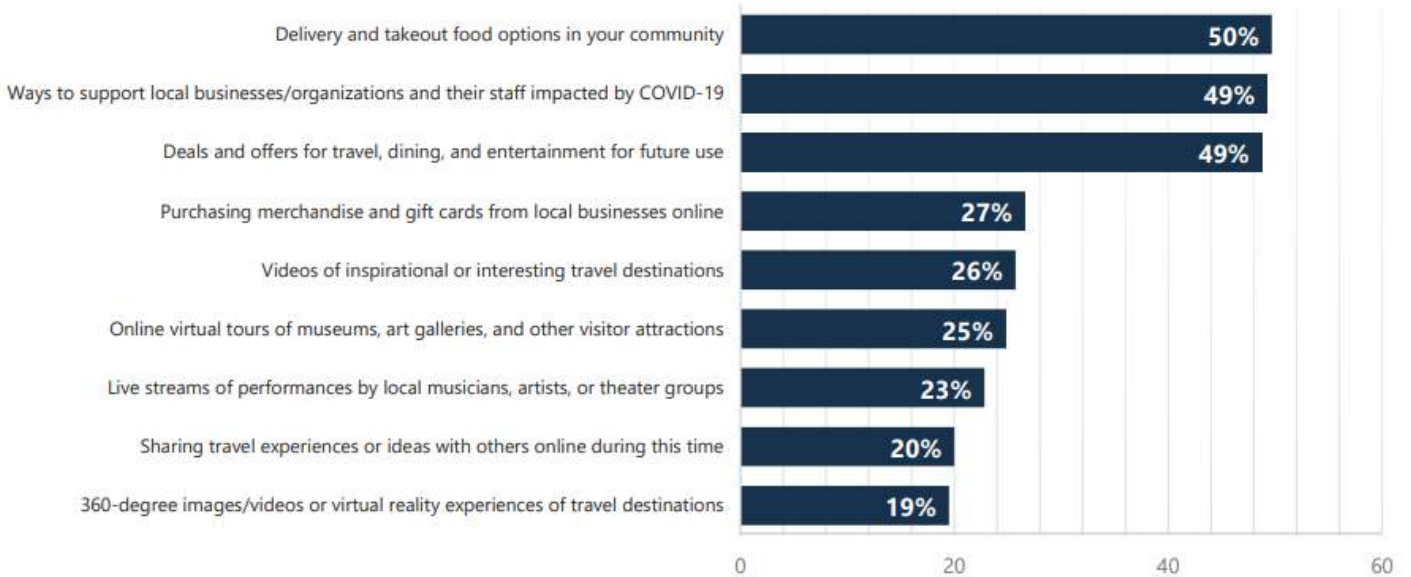


CONTINUED...

Impact of COVID-19 on Upcoming Travel Plans Comparison



Information and Content of Interest to Travelers





SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Mountain/rural communities deemed “safe travel” destinations.
- 60,000+ acres of public land—access to nature.
- Rebranding prior to COVID-19 positioned us as a mountain destination.
- Domestic, drive-to market
- Easy, scenic drive from major metropolitan markets within 3 hours distance.
- Fewer crowds.

WEAKNESS

- Did not have visitor profile data prior to COVID-19.
- Brand recognition is still new within target markets.
- Funding heavily impacted by COVID-19.

OPPORTUNITIES

- New attitudes towards quality of time. This “down time” has generated a new sentiment/appreciation for family and the importance of travel.
- People will be eager to visit family.
- Outdoor recreation assets.
- Scenic Byways product, since “road trips” will be a trend.

THREATS

- Health-crisis still at large. Concern over ‘second wave.’
- Lack of consumer spending, given personal financial strain.
- State-to-State restrictions may limit the timing of our campaigns and our ability to market the destination and our assets.
- Will our assets sustain the economic crisis? Will we lose businesses/attractions we relied upon for marketing/storytelling.



PHASES

*Allegany County Tourism's Relaunch Tourism Strategic Plan is reflective of the Maryland Roadmap to Recovery plan, which was released by Governor Larry Hogan on April 24, 2020. The document outlines a path to gradually and responsibly reopen Maryland's economy and details the "new normal" necessary to do so. **It is important to realize that these phases and this plan is non-exclusive and subject to change depending upon COVID-19 updates.***

PRE-PHASING:

Declared State of Emergency. On March 23, 2020, Governor Larry Hogan issued the closure of all non-essential businesses in Maryland. This is the current stage we find ourselves in, with mandates in place regarding business closures, restrictions on operating essential businesses, restrictions on crowd gatherings of 10 people or more, and required PPE in specific public places.

PHASE I: Low Risk

This is the first stage of the recovery and involves business, community, religious, and quality of life improvements. The decisions on what "Low Risk" activities can resume will not be announced in whole as one package but rather as a phased rollout over a period of time using the White House's recommended gating protocols.

Beyond lifting the "Stay-At-Home" Order, other examples of changes that could be implemented in this stage:

- a. Small shops and certain small businesses
- b. Curbside pickup and drop-off for businesses
- c. Elective medical and dental procedures at ambulatory, outpatient, and medical offices
- d. Limited attendance of outdoor religious gatherings
- e. Recreational boating, fishing, golf, tennis, hiking, and hunting
- f. Car washes
- g. Limited outdoor gym and fitness classes
- h. Outdoor work with appropriate distancing measures
- i. Some personal services

CONTINUED...

PHASE II: Medium Risk

This will likely be a longer stage of the initial recovery but will also be the stage when a large number of businesses and activities come back online. Any businesses that reopen during this period will need to comply with strict physical distancing and appropriate masking requirements. The stage includes numerous steps over many weeks towards recovery.

Within this Stage, there will be sub-phases with capacity restrictions, again set by the gating protocols. Examples of changes that could be implemented in this stage:

- a. Raising the cap on social gatherings
- b. Indoor gyms and fitness classes
- c. Childcare centers
- d. Transit schedules begin returning to normal
- e. Indoor religious gatherings
- f. Restaurants and bars with restrictions
- g. Elective and outpatient procedures at hospitals

PHASE III: High Risk

These are the more ambitious and long-term goals. There is no realistic timeline yet from any of the scientific experts for achieving this level, as this requires either a widely available and FDA-approved vaccine or safe and effective therapeutics that can rescue patients with significant disease or prevent serious illness in those most at risk to reach a full return to normal conditions.

Examples of changes that could be implemented in this stage:

- a. Larger social gatherings
- b. High-capacity bars and restaurants
- c. Lessened restrictions on visits to nursing homes and hospitals
- d. Entertainment venues
- e. Larger religious gatherings



PRE-PHASING/PHASE I: SUPPORT. MITIGATE. INSPIRE.



GOAL:

Allegany County Tourism's goal is to be a resource for tourism-based businesses, to provide community members with immediate ways to support local that relate and adapt to the restrictions we are under, and to be inspirational to our business leaders, citizens, and past/future visitors. As we move into Phase I, we begin to actively assist with the transition and promotion of reengaging our community with local businesses as they have the ability to open and serve.

CONNECT WITH LOCALS:

Locals are hungry to support local restaurants/businesses that they can with safety remaining a priority. There is also a sentiment to protect and support tourism-related business owners and staff.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Develop a communications website and deliver accurate and timely information.
- Sharpen market research to identify industry trends, recovery mechanisms, market research, and new traveler segments.
- Develop strategy for brand positioning.
- Research ways to distinguish destination from competitors within target markets.
- Work closely with industry partners to align with their recovery launch.
- Secure appropriate funding to support relaunch marketing efforts.
- Manage expenses and redirect funding.
- Restrict/restructure marketing activities to compliment market/audience sentiment.
- Utilize social media effectively to communicate and promote.
- Plan for relaunch. Develop plans for rebuilding.

This plan is subject to change, as strategies will reflect mandates and health/safety standards.

MARKETING AUDIENCE:

Primary:

- Allegany County residents/locals
- Tourism-based Stakeholders

Secondary:

- Invested/Loyal Travelers

TARGET MARKETS:

- Allegany County-based

KEY MESSAGING:

- Solidarity
- Community Support
- Support Local/Small Business
- "Safe" Outdoor Recreation
- Connect with Nature
- When the Time is Safe, We Wait to Welcome You



PHASE II: REASSURE. ENGAGE. RE-ENTRY.



GOAL:

Allegany County Tourism's goal through Phase II is to shift from micro-local, with a focus on spending local, to encouraging locals and regional markets to book staycations. We will also maintain destination presence in the consumer marketplace and position Mountain Maryland for growth when the travel demand returns.

STAYCATION APPROACH:

Locals can regenerate the tourism industry locally. People are more confident in the known and will feel safer easing into familiar and close destinations.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Ramp up marketing efforts to promote destination awareness through aspirational messaging, which will entice future booking methods.
- Phase advertising to include tri-state reach.
- Prepare for travel demand rebound.
- Communicate the benefits of tourism to the local community.
- Follow market audience reopening status and COVID-19 cases.
- Promote safety standards and messaging to businesses to encourage traveler demand.
- Advocate for tourism funding and support as tourism is the most impacted industry from COVID-19 crisis.
- Publicize the positives.
- Monitor and report industry progress.

This plan is subject to change, as strategies will reflect mandates and health/safety standards.

MARKETING AUDIENCE:

Primary:

- In-State/Local
- Regional travelers (25-55 years)

Secondary:

- Invested/Loyal Travelers

TARGET MARKETS:

- Allegany County-based
- 1-2 hour drive distance

KEY MESSAGING:

- Be a tourist in your own community
- Take a staycation
- 60,000 acres of public land, with ample outdoor experiences
- Support Local/Small Business
- Destination awareness



PHASE III: WELCOME. RELAUNCH. RECOVER.



GOAL:

Allegany County Tourism's goal through Phase III is to engage the strengthening travel demand, with restrictions ultimately easing altogether. We will switch from local/regional drive audiences to actively re-engaging our destination target markets, with strong campaigns that we are open for travel.

MARKET EXPANSION:

The pre-COVID-19 definition of "visitor" - a person traveling 50+ miles from Allegany County - will become the primary target once again. Heavy focus will be on relaunching, which will drive destination travel.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Relaunch travel destination within target markets.
- Continue marketing efforts, but redirect message to intentional funnels for booking.
- Drive traveler demand.
- Follow market audience reopening status and COVID cases.
- Restoring confidence in source markets. Example: Travel Writers.
- Advocate for tourism industry support.
- Alleviate tourism travel phobia.
- Promote sustainability.

MARKETING AUDIENCE:

Primary:

- Travelers 50+ miles or more (25-55 years old)

Secondary:

- Allegany County residents/locals

TARGET MARKETS:

- Baltimore, MD; Cleveland, OH; Pittsburg, PA; Washington, DC.
- Regional 1-2 hour drive markets.

KEY MESSAGING:

- The mountains are calling.
- Safe destination with few crowds and open spaces.
- Hub for outdoor recreation.
- Take a road trip.

This plan is subject to change, as strategies will reflect mandates and health/safety standards.