

# THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL

VISIT MACON'S 2020-21 ACTION PLAN



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where soul lives





With the unprecedented impact of the pandemic on the travel/hospitality industry, Visit Macon is pivoting from reaction and response to a strategic action plan in Fiscal Year 2021. This action plan is the result of research and input from the Visit Macon Board and Leadership Team. It also takes into consideration the new tourism landscape resulting from COVID-19.





# WHAT DOES THE NEW VISITOR WANT/EXPECT?

Naturally, people have reservations about traveling again, but there is a demand for travel, even if in the short term. Safety is priority number one for every visitor and hospitality operator. Until a cure or vaccine is released into the market, there will be fears about gathering in groups for meetings or events and a reluctance to visit attractions where crowds naturally congregate.

Industry surveys will continue to provide clarity to travel planning in the near-term and the future. The data points to a visitor traveling domestically versus traveling internationally. In the near-term, the visitor will also plan travel by auto with a reluctance to travel by air. This creates an immediate opportunity for the Macon market to message to new and return visitors.



## FILM:

Plans are already underway for production to resume as early as July. Currently, Film Macon is servicing requests from location scouts of several potential productions. In addition, Visit Macon leadership is working with area educational institutions on potential film projects and development. Film Macon anticipates the following in the near term:

- Work to place productions into the market as an opportunity to recover room nights in the interim while the group market is delayed.
- Offer “virtual” location scouting, which both recognizes social distancing desires and the speed at which films may want to find their locations.
- Goal of three productions into Macon-Bibb by end of 2020.

# SALES ACTION PLAN:

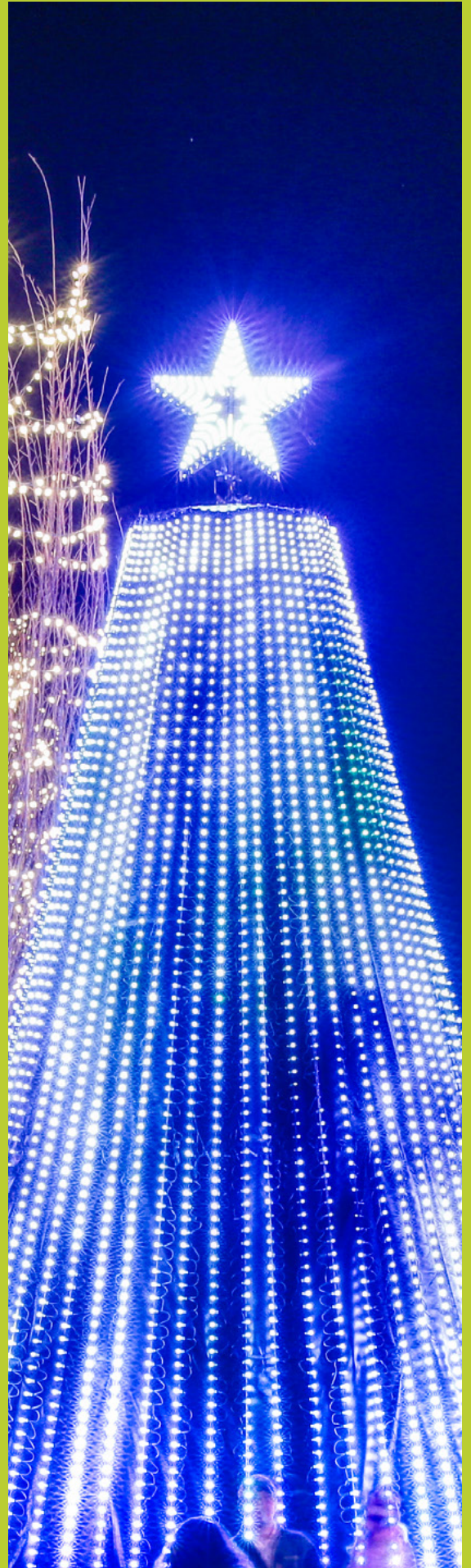
It is critical in the near term as well as long-range planning for sales to be the most efficient and productive coming out of the COVID pandemic. With that being said, the group, convention and meetings market looks to be the most sluggish in recovery as groups will initially be reluctant to gather. According to industry research, corporate and sports markets might return more quickly, presenting the opportunity for larger room night counts. This uncertainty will make it difficult to project and set sales goals for Fiscal Year 2021. Macon-Bibb market research suggests the following will be the most efficient plan of action for the Visit Macon Sales Team:

- The first step already being implemented is contracting all annual business, especially city-wide events which make the most impact on room nights and hotel/motel collections. Most of the annual business in FY21 first and second quarter (July-December) has cancelled or postponed into 2021. The sales team will continue to maintain contact with planners and pursue contracts for the 2021 events, including the annual Georgia Baptist MOVE Conference in December.
- In contracting new business, Sales will focus on January 1, 2021 and beyond to secure any new events. There will be opportunity for Request for Proposal response during the first and second quarter, however that business will not realize until at least 1-2 years into the future. This will allow for existing business that cancelled in 2020 to reset and schedule 2021 dates. Pickup goals will be set based on the third and fourth quarter business.
- For first and second quarters FY21, the focus will need to be centered around the sports, corporate and film markets for room nights and near-term recovery.
- **SPORTS MARKET** – Currently, Visit Macon has tennis and cross-country events holding in place for the Fall. However, that could shift depending on governing bodies and their respective policies for conducting events. In addition, Visit Macon can use financial resources to incentivize spin-up events like Esports, Cross Country, etc.
- **CORPORATE MARKET** – The Visit Macon Sales Team is currently working with planners on corporate trainings and meetings in July. This proves a quick turnaround for groups within the industry. The team will continue to work with local corporate partners on future training and meetings.
- **ASSOCIATION MARKET** – Opportunity to schedule smaller association meetings exists as the Sales team has been in contact with planners and already placed business as early as July 2020.











# MARKETING PLAN:

Various industry surveys point to a consumer desire to travel. However, the data also suggests a new consumer emerging from the pandemic. A Skift.com Survey notes that 41% of respondents said their first trips in the next 4-6 months would be within 100 miles of their home. Additionally, those respondents noted that future travel plans would be domestic and by auto. The findings create continued opportunities for Macon as Visit Macon's marketing efforts over the past three years have been focused on attracting the Atlanta leisure traveler. While the sustained return of group and convention travel realistically will be in the third and fourth quarter of FY21, there will be demand for the leisure traveler to create new experiences with a spike potentially in first quarter. Following a sharp spike to begin FY21, indications are that demand will level off during the fall. The Marketing Team is targeting the initial action steps below with a pivot expected following December:

- Initial marketing will leverage local earned media and messaging to encourage "Friends and Family" visits to Macon. Further research reveals a consumer desire to visit with family in the near future. Visit Macon has focused messaging previously on local events, attractions and small business.
- Visit Macon launched a "We are here when you are ready to visit" video campaign in conjunction with the Memorial Day Weekend. This is normally the unofficial start to the summer travel season.
- Visit Macon will focus all advertising and marketing efforts within a 250-mile drive radius and launch into markets like Atlanta, Chattanooga and Birmingham. The campaign will feature "Soul Searching" in its messaging.
- Travel appetite will be directed to destinations that can support social distancing. Outdoor attractions like parks, lakes and trails will be the initial draw. Visit Macon will focus the majority of initial outward advertising on Ocmulgee National Historical Park as well as Lake Tobesofkee and Amerson Park.
- In addition, the first two quarters of FY21 will allow for a ramp up in advertising for the Christmas Lights Extravaganza. Having a strong anchor event like the Lights, which is an open-air experience that allows for continued social distancing, creates messaging opportunities in Visit Macon's normal target leisure visitor in Atlanta.
- Prior to the COVID state of emergency, Visit Macon had been working with vendor Simpleview on a redesign of VisitMacon.org. The launch will be at the end of fourth quarter FY20. The new design will allow a critical portal for partners and allow for marketing with limited resources.



# VISITOR CENTER REOPENING:

Staff and visitor safety precautions will be key for the reopening of the Downtown Visitor Center as well as the Interstate 75 Visitor Center. The COVID state of emergency has halted production of the needed equipment for the I-75 VIC. GDOT has reported that the repairs are a priority with hopes of finishing the required HVAC replacement by the end of summer. The following are steps and precautions to prepare the VICs for opening at full operation by first quarter FY21:

- Work with state and local leaders on uniform best practices for opening to the public. Visit Macon serves on a local task force of venues and events to address policies on safety.
- Move all brochures and retail items out of the public areas – available on request to the Destination Specialists.
- Funnel all incoming traffic through the side entrance to monitor numbers.
- Provide sanitizing stations at all visitor and employee entrances.
- Utilize PPE for employees.
- Monitor and direct social distancing practices for visitors.