



# A TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL'S INSIGHTS ON TRAVEL IN VIRGINIA

French travel professional, Olivier Barthez, with Rep and Co, recently visited Virginia following his attendance at a travel conference in Las Vegas. Mr. Barthez travels around the world regularly, working with tour operators, travel agents, travel media and other partners to promote destinations. Below he provides his expert insight regarding his travel experience in Virginia.

## ***FLYING INTO WASHINGTON DULLES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT***

I flew from Las Vegas to Washington Dulles International Airport with United on September 28, 2021. Our plane landed on time at IAD, and the arrival process was very smooth. From the moment I walked into the terminal I could tell that the airport authorities take protective measures against Covid19 seriously and passengers seemed very respectful of these procedures. Everyone was wearing a face covering; sanitizing gel was available at multiple locations; Covid19 information signs were clearly visible everywhere. It all contributed to make me feel safe and that Virginian authorities were very well prepared to welcome passengers.

## ***RENTING A CAR AT WASHINGTON DULLES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT***

After picking-up my luggage I took the Avis shuttle to go get my rental car. At the counter, Plexiglass shields were separating the agents from the customers so the check-in process could take place safely and in a convivial way at the same time. The company encouraged touch-free procedures as much as possible and sanitizing gel was available at each counter. The car was perfectly cleaned, and a seal was put on each car door to certify nobody had entered the car after it was sanitized.

## **HOTEL STAYS**

I chose to stay in properties that belong to major hotel chains, such as Marriott; it was a way for me to ensure that the hotels I stayed at would have clear sanitary measures in place: face masks were required in hotels' public spaces (except when seated); sanitary gels were available at each check-in desk as well as in front of the elevators at each floor; Disinfectant wipes were available in the bedrooms and I was given the choice to have my room serviced or not, in case I preferred to have a minimum of outside "intrusion" in my room. Marriott offers the possibility to do mobile check-in and to have our cell phone turned into our room key, which means that I could go straight to my room without going to the check-in desk and therefore very little interaction was involved.

During my stay in Virginia, I had the opportunity to tour a good selection of hotels, (both independent and chain hotels) and I can tell that even the smallest boutique hotel had clear sanitary measures put in place. I found it very consistent throughout the state.

## **RESTAURANTS**

As a foodie, I was very much looking forward to returning to some of my favorite dining places in Virginia, such as Perch in Richmond or Norfolk Seafood Company & Big Easy in Norfolk, as well as to try new places. To my great satisfaction, I noticed that all the restaurants I was used to visiting prior to the pandemic were still open and fully operational. Restaurant and café personnel were all wearing face coverings, while customers were allowed to enter without their masks, provided they were fully vaccinated. I personally currently prefer to wear a face mask when entering a restaurant until I sit at my table, and at no time did I feel ostracized; patrons respect each other's approach to COVID-19, and I found it very comfortable. The huge majority of the restaurants now provide their menu via a QR code, which prevents from touching paper menus. My experience in Virginia's restaurants and cafés exceeded my expectations, as I felt both welcomed and safe.

During the peak period of the pandemic, when restrictions were at the highest level, the city of Alexandria had blocked all car traffic on a whole block of King Street in Old Town so that restaurants could install terraces and allow outdoor dining. It was very pleasant to see this popular section of King Street dedicated to pedestrians. Locals and visitors rapidly adopted this new "outdoor city patio" and the City Council recently voted to make it permanent.

## **THE GENERAL ATMOSPHERE**

I found the general atmosphere in Virginia quite laidback; I could tell local restaurants, cafes, shops, and attractions were most happy to see visitors come back to their communities, take the time for a nice meal with friends or family, etc. Everywhere I went I was identified as an international visitor because of my French accent and the great enthusiasm of the Virginians I interacted with made me feel special. 😊