

## *SC DMOs fight back against bad publicity*

As several states warn about vacationing in South Carolina, two coastal communities are spending millions to entice visitors to travel to the area, despite rising COVID-19 cases.

South Carolina tourist destinations Myrtle Beach and Hilton Head Island have ramped up their marketing efforts as both regions receive national attention with state and local leaders encouraging tourism but failing to make any substantial decisions that could significantly limit the spread of coronavirus as cases continue to boom.

Several states have also reported over 100 cases being linked to Myrtle Beach following visits, something that Karen Riordan, Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce CEO and president, says is unnecessary.

“There’s been some very hurtful and very large distribution papers that have said extremely negative things about South Carolina, and Myrtle Beach in particular, but we

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**Below: Three generations of the Palmer family visited Hilton Head Island recently. – The Island Packet**



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## States are helping fund hard-hit DMOs

When the tourism business went on lockdown, DMOs that depend on hotel occupancy taxes faced devastating shortfalls.

Now some states are passing along federal help or other funding to aid struggling local organizations.

A prime example is the Virginia Tourism Corporation’s WanderLove Recovery Grant Program, which recently shared more than \$866,000 statewide.

Here are more examples:

### Idaho

During its meeting held in Island Park this week, the Idaho Travel Council (ITC) granted \$5,867,607 in tourism marketing funding to non-profit organizations through the Idaho Regional Travel and Convention Grant Program.

Eligible award recipients include non-profit local and regional tourism development organizations such as chambers of commerce, convention and visitors bureaus and regional travel organizations. Grant recipients use their awarded grant dollars to promote cities, towns, and regions of

the state as travel destinations. Program elements are varied, but often include print and digital advertising, videography, brochures, attendance at travel shows, public relations, industry research, and the creation of websites.

“The Idaho travel and tourism industry is a key driver of our economy. We are working together with many stakeholders to rebound in the coming year,” said Idaho Commerce Director Tom Kealey.

Tourism is a \$3.7 billion industry in Idaho. Idaho Commerce – Tourism Development activities are funded by a 2% tax paid by travelers, and collected by the state’s hotel, motel, vacation rental and private campground owners.

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### Missouri

Missouri Gov. Mike Parson last month announced that \$15 million in grant funding will be spent to help rebuild the state’s tourism industry.

The money will come out of CARES

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## Social media influencers back on the job

As Florida's tourism industry begins to reopen tentatively during the coronavirus pandemic, marketing efforts are also beginning to thaw. Social media influencers are returning from their hiatus as well and heading back to Orlando resorts.

One of the first local resorts to begin hosting influencers has been Gaylord Palms, where select media outlets and social media influencers have started visiting in recent weeks.

Orlando-area resorts were forced to cancel their annual FAMs this year, which usually take place each spring. The same is true for nearly all other social-media-focused marketing that local groups, including Visit Orlando, typically rely upon to reach crucial Millennial and Gen Z audiences. Disney World



Image via AmraandElma.com

### Influencer Elma Beganovich

held its annual, influencer-focused Creators Celebration in February, just prior to their mid-March pandemic closure.

With an ability to break through to consumers in ways older forms of advertising cannot, influencers are sharing the updated safety procedures now required.

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Act funding and will go to destination marketing organizations, meaning “entities that promote Missouri as a great place to visit.”

A release from the governor’s office said, “The funds will be administered by the Missouri Division of Tourism and will grant eligible DMOs funding for recovery efforts such as payroll relief, reimbursement for necessary safety equipment, and the initiation of marketing campaigns with messaging focused on safe travel.”

“Missourians are counting on us to ensure a safe and successful reopening of our state,” the governor said. “These resources will help us rebuild Missouri’s tourism industry and continue to prioritize the health and safety of our citizens, businesses,

and communities.”

“This program is part of a focused effort to support Missouri’s tourism industry. When the COVID-19 health emergency hit Missouri, the tourism and hospitality industry nearly shut down completely,” said Rob Dixon, Director of the Missouri Department of Economic Development.

The program is meant to help the tourism industry make the state’s many attractions and activities safer and reinforce messaging to encourage visitors to come to Missouri and safely enjoy all there is to see and do in the state.

Eligible DMOs must have participated in the Division’s Cooperative Marketing Program in FY19, FY20, or both.

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cannot allow that to lie,” Riordan said in a City Council meeting. “The last time we checked this is worldwide pandemic; it just seems to me to be a step backwards to be blaming one state.”

Horry County, which is home to Myrtle Beach, reported over 6,500 cases in only two weeks after the area reopened to tourism.

Cases have been rising in Hilton Head as well.

Despite limited measures in place — both destinations have mandates requiring face masks be worn — the area chambers of commerce in these communities have gone on the offensive to promote tourism with advertisements and marketing campaigns targeting states such as Ohio, Georgia, New York and New Jersey, with families the primary demographic.

“It is possible to social distance and go to the beach,” Riordan said. “We’re trying to hammer the idea that places don’t spread COVID-19, people do.”

“It’s been good,” Ashley Palmer said on the last day of her family’s trip during the July Fourth holiday week. “Just a little stressful because no one’s wearing masks, and so we’ve been really limited as to how often we’re going out.”

Palmer’s family, which included her elderly in-laws and three children, wore masks any time they left their north-end rental and only ordered takeout on their trip.

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