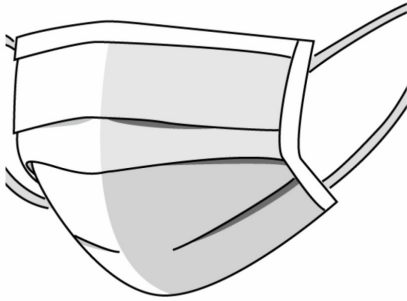


Travel Trends

Prepared for Visit Williamsburg
and the Williamsburg Tourism
Council



Face mask requirements divide public, industry

Here are two examples:

Public officials and health experts in much of the country are emphasizing people should wear face masks to slow the spread of COVID-19 as the pandemic continues to surge.

But many visitors in Santa Fe, NM — some from states with soaring cases of the illness — still tend to stroll downtown with their faces fully uncovered.

On May 15, the state issued a public health order that required masks of everyone in public places, with “exceptions for eating, drinking and exercising and medical requirements.”

The Santa Fe City Council approved a similar measure June 10. Repeat offenders face a \$50 fine.

Several downtown store owners said visitors generally cover their faces when they step inside.

Jim and Patti Brown and Pam Wallace, visiting from Texas, said they were aware of the mask rule and all three had their faces covered.

“Your governor said wear a mask, so we are wearing a mask,” Patti Brown said.

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lancasteronline.com

The Strasburg Rail Road in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, reopened Friday.

Road trips, safety seem to be top-of-mind

In Pennsylvania, Lancaster County’s tourist industry began to try to salvage what’s left of its peak summer season on Friday, when Gov. Tom Wolf allowed businesses to partially reopen by loosening the county’s pandemic restrictions.

“Purely from a business and financial standpoint, we would not have been able to sustain closure for much longer,” said Steve Barrall, vice president of Strasburg Rail Road.

Safety protocols, implemented to prevent the spread of the virus, were followed without a hitch, he said.

Train cars were filled to just 50% of capacity to provide social distancing. The railroad also added 30 minutes to the time between trains to give employees the chance to clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs and countertops. Guests and employees wore masks, unless they had a medical exception or other valid reason, Barrall said.

Following are some more examples of how attractions and DMOs are stressing short road trips and a commitment to cleanliness:

— lancasteronline.com

In Michigan, the Star of Saugatuck cruise ship is running on the Kalamazoo River, art galleries and ice cream shops are open and beaches are filling with visitors.

It’s starting to feel more like a normal summer on the lakeshore, and tourism in Holland and Saugatuck is beginning to pick up as the state reopens more fully from the coronavirus shutdown.

Local tourism offices won’t have hard data on the success of the season until the fall. But some measures, like hotel occupancy rates, are encouraging cautious optimism in Linda Hart, interim executive director for the Holland Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

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Experts foresee a reliance on short trips

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In April, hotels and other lodging were allowed to be open to house essential workers only and some simply closed during that period.

Now, vacation stays are permitted everywhere in the state and short-term rentals were permitted to begin taking reservations for vacationers again when Gov. Gretchen Whitmer lifted the stay-home order on June 1.

In Saugatuck, inns and bed and breakfasts say that bookings are up.

“Our lodging partners are taking a lot of reservations, and many of them are saying we are booked every weekend from now until the end of the summer,” said Lisa Mize of the Saugatuck Douglas Area Convention & Visitors Bureau.

The demand is coming from states surrounding Michigan, like Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri and Kentucky. Travel industry experts say travelers are hesitant to fly and are choosing shorter road trips instead this summer.

– *sentinel-standard.com*

In Kentucky, the Owensboro Daviess County Convention & Visitors Bureau has started its pandemic tourism recovery campaign called “Come for a Visit, Stay a Lifetime.”

“The tourism industry was the first to get hit, was the hardest hit and will likely be the last to recover from this global pandemic,” said Mark Calitri, president & CEO of Visit Owensboro.

Dave Kirk, destination manager for Visit Owensboro, said they are focusing their marketing efforts on a regional audience that includes people from all across the Commonwealth, southern Indiana, southern Illinois and northwest Tennessee.

“The research done by our partners at the Kentucky Department of Tourism and Kentucky Travel Industry Association tells us drive markets will be the first to come back,” he said.

– *owensborotimes.com*

In Florida, Pensacola tourism leaders are optimistic that the return of tourists to beaches and restaurants will be the case for the whole industry this summer as it works to recover from closures to curtail spread of COVID-19.

Visit Pensacola CEO Darien Schaefer said projections show that short-term rentals, not including hotels, are expected to be just 3% to 5% lower this June than in June 2019.

While hotels were never forced to close to prevent the spread of COVID-19, business slowed in March and April as travel halted to stop the spread of the virus.

– *pnj.com*

Yet other areas of Florida are shutting down beaches this upcoming July 4th weekend.

Several counties in South Florida, including Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Monroe (home to the Florida Keys) are closing their beaches as part of a statewide effort to get control over the state's spiking COVID-19 infection rate.

Not all counties are closing beaches. Lee County, home to Fort Myers, has decided to keep its beaches open.

County spokeswoman Betsy Clayton said in an email that the county has created signs asking visitors to follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines and to wear masks in all public areas to prevent the spread of the virus.

– *usatoday.com*

Face mask requirements divide public, industry

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“We’re just being prudent and careful,” Wallace added. Brian Davis, visiting from Missouri, was not wearing a mask “because we’re outside,” he said. “When I go into a store, I wear a mask.”

– *sfnewmexican.com*

In South Carolina, Horry County tourism leaders believe that tourists will have more confidence visiting a community where wearing masks is a common practice.

After local stories about visitors to the Grand Strand getting the virus during their trip went national, Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce CEO Karen Riordan said locals and visitors promising to wear a mask is more important than ever.

For the past couple weeks, Horry County has had some of the highest daily confirmed case counts in the state. The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control labeled the area a hot spot.

Horry County’s Welcome Back Committee created the “Greater Grand Strand Promise” that asks businesses, residents and visitors to promise to wear masks, practice social distancing and do all they can to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Since the initiative went live, there have been 170 businesses, 210 residents and 50 visitors taking the pledge to follow social distancing rules.

– *myrtlebeachonline.com*