



Tourism in the time of COVID-19

PROVIDED BY SOUTHERN DELAWARE TOURISM

TOURISM HAS, for all intents and purposes, come to a standstill in Southern Delaware, as it has everywhere else. That doesn't mean the team at Southern Delaware Tourism (SDT) hasn't remained very busy. As the fourth largest employer in the state and the second largest in Sussex County, Delaware's tourism industry matters. It matters to every household in Delaware that pays about \$1,600 less in taxes each year as a result of it. It matters to the over 44,000 people in the state whose livelihoods rely on it (nearly 19,000 of those jobs are in Sussex County, making up over 16% of the county's workforce.) It matters to the hard-working business owners whose employees rely on them to support their families in a challenging seasonal economy.

In place of actively promoting travel to Southern Delaware as we would be in normal years, SDT has shifted our focus to assist our tourism partners by consistently sharing updated, valuable information on the latest announcements from state government, assistance programs, marketing ideas and opportunities, guidelines, and resources. We're also planning and creating our reopening marketing strategy and preparing to deploy it when the time comes.

We're providing ways for visitors and potential visitors to connect and engage with Southern Delaware via our social media channels and website so when restrictions are lifted and travel is safe, Southern Delaware will be their destination of choice. Our office is working with partners at the state, county, and local levels to spotlight tourism's relevance to our state's recovery.

A few of the initiatives SDT has undertaken to address the crisis so far include:

- Creating a web page for tourism partners containing federal, state and industry updates on emergency declaration amendments, safety

guidance, loan and grant programs and more. When updates occur, we email partners to let them know there are updates they may want to read. (visitsouthern.delaware.com/covid-19-tourism-partner-resources)

- Creating a web page for consumers containing updates on cancellations, postponements, and reopening information. (visitsouthern.delaware.com/coronavirus-cancelled-events)
- Creating a web page for visitors and potential visitors highlighting opportunities to "visit" or "revisit" Southern Delaware virtually by highlighting partners who have virtual opportunities to promote their businesses and organizations. This page includes art classes, concerts, virtual tours, web cams, chef demos, virtual museum and art gallery exhibits, and more. (<https://visitsouthern.delaware.com/enjoy-southern-delaware-virtually>)
- Working with the Sussex County Economic Development Office to create a Sussex-specific "Buy Local" program to encourage county residents to support our neighbor businesses and organizations as many of them struggle to recover from the economic downturn created by the pandemic.
- Working with local restaurant partners to highlight chef demo/recipe videos on our social media platforms to entice travelers to visit them when they return, and working with accommodations partners to promote gift card sales for future visits.
- Creating and promoting an "Until We See You Again" video that has reached many thousands of potential visitors in drive-from markets.

Scott Thomas, SDT's executive director, says "SDT has been working hard to keep Sussex County a destination of choice in the minds of visitors throughout this crisis. We know that there is much pent-up travel demand, especially for drive-to destinations like Southern Delaware." ■