

Tourism: Delaware's Comeback Kid

BY JEN BOES

AS SUMMER HEATS UP and COVID-19 slowly but surely moves into our rear view, the outlook for tourism in Delaware is good.

In Northern Delaware, the Blue Rocks kicked off their 2021 season in May, bringing back one of America's favorite past times to Wilmington after a year hiatus. People are returning to downtown restaurants. Travelers are booking weekend getaways to take in the gardens and estates of the Brandywine Valley. Many festivals and special events are back on the books.

But there is still a lot of ground to cover. It will take many months if not years for hotels, restaurants, attractions, retail establishments, and other businesses reliant on tourism to fully recover. Wilmington, in particular, has been hard hit because corporate travel has not rebounded as quickly as leisure travel, leaving area hotels grappling for ways to put "heads in beds" during the week. A labor shortage here in Delaware, and across the nation, also impacted the tourism industry. Restaurants, attractions, and hotels are finding it difficult to accommodate demand as restrictions begin to be lifted and travel resumes.

To help hasten the recovery, the Greater Wilmington Convention and Visitors Bureau has aimed its marketing and advertising initiatives at rebuilding brand awareness, promoting the region's outdoor assets, and targeting a more heavily concentrated drive-to market, including locals. This is in response to tourism research that indicates people are ready to travel but not too far from home.

As part of its marketing push, the Bureau launched three initiatives to leverage consumers' pent-up demand for travel.

The 3-2-1 Getaway promotion ran from April 1 to June 30. Through this offering, visitors staying a minimum of two overnights at participating hotels could visit three attractions for free: Hagley Museum and Library, Mt. Cuba Center, and Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library. As of



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early June, 225 packages were sold.

It also introduced the Brandywine Valley Adventure Pass, enabling visitors to create their own itinerary and gain admission to the attractions they select at a discount. This promotion launched in late May and will run through October 31. Its all-digital format allows attractions to customize their pricing and offerings. For example, a museum can offer Adventure Pass users a free coffee or a gift shop BOGO offering along with the already discounted ticket.

Finally, the Bureau introduced its first all-digital visitor guide in April. The guide, focused on outdoor experiences, has been a big success. At the time this article went to print, requests for the guide exceeded 1,600 copies, pointing to high interest in visiting Northern Delaware. This bodes well for the tourism and hospitality industry. The key is continued promotion to increase awareness among those most likely to visit this area. And that's a lot of people: more than one-third of the U.S. population is within driving distance of Greater Wilmington.

Looking to the future, the Bureau looks forward to rolling out more initiatives as it moves closer to its pre-COVID budget. It also continues to creatively leverage less costly social media, digital marketing, and media relations

tactics to keep the conversation going about the region's many tourism assets. To find out more about the Bureau including membership benefits, go to [VisitWilmingtonDE.com/membership](https://www.visitwilmingtonde.com/membership). ■



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