

From the Dean's Desk

The future is so bright for our hospitality and tourism industry partners this summer, my progressive lenses are staying in sunglasses mode. In this issue of the communiqué *From the Dean's Desk*, we look at summer travel and experiences as vaccines and the lifting of some safety mandates are allowing us to move about the country and some of the globe more freely.

Here in Orlando, theme parks and attractions, while still operating at reduced guest capacity, have relaxed or eliminated their face covering guidelines and social distancing. Guests from across the country are once again savoring the thrills of the newest roller coasters and enjoying themed experiences that the parks are so skilled at presenting.

For parks without themes, the national and state parks all across the country, those who enjoy the great outdoors are expected to take it all in. From the Grand Canyon to Yellowstone, from Acadia in Maine to the Everglades here in Florida, park admissions are expected to be up, even to levels higher than in 2019 before the pandemic. RV rentals, which jumped last year, are expected to continue at high levels this summer as people take road trips to visit loved ones they have not seen in over a year, and just to get out and have trips that were deferred due to health and safety concerns.

Hotel rooms are getting heads in beds. According to Visit Orlando's data for April 2021, hotel occupancy is averaging about 60% in the metro Orlando area. It's not where it was prior to COVID-19, but compared to this time last year it's on the rise. And speaking of rising, airline travel is increasing. In April, Orlando International Airport (MCO) surpassed the 3 million total passenger mark for the second month in a row with over 3.2 million travelers. That is a 2,000 percent increase over April of 2020. For the weekend of June 11-13, 2021, passenger traffic was a record setter at MCO. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday, the TSA screened more passengers at Orlando International Airport than prior to the pandemic, on average about 60,000 guests per day.

Restaurants are hungry for things to get back to pre-pandemic ways. According to the National Restaurant Association, after losing a staggering \$240 billion in sales in 2020, the restaurant industry has entered a period of transition and redevelopment this year. Changes in consumer behavior, and how the industry reacted to them, such as a new focus on off-premises dining and takeout, are likely here to stay. More than 110 thousand restaurants closed either temporarily or permanently due to COVID-19. The industry also lost over three million workers. With more people travelling about the country and even going abroad to nations that have opened their borders, it is likely that restaurants will regain some of their losses, but will have to adapt to the desires of consumers to take-away their meals to the comfort of their homes or to an outside location for a picnic.

Rosen College students who found themselves out of work and internships during the pandemic are back on the job, with more than 91% of them back in their chosen field of study whether that be hospitality management, entertainment management, event management, restaurant and foodservice management, and also senior living management. You can find out more about the undergraduate degree programs at UCF Rosen College where we are educating the future leaders of these industries by visiting our website: <https://hospitality.ucf.edu/degree-programs/>.

Great change came from the pandemic. Our industries are resilient and 2021 should prove to be a better year, filled with promise for the future. Charge On!

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