

Visit Greenville, NC Destination Recovery Plan

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a drastic impact on the travel and tourism industry across the globe that no one could have ever predicted or imagined. An industry that was enjoying record year over year averages in average daily rate, revenue per available room, and occupancy since 2014 has now been severely affected. Data research clearly shows that it may be between 24 and 36 months before we reach pre-COVID levels again in the tourism industry.

The Greenville-Pitt County Convention & Visitors Bureau (Visit Greenville, NC) has established a recovery plan for our destination that focuses on travel to help our local economy rebound. This plan focuses on a variety of strategies designed to engage, encourage, and reassure travelers across all market segments that when travel fully resumes Greenville-Pitt County is ready and waiting for their return. The conclusion of this plan also advocates that our entire destination to work together to be successful in our recovery efforts. Visit Greenville, NC looks forward to working with community and tourism partners to implement this recovery plan.

It is important to note this plan is fluid in nature and will be adapted to changing conditions as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves. We will utilize several metrics to measure our recovery efforts and these will also assist in creating different strategies for recovery as needed.

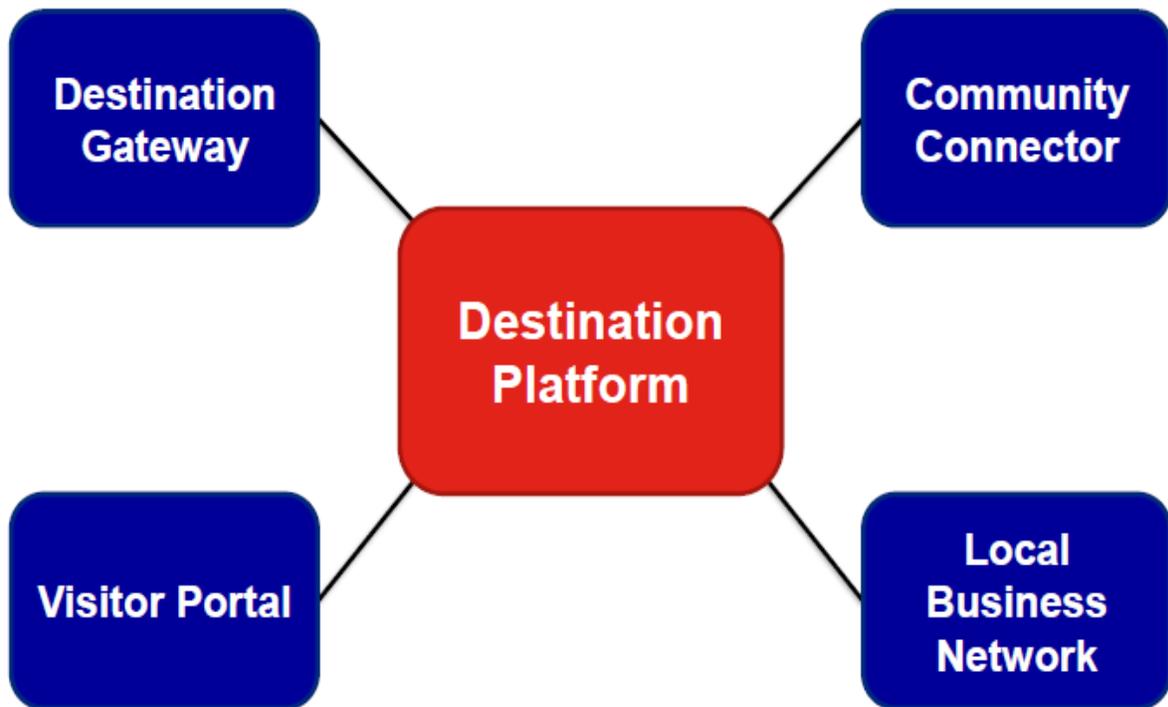
Destination recovery starts with community engagement with our own citizens and local businesses, and then will branch out to our target markets outside of Greenville-Pitt County. Residents must feel comfortable venturing out in our community before visitors will feel confident traveling to our destination. Local businesses are on the front line for recovery and it is critical they provide an atmosphere of safety and confidence for their customers and staff.

An important component of our plan involves regular research updates on the evolving resident and traveler mindset, so timely and targeted messaging can be developed. Visit Greenville, NC receives weekly research updates from Visit North Carolina, the official travel and tourism office for our state and a division of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina. Although this data is constantly changing, there are some commonalities that will stay consistent throughout the COVID-19 pandemic:

- There will be a segment of the local community that will not want visitors to come in from the outside citing fear of community spread of COVID-19.
- There is a segment of the community that will not engage in their own communities due to fear of contracting COVID-19 from exposure to other residents.
- A majority of those who enjoy travelling are ready to hear messaging from destinations to inspire travel planning in the future, but are not yet ready to travel themselves.
- The number one concern of those who are planning travel for the fall is the safety of their families and want to see active marketing from destinations on this subject.

- Those planning travel want to understand what destinations, lodging facilities, meeting facilities, and attractions are doing to manage and ensure resident and visitor safety.
- Those who plan to travel this fall or beyond are looking for more outdoor experiences where they can escape, relax, and control social distancing.
- Those who plan to travel this fall or beyond are looking for experiences within driving distance/closer to home. Larger fly-in markets will take longer to recover.
- Resident exploration within their own communities and leisure travel are the first tourism market segments expected to recover and should be promoted heavily.

To effectively engage both residents and visitors, Visit Greenville, NC has built a destination platform with messaging focused on reaching the community, local businesses, visitors, and travel planners.



Destination Platform

Community Connector

During the COVID-19 crisis, Visit Greenville, NC will strive to be a resource of information for the residents of Greenville-Pitt County. Current and other pertinent information regarding COVID-19 will be accessible via the home page of the visitgreenvillenc.com website. The COVID-19 Updates page will include all local, statewide, and federal guidelines and links to additional information. Visit Greenville, NC will also utilize our social media platforms for this purpose.

Of equal importance will be Visit Greenville, NC's effort to educate residents on the importance of following safety guidelines and recommendations to prevent community spread of COVID-19. An example of this is encouraging all citizens to wear face coverings while in public spaces, washing hands frequently, and waiting six feet apart when in lines. The citizens of Greenville-Pitt County must be good "stewards" of our destination before we can attract people to visit and spend money in our destination. The goals of "**destination stewardship**" during COVID-19 include the following:

- Make visitors feel safe and comfortable in our destination by seeing residents taking the appropriate and recommended/mandated precautions to prevent community spread of COVID-19.
- Ensure our visitors feel safe and protected when frequenting local businesses by seeing them take the appropriate and recommended/mandated precautions to prevent community spread of COVID-19.
- Encourage businesses to share their safety efforts within their locations and via social media to show residents and visitors that health and safety of their staff and customers is the top priority.

Local Business Network

In a recent survey by Longwoods International, 87% of those interested in travel responded that health and safety would drive their decision on where to visit. This data confirms the importance of our destination taking action in making the extra effort to implement and promote health and safety protocols to effectively restart travel back to Greenville-Pitt County.

Visit Greenville, NC has and will continue to urge our local businesses to participate in the Count On Me NC program developed in partnership between the NC Restaurant & Lodging Association, the NC Department of Health & Human Services, NC State University Extension, and Visit NC. Count On Me NC is a scientifically based public health initiative that empowers guests and businesses to each do their part to keep everyone safe from COVID-19.

Individual business owners and their employees are encouraged to complete free training modules focused on their individual areas of business. Training modules include:

- Training restaurant owners how to help ensure the safety of everyone who enters their restaurant.
- Implement best practices for staff in restaurants who regularly interact with customers
- Training back of the house restaurant employees' procedures to increase health and safety
- Learn protocols for cleaning and disinfecting to help keep everyone in your establishment safe no matter what type of business you run.
- Learn best practices for COVID-19 management to support the well-being of others.

Upon completion of training, businesses will receive a downloadable Count On Me NC certificate and toolkit, which includes social media graphics, window clings they can proudly display, and other methods to show their participation in Count On Me NC program and commitment to the safety and health of their staff and customers.

Visit NC is creating a statewide and national marketing campaign around the Count On Me NC program that will launch on July 1, 2020. This initiative was created with special funding from the North Carolina House and Senate to restart travel to North Carolina in a safe and thoughtful way. Businesses that have completed the program will be listed on the Count On Me NC website and be recognized as businesses that have gone above and beyond the requirements to keep staff and customers safe and healthy.

From a Destination Management Organization viewpoint, Visit Greenville, NC considers local business participation in this program essential in creating the proper perception for residents and travelers that our community takes their health and safety seriously.

Destination Gateway/Visitors

Although most people are not yet comfortable with travel, research clearly shows that most are planning travel for when the time is right and are open to receiving marketing messages from destinations. Beginning July 1, 2020, Visit Greenville, NC will restart its advertising program that has been paused since the mid-March 2020. Our campaigns will be targeted to leisure travelers, meeting planners, and sports tournament rights holders, and include a mix of print, digital, programmatic, and social media marketing with messaging keeping the following phases in mind:

- Initial Recovery Phase- Drive market leisure travel

- Secondary Recovery Phase- Regional leisure travel, small events, meetings, and sports tournament markets
- Final Recovery Phase- Wider leisure travel, larger events, meetings, and sports tournament markets (estimated mid-2021)

Marketing messaging will initially be centered around the following themes:

- Making our residents and visitors feel safe by sharing local business efforts and participation in the Count On Me NC program.
- Sharing hospitality specific efforts that our destination is making to ensure resident and visitor safety.
- Promoting outdoor activities that make it easy to relax, explore, and social distance.
- Marketing safe activities for families.
- Letting visitors know we are ready and waiting for them when they are comfortable to travel.

Due to COVID-19, Visit Greenville, NC's budget has been reduced by 25% for FY 2020-2021 as compared to the FY 2019-2020 budget. To help offset this reduction in budget, Visit Greenville, NC will work to secure available advertising grants and look for cooperative advertising opportunities to increase its marketing reach.

Metrics

Visit Greenville, NC will utilize several metrics to gauge the success of our destinations rate of recovery. Metrics will include the following:

- Hotel average daily rate
- Local business data
- Occupancy rates
- Revenue per available hotel room
- Sales tax revenue
- Traveler mindset data
- Traveler sentiment data
- Website traffic
- Social media engagement
- Visitor inquiries

Partnerships

Destination recovery in the tourism industry from COVID-19 will be a long process. During the recession of 2008, it took 21 months for hotel demand to rebound to pre-recession levels and three years for occupancy and average daily rate to do the same. In short, our economic recovery in the tourism industry, which is responsible for a sizable amount of local sales tax generation each year for Greenville-Pitt County, will be an ongoing process.

Visit Greenville, NC believes that a resident first approach is the quickest way for us to bring travel back to Greenville-Pitt County. Our businesses and organizations need to work hand in hand to collaboratively jumpstart the recovery process for our local economy with our own residents in mind. Our local businesses, in conjunction with organizations like Visit Greenville, NC, Uptown Greenville, the Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce and others, must develop creative COVID-19 safe events and activities that will not only help our small businesses, but instill confidence in our own community. These activities and events could then be expanded to drive market visitors.

Opportunities to package travel experiences between businesses should also be explored as many families are experiencing economic hardships due to COVID-19. Providing a single package price for creative COVID-19 safe experiences for both residents and visitors will simplify travel planning for those who now find themselves overwhelmed with information, guidelines, and economic challenges.

Conclusion

Since there is an enormous amount of uncertainty in how COVID-19 will evolve in the future, Visit Greenville, NC will update our recovery plan on a quarterly basis or more frequently if necessary. Visit Greenville, NC will also reach out to partners to seek their assistance in implementing this plan. We will share plan metrics monthly with partners and interested parties.