

Openings cause bumpy ride for some companies

Lancaster County, PA — Local tourism is seeing a major boom.

Some agencies are predicting a historic year, even eclipsing the numbers pre pandemic.

But with worker shortages, can some of these places handle the influx of guests?

Some attractions are offering more money just trying to get people in the door.

Ed Harris from Discover Lancaster says tourism is soaring to new heights.

“We are experiencing record demand, record amount of revenue in our hotel community”

Harris explains the pain at the gas pump combined with skyrocketing airfare is giving local tourism a shot in the arm.

“There is a chance we could see a benefit, believe it or not from some of these inflationary pressures.”

Destinations like Dutch Wonderland are already noticing an influx of visitors.

Jeff Eisenberg says season passes are selling fast and website traffic is blowing up. “We are seeing a lot of interest in the park in some ways even more so than pre COVID.”

But with business booming, worker shortages are causing a bumpy ride.

Continued on page 2



Employees of Catch 31 Fish House & Bar in Virginia Beach work the lunch crowd recently.

Photo: Stephen M. Katz / The Virginian Pilot

Summer brings staffing challenges to Hampton Roads and Outer Banks

Virginia Beach, Va. — More than two years have passed since the start of the pandemic, but the region is still feeling its effects on the workforce — particularly the tourism industry.

While some workers who were sent home or opted not to work during the height of the crisis have returned, there are more jobs available at hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions this season than employees to fill them.

Those businesses expect to struggle to provide top-notch customer service this summer because they're short-staffed and, in the Outer Banks, in dire need of workforce housing.

As challenging as it may seem, the situation is better than last summer.

Wages have increased, international workers are returning, and employers are offering incentives.

“COVID-19 ushered the tourism industry into a workforce crisis,” said Victoria Cimino, CEO of Williamsburg’s regional tourism arm, Visit Williamsburg. “Today, businesses throughout the region struggle to rehire and fill positions, resulting in a new set of challenges to overcome.”

The Cheese Shop, owned and operated by the Power family in Williamsburg, has been a landmark destination on Duke of Gloucester Street since 2003. During the pandemic, however, the Powers have struggled to fill staff positions.

Continued on page 2

Shortage of hospitality workers threatens recovery of tourism

Outer Banks lacks housing for seasonal workers

Continued from page 1

As of mid-May, The Cheese Shop had only added three workers this year — one full-time. Ideally, they would have hired 10 people, said Mary Ellen Power Rogers, who runs the family business with her siblings.

With more than 11,800 tourism-related jobs in Dare County representing about one-third of the total year-round population, staffing for the summer season has never been easy. But two years of record tourism spending — about \$1.4 billion each year — coupled with severe worker housing shortages has the Outer Banks at a breaking point.

Long-term rentals for the county's tourism workforce have vanished almost entirely as new owners have turned them into more profitable vacation rentals.

The most popular jobs on the Outer

Banks come with housing, because of the high cost and short supply. In February, the Dare County Board of Commissioners hired a contractor to develop essential and workforce housing projects, using the \$35 million in funding allocated to the county in the state budget last year. Coastal Affordable Housing plans to construct up to 400 housing units in Dare County by the end of 2023.

In the greater Williamsburg area, occupancy rates already exceed those of 2019, according to statistics from Smith Travel Research, which provides market data on the hotel industry worldwide. In March, the region saw an occupancy rate of 45.6%, up from March 2019's rate of 44%. It's a positive sign, especially considering that group, business and international travel have yet to fully rebound.

— *pilotonline.com*

Consumers notice lack of service and complain

Continued from page 1

"It's a challenging hiring environment, we certainly haven't been immune from it." Eisenberg said.

Even wages at the park are climbing up the tracks. Eisenberg says the theme park is dishing out more money to get people in the door. "Over the past two seasons, we have increased our seasonal rates quite significantly, in some cases up to 3 dollars per hour."

While not fully staffed, Eisenberg says all rides at the park will remain open and hours won't be scaled back. "For where we are right now, we are on pace of where we want to be at this

point in the year."

But it's been a rollercoaster for attractions like Hershey Park.

Social media has been blowing up with visitor complaints like this.

"Anybody heard anything about Stormrunner? It hasn't run all day."

"Just looked at the hours for the season and I'm disappointed even the water park closes at 5.

Although staffing is a concern, many destinations like Hershey are banking on students graduating high school and coming home from college to fill those open positions.

— *local21news.com*

NM seeks to create first state exchange

The New Mexico Tourism Department (NMTD) has released a Request for Proposal for an integrated tourism exchange platform, which will enable a better travel planning and booking experience for suppliers and customers.

Tourism exchanges are government-supported digital business-to-business distribution platforms that connect suppliers and distributors, as well as intermediaries such as online travel agencies. It then can provide the engagement data from the platform to provide more sophisticated analytics to those intermediaries, as well as local destination marketing organizations.

A tourism exchange will also allow NMTD and local destination marketing organizations to offer unique travel packages that prospective travelers desire, making tourism-related businesses more competitive in the global market. This is particularly helpful for smaller and independent tourism businesses that do not have robust marketing resources to thrive in today's digital environment.

Only Australia, Japan, Indonesia, Great Britain, and a coalition of 20 islands in the South Pacific have fully executed a tourism exchange. Currently, no state has deployed a tourism exchange at a statewide level.

— *ladailypost.com*