



COVID-19 RESPONSE

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TOURISM IN OKLAHOMA

Learn about impacts to tourism in Oklahoma due to the COVID-19 virus.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, Oklahoma has been under a “safer at home” recommendation since early March, transitioning in early May to a phased plan, which gradually lifts travel restrictions and reopens tourism destinations. This phased plan is in accordance with CDC guidelines, which promotes hygiene and social distancing measures at each reopened business.

Prior to the pandemic, Oklahoma was experiencing sustained growth in its tourism industry, with increasing employment, wages and revenue. The tourism industry represents a significant economic driver¹ and has been one of the hardest hit sectors, due to travel restrictions and closures. As of 2018, Oklahoma employed more than 214,000 people in the tourism sector, which includes arts, entertainment and recreation, as well as accommodations and food service², two sectors that were deemed “essential businesses.” The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate layoffs in tourism-related organizations were nearly 40% by late April of this year.³

As phased reopening begins, industry surveys and mobility data⁴ suggest individuals and families are willing to travel to Oklahoma destinations again. As of early May, travel to Oklahoma parks and outdoor recreation venues increased by 39%, compared to 2020 indicators in January and February. This trend is likely to continue,

as tourism destinations reopen, using specific protocols to encourage public safety. Parks and outdoor recreation venues are popular destinations following new recommendations, because social distancing guidelines can be maintained with relative ease. Additionally, many tourism destinations are providing virtual tours and live-streamed events. While these activities may not translate to short-term revenues, they increase the visibility of Oklahoma outdoor assets. As households seek destinations that are accessible and located near home, these opportunities are likely to increase in popularity during the summer months. Certain tourism sectors may see an increase in revenue and activity, but it will likely be from in-state visitors. Revenue from tourism more broadly is likely to remain low as social distancing guidelines remain in place and inter-state travel is reduced. The food service sector may be slower to recover as restaurants are unable to operate at full capacity with social distancing guidelines enacted to protect public health.

Acknowledgement: Appreciation is extended to Katie Welch for providing the 2018 IMPLAN data and to Joe Schatzer and Mike Woods for reviewing this document.

- 1 Dean Runyan Associates, December 2019; OK Travel Impacts- State-wide Estimates 2010 – 2018.
- 2 Source: IMPLAN Group, LLC. IMPLAN2018. Huntersville, NC. IMPLAN.com.
- 3 Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 2020; Unemployed Persons by Industry, Class of Worker and Sex.
- 4 Google LLC “Google COVID-19 Community Mobility Reports.”

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