



Erie County Tourism Recovery Task Force Report

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Introduction

COVID-19 has brought about incredibly trying times for businesses throughout our country. No industry has seen a more dramatic and abrupt stop of business than the tourism industry. However, Northwest PA is beginning to see a light at the end of the tunnel. Erie County's tourism industry is a major economic driver generating \$1.2 billion in annual visitor spending and has supported up to 17,500 jobs. Our industry is looking forward to climbing back up to some sense of normalcy. To that end, VisitErie, as the leader for marketing Erie's tourism industry and promoting its economic growth, has established the Erie County Tourism Recovery Task Force to encourage the suggested protocols found in this report. It is our way to ensure and reassure our visitors and residents that our community is a safe, clean and healthy destination, making their experiences in our region enjoyable and memorable.

We divided the tourism industry into the following six sectors: Accommodations, Large Attractions, Small Attractions/Retail, Restaurants, Facilities and Transportation. The various representative task force members from each sector were asked to provide protocols they felt would assure the safety of visitors and employees. This report is not intended to present mandated protocols. It is a compilation of suggestions to consider when determining the preparedness of the tourism industry as restrictions are lifted.

It's time to capitalize on our strengths and acknowledge the tremendous impact Erie's tourism industry brings to our region. Sustaining a high level of health and safety in Erie County is mission critical for us as a destination. The destinations that come out of this pandemic the strongest will be the ones that lead with smart decisions, necessary changes and most importantly, keeping the safety and protection of both residents and visitors top-of-mind.

VisitErie



John Oliver
President/CEO

ERIE COUNTY TOURISM TASK FORCE PARTICIPANTS

Accommodations

Sheraton Erie Bayfront Hotel
Dan Pora

Scott Enterprises
Chris Scott

Cobblestone Hotel & Suites
Bayfront, Corry and Harborcreek
Paul Leroux

Lakeview on the Lake Motel
Kelly Edwards

Large Attractions

Waldameer Park & Water World
Brian Gorman

Presque Isle State Park/TREC/DCNR
Matt Greene

Presque Isle Downs & Casino
Kevin O'Sullivan

Mazza Vineyards
Mario Mazza

Erie Zoological Society
Scott Mitchell

Small Attractions/Retail

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Millcreek Mall
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Erie Art Museum
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Restaurants

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Facilities

Bayfront Convention Center
Gus Pine

Lake Erie Speedway
AJ Moore

ERIEBANK Sports Park
Brian Ramm

Erie SeaWolves
Greg Coleman

Transportation

Erie Regional Airport Authority
Derek Martin

Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority
Jeremy Peterson

TOURISM SECTOR – ACCOMMODATIONS

Erie County is home to 45 lodging properties that provide visitors with a total of 4,500 sleeping rooms as well as various-sized meeting space at select properties. Since the start of the statewide shutdown, 60% of VisitErie’s partner lodging properties remained open. In doing so, those partner facilities have implemented standard cleanliness protocols that will be maintained or expanded once the stay-at-home orders are lifted and tourism begins to move back toward normal expectations. The expectation is that VisitErie partner lodging properties that closed during the pandemic will institute many, if not all, of the protocols below when they reopen.

- Use of franchise-approved “hospital grade disinfectant” for next-level cleaning in all guest rooms and public spaces.
- Reduction of stay-over service to limit the amount of contact that associates have in the guest rooms.
- All associates wear face masks when dealing with guests or in public spaces as necessary.
- Floor markers with 6 ft. social distance separations for the front desks and elevators.
- Hand sanitizer stations at the front desk and at elevator landings.
- If applicable, room service will be delivered to the door, but no entry into the room and the servers will wear masks and gloves.
- Strict guidelines for staff that are sick to stay home and quarantine for 14 days along with mandatory temperature checks of all associates in the event there is a COVID-19 related case at the property.
- If possible, leave a room vacant after check out for 72 hours.
- Increase frequency of cleaning public area (lobbies, elevators, door handles, public restrooms and ATMs).
- Ensuring all team member are washing hands once an hour.
- Increased cleaning of the front desk ensuring credit card machine is disinfected after each use.
- COVID-19 Training: All employees will receive training on COVID-19 safety and sanitation protocols. Appropriate PPE will be worn by all employees based on their role and responsibilities and in adherence to state or local regulations and guidance.

Additional protocols to consider implementing if possible:

- Where applicable, use of national property franchise “mobile key” program to limit the amount of contact associates have with guests.
- Front desk plexi-glass shield in place to prevent the spread of airborne germs and promote social distancing.
- Develop steps to become cash-free.
- Lodging restaurants reconfigured with a “social distancing” floor plan to give guests the comfort of safety.
- Lodging meeting space reconfigured with capacities based on social distancing.
- Pools and fitness center should enact extreme restrictions and cleaning measures or consider closing temporarily.

TOURISM SECTOR – LARGE ATTRACTIONS

VisitErie's large attraction partners are the cornerstones of Erie County's tourism industry and have seen a significant negative impact since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially given the timing at the start of Erie's busiest traveler season. While our partner attractions are not able to welcome visitors at this time, each have outlined major changes to safety protocols to reduce points of contact wherever possible, provide protective equipment to ensure the safety of staff and reduce guest numbers in enclosed spaces.

- The addition of hand sanitizer stations throughout the facility.
- Closure of certain attractions/exhibits/areas that social distancing cannot be controlled.
- Marking social distancing lines in attraction entrance queues.
- All guests over 2 years old must wear a mask, except those with medical conditions preventing their ability to wear a mask.
- Increased cleaning and sanitization of high traffic touch points. Place an emphasis on frequent contact surfaces including, but not limited to: check-in counters, elevators and elevator buttons, hand railings, door handles, public bathrooms, ATMs, etc.
- Reducing capacity of the facility based on a formula of a certain square footage per person.
- Altering food preparation to eliminate buffets and create made-to-order food in individual packaging.
- Addition of signage stating new protocols and health guidelines.
- Guests advised to practice social distancing by standing at least 6 ft. away from other groups of people not traveling with them while standing in lines, using elevators or moving around the property. Attractions with restaurant tables and other physical layouts will be arranged to ensure appropriate distancing.
- Employees reminded not to touch their faces and to practice social distancing by standing at least 6 ft. away from guests and other employees whenever possible.
- COVID-19 Training: All employees will receive training on COVID-19 safety and sanitation protocols. Appropriate PPE will be worn by all employees based on their role and responsibilities and in adherence to state or local regulations and guidance.

Additional protocols to consider implementing if possible:

- Conduct non-invasive temperature checks utilizing thermal thermometers. Employees or guests confirmed to have a temperature over 100.0°F will not be allowed entry to the property and will be directed towards appropriate medical care.
- Health and hygiene reminders throughout the property including the proper way to wear, handle and dispose of masks. Signage throughout the facility can also be used for messaging and communication.
- Plexiglass installed in any register area that is open.
- Develop steps to become a cash-free venue.
- If facility has a gift shop/area, the number of guests allowed in the gift shop will be limited.

TOURISM SECTOR – SMALL ATTRACTIONS/RETAIL

Much like VisitErie's large attraction partners, small attractions and retailers have felt a dramatic shift in the way they can operate under current stay-at-home orders. While some local retailers have been able to shift sales to online platforms, and will continue to operate that way to an extent when orders lift, certain common practices are being taken by all attractions and retailers to ensure the safety of Erie residents and visitors alike. Maintaining social distancing guidelines and limiting the number of guests allowed inside at one time will be crucial to the safe reopening of these establishments.

- All guests over 2 years old must wear a mask, except those with medical conditions preventing their ability to wear a mask.
- Creating more distance between exhibits and/or galleries.
- Increase frequency of cleaning and disinfecting throughout the day in high traffic areas.
- Providing additional hand sanitizers.
- Social distancing processes including: tape identifying a 6 ft. distance at the registration and throughout facility, plexi-glass barrier to separate staff from customers and extra tables/chairs to be removed to discourage group gatherings.
- Group activities that previously accommodated over 25 guests will be cancelled, until restrictions allow for further leniency.
- Clean and sanitize before opening and at the end of every shift.
- COVID-19 Training: All employees will receive training on COVID-19 safety and sanitation protocols. Appropriate PPE will be worn by all employees based on their role and responsibilities and in adherence to state or local regulations and guidance.

Additional protocols to consider implementing if possible:

- Adjust hours of operation, hand out timed tickets, consider special member-only times, overall limit hours.
- Develop steps to become a cash-free venue.
- Stagger employee working hours to allow for additional safe social distancing.
- Social distancing in break room.
- Any staff meetings will only take place if social distancing can be monitored.
- If facility has a gift shop/area, the number of guests allowed in the gift shop will be limited.

TOURISM SECTOR – RESTAURANTS

Many restaurants in Erie County remained open throughout the stay-at-home order, though under drastically different parameters. Reduced hours of operation and take-out/delivery only became the norm and VisitErie partner restaurateurs enacted several protocols in an effort to ensure a safe environment for their employees and quality food service for their customers. Similar to accommodations, the expectation is that VisitErie partner restaurants that closed during the pandemic will institute many, if not all, of the protocols below when they fully open.

- Reduce seating capacities to allow for a minimum of 6 ft. between each seated group/party of guests.
- Table tents for tables marked "Closed Seating for Distancing" and "Cleaned & Sanitized."
- Instructions for staff to sanitize all menus after every seating or the introduction of single use and/or disposable menus. Porous placemats replaced with linen, single use disposable or non-porous placemats that can be machine washed and sanitized after each use.
- Food preparation stations to be sanitized at least once per hour.
- Kitchens to be deep cleaned and sanitized at least once per day.
- "Sealed for Safety" on to go orders being delivered or picked up.
- Host podiums including all associated equipment to be sanitized at least once per hour. Designated host at all times to seat guests at both the bar and dining room.
- Service stations, service carts, beverage stations, counters, handrails, trays, etc. sanitized at least once per hour.
- Point of Sale (POS) terminals to be assigned to a single server where possible and sanitized between each user and before and after each shift. If multiple servers are assigned to a single POS terminal, servers will sanitize their hands after each use.
- Consider developing steps to become cash-free.
- Dining tables, bar tops, stools and chairs to be sanitized after each use.
- Condiments to be served in single use containers (either disposable or washed after each use).
- Check presenters, pens and other reusable guest contact items to be sanitized after each use.
- COVID-19 Training: All employees will receive training on COVID-19 safety and sanitation protocols. Appropriate PPE will be worn by all employees based on their role and responsibilities and in adherence to state or local regulations and guidance.

Additional protocols to consider implementing if possible:

- Screen employees daily for health check. Employees must have less than 100.0°F temperature to work.
- Encourage customers with any illness/sickness symptoms to stay home. Guests can still support the restaurant using online ordering, curbside pick-up or delivery.
- No tables of large groups (8 guests or more). Larger groups can be seated in a designated private area.

TOURISM SECTOR – FACILITIES

Erie County's event facilities although closed throughout the statewide stay-at-home order, have been working behind the scenes to deep clean and prepare for their eventual opening. Social distancing will remain standard protocol at meetings, conferences and events when they are allowed to convene; enforced by staff training and signage. Partner facilities are working together to ensure that consistent and similar actions are being taken to minimize the threat of spread when able to welcome visitors back.

- Seating capacities and floor plans reviewed on an event-by-event basis with guest count reductions to be below fire code guidelines.
- Meeting and banquet set-up arrangements to allow for physical distancing between guests in all meetings and events based on state or local recommendations.
- Self-serve buffet style food and beverage service will be suspended and replaced by alternative service styles. Explore pre-packaged food and condiment options to reduce potential spread.
- Patrons will be encouraged to safely dispose of their own empty food and beverage debris (as opposed to leaving it behind for janitorial staff to remove).
- Table coverings will be changed and cleaned after each use and changed during meeting breaks when possible.
- 6 ft. distancing in grandstands, ticket lines, concession lines, restrooms and other public spaces.
- Patrons required to wear masks or shields to enter, based on government guidelines.
- An increased emphasis placed on mobile ticketing. Ticket takers and ushers will be instructed not to touch tickets or devices.
- Place hand sanitizer stations around the venue (concession line areas, kid play areas, suite areas, etc.)
- Plexi-glass in front of all register areas. When necessary, registration tables and areas will be protected with the addition of face shields, sanitizer and other materials necessary to maintain safety.
- Employees will need to wear a mask and/or shield. Latex gloves may be required by select employees based on job function.
- Signage stating new guidelines. Front of house signage and video board messaging used to communicate healthy behaviors, social distancing and hand-washing.
- Stricter guidelines as far as bringing items into a venue.
- Develop steps to become a cash-free venue.
- Fans/patrons seated to leave 6 ft. of space between each group of patrons as long as availability permits.
- Increased frequency of cleaning for high-touch areas including door handles, chairs, light switches, elevator controls, counters, vending machines, ATMs, restrooms, railings and other equipment, when appropriate.

- COVID-19 Training: All employees will receive training on COVID-19 safety and sanitation protocols. Appropriate PPE will be worn by all employees based on their role and responsibilities and in adherence to state or local regulations and guidance.

Additional protocols to consider implementing if possible:

- Limit elevator capacity.
- Reduce staffing in all areas to allow for appropriate social distancing.
- All guest and staff seating and gathering areas will be arranged to abide by current distancing guidelines.
- One-way traffic direction will be applied wherever possible in both front and back of house areas to promote distancing.
- Consider investing in a fogger to disinfect high traffic areas, dressing rooms and other back-of-house areas daily.

TOURISM SECTOR – TRANSPORTATION

The Erie Regional Airport Authority and the Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority (EMTA) are integral to the movement of visitors into and around Erie County. Defined as essential service organizations from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, both organizations have already implemented countless protocols designed to improve customer safety. They operate under strict guidelines to minimize the risk of contracting or spreading the virus while utilizing each of their services.

- Maintain pre-existing cleaning protocols.
- All employees wear masks.
- Clean and disinfect high-traffic areas, in accordance with CDC guidelines.
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer stations.
- Nightly deep-clean of public and on-board restrooms.
- Employees enforce social distancing of at least 6 ft.
- Deep cleaning and detailing the insides of all areas inside the bus/plane.
- All building structures/offices (administrative building and maintenance offices) are deep cleaned.
- “Double cleans” of interior offices/common places. Wipe down common areas once people exit.
- Develop steps to become cash-free.
- COVID-19 Training: All employees will receive training on COVID-19 safety and sanitation protocols. Appropriate PPE will be worn by all employees based on their role and responsibilities and in adherence to state or local regulations and guidance.

Additional protocols to consider implementing if possible:

- Post a “key points” memo informing customers to maintain 6 ft. of distance of one another and wear masks. Knowing that all citizens and customers may not be able to afford or locate a mask, take proactive steps provide masks.
- Detailing, cleaning and disinfecting inside the bus/plane when routes are finished. “Fogging” all areas with industrial manufactured misters. Before fogging, all common areas are thoroughly wiped down with several different types of CDC recommended disinfectants.

ADDITIONAL PROTOCOL RESOURCES

- Erie County Government/Department of Health <https://eriecountypa.gov/covid-19/covid-19-business-resources/>
- American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) https://www.visiterie.com/assets/Reopening_Guidelines_for_AHLA_Members.pdf
- Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>
- The International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) <https://iaapa.org/covid-19-resources-north-america>.
- National Restaurant Association (NRA) <https://www.visiterie.com/assets/National-Restaurant-Association-COVID19-Reopening-Guidance.pdf>
- Pennsylvania Restaurant & Lodging Association <https://www.prla.org/coronavirus.html>