

COVID-19

# How two American cities are encouraging safe travel in the era of COVID-19

Yesterday — By Lola Méndez



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**Chicago and Nashville have both rolled out expansive programs to stimulate local tourism.**

Around the United States cities are starting to roll back COVID-19 pandemic-fueled regulations and [encourage stateside travel](#). The States just surpassed [2 million cases of COVID-19](#) and many states are seeing an uptick of new cases. Non-essential travel is still not recommended by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#).

Before you book a trip be sure to check the status of coronavirus at the destination you're visiting to make an educated decision about whether it's worth the risk. It's too soon to tell if reopening destinations for tourism is wise, yet many destinations are moving forward and implementing new health and sanitation practices to keep locals and visitors safe. Here is how two major US cities are moving forward with tourism operations in the time of COVID-19.

## Chicago, Illinois

[Choose Chicago](#), the city's tourism board, has announced the [Tourism & Hospitality Forward](#) program in hopes of responsibly welcoming travelers to visit Chicago to stimulate the local tourism industry and expedite the city's economic recovery after COVID-19 restrictions. Chicago has seen a [decrease in COVID-19 cases](#) and is in its third phase of reopening and has lifted the previous stay-at-home order.

"Our first priority is to promote socially responsible tourism. We will demonstrate to our guests that through the operational changes and precautions taken, it is safe to enjoy Chicago again," Glenn Eden, Chair of the Choose Chicago Board of Directors, said in a [press release](#). A major component of the program will be encouraging staycations and engaging locals to explore the Windy City. Seasonal initiatives will target leisure travelers from neighboring states.

Over 250 local tourism and hospitality businesses have pledged to adhere to socially responsible tourism and hospitality. The program has established best practices and safety measures for the health and safety of residents and visitors when cultural institutions, hotels, attractions, and restaurants return to regular business. The city is working directly with museums, attractions, festivals, and sporting events to collaborate with the long-term

Reopening and Recovery Task Force. The Illinois Hotel & Lodging Association is keeping team members and guests safe when travel resumes with increased cleanliness and safety standards.

The Illinois Restaurant Association reported that by mid-April fifty-five percent of the state's industry employees were laid off or furloughed. As hotels and eateries begin to reopen, tourists can expect to see them [adhere to public health guidance](#). They'll be required to implement contactless options, use protective gear, and rearrange their physical space to increase social distancing. All staff must wear face masks and receive proper PPE training.

Restaurants are encouraged to use disposable menus, containers, and condiments, although those single-use items are terrible for the environment. Anything non-disposable must be sanitized between each use including table and chairs. There can only be six guests per table and the tables must be six feet apart or have physical barriers.

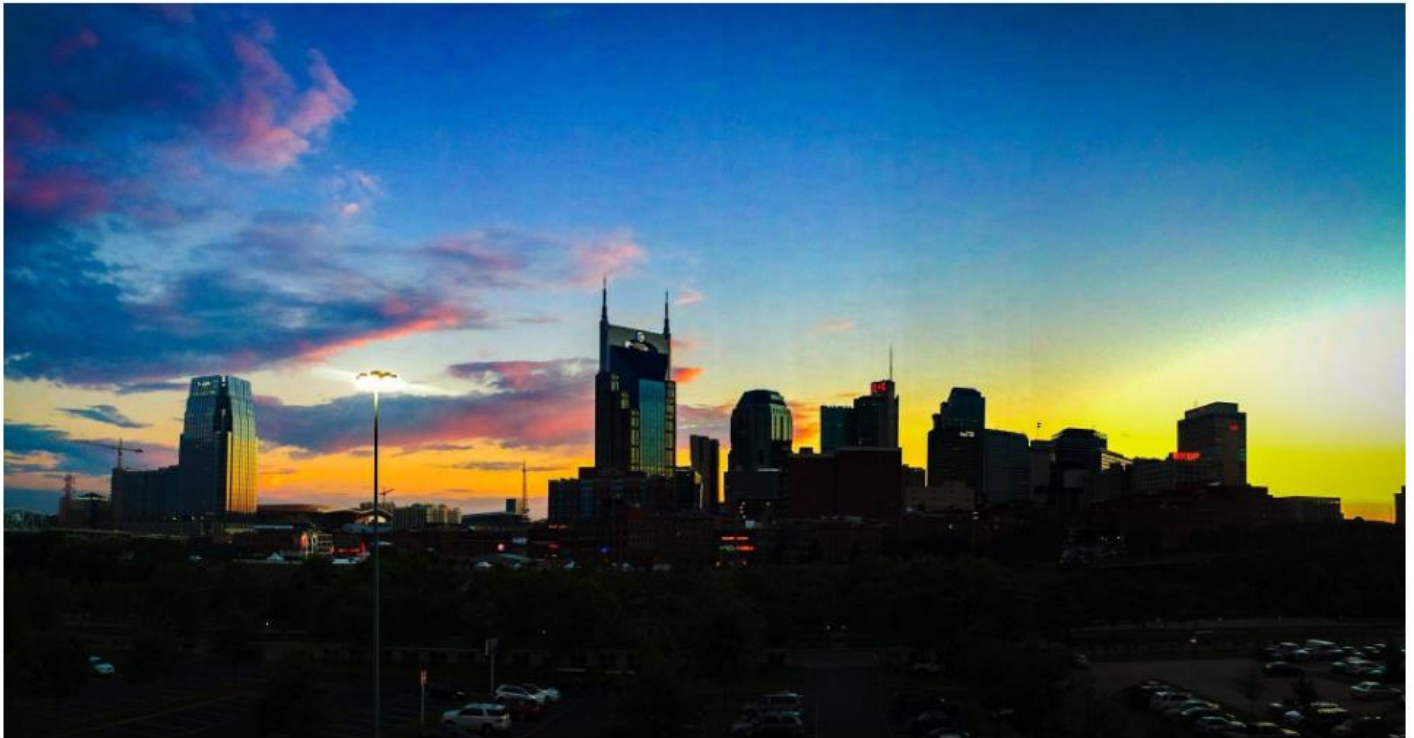
Accommodations must clean high contact surfaces frequently, provide housekeeping only upon request, and remove non-single use items from guest rooms and public spaces. Social distancing is regulated at Chicago's parks and gardens using physical barriers to regulate the flow of foot traffic. Activities are limited to non-contact sports and playgrounds remain closed.

[Amber Gibson](#) is a travel writer in Chicago who is fine with the city welcoming tourists. "Small businesses really need the business now and I think businesses that have opened up are taking all the proper precautions. I wish airports would take temperatures of arriving guests. This seems like a simple enough procedure to implement," she said.

## **Nashville, Tennessee**

[Visit Music City](#), Nashville's tourism board, reported that approximately 50% of the local tourism and hospitality are currently unemployed. In addition to the pandemic, the city is also recovering from [a deadly tornado](#). Unfortunately, Nashville is currently seeing a [slight increase in new COVID-19 cases](#).





Nashville Tennessee at sunset. Photo by Laura Brown

Nashville resident [Tomiko Harvey](#) is hesitant about her city reopening. "Gatherings of 25 or more are still banned and residents are asked to continue social distancing but most residents aren't adhering to the rules. I'm taking precautions by using hand sanitizer, wearing a face mask, and limiting time in public places because health officials warn that getting back to normal too soon will not be without consequences," she said

Music City is hoping to move into [phase three](#) of their reopening plan within the next two weeks. Some measures include that masks must be worn in public, restaurants will be open at full capacity, bars open at half capacity, and socially distant live music performances. Retail businesses and services like nail salons and tattoo parlors will be open at full capacity. All staff at any of the aforementioned businesses are required to be screened daily and wear face masks. Large sports and music venues will remain closed but museums will be allowed to welcome visitors.

To prepare for [reopening tourism](#), [Vanderbilt Health](#) and [Ryman Hospitality](#) have created a citywide [Good to Go program](#) aimed to keep visitors and community members healthy. The program provides uniform industry guidelines and comprehensive toolkits for businesses in

response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Businesses have been granted free access to Vanderbilt's leading infectious disease experts who are available to provide guidance on best practices, the latest research and public health guidance, and answer questions about reopening. Participating businesses will be easily identifiable with a green music note signage displayed on their website and at their locations.

Tourists who want to visit Nashville can check out listings on the Good to Go website to find hotels, attractions, venues, and restaurants that meet the Metro Public Health Department (MPHD) and CDC guidelines. "We encourage every business in Nashville to join Good to Go. We want to show the world that through cooperation and collaboration, Nashville is safe and sound," Butch Spyridon, president and CEO of NCVV, said in a [press release](#). Spyridon wants Good to Go to give all who live and come to Nashville confidence and peace of mind.