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Miami Magic

Tourist mecca reopens amid
coronavirus concerns



GABRIEL GARCIA/GREATER MIAMI CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

Local leaders and tourism officials are welcoming visitors to Miami, where venues like Maurice A. Ferré Park, also known as Museum Park, in downtown are open for business.

By Lisa A. Beach

N MID-JULY, FLORIDA SHATTERED a U.S. record with more than 15,000 new COVID-19 cases reported in a single day — with Miami at the epicenter. Long known as a top international travel draw, how does one of the nation's hottest tourist destinations reopen amid a pandemic?

Very cautiously, according to city and tourism officials.

OPEN, WITH LIMITS

"This needs to be clear: Miami is open. Our hotels are open, our restaurants are

open and our beaches are open. Visitors can still expect the same world-famous Miami hospitality, just under the 'new normal' guidelines," says Miami Mayor Francis Suarez, who tested positive for COVID-19 in March. "But as badly as we want our city to recover, and as badly as we want to get out of COVID, we must find the right balance of safety for our visitors and our residents."

In July, when Miami was experiencing the peak of the virus, Miami-Dade County reinstated a 10 p.m. curfew before the July Fourth holiday and, a week later, once again closed indoor dining at restaurants. In a July 16

news conference outside Miami City Hall, Suarez signaled he'd consider a lockdown if the rise of positive cases and hospitalizations continued. "I want to avoid a shutdown. I want to make that clear," Suarez told reporters.

But with the pent-up desire to travel, people are flocking to Florida — and Miami in particular — according to Rolando Aedo, chief operating officer of the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau. Amid such a fluid situation, guidelines for many tourism touch points (such as hotels, restaurants and airports) continue to evolve.

"We're modulating our message to

ensure that, for those who are willing to travel, yes, we are open for business with some limitations," Aedo says. "We welcome you, but in a responsible way." Responsible means washing your hands frequently, practicing safe social distancing and wearing a face mask at all times — now mandatory within city limits — when you're out in public.

WHAT'S OPEN, WHAT'S NOT

Many Miami businesses and recreational venues are open. Most have some kind of restrictions (such as capacity, activities allowed or operating hours) as

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well as safety protocols in place to follow current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Florida Department of Health guidelines. For example, Suarez says hotels are open and operating at 30 percent to 40 percent occupancy.

With a 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. countywide curfew in place, here is the status of various venues and activities at press time:

**OPEN**

Beaches; marinas and waterways; select parks, gardens and trails; golf courses; some hotels; museums; restaurants (outside dining only); entertainment venues; retail stores

**CLOSED**

Interior dining rooms; banquet halls and ballrooms; bars and nightclubs; gyms and fitness centers; park playgrounds; some dog parks, some pools, picnic shelters, basketball and volleyball courts and sports fields; Zoo Miami

FALL FORWARD

While it's difficult to predict what lies ahead as Miami — and the rest of the country — continues to grapple with the pandemic, Suarez and Aedo remain optimistic.

"As cases begin to decline, we'll be able to continue with the phased reopening of the city," says Suarez. "While there will still be many unknowns in the months to come, what we know for certain is that every decision we make is driven

by evidence and data. Our businesses will remain open as long as they are considered safe to be so."

And Aedo points to fall and winter events still on the docket, such as Art Basel, a renowned international art

festival that was canceled in March in Hong Kong and in June in Switzerland. The Miami event is scheduled for Dec. 3-6 at the Miami Beach Convention Center. Aedo says that, with 1 million square feet of exhibit space, the venue lends itself to social distancing. "I'm cautiously optimistic that we'll still have some of these large-scale events towards the end of the year," he says.

Helping to stop the spread of the virus remains a top priority, and exploring Miami means everyone — residents and tourists — has to do their part, says Suarez.

"Miami is open, but if you do decide to travel, please get tested or self-isolate both before you arrive and after you leave to ensure that you are not potentially infecting fellow passengers or traveling with the virus," he advises. "The most important thing for both residents and tourists is safety."

If you're thinking about traveling to the Miami area, check local tourism websites for the most current information. Visitors can take advantage of deals from hotels, museums and attractions, courtesy of the Miami Shines program (miamishines.com) and enjoy dining deals from programs such as Miami Eats, launched during the pandemic, and Miami Spice, an annual event highlighting the city's ever-evolving culinary scene.



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Visitors to public spots like Miami's South Beach must follow COVID-19 guidelines.



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Congregating at popular tourist sites, including Ocean Drive in Miami Beach, is allowed, but under social distancing rules.

PLAN AHEAD

Check the latest coronavirus case counts in Miami, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises against traveling to areas where transmission levels are high. For the latest information on traveling to Miami during the COVID-19 pandemic, visit the following websites:

- Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau: miamiandbeaches.com
- City of Miami: miamigov.com
- City of Miami Beach: miamibeachfl.gov
- Florida Department of Health: floridahealthcovid19.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov