

DMOs' Top FAM Concerns During COVID-19 Pandemic

Highlights from the Tourism Practice Survey | Completed Late June 2020

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touted FAMs as “extremely important” to their overall PR/marketing strategy.



of those surveyed have started receiving visit requests from media/influencers, whether they have loosened the reins on their hosting programs or not.



of DMOs' surveyed have started inviting media back into market for the summer.



of respondents host fewer than 20 media annually.

DMOs' TOP THREE CONCERNS

Regarding FAM hosting in the age of COVID-19 were:

1

Ensuring an optimal visit experience, with some attractions/restaurants closed

2

Budget availability

3

Legal liability associated with hosting media/influencers during a pandemic



stated they have **not changed anything** in their hosting evaluation processes, due to COVID-19

Seventeen percent have heightened requirements, such as hosting only top-tier media and/or requiring journalists to have a confirmed assignment.

TOP THREE THINGS THEY ARE DOING DIFFERENTLY

For those destinations currently hosting media

1

closer collaboration with partners on itinerary and health/safety measures

2

eliminating group FAMs in favor of custom FAMs

3

only hosting drive-market media/influencers, vs. those who may normally fly

RECOMMENDATIONS

for DMOs considering hosting a FAM during the COVID-19 pandemic

1

Don't abandon FAMs completely, but instead find a way to keep your destination top of mind during a time of uncertainty.

It's no surprise that FAMs are a major cornerstone of most DMOs' PR/marketing strategy, with **nearly half of survey respondents** touting them as "extremely important." If you can't physically bring media and influencers into market right now, **looks for ways to keep your destination relevant** in the interim. **Virtual press trips** and **desk-side briefings**, complete with **tangible food items** or **real-time partner interaction**, are just a few ways this can be done.

2

Be more "hands on" with itinerary building to ensure an optimal visit experience for those coming into market.

Ensuring an optimal visit experience, with **some attractions and restaurants being closed temporarily**, was the top concern of DMOs responding to the survey. Alleviate this worry by taking a heavier hand with itinerary building, and **being completely transparent** about what is open vs. what is not. Creating a temporary "media pass"-type guide of approved stops – which, ideally, you or someone on your staff has visited personally – will **help guide media and influencers** to the locales that will best showcase the destination.

3

Consider ways to stretch your hosting budget while facing unprecedented financial cuts.

It's no secret that many DMOs' budgets have been cut significantly across the board, with FAMs often a top out-of-pocket line item eliminated or on hold. **Get creative with targeting** during this time, seeking out hyperlocal influencers who may be open to **bartering deliverables** – like **imagery and/or social media content** – in exchange for a visit. Also focus on **drive-market targets** who could easily visit **via a road trip (or even day trip)** to help control costs. Finally, consider collaborating with nearby destinations to create a multi-stop road trip FAM.

4

Protect your destination by incorporating a liability waiver into your hosting process.

This is one of the **hottest issues in the tourism industry** right now, with many **unsure of their destination's liability** should a media/influencer contract COVID-19 while in market and incur additional costs as a result (extended lodging stays, for instance). According to Susan Rector, an attorney with Peterson Connors LLP who has been closely following this issue, **standard negligence law applies** – meaning that there would only be liability if the destination failed to follow the readily available guidance as to how to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 – **but it never hurts to have a waiver in place to ensure both parties are aware of the risks.**

5

Remain nimble, but always value health and safety first.

It goes without saying that we are **people first and destination markets second**, so we need to be **mindful of health and safety** when inviting media/influencers – and consumers – into our destinations. This includes things like working closely with partners to **ensure they are aware of and complying with the appropriate protocols**, and **shifting to custom FAM visits** instead of group FAMs. **Monitoring CDC guidelines** closely and **evolving your hosting program accordingly** should be a top priority.