

Forbes

Apr 1, 2021, 06:00am EST

Socially-Distanced Joyrides Offer A Safer Way To Explore Rhode Island



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Travel

I'm exploring the world, one bite at a time.



Providence, Rhode Island from above the Providence River. GETTY

The beauty of a road trip is that you can make it anything you want to be, from a meticulously-planned itinerary covering thousands of miles to a spontaneous, “see where the road takes you” jaunt to a new place. But over the past year, any kind of travel has been impacted significantly. Nationally, travel spending decreased by 42 percent year over year, according to the U.S. Travel Association, a nearly \$500 billion loss.

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33,734,080 unique
monthly visitors

In Rhode Island, a state in which more than [13 percent of total jobs](#) are tied to the tourism economy, that loss has been keenly felt. Last year, Providence and its surrounding areas lost \$73 million in direct spend impact just from cancelled conventions alone, according to Kristen Adamo, president of the Providence-Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau (PWCVB). But with cabin fever at an all-time high, people are looking for ways to safely get out of the house without coming into contact with others. That's where [Joyrides RI](#), a set of socially-distanced day trips through the state, comes in.

“One of the great things about Rhode Island is that you can explore it in a day,” Adamo says. Because daytrippers usually head to the southern part of the state to explore Newport and the coastal towns, Northern Rhode Island tends to be overlooked by visitors. “We partnered with Blackstone Valley Tourism and created these themed rides, where you can go exploring the northern half of Rhode Island,” she adds.

The single day routes put the focus on often-overlooked destinations in the state, and are designed to meet different comfort levels of interaction with other people. While some of the itineraries have indoor stops and suggestions for sit-down dining, others are completely outdoors and offer takeout food options. A shopping-focused route takes people to the beautifully curated independent stores of downtown Providence, inside the state's vast array of artists and makers at Pawtucket's Hope Artiste Village, and to a restaurant that's part antiques store. One with family activities offers options like a rock-climbing gym and an entertainment complex with escape rooms, ax throwing and indoor go-karts that top out at 45 miles per hour. A route through the wineries and breweries in Northern Rhode Island comes with an option for hiring a transportation company, while an all-outdoor route has stops at [New England's most popular zoo](#) and a waterfront park where you can still see the remains of the amusement park that used to occupy that land.



A zookeeper feeds a giraffe at Roger Williams Park Zoo in Providence. AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

The Joyrides itineraries are in keeping with a national trend towards Americans becoming more comfortable with travel, but in limited, and what they feel are safer, capacities. “In a survey of over 10,000 Americans, Harvest Hosts has found that they have plans of increased travel this year,” [Travel Agent Central reports](#). “Most Americans, according to the study, are planning to travel more this year than they did in 2019 — before the pandemic even hit. What’s different now is that travelers’ values and priorities are shifting — focusing on safety, cost-effectiveness and more accommodating travel options.”

What that means, for the most part: travel by car. “Americans are choosing road trips over flights as they choose a safer-perceived way to vacation,” according to a [report by Institutional Investor](#). “Trips are shorter-distanced, generally about 100 miles away.”

All of the Joyrides have options for hotel stays on either end of the route, which are especially affordable this month. The second annual [Rhode Island Hotel Week](#) is happening April 17-30, when both luxury and economy hotels around the state are offering stays at deeply discounted rates. Each participant has listed its enhanced COVID safety protocols on the Hotel Week site. Per [state guidelines](#), travelers arriving from another state must have negative COVID-19 results from a test taken within 72 hours of arrival, or upon arrival.

Adamo says the Joyrides program will run through the summer. “We think a lot of people are going to want to get in their cars,” she says. “We’re a great drive market. So we’re hoping people will come and explore.”