

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

The shutdown may yet make a mess of your trip

JOHN SPINK/ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION VIA AP

By Christopher Elliott

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Ask travelers about the partial government shutdown, and you may get a dismissive answer. After all, most flights are still running on time, many national parks remain open, and passports are being processed.

“Shutdown?” says Chris Luth, a sales manager based in Ozark, Mo. “What shutdown?”

As the partial government shutdown moved through another week with no end in sight, the economic blow was being felt not only by federal workers but also by business people, households, and travelers across the country.

Luth says he hasn't noticed a “single change” in his travels since the lapse in government funding that began Dec. 22. That includes a recent trip from Dallas to Mexico City, where he passed through the TSA PreCheck line in 30 seconds, and a return flight to Dallas, where he made it through immigration in 45 seconds, thanks to his Global Entry card. “Both flights were perfectly on time,” he adds.

But the worst may be yet to come. Even if the partial shutdown ends soon, it could have a ripple effect that's felt into the busy spring-break-travel season and beyond. It threatens to touch every aspect of travel, including hotels and restaurants. Now is the time to prepare for it.

The shutdown is costing the tourism industry more than \$100 million a day, according to an analysis by the US Travel Association. It includes nearly \$50 million a day in direct domestic travel spending and more than \$50 million in indirect and induced travel-related output, according to the trade group. Delta Air Lines says the shutdown will cost it \$25 million this month. Often, these costs are passed along to consumers in the form of higher prices.

“The government shutdown is causing a domino effect on the hospitality industry,” says Mahmood Khan, a professor in Virginia Tech's Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management. “Restaurants, hotels, theme parks, at-

tractions, and the airlines are all interrelated and impacted directly or indirectly.”

There have been scattered reports of disruptions. In the past weeks, air travelers reported longer screening lines in Atlanta and Houston. In response, the Transportation Security Administration issued a rare statement with internally reported screening times, which showed 99 percent of passengers waited less than 30 minutes to clear security on Monday.

Mikah Meyer contacted me before boarding a flight to Guam to visit the War in the Pacific National Historical Park. It's part of his attempt to become the youngest person to visit all 418 National Park Service sites.

“I've been in contact with local tourism officials, but no one has yet been able to confirm to me if I'll be able to access the parkland or not,” he says. “I'm pretty terrified of landing later this month and the government not being open.”

Pam Ivey, who runs an international retreat company in Wasaga Beach, Ontario, says the shutdown ended her efforts to join Global Entry, a system that allows preapproved travelers to enter the United States faster. Just before her final interview, she received an e-mail saying that because of the shutdown, “there will be no US officers present to finalize their portion of the interview.” All Global Entry interviews, it added, “have been canceled for the foreseeable future.”

But among travelers, there seems to be a consensus that the shutdown has had little or no effect — yet. But the real shock may be just ahead. January is typically the slowest time of the year for almost any type of travel in the United States. So a few TSA agents calling in sick are unlikely to affect the overall speed of screenings. Experts say the effects of the shutdown might be felt when the busy spring-break-travel season begins.

Gordon Gray, the director of fiscal policy of the American Action Forum, a nonprofit think tank that has calculated the costs of the shutdown, warns of a scenario in which

thousands of TSA agents quit their jobs and find new work. Even if the shutdown ends quickly, the agency would be short-staffed.

“We could find ourselves at the end of February with not enough TSA staff to do screenings,” he says.

Add more travelers to the equation, and you have a recipe for gridlock on the ground.

That's not all. Take the Smithsonian museums and zoo and the national parks. After the shutdown ends, it could take weeks before some of these facilities are fully operational. That could affect spring trips to national parks and to the District.

Khan, the tourism professor, says there are other aspects of the shutdown that few visitors consider. They include reduced food-safety inspections, which could affect restaurants. Several large meetings and conferences could lose federal funding and federal participants, which might hurt businesses that depend on tourists and other travelers.

“Hotels are suffering across the country due to lack of business travelers,” Khan says. “Since attractions are closed, many food service and restaurant operators will suffer. For example, food trucks depend on office employees and tourist attractions for business. In many cases, their operation is the primary source of income for families.”

It's difficult to prepare for the ripple effects. Most travelers are doing nothing more than worrying, which is not an effective strategy. Gray, the fiscal policy expert, says travelers will have to go the “extra mile” during and after the shutdown.

Anytime your trip touches the federal system — whether you're being screened at the airport, applying for a passport or Global Entry credentials, or passing through customs — Gray advises that you expect delays.

Those are the easy ones to anticipate. Knowing how the shutdown will affect the rest of your travel experience may be impossible — until you start your journey.

HERE

ROWLEY GETS A STYLISH INN

The Briar Barn Inn recently made its stylish debut in Rowley. The full-service property sprawls across 4 manicured acres where a series of buildings — housing 30 boutique rooms, a 100-seat restaurant in a white post-and-beam barn, a holistic spa, meeting rooms, and offices — create the feeling of a small pastoral village. Airy accommodations with high ceilings and large windows each boast a private in-room gas fireplace, antique and contemporary furnishings, plush bedding with Sferra and Frette linens, and bathroom outfitted in farmhouse style with black and white tile floors, soaking tub, and separate shower. Operated by Bramble Hospitality, the Briar Barn Inn joins its sister property, Wilfordale Estate, as a venue for weddings and private events. Combining casual elegance and rustic comfort, the inn is also perfect for intimate winter getaways. Rates from \$119. 978-653-5323, www.briarbarninn.com

BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL HONORS JOE VAL

Shake off February doldrums at the 34th Joe Val Bluegrass Festival, the premier wintertime bluegrass fest in the region. The rollicking good time takes place at the Sheraton Framingham over Presidents' Day Weekend (Feb. 15-17) where national and regional artists will perform on the Main Stage (including the Seldom Scene, Sister Sadie, Lonely Heartstrings Band, and more); and the next generation of rising stars will grace the Showcase Stage. Extensive educational programs include more than 60 master

classes, workshops, instructor-led jam sessions, and the Joe Val Bluegrass Academy for Kids. In addition, find instrument vendors, luthiers, and, of course, picking around the clock. In October 2018, Joe Val was inducted into the International Bluegrass Music Association's Hall of Fame, making this year's festival extra celebratory. Plan ahead: Tickets sell out quickly. www.bbu.org/events/joe-val-festival



SKI-IN, SKI-OUT LUXURY HOTEL DEBUTS

Deep powder fans will want to check out The Josie, a Nobel House Hotel ski-in, ski-out property located at the base of RED Mountain Resort's slopes in Rossland, British Columbia, the first stop along Canada's renowned Powder Highway. Surrounded by nearly 2,877 pristine acres — in an area with a reputation for light, dry powder, average 300-inch yearly snowfall total, and variety of challenging

terrain for intermediate and expert level skiers — the recently opened hotel offers guests easy access to cat skiing, snowshoeing, fat biking, cross country skiing, curling, ice skating, and hockey. The Josie's stylish and contemporary 106 one-bedroom suites, guest rooms, and studio suites offer those just in from a day of playing hard outdoors a luxurious way to unwind. Amenities include a ski con-

cierge, spa and fitness center, and the Velvet Restaurant and Lounge, serving a locally-inspired craft cooking menu by Chef Marc-André Coquette. Rates from \$218. 888-915-6743, www.thejosie.com

THERE

SMOOTH SKATING IN THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

Lace up your skates in Lincoln, N.H.,



where the Rink at RiverWalk Resort at Loon Mountain welcomes skaters of all ages. The enormous outdoor rink (in summer months a 167,000-gallon swimming lagoon) offers a one-of-a-kind ice skating experience, including a central fire pit to keep you warm on chilly days. Through March 31, guests can glide and spin across a perfect sheet of ice, kept smooth by RiverWalk's very own Zamboni machine. Forgot your skates? Rentals are available. *Skating is free for resort guests; open to the general public for \$10 fee. Resort accommodations from \$249. 603-745-7500, www.riverwalkresortatloon.com*

GOT WHISKEY?

At the top of Edinburgh's Royal Mile, right next door to Edinburgh Castle, The Scotch Whisky Experience celebrates its mission “to make the world

fall in love with Scotch whisky.” New bespoke VIP experiences this year include fine dining in the world's largest whisky collection; super-premium whisky tastings; and a blend-your-own whisky master class — where guests can taste limited edition single malts from the now-silent stills of Scotland. First opened to the public in 1988, The Scotch Whisky Experience was created when 19 individual companies committed to jointly showcase Scotch whisky to international visitors. An interactive exhibition, not a working distillery, the Experience represents 90 percent of the industry, making it an ideal first stop for enthusiasts. Not to be missed, and part of every tour, is the Diageo Clave Vidiz Whisky Collection, 3,384 bottles of golden spirits displayed in a marble and glass vault. Experiences \$20-\$96. www.scotch-whiskyexperience.co.uk

EVERYWHERE

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