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Legislative Session Brings Major Changes and More Dollars to Tourism Industry

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The 2019 Legislative Session was an active and successful one for West Virginia’s tourism industry. During the 60-day regular session, state lawmakers took significant steps to modernize the state’s beer, wine and liquor laws – an effort that was spurred in large part by the state’s growing craft brewery and hospitality industries.

The Legislature also passed legislation aimed at removing roadblocks to the delayed implementation of the state’s previously enacted medical cannabis program. And with the state running a budget surplus, lawmakers dedicated additional funding to the West Virginia Tourism Office. These measures will, no doubt, bring about significant and exciting opportunities for West Virginia’s tourism industry.

Sunday Liquor and Streamlined Alcohol Sales

With the passage of four separate pieces of legislation, legislators effected a major overhaul of many of the state’s alcoholic beverage laws this year. One of the most significant changes came in the form of House Bill 2481, which finally authorizes retail liquor sales on Sundays after 1 p.m. in West Virginia. The legislation, which was effective from passage, provides limited exceptions for Easter Sunday and any Sunday on which Christmas falls. However, counties still have the option, via ballot referendum, to prohibit Sunday liquor sales.

Senate Bill 561 makes several changes to state law in an effort to modernize West Virginia’s liquor laws. Notably, the legislation streamlines many aspects of the licensing process for resorts, restaurants, brew pubs and private clubs. The legislation allows for certain private clubs to provide bottle service and also facilitates the sale of frozen alcoholic drinks.

Significant changes to West Virginia’s nonintoxicating beer statutes were also included in Senate Bill 529. Many of the bill’s provisions are aimed at the state’s growing craft brewery industry. Of note, the bill increases the alcohol by volume limit for craft brewers from 12 percent to 15 percent. The legislation also eliminates previous per patron limitations on the sale of growlers, and instead allows for the sale of up to 128 ounces of beer for off-premises consumption. The bill also fosters tourism by allowing West Virginia’s craft breweries to provide samples to visiting customers.

Finally, Senate Bill 511 sought to streamline many of the regulations on West Virginia’s farm wineries and retail establishments. The legislation, among other things, permits the creation of alternating wine proprietorships for wineries and farm wineries, authorizes certain grocery stores to sell wine for at-store pickup through mobile or internet applications, and provides that authorized wine specialty shops may be licensed to deliver wine with gift baskets.

Millions for West Virginia Tourism Office

It’s no secret that tourism is a top priority of West Virginia Governor Jim Justice, and this year’s





Budget Bill (HB 2020) ensures that the West Virginia Tourism Office will be well-funded in the upcoming fiscal year. With the well-received “Almost Heaven” advertising campaign and national attention over the West Virginia-themed “Fallout 76” video game, the past year has been a significant one for marketing the Mountain State. Through the Budget Bill, lawmakers have authorized up to \$14 million in tourism/marketing spending for FY2021 – \$7 million through immediate general revenue appropriations and another \$7 million in possible surplus revenue funds. ▾



West Virginia Tourism's new 146-page vacation guide boasts all the various activities and adventures that can be explored throughout the Mountain state, including "You Might Belong in a Mountain Town," "A Foodie's Long-Weekend Road Trip" and "Kid-Approved Activities."