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From the Houston Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/houston/news/2020/08/08/bluejack-national-memberships-up-staycation-push.html>

Bluejack National with Tiger Woods-designed golf course sees memberships jump amid 'staycation' push

With most travel tourism all but canceled as a result of the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic, businesses across Houston have launched an aggressive effort to cater to local residents seeking a "staycation."

Many companies have launched steep discounts and programming aimed at enticing Houstonians to consider enjoying some rest and relaxation without traveling too far from home.

One company that has already seen an uptick in business from the staycation market is Bluejack National Club and Community, the 755-acre resort-style community in Montgomery that is anchored by an 18-hole golf course designed by professional golfer Tiger Woods.

Bluejack National President and General Manager Brett Schoenfield said the community's memberships and real estate tours have increased by between 12% and 15% compared to this time last year.

"People are forgoing their vacations for staycations," Schoenfield said in an email. "We are a drive-to destination for a lot of Texans, and ... we prioritize safety and



COURTESY OF BLUEJACK NATIONAL

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have managed that well concerning the virus.”

Given its location about 50 miles north of Houston, it’s perhaps unsurprising that Bluejack National has benefitted from an uptick in staycationers. That said, the community is also receiving interest from those living outside the greater Houston area.

Bluejack National offers a membership program for people living 200 miles or more away. Schoenfield said the program was filled with 50 members in 2019 when it closed.

“Because of the recent demand, we are reopening that category for a limited time,” Schoenfield said.

The community has also benefitted from the uptick in the number of people working from home. Many of the community’s residents who have second homes at Bluejack National have essentially made those homes their primary residence during the pandemic, Schoenfield said.

Schoenfield attributes much of the success the community has seen recently to the increased safety protocols Bluejack National has put in place. Add to that the fact that that golf, as well as some of the other activities offered at Bluejack National, naturally cater to social distancing, and people feel comfortable visiting the community, Schoenfield said.

In recent years, Bluejack National has been moving to expand its amenity offerings.

In October, the community broke ground on a new 60,000-square-foot clubhouse, which will be known as The Porch. Since then, plans have changed and buildings have been split into smaller venues. Those structures will be located inside the community at 4430 S. FM 1486 in Montgomery.

Plans for The Porch call for a range of amenities, including a game room, men’s and women’s lounges and locker rooms. The facility will also include a number of guest suites, dining and entertainment areas, a courtyard and corporate meetings spaces. A spa, fitness studio, movement studio and a steam room will be in a different facility called The Sanctuary.

The community's last major development project, a "Disney-esque" indoor-outdoor facility called The Fort, was awarded first place in Golf Inc. Magazine's 2019 Best New Amenities competition, which recognizes the year's most outstanding upgrades and additions at golf clubs and resorts.

"People's need for a vacation hasn't changed, but destinations have," Schoenfield said. "And while the world has changed, people come to Bluejack because they know what they're going to get at Bluejack. They know we will take care of everything."

It's not only Bluejack National that has been seeing a benefit from the local staycation market.

Houston First Corp., the organization charged with promoting the city's tourism industry, recently launched a marketing campaign specifically aimed at promoting Houston's hotels and event venues.

The "Missing HOU" campaign, which launched in June, has gathered data from social media polls and artificial intelligence systems to find the best way for businesses to promote themselves to staycationers.

Houston First's poll found that 60% of respondents were interested in outdoor recreation as part of a potential staycation, while another 54% would seek out arts and culture. Perhaps unsurprisingly, just 23% of respondents were interested in bars and nightlife — businesses that have been hit especially hard by social distancing mandates limiting the number of people who can enter at one time.

Based on those findings, Houston First worked with hotels to assemble staycation packages, which it promotes on the organization's website, visithoustontexas.com.

Some of the packages offered by local hotels include discount rates for hotel stays and spa treatments. Others offer more specialized experiences, like the Post Oak Hotel at Uptown Houston's bourbon tastings and trips to the Downtown Houston Aquarium.

Elsewhere, the newly opened Margaritaville Lake Resort, Lake Conroe-Houston has been offering its own staycation packages, which include deals on a round of golf and credit for food at the resort's restaurants. The resort is also offering special deals for Texas residents, as well as health care workers and first responders.

The Houston Zoo, the Downtown Houston Aquarium, Space Center Houston and other entertainment venues around town have also launched deals targeting staycationers.

Zoo spokeswoman Jackie Wallace said the zoo has seen a 20% uptick in the number of number of visitors coming from greater Houston, as opposed to those outside of the region. The zoo has been promoting new exhibits to help attract local visitors. Later this year, the zoo will open its newest multispecies habitat, South America's Pantanal, which will show off wildlife from Brazil's tropical wetlands.

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