

Hudson Valley Hotels Divided Over Reopening

By Melissa Dempsey

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The Rose Garden at Valley Rock Inn.

In these months of isolation, many of us have found new hobbies, started gardens, or reconnected digitally with friends and family—silver linings of an otherwise confusing and challenging time. Staying home has been hard for many, especially as warm weather beckons usually avid travelers to explore.

Although they were never officially mandated to shutter (dubbed "essential infrastructure"), nearly every single hotel and inn in the region closed during the statewide lockdown. Now, as the Hudson Valley enters its phased reopening, many of the area's lodgings have started welcoming guests with new safety protocols in place. Others have said, "Thanks, but no thanks," believing that too rapid a reopening will prevent us from quelling the deadly virus. Here's a glimpse at how some of the region's coveted getaways are handling the situation.

“We opened Memorial Day weekend to a full house and started filling up the calendar for the summer,” says Michael Bruno, owner of the high-end Valley Rock Inn & Mountain Club in Sloatsburg. Each of their stunning three-to-five-bedroom private guest houses includes a great room, porch, and bedroom. “Our property is unique in that each group has their own guest house, plus their own dedicated dining tables in the garden and by the pool, as well as their own poolside cabana area with lounges and seating.” Valley Rock is currently spacing bookings at least two days/one night apart to allow optimal time for cleaning between visitors. Valley Rock guests who prefer to avoid the shared dining spaces altogether can request meals be delivered directly to the guest house. As far as social distancing-compliant recreation, the inn offers mountain biking, hiking, and kayaking and is surrounded by 70,000 acres of parkland and also close to Storm King Art Center.



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The Rivertown Lodge in Hudson reopened at the end of May, as well. Formerly the Warren Inn Motel, and prior to that a Vaudevillian-era movie theater, the redesigned building features a Wes Anderson-meets-Hudson Valley artisan aesthetic with furniture, art, and design work crafted by local makers. As part of their COVID-19 reopening plan, a new check-in policy includes day-of communication via e-mail; sterilized keys will be placed in rooms. To limit outside exposure, housekeeping will be on pause while rooms are occupied, though extra linens and towels can be obtained by calling or emailing the front desk. Their open-plan lobby, which usually invites guests to stay and commune among one another, has been set up with social distancing in mind.

As soon as Mohonk Mountain House—the enchanting resort in the heart of the Gunks—announced their anticipated June 15 opening, their phones lit up and online inquiries poured in. Mohonk has been long-lauded for its award-winning spa, winding nature trails, flower gardens, mountain lake, and farm-fresh dining; it’s no surprise travelers jumped at the chance to book. (The resort is even a Hollywood starlet, with more than eight film credits to date.) But those who’ve made the resort an annual tradition should expect big changes. “Mohonk will be implementing a number of new protocols to protect and prioritize the health and safety of staff and guests,” explains the resort’s president, Eric Gullickson. “Some of these protocols include wellness screenings at the Gatehouse, physical distancing, increased sanitization of the entire property—especially at high touch-point areas, facemask requirements, takeout options, and modified activities, such as moving mindfulness and fitness programs outdoors.” Read a full description of Mohonk’s reopening protocols.



Courtesy of Mohonk Mountain House.

A King suite at Mohonk Mountain House.

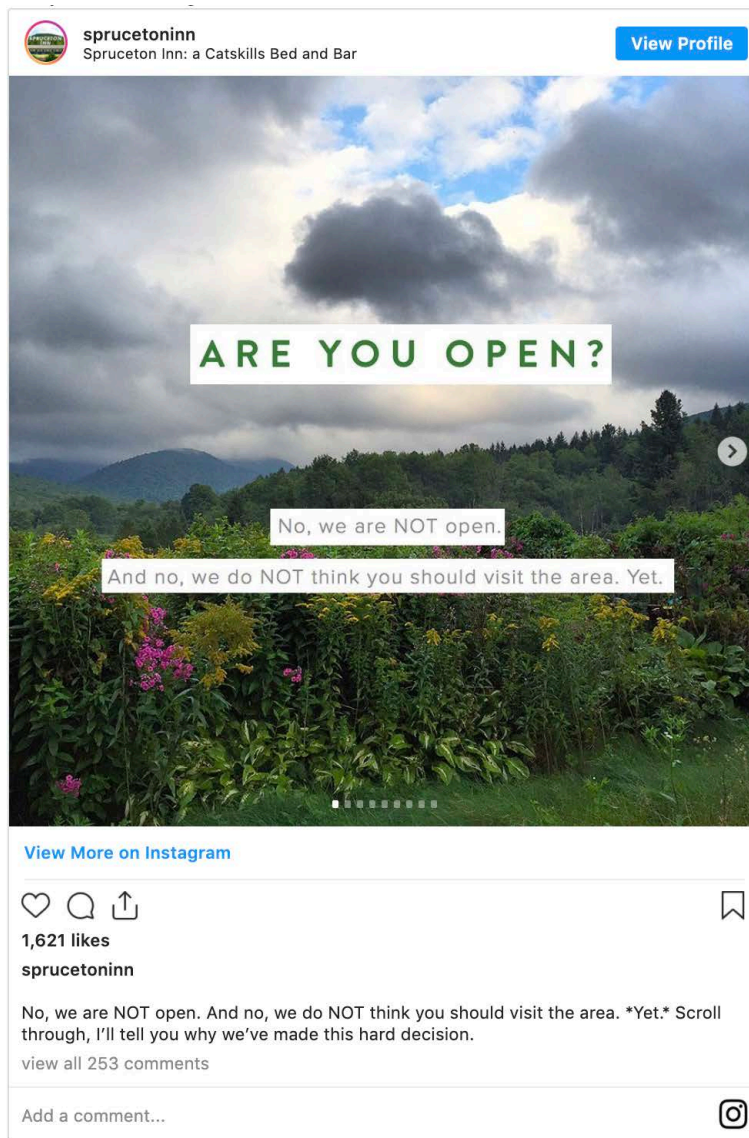
The historic Beekman Arts & Delamater Inn in Rhinebeck is one of the rare hotels that actually never closed. “We were deemed an essential business because we offer temporary shelter. We could, and did, house essential workers as needed,” explains General Manager Lisa Wolgamuth. “But since approximately May 1, we have seen an increase in people shopping the hotel, with numerous inquiries into future dates, our COVID-19 practices, and when things will open up more in Rhinebeck.” The latter being an obvious concern, some travelers are holding off on visiting the village until the beloved boutiques and eateries that line quaint East Market Street and its surrounding reopen. “We find that people are not necessarily looking to book a room if they can't go out to eat or shop the stores,” she says. “Many groups on the books have moved and quite a few have cancelled.”

Having been open this entire time, the inn has normalized its precautions. Staff members must be wearing a mask and engage in frequent hand washing; they've been directed not to report to work if feeling ill or exhibiting COVID symptoms, too. There's increased availability of sanitizer for guests, and multi-touch surfaces like doorknobs and banisters are regularly disinfected. Rooms are assigned in a way that allows as many days as possible in between guest use. “Currently, if someone checks out of a room, it is not booked again, unless absolutely necessary, for a minimum of 48 to 72 hours,” she explains, adding that many have not been used since before the shutdown.



Other hotels, however, are taking a more cautious approach and holding off on reopening—the Inn & Spa at Beacon and the Stewart House in Athens, among them. Much to the chagrin of city-dwellers seeking an escape to a favorite Catskills getaway, Tannersville’s Deer Mountain Inn also remains closed—though their kitchen is open.

The Spruceton Inn: A Catskills Bed and Bar is choosing to stand firmly in their decision to wait until there has been a consistent downward trend of infections country-wide, as well as widely available testing and a vaccine.



“There was a big bump in interest right before Memorial Day Weekend as folks looked forward to the traditional kick-off of summer,” explains Casey Scieszka, head innkeeper. “I think people, especially those in NYC, are experiencing some serious stay-at-home-fatigue after the past few months and are understandably excited to get out of their apartments.” A brass tacks Instagram post on May 20 outlined their position: “Scientists and health experts warn that allowing people to travel could trigger a second outbreak and we do not want to have a hand in those hospitalizations and deaths. There is still not enough testing and there is still no vaccine.” (Not to mention no hospital in Greene County!)

Scieszka explains that the inn would bring an estimated 2,000 summertime guests from the city, and she says that she feels a personal responsibility in not encouraging the spread of the virus across the region. She says, “I cannot wait to reopen—once we feel it is responsible to do so.”