



Making the Most of Minnesota's Summer

A Strategic Guide for Minnesota Restaurants

Prepared in partnership with Performance Foodservice Minnesota and Hospitality Minnesota



PHOTO CREDIT: VISIT FAIRMONT

Summer's here. Finally.

You know what the next twelve weeks mean. Patios fill up. Lake towns wake up. Road-trippers roll through with the kids in the back seat. This is the season we plan for all year — and it's a good one.

So let's talk about the upside. Summer travel isn't just tourists. It's two audiences in your dining room at once — the visitor who drove three hours to see your town, and the local who's been here all along. The smart play takes care of both.

Here's what I keep telling operators: you don't have to outspend anybody this summer. You have to be ready. The crowds are coming whether you plan for them or not — the only question is whether you catch them. A few ideas you can pull off before the Fourth.

Be the "only here" stop. Travelers don't drive across the state for something they can get at home. Put one dish on the menu that says Minnesota and nothing else — walleye, wild rice, sweet corn, berries off a farm down the road. One memorable plate gets told to ten people. That's free marketing, and it tastes better than an ad.



Don't Take Summer for Granted.

Stretch the daylight. Our June sun doesn't set until after nine. Use it. A golden-hour special, a late patio, a sunset cocktail — give people a reason to linger when the light's at its best. Don't close at the same time you do in February.

Win the midweek with your neighbors. The visitor rush dips Tuesday and Wednesday. That's the night for locals. Give the people who live here a reason to walk in. A neighbor looked after in June is a neighbor still coming in November.

Maximize Potential Costumers.

Team up. A few downtown spots sharing a summer passport. A restaurant and the lake resort sending each other guests. Visitors experience the whole town, not one business. When the town wins, you win.

Make it easy to say yes. Update your hours online so the photo people find is your patio, not last winter's snowdrift. Summer guests decide fast and move on — the easier you are to choose, the more often you get chosen.





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The Fourth is Almost Here – Plan It Now.

Independence Day lands on a Saturday this year. It anchors one of the biggest travel weekends of the entire year, not only the summer.

Stay proactive, stay ahead. The places that do well on the Fourth aren't the ones that hustle that morning — they're the ones that decided in June.



A few things worth nailing down now:

- **Set your hours and staff to match.** Decide your holiday hours early and get them posted everywhere. Build the schedule around the rush, not a normal Saturday — and take care of the team working the holiday so they want to be there.
- **Own a piece of the day.** Tie into what's already happening — the parade, the fireworks, the lake. A holiday special, an early dinner before the show, a late patio after. Be the answer to "where should we eat?" before anyone has to ask.
- **Feed the backyard, too.** Not everyone goes out on the Fourth — plenty are grilling at home. To-go platters, party trays, a simple holiday catering menu let you serve the folks who never walk through the door. Put it in front of people now, while they're still planning.

The Bottom Line

None of this takes a big budget. It takes showing up and remembering that summer is the easiest time of year to make someone's day. People are happy. They're off work. They want to be here. Meet them there.

We've earned this season. Make the most of it.



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