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THE SOURCEBOOK

More locales ban smoking

By Jon Boroshok, Special to The Times

The good news for nonsmokers: At least six states and hundreds of cities have followed California's lead and banned smoking in most public indoor areas, including restaurants and hotels.

The bad news: Smokers simply have been pushed outside, in many cases to those places where fresh-air-loving travelers may go for hiking, sunning, alfresco dining — now all bound in cigarette haze.

For some nonsmokers, particularly parents with young children and anyone with asthma, a smoke-free atmosphere is a crucial factor in choosing vacation destinations.

For this reason, more tourist destinations are going beyond legal requirements and becoming 100% smoke-free.

In San Diego County, Solana Beach banned smoking on the beach in late 2003.

"On city beach cleanup days, 50% to 60% of the litter was butts," said Assistant City Manager Matt Rodriguez.

Since the ban, "more kids and families are using the beaches, and tourism has increased," he said. "Our beach is not an ashtray."

Walter McLeod, board member of the Washington-based nonprofit Clean Beaches Council, cited a cultural shift in the way people behave on beaches and other public lands.

"Smoke-free beaches are a great, positive, growing trend," he said.

He said Florida and the Carolinas were starting to zone certain parts of beaches as smoke-free, and towns in New Jersey and Delaware were studying similar moves.

"In the last five years, facilities like stadiums, outdoor public markets and parks have gone smoke-free in response to people's desires," said Paul Knepprath, vice president of government relations for the American Lung Assn. of California. "Especially families with kids."

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Still, rules can be inconsistent in California. Disneyland, Six Flags Magic Mountain and Universal Studios Hollywood prohibit smoking near waiting lines, eating areas, pools and children's areas. Knott's Berry Farm, however, allows smoking in outdoor eating areas and its midway.

Holiday World and Splashin' Safari amusement park in Santa Claus, Ind., banned smoking except in a few designated areas last year at the request of guests.

"They said, 'If you really were a family park, you wouldn't allow smoking,' " said Will Koch, president and general manager. "We took that to heart. Families are our specialty, and so we accepted the challenge."

He said complaints from smokers were minimal and attendance was up 14% last year.

"I don't know if I'd give the smoking policy the credit," he said, "but it is clear that the policy didn't hurt."

Since 2003 most areas in the San Diego Zoo have been smoke-free, including the dining terraces, bus tours, Skyfari aerial tram, show amphitheatres and any spot within 20 feet of a doorway.

"Zoos, like all public institutions, are trying to do what's best for visitors and animals," said Jim Hubing, director of the Henry Vilas Zoo in Madison, Wis.

That zoo, where about half of the 500,000 annual visitors are children, banned smoking four years ago. Complaints, Hubing said, have been few, and the new policy has lessened litter too.

The Silver Lake Winery in Woodinville, Wash., has written guidelines for tasting room etiquette that state: "Any casual or serious wine tasting requires no smoking and no wearing of perfumes or colognes that would overwhelm the delicate nuance of the wine. We therefore do not allow smoking in our building and request that you refrain from smoking anywhere near our tasting facility."

Explorations in Travel, which runs adventure programs for women 40 and older in Guilford, Vt., asks guests not to smoke in common areas, indoors or outdoors.

"We rarely get smokers on our vacations but instituted the policy for the occasional smoker that joins us," founder Debbie Jacobs said.

For some travelers, however, awkward situations and disappointment remain all too common. Some tips:

- Before making reservations, call the chamber of commerce or visitors bureau at your destination and ask about local smoking laws. Also ask whether any lodgings or attractions are known for their smoke-free environment.
- Ask about rules on smoking in public areas, including the pool and outdoor dining areas.
- If the people at the adjacent table, behind you in line or next to you at the park decide to light up, ask politely if they would not smoke. They might just comply. If you object because your child is nearby, say so.
- Inform management if someone breaks the rules in a nonsmoking area. It's difficult for management to enforce policy if violations go unnoticed.

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