

# Brooks, UFC, Mars giving Las Vegas big back-to-back weekends

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Normally, there's a tourism lull the week after a three-day weekend.

But as everyone knows, 2021 is far from normal, and the weekend after the [three-day Fourth of July holiday](#) has the makings of a blockbuster for Las Vegas.

Credit a supercluster of blockbuster entertainment coming up in the city this weekend.

The [UFC 264 event](#) at T-Mobile Arena, featuring Conor McGregor-Dustin Poirier. [Garth Brooks](#) at Allegiant Stadium. [Bruno Mars at Park MGM](#).

On top of that, former President Donald Trump is planning to attend the big fight, UFC President Dana White confirmed Thursday.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority doesn't have any historical data to calculate an estimate of how many people will venture to Las Vegas this weekend, but most observers think more than 300,000 people were in the city over the Fourth of July three-day holiday. Will 300,000 more be here this weekend?

# Testing transportation

If nothing else, the existing transportation grid will be put to the test with three major events — the Garth Brooks concert, the UFC fights and Bruno Mars — occurring at venues within a half-mile of each other at right around the same time that night.

But health officials have expressed concern that big crowds have the potential to create superspreader events.

Nevada on Thursday [reported 697 new coronavirus cases](#) and two deaths as the state's test positivity rate continued to climb.

Updated data posted by the state Department of Health and Human Services on the state's coronavirus website pushed the state's case total to 337,259 and showed the two-week moving average of new COVID-19 cases increasing to 369 per day.

Thursday's update also showed the state's two-week positivity rate, which essentially tracks the percentage of people tested for COVID-19 who are found to be infected, continuing its recent surge, jumping 0.3 percentage point to 8.2 percent. The rate, which exceeded the 8 percent threshold for the first time since late February, has been increasing since it hit a recent low of 3.3 percent June 9.

But generally, industry observers see more positives than negatives.

“Las Vegas is back, travel is back, and U.S. consumers are craving a return to normalcy,” said Amanda Belarmino, an assistant professor at the William F. Harrah College of Hospitality at UNLV.

# Sustained growth

“However, the key to sustained growth will be increased vaccination rates throughout the state and the U.S.,” she said. “The upcoming weekend with Garth Brooks and the first big UFC fight will demonstrate the ability of Las Vegas to provide world-class entertainment and service that truly makes us the most exciting city on the planet.”

The Garth Brooks show, sold out the day tickets first went on sale, should be the biggest test, said Josh Swissman, founding partner of The Las Vegas-based Strategy Organization.

“(Garth Brooks’ stadium show) has about as high a production value as anything out there,” Swissman said. “They have a big team, lots of equipment and lots of complexity tied up in that show, and so this, to me, feels like the big weekend to really demonstrate to the country and all the people who are thinking about coming to Vegas that entertainment is back in Sin City.”

Alliegiant Stadium already had a concert trial run last weekend when Illenium, an electronic dance music star, performed there July 3. But Swissman noted that there may be close to twice as many people jamming the arena for Brooks.

“Don’t get me wrong, drawing 40,000 people is no slouch,” Swissman said. “But Garth Brooks is a flagship, marquee sellout event for that arena. I think it’ll be the first sellout event in that arena.”

There’s also going to be a sellout up the street at T-Mobile Arena. Research by Jeremy Aguero, a principal at Las Vegas-based Applied Analysis, indicated that

about 12 percent of the crowds attending UFC events are local residents, with the other 88 percent coming from out of town.

Swissman is confident the percentage of locals attending the Brooks show will exceed 12 percent, but because of the high volume of attendees at the show, there could be thousands coming to see the country superstar.

“That is still a huge draw for out-of-town people, and obviously the seating capacity is much greater at Allegiant Stadium than T-Mobile as well,” he said. “Those two events alone are going to be bringing a substantial number of folks to the valley.”

Brendan Bussmann, director of government affairs for Las Vegas-based Global Market Advisors, said the heat will be on, both on the Strip and outside this weekend, with the blockbuster entertainment provided by Brooks, Bruno Mars and UFC 264.

“While we are still in recovery mode, it proves the resiliency for the destination and pent-up demand coming out of the pandemic,” Bussmann said.

## **Some voids remain**

Bussmann said there are still a few holes in Southern Nevada’s tourism picture — mostly with meetings and conventions. But the high-profile sports and entertainment scene are off to a great start.

“Sports and entertainment continue to be two strong sectors for the destination,” he said. “This weekend proves that, with T-Mobile Arena and Allegiant Stadium as assets, our ability to grow this sector remains strong.

“But challenges still remain for our recovery, with the biggest hole still being the return of the meeting and convention segment, but visitation continues to remain strong. It is about sustainability and diversity at this point that is the key to our long-term efforts.”

Bussmann also noted the issue of the coronavirus lurking in the background.

“We are on the right track to getting ‘back,’ but rising cases may limit the current trajectory of our recovery,” he said. “No industry has done it better on health and safety measures, but there are still challenges that may arise with potential government mandates that have come back into the conversation recently.”

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