

## WHAT'S GOING THERE

# Buc-ee's in NJ? If it's coming to the land of Wawa and QuickChek, here's what must change

*Four-minute read*



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Just what are your intentions, Buc-ee's?

You put up a billboard on the New Jersey Turnpike advertising that the nearest Buc-ee's is just 581 miles away. Are you teasing us by floating the prospect that Buc-ee's, which has 48 stores across Texas and the South — and a recent addition in Colorado — may one day come to the Garden State?.

What's Going There asked Jeff Nadalo, Buc-ee's spokesman and general counsel: fantasy or eventual reality?

It turns out New Jersey's prohibition against self-serve at the gas pump is a big sticking point. New Jersey is the last full-service-only state in the U.S.

**Why does NJ still ban self-serve gas?** Do you want to pump your own gasoline?

"The challenge is we can't open one until the state changes the rules on fueling," Nadalo replied. "We don't man our pumps."

And a Buc-ee's can have as many as 120 fueling stations. "We wouldn't have enough" workers, Nadalo said. The big convenience store chains battling it out in New Jersey, Wawa and QuickChek, have far fewer pumps. For instance, Wawa on Route 70 in Lakehurst has 12 fuel spots.

**QuickChek or Wawa?** Which one is growing faster in NJ?

Buc-ee's also gravitates to locations along busy highways where they're practically the only game in town, an industry expert said.

"It really needs to be on the side of a busy highway where you want to take a break," said Jeff Lenard, a spokesperson with the National Association of Convenience Stores. "If it's something where you can drive another five miles and find something else, it probably doesn't fit their model, their current model."

The billboard showcases Buc-ee's. With customers crazy for its Beaver Nuggets, which are coated puffed corn, brisket sandwiches, fudge and jerky, Buc-ee's has a cult following. And apparently, it also has cleanest restrooms anywhere. (In 2012, Cintas, which supplies uniforms and cleaning supplies, said Buc-ee's in New Braunfels, Texas had the cleanest restrooms in the nation.)

### **Where's Waffle House?** Chain restaurants missing at Jersey Shore

"Buc-ee's billboards alert those passing southbound that they should consider visiting our award-winning clean restrooms," Nadalo said. "People from New Jersey may not be familiar with our award-winning clean restrooms. Therefore we have billboards to familiarize them for when they travel south."

The billboards are meant to get people to think about Buc-ee's between here and wherever they're going, whether it be Florida, Georgia, South Carolina or Texas. "It's a really effective way to create a buzz in a market where you don't have stores because billboards aren't all that expensive," Lenard said.

Still, retail analyst Burt Flickinger III said Buc-ee's would do pretty well if it came to New Jersey and joined the convenience story fray that's already underway between Wawa and QuickChek. They would compete against Costco Wholesale and BJ's Warehouse Club, giant retailers that pump gas, too.

### **Wawa vs. QuickChek:** NJ death battle grows with stare down at this Freehold corner

As previously noted, Buc-ee's has a large fan base. "It's a following I haven't seen anywhere else other than the followers of Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band," said Flickinger, managing director of Strategic Resource Group in New York City. "Buc-ee's is ... number one in appeal for consumers."

Buc-ee's in New Jersey would "create a lot of excitement and a lot of additional

competition in the marketplace," Flickinger said.

So here's some things you should know about Buc-ee's.

## **The stores are bigger than your Jersey convenience store.**

Buc-ee's stores can be more than 70,000 square feet, Flickinger said.

That's the size of about two Whole Foods supermarkets, Lenard added. "Beyond the restrooms, the conditions and standards for the stores are also best in the USA," Flickinger said. "There's so disciplined from the front of the store to the back of the store."

## **It's not boring. It's an experience.**

"What they've essentially done is they've taken all the things you don't like about road trips, which is stopping to go to the bathroom, getting gas, delaying your arrival because you want to eat and they've made them the things that you want to do," Lenard said.

The parking lot's the size of a mall parking lot, where it's not unusual to take some time to walk to the door. At the entrance, there's a statue of Buc-ee, the company's beaver mascot. When you're inside, you can take a picture with Buc-ee too.

## **There's plenty to buy and see.**

In a traditional convenience store, you'll find food and stuff you to consume immediately. Walk into you a Buc-ee's and you might find a \$1,500 gas grill for sale. "You're just hit by incredible amounts of merchandise, much of it Buc-ee's branded," Lenard said. "You want Buc-ee's lawn chairs, you got them; you want Buc-ee's tee shirts, bathing suits, hats, plush toys, you're going to find them."

## **And then there's the bathrooms.**

Like the gas pumps, there's a lot of them. For instance, in the men's room, there may be three dozen urinals and just as many stalls. "They're really well taken care of," Lenard said.

## **Oh yes, and the food.**

Brisket sandwiches, a wall of beef jerky, roasted nuts, tacos, sausage, wraps, kolaches and

a line of soda dispensers. "It's food theater," Lenard said. "It's a lot to take in. You just have to be ready for it," Lenard said. "If you want dull and quiet, you want to keep driving."

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