

AAA: Projects highest Thanksgiving travel volume in a dozen years

Posted on Thursday, Nov 16, 2017

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MADISON, Wisc. (November 16, 2017) – AAA projects 50.9 million Americans will journey 50 miles or more away from home this Thanksgiving; a 3.3 percent increase over last year. The 2017 holiday weekend will see the most Thanksgiving travelers since 2005, with 1.6 million more people taking to the nation's roads, skies, rails and waterways compared with last year.

“Thanksgiving kicks off the start of what will likely become the busiest holiday season in more than a decade,” said Vicky Evans, Assistant Vice President, Travel Sales Development, AAA – The Auto Club Group. “A strong economy and labor market are generating rising incomes and higher consumer confidence. These factors should help fuel consumer spending and generate a strong finish for the travel industry this year.”

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The Thanksgiving holiday travel period is defined as Wednesday, Nov. 22 to Sunday, Nov. 26.

Wisconsin Forecast:

Total Travelers: Approximately 1,056,000 Wisconsinites will travel 50 miles or more;

an increase of nearly 35,000 people (3.4%) over last year.

Road Trip Ready: Over 945,000 will take a Thanksgiving road trip; an increase of almost 30,000 people (3.3%).

Flying High: Over 82,000 Wisconsinites are forecast to take a flight. That is a 6% increase over last year and the highest number on record for the state.

Alternate Travel: Almost 29,000 will travel by other means like trains, buses, and cruises. The 1.2 percent increase represents 335 more travelers than last year, and the most since 2008.

Fueling Up: Gas prices in Wisconsin averaged \$2.03 heading into the Thanksgiving travel period in 2016. Prices this year are likely to be the highest since 2014, but should be lower than what motorists were paying earlier this month.

National Forecast:

Road Trippers: 89 percent of all travelers –45.5 million– are planning a Thanksgiving road trip; an increase of 1.6 million people (3.2%) over last year.

Cheaper Airfare: Consumers will pay the cheapest average airfare since 2013. View the pricing index

Fuller Skies: The largest growth in holiday travel is by air travel, at 5 percent, with 3.95 million travelers.

Alternate Travel: Travel by trains and other modes (including buses and cruises) is expected to increase 1.1 percent to 1.48 million travelers.

Fueling Up: Drivers will pay the highest Thanksgiving gas prices since 2015.

Holiday High: Car rental daily rates will hit a five-year holiday high at \$70/day due to an increase in domestic demand and cost of newer vehicles.

Travelers still hitting the road despite higher gas prices

“AAA forecasts drivers will pay the highest Thanksgiving gas prices since 2014, thanks to strong demand and high oil prices,” said Nick Jarmusz, spokesman, AAA-The Auto Club Group. “Although it will be more expensive to drive compared to recent years, the current price is not high enough to be a deterrent for travelers.

Motorists should see some relief at the pump before the holiday. Oil prices have begun retreat from 2-year highs, which should allow gas prices to start drifting lower by the time people set out for their destination.

Highs and Lows: Car Rentals, Hotel Rates, and Airfares

According to AAA's Leisure Travel Index:

Travelers taking to the skies will pay the lowest average in five years for a round-trip flight for the top 40 domestic routes. At \$157, on average, that is a 23 percent fare drop year-over-year.

Travelers can expect to spend any 'flight savings' on car rentals. At \$70/day, the daily car rental average is 34 percent more than last year and the highest rate for Thanksgiving weekend since 2013.

Travelers will pay more for AAA Three Diamond Rated hotels this holiday weekend. The average price increased by 14 percent to \$176/night. Conversely, the average rate for a AAA Two Diamond Rated hotel has decreased 5 percent with an average nightly cost of \$117.

Top Ten Thanksgiving Destinations

Many travelers will seek theme-park and warm-weather destinations this Thanksgiving. Both Orlando, Florida, and Anaheim, California, top this year's top 10 holiday destinations based on AAA.com bookings. Compared to previous years, New York City, Las Vegas and San Francisco are gaining popularity as holiday hot spots.

Orlando, Florida

Anaheim, California

New York City, New York

Honolulu, Hawaii

Las Vegas, Nevada

Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

Cancun, Mexico

San Francisco, California

Kahului, Maui, Hawaii

Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Cruise Ships Return to Key Caribbean Ports

Just in time for the holidays, cruise ships will return to three of the most popular Caribbean cruise ports affected by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Sailings to St. Thomas and San Juan are resuming this month, while St. Maarten is scheduled to re-open in December. According to the Cruise Lines International Association, 87 percent of the nearly 100 cruise ports in the Caribbean are open, including the one in Key West.

"This is great news for both the cruise passengers who love these destinations, and for the islands themselves which rely on tourism to support their local economies,"

Evans continued. "Being on a cruise ship may not seem like a traditional way to spend the holidays, but is actually very popular when you consider that the entire family can travel together, without worrying about all the cooking and cleanup."

Top 5 Busiest Airports for Car Rentals

According to Hertz, the busiest airport pick-up locations for travelers planning to rent a car this Thanksgiving are expected to be Orlando (MCO), Los Angeles (LAX), Miami (MIA), Las Vegas (LAS) and Fort Lauderdale (FLL). The busiest day for rental pick-ups is expected to be Wednesday, Nov. 22, with an average rental length of nearly five full days, as travelers look to take advantage of the long holiday weekend.

330,000 Motorists Will Have Car Trouble

AAA expects to rescue more than 330,000 motorists this Thanksgiving weekend, with the primary reasons being lockouts, flat tires and battery-related issues. AAA recommends motorists have their vehicles inspected by a trusted repair shop, such as one of the more than 7,000 AAA Approved Auto Repair facilities across North America. Members can download the AAA Mobile app, visit AAA.com or call 1-800-AAA-HELP to request roadside assistance.

Download the AAA Mobile app before a Thanksgiving getaway

Before setting out for the long Thanksgiving weekend, download the free AAA Mobile app for iPhone, iPad and Android. Travelers can use the app to map a route, find the lowest gas prices, access exclusive member discounts, make travel arrangements, request AAA roadside assistance, find AAA Approved Auto Repair facilities and more. Learn more at AAA.com/mobile.

With the AAA Mobile app, travelers can also find nearly 59,000 AAA Diamond Rated hotels and restaurants. AAA's is the only rating system that uses full-time, professionally trained evaluators to inspect each property on an annual basis. Every AAA Inspected & Approved establishment offers the assurance of acceptable cleanliness, comfort and hospitality, and ratings of One to Five Diamonds help travelers find the right match for amenities and services.

About the AAA travel forecast:

AAA's projections are based on economic forecasting and research by IHS Markit. The London-based business information provider teamed with AAA in 2009 to jointly analyze travel trends during major holidays. AAA has been reporting on holiday travel trends for more than two decades. The complete AAA/IHS Markit 2017

Thanksgiving holiday travel forecast is available here.

As North America's largest motoring and leisure travel organization, AAA provides nearly 58 million members with travel, insurance, financial and automotive-related services. Since its founding in 1902, the not-for-profit, fully tax-paying AAA has been a leader and advocate for the safety and security of all travelers. Motorists can map a route, identify gas prices, find discounts, book a hotel and access AAA roadside assistance with the AAA Mobile app for iPhone, iPad and Android. Learn more at AAA.com/mobile. AAA clubs can be visited on the Internet at AAA.com.