

Record-Breaking 107 Million Americans to Celebrate Holidays Away From Home

'Tis the season to spend with family and friends, and this year Americans are traveling in record numbers.

AAA forecasts 107.3 million people will take to planes, trains, automobiles and other modes of transportation during the year-end holiday period from Saturday, Dec. 23 through Monday, Jan. 1. This will be the highest year-end travel volume on record and a 3.1 percent increase in travel volume compared with last year.

2017 marks the ninth consecutive year of rising year-end holiday travel. Since 2005, total year-end holiday travel volume has grown by 21.6 million, an increase of more than 25 percent. Throughout the year travel has increased for every major holiday weekend – Memorial Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving – and AAA projects the same for the year-end holiday period.

"Overall, our research shows that Americans are doing better than last year and want to go somewhere for the holidays," said Vicky Evans, Assistant Vice President, AAA Travel. "Whether they are going home or visiting a new destination, Americans have more money to finance their travel plans, thanks to a stronger economy and growing consumer confidence.

"Depending on where your travels take you, consider using a travel agent to plan your final trip of the year," Evans continued. "Of course, winter weather can be unpredictable, and cause unexpected issues like flight delays or cancellations. If that happens to you, the right travel insurance plan will help offset out-of-pocket expenses."

By the Numbers

- **All Travel Modes:** 107.3 million Americans will travel 50 miles or more (3.2 million more than last year)
- **Automobiles:** The majority of travelers - 97.4 million - will hit the road (a 3 percent year-over-year increase)
- **Planes:** 6.4 million people will travel by air, a 4.1 percent increase and the fourth year of consecutive air travel volume increases
- **Trains, Buses, Rails and Cruise Ships:** Travel across these sectors will increase by 2.2 percent to 3.6 million

Headache Hot Spots

For the 97.4 million Americans traveling by automobile, INRIX, a global transportation analytics company, in collaboration with AAA, predicts travel times during the holiday week could be as much as three times longer than the normal trip.

Based on historical and recent travel trends, INRIX expects drivers will experience the greatest amount of congestion before the holiday week – on Wednesday, Dec. 20 and Thursday, Dec. 21 – in the late afternoon as commuters leave work early and mix with holiday travelers.

"With record-level travelers hitting the road this holiday, drivers must be prepared for delays in major metros," says Dr. Graham Cookson, chief economist & head of research at INRIX. "Our advice to drivers is to avoid peak times altogether or consider alternative routes."

Top 10 - Worst Days/Times to Travel

Metro Area	Worst Day for Travel	Worst Time for Travel	Delay Multiplier
New York, NY	Wednesday, Dec. 20	3:30 - 5:30 p.m.	3x
Los Angeles, CA	Wednesday, Dec. 20	3:30 - 6:00 p.m.	2.5x
Washington, DC	Thursday, Dec. 21	3:00 - 6:00 p.m.	2.5x
San Francisco, CA	Wednesday, Dec. 20	3:00 - 5:30 p.m.	2x
Chicago, IL	Thursday, Dec. 21	4:00 - 6:00 p.m.	2x
Boston, MA	Thursday, Dec. 21	2:30 - 4:30 p.m.	2x
Seattle, WA	Thursday, Dec. 21	4:00 - 6:00 p.m.	2x
Atlanta, GA	Thursday, Dec. 21	4:30 - 6:30 p.m.	1.5x
Houston, TX	Wednesday, Dec. 20	5:30 - 7:30 p.m.	1.5x
Detroit, MI	Thursday, Dec. 21	3:00 - 5:30 p.m.	1.5x

Travel Tip: Try to avoid traveling through major cities during peak travel times. The best times to leave are typically early morning or after the morning commute because the roads should be less crowded and you will have more time to get to your destination safely. If your schedule permits, traveling on the holiday itself often results in fewer cars on the road.

Travel Expenses

The 90 percent of holiday travelers choosing to drive will find the most expensive year-end gas prices since 2014. The current national average is \$2.44, which is 22 cents more than last year. The North Dakota average stands at \$2.49, 38 cents more than last year. AAA does expect the North Dakota average to fall 10 cents or more by year-end, saving motorists a few pennies at the pump.

Airfares - Holiday airfares are nearly 20 percent cheaper than last year. At \$165, the average end of year holiday airfare for a round-trip flight for the top 40 domestic routes is at a five-year low, according to AAA's Leisure Travel Index. On average, 2017 airfares are 5 percent less expensive compared to 2016. Overall, competition, capacity over-expansion and lower oil prices are contributing to the decline.

Hotels - Travelers can also find savings at AAA Two and Three Diamond Rated hotels. On average, a Three Diamond hotel nightly rate is \$156, a two percent year-over-year decrease. The Two Diamond nightly average rate is \$121, a five percent decrease from last year.

Rental Cars - Similar to Thanksgiving, car rental rates are more expensive on the year. At \$74, the daily car rental rate increased 11 percent. This sets a new five-year record high rate for year-end holiday travel. The increase is on par with the rate increases seen at Thanksgiving.

Top Destinations

For a second year, Orlando, Florida, and Anaheim, California, top this year's top 10 holiday

destinations based on AAA.com bookings. Warmer weather destinations reign supreme in winter months with Cancun, Kahului (Maui) and Montego Bay gaining in popularity as holiday spots compared with last year.

1. Orlando, Florida
2. Anaheim, California
3. Cancun, Mexico
4. Honolulu, Hawaii
5. Kahului (Maui), Hawaii
6. Montego Bay, Jamaica
7. Punta Cana, Dominican Republic
8. Miami, Florida
9. Fort Lauderdale, Florida
10. New York, New York

Travel Tip: Airports will be busy and security lines may be longer than usual around the holidays. Travelers should plan to arrive at the airport at least two hours prior to the scheduled departure of their flight. During peak travel times, contact your airline for guidance, as it may be necessary to arrive even earlier. This time of year travelers need to also be aware of potential weather delays. Make sure to check flight status regularly before traveling to the airport. To expedite travel, AAA recommends enrolling in programs such as TSA PreCheck and Global Entry.

Stranded Motorists

The vast majority of holiday travelers will drive to their destinations, and AAA expects to rescue nearly one million (901,600) motorists. Car battery-related issues, lockouts and flat tires will be the leading reasons AAA is called for roadside assistance over the holidays. For members in need of roadside assistance, download the [AAA Mobile app](#), visit [AAA.com](#) or call 1-800-AAA-HELP. For added convenience, Wazers can now request AAA roadside assistance directly from the Waze app by tapping the Report menu.

Before hitting the road, make sure your vehicle is road-trip ready. Stop by a trusted repair shop, such as one of the more than 7,000 [AAA Approved Auto Repair](#) facilities across North America, for an inspection. In case of an emergency, be prepared by keeping a cell phone and charger with you at all times. Carry an emergency kit with a flashlight, extra batteries, warning devices such as flares or reflective triangles, jumper cables, a first-aid kit and extra water.

Travel Tip: Get plenty of rest before setting out on a holiday road trip and schedule breaks every two hours or 100 miles to remain alert and avoid driving drowsy. Also, be aware of the dangers of driving distracted. Drivers should designate a passenger to serve as their official text messenger and navigator.

AAA Mobile App

Before heading out on your year-end holiday road trip, 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.