

## AAA Says Busiest Fourth of July Travel Weekend Ever

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This year, the 50th Anniversary of the Interstate Highway System will kick off a record Fourth of July holiday weekend. AAA estimates that 40.7 million Americans will travel 50 miles or more from home this holiday, a 1.2 percent increase from the 40.2 million who traveled last year.

Of those travelers, about 85 percent will travel by car on our national interstate and local road way system this weekend.

"Vacation travel has changed dramatically in the past 50 years and this will be no more apparent than during this holiday weekend, which is the biggest vacation travel weekend of the summer," said Robert Darbelnet, AAA President and CEO. "American vacationers did not have the myriad of highways, hotels, restaurants and attractions that exist today."

Thursday will mark the 50th anniversary of the Interstate Highway System which was created when President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Federal Aid Highway Act on June 29, 1956.

This weekend approximately 34.3 million travelers expect to go by motor vehicle, a 1.3 percent increase from the 33.8 million who drove a year ago. Another 4.6 million plan to travel by airplane, the same number flying last Fourth of July.

Darbelnet noted this weekend's drivers will have a much different travel experience than the first highway adventurers 50 years ago. Today's highway vacationers will be paying \$2.86 a gallon for gas compared to 22 cents a gallon in 1956 and the average hotel rate will be \$96.08 a night compared to \$8.86 in 1956. Niagara Falls was the top vacation destination in the U.S. in 1956; today it is Orlando, according to AAA.

The greatest number of Fourth of July auto travelers will originate in the Southeast with 8.8 million, followed by the West with 8.5 million; Midwest, 6.6 million; Northeast, 5.7 million; and Great Lakes, 4.7 million.

The West is expected to produce the largest number of air travelers with 1.7 million, followed by the Midwest and Southeast at 800,000 each; Northeast, 700,000; and Great Lakes, 600,000.

It is no surprise that ocean and beach vacations top the list of preferred destinations this holiday with 22 percent of travelers saying they will be taking a water-based vacation. Small towns and rural areas was the next popular destination, with 21 percent and cities were third at 19 percent. Ten percent of travelers will head to the lake areas, and 5 percent to the mountains.

If you haven't made your hotel reservations, AAA notes it might be challenging to find rooms available. More than one quarter of the total Fourth of July travelers expect to stay at a hotel or motel. Forty percent of travelers expect to stay with friends or relatives. Look for AAA Approved and Diamond rated properties to ensure that your accommodations meet strict quality standards.

Holiday auto travelers will find an average gas price of \$2.86 -- down three cents from a month ago and about 72 cents higher than a year ago. Gasoline prices, which have so far resisted the broad decline in stock and commodity prices of recent weeks, could soon be moving a bit lower, AAA said. To save on gas, millions of Americans go online to AAA's FuelCostCalculator (<http://www.fuelcostcalculator.com>). The tool helps drivers plan out their fuel costs so they can budget their travel expenses in advance.

AAA's Leisure Travel Index shows other vacation costs up somewhat from Fourth of July 2005. Hotel rates are up slightly, averaging 10 percent higher for AAA-Rated Three Diamond hotels for the 20 top destinations used in the comparison. Two Diamond properties will show a 6 percent increase in prices. Airfares are up 7 percent and car rental rates are up 5 percent.

AAA says it has played a major role over the past five decades in making highway travel more convenient for vacation travelers. And today's travelers can benefit from online mapping services such as AAA.com TripTik(C) routings used by millions of Americans who go online to map out their summer vacation road trip before they leave home. In addition, many Americans have continued to rely on AAA TourBook guides over the years as a comprehensive travel source with thousands of AAA Diamond rated hotels and restaurants plus attractions, events and destinations.

Research for holiday travel is based on a survey of 1,500 adults by the Travel Industry Association, which conducts special research for AAA. The survey was conducted in May 2006.

*As North America's largest motoring and leisure travel organization, AAA provides more than 48 million members with travel, insurance, financial and automotive-related services, as well as member-exclusive savings. 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.*

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