

# More people expected to travel during Thanksgiving holiday

AAA forecasts 42.5 million Americans will travel 50 miles or more from home during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend (Nov. 23-27), a 4 percent increase from the 40.9 million people who traveled last year.

“This is the first significant increase in any holiday travel this year,” Bill Sutherland, vice president of AAA Travel Services, said in a press release. “Memorial Day travel was statistically flat, while Independence Day and Labor Day travel experienced decreases of 2.5 percent and 2.4 percent, respectively.”



Expect the roads to full with Thanksgiving travelers.  
Photo/LTN file

With volumes still below historical averages, pent-up demand will be a contributing factor in increased holiday travel, despite current economic conditions.

Approximately 38.2 million people (90 percent of holiday travelers) plan to take to the nation's roadways this

Thanksgiving holiday weekend, a 4 percent increase compared to Thanksgiving 2010 when auto travelers totaled 36.8 million. Automobile travel remains the preferred choice of transportation for holiday travelers as it is often more affordable, convenient and flexible. The current national average price for regular unleaded gasoline is approximately \$3.39 per gallon, about 50 cents more than one year ago. However, the national average price is about 60 cents less than this year's peak price of \$3.98 on May 5.

Almost 3.4 million leisure travelers (8 percent of holiday travelers) will fly during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, a 1.8 percent increase from 2010. Fuel costs, combined with steady air travel demand and capacity cuts have resulted in rising airfares over the past year. According to AAA's Leisure Travel Index, Thanksgiving airfares are expected to be 20 percent higher than last year, with an average lowest roundtrip rate of \$212 for the top 40 U.S. air routes. The combination of higher fares and lower availability of seats is expected to limit air travel growth this holiday to less than half of total traveler growth.

Other modes of travel (bus, trains, watercraft, multi-modal travel) will make up the remaining two percent of the total person-trips, with just over 900,000 people expected to travel by these modes, 14.7 percent higher than in 2010.

Hotel rates for AAA Three Diamond or mid-range lodgings are expected to increase 6 percent from one year ago with travelers spending an average of \$145 per night compared to \$136 last year. Travelers planning to stay at AAA Two Diamond hotels can expect to pay 7 percent more at an average cost of \$103 per night. Weekend daily car rental rates will average \$37, an 11 percent decrease from one year ago.

According to a survey of traveler intentions, the average distance traveled by Americans during the Thanksgiving holiday is expected to be 706 miles, which is a decline of 13.5

percent from last year when travelers planned to log an average of 816 miles. Median spending is expected to be \$554, which is a 12 percent increase from \$495 last year. However, Thanksgiving holiday travel is typically less expensive than other travel holidays because of the emphasis on the Thanksgiving meal and gathering of friends and family. Fuel and transportation costs combine to consume the largest share of holiday spending (33 percent), followed by shopping (18 percent) and food and beverages (18 percent). Other expenditures include accommodations (16 percent), entertainment and recreation (12 percent), and other costs (3 percent).