

More people expected to travel at the holidays this year

AAA projects 93.3 million Americans will journey 50 miles or more from home during the year-end holidays, an increase of 1.6 percent from the 91.8 million people who traveled last year.

This increase brings holiday travel figures to within half a million of the decade high mark seen during the 2006-07 season. The period is defined as Dec. 22-Jan. 1.

Ninety percent of travelers (84.4 million) are expected to travel by automobile, representing 26.7 percent of the total U.S. population. Holiday air travel expected to increase 4.5 percent to 5.6 million travelers from 5.4 million in 2011.

AAA estimates the national average price of gasoline will slowly drop through the end of the year and average between \$3.20-\$3.40 a gallon by New Year's Day. Gas prices dropped about 50 cents a gallon on average from September through early December, but remain at record highs for this time of year. AAA does not expect gas prices to have a major impact on travel volume, but consumers could have more money to spend on holiday shopping, dining and entertainment if prices drop through December as expected.

According to AAA's Leisure Travel Index, year-end holiday hotel rates for AAA Three Diamond lodgings are expected to increase 2 percent from a year ago, with travelers spending an average of \$129 per night compared to \$126 last year. Travelers planning to stay at AAA Two Diamond hotels can expect to pay 3 percent more, at an average cost of \$95 per night.