



News Release

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SLIGHT INCREASE IN THANKSGIVING TRAVEL EXPECTED FOR 2012, AAA SAYS

Holiday travel continues a slow, but steady climb from 2008 level with 43.6 million Americans expected to take Thanksgiving trips

VIRGINIA BEACH, VA, (Nov. 13, 2012) – AAA projects 43.6 million Americans will journey 50 miles or more from home during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend; an increase of 0.7 percent over the 43.3 million people who traveled last year. This marks the fourth consecutive year of increase in holiday travelers since 2008 when Thanksgiving travel fell by 25 percent. The Thanksgiving holiday travel period is defined as Wednesday, Nov. 21 to Sunday, Nov. 25.

Highlights from this year's 2012 AAA Thanksgiving Holiday Travel Forecast include:

- Thanksgiving travelers to total 43.6 million, an increase of 0.7 percent from the 43.3 million who traveled last year.
- Ninety percent of travelers or 39.1 million to travel by automobile, an increase of 0.6 percent.
- Holiday air travel to decline to 3.14 million travelers from 3.2 million in 2011.
- Median spending expected to drop 10 percent to \$498, compared to \$554 last year. Spending remains consistent with historic averages as Americans continue to prioritize travel while finding ways to economize.
- Average distance traveled to decline to 588 miles from 706 miles, due in part to a decrease in the number of air travelers and Americans desire to economize budgets.
- Despite mild improvements in unemployment, the housing market and greater consumer optimism, the economy is still struggling to keep its head above water.

Highlights from Virginia's Thanksgiving Holiday Forecast include:

- *Virginia travel expected to total 1.24 million almost equal to 2011 actual travel numbers.*
- *Ninety-one percent of Virginians expected to travel by automobile.*
- *Holiday air travel expected to decline to 86,829 travelers from 89,277 in 2011.*
- *Gas prices in the Commonwealth are averaging \$3.26 for self-serve unleaded, which is 34 cents or 11% lower than last month and 4 cents lower than one year ago.*

"Thanksgiving travel hit a decade low in 2008 when only 37.8 million Americans traveled," said Georjeane Blumling, spokesperson for AAA Tidewater. "Since that year we have seen a steady increase in the number of travelers taking to the roads and skies for the holiday. Americans continue to find ways to economize their budgets so they can gather around the holiday table to carve the turkey."

"While we do not yet know the full impact that Hurricane Sandy will have on travel from the Mid-Atlantic region, we do know that the impact for many Americans in that region is substantial," continued Blumling.

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Impact of gasoline prices on travel plans

AAA estimates the national average price of gasoline will drop to between \$3.25-3.40 a gallon by the holiday, similar to last year's average of \$3.32, which was the most expensive average ever on Thanksgiving. Despite the historically high prices paid by motorists this year, the national average has declined by nearly .40 cents a gallon since early October and should continue to drop through the end of the year. **In Virginia the average price has declined by .42 cents from a Mid-September 2012 high of \$3.71.** The national average price of gas for Thanksgiving from 2007-2011 was \$2.75 a gallon. **The average price of gas in the Commonwealth for Thanksgiving from 2007 – 2011 was \$2.65 per gallon.**

Wednesday before the holiday is expected to be busiest travel day

The Thanksgiving holiday is unique falling on a Thursday every year. Many people are off from work the Friday after, giving travelers the opportunity to spend more time with family and friends. AAA asked intended travelers which days they would depart for and return from Thanksgiving Travel. Among those surveyed, the majority of travelers plan to leave the Wednesday before the holiday (45 percent) and return the following Sunday (36 percent) with another 25 percent expecting to return on Monday, Nov. 26.

Automobile travel remains a dominant mode of transportation while air travel decreases

Approximately 90 percent of travelers or 39.1 million people plan to travel by automobile this Thanksgiving. This is a 0.6 percent increase over the 38.9 million people who traveled by auto last year. Air travel is expected to decrease 1.7 percent as 3.14 million holiday travelers will take to the skies.

Those traveling by air will find lower airfares according to AAA's Leisure travel Index. For the Thanksgiving holiday, the average lowest round-trip rate is \$188 for the top 40 U.S. air routes, an 11 percent decrease from last year. Approximately 1.3 million travelers will choose other modes of transportation, including rail, bus and cruise ship.

Hotel rates relatively flat, car rental rates increase 27 percent

According to AAA's Leisure Travel Index, Thanksgiving holiday hotel rates for AAA Three Diamond lodgings are expected to decrease one percent from a year ago, with travelers spending an average of \$143 per night compared to \$145 last year. Travelers planning to stay at AAA Two Diamond hotels can expect to pay 1 percent more, at an average cost of \$104 per night. Weekend daily car rental rates will average \$47, compared to \$37 last year.

Average travel distance decreases

According to the survey of intended travelers, the average distance traveled by Americans during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend is expected to be 588 miles, which is a decline of 16.7 percent from last year when travelers planned to log 706 miles.

Median spending down 10 percent; visiting family, dining and shopping top activities

Median spending is expected to be \$498, a 10 percent decrease compared to the expected median spending of intended holiday travelers (\$554) in 2011.

While spending time with friends and relatives and dining are primary activities for nearly all holidays, it is even more relevant for Thanksgiving travelers. Therefore, it is not surprising that

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spending time with family and friends (75 percent) and dining (56 percent) are the most popular activities planned by travelers. Despite lower median spending, half of all travelers (50 percent) plan to shop during the holiday which can be expected given Black Friday occurs during the holiday weekend.

AAA offers digital travel planning resources

AAA's digital tools for travel planning 'on the go' include eTourBook guides for 101 top North American destinations, free to members at AAA.com/ebooks. Choose from city titles, like Orlando, New York and the award-winning Las Vegas, as well as National Parks.

The free AAA Mobile app for iPhone and Android devices uses GPS navigation to help travelers map a route, find current gas prices and nearby member discounts and access AAA roadside assistance. Travelers can learn about the AAA Mobile app and AAA Mobile Web at AAA.com/mobile.

On AAA.com travelers can find thousands of AAA Approved and Diamond Rated hotels and restaurants using AAA's TripTik Travel Planner or the searchable Travel Guides at AAA.com/Travel. Every AAA 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.

AAA's projections are based on economic forecasting and research by IHS Global Insight. The Colorado-based business information provider teamed with AAA in 2009 to jointly analyze travel trends during the major holidays. AAA has been reporting on holiday travel trends for more than two decades. The complete AAA / IHS Global Insight 2012 Thanksgiving Holiday Travel Forecast can be found at NewsRoom.AAA.com.

As part of North America's largest motoring and leisure travel organization, AAA Tidewater Virginia provides its more than 325,000 members with travel, insurance, financial and automotive-related services. Since its founding AAA Tidewater Virginia has been a leader and advocate for the safety and security of all travelers. For more information, visit AAA.com and follow us on Twitter at [Twitter.com/AAATWnews](https://twitter.com/AAATWnews).

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