

Record high gas prices won't deter Thanksgiving travel

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Travelers this Thanksgiving are facing record high gas prices for November but that will not keep them from seeing friends and family this holiday. AAA estimates that 38.7 million Americans will travel 50 miles or more from home this holiday, a modest 1.5 percent increase from last year's 38.1 million travelers.

"This is the first time ever the average price of gas in Oregon has been higher than \$3.16 a gallon in November. But Thanksgiving is traditionally a time for family gatherings, and those higher gas prices won't keep people from seeing their loved ones or heading to Grandma's house for the big turkey dinner," says AAA Oregon Public Affairs Director Marie Dodds. This is consistent with historical data, which shows that high gas prices do not generally keep people from traveling by car.

While travelers will be paying more at the pump, they will be getting a break in other areas of their travel budget this holiday. Following steep increases last year, hotels, airfares and car rental prices are all either flat or showing a drop in price, according to AAA's Leisure Travel Index. Compared to last year, holiday hotel rates are down three percent for AAA-Rated Three Diamond hotels, after a significant increase last year. Rates at AAA Two Diamond hotels are up by only one percent this holiday. Expect lower rates for rental cars, as well, with an average decrease of 12 percent. With an average seven percent decrease from last year, airline passengers will be getting a bit of a break this holiday.

Approximately 31.2 million travelers (80 percent of all holiday travelers) expect to go by motor vehicle, a 1.3 percent increase from the 30.8 million who drove in 2006. "Our advice for travelers this holiday season is to do your homework before you fill your tank for your Thanksgiving excursion. AAA.com can be a great resource," says Dodds. Travelers can use AAA's free website to get an estimate of how much money they will be spending on gas during their trip. Also, AAA.com now provides the locations and prices for more than

100,000 gas stations in the U.S. so long distance travelers can know in advance where to find the cheapest fuel along their route.

AAA expects 4.7 million Americans (12.1 percent of holiday travelers) to travel by airplane, up 2.2 percent from last Thanksgiving holiday. A projected 2.8 million travelers will go by train, bus, or other mode of transportation.

This holiday season AAA collected additional demographic information on holiday travelers and found some interesting results. The largest portion of holiday travelers, 43.3 percent, will travel with two to three other people from the same household, while 21.8 percent will be traveling with four or more people from their household. Another 34.8 percent will be traveling alone or with one other person from their household.

Survey data for this holiday also shows that people with children tend to travel with them. Of families with children, 71.1 percent will be taking their kids with them and 28.9 percent will be traveling without them. The region with the greatest percentage of family travelers is the West at 79.8 percent; followed by the Midwest at 74.2 percent; the Southeast at 68.5 percent and the Northeast at 65 percent. In terms on income, 44.3 percent of holiday travelers say they earn \$40,000 or less, 32 percent earn between \$40,000 and \$75,000 and 23.4 percent earn \$75,000 or more. Nearly 60 percent (59.4 percent) of travelers this holiday are married and 18.9 percent are single with the remainder falling into other categories. Finally, 40 percent will be coming from big cities, 23.7 percent from the suburbs and 35.5 from rural areas of the U.S.

The greatest number of Thanksgiving auto travelers will originate in the Southeast with 9 million, followed by the West, 7.1 million; Midwest, 6.6 million; the Great Lakes, 6.2 million; and the Northeast, 2.4 million.

The Southeast is expected to produce the largest number of air travelers with 1.3 million, followed closely by the West which expects 1.2 million air travelers. The Midwest comes next with 783,000; then the Northeast with 769,000; and Great Lakes with 646,000.

Traditionally Thanksgiving is a time for people to visit friends and family, so as expected the vast majority of this year's travelers expect to stay at a friend or relative's home. Hotels and motels are usually the second choice of lodging for Thanksgiving travelers followed by cabin/condo and camper/trailer/RV/tent.

Research for Thanksgiving holiday travel is based on a national web survey of 2,200 adults by the Travel Industry Association, which conducts special research for AAA. The survey was conducted October 22-26, 2007.

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