AAA: High gas prices won't stop travelers

by Bend Weekly Sources

Travel will be up slightly this Memorial Day holiday despite high gas prices and increasing vacation costs, according to AAA. AAA estimates that 37.6 million Americans will travel 50 miles or more from home this holiday, a 0.9 percent increase from last year.

Approximately 31.4 million travelers (84 percent of all holiday travelers) expect to go by motor vehicle, a 0.7 percent increase from the 31.2 million who drove a year ago. Another 4.3 million (11 percent of holiday travelers) plan to travel by airplane, up 1.5 percent from last Memorial Day. A projected 1.9 million (5 percent of holiday travelers) vacationers will travel by train, bus, or other mode of transportation, about even with a year ago.

"High gas prices and increased vacation costs aren't deterring Americans from traveling," said Beth Van Horn, AAA Oregon Senior Vice President, Travel Services. "Families may travel closer to home or for fewer days, but they'll continue to take vacations and plan getaways. According to Auto Travel Counselor Joseph McMahon, requests for TripTiksÂ® and trip planning assistance have been steady and increasing daily as summer approaches."

Holiday motorists will find gas prices nationwide currently averaging $2.93 for a gallon of regular-up 17 cents from a month ago and more than 75 cents higher than one year ago. In Oregon, regular gasoline currently averages $3.08, 39-cents higher than a month ago and 65-cents higher than a year ago.

Air travelers will pay more to fly this Memorial Day weekend. AAA's Leisure Travel Index shows airfares averaging 10 percent higher than last year, pushed upward by fewer seats and higher fuel costs. Hotel rates are up about 5% from a year ago. The greatest increase, however, is in rental car rates-about 19 percent higher than a year ago-adding almost $6 to the average daily car rental rate, the highest average rate for Memorial Day weekend in the past six years.

Van Horn says, "Although airfares are up, travelers should expect full planes and busy airports not only for the Memorial Day weekend but throughout the summer."

AAA's travel agents continue to see increased interest in summer travel compared to a year ago, especially in international travel. In addition, cruise sales for AAA travel agencies are up 4.7 percent, online bookings have increased 35 percent and sales of trip insurance are up 4 percent during the same period last year.

The greatest number of Memorial Day auto travelers will originate in the West with 7.5 million travelers, followed by the Southeast with 6.9 million; Midwest, 6.7 million; Northeast, 5.8 million; and Great Lakes, 4.6 million.

The West is expected to produce the largest number of air travelers with 1.4 million, followed by the Midwest with 1.2 million; Southeast, 853,000; Northeast, 555,000; and Great Lakes, 400,000.

Cities top the list of preferred destinations this holiday with 23 percent of travel volume. Small towns and rural areas took a close second with 22 percent, followed by ocean/beach at 16 percent; mountain areas, 8 percent; and lakes, 13 percent. State/national parks, 1 percent, and theme/amusement parks, 6 percent rounded out the list. Another 10 percent responded with other, and 2 percent said they didn't know.

Guest bedrooms across the country will be full this Memorial Day holiday as 41 percent of travelers expect to stay with friends or relatives. Hotel/motels rank second with 35 percent; followed by cabin/condo, 8 percent; no overnight stay, 7 percent; and camper/trailer/RV/tent, 5 percent. Another 1 percent responded with other and 2 percent didn't know.

Research for Memorial Day travel is based on a national survey of 1,500 adults by the Travel Industry Association of American, which conducts special research for AAA.

For a comparison of fuel prices across the nation, go to the AAA Fuel Price Finder at www.aaa.com.

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