

Christmas-New Year's Holiday Travel to Increase 2.2 Percent

by Bend Weekly News Sources

More Americans will travel this Christmas-New Year's holiday than ever before. AAA estimates that 64.9 million Americans will travel 50 miles or more from home during the holidays, a 2.2 percent increase from last year's 63.5 million travelers.

"Because hotel rates and air fares have risen only slightly from this time last year, Americans will not hold back when making travel arrangements this holiday season," said AAA Oregon Senior Vice President Beth Van Horn. "This Christmas-New Year's holiday travel closes the books on a very robust year for the travel industry in the Pacific Northwest."

Approximately 52.6 million travelers (81 percent of all holiday travelers) expect to go by motor vehicle, a 2.1 percent increase from the 51.5 million who drove a year ago.

Another 9 million (nearly 14 percent of holiday travelers) plan to travel by airplane, up 2.7 percent from the 8.7 million that flew over the holidays last year. A projected 3.3 million travelers (5 percent) will go by train, bus, or other mode of transportation, up slightly from 3.21 million a year ago.

"Airports will be busy this December as Americans visit family and take end of the year vacations to beaches, ski slopes, cruise ships and more," said Van Horn. "We encourage travelers to make their Christmas-New Year's plans early, since waiting until the last minute will result in higher rates and fewer options."

According to AAA's Leisure Travel Index, Christmas hotel rates are up 4 percent for AAA-rated Three Diamond hotels, as strong demand allows hoteliers to raise rates. Airfares basically stayed even while rental car rates dropped an average 3 percent from their prices last Christmas.

Travelers during the New Year holiday also will be rewarded with airfares two percent lower and no increase in hotel rates from last New Year. But rental car rates will be about five percent higher than one year ago.

The greatest number of Christmas-New Year auto travelers will originate in the Southeast with 13.8 million, followed by the West, 13.2 million; Midwest, 10.2 million; the Great Lakes, 8.3 million; and the Northeast, 7.2 million.

The Southeast also will produce the largest number of air travelers, 2.7 million, followed closely by the West with 2.5 million; then the Northeast with 1.8 million; Midwest with 1 million; and Great Lakes with 924,000.

Sixty-six percent of holiday travelers expect to stay at a friend or relative's home. Hotels and motels are a distant second at 19.7 percent, followed by cabin/condo, 2.4 percent; camper/trailer/RV/tent, 1.9 percent; other, 1.8 percent; no overnight stay, 5.1 percent; and didn't know, 1.3 percent.

Small towns and rural areas are the expected destinations for 37.6 percent of holiday travelers, followed by cities, 35.3 percent. Oceans and beaches should see 10.1 percent of travelers, followed by mountain areas, 6.5 percent; theme/amusement parks, 3.9 percent; 0.7 percent for lake areas, and 0.1 percent for state/national parks. Another 4.7 percent responded with other and 1.2 percent didn't know.

Research for Christmas-New Year's holiday travel is based on a national telephone survey of 2,000 adults by the Travel Industry Association of America, which conducts special research for AAA.

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