

Americans cautiously making vacation plans through end of the year, survey shows

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The great American road trip is the most popular way to travel this fall.

A new AAA survey finds that three out of 10 Americans are planning a vacation before the end of the year, and 80 percent of those will go by car. Not surprisingly, the top destinations are those known for outdoor recreation and socially distanced activities as travelers hit the road during the coronavirus pandemic.

Travelers can find the latest COVID-19 travel restrictions at [AAA.com/covidmap](https://www.aaa.com/covidmap). Just click on the destination you'd like to visit for the latest information. AAA advises travelers to take proper precautions to help keep themselves and others safe while away from home.

The AAA survey finds that 23 percent plan to fly to a domestic destination, and eight percent plan to fly to an international destination.

Two-thirds (67%) of U.S. adults planning a vacation before the end of the year report some degree of uncertainty they will actually be able to take their vacation. As a result, some are opting for spur-of-the-moment travel decisions as they take coronavirus implications into account. One in five who are planning a trip before the end of this year expect to book within one week of traveling.

“Road trips make sense because travelers have great flexibility in planning itineraries and activities, and can pack their own food and supplies,” says Marie Dodds, public affairs director for AAA Oregon/Idaho. “And that road trip will cost less this year because gas prices are about 50 cents a gallon less than last fall.”

“Travelers are especially interested in destinations that are fairly close to home—within a one- or two-day drive—and most are interested in long weekend getaways instead of extended vacations,” says Doreen Loofburrow, senior vice president of travel for AAA Oregon/Idaho. “Trips that allow people to enjoy the great outdoors are most popular including hiking, camping, visiting beaches, and exploring state and national parks.”

What to Know Before You Go

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention continues to advise that staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

For those who make the personal decision to travel, AAA recommends travelers check with state and local authorities where they are, along their route, and at their planned destination to learn about local circumstances and any restrictions that may be in place. These tips play an important role in being a responsible traveler.

“The bottom line is traveling during the coronavirus pandemic requires you to do your homework before heading out,” says Dodds. “Book your lodging and activities in advance, and plan your stops for food, gasoline and EV charging. Many national parks and attractions limit capacity so it’s best to make arrangements for these in advance.”

Heed all official warnings and remain vigilant while traveling. Refer to the latest updates from The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and U.S. Department of State to help decrease the spread of COVID-19. Check the CDC’s Covid-19 data tracker, municipal and state health departments and local news for updates on coronavirus cases and continue to do so while on the road.

Check in advance on travel restrictions for each destination you plan to visit. Many states, counties, cities and countries still have travel restrictions in place. AAA has developed an interactive TripTik map with COVID-19 travel restrictions. Just click on the destination you’d like to visit for the latest information. AAA.com/Covidmap

Book your lodging, camping and rental car in advance. Many providers are limiting the number of guests and/or allowing more time between guests, so availabilities will likely be reduced.

Prior to any stay, ask what precautions hotels, campgrounds and other lodging are taking to protect guests. Ask about social distancing protocols like capacity reductions in common spaces and hotel staff requirements to wear masks at all times. Ask about any restrictions or changes to the check-in process. Many properties have reduced face-to-face interactions with guests.

Check on the cleaning standards. Many hotels, campgrounds, parks and rental car companies offer enhanced cleaning policies. For extra confidence, look for Diamond hotels that display a AAA Inspector's Best Of Housekeeping badge. Oregon has 181 properties from Albany to Yachats that are honored. Here's the complete list of Oregon properties.

When you check into your room, wipe down commonly touched surfaces with disinfectant. Pay special attention to light switches, door knobs, faucets, refrigerator handles, and remote controls.

Check with any museums, parks, attractions, etc. you want to visit and consider purchasing tickets in advance. Many will have reduced operating hours and limit the number of visitors at a time. Many also require face masks.

Bring snacks, beverages and non-perishable foods with you. Grocery stores and restaurants may have limited hours. Check to see if restaurants are open, and if they offer dine-in service, take-out and/or delivery. Pack picnic supplies and look for scenic stops where you can enjoy the outdoors while social distancing.

Pack hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting products such as face masks, hand sanitizer, soap, wipes, sprays, paper towels, tissues, toilet paper, thermometer, gloves, etc. as these items may be difficult to purchase while you're on the road.

Pay with a credit card instead of cash and use a wipe or sanitizing spray to disinfect your credit card before putting it away.

Take all necessary travel documentation, including health insurance cards.

Consider working with a travel professional to help plan your trip. They can help you sort through all of the pandemic-related restrictions, help you get the biggest bang for your vacation dollars, and act as an advocate if plans change unexpectedly. Visit [AAA.com/Travel](https://www.aaa.com/Travel) to get started.

Get your car road-trip ready. Breakdowns are always a hassle, and you don't want to be stranded during the coronavirus pandemic. Find a trusted mechanic nearby at [AAA.com/repair](https://www.aaa.com/repair).

If renting a car, ask about cleaning policies. Hertz, for example, has introduced Hertz Gold Standard Clean, an enhanced vehicle disinfectant and sanitization process. For extra peace of mind, use disinfecting wipes to wipe down door handles, steering wheels, shifters and control panels. Hertz is also offering deals for road trippers this fall. Book four or more days at any Hertz neighborhood location and get one day free. Visit [AAA.com/Hertz](https://www.aaa.com/Hertz) for more details.

Top Road Trip Destinations

This fall, vacationers are showing a preference for the great American road trip and U.S. destinations that allow for socially distanced, outdoor recreation. Here are the top searches at AAA.com by members of AAA Oregon/Idaho:

Missoula, MT

Denver, CO

Las Vegas, NV

Los Angeles, CA

San Diego, CA

Seattle, WA

Zion National Park, Utah

Phoenix, AZ

Grand Canyon National Park, AZ

Colorado Springs, CO

National parks, state parks and locations that provide an escape from crowds are also of great interest. Crater Lake, Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks were very popular destinations during the summer and early fall but are impacted by winter weather.

Thanksgiving and Holiday travel

AAA will release Thanksgiving travel projections on November 12, and the year-end holiday travel projections on December 15.

“For those who want to fly to visit loved ones over the holidays, now is a good time to book your flights. Most major airlines have waived change fees so you can alter your plans if necessary. But this doesn’t mean you can get a refund if you decide not to go, or that you won’t have to pay the difference in fare if you change to a more expensive flight. It’s very important to read the fine print,” says Loofburrow.