

Holiday Travel: Make way for Christmas!

December 22, 2022



The American Automobile Association (AAA) projects 112.7 million Americans, 33.8% of the population, will travel for the Christmas and New Year holidays.

This is up 3.3% from 2021 and closing in on pre-pandemic numbers. About 1.6 million Oregonians will pack their sleighs for a holiday trip. 2022 is expected to be the third-busiest year for holiday travel since AAA began tracking in 2000, only trailing 2019 and 2018.

Bend, Lincoln City, Newport and the Medford area are among the top 10 regional holiday destinations, according to the AAA.

While about 90% of travelers will drive to their holiday destinations, air travel is seeing a jump this year, up 14% compared to 2021. The holiday travel period is defined as Friday, December 23 through Monday, January 2.

“With Christmas Day and New Year’s Day falling on Sundays, many are taking long weekends to celebrate the holidays,” AAA Oregon/Idaho Senior Vice President of Travel Doreen Loofburrow said. “And with

hybrid work schedules, we're seeing more flexibility with the days people are traveling because they can work remotely at their destinations."

"Despite roller coaster gas prices and a bumpy year for flights, people are ready to wrap up the year with a holiday trip," AAA Oregon/Idaho Public Affairs Director Marie Dodds said. "This will be one of the busiest times for holiday travel in the last two decades. Travelers should expect busy roads and crowded airports this holiday season."

Most will travel by car

AAA projects nearly 102 million Americans (90.4% of travelers) will drive to their holiday destination. This is up 2% compared to 2021. Travel by car this year is on par with 2018 but shy of 2019 when 108 million Americans drove out of town for the holidays, the highest year on record.

In Oregon, roughly 1.4 million will drive.

Air travel increases despite higher ticket prices

Holiday air travel will rise by 14% this year with nearly 7.2 million Americans flying to their holiday destinations. AAA expects the number of people taking holiday flights this year will come close to matching 2019 when 7.3 million Americans traveled by air.

Approximately 151,000 Oregonians will travel by air. In all, 6.4% of holiday travelers will fly to their destinations.

Air travel costs more this holiday season. AAA finds that the average lowest airfare during the week of Christmas is 6% more than last year coming in at \$163 for major U.S. destinations.

Those wanting to book last-minute travel may find good fares, but availability will be limited.

Travel by bus, train and cruise rebound

Travel by other modes, including buses, trains, and cruises, will rise to nearly 3.7 million, an increase of 23% from 2021. This is nearly 94% of the volume in 2019. In all, about 3.2% of all travelers will go by these modes.

Roughly 47,000 Oregonians will travel by these modes this year.

AAA advice for air travelers:

Book the first flight of the day or early morning flights if you can. They are less likely to be cancelled or delayed.

Try not to book tight connecting flights – you'll want enough time to change flights in case your originating flight is late.

If possible, avoid airports for connecting flights where winter weather can lead to delays, including Chicago O'Hare, Newark Liberty, LaGuardia, Denver, and JFK.

If you really need to be at your destination on a certain day, book flights a day or two early so that you have a buffer.

Download the airline's app on your phone and set it up for push notifications so that you'll be notified about departure and arrival information as well as any flight changes, delays or cancellations. FlightAware and other sites let you track your incoming flight so you can find other options if that flight is late or cancelled.

Get to the airport early – at least two hours before domestic flights and three hours before international flights. The increase in travelers along with potential staffing shortages can make for long wait times to get through security.

If you need to park at the airport, book a parking spot in advance or at least check on availability before you go. Better yet, take transit, use a ride sharing service, or get a ride from a friend to the airport.

Carry your bags on your flight instead of checking them. If you do need to check bags, bring medications, a change of clothes, comfortable shoes, and any other necessary items in your carry on bag. Make sure your bags have name tags, and also put your name and contact info inside each bag.

Bring a refillable water bottle and snacks since some airports and flights still have reduced meal and beverage service. Many airlines allow you to pre-order food up to 24 hours before your flight. The TSA allows solid foods through screening but liquids or gels (such as yogurt) must comply with the 3-1-1 liquids rule.

Consider signing up for TSA PreCheck, Global Entry and/or CLEAR to expedite the security screening process. Do make sure the airports you use offer CLEAR as it's not available at all airports.

If your flight is canceled by the airline or there are significant delays, they will try to accommodate you on a later flight; however, you are entitled to a full refund under federal law.

Gas prices similar to last year

Those who hit the road for the holidays will find gas prices within about 20 cents a gallon of last year's prices.

For the week, the national average for regular drops 13 cents to \$3.12 a gallon. The Oregon average slides 16 cents to \$3.82. Find current prices at <https://gasprices.aaa.com>.

Peak traffic expected Dec. 23, 27, 28 and Jan. 2

Travelers can expect the busiest roads on Dec. 23, 27 and 28 and on Jan. 2. Delays will be the longest in the afternoons and evenings, especially in urban areas, as travelers mix with commuters. Some metro areas across the U.S. could see more than double the delays versus typical drive times, and larger urban areas could experience three times the normal delays.

“Knowing the busiest drive times can help you avoid the stress of being stuck in stop-and-go traffic,” Dodds said.

Top holiday destinations

These are the trending destinations for domestic and international travel for members of AAA Oregon/Idaho based on bookings by our AAA travel agents and at AAA.com.

Maui, HI
Anaheim, CA
Oahu, HI
Las Vegas, NV
Phoenix, AZ
Cabo San Lucas, Mexico
San Diego, CA
Orlando, FL
Fort Lauderdale, FL
Cancun, Mexico

These are the top regional destinations for members of AAA Oregon/Idaho based on bookings by our AAA travel agents and on AAA.com.

Bend, OR
Seattle, WA
Lincoln City, OR
Medford/Ashland/Central Point, OR
Redding, CA
San Francisco, CA
Boise, ID
Sacramento, CA
Newport, OR
Salt Lake City, UT