

2 Million Michiganians Plan Holiday Travel, Reports AAA

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Jim Rink (313) 336-1513

An estimated 2 million Michigan residents — almost the same number as last year — will travel 50 miles or more from home during the upcoming Christmas holiday period, according to AAA's latest travel survey. Nationwide, AAA predicts a slight decline in travel.

Most travelers will go by car, truck or van to their destinations this year (88 percent), while fewer will go by air (7 percent). Lower gas prices will provide additional incentive for travelers to hit the roadways this holiday. Michigan motorists can expect to pay \$1.34 less for a gallon of gas (\$1.699 as of December 16), compared to last year.

According to AAA's Leisure Travel Index (LTI), which is based on available rates this holiday, Americans can expect lower hotel and higher car rental rates throughout the holiday season. However, travelers should expect different trends in airfares depending upon the week of travel.

For Americans traveling during the week of Christmas, rates for AAA Three Diamond hotels are down an average three percent compared to last year. On average, travelers renting a vehicle during the week of Christmas will pay two percent more than a year ago. Air passengers, however, can expect some relief in airfares this Christmas with prices nine percent less than last year.

Those planning to travel the week of New Year's will welcome a significant decline in hotel costs with rates for AAA Three Diamond hotels 16 percent less than a year ago. Car rentals rates are eight percent higher than last year for the same period. Americans traveling by air will pay an average three percent more for airfares than a year ago.

AAA Michigan advises air passengers to check with their airline or travel counselor about additional fees before booking a trip. Most airlines continue to charge fees for checked baggage and other previously complimentary services like beverages and snacks.

The official 102-hour Christmas holiday period begins at 6 p.m. Wednesday, December 24 and runs to 11:59 p.m. Sunday, December 28.

During last year's 102-hour Christmas holiday period, there were 11 traffic fatalities reported by the Michigan State Police. Of the 11 fatal crashes, five involved alcohol. Lack of restraint use was a factor in three of the 11 fatalities.

Michigan's safety belt law requires that the driver and all front seat passengers be buckled, children under the age of four must be in a child safety seat, children four to eight must be in a booster seat, both preferably in the back seat, and children eight to age 16 must be restrained no matter where they're riding.

AAA Michigan urges motorists to allow extra time, buckle safety belts, get plenty of sleep and avoid alcohol during the upcoming holiday travel period. For tasty nonalcoholic drink recipes, visit AAA.com/Pretenders.