

Record holiday travel predicted

AAA projects more than 103 million Americans will travel for the Christmas, Hanukkah, and New Year holidays. This is the most on record and a 1.5 percent increase with 1.5 million more people traveling compared to last year. In Oregon, roughly 1.3 million will travel. The increase comes despite one less travel day this holiday season. The year-end holiday travel period is defined as Friday, December 23 to Monday, January 2, 2017.

The increase in holiday travel this year is being driven by additional consumer spending, a result of improvements in the labor market and rising wages. Additionally, relatively low gas prices and increased consumer optimism will prompt more Americans than ever to set out on road trips, take to the skies, or board trains, buses and cruise ships to celebrate the holidays. The vast majority of travelers — 91 percent or 93.6 million people — will take a holiday road trip, an increase of 1.5 percent over last year. In Oregon, nearly 1.2 million will drive.

Air travel is expected to increase by 2.5 percent, with more than 6 million Americans and 236,000 Oregonians flying to their holiday destinations. Travel by other modes of transportation, including cruises, trains and buses, will decrease

slightly, to 3.5 million travelers.

“’Tis the season for travel. More Americans than ever before will travel to celebrate the holidays despite climbing gas prices,” said Marie Dodds, public affairs director of AAA Oregon/Idaho.

Pump prices have risen in November and December this year due to the agreement reached by OPEC to cut oil production beginning in January 2017. But gas prices remain relatively low compared to previous years. Most U.S. drivers will pay more over the holidays than last year, but will still enjoy the second-cheapest holiday gas prices since 2009. The current national average is \$2.24, and Oregon’s average is \$2.40.

According to AAA’s Leisure Travel Index, holiday airfares are projected to average \$204 for a roundtrip flight along the top 40 domestic routes, up 17 percent from \$174 last year.

Rates for AAA Two and Three Diamond Rated lodgings are expected to increase seven percent, with travelers spending an average of \$128 and \$160 per night, respectively.

Daily car rental rates will average \$66, slightly lower than last year.

With the exception of New York City — an ever popular holiday destination — warm-weather locales in Nevada, Florida, and California top

the list of most popular destinations for this holiday season, based on AAA.com bookings:

1. Las Vegas, Nevada
2. Orlando, Florida
3. New York City
4. San Diego, California
5. Anaheim, California

Be prepared for winter driving conditions. AAA recommends checking windshield wipers and inspecting tires to ensure safe drivability before setting out. Pack an emergency kit containing a snow shovel, flashlight, ice scraper, jumper cables, warning devices and extra warm clothing for everyone riding in the vehicle. When driving, slow down and do not tailgate. Increase following distances to a minimum of five to six seconds to allow additional braking room.

Before hitting the road, drivers should also get plenty of sleep to avoid driving drowsy. Research from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that drivers who miss just one to two hours of the recommended seven hours of sleep nearly double their risk for a crash. For long trips, drivers should travel at times when normally awake, schedule a break every two hours or every 100 miles, avoid heavy foods, travel with an alert passenger and take turns driving, and avoid medications that cause drowsiness or other impairment.

Bend businessman guilty in tax case

On Monday, December 12, Stephen Miles Munson, 72, of Bend, pleaded guilty to willfully filing a false tax return.

According to court documents, on his 2008 federal income tax return, Munson falsely claimed that he donated 200,000 shares of stock to the University of Oregon and Stanford University. He claimed the shares had an alleged value of \$3.2 million. In reality, Munson never made the claimed donations.

On October 8, 2015, Munson was charged in a multi-count indictment with willfully filing a false tax return and bankruptcy fraud. He is a retired U.S. Army captain with degrees from the University of Oregon and Stanford University. In 1991, Munson started Vulcan Power Company, a geothermal energy company in

Bend, and served in the company in different capacities, including president and chief executive officer, until 2008.

In 2008, he sold a controlling interest in Vulcan Power Company for almost \$15 million. On his 2008 federal income tax return, Munson fraudulently claimed that amount as a charitable deduction, and due to his alleged donation, he requested and fraudulently received a \$407,019 refund from the Internal Revenue Service for the 2008 tax year. As part of his plea agreement, Munson agreed that the loss to the IRS for the false 2008 tax return was \$2,422,202.

In January 2011, Munson entered into voluntary bankruptcy proceedings. According to court records, Munson submitted his false 2008 federal income tax return in support of his bankruptcy.



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