

<http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-travel19-2008nov19,0,1032400.story>

From the Los Angeles Times

Thanksgiving air travel expected to drop 10%

Car travel is likely to decline too, says AAA. Penny pinchers are expected to stay close to home and use cheaper ways to visit family such as trains and buses.

By Catherine Ho

November 19, 2008

The slumping economy is keeping Americans closer to home for Thanksgiving as travel by planes and automobiles is expected to drop for the first time in six years.

Penny-pinching travelers are expected to find cheaper alternatives such as trains and buses to visit their families.

"The overall state of the economy continues to present real challenges for some Americans looking to travel this Thanksgiving," said AAA Chief Executive Robert L. Darbelnet.

Nationwide, about 41 million people will travel 50 miles or more from their home over Thanksgiving weekend, a 1.4% decline from last year's 41.6 million, according to AAA's annual survey released Tuesday.

Air travel is expected to drop the most, nearly 10% compared with last year, according to the Air Transport Assn. of America, a group that represents commercial air carriers.

Still, President Bush said Tuesday that the Pentagon would once again open up airspace typically reserved for military use to reduce air traffic congestion during the holidays. The move will open up skies over parts of the East Coast, the Midwest, the Southwest and the West Coast, including around Los Angeles.

Despite the expected decline in passengers, "Thanksgiving remains the busiest time of the year for airlines," said James C. May, chief executive of the Air Transport Assn. "And make no mistake -- the airports will be busy and many flights will be 100% full."

The president also said new regulations would be in place in time for the Christmas crush to protect travelers, including an increase in the amount airlines must pay to travelers for lost bags.

"A lot of our citizens are nervous about travel," Bush said. "They are saying, 'Will

traveling home for the holidays be "It's a Wonderful Life," or will it be "The Nightmare Before Christmas"?" "

But many travelers are not flying or planning to drive far. Plummeting gas prices may entice drivers to hit the road for a shorter, more economical weekend trip. And more travelers will hop on buses and trains, up 5.8% from last year.

Last week, gas prices in Southern California were at their lowest level in nearly two years. On Tuesday, the average price for gas in the Los Angeles-Long Beach area was \$2.39 -- \$1.01 less than the average a year ago, according to the Automobile Club of Southern California.

"We haven't seen local prices this low since January 2007," said Jeffrey Spring, spokesman for the auto club. "This may make Thanksgiving travel much more affordable for many families, because gas prices are almost a dollar lower than last Thanksgiving."

People are renting more recreational vehicles this year, said Joe Laing, marketing director of El Monte RV, which has 11 motor home rental locations in Southern California.

Laing said his company had booked 6.5% more reservations in Southern California for this Thanksgiving holiday compared with last year.

Susie Lott, branch manager at Apollo Motorhome in Hawthorne, said the economy hadn't affected RV rentals as much as it had other industries.

"People think maybe going on an RV trip would be a luxury, but instead, people are saying, 'We're not going to give this up.' They'll go closer to home, but they'll still go for the experience."

Nationwide, the number of people traveling by car -- about 80% of holiday travelers -- is expected to fall 1.2% to 33.2 million, according to AAA. Even fewer will fly over Thanksgiving weekend.

"They're going less -- a lot less -- than last year," said Sam Varee, a travel agent at Econo Travel in Hollywood, which has about 3,000 regular clients who normally travel during the holidays. "People just don't call to make reservations at all. They're just staying at home."

Major U.S. airlines including United and American are offering reduced holiday airfares to drive up ticket sales. Southwest Airlines launched three sales in the last week alone, according to FareCompare.com, an online travel service.

"It is pretty obvious that there are more than a few empty seats hanging out this winter, even with the substantial seat cutbacks," said Rick Seaney, CEO of FareCompare.com. "I can't recall three airfare sales from Southwest in a quarter, let alone a week."

Ho is a Times staff writer.

catherine.ho@latimes.com

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at latimes.com/archives.

TMSReprints

Article licensing and reprint options

Copyright 2008 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)
[Home Delivery](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)

partners:

