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Holiday travel tips

Millions of people travel to visit family and friends each holiday season. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, during the Christmas and New Year's holiday period, the number of trips to and from a destination 50 miles or more away rises by 23 percent compared to the average number for the rest of the year.

While many people look forward to reunions with family and friends come the holiday season, long-distance holiday travel can take both a physical and financial toll. But there are ways to enjoy holiday travel and maybe even save some money at the same time.

• Be flexible with your travel dates. Holiday travelers who are flexible with regard to their travel dates may be able to avoid traffic or long lines at the airport. The BTS notes that people traveling between 50 and 99 miles away from home are most likely to travel on Thursday and return on Saturday. So those making short trips who want to avoid traffic may actually benefit by driving home on Sunday after leaving home on Friday rather than traveling on Thursday and Saturday. The BTS notes that travel days are spread out almost equally among people who travel 100 miles away from home or more, so the day travelers choose may not matter as much as the time of day they choose to travel. Flights during off-peak hours, for example, may help travelers avoid long check-in and security lines at airports.

• *Be flexible with airports.* Air travelers who are flexible with regard to their departing and arriving airports may be able to save time and money. Small airports might not boast the shopping and din-

ing amenities of large airports, but small airports have less flights and, as a result, tend to experience less flight delays, saving travelers time. Small airports also may not charge as much for overnight parking as large airports. When considering flights from various airports, factor in the cost of parking and transportation to and from each airport. A flight that takes off at your ideal travel time but costs more than the alternative might actually save you money if you can save on transportation and parking.

• **Book early flights.** Early flights may be less likely to be delayed than flights in the afternoon and evening. The later into the day your flight departs, the more likely that departure might be affected by delays or inclement weather at other airports and in other cities. Waking up early might not be ideal for everyone, but check-in and security lines tend to be short in the early morning hours as well. Those lines get longer as morning becomes afternoon and afternoon becomes evening.

• Save money with package deals. Holiday travel is expensive, as airlines and hotels recognize the holiday season is peak travel season. Package deals from sites such as Orbitz^{*} combine flight and hotels into one price, and such deals may even include rental cars. Travel bundles can save travelers considerable amounts of money. Compare the prices when booking each individually to the price of a package deal, and choose the one that best suits your budget.

Savvy men and women can save both time and money by employing a handful of strategies when booking holiday travel.

