

SundayTravel

ON THE ROAD

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WITH: NEW ENGLAND DESTINATIONS

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HOW TO GET ROAD-TRIP READY

Some extra planning now will make for a smoother, more care-free ride later

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For many of us, the road beckons. Cooped up at home and fearing the tight confines of airline travel, many Americans will hit the road this summer as travel restrictions gradually ease — perhaps with the words of Walt Whitman on their minds: “I take to the open road, Healthy, free, the world before me.” But how do you approach a road trip during a time of uncertainty and shifting information? By consulting helpful resources, doing your homework, and remaining flexible. Whether you need to travel for essential reasons or are looking ahead to a future road-trip adventure, it’s important to put some extra thought and effort into your planning.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention currently recommends that people remain at home and avoid nonessential travel to prevent spreading COVID-19, which has been reported in all states. Many states have started relaxing travel restrictions, but some still have stay-at-home or shelter-in-place orders or mandated quarantines (such as Maine and Hawaii, which — at the time of writing — require visitors to self-quarantine for

14 days upon arrival).

“Our mantra is: ‘Plan for the road ahead,’” says Mary Maguire, Massachusetts spokeswoman for AAA Northeast. “That means looking ahead at what authorities are saying and what restrictions — or recommendations — are in place along your route.” For instance, says Maguire, “If you’re traveling through Massachusetts and stop to get gas, you have to have a face covering on, so you need to familiarize yourself with executive orders along your route and at your destination.”

The CDC website (www.CDC.gov) has links to health departments for all states, the District of Columbia, and numerous US territories. AAA also serves as a great resource for its members, providing up-to-date trip planning and travel insurance to emergency roadside assistance. The company’s eight Rhode Island branches reopened last week, and many of its Massachusetts branches started reopening this week. In the meantime, members can put together a TripTik online to map their route and then work with a AAA travel planner to find out about COVID-19 travel restrictions and which rest stops are open or closed along their route.

Although the carefree, fly-by-night approach to road-tripping may appeal to you, it’s best to plan a few nights ahead of time so you can call and make sure hotels, inns, or campgrounds and RV parks will be open when you arrive.

PREPPING YOUR CAR

Give your car a thorough cleaning and look-over before your trip, especially if it has been sitting idle for a couple of months. First, clean the doorknobs and handles, the steering wheel, the gear shift, and all surfaces with sanitizer or soap and warm water.

Then either take your car to an auto mechanic or, if you have the know-how, go through it to make sure the battery has plenty of life, the windshield wipers and brakes are in good working order, all fluids are topped off, the air conditioning

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A well-stocked first-aid kit is essential. And don’t forget prescription medications, if needed.



Prepare now for a much safer road trip later

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works fine, and your tires are in good shape and at the right pressure (even the spare, if you have one). It's still a good idea to have a mechanic check all your car's belts and hoses and put the car on a lift to complete a thorough safety inspection.

The bottom line: You want to make sure you've done everything you can to ensure that your car is road-trip ready, to lessen any chances of a breakdown and the need to rely on mechanics and other emergency resources along your route.

Make sure your car also has a robust safety kit that includes a 12-volt tire inflator (you can pick up a basic one for \$20 at a hardware store), flares, a flashlight or headlamp, a small portable jump-starter (that lets you jump-start your vehicle without needing another car or person), a sleeping bag or blanket, WD-40, and electrical tape. It's good to throw in an old towel or a couple of rags, too.

Don't forget a good first-aid kit, especially if traveling with kids, and make sure nothing has expired. Consider packing the following items, based on your needs: Bandages of varying sizes (gauze and Band-Aids), antiseptic wipes, antibiotic ointment, bite cream, tweezers, an instant cold pack, moleskin, small scissors, tick remover, pain killer (Advil and Tylenol), an antihistamine (in case of an allergic reaction), and a small water purifier, such as a LifeStraw or SteriPen, just in case. Don't forget prescription medicines, too. It's a good idea to keep a can of sunblock in the car and either Emergen-C or Nuun tablets that you can add to water to replenish electrolytes (great for hot climates).

STOCK UP ON SUPPLIES

Pack extra supplies, especially hard-to-find items such as wipes and hand sanitizer, since you can't assume that you'll find these items as you need them. Also bring plenty of water (most community water fountains and refillable water stations are closed), non-perishable snacks and food (dehydrated camping meals and packets of oatmeal can save the day if a restaurant is closed), spare batteries (for your headlamp or flashlight) and, depending on how off-the-grid you're going, even a small propane camping stove and pot, just in case you need to boil water for those dehydrated meals.

Pack a cooler so you can have sandwiches, snacks, and cold water until you can resupply. Never leave home without your own cutlery set, too (REI sells lightweight, super-durable camping utensils if you don't want to take your kitchen items). Toilet paper sup-



CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

plies still seem to fluctuate, so bring a couple of rolls just in case.

"We're living in a whole different climate now," says Maguire. "Try to make your car a small roving hotel room because the goal is to minimize any kind of health or safety risks along the route. If you don't have to get take-out or go into a restaurant, it just makes it safer."

ONCE UNDERWAY

If you're a AAA member, download the app and you can get up-to-date information as you travel on nearby gas stations, best gas prices, and hotels, motels and campgrounds, for instance. GasBuddy, a free community-driven app, also provides info on the most affordable gas prices and offers subscribers small discounts.

When stopping to get gas, make sure you wear a mask and gloves to operate the pump and credit card touchpad, and sanitize or thoroughly wash your hands after.

"One of our favorite apps for travel is Roadtrippers.com," according to Jerome and Jennifer Braga, professional photographers originally from Middletown, Conn., who now travel the United States full time in their RV and run the website Our1chance.com. "We use it to map our trip and to find roadside attractions, photographic opportunities, fuel stops, and any random adventures that pique our interest."

One of most stressful unknowns while road-tripping right now might be finding a clean restroom along your route. Several helpful apps can help make this an easier decision: Flush — Find Public Toilets/Restrooms and Be-Tomorrow's Toilet Finder (both free Android and iOS apps) list many public and paid bathrooms worldwide, and let you know their location and if they provide disabled access — and if they require a key.

Also, "look for big truck-stop gas stations (such as Pilot or Love's)," recommends Kristi Mason, a lifestyle

blogger who moved from Nashville to Kansas two weeks ago — road-trip-style. "First, they are well lit and get a lot of traffic. Second, they have a lot of rules and guidelines for keeping bathrooms clean and safe."

Road trips often mean logging lots of miles, but make sure your epic journey doesn't include epic driving stints without rest breaks.

"You don't want to put yourself in a situation where you're drowsy driving because you're reluctant to use a certain restroom or because you're pushing to get to a hotel or relative's house," says Maguire, who works on traffic safety issues. "There's no substitute for sleep other than sleep, and even a 20-minute nap can make you alert enough to continue. We recommend you take a break every 100 miles or every two hours, and that you drive when you're normally awake."

DEALING WITH A BREAKDOWN

You meticulously checked your car

pretrip and brought all the necessary supplies, and yet something still goes wrong, leaving you at the side of the road. Don't panic. Local authorities and mechanics will still come to your rescue.

AAA also continues to provide emergency roadside service to its members, but it will work a little differently right now. In the AAA Northeast territory, you'll take care of all paperwork over the phone, and then a mask- and glove-wearing mechanic will offer assistance in the field (typically jump-starting your car, providing enough fuel so you can get you to a gas station, or putting on a spare tire, for instance). Currently, you can't catch a lift in the mechanic's vehicle if your car needs to be towed, but AAA will help arrange ride shares or a hotel stay, and work with a local repair facility to get you back on the road as soon as possible, says Maguire.

TRAVELING WITH KIDS

No one loves a seemingly endless road trip more than a kid — said no child, ever. Making sure you are well prepared with plenty of activities that will make the trip go smoother. For younger kids, consider bringing coloring books, reading books, clay (keep tabs on this in a hot car), audiobooks, an MP3 player and headphones (in case your music choices diverge), and small games that your child can play on a lap-size tray table. Also bring yarn for finger knitting and an old phone with a few age-appropriate movies in case your kids are *done* before the day's driving is not.

Don't forget to pack along kid-size masks and gloves (check online for options), and a sizable container of hand sanitizer. Before setting off, give your kids a full rundown on how to use those items when you need to make the necessary pit stops along your route.

With good planning and preparation, you can take to the open road and enjoy safe travels along your route. That way, when you reach your destination or finally make it home, you will still be healthy and free to embrace the world.

Above:
California
Route 1 in
Carmel, Calif.

Right: The
Grand Teton
mountains are
reflected in the
sideview mirror
of a car near
Jackson Hole,
Wyo.



JANIE OSBORNE/THE NEW YORK TIMES/FILE

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