AAA Reading-Berks Member Publication

on the go

2026 YOUR DRIVING COSTS

Stress-free Packing Tips

November
December
2026

PERIODICAL

A Whole Lot of Fun

Brenda's Travel Tips

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Cover

Buying a car is one of the biggest purchase decisions a person will make in their lifetime. AAA's annual Your Driving Costs research offers comprehensive information on the expenses associated with new vehicle ownership beyond the sticker price.
More on page 6.

NOTICE – SPECIAL OFFICE HOURS:

Our office will be closed for the following observances - *Thursday, November 26 Thanksgiving Day; Thursday, December 24 Close at 1pm Christmas Eve; Friday, December 25, Christmas Day; Thursday, December 31 Close at 1pm New Year's Eve; Friday, January 1, New Year's Day*

On The Go

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CONTACT US

General	610.374.4531
Travel	610.374.5600
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President's Note

Peter J. Armstrong
President/CEO

"...many drivers view speeding as less dangerous..."

Traffic Safety – An Ongoing Collaborative Effort

Well, 2026 is nearly wrapped up. It's been a notable year. Nationally, we observed America's 250th anniversary. Regionally, Philadelphia had the privilege of hosting six matches during the FIFA World Cup games. Closer to home, the Union Pacific's Big Boy No. 4014 steam locomotive lumbered through Berks County on its way to Philly, drawing thousands of train enthusiasts.

In the traffic safety world, 2026 saw some positive trends. Although this year is still underway and therefore a complete picture of our traffic safety health for 2026 won't be available for months, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration noted that first-quarter traffic fatalities dropped by 4.3% to 7,770 deaths compared to early 2025, reaching an estimated rate of 0.99 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled.

Speeding remains the primary cause of vehicle-related deaths, prompting NHTSA to launch safety campaigns such as "Speeding Catches Up with You". You may remember seeing the social media ads with the tag line "Your speed, their life", or the poignant YouTube videos, or the press conference video with Jonathan Morrison, NHTSA Administrator, at the Nashville Super Speedway with the safety message, "speeding belongs on the track, not in our neighborhoods."

Along that line, in August 2026 the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety released their report, "Attitudes Toward Speeding: Insights from Focus Groups and a National Survey of U.S. Drivers". The report explored drivers' attitudes towards speeding and speeding-related countermeasures through focus group discussions with drivers.

The AAA FTS study revealed that, despite the fact that speeding contributes to nearly 30% of motor vehicle fatalities, many drivers view speeding as less dangerous than other risky behaviors and that speeding is the most common and sometimes the only risky driving behavior they admit committing.

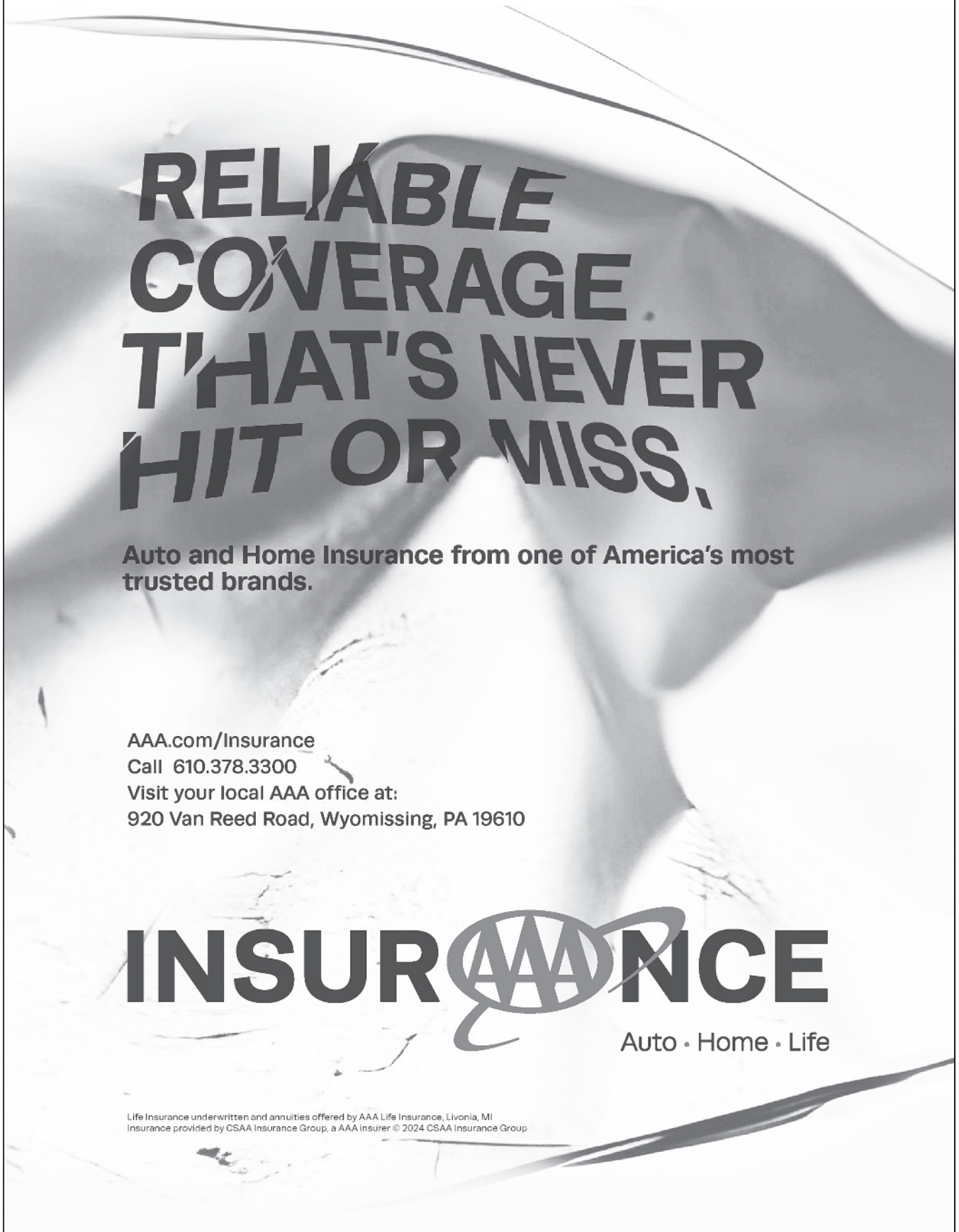
At this year's Lifesavers Conference at the Baltimore Convention Center, NHTSA announced a new traffic safety initiative, "Pathways to Safer Streets". P2SS is described as a comprehensive national traffic safety action plan to eliminate traffic fatalities. The focus of this new campaign will target the leading causes of road deaths: impairment, excessive speed, distraction, and a lack of seat belt use.

This year the US DOT updated its National Roadway Safety Strategy (NRSS), focusing on safer people, smarter infrastructure design, advanced vehicle automation, and improved post-crash care.

Research published this year by the AAA FTS regarding driver behavior and performance include "Factors Associated with Seat Belt Use Among U.S. Drivers and Passengers: A Mixed-Methods Study" (September), "Piloting a Reporting System for Roadside Safety Incidents" (July), "Safety of Micromobility: Regulations, Data and Stakeholders" (July), "Perceptions of and Experiences with Advanced Driver Assistance Systems Among New and Used Vehicle Purchasers, Renters, and Borrowers" (May), "Street Racing: Prevalence, Participation, and Public Concern" (April), and "Slow Down, Move Over Laws: National Survey of Drivers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors" (March).

Next year, the AAA FTS will be celebrating eighty years of research and traffic safety leadership. Some of the ongoing projects are "Safety Impacts of Lead Vehicle Behavior on Drivers' Decisions to Slow Down and Move Over", "Online Driver Education in the United States: Access, Perceptions, and Participation", "Developing and Evaluating Messages to Promote Sober Driving", "Effects of Vehicle Headlight Color on Glare and Safety", and "Understanding the Circumstances of Roadside Fatalities".

Here's to a new year of collaboration toward safer roadways and reduced deaths and injuries in 2027.


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new vehicle owner costs

EVs and Hybrids Join Mainstream Vehicle Comparisons, but Fuel Savings Don't Offset Higher Ownership Costs

For more than 75 years, AAA's Your Driving Costs (YDC) analysis has helped drivers understand the full cost of vehicle ownership. This year's analysis finds that the average annual cost to own and operate a new vehicle is $12,863, or $1,071.92 per month. This reflects continued increases from fuel prices, depreciation, and finance charges. In 2025, the total annual cost was estimated at $11,577, or $964.78 per month. *Note: Methodology updates make this year's results not directly comparable with last year's estimate.*

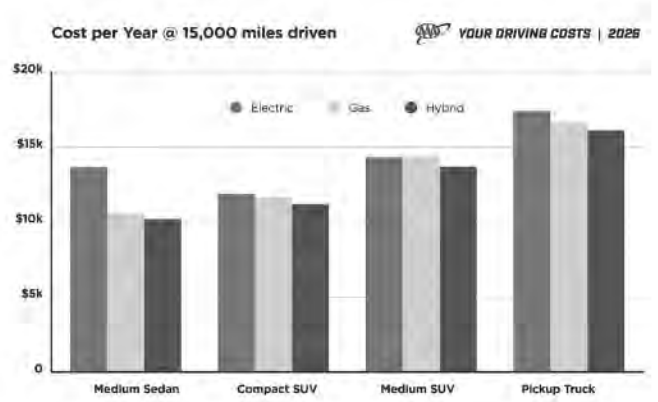
This year's Your Driving Costs analysis integrates select electric vehicles (EVs) and hybrids into standard vehicle categories that used to be exclusively traditional gas-powered models, reflecting their growing share in the new-car market.

"By looking at EVs, hybrids and traditional gas-powered vehicles within the same categories, consumers can better understand how total ownership costs vary by powertrain," said Greg Brannon, AAA's Director of Automotive Engineering. "Looking at the full ownership picture—including depreciation and other expenses—can help consumers better understand the total cost of each option."

Key Cost Themes

Fuel Prices – At the time of the study, the regular-grade gasoline used by nearly all YDC vehicles averaged $4.152 per gallon, while electricity for home EV charging averaged 18.0 cents per kilowatt hour. Gas prices are up 31.8% compared to 2025, while electricity prices rose only 7.8%, improving the relative affordability of EVs and hybrids; however, fuel economy alone did not determine the most affordable vehicle to own.

Depreciation — The difference between a car's purchase price and resale value remains the single largest ownership cost, with vehicles losing a weighted average of $4,422 per year. Vehicle type and purchase price both have a significant effect on depreciation for EV shoppers; for example, EV medium sedans had about twice the depreciation of gas-powered models, helping push total ownership costs 29.1% higher in that category.



Car Prices – The sales-weighted average MSRP of new vehicles this year is $39,376. While MSRPs increased slightly on average, incentives, demand and rebates can affect what consumers ultimately pay. The actual purchase price is used to calculate finance costs and depreciation.

EV and Hybrid Comparison Takeaways

By comparing select electric and hybrid models within the same categories as gas-powered vehicles, AAA gives shoppers a more practical view of how ownership costs compare across powertrains.

Gas-powered vehicles: Overall, gas models offered savings compared to EVs and hybrids in cost categories affected by purchase price, like finance charges, taxes

and fees, and depreciation. For example, gas-powered medium sedans cost $10,582 per year to own — $3,080 less than comparable EV medium sedans, which had significantly higher depreciation, fees and finance costs.

Electric vehicles: EVs delivered the lowest fuel costs, with charging costs for EVs about 66%–70% lower than fuel costs for traditional gas vehicles across the categories studied. However, those savings were often outweighed by higher depreciation, fees and finance costs; medium-sedan EVs, for example, cost 29.1% more to own annually than gas-powered models.

Hybrids: Hybrids were the most consistently lower-cost alternative to gas in the comparison categories. They combined meaningful fuel savings with smaller ownership-cost tradeoffs, costing less annually than gas-powered models in medium sedans, compact SUVs, medium SUVs and pickup trucks.

Car Buying Advice

Vehicle category makes a major difference. Half-ton pickups cost $1.10 per mile to operate — 48 cents more than small sedans — adding an average of $7,191 per year. In comparison, purchasing an EV may help offset annual fuel costs, but higher depreciation can increase total ownership costs over time. Choosing a vehicle that fits actual transportation needs can help buyers manage long-term costs.

• Create a monthly and annual budget that includes ownership and operating costs before purchasing.

• Keep the vehicle price, finance rate, and trade-in value as separate negotiations.

• Get pre-approved by a financial institution, such as a bank, credit union or AAA, before discussing financing with the dealer.

Additional AAA Support

Your Driving Costs Calculator is available at www.AAA.com/autorepair/drivingcosts.

AAA Car Repair Estimator can be found at AAA.com/autorepair/estimate. Breakdown of estimated parts and labor costs, including AAA member discounts, available at AAA Approved Auto Repair facilities.

Read about how Mechanical Breakdown Coverage can help protect you from the financial hit when unexpected breakdowns occur. Click on the Car & Driving tab at AAA.com for details.

Methodology and Overall YDC Analysis

AAA's YDC analysis discussed here estimates the cost of owning and operating a new vehicle for personal transportation over five years and 75,000 miles. Actual driving costs vary based on driving habits, location, operating conditions, and other factors.

AAA evaluated seven vehicle categories and 34 top-selling models across fuel, maintenance, repair and tire costs, license, registration and taxes, depreciation and finance charges.

EV and Hybrid Cost Comparisons

For EV and hybrid comparisons, AAA evaluated selected top-selling models in four categories — medium sedans, compact SUVs, medium SUVs and pickup trucks — alongside gas-powered models to show how ownership costs vary by powertrain within the same vehicle categories.

Because the EV and hybrid comparison uses a smaller set of categories, its overall results should not be directly compared with the overall results from the full YDC study.

For a full breakdown of the methodology and cost comparisons, download and review the Your Driving Costs fact sheet and brochure available at Newsroom.AAA.com.

Cost per Year @ 15,000 miles driven — *YOUR DRIVING COSTS | 2026*

	Medium Sedan			Compact SUV		
	Electric	Gas	Hybrid	Electric	Gas	Hybrid
cost per year	$13,662	$10,582	$10,204	$11,888	$11,656	$11,201
cost per mile*	$0.911	$0.705	$0.680	$0.793	$0.777	$0.747
	Medium SUV			**Pickup Truck**		
	Electric	Gas	Hybrid	Electric	Gas	Hybrid
cost per year	$14,332	$14,431	$13,698	$17,414	$16,626	$16,117
cost per mile*	$0.955	$0.962	$0.913	$1.161	$1.108	$1.074

* Total cost per year ÷ total miles per year.

Speeding is Becoming the Norm

"No one actually drives the speed limit." Three in ten drivers agreed with that statement in a new study from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (AAAFTS), highlighting how speeding has become normalized on today's roads.

While most drivers agreed that posted speed limits are appropriate, many also considered driving 10 mph over the limit acceptable, and nearly half believed keeping up with traffic is safer than obeying the posted limit.

Those attitudes matter because speeding continues to have deadly consequences. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, speeding was a factor in nearly 30% of traffic fatalities in 2024.

"Findings from this research show that some drivers in the United States view speeding as a normal part of driving," said Dr. David Yang, President and Executive Director of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety." When people take cues from surrounding traffic instead of following posted speed limits, it creates a culture that makes crashes more difficult to prevent and roads less safe for everyone."

The findings suggest many drivers aren't speeding simply to save time—they're often convincing themselves that speeding is the right choice for the situation.

Drivers' top reasons for speeding:

- To get around slower drivers (31%)
- To reach their destination faster (25%)
- To avoid holding up traffic (21%)

Drivers' top reasons to slow down:

- To avoid getting a ticket (79%)
- To avoid being involved in a crash (72%)
- Bad weather (60%)

The report also found that drivers generally prefer countermeasures that encourage safer speeds over those that physically force them to slow down.

Drivers expressed strong support for increased police presence in areas with a history (87%) or potential (88%) for speed-related crashes, and roughly seven in ten supported automated speed cameras in those locations.

Drivers also viewed advisory Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA) – in-vehicle warnings or alerts when a driver exceeds the speed limit – more favorably than technology that automatically limits vehicle speed.

Support declined for countermeasures that remove driver choice. Although more than nine in ten drivers believed speed humps are effective, fewer than half supported installing them in their own neighborhoods. Support for ISA decreased as the technology became more restrictive, i.e. if the driver could not override the system.

"There is no silver bullet for addressing traffic safety risks caused by speeding," Dr. Yang said. "Understanding which strategies drivers are most willing to adopt can help policymakers and safety professionals develop interventions that are both effective and publicly acceptable."

If you find yourself driving the speed limit while everyone around you is speeding,

- Stay in the rightmost lane and avoid driving in the passing lane.
- Maintain a steady, predictable speed.
- Increase your following distance and watch for faster vehicles approaching from behind.

To read the report and supporting materials, visit the AAAFTS' website, aaafoundation.org.



Are You Seeing Dots?

Dear Ask Ed,

I never noticed them before, but my friend pointed out a red dot on his car's tire. We can't figure out what it's for. Can you please explain?

Thanks,

Carl H.



Hello, Carl. Thanks for submitting your question. As a mechanic for many years - part of which was spent in the bays of a Goodyear store - I'm well acquainted with the red and yellow dots that may be on a vehicle tire's sidewall.

Please be reassured that this does not mean that there is anything wrong with the tire. It is what's known as a uniformity mark. Because tires are not perfectly round or perfectly balanced, a tire manufacturer may mark the point of maximum radial force - the "high spot" in the tire's roundness - with a red dot. The dot points to where the tire's maximum stiffness is, which is taken into consideration when the tire is mounted to a wheel. The red dot on the tire is aligned with the wheel's point of minimum radial runout - the "low spot" that may be indicated by a white dot or notch - to reduce vibrations when the vehicle is driven.



Vibrations in the tire/wheel assembly can cause more than an uncomfortable ride. Fuel economy and braking effectiveness also suffer when one or more of a vehicle's wheels and tires are unbalanced.

It will also make the vehicle harder to control, especially at higher speeds. As the tire/wheel assembly hops along the road surface, that loss of contact between the 1.5% to 3% of the tire's total surface (footprint) and the roadway means less friction when you apply the brakes.

Out of balance tire/wheel assemblies can also develop bald spots, affecting tread wear and shortening the tire's useful life, and can cause the vehicle's suspension to wear out before its time.

Tires are expensive! To get the most out of your car's tires, keep them properly inflated and have them rotated every 5,000-8,000 miles. If you notice a vibration, take your car to your mechanic or AAR and let the pros find the cause and use appropriate corrective measures.

Hope this helps. Happy motoring!

Ed

Contact Ask Ed with your automotive questions: AskEd@aaardgberks.com or write to Ask Ed, AAA, 920 Van Reed Road, Wyomissing, PA 19610.

Brenda's Travel Tips: Travel Smarter in 2027

As we approach the end of 2026, it's remarkable to see how much travel has evolved over the past year. New entry requirements, emerging travel technologies, and enhanced airport screening processes are changing the way we explore the world. Staying informed about these developments can help make your next journey smoother, more efficient, and more enjoyable. AAA Travel Advisors are available to assist with every aspect of your trip. Our appointment-based service ensures you receive the personalized attention and expert planning you deserve.

Technology continues to be one of the traveler's greatest allies. Today's smartphones are packed with features that can make navigating foreign destinations easier than ever. Translation apps have become remarkably sophisticated, and Apple's new Live Translation feature on compatible AirPods and iPhones is helping travelers communicate more naturally across language barriers. I just love this feature with my Airpods! Another handy tool for international travel is the built-in currency converter in Apple's Calculator app. Even without Wi-Fi or cellular service, you can perform currency conversions.

Air travel is becoming more efficient as well. TSA PreCheck® Touchless ID uses facial comparison technology to streamline identity verification at airport security checkpoints. Eligible TSA PreCheck members with a valid passport can enroll through participating airlines or Google Wallet and enjoy a faster, more seamless experience through dedicated screening lanes.

As of February 2026, the UK requires visa-exempt visitors, including U.S. travelers, to obtain an approved ETA before traveling. Airlines are required to verify ETA approval before boarding, making advance preparation essential for anyone planning a visit to England, Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland.



Brenda Huey, VP, AAA Travel

Across Europe, modernization efforts at border crossings continue through the implementation of the Entry/Exit System (EES). The new system uses biometric technology, including facial imaging, to streamline arrivals and enhance security. Meanwhile, the related European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) remains in development, and travelers should monitor updates as implementation timelines continue to evolve.

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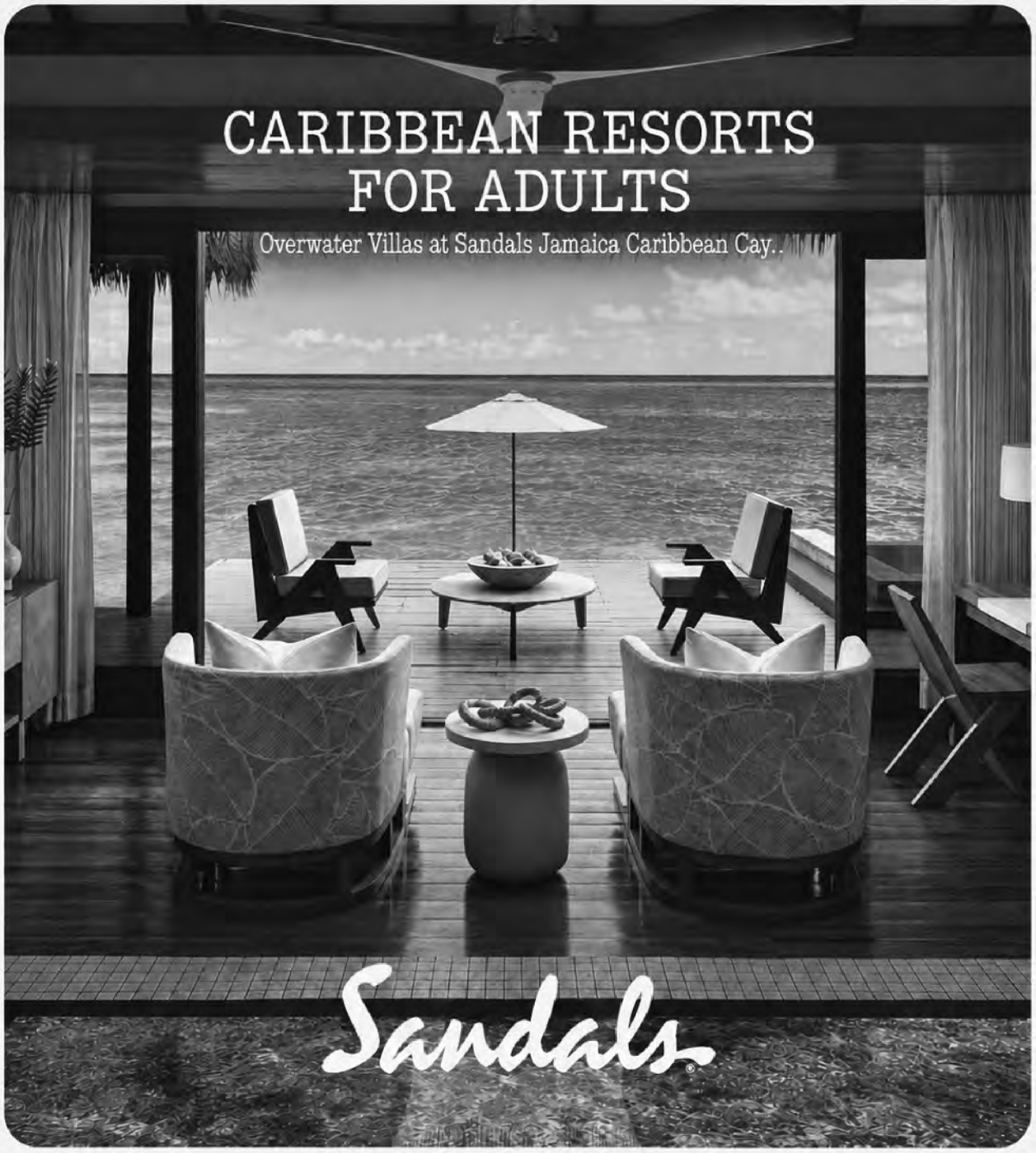
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stress-free tips for packing

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.....

Are you feeling overwhelmed by the thought of packing for a trip? We've created this comprehensive guide to simplify the process and alleviate any travel prep stress.

Whether you're exploring a top travel US destination or venturing abroad, these packing tips for travel are designed to help you easily conquer your packing to-do list. Read on to discover hacks for maximizing space and travel essentials you never knew you needed.

Before you dive headfirst into packing, a little preparation can go a long way in saving you time and stress. Here are some tips to keep your packing process organized.

Start Planning Early

First and foremost, give yourself plenty of time to pack. It's a good idea to start planning 2-3 weeks ahead of time. Whenever you think of something you'll need, jot it down or make a list on an app. Even better, leave your suitcase where you can see it and throw things into it during the weeks leading up to your trip.

Research the Destination

Before diving into packing, especially for international travel, take a deep breath and research your destination. Understanding the climate, culture and any local restrictions will be your packing compass.

Will there be cool evenings that require a light jacket? Is it the rainy season, necessitating an umbrella? Knowing these things beforehand can help you avoid overpacking unnecessary items or feeling out of place.

It's important for women traveling alone to research cultural or legal dress codes in their destination country. For example, when traveling to Italy, consider bringing a shawl to cover your shoulders when visiting churches. With a little research, your suitcase will reflect your destination and not just your wardrobe.

Choose Your Luggage

Choosing the right luggage is key to a smooth packing experience. Think about the length of your trip and your mode of transportation. Weekend getaways may just need a carry-on, while longer adventures may require a checkable bag. Consider a travel pack for hands-free travel or a suitcase with maneuverable wheels for navigating airports and uneven terrain. Opt for a well-made, lightweight option that prioritizes durability and ease of movement.

Create a Travel Checklist

Creating a travel checklist streamlines your packing process, ensuring you don't miss anything essential. Start by planning outfits for each day of your trip, considering your itinerary and weather conditions.

This not only ensures you pack everything you need but also helps avoid overpacking similar items. With a checklist in hand, you've conquered packing anxiety and are ready to explore!

Place Necessities in Carry-on

Stow necessities in your carry-on. This may seem too obvious, but medicine, expensive tech equipment, jewelry and essential toiletries are things you don't want to lose and should keep close at hand.

In the unfortunate case that your luggage is lost or delayed, having your essential items will ensure you can get by on your trip until your situation is resolved. Consider also packing a change of clothes so you have a clean outfit to wear while you wait for your bag to arrive.

Your research and prep work are done! Now that those empty suitcases are staring you down, let's explore some space-saving packing strategies to keep everything efficient and organized.

Utilize Packing Cubes

Invest in a set of packing cubes to keep items separated. This will make finding things in your luggage, like your first pajamas for unwinding at the hotel, a breeze. The packing cubes keep your neatly folded or rolled clothes from wrinkling.

Embrace Rolling Your Clothes

Speaking of rolling clothes, many travelers firmly believe it's the best way to keep your garments crease-free. Here's how to do it: Lay your clothing piece flat and smooth out any wrinkles. Fold a small section of the piece at the bottom

inward. Start tightly rolling from the bottom to the top. Use a tie or soft ribbon to secure the piece from unrolling.

This is a great space-saving technique that allows you to fit more into your bag.

Pack Versatile Clothing

Packing multiple outfits with your clothing pieces minimizes what you need to bring. Plan on wearing versatile neutrals like beige, navy and black, which mix and match well, allowing you to create multiple looks with a few key pieces.

For a pop of color, a scarf or jewelry does the trick nicely without taking up valuable luggage space. And remember, dark colors don't show spills as much as light colors do. Along with neutral colors, items that are classic cuts, like button-down shirts or a maxi dress that can transform from day to night, are ideal.

Lean on the Power of Layers

Packing versatile pieces that you can layer allows you to conquer a wider range of activities and temperatures.

> "...a little preparation can go a long way..."

Consider bringing lightweight tank tops or tees, which you can easily warm up with a cardigan or sweater.

A fluffy scarf can be used for both chilly evenings and as a cozy airplane blanket during your flight. By layering, you pack less while maximizing your outfit options.

Consider Laundry Options

Researching laundry options at your destination allows you to pack lighter. Check if your accommodation has in-unit laundry or if there are laundromats nearby. Pack a travel-sized detergent or invest in convenient detergent sheets for handwashing in your sink.

Prioritize quick-drying fabrics and versatile pieces that mix and match, creating multiple outfits. By planning for on-the-go laundry, you can pack fewer clothes and avoid overpacking.

Stay Connected With Chargers

Pack an extra phone charger and a portable power bank. It's easy and fun to take photos for Instagram with your smartphone, but you can wear your battery down quicker than you may realize. And trying to find an outlet in a public place to charge your phone when your battery is at 4 percent power is almost impossible.

A portable power bank can give your phone a much-needed boost to keep you capturing your adventures throughout the day. Just remember to charge the power bank before you head out the door!

Pack Light on Toiletries

Bring travel sizes of grooming items like toothpaste, shampoo and deodorant, or fill up little empties with your favorite brand to save valuable space in your suitcase. To prevent leaks during transport, be sure to pack your travel tubes in a sealable plastic bag. Consider using solid toiletries like shampoo and conditioner bars to maximize space and minimize spills.

Separate Your Shoes From Clothes

Put shoes in thin plastic bags like a grocery bag or dry cleaning bag to keep them from touching your clean clothes. Pack footwear and other heavy things at the bottom of your suitcase to keep your clothes from wrinkling. This also helps distribute the weight evenly, making your suitcase easier to move.

Keep Your Clothes Smelling Fresh

For an extra touch of freshness, tuck a fabric softener sheet into your suitcase. While it won't necessarily remove wrinkles, it can help minimize mild odors and leave your clothes smelling pleasant when you unpack. Avoid using too many sheets, as the scent can overwhelm a confined space.

Maximize Dead Space

The key to packing like a pro lies in maximizing space. This means conquering every nook and cranny of your suitcase. Start by stuffing socks, underwear and other small items into shoes to fill their empty space.

Take advantage of rolled-up scarves, smaller tank tops or even rolled clothes to fill in those hard-to-reach areas. Remember, every bit of space you save means more room for those trip souvenirs!

Try the 5-4-3-2-1 Packing Method

Struggling with overpacking? The 5-4-3-2-1 method can help! This simple rule ensures you save space by only packing what you need: Five tops, four bottoms, three accessories, two shoes, one swimsuit.

For maximum outfit creation potential, stick to a similar color palette for your clothing. This allows for easy mixing and matching throughout your trip.

Consider Packing Essentials for Young Children

Traveling with young children requires extra planning, from transportation to packing. While your itinerary is the most important, prioritize packing essentials to keep your little's content and comfortable. Pack familiar items, like their favorite stuffed animal or blanket, for when they need to relax or take a nap.

Remember special medications, extra pairs of clothes for accidental messes and clothing layers for the plane. Pack plenty of healthy, high-protein snacks and nutritious food bars to keep your little ones happy and fueled throughout the journey.

Remember To Pack for Your Service Animal

Pack food, medication and waste disposal bags to last the trip duration, and include extra in case of any delays. Don't forget their favorite couple of toys and a copy of their service certification. By planning ahead, you both can enjoy a smooth and stress-free adventure.





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A Little Rock & Roll, A Little Niagara Sightseeing, and A Whole Lot of Fun

By Rose Fisher

Our trek to Niagara Falls and Cleveland, Ohio began on Monday, September 14. The weather was mild and partly cloudy as we left aboard our fine motorcoach - an excited mix of seasoned and novice travelers heading north toward another fun adventure.

Our route crossed the Susquehanna River, cut through the Appalachian



folds and skirted the edge of the Finger Lakes. The day was nice and sunny and the endless views of mountains glowed with all shades of green. A stop at Wegmans for lunch in Corning, NY was the only thing that interrupted our relaxing ride.

Arrival at the Seneca Falls Casino in Niagara Falls hit us with sensory overload. It was huge; bells were ringing from casino machines and not without a flurry of activity. The casino gifted us with a $100 voucher for playing and a $40 food voucher, which was enough to provide us all with several meals and snacks. That evening everyone was on their own to enjoy.

The next morning was spent with Cheri, our guide from Niagara Falls Tourism. We could not have asked for a bubblier and more colorful young lady. She provided us with a wealth of information and made our whole morning to the Falls, *Maid of the Mist* and Cave of the Winds fun.

After saying goodbye to Cheri the group separated a little; half went to the Bella Rose Vineyard and half spent the day enjoying the day and the sites of Niagara. Both options proved to be a good choice.

While at the vineyard enjoying some spirits we had a beautiful serenade by Scott McElree. The evening meal was enjoyed at the Top of the Falls restaurant. The view of the falls was nice, but we were a little early for the lights.

Another day began and we were off to Cleveland to visit the Christmas Story House & Museum in the city's Tremont neighborhood. I'll share a secret with you for the next time you watch the movie: although some of the movie was filmed in Toronto, the snow in scenes shot in Cleveland was instant mashed potatoes! SHHHH!

Checking into the Hampton Inn in downtown Cleveland was VERY interesting to say the least. A baseball game was just over and we hit all the traffic. Our driver, Rick from Elite, maneuvered those streets like he was driving a Volkswagen! No cars went under our bus.

We arrived at our hotel and - after dealing with only two working elevators - it was time to leave for dinner. Dinner was at the Alley Cat Oyster bar in the Sunset Room along Lake Erie. Miscellaneous ships and activities entertained us while we appreciated an excellent meal and several rounds of desserts.

Before leaving for home on Thursday, September 17, we had about three hours to explore the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Our dinner stop was supposed to be at Bob Evans but shortly before we arrived the restaurant called me after arranging for us to go to Cracker Barrel. To end our trip, we made one more short stop, survived a heavy rain storm and arrived at the AAA office in Wyomissing safely.

Until we meet again, safe travels.

Left: Judy and Jan Burkey outside the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Below: Mary and Daryl Tobias at the Christmas Story House and Museum.



Ready To Eat Bacon? AAA Recommends...

December 30 is National Bacon Day. It's not just for breakfast, so celebrate all day long! AAA inspectors recommend where to go. Don't forget to add your favorite Kevin Bacon movie to wrap up your celebration.

Lonesome Dove Western Bistro

123 W. 6th Street, Austin, TX

Calling all bacon lovers – check out the maple bacon ice cream sandwich at Lonesome Dove Western Bistro! The Western and Texas-themed dining room has a distinguished upscale atmosphere and the dimmed lighting sets the tone for a romantic evening. The menu is designed to offer a multi-course meal of small portions. The menu does change often so that the freshest seasonal ingredients are served.



Lunch is available only on Fridays.

Silver Fox Steakhouse

3422 Energy Lane, Casper, WY

Candied bacon knots are almost too formal to eat! Well-prepared dishes of prime rib and aged steaks are served in the relaxing setting that affords a nice mountain view in the main dining room. The filet mignon, fried green tomatoes and chicken pot pie are popular. Booths are also available for a quieter and more intimate dining experience. Closed for lunch Saturday through Monday.

Voodoo Doughnut

Three Portland, Oregon locations:

22 SW 3rd Avenue, Portland, OR

1501 NE Davis Street, Portland, OR

14620 SE McLoughlin Blvd, Milwaukie, OR

Mmmm. Gotta love bacon on a Voodoo Doughnut maple bar. Notice the pink boxes around town? Another happy patron has waited in line from 5 minutes to an hour for fresh-made goodness. Open 24 hours a day, the shop makes fresh doughnuts in all types of wacky flavor combinations. Relive childhood and try one topped with Cap'n Crunch, Fruit Loops or Tang. Favorites include the maple bar with bacon and the cake doughnut topped with mini M&Ms. A classic is the voodoo doll that oozes raspberry filling when it's ripped open.

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Tips For Traveling in Canada

When planning a trip to Canada, there are certain things that U.S. travelers need to keep in mind to ensure a smooth and enjoyable experience. From entry requirements to insurance, it's best to be prepared before you leave the United States (or any other country) and enter Canada. To help you prepare, here are a few things to know before traveling to Canada.

Pack Your Passport

U.S. citizens will need a valid U.S. passport (with at least one blank page in it) to enter Canada via international flights or by car. A passport is required for infants and children.

If you're a member of the NEXUS trusted traveler program (ie TSA PreCheck®), remember to bring your membership identification card to get through priority lanes at airport checkpoints. For passengers on cruise vacations, it is generally recommended to pack a U.S. passport regardless of ship itinerary.

Be Prepared for the Currency

The official currency is the Canadian dollar (CAD). Avoid airport currency kiosks, as they have the worst exchange rates. You'll usually get a better rate by using your home debit card at an official bank ATM, such as RBC, TD Bank or Scotiabank. Since credit cards, especially Visa and Mastercard, are accepted almost everywhere, you rarely need to carry large amounts of cash.

Know Customs and Declaration Rules

There are a few things you'll need to declare before arriving in Canada. For money, you must declare all currency or monetary instruments totaling $10,000 CAD or more. It isn't illegal to bring in more, but it's illegal to fail to declare it. Personal duty-free limits are set at 1.5L of wine (or 1.14L of spirits) and 200 cigarettes. All firearms, food, plants and animal products must also be declared.

Some items, however, are strictly prohibited and should be left at home. Common prohibited items include: mace and pepper spray, cannabis, automatic firearms, handguns (with some exceptions for competition) and replica firearms, switchblades, butterfly knives or any knife that opens with a spring, fresh meats, raw milk and some fresh fruits and vegetables.

Take Care if Traveling with Minors

Any minor under 18 traveling with only one parent or guardian must have a notarized parental consent letter. That letter, written in English or French, must include the non-traveling parent's address, telephone number and a photocopy of their signed passport or national identity card. You will also need the child's passport and a copy of their birth certificate.

Parents with sole custody should carry a copy of their court-issued custody agreement. Adults traveling with children who are not their own, such as for a school trip or with a grandparent, will need a written permission letter from the child's parents or legal guardians. They must include the parents' or guardians' full contact information (address and phone numbers) and be accompanied by photocopies of their signed passports or national identity cards.

Validate Your Driver's License and Insurance

If you're planning a road trip to Canada from the U.S., you don't need a Canadian driver's license. You must, however, call your auto insurance provider to confirm your policy extends to Canada.

Ask them to issue a Canadian non-resident inter-province motor vehicle liability insurance card. Your standard U.S. card is often accepted, but this specific Canadian card is the official proof of insurance and will prevent any headaches if you are stopped.



Understand Canadian Road Rules

Driving in Canada means understanding that road rules change by province. For example, in most of the country, a right turn on a red light is allowed after a complete stop. The major exception is the Island of Montreal, where right turns on red are completely banned.

If you're driving in winter, you must check the tire laws. In Quebec, winter tires are mandatory on all vehicles from December 1 to March 15. In British Columbia, they are required on most major highways from October through April. If you have trouble, the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) will honor your AAA coverage in Canada. You can contact them for roadside help.

Drivers Fall Short on Roadside Safety

A new survey from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (FTS) reveals a dangerous gap between driver awareness and roadside behavior. While more than 90% of drivers reported moving over and/or slowing down the last time they passed a disabled vehicle, tow truck, or police car on the shoulder, previous AAA FTS research found that only 64% of vehicles subject to Slow Down, Move Over laws were observed changing lanes and/or reducing speed; 36% did neither.

Recent roadside fatalities show the deadly consequences when drivers fail to slow down, move over, and stay alert. From 2019 to 2023, more than 2,100 people were struck and killed while stranded or working on the roadside. In 2025, AAA responded to more than 30 million roadside events near active traffic, and 15 service providers were killed in Slow Down, Move Over-related incidents. The danger is compounded by risky driving behaviors: six of those cases involved hit-and-run drivers, and five involved impaired drivers.

"Many drivers know slowing down or moving over is the right thing to do," said Dr. David Yang, President and Executive Director of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. "But awareness is not enough. When drivers encounter a vehicle stopped along the roadside, they need to respond right away — because failing to slow down or move over can turn a standard stop into a preventable tragedy."

When approaching or passing an emergency response area, Pennsylvania's Move Over Law requires drivers to make a lane change away from the emergency area if possible. If moving over cannot be done safely, legally, or at all, they must then pass the emergency response area at a speed of no more than 20 miles per hour less than the posted speed limit and reasonable for safely passing the emergency response area.

An emergency response area is one that is clearly marked with road flares, caution signs or other traffic-control device. Covered vehicles: emergency vehicles (police, fire, EMS, Safety Patrol), roadside/service crews (tow trucks, utility maintenance vehicles, construction workers), and disabled private vehicles - any vehicle displaying hazard lights, flares, caution signs or traffic cones.



Don't Rush Growing Up, Keep Kids in the Right Seat

A new AAA analysis of nationwide crash data found a troubling pattern: child safety seat and booster seat use declines sharply with age, starting when kids are just three years old. Between 2020 and 2024, 78% of three-year-olds injured in car crashes were riding in a child safety seat or booster seat. By age six, however, less than half (45%) were.

This steep decline in child restraint use is concerning because many children have not yet outgrown the need for a car seat or booster seat based on their size and development. In fact, new data from the National Digital Car Seat Check Form (NDCF) found that 86.5% of children evaluated during child safety seat inspections in 2025 had transitioned to an adult seat belt too soon.

"Parents spend years protecting their children, and that shouldn't stop just because their little ones aren't so little anymore," said AAA spokesperson Kellan Howell. "At AAA, we're working to save lives by helping families make informed choices. If a seat belt doesn't fit your older child correctly, then it's likely that a booster seat is still the safest choice, and it's okay to let them stay little a little while longer."



"As children develop and grow, it is vital to take proper steps to ensure their safety at every age," said Angela Brown, Senior Director of Driver Safety Training at the National Safety Council. "Children ages ten to twelve may appear ready for an adult seat belt, but many still need booster seats to ensure the seat belt fits properly and safely.

Parents and caregivers can schedule a free visit with a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician in their area or online to make sure their child's restraint system is right for their size and developmental needs."

While progress has been made, car crashes remain a leading cause of death for children. Between 2020 and 2024, more than 3.7 million children were involved in crashes nationwide. During that same time, more than 500,000 children were injured and more than 2,800 were killed.

When used correctly, child restraints are highly effective. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), car seats reduce the risk of fatal injury by 71% for infants and by 54% for toddlers in passenger cars. Yet many children transition out of the appropriate restraint before they're ready, underscoring the importance of choosing the right seat for every stage of a child's development.

Inspection data from the NDCF reinforces the need for continued education as children grow. Nearly three-fourths (73.7%) of car seats inspected by certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians in 2025 were installed or used incorrectly. Yet only one in five parents and caregivers report seeking expert assistance with car seat installation or use, highlighting the value of having seat assessments conducted by a trained technician.

While many families seek help before a baby is born or during the first year of life, fewer return for follow-up checks as children grow, even though more than 80% of forward-facing seats inspected were being used incorrectly.

The most common issues technicians identified:

- Car seats installed too loosely.
- Failing to use the top tether strap with forward-facing car seats.
- Harness straps that are too loose.

September 20-26 was National Child Passenger Safety Week this year. AAA Reading-Berks hosted free public car seat checks at our office conducted by PSP Troop L officers who are Certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians.

AAA also assisted the Exeter Township Police Department as they conducted a car seat check event for National Seat Check Saturday, September 26.

No-cost car seat checks can be arranged by calling 484-987-7025 or by visiting pakidstravelsafe.org.

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Cherry Blossom Lunch Cruise

March 31, 2027
From $289* pp
Join us for a springtime getaway to Washington D.C. featuring a scenic lunch cruise aboard the single-level, climate-controlled, glass-enclosed vessel *Odyssey*, stunning views of the iconic cherry blossoms, and a guided tour of the nation's capital.



Michigan's Tulip Time Festival

April 30-May 5, 2027
From $2,179* pp dbl occ
Experience the beauty and charm of springtime in Holland, Michigan during the world-famous Tulip Time Festival. Stroll through vibrant displays of millions of blooming tulips, discover Dutch heritage through unique cultural experiences, and enjoy special festival events, gardens, windmills, and local entertainment.

INCLUDED FEATURES:

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June 5-9, 2027
From $2,379* pp dbl occ
Experience the vibrant energy of Toronto's skyline, cultural gems, and waterfront, then journey to the breathtaking power of Niagara Falls. From city lights to natural wonder, this unforgettable trip blends excitement, beauty, and adventure into one seamless getaway you'll treasure forever with friends and family.

Coastal Maine Tour/ Maine Lobster Fest

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*Rates are pp based on a minimum number of passengers and may be based on double occupancy. Subject to availability at time of booking and includes taxes, fees and fuel surcharges which are subject to change. These getaways are arranged in connection with AAA Central Penn.

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39 Steps

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Holland Tulip Festival

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Witches in Salem

October 25-28, 2027 Call 610.374.5600 x 7938 for pricing for this multi-day motorcoach getaway

Holidays at Mount Hope

Tuesday, November 30, 2027 $149* pp

New York

Wednesday, December 8, 2027 $83* pp

*For more information or to book any of these getaways, contact Rose Fisher, 610.374.5600 x 7938 or rfisher@aaardgberks.com.

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[1]T&Cs: [1]Black Friday BOGO 50% Off: Valid on select Tour and River Cruise itineraries featured on Trafalgar.com, bookable only the week advertised. Two guests on the same reservation each receive 25% off; solo travelers receive 25% off the trip price, including any single supplement. Full payment due at booking. [2]Black Friday Deals: Up to 15% off select Tour, River Cruise, Small Group and Rail Journey departures. Deposit due at booking; final payment due 120 days before departure. All offers: New bookings made Oct. 31–Dec. 3, 2026 for travel Jan. 1, 2027–Dec. 31, 2028; land or cruise portion only; not valid on airfare, extra nights or River Cruise Suites. Subject to availability. Combinable only with standard 5% past guest savings. Trafalgar may withdraw or amend offers or correct errors at any time; confirmed bookings are honored. Governed by California law. [3]Credits and vouchers must be used on or toward the trip, cannot be substituted or transferred, are non-refundable and have no cash value. Ask your AAA Travel Advisor for full terms. CST#2077132-20



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[1]The 1 free day rental offer is an exclusive offer for AAA members who enroll at AAA.com/hertzgold. Valid for new Hertz Gold Plus Rewards® (HGPR) members only. Free rental day will be awarded in the form of 950 Gold Plus Rewards points after the member's first paid Hertz Gold Plus Rewards rental. Free day excludes taxes, fees, & options. © 2026 Hertz System, Inc. All rights reserved. CS 1025031







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