

Holiday weekend travel: People are celebrating like it's 2019

Brace for traffic jams, long ferry waits and lines at the airport.

By [Andrea Brown](#)

EVERETT — Going somewhere fun this weekend?

So are about 882,000 of your neighbors, according to AAA Washington.

That's 66% more travelers than on Memorial Day weekend in 2020, and they are eager to get out after being cooped up.

The sunny forecast means even more people will celebrate like it's 2019.

There are simple hacks to avoid gridlock and play safely.

"Travel off hours, when everyone else isn't traveling," said Ian Sterling, [Washington State Ferries](#) spokesman. "It's like commuting during rush hour — you're not going to get to work as quickly."

Thursday not only kicks off a busy weekend at sea, it's also the most challenging day on the road, said Kelly Just, a AAA Washington spokeswoman.

Get an early start, or if you're not going too far, wait until after supper. Traffic slowdowns are expected in some usual trouble spots, such as Lynnwood to Seattle and the Everett-to-Marysville corridors.

AAA expects to rescue more than 468,000 Americans hitting the road. Check the oil, tires and fill 'er up. Gas is about \$3.50 a gallon, which is \$1 more a gallon than a year ago, but similar in price to 2019.

Pack your vaccination card, masks and disinfecting wipes. AAA's [COVID-19 Travel Restrictions Map](#) and [TripTik.AAA.com](#) have details about coronavirus mandates by states and cities.

One thing is for sure: Wanderlust is back after taking a vacation in 2020.

A report by TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit, said vehicle travel in March rebounded to close to pre-pandemic levels in most states and is higher in 15 states.

AAA Washington reports that on May 20, online hotel bookings hit a single-day sales record not seen since prior to COVID-19. A majority of travelers made last-minute plans: 40% a day or two before travel and 50% for the Memorial Day weekend. The remaining 10% booked hotel stays for June, July and August.

The whopping increase in Memorial Day travel this year is a strong indicator for summer, Just said.

Prepare for long lines at the airport. Seattle-Tacoma International expects 100,000 passengers daily coming and going this weekend.

Wearing a mask is required on planes, buses, trains and other public transit.

Ferry traffic is already booming.

"This is the kickoff to the really busy time of the year for us," Sterling said. "We carry 50% more passengers in a normal year during the summer than we do in the winter. This is all hands on deck."

There are fewer hands, due to continued coronavirus-related crewing challenges for quarantines and vaccinations. Sailing reductions have been in place since the pandemic began. Some routes have smaller vessels because the aging boats can't be fixed and replaced fast enough.

"You're going to see some pretty extensive waits," Sterling said. "We're down a lot of boats this year. It's as bad as I've ever seen it. This isn't Plan A, this is Plan B."

Seattle-Bainbridge ridership was up 159% last week compared to the same dates in 2020. The Anacortes-San Juan Islands route jumped 95%, Edmonds-Kingston increased 39% and Mukilteo-Clinton is up 19% from a year ago.

The Port Townsend-Coupeville route was cut to one boat, even though ridership is up 55% from a year ago. [Vehicle reservations are available](#) on that route as well as the Anacortes-San Juan Islands route.

Leave your car and cares behind.

"If you're vaccinated and comfortable getting out and about, walking on board is another way to not have to wait in line," Sterling said.

The galleys remain closed. No jigsaw puzzles on the tables. The spectacular scenery is all you need, anyway.

You can even get vaccinated on a ferry.

Peninsula Community Health Services was offering COVID-19 vaccines on Seattle-Bremerton vessels Thursday and will again for three days next week. Passengers can get a shot on sailings departing either terminal during the first 30 minutes to allow time to be monitored for reactions. No insurance information or ID needed. Both the Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson vaccines are available. Children aged 12 and older can be given the Pfizer vaccine with parental consent.

Some places are loosening face covering mandates, but not in laid-back Langley.

If you're heading to the seaside Whidbey Island village, better cover those naked cheeks in the downtown core of shops, eateries and galleries.

Langley early on [issued a proclamation to mask up](#), even while outdoors. Some of the sculptures wear them, too.

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