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Get summer road trip ready

Road trips can present a perfect escape any time of the year, but they're especially popular during the summer when people have time off from school and work. According to a 2024 summer travel survey from The Vacationer, 82 percent of Americans were planning to travel this year, and driving is the most popular method of getting around. Seventy-five percent of those in the U.S. intend to take at least one road trip this summer. The 2024 Blue Cross Travel Study revealed that more Canadians are optimistic about travel and

are planning more trips this year. Perhaps road trips are so popular because they don't require booking tickets, complicated transportation to and from airports and rigid itineraries. Many road trips can be spur of the moment, explore-as-you-go excursions. But it still pays to prepare a bit for an upcoming road trip. These guidelines can get you started.

- Create a generalized itinerary. While it may be tempting to fill up the gas tank and see where the ride takes you, an itinerary will ensure that you know dis-

tances between stops so that you will not get burnt out by driving. Use mapping apps to research the trip before departure and plot out points of interest and where you will rest, fuel up (both body and vehicle) and stay overnight.

- Slow is pro. A large part of the road trip is about the ride itself. Resist the temptation to speed and rush through various towns. Get out and stretch your legs as much as possible and take advantage of roadside attractions, tourist traps, rest stops, restaurants, and so much more.
- Find your inspiration to travel. Check out travel blogs, online videos and magazines or get recommendations from friends and family regarding spots of interest. Maybe you've always dreamed about seeing the California Redwoods but you live on the East Coast? It may take several days, but an epic road trip adventure can get you to your destination no matter how far away it might be.
- Emphasize fuel efficiency. Fuel is one of the biggest expenses on a road trip. Before setting out on the trip, ensure that the vehicle is inspected and road-ready. This means that oil and fluids have been changed and the tires are in good shape (with a spare on hand). While driving, stick to the speed limit and do not overpack the vehicle, as more weight leads to greater fuel consumption.
- Research everything about your destination(s). Who can forget the deep disappointment when the Griswold family reaches Wally World, billed as "America's Favorite Family Fun Park," after a cross-country trip from Chicago only to discover it is closed for the next two weeks for repairs? Before such mishaps happen to you, make sure you know the hours of places you plan to visit, as well as any scheduling changes that may be happening while you're traveling.

These are just a few tips for having a road trip to remember this summer.

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How to handle fireworks safely

Warm weather generally translates to more time spent outdoors. That means more barbecues, days spent poolside, trips to the beach, and even camping excursions. This time of year also inspires people to celebrate. What better way to signal the party has started than with fireworks?

Firework traditionally are part of large celebrations, such as national holidays or grand opening events. Many individuals also take it on themselves to set off firework during block parties or other neighborhood gatherings. Though fireworks are awe-inspiring, they're also dangerous, which is why it's best to leave them to the professionals.

The US Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that fireworks-related injuries and deaths in the United States have risen by roughly 25 percent in the last 5 years. In 2019, 11 people died in accidents involving fireworks, and 1,169 were injured.

"The safest way to enjoy fireworks is to watch the professional displays," said Alex Hoeh-Saric, chair of the CPSC.

Three-quarters of firework injuries occur the week before and following the July 4th holiday in the United States. The Canadian



Government indicates two-thirds of all fireworks-related injuries in Canada occur between May and August, with nearly one-third happening on days surrounding Victoria Day and Canada Day.

Firework can injure any part of the body, but burns to the hands and fingers, trunk,

and arms are the most commonly affected areas. Injuries to the eyes, including blindness, also may occur.

Sparkers are not necessarily safe, either. The CPSC reports that 10 injuries result from sparkers each year.

As fireworks become widely available, it's im-

perative that individuals follow these crucial safety tips when using them.

- Never allow children to play with or ignite any type of firework, including sparkers.

- Keep a bucket of water or garden hose nearby to extinguish fires or sparks.

- Only buy and use fire-

work if they are legal.

- Light fireworks one at a time in accordance with manufacturers' instructions.


- Choose a field or area free from trees and other obstructions, far away from spectators to light fireworks.

- Never use fireworks while impaired by alcohol or drugs.

- Never point or fire firework in the direction of other people.

- Do not place any part of the body directly over firework when lighting a fuse.

Firework can be beautiful, but are best left to the professionals.



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9 facts about the Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence is a document that indicates the founding principles of the United States of America. The declaration was issued by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, and announced the separation of the 13 British colonies in North America from the United Kingdom.

That significance means the public may want to learn more about the Declaration of Independence. Here are some key facts.

1. While Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, it was carefully reviewed and modified by other members of the Continental Congress, notably John Adams and Benjamin Franklin.

2. The Continental Congress actually voted for independence on July 2, 1776. The written Declaration was dated July 4, 1776, but it wasn't actually signed until August 2nd of that year. John Adams thought July 2nd would be marked as the national holiday.

3. Fifty-six delegates



signed the Declaration of Independence, but not all were present on that day in August.

4. While many know that John Hancock signed first, with his prominent signature readily visible, it is believed that Thomas McKean of Delaware was the last person to sign.

5. Others signed according to state delegation and

in columns, starting with the northernmost state (New Hampshire) to the southernmost (Georgia).

6. About 200 copies of the Dunlap Broadside were printed. Today, 26 copies remain.

7. The original rough draft of the Declaration of Independence has been lost.

8. The Declaration of

Independence was not universally accepted, and many people in the colonies remained loyal to the British monarchy and opposed American independence.

9. The Declaration of Independence has a message written on the back of it. It reads, "Original Declaration of Independence dated 4th July 1776."

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Tips to save when shopping for your July Fourth barbecue

Barbecues are part and parcel of July Fourth celebrations. Such get-togethers might be even more notable in 2025, when Independence Day falls on a Thursday. That means many people will likely be taking off on Friday, July 5 which adds another day to celebrate with friends and family around the grill this year.

Opportunities to entertain will abound this July, and that can take a toll on hosts' pocketbook. As the holiday approaches, individuals planning to host a July 4 barbecue can heed these tips to save on food and supplies at the grocery store.

- Ask guests to bring a side and/or beverages. Hot dogs and hamburgers may garner the bulk of the culinary attention at a July 4 barbecue, but side dishes are necessary as well. When inviting guests, ask each to bring a side dish or dessert. Potato salad, mixed greens, pasta salad, chicken salad, and other cold fare go well with traditional barbecue favorites, and asking guests to bring these along can save hosts substantial amounts of money. If guests can't bring food, ask them to bring beverages like soft drink, iced tea, beer, or wine.
- Shop ahead. Hot dogs, hamburgers, chicken



breasts, and other summer grilling favorites can be frozen and thawed out come the day of the barbecue. Shopping ahead for such items, as well as beverages, can help hosts spread out the cost of hosting, which can make it easier to manage the cost of throwing a party, particularly if the guest list figures to be sizable.

- Consider less expensive cuts of meat. If steak is on the menu at your Independence Day barbecue, consider purchasing less expensive cuts of meat. The

Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association notes that chuck cuts like flat-iron steaks and petite filets are flavorful cuts that won't cost nearly as much as rib-eyes and New York strip steak. Hosts also can save on burgers by purchasing ground beef and creating their own patties as opposed to purchasing pre-made hamburgers from their grocer's meat department. The HPBA notes that chicken thighs, legs or quarters also tend to be less expensive than chicken breasts.

- Grill up healthy fare.

Vegetables are less expensive than meat and poultry, and there's many ways to prepare veggies over an open flame. Grilled vegetable skewers are flavorful and popular, and guests might appreciate some nutritious fare to counter all the less healthy items they're accustomed to eating at July 4 barbecues.

There's no shortage of ways to save money when celebrating July 4 in the backyard. This year hosts can celebrate to the fullest without breaking the bank

Prepare pets for Fourth of July festivities

Many people are eager for Independence Day celebrations in early summer. There is much to be excited about, as festivities often begin in the afternoon with barbecues and pool parties, and commence late at night after fireworks shows that light up the night sky. Still, not everyone enjoys the extra noise and busy nature of July 4th parties, particularly furry members of the family.

Animal control services often report an increase in lost animals between July 4th and July 6th. That's because the excitement of the holiday puts pets out of their comfort zones.

While pet owners need not cancel their July 4th plans, they should take heed of the many ways to keep their pets safe during the festivities.

Update identification

Be sure prior to any July 4th events that pets are wearing collars with current identification information. If an address or phone number has changed since the last time you updated microchip records, be sure to check the account is current.

Be careful with alcoholic drinks

Party hosts typically serve beer, wine and cocktails. Alcoholic beverages have the potential to poison pets, says the ASPCA. Animals can become very intoxicated, severely depressed or go into comas if they drink alcohol. Keep spirited drinks well out of reach.

Check with the vet

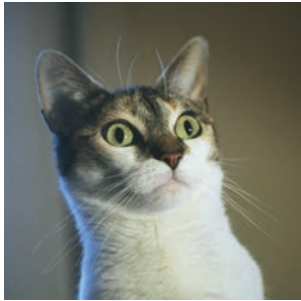
Many pets are prone to anxiety from loud noises, such as thunderstorms and fireworks, and lots of commotion — something that occurs in spades come July 4th. Some veterinarians recommend a small course of anti-anxiety medication or a sedative to help pets cope with the stimuli.

Create a quiet space

Allow pets to ride out the day in their comfortable, quiet and cozy retreats. If necessary, create a space in an interior room. Cover the pet crate with a blanket and offer favorite toys or bedding to create a soothing environment.

Place notes on doors and gates

While it's best to keep



Pick up debris

Firework debris can rain down on properties even if you were not shooting off the fireworks. Curious pets may pick it up or eat it, which runs the risk of an upset stomach or even an intestinal blockage. Check your yard before letting pets out to play.

Keep an eye on the grill

Pets can be opportunists, and those burgers and chicken drumsticks smell delicious to pets. Pets that get too close to the grill can become injured. And if pets eat leftovers, they may end up with digestive distress or even be poisoned by foods that are toxic to cats and dogs.

Pets need to be protected during summertime parties like Independence Day celebrations.

pets in a locked room away from the fray, some pets like to socialize with guests and are not bothered by noises. However, alert guests with notes posted on doors and fence gates to check to make sure pets are not trying to escape behind them. All doors should be closed firmly when entering or exiting.

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