

# Travel industry trots out driver incentives

By Laura Bly  
USA TODAY

With gas prices soaring almost as quickly as spring pollen counts, nervous travel companies and drive-to destinations are offering earlier-than-normal incentives to hit the road, from \$20 ethanol vouchers in South Dakota to discounts of \$10 per car-engine cylinder at bed-and-breakfast inns in Maine.

And according to several new polls, those jitters are nothing to sneeze at. Surveys released this week by the American Petroleum Institute and U.S. Energy Information Administration showed that Americans have curbed their gas use in apparent response to higher prices at the pump.

Last month, 68% of vacationers polled by the motorist

group AAA said they would consider reducing the number of driving trips if the average price of regular unleaded gas topped \$2.85 a gallon — with that number climbing to 83% if the price reaches \$3.35 a gallon.

Thursday's nationwide average was \$2.83, up 61 cents from a year ago, AAA reports. Average per-gallon prices for regular unleaded already straddle \$3 in California, Hawaii, New York and Washington, D.C., and have reached \$3.60 a gallon in Canada. And with oil prices spiking to a new high of \$74 a barrel Thursday, gas watchers say the worst may be yet to come.

In response, several lodgings and destinations are dangling incentives.

In South Dakota, licensed

## Pain at the pump

The average cost for a gallon of regular unleaded gas is more than 43 cents higher than what it was this time last year.



Source: Oil Price Information Service

By Julie Seider, USA TODAY

drivers from 10 states can apply online at [visitsd.com](http://visitsd.com) for a \$20 ethanol voucher that can be redeemed at participating gas stations from May 1 through

Aug. 31. The voucher deal for gas mixed with ethanol, an alternative fuel made from corn, is "a two-pronged effort," says spokeswoman Nicole Nordbye, to help gas-conscious travelers and "promote a home-grown commodity."

In Aspen, Colo., where more than two-thirds of summer visitors arrive by car, lodges are renewing last year's promotion of a \$50 gas certificate, free bus passes and bike rentals and other sweeteners.

More than 40 members of [BedandBreakfast.com](http://BedandBreakfast.com), meanwhile, have moved up their summer "Tanks a Lot" program targeting would-be customers skittish about higher pump prices. Many offer a \$25 gas rebate for stays of two or more nights; midweek guests at the Historic Inns of Rockland,

Maine, get a package discount equal to 10 times the number of cylinders in their car's engine (limit \$80).

"Fuel costs are still a small part of vacation budgets," says AAA's Mantill Williams, who notes that a family taking a 1,000-mile trip in a car averaging 20 miles a gallon will spend about \$150 for gas this spring, an increase of \$50 from last year. "For most people, that's not a deal breaker."

But, Williams says, the volatile combination of overseas uncertainty, decreased U.S. refinery capacity and a traditional spike in summer vacation demand means "we are headed into uncharted territory."

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