2021 Memorial Day Holiday Travel to Rebound to More Than 37 Million

37.1 million Americans forecasted to travel this Memorial Day – an **increase of 60%** from last year, but 13% less than 2019

Supported by rising vaccination rates, loosening pandemic-related restrictions and improved consumer confidence, 2021 Memorial Day holiday travel is expected to reach 87% of 2019 pre-pandemic levels.

Car travel to dominate this Memorial Day holiday, with **34.4 million travelers**

While growing substantially from 2020 (+52.4%), 2021 auto travel will remain nearly 9% below 2019 levels. Auto travel will comprise 92.7% of all travel this year, the highest on record outside of 2020.

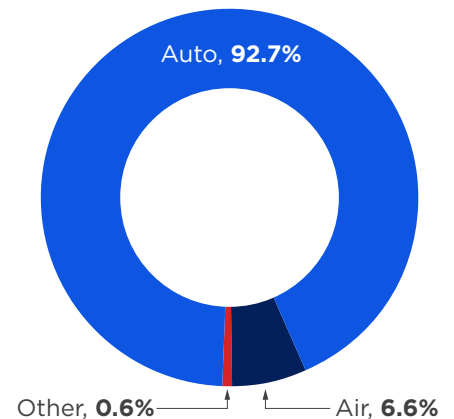**2.5 million** will travel by air this Memorial Day

Memorial Day air travel volumes will be nearly six times greater than in 2020 (+577%), but 23.4% lower than in 2019. Air travelers will make up only 6.6% of all travel, which is down from 7.3% from the five-year pre-pandemic average.

Key Takeaways:

- The 2021 Memorial Day holiday travel volume forecast of 37.1 million reflects a substantial increase from 2020. While growing more than 60% from last year (which saw 23 million travelers), 2021 travel will see 13.3% fewer Americans travel as compared to 2019 (which saw nearly 43 million travelers).

- Travel by automobile will rebound from the significant drop in 2020. Nearly 12 million more Americans will travel by car this holiday than in 2020, an increase of more than 52%. Travel volume by car will remain 3.3 million below 2019 levels (-8.7%).

- Air travel volume fell from 3.2 million in 2019 to just 363,000 in 2020. This year, air travel will rebound to 2.5 million. This represents an unprecedented 577% increase over 2020, and a 23% decrease compared to 2019. Share of travel by air will remain low at 6.6%.

- 237,000 people will travel by other modes (including bus, rail and cruise ship). This is the second-lowest volume on record, higher only than the 185,000 who traveled in 2020. 2021 travel via these modes will be 88% below 2019 levels.

AAA and IHS Markit forecast up to 37.1 million travelers this Memorial Day holiday season, an increase of at least 60%.

Share of Travelers by Mode

Auto, **92.7%**

Other, **0.6%**   Air, **6.6%**

Memorial Day Holiday Travelers (millions)

	Automobile	Air	Other	Total
2019	37.6	3.2	1.9	42.8
2020	22.6	0.363	0.185	23.1
2021 (forecast)	34.4	2.46	0.237	37.1
Change (2019 to 2021)	-8.7%	-23.4%	-87.5%	-13.3%
Change (2020 to 2021)	52.4%	577.5%	28.0%	60.5%

Economic factors include:

- Easing travel restrictions, successful vaccination progress, and improving consumer attitudes about resuming social activities will lead to improved consumer spending in 2021.

- GDP should increase 6.2% compared to a year ago while the unemployment rate is expected to fall to 5.2%, which is an improvement from the 8.1% seen last year but above the 3.7% seen in Q2 2019.

- Several high-frequency indicators are pointing to a firming recovery, from strong employment growth in March, and data on credit- and debit-card spending for the first half of March exhibiting particular strength. Other indications of strength in recent weeks include rapidly growing restaurant activity, a sharp upturn in U.S. airport passenger traffic via TSA screenings, and a growth in hotel revenues.

- Consumer sentiment will improve to 86.7 in the second quarter, up from 74.0 in the same period last year.

- Gas prices for April averaged $2.86, more than $1 more than last year but only a few cents higher than the monthly average seen in April 2019. Memorial Day gas prices are expected to remain under $3/gallon for the vast majority of the country.

Holiday Forecast Methodology: A Brief Overview

In cooperation with AAA, IHS Markit — a world leader in critical information, analytics and expertise — developed a unique methodology to forecast actual domestic travel volumes. The economic variables used to forecast travel for the current holiday are leveraged from IHS Markit's proprietary databases. These data include macroeconomic drivers such as employment, output, household net worth, asset prices including stock indices, interest rates, housing market indicators, and variables related to travel and tourism, including prices of gasoline, airline travel and hotel stays. AAA and IHS Markit have quantified holiday travel volumes going back to 2000.

Historical travel volume estimates come from DK SHIFFLET's TRAVEL PERFORMANCE/Monitor[sm]. The PERFORMANCE/Monitor[sm] is a comprehensive study measuring the travel behavior of U.S. residents. DK SHIFFLET contacts over 50,000 U.S. households each month to obtain detailed travel data, resulting in the unique ability to estimate visitor volume and spending, identify trends, forecast U.S. travel behavior and position brands—all after the trips have been taken.

The travel forecast is reported in person-trips. In particular, AAA and IHS Markit forecast the total U.S. holiday travel volume and expected mode of transportation.

AAA did not issue a Memorial Day holiday travel forecast in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, actual travel volumes were recorded after the holiday for comparison purposes this year.

For purposes of this forecast, the Memorial Day holiday travel period is defined as the five-day period from Thursday, May 27 to Monday, May 31. The five-day holiday length is consistent with previous holiday periods. The travel forecast presented in this report was prepared the week of April 12, 2021.