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## **Travel Tips for Summer Road Trips: Cameron on Transportation**

**Author :** David Gurliacci

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The summer travel season is starting with a vengeance. After a year of quarantining, we're all anxious to get back on the road again. But where to go? And what can you expect when you get there? A recent mid-week mini-vacation to the Berkshires taught our family some important lessons.

**WHERE TO GO?** Like many vacationers we opted for a road trip instead of flying. There are great destinations within two or three-hours drive. But in deciding where to go, remember you're not just going to see the sights or visit friends. You're relying on local services and the folks who live there and run them.

**MASKS OR NO MASKS?** With vaccination levels well over 50% here in Connecticut and mask rules relaxed, especially for those vaccinated, you'll want to see how your destination compares. Do you really want to go someplace where vaccination rates are low or mask compliance is arbitrary?

**WHAT'S OPEN?** In many parts of the country restaurants and hotels are still shuttered, so put your spontaneous wanderlust on hold and do your research. Don't just rely on apps or websites. Call ahead and be sure they're open.

**CAR RENTALS:** If you are flying or enjoying Amtrak to travel and need a car at your destination you don't want to be disappointed. Many car rental companies downsized dramatically during the pandemic, selling off their fleets. Now, because of the chip shortage hitting auto makers, they can't get the new cars they now need. Reservations will be a must and car rental availability may even end up determining where to go.

If you can reserve a car, prepare for sticker shock as rates have soared, on average double the old rates.

**GASOLINE:** Unless you're driving an all-electric car, the availability and price of gasoline may also factor into your plans. In the Northeast availability was unaffected by the recent Colonial Pipeline shutdown, so the supply is there. But rising demand will see the highest prices in seven years. AAA suggests filling your tank before arriving at busy resort destinations where prices will be the highest.

**STAFFING SHORTAGES:** The biggest surprise on our recent trip was the number of establishments offering reducing hours because they can't find staff. Restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, museums and art galleries were all operating on reduced hours while their windows were plastered with help wanted signs.

Several owners lamented to me that they desperately needed servers, kitchen help and sales staff but nobody was applying. "I need four people right now," said one restaurateur, "But nobody wants to work. They're all making \$600 a week on unemployment!"

This is becoming a serious issue, not just in hospitality but in transportation.

**DRIVER SHORTAGE:** Supply chain issues have left some store shelves empty because the trucking industry says they have a driver shortage. In some areas of the country that's also affecting gasoline deliveries. In New York City the MTA needs 400 bus drivers, meaning reduced frequency and longer waits at bus stations just as they're urging riders to come back to mass transit. Some school districts are also having trouble filling bus driver jobs as are tourist destinations that run jitneys.

But don't let all of this frighten you. We all deserve and can enjoy our summer travels if we just do a little planning ahead.

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*Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for more than 25 years. He is the founder of the [Commuter Action Group](#), sits on the [Merritt Parkway Conservancy](#) board and also serves on the Darien RTM and as program director for Darien TV79. The opinions expressed in this column, republished with permission of Hearst CT Media, are only his own. You can reach him at [CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com](mailto:CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com).*