

Home



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Travel

Travel

Auto

Auto

Insurance

Insurance

Contests and Offers

Contests & Offers

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Marketplace

Marketplace

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Worth the Drive: Capitalizing on Gas Incentives

High gas prices can take the fun out of summer travel, but hotels and destinations are fighting back to ease travellers' pump pains

Steve English

Everyone has a limit, and hotel and attraction operators are getting worried that Canadian drivers are rapidly approaching theirs.

With gas prices declining yet still averaging about \$1.05-per-litre nationally as the summer travel season ramps up, many businesses that depend on tourists are doing whatever they can to entice travellers to pack up their cars and hit the highways. For many companies, that includes offering special incentives on fuel or rebates for out-of-province visitors.

The tourism industry has good reason to worry. A 2006 Environics Research Group poll conducted on behalf of Natural Resources Canada found that high gas prices do impact Canadians' travel habits. Only 25 percent of Canadians drive more than 20,000 km a year (a drop of 5 percent since 2002), with skyrocketing gas prices the likely culprit. As of the first week in June this year, the price of regular gasoline was already up an average of five cents nationally over the same time last year, with prices traditionally peaking between late July and mid-August.

While these numbers may make drivers groan, in reality, gas is actually one of the lesser expenses incurred on most family vacations. Still, fuel

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Categories

• [On the Road](#)

• [On the Issues](#)

• [On Vacation](#)

economy is a hot-button issue for most drivers, which makes gas incentives a valuable draw for hotel chains and attractions looking to entice travellers with something extra. An extra \$60 on an 800-kilometre drive doesn't look like much on paper, but financially, it can turn that same 800-kilometre drive into a 600- or 500-kilometre one, in terms of gasoline expenses.

Hotel chains are starting to take note. Select Marriott hotels across Canada, for example, are offering a promotion this summer called "Cars Eat Free" in which guests receive a \$25 Petro-Canada gas card for each night of their stay. Most locations offer free parking, too. (CAA Members also receive the best available rates when booking in advance, thanks to the *Show Your Card & Save*[®] program.) Check out www.carseatfree.ca for a list of participating hotels along your route.

Is a break on gas not enough of an incentive? Some individual hotels and attractions have taken the next step and bundled fuel vouchers with other travel packages to further sweeten the deal. The Trickle Creek Residence Inn in Kimberley, B.C., for example, offers a \$40 Gas n' Go voucher to the local Husky station for visitors who purchase the inn's mid-week [Golf Kimberley package](#).

Some U.S. destinations offer fuel incentives, too. Branson, Mo., for example, is a popular family vacation spot where 87 percent of visitors arrive by car. Visitors who live 100 miles or more away who purchase show and event tickets from the Branson Tourism Center receive a coupon that will save them 20 cents US per gallon (3.8 litres) – with a 20 gallon (75 litre) maximum per vehicle – from the Center's own filling station.

If you're planning a road trip in the U.S. this summer, be sure to check out the hotels and accommodations in your destination city to see if any of them will help offset your gas costs. Incentives are especially popular with smaller operations like bed and breakfasts and off-season ski resorts, many of which either offer gas vouchers or highlight their proximity to major cities as "one-tank trips." Many are listed online at www.bedandbreakfast.com and www.bnbfinder.com.

And don't forget that there's no law saying you need to drive your own car this summer. If you're planning a big trip and want to take better advantage of gas offers along the way, why not rent a more economical model or hybrid instead? [Hertz Canada](#) offers a range of fuel-efficient and low-emission vehicles, and as a CAA Member, you'll receive exclusive benefits and discounts.

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