



The Ultimate Road Trip Checklist

Complete planning, prep, and packing guide for the perfect road trip — 180+ items

Full guide: <https://yopki.com/guides/road-trip-planner>

VEHICLE INSPECTION — DO THIS 1-2 WEEKS BEFORE

Engine & Fluids

- Engine oil level and condition (change if overdue or within 500 miles of due)
- Coolant/antifreeze level (check reservoir — should be between min and max)
- Brake fluid level
- Power steering fluid level
- Transmission fluid level and color (should be pink/red, not brown/black)
- Windshield washer fluid (top off — you'll use more than you think)

Tires & Brakes

- Tire pressure on all 4 tires (check when cold, match door sticker PSI)
- Tire tread depth (penny test: if you see Lincoln's head, replace the tire)
- Inspect tires for cracks, bulges, or embedded objects
- Spare tire pressure and condition (when's the last time you checked?)
- Know where your jack, lug wrench, and spare tire are located
- Brake pads condition (should have at least 3mm of pad remaining)

Electrical & Visibility

- Battery terminals clean and secure (no corrosion)
- Battery age and charge (most last 3-5 years — AAA can test for free)
- All headlights working (low beam, high beam)
- Taillights and brake lights working
- Turn signals working (front and rear)
- Hazard lights working
- Interior lights working
- Windshield wipers in good condition (replace if streaking)
- Windshield clean and free of major chips or cracks
- All mirrors clean and properly adjusted

Other Systems

- Air conditioning / heating working
- All belts in good condition (no cracks or fraying)
- Horn working
- Exhaust system — no unusual sounds or hanging parts
- Door locks all functioning

- Trunk/liftgate opens and closes properly

EMERGENCY ROADSIDE KIT

 *Keep this kit in your car year-round, not just for road trips.*

- Jumper cables or portable jump starter (lithium models are compact and powerful)
- Roadside emergency triangles or flares
- Reflective safety vest
- Flashlight with extra batteries (or hand-crank flashlight)
- Basic tool kit (pliers, screwdriver set, adjustable wrench, zip ties)
- Duct tape (fixes almost anything temporarily)
- Tire pressure gauge
- Tire patch kit and 12V portable air compressor
- Tow strap or tow rope
- Work gloves
- Rain poncho
- Fire extinguisher (small, rated B:C for vehicle fires)
- First aid kit (comprehensive — bandages, gauze, antiseptic, pain relievers, etc.)
- Blanket (wool or emergency mylar blanket)
- Bottled water (1 gallon per person minimum)
- Non-perishable snacks (granola bars, nuts, dried fruit)
- Paper towels / rags
- Ice scraper and snow brush (winter/cold climate)
- Small bag of sand or kitty litter (winter traction)
- Extra quart of engine oil
- AAA or roadside assistance membership card / app (or check if your auto insurance includes it)

ROUTE PLANNING

- Map your full route in Google Maps (save offline)
- Identify backup routes in case of road closures or traffic
- Research road conditions and construction zones (check state DOT websites)
- Plan fuel stops — never let the tank go below 1/4 in rural areas
- Identify rest stops and restroom locations along the route
- Plan meal stops (research restaurants along the way vs. packing food)
- Research scenic detours, viewpoints, and roadside attractions
- Check for toll roads and have cash, E-ZPass, or toll app ready
- Download offline maps for areas with poor cell coverage
- Research altitude changes (mountain passes may require chains in winter)
- Check if your route crosses time zones — adjust arrival estimates
- Plan your driving segments (no more than 8-10 hours of driving per day)
- Research parking at your destination and along the way
- Check state-by-state speed limits (they vary significantly)
- Research state-by-state hands-free phone laws

ACCOMMODATION PLANNING

- Book hotels/motels for each overnight stop (or keep it spontaneous with backup options)
- Confirm pet-friendly accommodations if bringing pets
- Check for free cancellation policies (plans change on road trips)
- Look for hotels with free breakfast (saves money and time)
- Confirm parking situation (free parking, overnight parking OK?)
- Book campsites if camping (popular ones fill months ahead)
- Download hotel loyalty apps for mobile check-in
- Research truck stops for RV/long vehicle parking and amenities

CAR ORGANIZATION & COMFORT

Organization

- Phone mount (dashboard or vent — hands-free navigation is essential and legally required)
- Center console organizer
- Backseat organizer (for kids or easy access to essentials)
- Trunk organizer or collapsible storage bins
- Trash bag or portable car trash can
- Cooler or insulated bag (for drinks and perishable snacks)
- Reusable grocery bags (for shopping stops and organizing)
- Bungee cords or cargo net (to secure items in the trunk)

Driver Comfort

- Adjust seat for long-distance comfort (lumbar support is key)
- Lumbar support cushion or pillow (if your car lacks adjustable lumbar)
- Seat cushion or pad (for long drives — memory foam helps)
- Polarized sunglasses (essential for glare, especially driving west in evening)
- Backup sunglasses
- Comfortable driving shoes (not flip-flops — you need to brake quickly)
- Tissues / napkins within reach
- Lip balm
- Water bottle within easy reach
- Gum or mints

ENTERTAINMENT

- Create playlists before the trip (road trip anthems, chill driving, sing-along)
- Download podcasts for offline listening (enough for the full drive time)
- Download audiobooks (Audible, Libby — great for long stretches)
- Prepare a road trip game list (20 Questions, License Plate Game, Would You Rather, Alphabet Game)
- Car karaoke playlist (everyone picks 5 songs)
- Bluetooth aux adapter (if car doesn't have Bluetooth)
- USB drives loaded with music (backup for dead phones)
- Books / magazines for passengers

- Downloaded movies/shows on tablet for kids
- Kids headphones (volume-limited for safety)
- Travel games (magnetic chess, card games, Mad Libs)
- Coloring books and crayons (for kids — no markers near car seats!)
- Portable gaming device (Nintendo Switch, etc.)

SNACKS & DRINKS

Healthy, Low-Mess Options

- Trail mix and mixed nuts
- Granola bars / protein bars
- Fresh fruit (apples, grapes, bananas, clementines)
- Cut vegetables (carrots, celery, cherry tomatoes) + hummus cups
- String cheese or cheese cubes
- Beef or turkey jerky
- Pretzels or crackers
- Peanut butter or almond butter packets
- Dried fruit (mango, cranberries, apricots)
- Sandwiches or wraps (pre-made for the first day)
- Yogurt pouches or cups (keep in cooler)

Drinks

- Refillable water bottles for everyone
- Coffee thermos / travel mugs
- Juice boxes (for kids)
- Electrolyte packets (Liquid IV, Nuun — driving dehydrates you)
- Cooler with ice packs

NAVIGATION & COMMUNICATION

- Phone mount (dashboard or windshield — essential for safe navigation)
- Car charger — USB-C and Lightning compatible
- Download offline maps in Google Maps for your entire route
- Download offline maps in a backup app (Maps.me, HERE WeGo)
- Paper road atlas or state maps (for areas with zero cell service)
- Portable WiFi hotspot (if multiple people need internet)
- CB radio or walkie-talkies (for caravanning with multiple cars)
- Share your route and ETA with family/friends via Google Maps or Find My

SAFETY & PREPAREDNESS

- Share your route and check-in schedule with someone at home
- Save emergency contacts as ICE (In Case of Emergency) in your phone
- Print or save your auto insurance card (physical + digital)
- Print or save your vehicle registration
- Check that your AAA or roadside assistance membership is current

- Research hospitals and urgent care along your route
- Carry a physical driver's license (not just phone copy)
- Ensure all passengers wear seatbelts — check child seat installation
- Follow the 2-hour rule: stop for at least 15 minutes every 2 hours
- Know the signs of drowsy driving — pull over if eyelids get heavy
- No driving under the influence — zero tolerance
- Designate a co-pilot for navigation so the driver can focus on the road
- Lock car doors while driving and at every stop
- Park in well-lit areas at night
- Don't leave valuables visible in the car when parked

BUDGET TRACKER

 Gas estimate formula: $(\text{total miles} \div \text{your car's MPG}) \times \text{current gas price per gallon} = \text{total fuel cost}$

Category	Estimated Cost	Actual Cost
Gas / Fuel	\$ _____	\$ _____
Tolls	\$ _____	\$ _____
Hotels / Camping	\$ _____	\$ _____
Food & Drinks	\$ _____	\$ _____
Activities & Attractions	\$ _____	\$ _____
Parking	\$ _____	\$ _____
Shopping / Souvenirs	\$ _____	\$ _____
Emergency Fund (10-15%)	\$ _____	\$ _____
TOTAL	\$ _____	\$ _____

WEATHER & SEASONAL PREP

Summer / Hot Weather

- Sunshade for windshield (protects dashboard and keeps car cooler)
- Extra water (at least 1 gallon per person in desert areas)
- Coolant check — overheating is a top summer breakdown cause
- Sunscreen in the car (reapply even through windows on long drives)
- Keep gas tank above half (fuel evaporates faster in heat)

Winter / Cold Weather

- Winter tires or all-season tires with good tread
- Tire chains (required in some mountain passes — know how to install them)
- Ice scraper and snow brush
- Bag of sand or kitty litter (for traction on ice)
- Extra warm blankets (one per person)
- Extra warm clothing in the car (hat, gloves, scarf)
- Hand and toe warmers
- Full tank before entering remote/mountain areas
- Check weather and road conditions before mountain passes

PET ROAD TRIP ADDITIONS

- Pet carrier or travel crate (secured in car)
- Pet seatbelt or harness (for safety — loose pets are dangerous in crashes)
- Food and portable food/water bowls
- Bottled water (some dogs react to unfamiliar water)
- Poop bags — lots of them
- Leash and collar with ID tags (current phone number)
- Pet's medications
- Vaccination records (some hotels/campgrounds require proof)
- Favorite toy, blanket, or bed (comfort from home)
- Pet-safe seat cover or towel for car seats
- Lint roller (for pet hair cleanup)
- Paper towels and stain remover (accidents happen)
- Research pet-friendly hotels, restaurants, and rest areas along route
- Never leave your pet in a parked car — temperatures rise dangerously fast

FAMILY / KIDS ROAD TRIP ADDITIONS

- Properly installed car seats (check local fire station for free inspection)
- Window sun shades for rear seats
- Spill-proof cups and snack containers
- Wet wipes / cleaning wipes (always within reach)
- Change of clothes for each child (easily accessible, not in trunk)
- Diapers, wipes, and changing supplies (if applicable)
- Plastic bags for dirty clothes or car sickness
- Activity packs for each child (stickers, coloring, small toys)
- Tablet loaded with downloaded movies and shows
- Kid-safe headphones (volume-limited)
- Rest stop schedule that includes playgrounds (Google 'playgrounds near [city]')
- Car sickness medication (Dramamine for kids — check age requirements)
- Comfort items: stuffed animals, blankets, pillows
- Travel potty seat (for recently potty-trained kids)
- First aid kit with kid-specific items (children's Tylenol, band-aids with characters)