

HelloRoad



# REALITIES OF ROAD TRIPS



*Your Survival Guide to Road-Tripping With Others*

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## Tip 1:

# CHOOSE YOUR ROUTE WISELY

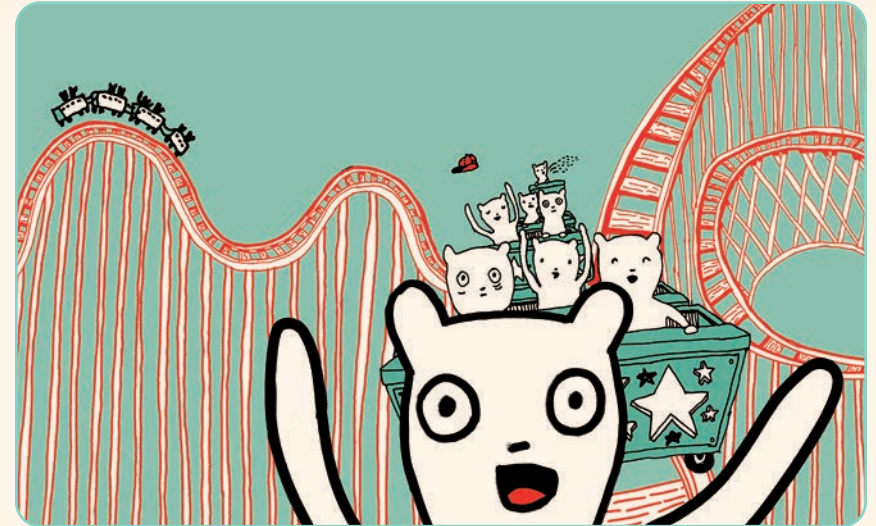


Road trips are as American as apple pie and ice cream. They represent wanderlust that is as much a part of the fabric of our national ideal as the scales of justice, democracy and, of course, “Real Housewives” TV shows. American novelist and poet Jack Kerouac regaled us with stories of his time on the road; journalist Hunter S. Thompson did the same (just with more f-bombs). Then, of course, there was “Thelma and Louise.”

But the realities of road tripping with real-life people are far different than the fantasy of road tripping in novels, gonzo journalism or on the silver screen. And when your road-trip “buddies” aren’t yet old enough to vote, let’s just say that’s an entirely different proposition.

I’ve crisscrossed the country more than a dozen times — solo, with friends, even with my kids.

Based on my experience, here are five tips to keep on trucking the next time you hit the road.



My paternal grandfather would always say the key to a good road trip was a good map. Even now, this credo still rings true, especially when you are the one responsible for answering the repetitive, “Are we there yet?” The only difference now is that just about everyone uses maps on cellphones.

Generally, this is convenient — most GPS apps are accurate and many of them talk, so you don’t have to keep glancing down while you’re trying to drive. Sometimes, however, the fastest way between two points is a random road that looks like a local thoroughfare on Google Maps but in real life ends up being the Autobahn. Or a windy and tortuous roller-coaster ride that makes everyone hurl. The point: You gotta be careful.

I usually plot my route on a desktop computer before I ever leave the house; that way I can research restaurants and bathrooms in case one of my car-mates needs them in a pinch (ahem, kids).

Sometimes I’ll also lean on AAA for a TripTik. I know they’re now available online, but I still like the old-fashioned ones you can hold, touch, dog-ear and fling on the dashboard when you’re done for the day. I’m pretty sure I still have the one I took on my first road trip from New York (where I grew up) to Florida. Because of that little book, every pit stop was a toilet (instead of the side of the road).



## Tip 2:

# ALLOW FOR OWNERSHIP



The best way to keep your traveling companions involved in the trip is to empower them to own parts of the journey.

No, I'm not talking about those signs you see on the freeway indicating which businesses have agreed to pick up trash for the next mile. I'm talking about you as the driver giving specific responsibilities to your friends, colleagues or kids that make them feel like they have a stake in how things turn out.

If you're road tripping with friends, this means allowing them to pick the route or stops along the way. If you're road tripping with kids, allow them to navigate, pick restaurants and play announcer. ("And now, off the starboard bow: COWS! Again! For the fifth time in the last six minutes! Isn't Kansas amazing?")

Depending on the trip — and your control issues, to be honest — assigning ownership even can trickle down into DJ duties and radio or podcast (or audio book) management.

If you do this, be warned: Most teenagers have terrible taste in music.

## Tip 3:

# GET GOOD SNACKS



A good friend (and stellar traveling companion) once told me that a road trip is only as epic as the snacks you buy for it. From my perspective, as both an accomplished road-tripper and experienced snacker, I could not agree more.

Of course, the No. 1 rule of road-tripping is that unhealthy snacks don't count. It's a known fact that careening at 70 mph down an interstate opens a hole in the time/space continuum that allows for limitless servings of gummy worms, Pringles, Slim Jims and more. Beverages don't count either — whether you have one Mountain Dew or six Mountain Dews, it's all the same.

(In case you're wondering, I'm a coffee guy, and I've murdered hundreds of bags of Traditional Chex Mix on the road.)

These bizarro laws of physics behoove you to choose wisely — not just for yourself but for others in the car as well. If you're traveling with multiple people, consider sharing to spread the wealth.

Oh, and if you want to try to be healthy, remember the golden ratio: For every celery and carrot stick, you and your companions should be allowed an equivalent number of Twix bars and KitKats. What's that they say about diets? Right! Everything in moderation.

## Tip 4:

# FILL AND EMPTY



No, this section isn't about gas (although with today's prices, that's important too). It's about hydration, and about managing the inevitable pit stops that are an, um, downstream effect of what you imbibe. The top-level lesson here, of course, is easy: drink, drink, drink. A concomitant tip: Be tactical about pit stops because they are the ultimate rally killer when you're making time.

Personally, I embrace the philosophy of group pit stops.

Under this approach, everyone is required to exit the vehicle and empty bladders at every pit stop. Yes, it usually means more time at each pit stop. But because everyone is going every time you stop, unless you're traveling with someone who has an abnormally small bladder, there will be fewer stops overall.

There's probably some economic theory that applies here — something about the scarcity of resources and maximizing value. I just think it's efficient. Release at every stop and you don't get desperate.

To state the obvious after years of a global pandemic, every pit stop should be followed immediately by at least 20 seconds of vigorous handwashing. Another tip: If you're worried about the availability of soap (or general hygiene) in foreign restrooms, be sure to travel with your own container of hand sanitizer to make sure everyone's safe.

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## Tip 5:

# ESTABLISH PROGRESS GOALS



The only way to guarantee forward progress on a road trip is to establish goals for every day. The goals can vary: distance (miles or kilometers), time in the car, number of McDonald's shakes, whatever. You just need to have goals.

If you're traveling with kids, the goals part is easy — especially when you choose to mark progress by something they can count.

Maybe it's mile markers. Maybe it's state troopers. Maybe it's license plates from states that start with the letter A. Heck, maybe it's even instances during which the grownups in the car act like clueless rubes about technology or Bluetooth or Lauren Spencer-Smith. When you notch five or six of any of these examples, you've had a good day of driving.

If you're traveling with other adults, progress monitoring can be more fluid; maybe you chart progress by how many meaningful conversations you've had, or by the number of successfully answered Star Wars trivia questions.

The "how" here isn't nearly as important as the fact that you measure at all. While the magic of a road trip is in the journey, you still need to get where you're going, and the car ain't gonna drive itself (yet).

**Matt Villano** is a writer and editor based in Healdsburg, California. He has logged more than 250,000 miles on road trips since 2000.