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# Summer Fun

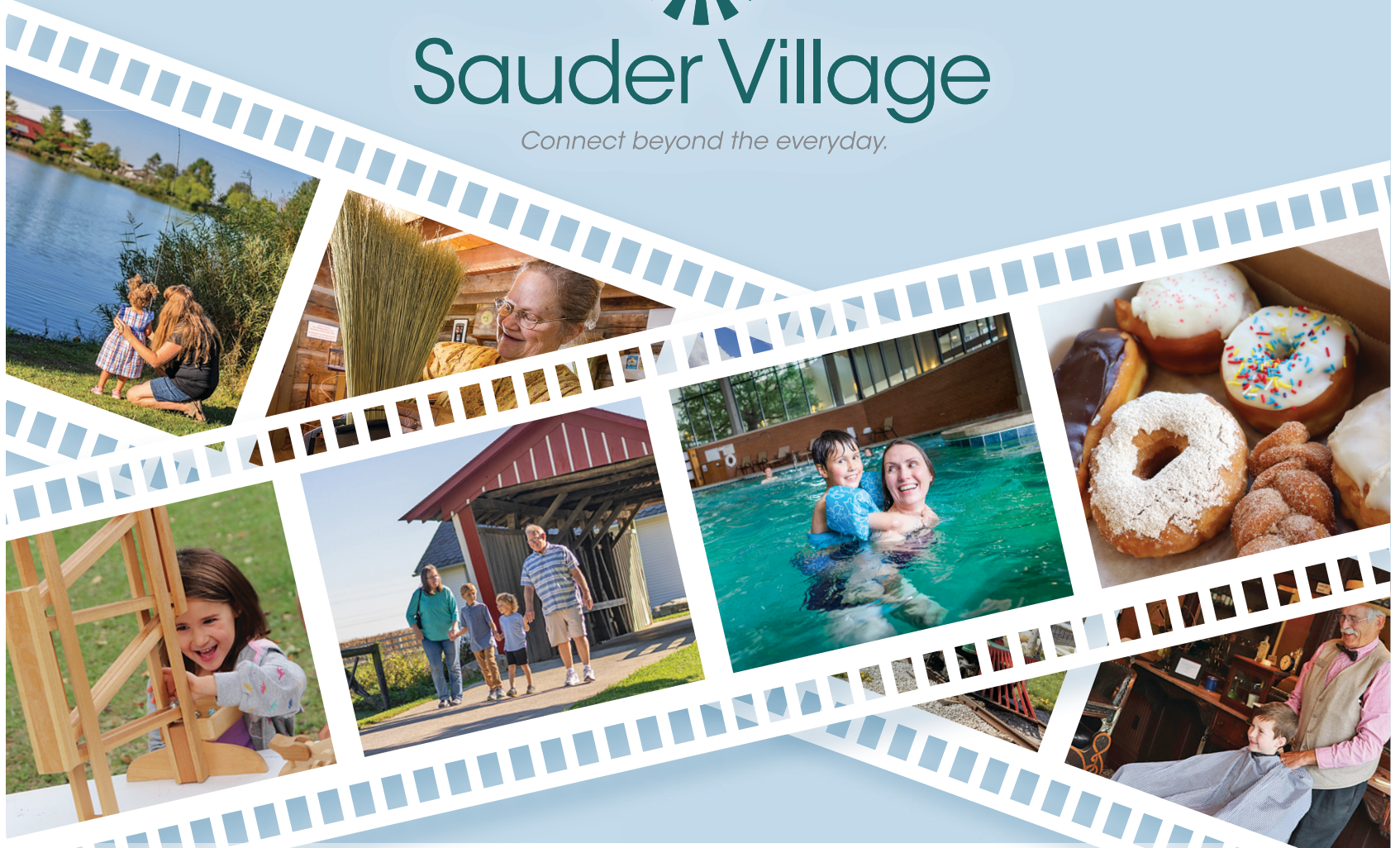


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**SauderVillage.org**

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# 8 games to try at the next backyard bash

## BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Games can enhance any outdoor function. Whether at the beach or in one's backyard, activities can keep guests entertained in between the food and other refreshments. And the good news is that most games designed for these types of functions are appropriate for players across a wide range of ages.

The following are eight games that can add to the excitement of any outdoor gathering.

**1. Ladder toss:** Also known as ladder golf, this game requires players to toss string-attached balls onto a ladder-shaped target. Points are awarded depending on which rung the ball lands on.

**2. Kubb:** Pronounced "KOOB," this Swedish lawn game believed to have originated during the era of the Vikings and is best described as a blend of bowling and horseshoes. Two teams compete to knock over their opponents' wooden blocks by throwing batons.

**3. Cornhole:** Many people have played cornhole, which involves tossing bean bags at the cornhole board. The objective is to get the bag into the hole or on the board to score points. The game can be played as singles or doubles. The first team to reach 21 points

wins.

**4. Spikeball™:** Also called Roundnet, this two-on-two sport is played by hitting a ball off a net with the goal of preventing the opposing team from returning the ball within three touches.

**5. Ring toss:** This is another game that tests hand-eye coordination. Players take turns tossing the rings onto the target pegs. Each peg is worth a different number of points. The first player to reach the agreed-upon amount of points wins.

**6. Connect four in a row:** Giant versions of familiar tabletop games also are available for yard use. With this game, players need to get four chips in a row, either up and down or diagonal.

**7. Kan Jam®:** Similar to cornhole or horseshoes, Kan Jam® features two teams of two that alternate between throwing a frisbee and trying to deflect it. The goal is to get the frisbee into the can.

**8. Rollers:** Goals are placed 25 feet apart and then players roll wooden discs to try to get closest to the goal. Each side of the disc has a different number to determine the point value.

Backyard events can be enhanced with some game play. There are plenty of fun options for your next gathering.



METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

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# Get fired up about these fireworks

## BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Fireworks are integral components of many large celebrations. Pyrotechnics may rise into the sky right after midnight at the start of a new year, during sporting events, and of course to mark Canada Day or Independence Day festivities.

Although fireworks can be impressive displays with their awe-inspiring designs and colors, they are best left to professionals and ideally avoided by amateur enthusiasts. In 2023, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimated that 9,700 individuals were treated in hospital emergency departments for fireworks-related

injuries. The CPSC indicates that the majority of fireworks injuries are burns that affect hands, fingers, head, face, and ears. Leaving fireworks to professional pyrotechnics experts can reduce injuries and even deaths.

That leaves the question of what revelers can do to make their celebrations festive without relying on fireworks? There are plenty of options and fun alternatives to fireworks.

- **Confetti:** Throwing confetti can simulate the different colors of fireworks displays. Choose recycled paper that will not have a detrimental effect on the environment, and clean up thoroughly after the celebration.

- **Noisemakers:** Children can bang pots and pans or use other items to make noise in celebration to simulate the pops and bangs of fireworks.

- **Sprinklers:** Instead of sparklers, kids can use sprinklers and water features for fun. Some pools have water return jet add-ons that spray water up in the air or out over the pool. When paired with colorful underwater lights, this can make an impressive display to swim through on a hot evening.

- **Snappers or caps:** Depending on the area where you live, smaller popping novelty items that make a loud popping noise when thrown or stepped on may be sold. They

are generally safer to handle than traditional fireworks.

- **Balloons:** Everyone can play games involving water balloons or even regular balloons. Sitting or stomping on balloons can create loud pops reminiscent of fireworks.

- **Fiber optic novelties:** Celebrants can wave fiber optic wands or other novelties that cast bright lights. Additional options are glow sticks that also can light up the night.

Although fireworks can be impressive, it's best to watch them from afar and leave their handling to professionals. Safer alternatives are best for home celebrations.

# Low-cost summer entertaining

## BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Summer is a season for entertaining. But as the cost of consumer goods and even necessities like food has risen in recent years, some people may be hosting a lot less often than they used to.

It's important to keep in mind that memorable entertaining options are not only defined by cost. Sure that professional decorator or expensive catering service may be lavish, but it's possible to host a gathering without putting a strain on your finances. Here are some strategies for budget-friendly summer entertaining.

- **Buffets and bars:** A complex, multi-course meal will be expensive, and some guests may even find it pretentious. Instead, reduce time spent in the kitchen and simplify meal service with buffet stations and food bars. Allow guests to customize their food with different toppings and ingredients, which can elevate even simple fare like tacos or burgers.

- **Signature drinks:** A full open bar is expensive. Keeping a few staples on hand, such as beer and red

and white wine, should be sufficient. But hosts also can create a signature cocktail, make it in bulk and serve it in a pitcher. Spritzers also can stretch wine or liquor further because they are mixed with sparkling water. Remember to also make non-alcoholic offerings available. A pitcher of mineral water with fruit or cucumber slices is affordable and refreshing.

- **Affordable atmosphere:** There's no need to hire a party planner to transform an entertaining space. Inexpensive tricks can go a long way. Lighting is important, and repurposed holiday lights or bistro lights will make the space intimate as the sun goes down. Even tea candles in scattered mason jars will create a relaxing ambiance. Utilize found items for decor, like seasonal fruits in a bowl for a vibrant centerpiece or clippings from the garden instead of costly bouquets picked up from the store.

- **Music:** Music is an useful means to set the mood and help guests feel comfortable, while silent space can be austere and awkward. Hosts can curate

a party playlist via a free or paid music app rather than spending money on live entertainment.

- **Encourage contributions:** As a party host or hostess, it's tempting to want to do it all and take on all of the burden. But it's alright and cost-effective to accept help when guests want to contribute. If friends express a desire to help, ask them to bring a side dish, a favorite beverage or a dessert to defray costs.

- **Low-cost activities:** Keeping guests occupied doesn't have to be expensive. Pass around lyrics to songs so everyone can join in on a group karaoke session featuring familiar favorites like "Sweet Caroline" or Shaboozey's "A Bar Song (Tipsy)," among others. Board games, lawn games like cornhole, or even card games are some additional low-cost options. Pool owners have an ultimate source of entertainment without any new expenses.

Entertaining during the summer doesn't have to be expensive. By focusing on company, fun and casual food, hosts and their guests are likely to have a good time.



METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

# How to up the flavor of grilled fare

## BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Foods cooked over an open flame are a staple of summer. Whether you're looking to avoid heating up the house by using the stove on a summer weeknight or hosting a backyard barbecue for family and friends, a grill is a go-to at dinnertime once the weather warms up.

Grilling imparts a uniquely smoky flavor to various foods, and there are many ways to make meals cooked over an open flame even more flavorful. As grilling season hits full swing, try these strategies to add flavor to grilled foods.

- **Know when to use marinade and when to use a dry rub.** Marinades and dry rubs are widely viewed as effective means to improving the flavor profile of grilled foods, and those reputations are well-deserved. But which one to use and when? According to the spice and herb experts at Simply Organic®, marinade is best utilized when grilling leaner meats or tougher cuts that could benefit from some tenderizing. A dry rub works best when grilling or smoking meats that are already tender or have a lot of fat content.

- **Consider taking meats out of the refrigerator 15 to 30 minutes before placing them on the grill.** Taking meat, pork, and even fish out of the refrigerator 15 to 30 minutes before cooking is a process known as "tempering." Some insist on this approach, while others suggest it does little to improve flavor. Advocates of tempering insist the approach produces juicier, more evenly cooked foods. Those who feel tempering is unnecessary suggest

flipping foods with greater frequency can lead to more evenly cooked foods. This debate is unlikely to end anytime soon, but those who have never tried tempering can give it a shot if they feel their grilled meats could be cooked more evenly.

- **Monitor the temperature when cooking hamburgers.** It sounds simple, but keeping an eye on the temperature inside the grill is vital if you hope to avoid charring or dried out foods. Many grilling enthusiasts know to utilize a meat thermometer when cooking steaks and roasts over an open flame. But burgers tend to be tossed on the grill and cooked without consideration for grill temperature or internal temperature. According to DDR BBQ Supply, the best grill temperature for burgers is between 350 F and 400 F. Grilling burgers below 325 F will lead to the burgers drying out before they brown, while grilling them at 450 F or above will cause the burgers to burn before they're cooked through.

- **Use wood.** When cooking on a traditional charcoal grill, seasoned wood chips or chunks can impart some extra smoky flavor onto foods. Wood also can be used when cooking on a gas grill, but this requires a little extra work. When using a gas grill, place the chips or chunks in a smoker box or a foil pan or wrap them in foil. Place the box or pouch on the grate and light the burner, and the resulting smoke will impart extra flavor to the food cooked elsewhere on the grate.

Imparting additional flavor to grilled foods can make this popular way to cook out even more enjoyable.



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# Go Birdwatching

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Birdwatching, or birding, offers nature enthusiasts a captivating opportunity to connect with the avian world and appreciate the beauty and diversity of bird species in their natural habitats.

Birdwatching.com claims that birding is the fastest-growing outdoor activity in the U.S. They cite a survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that says 51.3 million Americans report that they are birdwatchers.

Selecting the right location is key to a successful birdwatching expedition. Research and identify birding hotspots known for their rich biodiversity and abundance of bird species. National parks, wildlife refuges, wetlands and coastal areas are often prime

birdwatching destinations. Consider visiting local bird sanctuaries, nature reserves and eBird hotspots, which provide valuable data on bird sightings and species distribution.

Plan your birdwatching expeditions during optimal times of the day when bird activity is at its peak. Early mornings and late afternoons are prime birding hours when birds are most active, singing, foraging and displaying their vibrant plumage. Consider seasonal migrations and breeding patterns to maximize your chances of spotting migratory birds and nesting activities.

Invest in quality birding gear and equipment to enhance your birdwatching experience. Essential items include binoculars or a spotting scope for magnified

views of distant birds, a field guide or birding app for species identification, a notebook and pen for recording observations and comfortable outdoor attire suitable for the weather and terrain. Consider bringing along a camera or smartphone for capturing memorable bird sightings and moments.

Birdwatching requires patience, keen observation skills, and a sharp eye for detail. Be prepared to spend time quietly observing birds in their natural habitats, using stealth and camouflage techniques to avoid startling them. Listen for bird calls, songs and alarm signals to locate hidden or elusive species, and pay attention to behavioral cues and flight patterns for species identification.

Being able to identify a

bird is a journey, according to Audubon. They say you will need to get to know a bird's habitat, note its field marks and consider its calls. They offer an extensive guide on their website to help birders distinguish between different birds.

Practice ethical birdwatching and respect the welfare of birds and their habitats. Keep a safe distance from nesting sites and sensitive habitats to avoid disturbing birds or causing unnecessary stress. Stay on designated trails and paths, avoid trampling vegetation, and refrain from feeding or approaching wild birds. Leave no trace and minimize your impact on the environment during your birdwatching expeditions.

Consider joining local birding groups, clubs or guided birdwatching tours

led by experienced naturalists and birding experts. Birding groups provide opportunities for shared knowledge, camaraderie and mentorship, as well as access to exclusive birding locations and events. Guided tours offer valuable insights into bird behavior, ecology and conservation efforts while exploring diverse ecosystems and bird habitats.

Embark on thrilling birdwatching expeditions and discover the fascinating world of birds in their natural habitats. With careful planning, essential gear and a passion for observation, birdwatching enthusiasts can enjoy memorable encounters with a wide variety of bird species while fostering a deeper appreciation for the wonders of nature.

# Outdoor Yoga and Fitness

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

This summer, take your yoga practice or fitness routine outdoors and immerse yourself in the beauty of nature.

Outdoor yoga and fitness classes offer a refreshing alternative to indoor workouts, allowing you to breathe in the fresh air, soak up the sunshine and connect with the natural world while nurturing your mind, body and spirit. Exploring outdoor classes in scenic locations can invigorate your practice

and inspire a deeper sense of well-being.

One of the most compelling aspects of outdoor yoga and fitness classes is the opportunity to practice in breathtaking natural settings, such as parks, beaches, gardens and mountaintops. Practicing yoga amidst lush greenery, with the sound of birds chirping and the gentle rustle of leaves in the background, can create a sense of peace and tranquility that enhances your practice and promotes

relaxation and mindfulness.

Many outdoor yoga and fitness classes are designed to cater to practitioners of all levels, from beginners to experienced yogis and fitness enthusiasts. Experienced instructors lead classes that incorporate a variety of yoga styles, including vinyasa, hatha, yin and restorative yoga, as well as high-intensity interval training (HIIT), Pilates, and boot camp-style workouts. These classes offer a dynamic and challenging workout while

providing modifications and adjustments to accommodate individual needs and abilities.

In addition to the physical benefits, outdoor yoga and fitness classes offer an opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals and build a sense of community. Practicing in a group setting fosters a supportive and uplifting environment where participants can share their experiences, celebrate their achievements and encourage one another to reach their fitness goals. Many outdoor classes incorporate elements of mindfulness, meditation and breathwork, allowing participants to cultivate inner peace and mental clarity amidst the beauty of nature.

When participating in outdoor yoga and fitness classes, it's important to come prepared with the right gear and equipment. Wear comfortable, breathable clothing that allows

for ease of movement and proper footwear suitable for the terrain. Bring along a yoga mat or towel to provide cushioning and support during yoga poses and floor exercises, as well as a water bottle to stay hydrated.

Before attending an outdoor class, check the weather forecast and dress accordingly. Apply sunscreen to protect your skin, and consider bringing a hat, sunglasses and insect repellent. Arrive a few minutes early to set up your mat and familiarize yourself with the surroundings, and be mindful of any safety guidelines or instructions the instructor provides.

Outdoor yoga and fitness classes offer a rejuvenating and invigorating way to enhance your well-being and connect with nature. So grab your mat, step outside and embark on a transformative journey of self-discovery and self-care amidst the natural wonders of the world.



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# Participate in a Beach Cleanup

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Beaches are synonymous with summer, but they've come under increasing threats that can spoil them for both humans and the marine life that live in lakes and oceans.

Marine debris and litter are polluting our coastlines and threatening fragile ecosystems. Fortunately, beach cleanup initiatives offer an opportunity for individuals and communities to come together in the spirit of conservation and make a tangible difference in preserving coastal environments.

Coastal ecosystems, including beaches, dunes and mangroves, are vital habitats that support a diverse array of marine life and contribute to global biodiversity.

However, human activities such as littering, improper waste disposal and marine pollution pose significant threats to these sensitive environments. Debris, including plastics, glass and other materials, can harm ocean and lake animals through ingestion, entanglement and habitat destruction, causing harm to marine ecosystems and biodiversity.

Beach cleanup initiatives empower individuals and communities to take action and become stewards of their local coastlines. Organized by environmental organizations, non-profits, schools, businesses and community groups, beach cleanups bring together volunteers of all ages and backgrounds to remove litter and debris from beaches and coastal areas. By partic-

ipating in beach cleanups, volunteers contribute to cleaner shorelines and raise awareness about the importance of marine conservation and environmental stewardship.

Some organizations, such as the Alliance for the Great Lakes, sponsor groups that want to adopt a specific beach. They ask team leaders to organize volunteers, pick up debris and then enter litter data into a database that helps the organization understand the extent of issues on the Great Lakes.

Beach cleanups have a tangible and immediate impact on coastal environments, helping to reduce the harmful effects of marine debris on marine life and ecosystems. Every piece of litter removed from the beach represents a step

towards a cleaner, healthier coastline. Additionally, beach cleanups provide valuable data on the types and quantities of litter collected, which can inform policy decisions, raise public awareness and support efforts to address the root causes of marine pollution.

The Ocean Blue Project encourages beach cleanups as a part of eco-tourism, explaining that the cleanups safeguard marine life and its habitats. It's a way of maintaining the ecological balance and integrity of endangered regions while ensuring long-term marine biodiversity.

Getting involved in beach cleanup initiatives is easy and rewarding. Check local environmental organizations, community groups or online platforms for upcoming

beach cleanup events in your area. Join organized cleanup efforts or gather a group of friends, family or colleagues to initiate your own beach cleanup project. Remember to follow safety guidelines, wear appropriate attire and bring gloves, bags and other cleanup supplies.

Individuals can raise awareness about marine conservation and environmental issues through education, advocacy and community engagement. Share information about the importance of reducing plastic consumption, recycling responsibly and adopting sustainable practices to minimize waste and protect our oceans. Encourage others to join the movement and promote healthy coastal environments.

# Tips to steer clear of traffic on your next summer road trip

## BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Travelers take to the roads in droves come the summertime. When vacation season hits full swing, vacationers have long had a tendency to get behind the wheel and take to the open road, and that tradition seems to be especially appealing to modern travelers.

The 2026 Trends Report from Hilton indicated that 71 percent of travelers surveyed indicated their intentions to drive on their next vacation. Road trips are favored for a variety of reasons, including a sense of spontaneity that is not available when vacationers are traveling on airline's schedules.

With so many vacationers expecting to hit the open road this summer, it can benefit all drivers to embrace strategies designed to help motorists steer clear of traffic.

• **Choose alternative routes when mapping trips**

**on GPS.** Modern drivers rely on mapping applications to get them to and fro on long road trips, and some of those apps may allow drivers to choose alternative routes that are less busy. Many mapping apps default to the fastest route, but Apple Maps and Google Maps also offer options to avoid highways and tolls. Those alternative routes tend to be less heavily trafficked than the primary routes. Drivers also can look for specialized navigation apps like Calimoto. Calimoto is popular among motorcyclists who use it to find the most scenic and winding routes as opposed to the fastest. Such roads tend to be less crowded, which can be ideal for vacationers who aren't in a hurry but hoping to avoid traffic.

• **Wake up early.** While it might not be for everyone, those who can rise early can beat many of their fellow travelers to the road. Peak congestion periods vary by region, but

it's generally best to avoid departing during times of day associated with morning and evening rush hour. That's between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. and between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. Roads tend to be considerably less congested between 4 a.m. and 6 a.m., but it's important that drivers who intend to hit the road at this time get sufficient sleep the night before departing and avoid driving drowsy.

• **Depart a day early.** If possible, drivers can plan to leave for vacation a day

early. For example, leaving on a Thursday as opposed to a Friday can help drivers avoid weekend road trippers and others who are starting their own lengthier trips on Friday. It also can help to return home a day early or leave as little driving as possible for the final leg of the trip, particularly if it's on a Sunday. Roads tend to be packed with returning vacationers and weekenders on summer Sundays, making those days a particularly busy time to travel.

• **Dust off the map.**

When confronting a traffic jam, many travelers will utilize the same mapping apps to find alternative routes. That means the traffic may just be shifting from one busy road to another road that may soon become just as crowded. Drivers are urged to bring along a traditional map to find local roads that mapping apps are unlikely to recommend.

Roadways tend to be busy in summer. But there's much vacationers can do to avoid being stuck in heavy traffic.


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