

Best road-trip apps for holiday travels

Dennis Schaal, Special for USA TODAY 11:12 a.m. EDT October 14, 2013

If you are setting out on the road this fall or winter, plug in your car-charger and smartphone because you can bring along a ton of collective wisdom in the form of great road-trip apps.

From the navigation-oriented Waze to gas-price bargain hunter Gas Buddy, the best of these apps incorporate the wisdom of like-minded travelers with updates about lurking speed traps, ever-changing fuel costs, and ratings of the hotel staff or restaurant just off the exit.

You can even use the Waze app to let your hosts know when to take the turkey out of the oven, and you can send them a live link to follow your whereabouts and gauge your estimated time of arrival.

Here are some of the best apps for your fall and winter holiday road trips:

WAZE (Free, available on iOS and Android)

Waze is a navigation app that leverages its database and a very active community of drivers to guide and even reroute your trip. It provides real-time intelligence and alerts on speed traps, traffic tie-ups, road hazards, cars stuck in the road or on the shoulder, and the snowstorm ahead.

You may be driving alone, but you won't necessarily feel that way with Waze users' constant updates. Heading toward a Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner? You can send a link to your hosts, who can view your estimated time of arrival and monitor your location live on a map. While Waze's directions can occasionally be off-target, its users provide feedback and corrections.

GAS BUDDY (Free, available on Android, iOS, Windows Phone and BlackBerry)

With the Gas Buddy app, you can view prices for regular, midrange, premium or diesel fuel at stations close to your location. You can also search by city, state or ZIP code.

If you search for cheap gas prices to refuel, Gas Buddy will let you know how far the station is off the highway exit so you are not driving endlessly. Fellow Gas Buddy users submit prices as they visit or drive by stations, and users can see how recent the update is.

HOTELS.COM (Free, available on Android, iOS and Windows Phone)

Hotels.com is a very handy app for road trippers because of its sole focus on hotels, its wide selection of properties, and its ease of use, with just several taps from searching to booking. The app defaults to hotels near you and those that are available for tonight.

There are ratings of properties by former guests, and a "call" button connects you to a real person at Hotels.com who can help with your reservation. Hotels.com is a better option than HotelTonight for most road trippers because it offers more properties and a varied selection of hotel types.

ROADTRIPPERS (Free, available on iOS)

The RoadTrippers app can help you find both tourist attractions and offbeat destinations, replete with driving directions and maps, as you are motoring through the area. Using its database of more than 75,000 places, as well as recommendations from local experts, the app offers suggested guides as well, from the Haunted Northeast to the Kentucky Bourbon Trail.

You can also use the app to find restaurants, hotels, scenic vistas and shopping, although there are glitches. A search for places in Pittsburgh turned up Pittsburgh Willy's, a spot for "Pennsylvania pierogies" in Chandler, Ariz.

FIELD TRIP (Free, iOS and Android)

This app from Google runs in the background on your smartphone, and a card pops up with information when you are driving near a local attraction that's cool or interesting. You can pre-select your interests, and the app may notify you about a nearby historic golf course, a Civil War battlefield or a restaurant.

Field Trip will also help you when you aren't in the car. You can get directions to the attraction by car, walking or using mass transit. Expect a lot of reviews by Google-owned Zagat. Unlike Roadtrippers, the attractions in Field Trip tend to be on the beaten track.

CANDY CRUSH SAGA (Free, Android and iOS)

If you are not going to be "there yet" for many hours, then the Candy Crush Saga app can help the hours zoom by. Gamers, whether kids or adults, mix and match sweets in various combinations and at ever-increasing levels of expertise as the game progresses.

The game syncs up whether you are playing on a desktop, on Facebook or in the car so you can continue in the car what you started at home and vice versa. Like Waze and Gas Buddy, there are social aspects to Candy Crush Saga as you can sign into the app through Facebook to view your friends' scores and levels