

Taking the High Road: Tips for passing (joints) through the New England states this summer

I don't know about you, but when it comes to vacationing in the summer months, I don't feel the need to go very far from home. Of course there is a reason that so many tourists flock to our area in the summer months — loathe them though we may — and I, too, appreciate the natural beauty, outdoor recreation and convenience offered by traveling to nearby states during our short summer season here in New England. If you are like me (meaning you enjoy cannabis and are planning a weekend trip or two this summer), here are my best tips to keep your New England road trip safe, legal and just a little bit silly.

Know the Laws

Regardless of your road trip route, it is critical to understand your destination's cannabis laws as well as those of states you will be passing through along the way. Luckily, almost every state in New England has legalized cannabis for adult use and possession, and even in those that haven't yet (Hello, RI and NH!), medical marijuana and decriminalization laws make getting caught with cannabis much less dangerous than in years past. If you are a medical marijuana patient, be sure to bring your patient card with you, and if you happen to be traveling to a state with patient reciprocity laws (Maine or Rhode Island), you will be able to purchase from the medical dispensaries there. *Note: New Hampshire recognizes out-of-state patient cards when it comes to possession, but dispensaries are open to in-state patients only.

Remember that just because a state has legalized, that doesn't mean that there will be dispensaries open for business when you arrive. It takes time to launch a legal cannabis market, so some recently legal states, such as New York and Connecticut, have yet to open doors on recreational dispensaries. Fortunately, in those states you can legally possess 3 oz and 1.5 oz respectively, so you can at least feel a little more comfortable traveling (or sitting in traffic) with cannabis in your vehicle.

To stay up-to-date with various state cannabis laws and ensure that you are within legal limits, do a little research before your trip (I recommend Marijuana Policy Project's interactive state policy map), and plan accordingly.

Pit Stops at Pot Shops

If you are driving through Massachusetts or Maine, you will likely see plenty of dispensaries along your route, and the recreational stores should be open to anyone who is 21+ (just don't forget your ID, because these places are serious about carding). If you are traveling to a new area and want some help finding "pot stops" along the way, there are a couple of apps that I would recommend: Weedmaps provides a user-friendly map of dispensaries based on your location, and Leafly offers both a dispensary finder and a strain explorer tool, if you would like to explore your options beforehand. If you are still unsure about what to purchase, you can always ask the budtender at the dispensary for advice. It's part of their job to educate and inform customers about the offerings on the menu. Lastly, keep in mind that most states have a strictly enforced purchase limit, which is probably for the best if you are traveling with cannabis, as you will want to keep your possessed amount within state legal limitations.

Keep It Secret, Keep It Safe

While New England state laws are becoming more favorable for cannabis users, we can't forget that it remains federally illegal to carry marijuana (a Schedule 1 substance, according to them) across state lines, even when traveling between legal states. Although I do believe that you would be unlikely to be charged with a federal crime while adhering to state law, it's still best to play it safe when you have cannabis in your cargo. I would definitely avoid crossing international borders with any amount of marijuana, though, as that would be more likely to fall under federal jurisdiction. In general, keep your products secured and out of sight (in the trunk is best), and be especially cautious about keeping products locked up and out of reach when traveling with children or pets. Most state laws treat cannabis products similarly to an open container of alcohol, so keep that in mind when hitting the road.

Be a Good Driver

We should always obey traffic laws, obviously, but we should be extra sure to do so when traveling with cannabis. As a teenager, I learned this concept as "One Crime at a Time," but even in this new age of legal cannabis, it's best to not provide any possible reason for an interaction with law enforcement. So don't speed, and avoid driving while partaking. It's best to wait until your destination or plan a leisurely stop along the way, so you can actually relax and enjoy yourself. If you are traveling with friends, designate a sober driver or take turns on longer trips. Wherever you are, avoid smoking in public, and be mindful of the rules of your accommodations when it comes to being "4/20 friendly."

No matter your destination, the most important part of a road trip is the journey. We all work too much, so I hope that you can plan a good old fashioned New England getaway this summer. What a great opportunity to slow down, put on a dope playlist, take the scenic route and enjoy the ride! Just don't forget the snacks.