

ARMED SERVICES YMCA & JACK DANIEL'S **OPERATION RIDE HOME**

2026 Holiday Season – Frequently Asked Questions

What is Operation Ride Home?

The 2026 holiday season marks 16 years of Armed Services YMCA and Jack Daniel's Operation Ride Home, an application-based travel assistance service to help junior enlisted service members and their families who may not have the financial means to travel home for the holidays. Operation Ride Home can bridge the distance between military families and their loved ones, which helps them feel less isolated and more connected. Since 2011, the Armed Services YMCA and Jack Daniel's have sent 16,072 service members and their immediate family members home for the holidays.

Who can apply?

Operation Ride Home is limited to E1-E5 Active Duty and Reserve personnel, both single and married, travelling with their spouse and/or dependent child(ren) ages 0-18, from all six Service branches and whose duty station is one of the installations served by Armed Services YMCA's 12 locations in the United States. If the E1-E5 service member is deployed, the spouse and dependent children are eligible to apply and travel without the service member. The service member, spouse or military representative may fill out the application, and the Armed Services YMCA reviews and selects eligible applications. Due to limited resources, National Guard are not eligible to apply.

Where are the participating locations?

The service member's duty station must be a military installation in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii, served by one of Armed Services YMCA's 12 Branches. For a list of locations and participating installations, visit <https://ridehome.asymca.org>.

Does the service member have to be one of the travelers?

No. While generally, the service member travels with their family, there may be instances when their military duties such as deployment or TDY keep the service member from traveling home. In these cases, the spouse or a child's legal guardian is eligible to travel home separately either individually or with dependent children age 0-18. Dependent children may not travel by themselves.

What if the service member is deployed?

If a service member is deployed, the spouse or a dependent child's legal guardian is eligible to travel home separately, either individually or with dependent children ages 0-18. the spouse/legal guardian must provide a military ID or a redacted copy of deployment orders. Dependent children may not travel by themselves.

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Are there any requirements for travel distances?

Yes. For air travel, the origination point/airport must be in the vicinity of the service member's duty station and the destination can be anywhere in the world. For vehicle travel, the origination point must be the duty station, and the destination must be at least 350 miles from the duty station. The choice to fly or drive is an individual decision made by the applicant.

When can I apply for Operation Ride Home?

Applications for the 2026 holiday travel open based on the dates provided by the 12 Armed Services YMCA Branch. Because the dates vary, please check <https://ridehome.asymca.org> for the dates and link to the application.

How are participants selected?

The Armed Services YMCA selects applicants based on level of need and may choose to coordinate with their local Board of Management and/or military unit/command.

By filling out an application am I guaranteed I'll be selected?

No. There are typically more applications submitted than resources to fulfill every request. In addition, applications can be declined at the discretion of the Armed Services YMCA Branch or Headquarters. However, if a Branch reaches its traveler limits, a waitlist will be created in case additional funds are made available.

How does the process work?

Visit <https://ridehome.asymca.org/find-your-ride-home/> for eligibility, application deadlines and a link to the application itself. For traveling service members, a Leave Dates Approval Form is required to submit an application. The Branch reviews submissions, makes determinations, and contacts approved applicants to coordinate travel logistics.

Why is the program only available at certain installations?

Because resources are limited, the Armed Services YMCA only offers the service through its 12 local Branches, which serves 95 military installations in the U.S., including Alaska and Hawaii. For a full list, visit <https://ridehome.asymca.org/find-your-ride-home/>.

If selected, how much travel assistance will I receive?

For air travel, the maximum amount is \$500 or 50,000 American AAdvantage miles for one round-trip ticket. Airline tickets must be booked by an Armed Services YMCA branch or Armed Services YMCA-approved travel agent. For vehicle travel, approved applicants receive one \$125 pre-paid gift card for the service member, spouse and dependent children ages 0-18 traveling in the vehicle. This amount is meant to help offset the costs of gas, food and/or hotel accommodations.

What if my travel costs are more than the stipend amount?

If the airline ticket exceeds the \$500 amount of assistance per approved traveler, the traveler must pay the difference. The traveler's credit card information will be collected at the time the ticket is booked. While Operation Ride Home is structured to help facilitate travel and offset costs as much as possible, it may not cover 100% of travel costs. To ensure optimal benefit of the donated funds, the program follows guidelines established by the ASYMCA and Jack Daniel's.

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Can I book my own air travel and be reimbursed?

No, approved applicants will not be reimbursed for pre-paid travel costs or if they book their own travel. All air travel must be booked by the Armed Services YMCA Branch or Armed Services YMCA-approved travel agent. Again, airfare booked outside of this process will not be reimbursed.

What is the travel timeframe?

The dates of allowable travel are November 1, 2026 – February 28, 2027. This allows service members flexibility to travel home based on their approved leave dates.

Are international flights allowed?

Yes, the airfare stipend may be applied to any destination around the globe; however, it does not change the maximum \$500 stipend amount. Any additional costs must be paid by the traveler.

If I'm flying and my ticket costs less than the stipend, will I receive the difference in cash?

No. If your ticket(s) is less than the allotted airfare stipend, the traveler will not receive the difference. The difference is put back into the program and allows more service members and family members to participate in the program. The Armed Services YMCA or its authorized travel agents will book travel and will look for the most cost-effective flights. Requests for specific airlines/routes may not be able to be accommodated.

Do you provide flights for family members to visit service members?

No. The intent of Operation Ride Home is to send service members and their immediate family from their duty station to their home destination for the holidays. Travel is not provided for family members to visit the service member.

I received travel assistance through Operation Ride Home previously, am I eligible again this year?

Yes. Applications are reviewed on an annual basis and prioritized according to need.

Do you provide cash assistance as part of this program?

No, cash is not distributed as part of this program. The Armed Services YMCA branch or Armed Services YMCA-approved travel agent books all flights directly to ensure the proper use of donated funds. For those driving, a pre-paid debit card will be provided by the Armed Services YMCA branch.

If I am selected to participate, what is required of me?

As part of the application process, a waiver of liability must be signed, and we ask that the applicant write a thank you note to Jack Daniel's for their generous support of the program. We also ask selected applicants to share photos and videos about their experience to demonstrate Operation Ride Home's value to the military community.

Where do the funds come from that support this program?

Operation Ride Home is funded by the generous contributions of its Presenting Sponsor Jack Daniel's, its distributors, employees, and parent company Brown-Forman, as well as the general public. American Airlines, the official Airline Sponsor, donates AAdvantage miles in support of the program. In honor of the 15th anniversary, American Airlines is generously increasing their contribution to 15 million AAdvantage miles.

How can the public participate to help send more military families home for the holidays?

We encourage everyone to support Operation Ride Home and help us send more military families home for the holidays. Bid on Jack Daniel's barrels, start a fundraiser, or donate at <https://ridehome.asymca.org> – How to Help.

If I have questions or comments about Operation Ride Home, who should I contact?

Email oprighthouse@asymca.org or contact your local Armed Services YMCA Branch.