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Drivers urged to ‘brace themselves’ for high fees at airport drop-off zones this summer

Ahead of the busy summer travel period, drivers taking relatives and friends to the airport should brace themselves for record terminal drop-off prices with seven of the UK’s 21 busiest airports putting up fees and one introducing them, new RAC research reveals.*

The biggest jumps were at Southampton Airport which has increased its drop-off fees to £6 for 20 minutes (was £4 for 20 minutes in 2022) and

Belfast International, which has put the charge up by £2 to £3 for 10 minutes. Drivers heading to Glasgow Airport pay £5 for 15 minutes (up from £4 for 15 minutes in 2022) while at Aberdeen the initial rate also sits at £5 for 15 minutes (up from £4 for 10 minutes in 2022). Leeds Bradford has upped its charges to £6 for 10 minutes (from £5 for 10 minutes), Liverpool John Lennon is now £5 for 10 minutes (up from £4 for 10 minutes) while Birmingham has increased its fee to £4 for 15 minutes (from £3 for 15 minutes).

Belfast's other airport, Belfast City, has now introduced a charge of £3 for 10 minutes, having previously not charged for dropping off.

Despite not increasing its fee this year, London Stansted continues to top the drop-off charges table with an initial charge of £7 for 15 minutes. Fortunately, six of the busiest UK airports are among the 13 airports that have frozen drop-off charges since last summer. Alongside Stansted holding its prices are London Heathrow and London Gatwick which charge £5, Manchester is £5 for five minutes, London Luton is still asking for £5 for 10 minutes and Edinburgh costs £4 for 10 minutes.

More encouragingly, there are still three airports where relatives and friends can be dropped off without any charge as Cardiff, London City and Inverness airports all have a free option at the terminal forecourt.

RAC head of roads policy Nicholas Lyes said:

“Having tracked airport drop-off fees since 2016, we can see putting up charges has now become something of an annual ritual. This year is no different with seven out of 21 increasing their fees and one introducing them for the first time. Drivers should brace themselves for jaw-dropping prices when they drop their loved-ones off at the terminal.

“Thankfully the proportion of airports hiking fees this year is lower than last year, but that will be little consolation as charges across the board have never been so high.

“What's perhaps more frustrating is that many travellers will call on their friends or family to take them to the airport because of persistent industrial action on the rail network meaning that for many, being dropped off at the airport by car is the only reliable way to make their flight on-time.

“Doing your research ahead of travelling has never been more important. Many airports offer a free or reduced-rate drop-off area away from the terminal in long-stay car parks where travellers can hop on a shuttle bus connection, saving their driver incurring more expensive charges nearer the departures building.

“Drivers tempted to drop loved-ones on the roads inside the boundaries of the airport should beware as many enforce no-stopping areas with cameras could lead to hefty penalty charges.”

** Full data is available by downloading the PDF below*

[View embedded content here](#)

Notes about the data

1. Drop-off data based upon nearest drop-off point to terminal building. These areas go under different names but are listed. We know that all airports offer either free or differently priced alternatives in mid or long-stay car parks with connecting bus or shuttle services.

2. Red in 2022 denotes changes in charges

3. Figures correct as of 12 June 2023; 2022 figures correct as of 16 August

2022;

4. Airports selected on the total passenger numbers for calendar year 2022. Top 21 as listed by Table 01 - passenger numbers in 2022
<https://www.caa.co.uk/data-and-analysis/uk-aviation-market/airports/uk-airport-data/uk-airport-data-2022/annual-2022/>

5. The RAC started recording prices in 2016. For ease of reference, we are only comparing 2023 and 2022 prices.

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