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Driving home for Christmas: drivers planning nearly 31m getaway trips by car

An estimated 31.2m separate leisure journeys will be taken between today and Christmas Eve, the highest number since drivers were first asked about their festive travel plans in 2013*, a study by the [RAC](#) and [INRIX](#) has found.**

This week could be the scene of some pre-Christmas panic on the roads as many drivers look to complete their journeys to see family and friends well ahead of the big day – a huge 25m leisure trips by car are predicted to be taken between today and the end of Sunday, with Wednesday and Thursday set to be the worst for traffic delays as leisure and everyday commuter traffic

combine.

Looking forward to the start of next week, an estimated 5.6m getaway trips are planned for 23 December and Christmas Eve, and, with fewer commuters on the roads these days, motorists will be hoping for trouble-free journeys as they drive home for Christmas.

Data provided by transportation analytics specialists INRIX indicates the M1 in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire, the northern and western sections of the clockwise M25 and M6 in the West Midlands are set to bear the brunt of the festive traffic. Two of the longest delays are expected on Sunday, with drivers facing queues of more than an hour and a half northbound between Flitwick and Daventry, and nearly an hour on the M25 clockwise between the junctions for the M23 and M40.

RAC patrol of the year Ben Aldous said:

“Our figures suggest many more drivers are planning leisure trips by car in the run-up to this Christmas this year, so bumper-to-bumper traffic on some motorways and major A-roads is going to be near-guaranteed.

“While Christmas Day is still a little way off, it looks as though millions of drivers are planning to complete their getaway trips this week. Unfortunately, when you add in the prospect of unsettled weather, with heavy rain and strong winds in some parts, these are likely to be pretty unpleasant drives for many of us.

“Popular days for travel also tend to be common days for breakdowns, and our teams will be working flat-out over the whole festive period, regardless of what the weather has in store, to give drivers complete peace of mind should their vehicles let them down. But drivers should remember that a small amount of preparation before setting out can dramatically cut the chances of breaking down in the first place – checking tyre tread and pressure, as well as ensuring oil and coolant are at the right levels, is a must before any long journey.”

INRIX transportation analyst Trevor Reed said:

“It does look as though this week is going to see a marked rise in traffic

volumes on major roads in the UK, with Thursday expected to see the largest increase in vehicles compared to a normal December day. Drivers desperate to get away for Christmas are going to find themselves competing with commuters and shoppers for road space, so we recommend keeping tuned in to the changing traffic conditions on local radio and via in-car apps.”

Highways England’s customer service director Melanie Clarke said:

“We’re doing everything we can to make journeys as smooth as possible and that’s why we’re keeping around 98% of the road network we manage, free from roadworks.

“Safety is our top priority and we know from experience that almost half of breakdowns can easily be avoided if motorists carry out simple vehicle checks before setting off over this period.

“We’re asking people to be prepared too. Make sure you have everything you need for your journey should there be any delays, check before and during your journey and also make sure you’re aware of the signs and signals on motorways.”

Met Office Chief Meteorologist, Dan Suri, said

“This week is looking unsettled with spells of strong winds and heavy rain interspersed with brighter, showery conditions. It will turn very windy in parts of the west during Wednesday with gales or severe gales and a yellow national severe weather warning for wind is in place from Wednesday afternoon into early Thursday morning.

“The second half of the week will be milder across much of the country, after a widespread frost on Tuesday night.”

Looking ahead to traffic between Christmas Day and New Year’s Day

A separate RAC survey of drivers’ intentions suggests as many as 33m separate leisure journeys will be taken by car between Christmas Day and the last day of the year, as people criss-cross the country to meet up with friends and family members, wherever they happen to live. Boxing Day and Friday 27th December look to be the busiest, with nearly 6m trips by car expected each

day, followed by Saturday with 5.6m and Sunday with 5.3m journeys.

Research among members of the RAC's Driver Opinion Panel*** also shows just how important the car is at this time of year – a fifth of drivers (21%) said they feel a fair chunk of Christmas is dominated by driving to see family and friends, while 5% – the equivalent of 1.7m motorists – say they feel a very large part of it is spent driving.

[View embedded content here](#)

Beat the queues: An at-a-glance guide to travel in the run-up to Christmas

Expected worst day for delays over this period is **Thursday 19 December**

Date	Leisure trips by car	Major roads likely to be busy	Major roads likely to be less busy	Expected longest delays (breakdowns and collisions can significantly increase journey times across all roads)
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Thursday 19 December	4.7m	Between 3pm and 7pm	After 8pm	M25 clockwise J23 Hatfield to J28 Chelmsford: 56-minute delay around 7.15pm M25 anticlockwise J17 Maple Cross to J12 for M3: 48-minute delay around 8pm M5 north J11 Cheltenham to J1 West Bromwich: 33-minute delay around 2pm
Friday 20 December	4.7m	Between 12pm and 7pm	After 8pm	M6 north J5 Sutton Coldfield to J10A Wolverhampton: 57-minute delay around 8.15am M25 clockwise J15 for M4 to J19 Watford: 46-minute delay around 2.15pm M1 south J16 Northampton West to J6 Watford: 43-minute delay around 3.45pm
Saturday 21 December	3.7m	Between 10am and 3pm	After 4pm	M40 south J11 Banbury to J9 Bicester: 42-minute delay around 1.15pm M1 north J12 Flitwick to J16 Daventry: 37-minute delay around 2.15pm
Sunday 22 December	2.5m	Between 10am and 4pm	After 5pm	M1 north J12 Flitwick to J16 Daventry: 97-minute delay around 12pm M25 clockwise J7 for M23 to J16 for M40: 58-minute delay around 12.15pm M5 south J15 for M4 to J23 Bridgwater: 48-minute delay around 3.30pm M40 north J12 Gaydon to M42 J3A: 41-minute delay around 6.45pm
Monday 23 December	3.1m	Between 10am and 3pm	After 4pm	M25 clockwise J15 for M4 to J19 Watford: 69-minute delay around 2.45pm

Tuesday 24 December	3.1m	Between 2pm and 6pm	Before 10am	-
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Don't be a breakdown statistic: the RAC's tips to keep us all moving

Drivers should remember their 'FORCES':

Fuel – Don't risk running out of fuel – top up before you set out

Oil – check it's at the right level to reduce the chances of overheating in traffic

Rubber – tyres need to be properly inflated and in good condition to give your car a safe, sure grip on the road

Coolant – this does a vital job in ensuring the engine runs at the right temperature. If it's not between the 'min' and 'max' levels, this could be the sign of a problem so contact a good garage without delay

Electrics – your wipers will help keep your windscreen clear of bugs, and you'll need your lights on during any heavy downpours. The electrics also control your indicators and windows, so check there are no problems

Screenwash – helps keep your windscreen clear

The RAC has put together a [comprehensive guide on preparing for driving in the winter, including how to avoid breakdowns](#). The MyRAC app, free to download for [iOS](#) and [Android](#) devices, also offers up-to-the-minute traffic information and smart route planning guidance.

Notes to Editors

* RAC first surveyed drivers about their travel plans in 2013

** About the data in this release: planned leisure trips based on RAC survey conducted w/c 9 December 2019 by Ragdoll Research of drivers' travel plans (sample size 1,600 UK motorists who are planning on driving across the surveyed period); congestion and road-specific information based on INRIX data. Globally, INRIX analyses 500 Terabytes of data from 300 million different sources covering over 5 million miles of road. The data used is the congested or uncongested status of every segment of road for every minute of the day

*** Figure based on research among 2,400 drivers on the RAC Driver Opinion Panel, conducted w/c 9 December 2019

Getaway-related resources for media

An animation, suitable for embedding online, highlighting the checks drivers should make to avoid breaking down can be downloaded here:

<https://media.rac.co.uk/images/rac-winter-forces-animation-1551495>

A vehicle checks infographic, courtesy of Highways England, can be downloaded from here: <https://dmscdn.vuelio.co.uk/publicitem/0164cfaa-7158-48be-9007-7775f7a5c792>

About the RAC

The RAC provides complete peace of mind to 11m UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. Its services include:

- **Breakdown assistance**. Its highly-skilled, 1,600-strong branded patrol workforce attends more than two million breakdowns every year, fixing on average four out of five vehicles at the roadside. The RAC's patrol fleet is one of the most advanced in the world, and was the first to roll out both an [All-Wheels-Up recovery system](#), allowing the vast majority of vehicles to be recovered from a single patrol van, and [EV Boost](#) mobile electric vehicle charging units
- **Insurance**. The RAC is a top-five [car insurance](#) broker having surpassed the 500,000 policies-in-force milestone in 2018. It also offers ['black box' telematics policies](#), as well as home and

travel insurance

- **Other motoring services.** The RAC leads in the development of new solutions for business, fleets, electric vehicles and future car technology. Its additional products and services include a [personal loans offering](#), a [used car buying website](#), [vehicle inspections and checks](#), [legal services](#) or up-to-the-minute [traffic and travel information](#). It also has a network of [Approved Dealers](#) and [Approved Garages](#) which combine the trust of RAC brand with local service and convenience

The RAC also works to support the interests of its members and UK drivers on the most important motoring issues which it identifies via the annual [RAC Report on Motoring](#) and the [RAC Opinion Panel](#). The Report on Motoring is the longest running analysis of driver opinion in the UK having been published every year since 1989.

For more information about the RAC, visit the [RAC website](#).

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