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## Festive getaway could be the busiest in five years with 27m trips planned

**This Christmas could see the busiest getaway on the roads in five years with an estimated 27m trips by car to see friends and family between today and Christmas Eve, a study by the [RAC](#) and [INRIX](#) shows.\***

With many schools in England and Wales breaking up today, the RAC's figures suggest there will be an extended getaway in the run-up to Christmas, with an average of 4.1m such journeys taking place every day next week, culminating in most leisure journeys by car – some 5.3m – taking place on

Christmas Eve, which the RAC has dubbed 'Frantic Festive Friday'.

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> is expected to be next busiest with around 4.1m leisure trips taken as drivers criss-cross the country to spend Christmas with those close to them. Drivers are advised to set off early or postpone their trips until after dark to avoid the worst of the traffic.

Given Covid travel restrictions are expected to be much less strict this year compared to last, the figures indicate that drivers are keen to make the most of the Christmas and New Year period to see friends and loved ones, but it's still the case that one in 10 drivers (10%) don't plan on travelling by car at all over Christmas because of the pandemic. The rapidly developing situation with infections of the Omicron variant could, however, still curtail the country's Christmas celebrations.

Both the RAC and transportation analytics specialists INRIX believe there is likely to be less pre-Christmas congestion than in a 'typical' non-Covid year, with the 'work from home' guidance leading to far fewer commuters on the roads. Nonetheless, INRIX data shows that drivers are likely to face festive delays on the clockwise M60 near Manchester, the southbound M40 in Oxfordshire and the northern and western sections of the M25. The single worst queue before Christmas is expected on the M25 between Gatwick and the junction for the M40 on Thursday afternoon.

Looking ahead to traffic over the Christmas break itself, the RAC's research indicates that Christmas Day, Boxing Day and the Monday bank holiday could all turn out to be busier than normal for leisure trips this year – with around 4.5m journeys a day by car taken to see friends and family, compared to the average of around 3.5m for the same period since 2015.\*\* INRIX also predicts some lengthy jams – delays of more than 45 minutes on the clockwise M25 between Gatwick and the M40 on Boxing Day, and of nearly an hour and a half on the same stretch the following day.

**RAC Breakdown spokesperson Rod Dennis said:**

“Despite the increasing prevalence of the Omicron Covid variant, our research shows that the vast majority of drivers are still determined to do Christmas properly this year – in sharp contrast to 12 months ago. We're expecting the biggest Christmas getaway for five years, including a 'Frantic Festive Friday' on Christmas Eve. But with overall traffic volumes in the run-up to the big

day set to be down slightly on normal given the current 'work from home' guidance, there's reason to hope there won't be too many queues as millions get away to see friends and family.

"As well as adding to the traffic jams, just a single breakdown has the potential to ruin Christmas which is why we're urging drivers to make sure their vehicles are 'road ready' before they set out. Spending a few minutes checking that tyres are in good condition and are properly inflated, and ensuring oil, coolant and screenwash levels are all correct can dramatically reduce the chances of running into problems – as our patrols will testify, it's always time well spent.

"Our figures this year also point to more drivers using the roads between Christmas Day and New Year for leisure trips than normal – perhaps to make up for the fact that last Christmas was such a write-off for so many people. Popular days for travel are often busy days for breakdowns, so following our advice to avoid a breakdown in the first place is arguably more important than ever this year. But, for anyone who still runs into trouble, our expert local patrols will be working incredibly hard throughout the festive period to keep them moving."

**INRIX transportation analyst Bob Pishue said:**

"With kids out of school and many Brits taking extended time off for the holidays, drivers can expect moderate delays around the UK, but heavier congestion on motorways in and out of the cities. Leaving later in the day is recommended, as roads will begin to clog up during the early afternoon."

**National Highways customer service director Melanie Clarke said:**

"We don't want roadworks to spoil Christmas so we're doing everything we can to make journeys as smooth as possible; that's why we're keeping almost 98% of the road network we manage free from roadworks.

"Our dedicated control room teams and traffic officer patrols are geared up to help those travelling over the Christmas and we're expecting Thursday 23 December to be one of the busier days in the lead up to the festive period.

"We know from experience that peak travel times can vary in the run-up to

Christmas, so we're encouraging drivers to check traffic conditions before heading out to help keep traffic flowing."

**Met Office meteorologist Alex Deakin said:**

"Weather in the UK in the run up to Christmas looks more grey than white. High pressure, and therefore dry weather, will dominate but it will also remain mostly overcast. Fog is likely to be the biggest hazard on the roads and at this time of year it can take all day to clear so it won't just be a morning problem.

"There are signs of a shift around the Christmas weekend to something a little wetter but it's too early to say more than that at the moment. Tune into our updated RAC forecast next week to find out what you need to know for any trips you're making. And stay up-to-date with the Met Office forecasts online or download our weather App for the weather at your fingertips."

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

<b>Date</b>	<b>Leisure trips by car</b>	<b>Major roads likely to be particularly busy between</b>	<b>Major roads likely to be less busy between</b>	<b>Major road expected to be subject to longest delay (excludes impact of any unplanned breakdowns or collisions)</b>
Monday 20 December	3.7m	3pm and 6.30pm	Before 1pm	M60 clockwise J7 to J18, late afternoon
Tuesday 21 December	3.7m	4pm to 5pm	Before 8am	M6 north J5 to J10a, early evening
Wednesday 22 December	3.7m	12pm to 3pm	After 5pm	M40 south J11 to J9, middle of the day
Thursday 23 December	4.1m	12pm to 4pm	After 6pm	M25 clockwise J7 to J16, middle of the day

Friday 24 December – 'Frantic Friday'	5.3m	11am to 2pm	After 6pm	A303 West Solstice Park to A36, middle of the day
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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.

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The press office email address is [press.enquiries@rac.co.uk](mailto:press.enquiries@rac.co.uk) and media centre is at [media.rac.co.uk](http://media.rac.co.uk). **Please note:** the press office is unable to help with individual customer enquiries - please visit the [RAC contacts page](#) to find the

right contact.

\* About the data in this release: planned leisure trips based on RAC survey conducted 9-14 December 2021 by Ragdoll Research of drivers' travel plans (sample size 1,400 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

\*\* Excludes 2020 research – given widespread Covid restrictions that were introduced shortly before Christmas, research from 2020 is not reliable

### **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 National Highways, can be downloaded from here: <https://dmscdn.vuelio.co.uk/publicitem/0164cfaa-7158-48be-9007-7775f7a5c792>

### **About the RAC**

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to 13 million UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. As well as its premium nationwide breakdown assistance service – with an expert branded patrol workforce attending more than two million breakdowns every year – it offers a wide range of market-leading products across insurance, legal services, vehicle inspections and service, maintenance and repair. The RAC is also at the forefront in helping drivers make the switch to electric vehicles and leads in the development of new solutions for businesses and OEMs, partnering with the best in the motoring and mobility space.

Visit the [RAC website](#).

## Contacts



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