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Late May bank holiday set to be busiest on the roads since COVID

More than 20m leisure journeys are expected to be made by car this late May bank holiday as traffic returns close to 2019's pre-pandemic levels, according to a new study of drivers' getaway plans from the RAC and INRIX.*

Analysis suggests the worst day to travel will be Friday 24 May when more than 4m journeys are planned, as this is not only the start of the long weekend but also the beginning of half term for many UK schools. Traffic volumes look set to remain consistently high throughout the long weekend

as 3.7m trips are expected to take place on Saturday 25 May, while 3.4m journeys are anticipated on both Sunday and bank holiday Monday.

With a further 5.7m leisure trips by car planned at some point throughout the long weekend, traffic could be at its worst since 2019 when over 22m drivers hit the road during the same period – meaning the volume of getaways this year could reach 90% of pre-pandemic levels.

The data also indicates that day trips are top of many drivers' itineraries for the late May bank holiday. Twenty-two per cent said the main reason they'll use their car will be for a day out with friends or family, while 8% intend to spend a day in the countryside or by the beach. Staycations rank third on the list as 7% said they are planning a short break, while a smaller proportion (3%) are heading to an airport or ferry port over the long weekend.

Traffic is predicted to build through the day on Friday, with transport analytics specialists INRIX advising motorists to delay their departures until 6pm to miss the worst of the queues when both commuter and leisure drivers are sharing the roads. The M25 clockwise between J7 for the M23 and J21 for the M1 is expected to bear the brunt of the traffic with those travelling on this stretch suffering delays of more than an hour and a half in the late afternoon.

On Saturday, traffic is expected to peak between 3pm and 6pm, with motorists advised to start their journeys as early as possible in the day to be in with the best chance of avoiding traffic. With day trips expected to be particularly popular, and even more so in those areas which see the best of the sun and warmth, INRIX is expecting routes from cities to coasts to have some of the worst delays as drivers head to the seaside. In the middle of the day, the M5 southbound – a major holiday route – is likely to suffer major hold-ups with journeys on a 45-mile stretch between J16 north of Bristol and J25 for Taunton in Somerset expected to take over an hour longer than usual.

Elsewhere, snarl ups are also anticipated on Saturday afternoon on the M25 anticlockwise towards the M23, the A14 eastbound towards the east coast, as well as on the M3 and A34 that funnel large volumes of leisure traffic towards resorts on the south coast.

Meanwhile the clockwise M25 is expected to again be the busiest route for traffic at the end of the school half term on Friday 31 May, with journeys

between the M23 and the M1 likely to nearly triple in duration to three hours.

RAC Breakdown spokesperson Alice Simpson said: “Our research suggests this weekend could be the busiest of the year so far on the roads, with millions of people embarking on getaway trips to make the most of the three days and, for those with school age children, the start of the half-term holiday.

“In fact, we’re looking at possible leisure traffic volumes returning to levels similar to what we last saw in 2019 before the coronavirus outbreak, as drivers’ desire to make the most of the UK increases. And, in those places where the warm spring sunshine makes its presence felt, the number of people deciding to get behind the wheel and head for the coast or countryside will only go up, swelling the overall volume of cars on the roads.

“While no-one likes to think about their vehicle breaking down, especially on a bank holiday weekend, those vehicles that are serviced regularly and generally looked after are much less likely to let their drivers down – meaning any worries about bad ‘carma’ can be often be put to rest. There’s still time to book a service or repair before next weekend using an [RAC Mobile Mechanic](#), while checking tyres are all in good condition and pumped up properly, as well as ensuring oil and coolant levels are where they should be, is a must for all drivers before any getaway trip.”



Bob Pishue, transportation analyst at INRIX, said: “With near record number of travellers expected to be on the roads over the holiday period, drivers should be prepared for long delays, especially in and around major cities and towards the coasts. The best general advice to anyone spending time away from home this weekend is to travel as early or as late in the day as possible to avoid the worst delays. Travellers should stay up to date on traffic apps like myRAC and listen to local news stations to avoid sitting in traffic longer than necessary.”

Met Office spokesperson Stephen Dixon said: “While there’s still plenty of detail to work out for the Bank Holiday weekend, signals are suggesting there’s a chance of some dry and fine weather developing in places for the UK, though periods of showery activity will still influence some of the weather. Temperatures should be above average for the time of year, though will be slightly subdued where those showers do develop. There remains a chance for the development of some thundery showers in places through the weekend, which is something we’ll be able to add some more detail to as we

get closer to the time. It's important to stay up-to-date with the forecast through the week as the details become clearer.”

Best and worst times to drive this late May bank holiday

Data and research from the RAC and INRIX

Date	Leisure trips by car	 Worst times to travel	 Best times to travel
Fri 24 May 2024	4,029,588	8am to 10am	After 6pm
Sat 25 May 2024	3,693,789	3pm to 6pm	Before 1pm
Sun 26 May 2024	3,357,990	11am to 1pm	After 3pm
Mon 27 May 2024	3,357,990	11am to 2pm	Before 10am
<i>On at least one of these days</i>	5,708,583		

RAC

Source: Time recommendations courtesy INRIX; estimated leisure trips data courtesy RAC • Created with Datawrapper

The press office email address is press.office@rac.co.uk and media centre is at 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 RAC

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to nearly 14 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. Included in this is the first-of-its-kind nationwide Mobile Mechanics service which brings the garage to homes and workplaces.

At the forefront of new solutions for business fleets and consumers, the RAC's breakdown service is electric-ready with mobile EV charging technology and can be called on using [myRAC](#) – the all-in-one route planner, fuel finder and breakdown reporting app.

Visit the [RAC website](#).

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