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Drivers set to make 21m Christmas getaway trips before the big day

Drivers are planning 21m festive getaways between today and Christmas Eve with 60% of these trips crammed into the last three days before the 25th, a study of 2,100 drivers by the RAC and INRIX suggests.*

With Christmas falling on a Monday this year, figures show leisure traffic levels will climb slowly the previous week before jumping by a whopping 43% from 2.2m on Thursday 21st to 3.2m on Friday 22nd December. The period covering Friday 22nd and Christmas Eve is expected to see the most leisure

journeys by car though – an estimated 13.5m this year, up 20% from the same period last year.

While Christmas Eve getaways match ‘Frantic Friday’ trips at 3.2m, the reality is Friday will be far busier as those heading off for festivities share the roads with commuters and parents collecting children from school. Roads will also be busy on Christmas Day and Boxing Day with an average of 3.5m trips expected, but serious delays should be less of a risk without the normal mix of commercial, commuter and school traffic.

Data from transport analytics specialists, INRIX, indicates there are likely to be daily delays of around 40 minutes between Friday 22nd – Sunday 24th on the M25 clockwise west of Greater London. The worst queue, of up to an hour, is expected along the M25 clockwise between the M23 for Gatwick and M40 for Birmingham on the 23rd December, a popular thoroughfare for those heading north and west of London. Drivers heading anti-clockwise between J17 – J12 on the same day should also prepare themselves for longer waits of around half an hour. Further afield, the M1 north between Woburn and Daventry, and the M6 south from Wigan to Stafford will be hit the hardest with delays in the run-up to the 25th.

Across most major routes during the pre-Christmas weekend, 12pm to 2pm will be the busiest time to travel, with both the RAC and INRIX urging drivers to avoid lunchtime journeys. The best times to travel will be before 11am and after 6pm on both the 22nd and 23rd December, when it’s hoped drivers will be able to reach their loved ones with slightly fewer tailbacks.

RAC Breakdown spokesperson Alice Simpson said: “Since Christmas falls on a Monday this year, there’s no need for drivers to use annual leave for getaway trips as they can travel over the weekend before. For that very reason, our research suggests these days will be the busiest times to drive, so we urge people to set off as early as possible on Saturday and Sunday.

“Since festive trips to see friends and family are so important, drivers do everything they can to avoid their vehicles letting them down. We recommend using the ‘FORCES’ acronym to help remember the Fuel, Oil, Rubber, Coolant, Electrics and Screen wash checks you need to make before a long journey.

“This is especially important if your route involves a motorway or A-road,

where most delays are expected this year. Although it's positive that National Highways have removed the majority of roadworks from high-speed roads,** an increase in drivers could mean an increase in breakdowns. To keep those who break down on motorways safe, two RAC patrols recently featured in a video advising drivers what to do and where to stand, which is available to watch on [YouTube](#)."

Bob Pishue, INRIX transportation analyst, said: "On average, drivers could see travel times up to 20% longer this holiday season, while travellers around Greater London could experience more than double typical drive times. Our recommendation is to avoid peak commuting hours and use [traffic apps](#) to minimise holiday travel traffic frustrations."

Drivers can also [book an RAC Mobile Mechanic](#) if they need their cars serviced or repaired before Christmas - this can be done from a driver's home driveway or place of work.

* Research conducted for the RAC among 2,100 UK adults w/c 4 December 2023. A nationally representative survey. Figures extrapolated to 33m licensed cars

** National Highways: To help keep festive disruption to a minimum, the vast majority of roadworks on these roads from 6am on Tuesday 19 December until 12.01am on Tuesday 2 January.ⓧⓧ

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About the RAC

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to more than 13 million 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.

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