

Travel

DON'T FALL INTO THE BREXIT TRAVEL TRAP

LARA KING



At last! Now that testing requirements for double-vaccinated UK arrivals have been scrapped, we're on the move again. And like many of those finally heading off for long-awaited journeys, Lara-Ann Smith had spent months planning her trip in meticulous detail.

The 26-year-old financial personal assistant from Sudbury was visiting Portugal for a family reunion to mark her dad's 60th birthday. "I woke at 4am to prepare for our journey to Faro," she says. "After a tough couple of years with Covid restrictions and my dad's cancer treatment making it difficult to see him, I felt like a kid on Christmas morning."

But when she arrived at Stansted for her Ryanair flight, she was not allowed to board the plane. Despite official UK and EU advice that she could enter Portugal with at least three months' validity on a passport issued within the past ten years, she was told at the gate that she required a passport with six months' validity. Hers had four months remaining.

"I was told at the airport that, since Brexit, Ryanair required six months' validity," she says. "I received three emails from them in the lead-up to my flights, but not once was I made aware that my passport could be an issue." She

Passport regulations are interpreted differently

has since learnt that many other people have been similarly caught out.

With no choice but to return home, she was heartbroken – and Ryanair would not offer a refund either, because of the terms and conditions that she accepted when booking. "The travel requirements for UK passport holders are clearly outlined on Ryanair's website," the airline said.

Since Britain left the EU it is more than just the colour of our passports that has changed: our freedom of movement has been replaced with a limit of 90 days in the Schengen area in any 180-day period; phone companies have been allowed to reintroduce EU roaming charges; and the European Health Insurance Card has been superseded by the UK Global Health Insurance Card, which covers fewer countries. In addition, pet passports are no longer valid, cars must bear a "UK" sticker instead of a "GB" one and by next

year, under the new European Travel Information and Authorisation System, we will need to pay for a visa waiver to visit Schengen countries.

The most troublesome issue, though, is passport validity. Countries and airlines seem to interpret unclear and sometimes contradictory regulations differently – and with Covid having grounded us for months, this Brexit hangover is only now kicking in.

So what has changed? First of all, your passport may become invalid months before its expiry date. Until September 2018, if you renewed a passport before it expired, up to nine months of unspent validity could be carried over – so the new passport could be valid for up to ten years and nine months. When Britain was in the EU, such passports could be used until the expiry date. But since the end of 2020 UK passport holders have been classed as "third-country nationals" – so your passport must have been issued within the past ten years to satisfy most EU nations.

Unsurprisingly this is catching many people out. Take the case of Aya Shillingford, whose plans to spend New Year's Eve on Tenerife were ruined when she

was escorted from a Jet2 flight after being told that her passport – with an expiry date of June 28, 2022 – was invalid because it was more than ten years old. The Foreign Office says that to enter most EU nations "your passport must be less than ten years old on the day you enter" and "valid for at least three months after the day you plan to leave".

Even if your passport meets these criteria, you must check with your airline, because some appear to be conflating the rules – disregarding expiry dates and insisting that a passport is only valid for nine years and nine months after the issue date. The European Commission (EC) has said the condition that a passport must have been issued within the previous ten years needs only be fulfilled "at the moment of entry" and "does not extend for the duration of the intended stay".

The Foreign Office said: "We are asking [the EC] to clarify the ten-year rule." So until that happens, how can you avoid being caught out? If travelling to a non-EU destination, relax – your passport is valid until its expiry date, however long you've had it (even if some countries require six months' remaining validity). But if you want to go to Europe, check your passport dates now. Keep on top of the latest advice for your destination at gov.uk too, but don't rely solely on that – also check with your airline (and, yes, read those terms and conditions) and the embassy of the country you're visiting.

And, to be absolutely sure, if your passport is going to be more than nine years and six months old by the time you travel, renew it – this might be a fuff, but it's not as bad as your holiday being canned at the boarding gate.

BIG SHOT

BOXED IN Congratulations to Marcus Bailey, whose shot of the Cube Houses in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, is this week's winner of our Big Shot competition, in association with the adventure cruise specialist Hurtigruten Expeditions (020 3553 9842, hurtigruten.co.uk). He receives a £250 John Lewis voucher and makes the shortlist for the main prizes, which include a northern lights expedition cruise. Upload shots at thesundaytimes.co.uk/thebigshot or enter on Instagram: tag us @TimesTravel and use the hashtag #STBigShot

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YOUR VIEWS

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Park life in the USA

LETTER OF THE WEEK

The national parks of America are a great treasure ("Wild wonders", last week). I lived and worked in Yosemite for five years – such a very special time in my life. I took a hippy bus (Green Tortoise, with beds instead of seats) from San Francisco overnight, woke up first and stepped out into an intense silence to see the valley below in the early morning sunlight – mind-blowing. I got a job there the next day. I regret that I did not visit more national parks while I was there.
Jane Patrick, via thetimes.co.uk

I drove across the USA with two friends during my gap year in 1981, camping in state and national parks. Yosemite is magnificent, and I have revisited it a couple of times, including with my teenage sons a few years ago. I also love the Tetons and Sequoia, as well as Zion, Bryce Canyon and Arches in Utah.
Suzanne Wilson, via thetimes.co.uk

The wildlife is absolutely fantastic. Walking in UK national parks you are lucky if you see a couple of birds and a bunny; the huge size of the US parks means that wildlife flourishes.
Ohlalaoo, via thetimes.co.uk

CAPITAL IDEA

Washington DC is a great holiday destination ("Focus on America", last week). I've been several times and still haven't managed all the museums, which are world class, and the zoo is the best I've seen. A visit to Arlington National Cemetery is also recommended; it's very moving and humbling. And of course all the Smithsonian museums and zoo are free. I can't wait to be able to go back.
JSCAPM, via thetimes.co.uk

Luke Jones was much too quick to dismiss American Civil War battlefield sites as "essentially messy lawns". I strongly recommend a visit to Gettysburg, a short drive from Washington. There is an excellent visitors' centre to set the context, and the battlefield can be viewed on a self-drive tour that fully conveys the bravery and horrors of the monumental three-day turning point of the war.
Dr Jonathan Whittmann, Kent

The most moving thing I saw in DC was the Vietnam War memorial. Understated and poignant.
Christopher Greaves, via thetimes.co.uk

Excellent article! I've only been to DC once, but I found the National Air and Space Museum the high point. The various memorials were extremely moving too, particularly the one for the Korean War.
Zatopek, via thetimes.co.uk

SLOPES WITH THE MOST

There's great skiing in Tahoe and Vail ("White out", last week) – high capacity, fast lifts and well marshalled; miles and miles of cruisy runs through the trees, stunning scenery. However, the food is so bad – mass catering, "lodges" the size of football pitches, pizzas and chilli. No comparison can be drawn with the restaurants in the Alps – you can't beat Europe for the holistic experience.
Round The Block, via thetimes.co.uk

DOWNTOWN ARISE

I came back from Los Angeles this week, and I still love it ("Downtown on the up", last week). I still think that the urban problems of Santa Monica are no worse than many less famous parts of London. The Getty Villa Museum is fantastic, and free to visit. The beaches of Malibu are also accessible to all, according to Californian state law. There is a vibrancy

about LA life that is hard to find elsewhere.
Posy Parker, via thetimes.co.uk

COVER-UP

I think it's a farce ("Masks on a plane – where do you stand?" last week). What is the point in mandating masks on flights when they can be removed while eating or drinking?
TheBluePirate, via thetimes.co.uk

If you are, or feel, vulnerable wear a mask; if not then travel without – but don't make them compulsory.
Ric Ackland-Snow, Lincolnshire

The prospect of having to wear a mask for a long-haul flight is extremely off-putting. I have worn masks for eight-hour stretches for work and travel, but I have also fainted while wearing one.
Bianca Pellet, via thetimes.co.uk

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POSTCARD FROM...

OTTAWA

City residents have been left less than impressed by the 'Freedom Convoy' truck protests, says *Fiona Tapp*

Like Narnia, with its never-ending winter, Ottawa is experiencing its own frozen stasis. Just as residents thought that boomerang Covid-19 restrictions might end, a new threat loomed – this time not a virus, but an equally insidious invasion.

Protesters in large trucks arrived in Ottawa almost two weeks ago, and they haven't left. About 500 of them are blocking off the downtown core of the city, causing chaos. They've been using the city and its historic monuments – including the National War Memorial and the statue of Terry Fox, a Canadian hero – as a party venue, soapbox and, most vile, lavatory. They set off fireworks near apartment buildings and honk their horns incessantly.

Living in one of the coldest capitals, we know how to make the most of winter in Ottawa. Sadly our annual Winterlude festival was cancelled because of the pandemic, although you can still skate almost five miles of the Rideau Canal, a Unesco world heritage site. But if our uninvited guests don't get the message and get lost, they threaten the reopening of the city, including the Rideau Centre shopping mall and history, nature and war museums, all of which remain closed while the demonstration continues.

Even those on the political right who argue for a relaxation of restrictions and removal of mask-wearing mandates are finding it hard to defend the behaviour we've seen from the truckers. As for the city residents, a poll found that nine out of ten Ottawans want them to go home.

The "Freedom Convoy" organisers say they won't leave until businesses can open up again, seemingly unaware that their presence is the reason that businesses remain closed.

Despite live music, barbecues and bouncy castles being inflated in the protest zone, an air of menace remains. Hateful posters and flags are on display, including some showing swastikas. There have been reports of violence, including arson in the lobby of an apartment building and volunteers at a shelter for the homeless being harassed into giving food to the truckers. This has led Jim Watson, the city mayor, to declare a state of emergency.



The agenda of those with signs supporting Trump has nothing to do with Canada

We're not "USA North", and this convoy involves political interference from a foreign nation – protesters carrying signs in support of Donald Trump and Confederate flags have an agenda that has nothing to do with Canada.

Before Christmas the Canadian government announced a travel advisory against international travel in light of the Omicron variant, and although vaccinated visitors can holiday here, many Canadians have cancelled their plans for winter sun. In December I went home to London to spend the holidays with my family and friends for the first time in three years – the paperwork was extensive, as was the cost of Covid testing.

We understand that these measures are in place to slow the spread of the pandemic, but they have affected travel to the capital at a time when it was on the up. Locals have been encouraged to take staycations and benefit from a tax break by staying at Ottawa hotels, but the convoy has scuppered these plans – even if you could find a room in a downtown hotel, would you stay there in the middle of a protest?

Although Ottawans may be fed up with Covid restrictions, we're a sensible bunch who largely respect the rules laid down by the provincial and federal governments. It's unusual to see unmasked Ottawans inside businesses, and the rules are enforced. Going out for dinner requires proof of vaccination, providing contact details and wearing a mask except when seated and eating. Some prefer to eat on one of Ottawa's ubiquitous restaurant patios, especially those in the historic ByWard Market; many of these businesses invested in heaters to extend the patio season through autumn and into winter.

Ottawa has a population of just less than a million and has handled the pandemic well – about 85 per cent of over-fives are fully vaccinated, with a little more than 700 having died of Covid.

Zoe's, the dining room at Fairmont Chateau Laurier, a fairytale castle hotel close to Parliament, is expected to reopen soon and will once again be serving its famous afternoon tea. I for one will be raising a teacup to celebrate the end of the occupation and the return of visitors to this small but very special city.



BOB HURLEY/ALAMY