

Everything you need to know before booking your half-term holiday

East Anglian travel agent Diane Price explains the latest rules... and the easiest places to get to
By **Danielle Lett**



The government has announced it is scrapping Covid testing for those arriving into the UK as of next month.

The changes – which come into effect at 4am on Friday February 11 – arrive just before the upcoming half-term, meaning swathes of families are hoping to book themselves a getaway without the worry of having to self-isolate upon their return.

But do you know what you need before you go, and where are some of the easiest places to get to?

Here to explain all is Diane Price, manager of Colchester Travel. With 41 years of experience in the travel industry, she knows all there is to know about changing rules and guidance when it comes to your next holiday.

“We’re booking quite a lot of holidays from February onwards now, especially for half-term, and also the summer holidays. It feels as though we’re getting some sense of normality back within the sector,” she explains.

So, what has changed, and what should you consider before packing your bags and heading away for some much-needed sun?

What are the new rules for arriving into the UK?

As of Friday February 11, all testing requirements will be removed for fully vaccinated

arrivals – with only Passenger Locator Forms (PLF) now required. Before the end of February, this form will be simplified, confirming the traveller’s vaccination status, travel history and contact details. People will also have an extra day to fill it out before travelling.

Those who are not fully vaccinated will only need to take a pre-departure test and a PCR test on the day, or two days before, they arrive in the UK. In addition, children aged 12-15 in England will be able to prove their vaccination status or proof of prior infection via a digital NHS Covid Pass from Thursday, February 3 for outbound travel.

“But what people need to realise is that there are still tests required to go into other countries – whether it’s a PCR or a LFT test,” she adds.

What tests do I need, and how do I get them sorted out?

Before going abroad (if your destination requires it) you must take a PCR or LFT test – and it cannot be an NHS one.

“You have to do a private test – but the good news is these have come down in price. When I travelled to Dubai in December 2020 when there was a short travel window, I paid £184 per person to get a PCR with a fit to fly certificate. But now you can get a PCR test with a fit to fly certificate

for around £69 per person, and lateral flow tests are around £40 per person.”

Which countries are the easiest to travel to right now?

The rules within each country are subject to change, and the best thing to do when booking your holiday is check the Foreign Office’s website to see which countries have which rules and requirements in place. But there are a number of countries that currently have eased restrictions.

“For instance, if you’re fully vaccinated you don’t need to test or quarantine if you wish to go to Turkey,” says Diane.

These rules also apply for children aged 11 and under. Prior to entry however, travellers will need to complete an online form a maximum of 72 hours before entering Turkey. All arrivals into the country will be subject to a medical evaluation for Covid symptoms, including temperature checks, and may possibly be subject to random PCR testing on arrival.

“Spain and the Canary Islands are also pretty easy to travel to at the moment,” adds Diane.

If you’re fully vaccinated and travelling from the UK, you can enter Spain without needing to

test or quarantine. Children under the age of 12 do not need to show proof of being fully vaccinated upon entry to Spain either.

Anyone wishing to travel to the United States will be required to show a negative Covid test one day before travel (however children under two years old do not need to test). Upon arrival, anyone who is fully vaccinated does not have to quarantine, but is recommended to take a viral test three to five days after arriving.

Some countries are totally restriction-free, however. Those who wish to escape to Mexico or El Salvador do not need to provide proof of vaccination status, or a negative covid test in order to entry the country.

For up-to-date and full details of each country’s entry status, visit the Foreign Office’s website when booking your holiday for the most current travel advice.

When is the best time to book a holiday? And is it best to book it online or with a travel agent?

Booking your holiday sooner rather than later seems to be key, despite changing rules and uncertainty.

“If you’re going to leave it until the last minute, you’re probably going to be looking at paying a lot

more – especially with half-term and the school holidays on the horizon for families. I’d say we’ve done more bookings in the last six weeks than in the last two years,” explains Diane.

“I would also suggest booking with your local travel agent. One reason is because we can get what we call price parity with most companies anyway, so we can price match what you see online. Secondly, all of our holidays are ATOL protected, so if a tour operator or holiday company goes into administration, your money is safe and we can claim it back.”

Diane adds that travel agents are also able to help travellers with filling in forms – even when on holiday. “Last summer, we had people ringing us up from Greece with questions about their PCR forms, and we were able to talk them through it on the phone. It’s what we’re here for.”

What about cruises, are these safe now?

“Cruise companies are bringing out their prices earlier so people can book in advance if they don’t want to travel now but do in a couple of years’ time when hopefully there’s no restrictions. We’re booking cruises up to 2024 now,” explains Diane.



Covid tests for travel have to be through private companies



"For anyone who wishes to go on a cruise, you will need to take a PCR before boarding the ship, and each line has its own way of testing people, so check before you book. Some river cruises for instance will ask you to test every three or four days, and some will do a temperature check. If you have a high temperature, you will need to take a PCR or LFT, and if you're positive they will quarantine onboard the ship until they can get you off the ship at the next possible moment. If you're still positive, they will quarantine you in a hotel until you can fly back to the UK with a negative test. And while on board, passengers still need to wear a mask unless you're eating, drinking or outside on the deck."

I've not been away since before the pandemic – does travel insurance now cover Covid?

"The majority of companies now all include Covid cover – but you need to read the fine print and see what exactly that covers. With most providers, if you do get Covid abroad, most companies will cover you for medical treatment if you need it, as well as any hotels you may need if you're forced to quarantine.

"You also need to make sure

that if you catch Covid within 14 days of travelling, your insurance covers you for it so you're able to make a claim. For instance, if you caught Covid two days before you fly, you'd lose that money unless your insurance specifically covers that for you."

Is there anything else I should know?

The most important part of any trip – your passport. "Always check the validity of your passport, because since Brexit, passports are now only valid 10 years from the date of issue. A lot of passports had extra months on them in the past, but that's not the case anymore, and a lot of countries require a six-month validity on your passport – whereas before you could travel until its expiration date.

"For example, previously a passport issued on December 5, 2016 would be valid until June 5, 2027, but passports have now since lost that extra grace period, so it is only valid until December 5, 2026. If you try to travel thinking you've got extra months on your passport, you will be refused boarding at the airport. But as travel agents, we check people in online, so we're always checking passports."

Many countries have eased their restrictions for arrivals over recent months

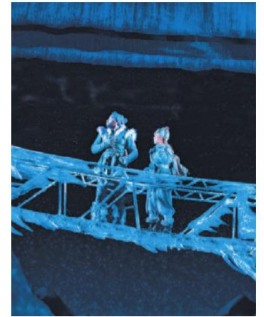
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