**Coronavirus advice for customers**

Please be aware we’re receiving an exceptional volume of customer enquiries, which we are responding to as quickly as we can. Unfortunately, we cannot respond to all of these calls directly, so please check our Q&A below.

ABTA Members are doing their best to manage arrangements for customers. If your trip is not imminent, your travel company may not be in touch with you right away. Our advice is to keep trying, though please do be patient.

**Travel update**

On 17 March the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) [advised against all non-essential overseas travel](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/travel-advice-foreign-secreatary-statement-17-march-2020)for British nationals, initially for a 30-day period.

On 23 March the FCO [advised all British travellers](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-advises-all-british-travellers-to-return-to-the-uk-now) to return to the UK.

**General travel advice for travellers**

The FCO currently advises against all non-essential overseas travel for British nationals. British people who decide that they still need to travel abroad should be fully aware of the increased risks of doing so. That includes the risk that they may not be able to get home, if travel restrictions are put in place.

**For the latest updates please visit the FCO website**[**here**](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus)**.**
Those currently in destination are advised by the Government to return to the UK now and should contact their travel company. They should also be aware that many destination authorities have introduced enhanced health measures including self-isolation procedures, and it is very important that travellers follow the public health advice relating to their local destination. Travellers should comply with these processes and take relevant [preventative measures](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-public-information-campaign-launched-across-the-uk) to reduce the risk of exposure. Travellers should also keep up to date on local advice.

For full information relating to the Coronavirus outbreak please visit the [Government website](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public), [Public Health England](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public) and the [TravelHealthPro website](https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/news/499/novel-coronavirus-covid-19-general-advice-for-travellers%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank).

**Advice to customers seeking refunds and with forward bookings**

On 17 March the Government advised against all non-essential travel overseas, initially for a period of 30 days, which has effectively brought travel overseas to a complete standstill and led to hundreds of thousands of holidaymakers not being able to take their holiday.

This situation is completely unprecedented, and the Government is urgently reviewing options to introduce temporary changes to regulations that will create a longer window for repaying refunds without affecting the protection provided by an ABTA or ATOL protected holiday.

Many customers have already postponed or rebooked their holiday or have received either refund credit notes or cash refunds from their tour operator or travel agent. A very important thing to note is that your holiday booking or refund credit note is financially protected in the event your travel business fails. Please see our guide on your options below.

We completely understand that customers may feel frustrated by the process of receiving a refund but we would ask for your patience and understanding at this incredibly challenging time.

Many tour operators and travel agents are doing all they can to help their customers but they have not yet received refunds from airlines and international hotels and without these they are simply not able to provide customer refunds, particularly on such a large scale in such a short space of time.

ABTA has also asked the government to establish an emergency fund for customers, where travel companies can’t recoup customers money from their suppliers, which would help alleviate the situation further, we will update customers when there is news on this.

We’d like to thank customers for their understanding, by following the steps below it will help to ensure that when this crisis is over UK holidaymakers will be able to book and enjoy their holidays in the same way as they have done for many years.

We would recommend the following steps:

1. If your trip has been cancelled because of the change in FCO advice, talk in the first instance to your travel provider to discuss options.
2. If possible, postpone your holiday or travel arrangements, don’t cancel – this will mean you have a holiday to look forward to in the future, and it will help your travel provider maintain its cash flow through the short-term challenges.
3. If you are not able to postpone, your travel provider may offer you a Refund Credit Note instead of an immediate cash refund. This Refund Credit Note can be used to book another holiday at a later date and, in the meantime, it is protected by ABTA/ ATOL if your original booking had that protection, so you would be reimbursed if the travel company failed financially.

Further details on this option are below:

•  This protection will last until 31 July 2020 at the latest at which point, if you have not used the Refund Credit Note to book another holiday, you will be entitled to a cash refund.

•  The value of the Refund Credit Note must be equal in value to the monies you have actually paid for the protected travel arrangements.

•  The Refund Credit Note must not include any other amount offered as a rebooking incentive or other offer.

•  Any such offers must be documented separately and are not covered by any scheme of financial protection.

•  The Refund Credit Note must expressly identify the original booking reference and attach a copy of the cancelled Booking Confirmation / Cancellation Invoice and, where appropriate, ATOL Certificate.
4. If your travel provider has said they will offer a cash refund, please be patient with them as they process this: they are likely to be dealing with an exceptionally high volume of enquiries.
5. If you have a travel booking for later in the year, please be patient. The situation is changing rapidly, and travel restrictions are currently only in place until mid-April.  You may incur cancellation charges or lose your deposit if you make a hasty decision.

Nobody knows for sure how long the current coronavirus pandemic will last, but we know that we will come out of the other side and we need to ensure that when we do, holidaymakers are still able to book and take their holidays and that there is a healthy and competitive travel industry to support them.

**Coronavirus Q&A**

**Q: What do I do if I have a holiday booked to depart after the current 30-day no-travel period (up to 16 April)?**

**A:** If you have a travel booking for later in the year, please be patient.  The situation is changing rapidly, and travel restrictions are currently only in place until 16 April.
If it turns out that FCO advice against travel affects your holiday, your travel company will contact you to discuss the options, at that time.
If there is no Government advice against travel to your destination, you’re free to make the choice not to go, but there's no obligation on your holiday company to give you a refund. Normal cancellation charges will apply.

It is highly unlikely that you will be able to claim any cancellation charge on your insurance as there isn’t normally cover for disinclination to travel but you can check the terms of your policy.

The safety of travellers is a priority for travel companies, and their decisions will follow British Government advice.

If you cancel now, or don’t pay your balance when it is due, normal terms and conditions will apply and you will lose your deposit or have to pay cancellation charges.

Travellers are advised to read the [FCO travel advice](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) for the country they are travelling to, which includes a link through to the [National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC)](https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries) TravelHealthPro website that provides specific travel health advice for countries. The Foreign Office also has a [specific page](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus) with more information on coronavirus.

**Q: I’m abroad already, should I return home immediately?**

**A:**All British tourists and short-stay travellers (this does not include permanent residents overseas) currently abroad should return to the UK as soon as possible where and while commercial flight options are still available.

This update reflects the pace at which international travel is becoming more difficult with the closure of borders, airlines suspending flights, airports closing, exit bans and further restrictions being introduced daily. Further closures to air routes may come in the next 48 hours, possibly without notice.

See further advice [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-advises-all-british-travellers-to-return-to-the-uk-now).

**Q: What happens if I have to travel whilst the non-essential advice is in place?**

**A:** British people who decide that they still need to travel abroad should be fully aware of the increased risks of doing so. That includes the risk that they may not be able to get home, if travel restrictions are put in place. Anyone still considering travel needs to be realistic about the level of disruption they are willing and able to endure, and to make decisions in light of the unprecedented conditions we face.

Anyone planning to travel should check the validity of their travel insurance.

British nationals who need to travel are advised to read the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) travel advice for the country they are travelling to, which includes entry requirements and a link through to the [National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC)](https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries)TravelHealthPro website that provides specific travel health advice for countries.

As a precautionary measure enhanced health screening procedures have been put in place at arrival and departure areas in many countries.

Many countries have also introduced entry restrictions for people travelling from certain countries, travellers are advised to read the [FCO travel advice](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and sign up to email alerts for the country they are travelling to, as these are subject to change at short notice.

**Q:  What are my options for postponing a trip?**

**A:**As a result of the extraordinary situation and customer concerns over coronavirus, many travel companies and airlines are doing all they can to offer more flexible booking policies at this time, such as giving customers the option to change their travel date should they wish to postpone their holiday. In certain circumstances this may not be possible. Customers should speak to their travel provider to discuss what their options may be.

**Q: If I cannot follow my initial travel plans due to the coronavirus outbreak, am I entitled to compensation?**

**A:**You won’t be entitled to any compensation, as the reason for the holiday not continuing is outside the control of the tour operator.

**Q: My holiday is after the current 30-day no-travel period (up to 16 April) but I have a pre-existing medical condition and do not want to travel – can I get a refund if I cancel my holiday?**

**A:** As with the above advice, you’re free to make the choice not to travel, but if the FCO are not advising against travel to your destination then there is no obligation on your travel company to give you a refund. Normal cancellation charges will apply.

If your GP has advised that you do not travel, and provided you with official documentation to confirm this, then you will need to check the terms of your travel insurance policy to see if you can claim any cancellation charge back.

**Q: My travel company says it is giving me a refund but that I’ll have to wait. Is there a time limit on this?**

**A:**Currently, there is no hard and fast rule. If your travel company is able to provide a cash refund, please be patient. They are dealing with a huge number of customers, and with offices closed and staff working from home, it’s a real challenge. ABTA will keep an eye on the situation and encourage ABTA Members to do all they can, but it’s not unreasonable at the moment to expect the process to take upwards of a month.

**Q: I have a package holiday booked within the UK, not overseas. Is my holiday affected?**

**A:**Even though UK holidays don’t come under the FCO’s advice against travel, they are very unlikely to be able to go ahead as planned. Accommodation may be unavailable, activities and bars and restaurants are closed. Therefore, we advise that you follow our general advice above, under “Advice to customers seeking refunds and with forward bookings”.

**Q: I have a booking coming up for accommodation only in the UK. What is the position for me?**

**A:**If your accommodation is closed or can’t be provided, follow the advice above under “Advice to customers seeking refunds and with forward bookings”. If it is still available and you decide not to go, look at the terms and conditions to see if you are entitled to any refund or released from any obligation to pay.

**Q: What should I do if I have a trip booked to a sports event and the event has been postponed or cancelled?**

**A:**This depends on how you booked your holiday and what the terms and conditions say. If the event has been postponed, you should speak to your travel company about rearranging your trip once the new date has been confirmed.

**Advice for ABTA Members, can be found**[**here**](https://www.abta.com/member-zone/running-your-business/coronavirus-advice-for-members)**.**