

Greek, Spanish and Portuguese islands could open early to British tourists for summer holidays

'Traffic light' plan for resuming international travel could see islands with lower Covid rates than mainland granted 'green light' status

By Charles Hymas, HOME AFFAIRS EDITOR

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The old Venetian harbour of Chania town on the island of Crete | CREDIT: istockphoto



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Greek, Spanish and Portuguese islands could be opened up early for summer holidays as part of the Government's ["traffic light" plans for resuming international travel](#), Grant Shapps has indicated.

The Transport Secretary said islands with lower Covid rates than the mainland could be granted "green list" status for holidaymakers to travel to them without facing quarantine on their return.

Greece has mounted a major campaign to fully vaccinate people living on 85 islands with more than 10,000 inhabitants by May so that they are Covid-free when the UK Government is due to lift its ban on non-essential foreign travel.

Other islands such as the Canaries, Madeira and the Azores have lower Covid rates than Spain and Portugal, which could mean they are granted green list status before their mainland counterparts.

Asked whether he would incorporate the "islands policy" into his [traffic light system](#) at a webinar organised on Tuesday night by Airlines UK, Mr Shapps said: "The simple answer is yes. I want to do that again. That's why I have introduced a green watch list."

The green watchlist is designed to give holidaymakers early notice of a green list country which may be about to turn "amber," requiring anyone returning to the UK to quarantine for 10 days.

The islands policy was introduced last summer, which allowed ministers to maintain quarantine free travel corridors to Greek and Portuguese islands while travellers to the mainland were subject to self-isolation on their return to the UK.

Greece aims to reopen to UK tourists who are either vaccinated, have proof of a negative Covid test or immunity through having contracted the disease from May 17.

Mr Shapps on Tuesday said the UK's roadmap plan for reopening foreign travel on May 17 was on course but he said people would have to wait until the beginning of May to discover which destinations would be on the "green" list.

Green

- One test within 72 hours of departure (to England)
- At least one test on arrival back in England (Could be lateral flow test - free to all from April 9)

Amber

- Pre-departure test
- Quarantine for 10 days at home
- PCR tests on day two and eight, with the option to pay for an extra test on day five to be released from isolation early
- Rules could be more flexible for fully vaccinated people, with no home quarantine

Red

- Will still have to hotel quarantine at a cost of up to £1,750 per person for 11 days with pre-departure tests followed by tests on days two and eight
- Direct flights from the red-listed nations are banned
- Britons currently in these countries must fly home via a third nation

It had been anticipated only a handful would be "green," which is determined by their vaccination and Covid rates, the risk from variants and ability to genome sequence the virus.

These included countries such as Israel, Gibraltar, the US and Iceland but excluded the vast majority of traditional summer destinations. Mr Shapps's announcement, however, appears to open the door to islands.

Mr Shapps also signalled he could approve a £45 PCR test, slashing the average price by two-thirds, and confirmed moves to allow holidaymakers to take free lateral flow tests to use for pre-departure.

It came as the Home Office urged Heathrow to reopen Terminal 4 to prevent passengers from "red list" countries spreading variants to other arrivals in crowded arrival halls, amid claims the airport is becoming a "breeding ground" for infections.

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