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Travelling to West Africa to celebrate 'Detty December'?

Take care of your health and don't forget malaria risks if travelling to West Africa this December to take part in cultural celebrations

Planning to celebrate 'Detty December' in West Africa this year? This festive season, from December to January, unites locals and those with African roots from all over the world for parties, Afrobeats concerts, carnivals, art shows, and cultural celebrations. Many use this time to reconnect with [family and friends](#) and to enjoy the festive atmosphere before ringing in the new year. A cultural and economic phenomenon originating Ghana and Nigeria is now spreading across Africa.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of people travel to West Africa for Detty December, including tens of thousands from the UK's large West African community, with nearly 90% being Nigerians living overseas – mainly in the United Kingdom and the United States of America [1]. Ghana received around 236,000 international visitors during November and December 2024, most coming from the USA, UK and Nigeria. The AfroFuture festival in Accra is also expected to attract tens of thousands of people this December [2].

As with other mass gatherings around the world, infections such as measles, respiratory viruses and gastrointestinal (gut) infections can quickly spread. For more information, check our [factsheet on mass gatherings](#). Take extra care with [food and water hygiene](#) to reduce the risk of gastrointestinal infections.

Malaria

Malaria is still a serious health issue. In 2023, there were 246 million cases and 569,000 deaths from malaria in the WHO African Region. The number of malaria cases in Africa has gone up in recent years, including an increase of about 6.8 million cases in Nigeria. [3]. In 2023, 2,106 imported cases of malaria were reported in the UK, the highest number in over 20 years [4]. Most of these cases (83.1%) were *Plasmodium falciparum* which is the most dangerous type of malaria. Where travel history was known, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Ghana were the most common countries where UK travellers caught malaria [4].

People travelling to Africa to visit friends and relatives (VFR travellers) are at most risk of getting malaria. Around 80% of UK travellers who contracted malaria abroad were of Black African descent [4]. To reduce the risk when travelling to West Africa, it is important to use mosquito bite prevention methods and take the recommended antimalarial drugs. Travellers should also be vigilant for any symptoms of malaria.

Country-specific information can be found on our [Country Information pages](#) and [Outbreak Surveillance section](#).

Advice for travellers

Before you travel

- Seek pre-travel advice, ideally 4-6 weeks prior to travel; although last-minute advice is still

useful if time is short.

- Make sure you get comprehensive [travel insurance](#).
- Check the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([FCDO](#)) [travel advice](#) for your destination.
- Check our [Country Information pages](#) for details on health risks, prevention measures, and recommended vaccinations.
- Arrange an appointment with your **practice nurse, pharmacist, travel clinic, or healthcare provider** to discuss vaccinations, malaria prevention, and other travel health concerns. For last minute trips abroad, some antimalarial tablets can be started up to two days before travel. Pharmacies can advise and prescribe medication.
- Review any relevant updates on our [Outbreak Surveillance database](#).

Important things to remember about malaria

- Malaria is preventable and treatable, but it is not a minor illness. It makes people sick and, in some cases, can be deadly.
- Being born or growing up in Africa does not make you immune to malaria. You are still at risk of malaria when you travel back.
- Having malaria before does not make you immune, you can catch it many times.
- Having sickle cell trait or sickle cell disease you immune to malaria. People with sickle cell disease are very vulnerable to severe malaria.
- Just one bite from an infected mosquito can give you malaria.

For practical, community-led malaria prevention advice, see the [Africans Against Malaria](#) campaign by the African diaspora malaria initiative. It provides guidance and resources specifically for African diaspora travellers.

While you are away

When visiting a malaria risk area, ensure that you follow all the important steps for malaria prevention:

A – Awareness - know whether your destination has a malaria risk. Most of Africa is high risk for malaria, especially West, Central and East Africa. Protecting yourself from malaria is crucial.

B – Bite prevention- this is your first line of defence. Prevent mosquito bites by using insect repellent suitable for tropical destinations, sleeping under insecticide-treated bed nets, and wearing long sleeves and trousers. These methods also help protect against other mosquito-borne infections.

C – Chemoprophylaxis- get malaria prevention tablets from a pharmacy, travel clinic or your GP. Take them before, during and after your trip as prescribed*.

D – Diagnosis- if you develop [symptoms of malaria](#) such as fever, chills, or flu-like illness, **seek medical advice immediately**.

***If taken correctly, malaria prevention tablets can be over 90% effective. They do not give 100% protection so you should still avoid bites and seek prompt advice if you develop symptoms.**

Infected mosquitos can spread a number of other diseases such as yellow fever, dengue and chikungunya. Further [advice for travellers about mosquito bite avoidance](#) is available.

When you return

Suspected malaria is a medical emergency. If you or your family get a [fever or flu-like illness](#) after visiting a country with malaria, get medical help straight away and ask for a same-day blood test for malaria. You can also call 111 or visit the [NHS 111 website](#). Tell them where you travelled, mention malaria, and ask to be tested. Malaria can show up even up to a year after your trip.

Advice for health professionals

Malaria should be suspected in anyone with a fever or history of fever who has been to a malaria-endemic area, even if they used prophylaxis.

The minimum incubation period for naturally-acquired infection is six days. Most patients with *Plasmodium falciparum* infection present in the first month after exposure; almost all present within six months of exposure. *Vivax* or *ovale* infections commonly present later than six months after exposure and presentation may be delayed for years [3].

Travellers returning from malaria-endemic areas with a fever should have a same-day blood test result for malaria. Information for health professionals about blood tests and how to request them in the UK is available from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) [Malaria prevention guidelines for travellers from the UK](#) [3]

If a travel-related infection is suspected, urgently consult your local microbiology, virology, or infectious diseases team, giving them a full travel and clinical history. They may advise that appropriate samples are sent for testing to [specialist laboratory facilities](#) in the UK.

Resources

- [Country Information](#)
- [Outbreak Surveillance](#)
- [Malaria in brief](#)
- [Malaria factsheet](#)
- [UK Health Security Agency. UKMEAG: Malaria prevention guidelines for travellers from the UK 2025](#)
- [Visiting friends and relatives abroad: advice for travellers](#)
- [Mosquito bite avoidance: advice for travellers](#)
- [Mass gatherings](#)

References

1. [Forbes Africa: 'Massive Opportunity': How Hotels, Nightclubs, Restaurants And Luxury Car Rentals Drove Lagos' \\$75 Million Tourism Boom In December \[Accessed 17 November 2025\]](#)
2. [Ghana Tourism Authority: Tourism Report \[Accessed 17 November 2025\]](#)
3. [World Health Organization. World Malaria Report 2024 \[Accessed 17 November 2025\]](#)
4. [UK Health Security Agency. Malaria imported into the UK: 2023. \[Accessed 17 November 2025\]](#)
5. [UK Health Security Agency. UKMEAG. Malaria prevention guidelines for travellers from the UK. \[Accessed 17 November 2025\]](#)