

An Essential Journey – My Experience of International Travel in Covid Times

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by [Joanna Sharp](#), *OffGuardian*

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I had not planned to travel abroad this year, especially after the UK government's announcement in early 2021 that foreign holidays were forbidden. Even heading towards the airport with an intent to go on a foreign holiday could result in a £5000 fine or imprisonment! Surreal.

Where we live in London under a flight path to Heathrow, we notice that although there are fewer flights, they have not ceased completely. So how do people travel? It's not something I have thought about.

One day at the end of April I receive a message that my elderly father's condition is critical. Within an hour I am looking at flights back home in Eastern Europe and checking the UK government travel 'advice' webpages.

I say 'advice' but that word belongs to the past. Today, 'command' might be more appropriate. According to the government, only "essential" international travel is permitted for named valid reasons; 'medical and compassionate' is the category which applies to me.

I wonder whose compassion this is a reference to: mine, for wanting to be with my sick father, or the government's for

including this as a possibility. Reassured that I can go, it is now a question of buying the plane tickets, checking in and packing, right? Not quite.

Wading Through the Red Tape

Since holiday travel has effectively been banned, the government created intricate webpages full of information on what is and what is not allowed, where citizens cannot travel, and if they must, what documents they need to prepare. So complicated travel advice alone has become that the [webpage now includes](#) a step by step flowchart with endless links within each step to be followed.

Getting through this information would take at least a day. It's like a cross between a maze and a vortex. I soon understand that I cannot buy my tickets until I have uploaded the right Covid related paperwork onto the airline website!

First, I need to fill a Declaration for International Travel (since the 17th May it is no longer required) which asks for personal details including my date of birth, passport number, home address and destination.

The key question is the reason for international travel – and in the actual online questions, the phrase is: '*What is your excuse for travel?*' My excuse? What kind of language is that? Am I asking a teacher to let me leave the classroom? Am I asked to explain why I haven't done my homework?

That really shocks me, although I have already noticed my own reaction to the very idea that I need permission to leave the country, as if I was back in Eastern Europe before 1989...I read the following declaration and tick the right box out of the given options.

I hereby declare that my reason for being outside my home to travel internationally is for:

– Work

- *Volunteering*
- *Education*
- *Medical or compassionate reasons*
- *Funeral*
- *Ending a temporary visit (non-UK resident)*
- *Allowing access to parents with children who do not live in the same country*
- *Other reasonable excuse – please specify*

Next, I am required to sign to *'certify that the information I have provided is true. I understand that if I provide false or misleading information, I may be issued with a fixed penalty notice and/or a direction to return home or be arrested'*.

So, by signing this, and I have no choice not to if I want to get my ticket, I have given the UK authorities permission to arrest or fine me should my excuse to travel turn out to be incorrect. What if my father is not that ill, then what?

But of course, that is not enough. I now need to provide evidence of my father's illness. How do you do that when the whole of the world is still in lockdown; imagine having to get a doctor's note on demand. I am still just trying to get a ticket.

I want to travel tomorrow morning, my sister-in-law tells me, Dad is given a couple of days. I ask my brother to send me an email confirming the family crisis, he does that within an hour. He is also trying to copy the notes from my father's last doctor's visit and the most recent diagnosis.

Then, still before I buy a return ticket, I need to get a kit of two Covid tests which I will need to take upon return to UK. Another link takes me on to a list of government-approved Covid test providers. A whole list of them, each can be accessed via a separate link. I try a few. They average around £200 each. The cheapest ones are £99 but are sold out.

Why can't I see any free NHS ones? The ones given out like sweets in schools and local pharmacies? Why are these not available? Why could I not just pick a free one at the airport?

But of course, there is no to answer these questions, I am desperate to leave so agree to this, too. No test, no flight. So, I order one of these almost £200 test kits, get an email confirming the order, upload all the documents and finally I can complete the purchase of my tickets which, as usual, turn out not so low cost after all.

I check in. My boarding card (lucky I had just bought a printer the previous week) says at the top of the page 'Covid Documentation Uploaded'. So, now I have the boarding card and a pile of printed pages which presumably I will need to show at UK border control in order to prove my excuse for leaving the country is legitimate.

Finally, I download and fill in the compulsory Passenger Locator Form for the destination country that will enable the system to track and trace me. It is nearly bedtime and I now need to pack.

On the Go

My husband drives me to Stansted in the middle of the night. An early morning flight, no public transport available but at least it's quiet and there is no traffic. The airport is still closed; a group of families with young children are waiting for the door to open.

These are not holidaymakers breaking the law to get some forbidden fun. No idea where they are travelling but they look like they are going home somewhere south, southeast perhaps? Turkey, Bulgaria or Ukraine? No idea but they do look like part of the globalised chain of workforce escaping poverty and perhaps the lockdown has pushed them to return. Better to be jobless and poor in your own village. The weather tends to be

better and the environment less hostile.

Finally, the doors open. I push the scarf up over my face, my hand clutching a plastic folder with a wad of documents allowing me to leave. It is quiet, no waiting. I go through security, passport control seems non-existent, shops still closed so nothing to stop for. I wonder at which point someone will ask me to see the papers. Ask me what my excuse for leaving is. Strangely, that never happens. I am almost disappointed. I spent about four hours sorting out all that paperwork the night before and now this is not even checked!

Immediately I catch myself: why am I disappointed? Because no one will give me the all-clear? Have I been conditioned to want to be waved through the green light already?

Perhaps that is how normalising oppression works. But of course, there is no need to check, the documents been uploaded and recorded somewhere and someone now knows everything about me, my plans, my reason ("excuse") for leaving the country. Or perhaps the intimate details of my family crisis; my father's terminal illness and my attempt to get to him before it's too late have now just been converted into big data slushing around the corpo-government's control AI machine, and turned into useful predictions.

I guess this type of authoritarianism does not even need stern looks from border control officials, no need to divulge private dramas in public. Hours of stress of getting the documents turned into a discreet but vital small print on my boarding card; the only visible proof that my travel is acceptable to the corpo-state. It is all so neat, tidy, hi-tech and invisible that we can just pretend that all is just normal.

After all, the airport trimmings look all the same; with adverts, duty-free shopping, same old queues at departure gates and same safety drills on the plane, down to the

irritating Ryanair voice thanking us for choosing to fly with them (no one chooses to fly with Ryanair, just like no one chooses to go to the dentist, you do it because you have to and you hope it won't be too unpleasant).

We can pretend nothing has changed. Except the masks on faces, of course. Slow drinking and eating is my solution. During the flight many noses protrude against the regulations, of course. People do need to breathe.

We land on time. I send a message to my father, anxious, hoping he is still there. He is not responding. I am worried. From the tarmac I can see the arrivals hall is full. There is no way of entering so the crowd from my plane stops outside and waits in the drizzle. I wonder why that is. Is that Brexit or is it that people's papers are now checked after all?

The queue moves very slowly, twenty minutes after landing I send my father another message saying that I'm still waiting for border control. I have no idea why this is so slow; each person seems to spend a good few minutes at the control desk. Finally, an hour and a half after landing I get into the taxi. As the driver pulls away, I notice a long queue of passengers outside the arrivals hall waiting to get a Covid test. I arrive home and find my father hanging on.

My Father's Illness

There is a twist to this story. My father has been treated for cancer but has been still doing quite well and has been planning to spend the summer away from his flat, in the countryside. His sudden deterioration it unexpected to me but I have not had time to think of reasons. I only learnt of this yesterday. But now I am in the flat, taking my shoes off when my brother drops the bombshell: *'you know, Dad took the vaccine'*.

I am shocked. He told me he was not going to, because he found the registration process too difficult, so he decided to stop

trying. I was relieved; I had been persuading him that he should not, that being immunocompromised, his system might not cope. I told him what I knew and what I worried about. My brother tells me another family member helped organize his jab and took him there. Jesus. But I am to pretend I don't know about it; Dad asked my brother not to tell me.

So, I learn that the day after the Pfizer jab he started to feel weak, and within ten days he was prescribed blood thinning injections, a daily drip and he became bedbound. My brother has hired a hospital-style bed and an oxygen machine, set them up in father's bedroom and organized a private nurse for daily visits. Dad had not wanted to go to hospital: he believed that hospitals were overrun by contagious Covid patients and that going to hospital would mean certain death under a ventilator.

Luckily (I never thought I would say this), unlike the UK, this ex-communist country never managed to build up its own national health service to a level able to deliver comprehensive care, so a secondary private sector filling the gaps exists and is not beyond the means of many people. So here he is, in his own bedroom and getting care at home.

He is happy to see me but asks me not to touch him. I feel sad, guessing he might worry I am bringing contagion. That hurts. I pretend I know nothing about the jab. Later, much later, I remember this moment and think that, he might have wanted to protect me. He knew the jab made him ill and he worried he was fighting vaccine induced-Covid and did not want to give it to me.

He never told me about the vaccine, I never told him I knew.

Quarantine One: The App

The day after arriving I receive a text message telling me I am now under statute of law obliged to download a particular app and use it during my 10-day home quarantine. I start the

download but can't complete it. Something is stuck and I have no idea how to fix it. I try for a while and then abandon it. I spend most of the time caring for my father who now slips in and out of consciousness.

The next morning I get a phone call but it stops ringing before I have time to answer it. The following day the same happens. I realise this is the local track and trace. They ring but don't wait for me to answer. Their call is logged, the box gets ticked but the robot or a human cannot be bothered to do the job properly. Actually, it must be a human as a robot would not give up. Good. The tyranny will fail due to human error or sheer laziness.

I don't know what possessed me but somehow, I manage to complete installing the Quarantine App. The system springs into action. I get a message from the app that I must take a selfie within the next 30 minutes and submit it. I take a selfie from the app which gives me as many times as I like to choose the best shot. I choose the worst shot.

Of course, there is a way to cheat: after doing my selfie I could leave the phone at home and go out for a walk. Trouble is, the selfie demand comes at a different time each day, usually towards the end of the day. But I have no reason to go anywhere, really, I have come here to be with him, and his condition continues to be critical. And at some point, during this journey I decided that I would do everything by the book, just to see what the new normal travel feels and looks like, and what exactly they want us to experience.

Well, here I am, in a 10-day quarantine in a flat with my dying father. We are lucky. I have my brother to get the shopping in and kind neighbours ready to help. We are lucky my father is at home. What would be the point of coming here all this way, only to be stuck in quarantine if he was in a hospital with no visitors allowed? So, all in all, we are lucky.

Difficult Days

Days go by, my father's condition improves a little, I am his nurse, and of course I touch him – he stopped protesting as soon as he needed a glass of water; I continue to take my selfies. We talk, I read to him, feed him, then he sleeps. He dies two days after my quarantine ends. That is good timing.

There is a lot to do now, and I will not be breaking the law trying to organize the funeral...I remember my favourite literature lesson at school when we debated who was right: Creon or Antigone. Even then, I was in team Antigone.

A doctor arrives to certify death. She is nice and takes her time. Talks a little. Does not look like a corporate bot. She is sitting at a coffee table doing the paperwork. For the cause of death, she writes 'Thrombosis'. I ponder for a bit and then hesitatingly say: *'Did you know he was vaccinated?'*

Her face changes and she asks: *'No, when?'* We tell her, *'Four weeks ago, exactly'*.

'I am not allowed to say anything,' she says, *'but I can tell you I have seen a lot lately. A lot!'* We try to encourage her to talk more but she is cautious. I just ask her: *'Why would a person on cancer treatment be given a vaccine? Surely that had not been done before?'* She looks at me and says: *'Because they want to vaccinate us all.'* So, she knows.

This kind of conversation would have been typical in the days of strict communist authoritarianism before 1989. You never knew whom you could trust so you just dropped hints and checked for people's response. In those days careless talk was dangerous, and I am too young to remember the worst times: the Stalinist years when children were encouraged to denounce their parents; many were imprisoned, tortured and killed.

Now the threat is only a loss of income and public humiliation and yet the new order based on lies, fraud and corrupt science

is already in place. Everyone is just doing their job. A perfect example of Hannah Arendt's banality of evil in which those, following orders in this elaborate house of cards, often do not even know their active contribution to harm inflicted on others. They do not realise because they refuse to look and to know. They stopped taking responsibility for their individual part in the whole.

There is a small group of doctors in the country who are challenging the official narrative, attempt to offer treatment for Covid patients and warn against the untested 'vaccines', particularly now that governments want to jab children. Their voices are censored, the people get smeared, ridiculed and shamed by the professional licensing medical body. The modern-day governance in Western democracies!

Travelling Home

As the funeral preparations get underway, I need to organise my return travel. I check the UK government website again. Travelling from an 'amber' coded country, I must test negative for Covid within 72 hours prior to departure. Tricky when the flight is on Monday afternoon.

I start to search for UK government-approved tests available in the city. Only a handful provide the specified UK approved antigen test with results in English. They are also open only in the mornings so if I test on Friday morning, I might be testing a few hours too early to fit within the 72 hours.

After hours of online searching, I find one that looks almost right. I pay the equivalent of £35 online and am told to come on the day, without an appointment. The laboratory website provides useful advice, how to prepare for the test. I learn that I should not brush my teeth or use mouthwash on the morning of test. So now I know what to do.

I arrive at the testing centre early, having heard that queues can be quite long. It is, and it is in the street. The lab's

waiting room only allows three people at a time so the rest stand outside. After about an hour it is my turn. I am allowed inside the surgery.

On the right, by the door, a masked man sitting at a desk behind a glass screen is checking my name and the type of test I have purchased. Then, a young tall, man in full white hazmat suit, his face covered, and in protective glasses ushers me to sit on a chair and tip my head backwards.

This is my first Covid test ever and I am terrified. I have rehearsed telling them how sensitive my face feels and asking not to go deep but there is no eye contact, no talk trying to help me feel comfortable, no attempt to put me at ease. He just tells me to tip my head back far.

I just manage to ask him to go into the left nostril as my right one is not straight. He happily obliges and shoves the long stick into my nostril. As soon as the tip enters my nose I feel shock, a feeling of something unnatural, wrong and threatening happening. The area he just touched is too soft, sensitive and the sensation so unfamiliar I involuntarily, and to my own shock, find myself pushing the man's arm away. He moves back and looks at me, his body language (there is no face available) disapproves of my behaviour.

I say, please don't go that deep, you already have some but he insists, tells me not to defend myself and does it again. And again, that feeling that a part of me which is vulnerable and should not be touched, gets scraped. He gets his sample and nods for me to go. I am frozen in that chair, unable to move for what seems like a while. I have tears in my eyes, and I am alone with two hazmat wearing robots. No word is uttered as I leave.

I get my negative result within hours. I recover with an old friend. By then I have a splitting headache and my left nostril is moist with a slight leak. The headache lasts for a

couple of days but the leak persists for at least ten.

I arrive at the airport early because I have difficulties completing the UK Passenger Locator Form which UK needs from all passengers. I pass through a manned gate with an automatic wrist temperature check. The airport is unusually quiet, and the staff help me identify the problem which stops me from completing the form. The reference number for the double Covid test needed for the Passenger Locator Form is wrong. I ring home and ask my husband to read the reference number off the Covid test kit. Surely it has arrived now. It hasn't. It looks like the Day 2 and 8 Test I ordered has not been paid for.

I am told I need to buy a new kit if I want to get this flight. I do as I'm told. No form, no flight. I stand next to the luggage drop off counter feeling sweaty, and with my hands shaking I battle the website on my phone. Again, all the 'cheap' ones are sold out and somehow, at the last minute I manage to make a purchase for £180, get an email, a reference number, complete the form and have my luggage accepted.

I hurry to my gate and make it just in time as passengers are starting to board. I slow down to join the Ryanair herd waiting on the tarmac for the aircraft to be processed before we are told we can travel.

The pavement is marked with lines at 2-meter intervals. Two men behind me are joking loudly that we must stand on the lines correctly, otherwise the virus will jump on us. I turn and smile (no mask, we are still outside) and make eye contact with the fellow humans.

Quarantine Two: Track and Trace

Back home in London, the following day I get my first out of ten phone calls from Track and Trace. Each time a different voice reads the same script.

I am contacting you on behalf of the NHS Test and Trace as

you have recently travelled into the UK from abroad. Are you happy to continue in English?"

No idea what would happen if I said 'no'.

Before we proceed, I need to make you aware that this call will be recorded for training and quality improvement purposes and should just take a few minutes of your time. I can confirm I have completed the necessary data security training and all information you provide today will be stored securely. NHS Test and Trace may need to share your details with other organisations including the Home Office, and further information on data security and privacy can be found on www.gov.uk/coronavirus. Sharing information in the call today means you consent for it to be stored in the ways I have described. Are you happy to proceed with the call?"

I wish I could say, no, I am not. Once or twice I ask how long the data is going to be stored. The caller is not sure and advises me to find this out from the government website. The call proceeds with them checking my year of birth. Then they ask if I have opted into a 'test to release' – I frankly don't even know it is my option, so I say 'no'.

I later learn that the Test to Release scheme does not replace the compulsory Day 2 and 8 test. The ten-day quarantine can be shortened to 5 days by 'opting into' Test to Release for an additional £99. I realise they ask this question to advertise another product!

Can you confirm that you are quarantining at the address you provided on the passenger locator form and will continue to do so for ten days starting on the day after you arrive in the UK."

So, again, I confirm, yes. What would happen if I said no?

As part of the Covid 19 response you are legally required to take the test on Day 2 and Day 8 and a failure to do so may result in prosecution."

That answers my previous question...

Has your test arrived? And have you taken or do you intend to take your test?"

Yes.

Then I am asked if I got my test from the NHS or from a private provider. I am confused as I had no option to get an NHS test and I tell the caller. They seem happy with my answer and continue:

If your Day 2 test is positive confirming Covid 19, you do not need to take another test on Day 8."

I think, on one occasion, I ask how I am expected to post the test if I am not allowed to leave the house. Of course, the assumption is there is someone else in the house, and if I still have difficulties, again, the go-to place is another NHS number. Amazing what they can do these days; they can even pick up your mail for you!

The call continues:

If you develop any of the three coronavirus symptoms which are: a new continuous cough, a high temperature, or a loss or change to your sense of taste or smell, please visit www.gov.uk/coronavirus for further advice. You should not go to the GP, hospital or a pharmacy. If you require medical advice, please ring the NHS on 111 or in an emergency dial 999".

So here we have the admission of medical malpractice: if I

fall ill, I must not seek help from NHS, not even by going to my local pharmacy. I must stay home without help, except of course, if I qualify for 999 ie, a ventilator..

The call continues:

I must advise you that if you test positive for coronavirus or are identified as a close contact of someone who has coronavirus you will be notified by NHS Test and Trace and may be contacted again. Is there anything you would like me to repeat?"

Of course, if someone I sat next to on the (half-empty) plane gets a positive result, my quarantine will stretch to a fortnight or longer! Each time, the call ends with a friendly, youthful, 'have a great day'. All those who have called me are young voices, all kinds of accents, probably desperate for any job in the current climate. They are trained to stick to the script and any departure from it by my questions seems to trip them up.

And most of them probably think they are doing something socially useful and valuable.

The Quarantine DIY Tests

The one I have purchased in haste at the airport is a kit with two PCR tests to be administered at home on Day 2 and Day 8. The instructions tell me that the test is run at less than a 30-cycle value threshold.

The first thing to say about the swab is that it is long. It looks like a cotton bud used for everyday use, but on closer inspection it is different. The stick itself is about 12 cm long, that's 6", and designed to break off after the sample is collected and put into a small tube provided. The tip itself is 2 cm long, quite thin and covered in almost translucent spiky bristles protruding outwards. It looks a bit like a miniature harsh brush designed to scratch the delicate tissue

inside the mouth and nose.

I am told to swab the back of the throat for 3-5 seconds over the posterior pharynx and tonsillar areas but to avoid tongue, teeth and the sides of the mouth. Then I am told to insert the same swab to each nostril about 2 cm deep and to rotate it for 3-5 seconds each time.

The form which I have to complete for each test is yet another mandated opportunity for the corpo-government to harvest my personal data, to store it for as long as it sees fit, yet, as is often the case in abusive relationships I have to (I repeat:) I have to give my consent for all this to happen, and even consent for my possible positive test result which may include my personal details: name, date of birth, gender, home address, telephone number, occupation, place of work, ethnicity and the fact that I have tested positive for Covid 19 to be communicated to Public Health England. Luckily, both of my test results are negative.

Eleven days after arrival in the UK my quarantine is officially over. It takes me a couple of days before I venture outside, I detect a bit of agoraphobia. In the last six weeks I spent twenty days in house arrest. They say it takes six weeks to develop a new habit.

Postscriptum

I doubt very much I will travel internationally any time soon. Not planning to take the experimental Covid jab and so will not be enjoying the privilege of freedom promised to those with the vaccine passport. At the time of writing, it is no longer illegal to leave England but the elaborate hoops and the red tape remain and the government [website reminds us that](#) *“to protect public health in the UK and the vaccine rollout, you should not travel to countries or territories on the red or amber lists”*.

The ‘red and amber’ lists cover most countries of the world

and returning from an amber list country will involve three or four tests which could come to £240-£340 per person plus the time spent completing all the online forms.

As to the red list countries; even a short spell there ends in an expensive £1750 per person prison-like stay at an airport hotel, as can be seen [here](#).

So whilst not forbidden, even essential travel has been made into a series of expensive, degrading and time-consuming obstacles. Vaccine passports are being rolled out precisely to convince people they will magically bring freedom back to their lives. Do they not realise, that once they have their passports, the vaccine will need regular boosters?

Those still asleep; trusting the governments and the mainstream media think that easy travel is only temporarily put on hold but once the pandemic is 'under control', things will get back to the way they used to be. They do not realise the plan is to make travel an exclusive and rare event beyond reach of ordinary people.

This is done to us not just by the predatory elite class. Disappointingly, the pro-lockdown left continues to cheer these restrictions on and dismiss people's desire and need to travel, as undeserved indulgence or middle-class privilege (interestingly, unrestricted travel around Europe was, until so recently, one of the main reasons for their fierce anti-Brexit position. What happened to their cherished principle of freedom of movement?). They could not be further from the truth.

They forget that, according to official migration data for the end of 2019, the UK is home to 6.2 million people – that is 9% of the total population – who have the nationality of a different country! And that data does not even include naturalised UK citizens like me, first-generation settled migrants who have close relatives all over the world and that

unrestricted travel is an essential means to family life, something which is protected by Human Rights Act 1998.

The irony for those like myself, who grew up in communist Eastern Europe, is that freedom of movement, so taken for granted in the West, the right to travel and to have your own passport at home at all times is what we did not have then. The state set limits on where 'citizens', treated like its property, could travel.

For many who experienced those times, even as children, a return to state-mandated travel restrictions will feel like going back into tyranny.

As for my own journey: I will never forgive those responsible and all those lockdown fanatics for stealing my Dad's, and so many other elderly people's, last year by locking them up in the prison of fear and isolation, and then for pushing them to take the dangerous experimental jab which – for so many – was the last straw in their already weakened bodies.

Joanna Sharp is an academic living in London.

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