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ow winter has taken a firm hold, your thoughts might be turning to planning a well deserved break in the New Year. Whether it's going on that long awaited adventure holiday or packing up for a few days in a caravan, the Financial Ombudsman Service hopes your holiday – like the vast majority that are taken ever year – will be problem free.

Ensuring you're covered by travel insurance can help give you peace of mind. Travel insurance can provide cover for a wide range of risks – subject to certain limits and exclusions. Sold either as a single-trip policy, an annual multi-trip policy, or an 'ongoing' policy, travel insurance policies vary dramatically, both in terms of price and scope of cover. So it's worth checking that your policy meets your particular holiday needs, rather than automatically going for whatever policy is cheapest.

An annual travel insurance policy can be the most cost-effective option for frequent travellers. However, make sure the policy covers your requirements for each of the holidays you intend to take – especially if you're planning a more unusual or activity-based trip. It's also a good idea to have travel insurance in place from the time you first book your holiday – an important part of travel insurance is the cover it provides in the lead-up to going away.

If things do go wrong, travel insurance problems can be a cause of real disappointment. What was supposed to be a relaxing escape has turned into something considerably more stressful. This is where the Financial Ombudsman Service may be able to help.

Travel disputes referred to the ombudsman often centre on whether a particular event is covered by the policy and whether relevant information had been 'disclosed' to the insurer. When you purchase your policy, try to answer the insurer's questions in as much detail as you can. If you aren't sure what the policy will cover you for – or have any concerns before you book your holiday or travel – speak to the insurer and ask them to explain.

Last year, the majority of travel insurance complaints referred to the ombudsman service related to rejected claims where planned holidays were cancelled. Many of these claims arose out of the ill-health of someone who was planning to travel – or one of their close relatives.



This happened to Miss Jarvis who booked a holiday to Greece and took out travel insurance at the same time. In January – five months before the holiday – Miss Jarvis' father was diagnosed with a heart condition. But after medical treatment he soon appeared to be back to normal. However, just

a few weeks before she was due to fly out, his condition deteriorated and Miss Jarvis had to cancel her holiday.

The insurer turned down her claim for the cost of the cancelled holiday as it said that Miss Jarvis should have cancelled her holiday back in January when she first became aware of her father's condition. Looking at the circumstances of the case we did not agree. Her father had responded well to treatment at the time and there had been no reason for Miss Jarvis to think she would need to cancel her holiday. We upheld the complaint and told the insurance company to reimburse her for the cost of the holiday.

As well as complaints about the cancellation and curtailment of holidays, we continue to see claims about medical expenses, lost baggage, and items left unattended. Mr Neal was sitting on a bench at a subway station in New York, when the person sitting next to him engaged him in conversation for a couple of minutes. When he looked down, he discovered that his rucksack – containing over £2,000 of personal possessions – had been stolen. He made a claim on his insurance policy but was told that as he had left his bag unattended, he was not covered. We did not agree. The ombudsman said that the bag was not "unattended" as Mr Neal was right next to it at the time it was taken.

In the unlikely event that you do have to make a claim – you should find your insurance company deals with matters swiftly and efficiently. But if things don't go smoothly, and you're unhappy with the way your insurer has handled things, the Financial Ombudsman Service may be able to help. Set up by law, it provides a free service and has official powers to settle complaints about a wide range of financial matters.

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Happy Holidaying