

Article

Overseas travel and tourism, provisional: July to September 2018

Visits to the UK by overseas residents, visits abroad by UK residents and spending by travellers, using provisional passenger traffic data.



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1 . Main points

- UK residents made 24.2 million visits abroad in Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018, which was 1% more than the corresponding period the previous year.
- UK residents spent £16.4 billion on visits abroad in the third quarter of 2018; this was an increase of 3% compared with Quarter 3 2017.
- Overseas residents made 10.8 million visits to the UK in Quarter 3 2018; this was a decrease of 3% compared with Quarter 3 2017, when record visits for the quarter were recorded.
- Overseas residents spent £7.2 billion on their visits to the UK in Quarter 3 2018; this was 15% less than in Quarter 3 2017.
- There were falls in the numbers of visits compared with a year earlier, and spending by visitors, but it should be noted that both visitor numbers, and spending by these visitors, were the highest ever recorded by the International Passenger Survey (IPS) in the corresponding three-month period of 2017.
- The IPS has recently transferred outputs from data collected on paper forms to an improved method using tablet computers, so some caution is advised in year-on-year comparisons of results.

2 . Things you need to know about this release

Overseas travel and tourism quarterly estimates are revised during the processing of the annual dataset. The most up-to-date and accurate estimates for the previous year's published quarters can be found in the latest edition of [Travel trends](#).

The International Passenger Survey (IPS) has recently transferred outputs from data collected on paper forms to an improved method using tablet computers. Tablet data collection was phased in gradually from September 2017 to April 2018. More background information about the rollout can be found in [Travel trends 2017: recent data collection changes and planned methodological changes](#).

With the new tablets offering the potential to improve the quality of the IPS data collected, discontinuities arising from the introduction of tablet data collection in the IPS were possible. We have therefore worked with academic experts and Office for National Statistics (ONS) Methodology to produce a method for detecting any such discontinuities.

We have continued to monitor the results as more data have become available. Analysis so far has found no detectable discontinuities, but some caution is still advised in the interpretation of data in this release.

Further planned methodological changes are described in [Travel trends 2017: recent data collection changes and planned methodological changes](#). These are weighting adjustments to address concerns about the imbalance in the IPS between the estimates of numbers of visitors arriving and departing for different nationalities. It is expected that the new method will be implemented in 2019. The date will be announced as soon as possible, and any plans for revisions to published estimates will be announced at the same time.

Estimates contained in this bulletin are produced from responses provided by international passengers arriving in and departing from the UK, sampled on our International Passenger Survey (IPS).

Responses to the survey are scaled up to represent all passengers using information on total international passenger traffic for the reporting period.

Estimates are based on interviews conducted when passengers end their visit. Any visits commencing in the reported month but not completed until later are not included in estimates for the reported month. The reported spend for visits includes any spending associated (excluding fares) with the visit, which occur before, during or after the trip.

Parts of the bulletin refer to countries visited abroad. It should be noted that if a UK resident visited more than one country on a trip abroad, the country recorded as visited in this publication is the country that was visited for the longest period.

Overseas travel and tourism monthly estimates are revised during the processing of the quarterly dataset and again during the processing of the annual dataset. This bulletin contains provisional overseas travel and tourism estimates to and from the UK for the third quarter (July to September) of 2018. Revised, final estimates for 2017 were published in Travel trends 2017 on 20 July 2018.

3 . What are the main trends in visits and spending?

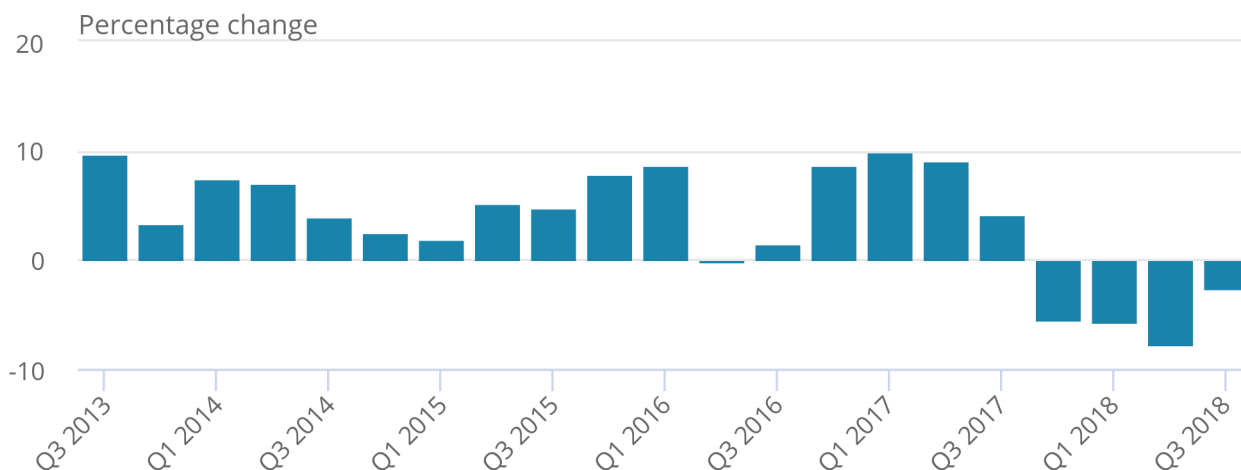
An estimated 10.8 million visits were made in Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018, which was a decrease of 3% when compared with the same period in 2017, when there were 11.1 million visits (Figure 1). However, the number of visits in Quarter 3 2017 was the highest ever recorded by the survey for the third quarter of the year. There were more visits to the UK by overseas residents in Quarter 3 2018 than in Quarter 3 2016 (10.7 million visits) and Quarter 3 2015 (10.5 million visits).

Figure 1: Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits to the UK from overseas residents

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015 to Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018

Figure 1: Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits to the UK from overseas residents

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015 to Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018



Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey (IPS)

Notes:

1. Q1 stands for Quarter 1 (January to March); Q2 for Quarter 2 (April to June); Q3 for Quarter 3 (July to September); Q4 for Quarter 4 (October to December).

Taking holidays was the most popular reason for visiting the UK in Quarter 3 2018, with 4.8 million visits. This was an increase of 1% compared with the third quarter of 2017. Business visits increased to 2.1 million, that is, 6% more than in 2017. Visits to friends and relatives decreased by 11% to 3.1 million.

Different trends were observed from different areas of the world. Visits from European residents decreased by 3%, and visits from residents of "other countries" (countries outside of Europe and North America) fell by 9%. Conversely, the number of visits from North American residents increased by 9%.

Estimated spending in the UK by overseas visitors fell by 15% to £7.2 billion in Quarter 3 2018 when compared with Quarter 3 2017 (Figure 2). This should be seen in the context that record high spending was recorded for Quarter 3 2017 (£8.4 billion). However, the Quarter 3 2018 spending represents a fall of 6% compared with Quarter 3 2016, and very similar spending to Quarter 3 2015.

There was a 2% decrease in spending by residents of North America, to £1.3 billion, while spending by European residents decreased by 7% to £3.1 billion.

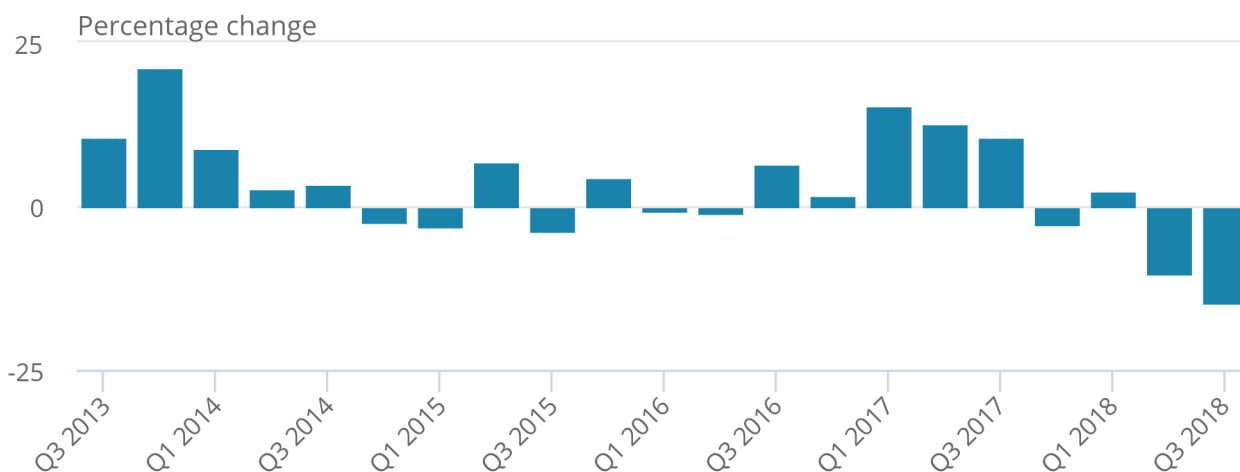
Spending by residents of “other countries” decreased by 26% to £2.7 billion. However, spending by visitors from other countries in Quarter 3 2017 (£3.7 billion) was the highest ever recorded by the survey for the third quarter of the year. Spending by residents of “other countries” in Quarter 3 2018 was very similar to Quarter 3 2016 (£2.7 billion) and higher than in Quarter 3 2015 (£2.6 billion).

Figure 2: Quarterly change from a year earlier in earnings from visits to the UK

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015 to Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018

Figure 2: Quarterly change from a year earlier in earnings from visits to the UK

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015 to Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018



Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey (IPS)

Notes:

1. Q1 stands for Quarter 1 (January to March); Q2 for Quarter 2 (April to June); Q3 for Quarter 3 (July to September); Q4 for Quarter 4 (October to December).

4 . Visits abroad by UK residents

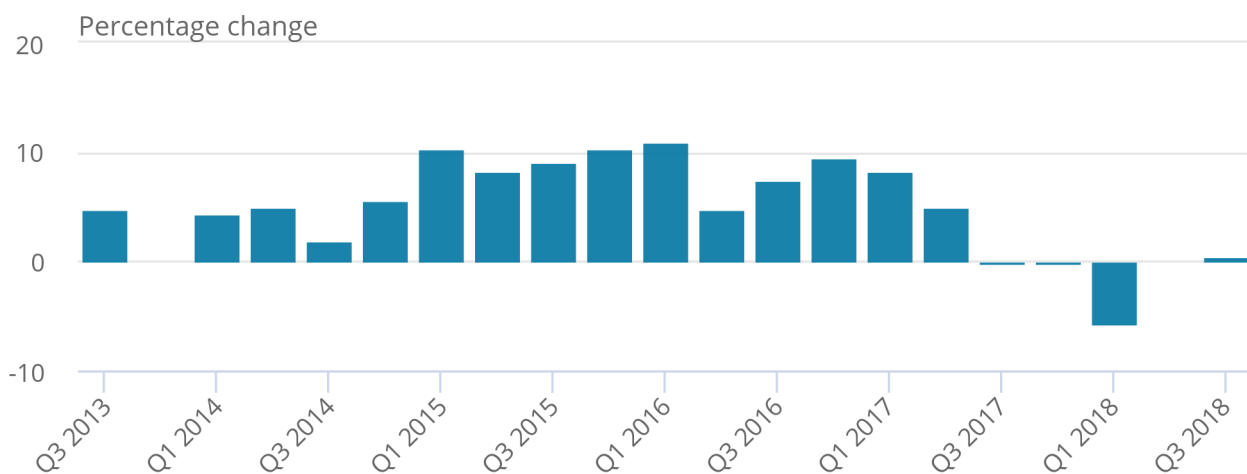
UK residents made 24.2 million visits abroad in Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018, that is, 1% more than the same quarter in 2017 (Figure 3). Trends were different for different areas of the world: there was a 6% decrease in visits to North America (1.3 million visits), while visits to European countries remained unchanged (20.1 million visits). However, visits to “other countries” increased by 7% to 2.8 million.

Figure 3: Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits abroad by UK residents

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015 to Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018

Figure 3: Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits abroad by UK residents

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015 to Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018



Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey (IPS)

Notes:

1. Q1 stands for Quarter 1 (January to March); Q2 for Quarter 2 (April to June); Q3 for Quarter 3 (July to September); Q4 for Quarter 4 (October to December).

Holidays continued to be the most common reason for UK residents' visits abroad. In Quarter 3 2018, there were 17.0 million holidays, an increase of 1% compared with the same quarter a year previously. Business visits increased by 6% to 1.5 million and visits to friends or relatives increased by 1% to 5.3 million. The number of visits for miscellaneous reasons decreased by 26%, although it should be noted that the numbers of visits in this category are relatively small (0.3 million in Quarter 3 2018).

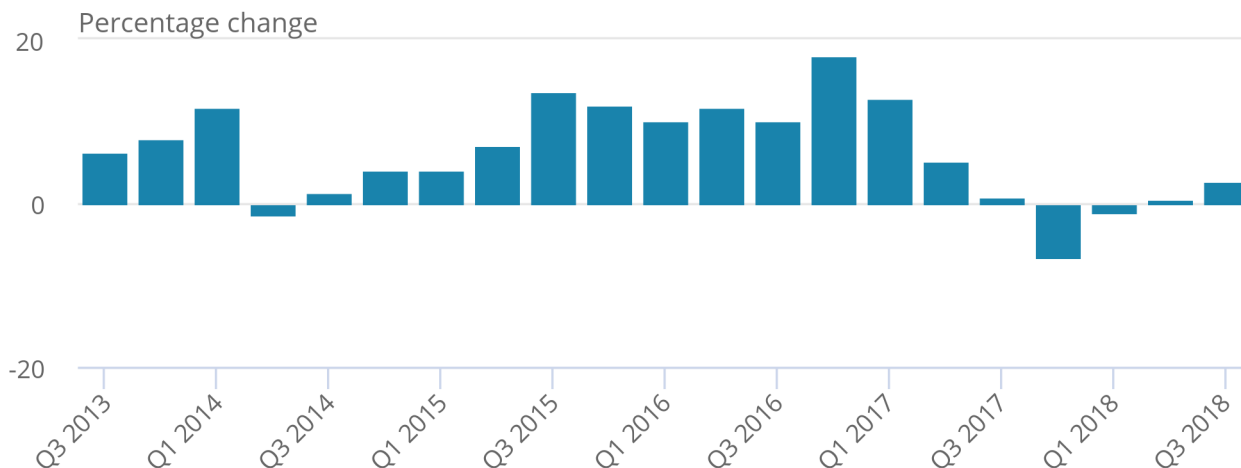
UK residents spent £16.4 billion during visits abroad in Quarter 3 2018, an increase of 3% compared with the same period of 2017 (Figure 4). Expenditure in Europe rose by 4%, and expenditure in “other countries” increased by 2%, while spending in North America decreased by 6%.

Figure 4: Quarterly change from a year earlier in expenditure from UK residents' visits abroad

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015 to Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018

Figure 4: Quarterly change from a year earlier in expenditure from UK residents' visits abroad

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2015 to Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018



Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey (IPS)

Notes:

1. Q1 stands for Quarter 1 (January to March); Q2 for Quarter 2 (April to June); Q3 for Quarter 3 (July to September); Q4 for Quarter 4 (October to December).

5 . What’s changed in this release?

In September 2017, Office for National Statistics (ONS) implemented a seven-month programme to phase out our paper-based data collection on the International Passenger Survey (IPS) and phase in a new tablet-based approach. Data collection by tablet offers significant advantages, including improved efficiency through reduced manual data entry, improved translations into different languages, easier survey updates due to greater flexibility and there is evidence that respondents relate better to the “one-question-per-screen” layout of the tablet, where they can see the questions in writing more easily themselves.

Rollout of tablet data collection started in September 2017 and completed in April 2018 when Heathrow Airport moved to tablets. The proportion of data collected by tablets has therefore increased over time. For the period covered in the January to March 2018 release, tablets accounted for approximately 65% of the weighted estimates of visits. Since April 2018, data collection has been conducted entirely on tablets.

Comparisons of Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018 estimates with the corresponding period of 2017 are comparing results for data collected using tablets with data collected on paper forms. See the “Things you need to know about this release” section for consideration of possible discontinuities in outputs arising from the introduction of tablet data collection.

6 . Other overseas travel and tourism releases

Further analysis of overseas travel and tourism trends are provided in the publications:

- [Monthly overseas travel and tourism](#), latest release July, August and September 2018 (published on 17 January 2019); next release October 2018 (to be published on 22 February 2019).
- [Travel trends](#) provides more detailed analysis of visits and spending, including analysis by demographics, towns in the UK visited and countries visited by residents of different parts of the UK; the latest release, Travel trends 2017, was published in July 2018 and the next release, Travel trends 2018, is due to be published in May 2019; the publication date of Travel trends could be subject to change, due to potential methodological changes outlined in Section 2.
- [Travelpac](#) is a dataset that allows you to conduct your own analysis of quarterly and annual data on important variables; the datasets are provided in SPSS and Excel; the latest release, Travelpac Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018, was published on 17 January 2019.
- Note that estimates are subject to revision between the monthly statistical bulletin and the quarterly publication and again when Travel trends is published; revisions result from more accurate passenger figures being made available; more information about the International Passenger Survey (IPS) revisions policy is available in the [Quality and Methodology Information report](#).
- Note that, although data by the IPS also feed into the calculation of migration statistics, the Overseas travel and tourism publications do not provide any information relating to international migration.

7 . Publication tables

Notes to tables

Table 6: Nights spent abroad by UK residents includes cruises allocated to "other areas".

The following tables have been removed from the quarterly publication from Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2016:

- Tables 17 and 18: Number of overseas visits to the UK by country of residence and mode of travel
- Tables 26 and 27: Number of visits abroad by UK residents by country visited and mode of travel

8 . Quality and methodology

The [International Passenger Survey Quality and Methodology Information](#) report contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
- uses and users of the data
- how the output was created
- the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data

The [International Passenger Survey Methodological Information](#) outlines definitions and sample methodology.

9 . Accuracy of the results

This section describes how revisions are carried out in the standard production cycle of the survey. Additional potential revisions, to be made on a one-off basis, are described in Section 2 of this release.

Figures for the most recent quarter are provisional and subject to revision in light of additional passenger data obtained at the end of each year.

International Passenger Survey (IPS) quarterly estimates are revised in line with the IPS revisions policy. The revisions policy is available in the [IPS Quality and Methodology Information](#) report to help users understand the cycle and frequency of data revisions. Users of this report are strongly advised to read this policy before using these data for research or policy-related purposes.

Planned revisions usually arise from either the receipt of revised passenger traffic data or the correction of errors to existing data identified later in the annual processing cycle. Those of significant magnitude will be highlighted and explained.

Revisions to published quarterly IPS estimates can be expected in the publication of the annual overseas travel and tourism report (Travel trends).

All other revisions will be regarded as unplanned and will be dealt with by non-standard releases. All revisions will be released in compliance with the same principles as other new information. Please refer to our [ONS guide to statistical revisions](#) for more information.

The main series are seasonally adjusted. This aids interpretation by identifying seasonal patterns and calendar effects and removing them from the unadjusted data. The resulting figures give a more accurate indication of underlying movements in the series.

The estimates produced from the IPS are subject to sampling errors that result because not every traveller to or from the UK is interviewed on the survey. Sampling errors are determined both by the sample design and by the sample size; generally speaking, the larger the sample supporting a particular estimate, the proportionately smaller is its sampling error. The survey sample size is approximately 70,000 per quarter.

Table 1 shows the 95% confidence intervals for the main quarterly estimates of the total number of visits, nights and expenditure for both overseas residents visiting the UK and UK residents going abroad. These represent the interval in which there is a 19 out of 20 chance that the true figure (had all travellers been surveyed) would lie.

If, for example, the relative 95% confidence interval relating to an estimate of 10,000 was 5.0%, there would be a 19 out of 20 chance that the true figure (if all travellers had been surveyed) would lie in the range 9,500 to 10,500.

Table 1: Sampling errors, Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018
Confidence intervals relating to overseas travel and tourism estimates, Quarter 3 2018

	Estimate	Relative 95% confidence interval (+/- % the estimate)
Overseas visitors to the UK	10,806	5.1%
Number of visits ('000s)	7,175	5.6%
Total earnings (£million)	87,965	6.9%
Number of visitor nights ('000s)		
UK residents going abroad	24,183	3.1%
Number of visits ('000s)	16,415	4.3%
Total expenditure (£million)	260,526	4.4%
Number of visitor nights ('000s)		

Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey (IPS)

Sampling errors relating to visits, nights and expenditure across regions of the world and purpose groups, together with countries visited or visits from and region of the UK visited, are provided within the [Confidence intervals, Quarter 3 2018 tables](#).

Further guidance for readers is provided about the quality of [Overseas travel and tourism estimates \(PDF, 404KB\)](#).

One indication of the reliability of the main indicators in this release can be obtained by monitoring the size of revisions. The [monthly statistical bulletin](#) provides information about the size and pattern of revisions to the quarterly IPS data that have occurred over the last five years to the following main seasonally adjusted estimates:

- the number of visits by overseas residents to the UK (GMAT)
- the number of visits abroad by UK residents (GMAX)
- earnings made from overseas residents in the UK (GMAZ)
- expenditure abroad by UK residents (GMBB)

Additional spreadsheets giving details of how the revisions have affected the provisional monthly and quarterly estimates are available in the data section of the [monthly statistical bulletin](#).

10 . Further statistics and other analyses

IPS data files

International Passenger Survey (IPS) data for the years 1993 onwards are available online. Travelpac is a free and simple to use dataset for those wishing to make further analyses of IPS data. It contains files provided in Excel and SPSS formats. More details can be found at [Travelpac, Quarter 3 \(July to Sept\) 2018](#).

Monthly figures of Overseas travel and tourism

These are published in the [Overseas travel and tourism statistical bulletin](#).

Further statistics

More detailed statistics covering 1980 to 2017 may be found in our 2017 annual report, Travel trends. A copy can be downloaded at [Travel trends 2017](#).

Other analyses

For general questions about the IPS and requests for ad hoc data analysis (a service governed by our Income and Charging policy):

Telephone: +44 (0)1633 455678
Email: socialsurveys@ons.gov.uk

Marketing agents

It is possible to commission more detailed analyses of the IPS data from marketing agents appointed by Office for National Statistics (ONS). The marketing agents are:

IRN Research (trading name of IRN Consultants Ltd)
60 Eastern Green Road
Coventry
CV5 7LH
Telephone: +44 (0) 7905 239 599
Email: info@irn-research.com
Web: www.irn-research.com

MDS Transmodal
5-6 Hunters Walk
Canal Street
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CH1 4EB
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Fax: +44 (0) 1244 348471
Email: enquiries@mdst.co.uk
Web: www.mdst.co.uk

11 . Other notes

The information provided to us by respondents is treated as strictly confidential as directed by the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). It is used to produce statistics that will not identify any individuals.

Next publication: Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2018 data will be published along with the 2018 edition of Travel trends in spring 2018, with the exact date to be announced.