

Article

# Overseas travel and tourism, provisional: July to September 2019

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

- Overseas residents made 11.4 million visits to the UK in Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2019; this was 5% more than Quarter 3 2018.
- Overseas residents spent £8.4 billion on their visits to the UK in Quarter 3 2019; this was 18% more than in Quarter 3 2018.
- UK residents made 25.1 million visits abroad in Quarter 3 2019, which was 4% more than the corresponding period the previous year.
- UK residents spent £18.1 billion on visits abroad in the third quarter of 2019; this was 10% more than in Quarter 3 2018.

## 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](#).

This article presents estimates of overseas visits to and from the UK. An overseas visitor means a person who, being permanently resident in a country outside the UK, visits the UK for a period of less than 12 months. UK citizens resident overseas for 12 months or more coming home on leave are included in this category. Visits abroad are visits for a period of less than 12 months by people permanently resident in the UK (who may be of foreign nationality).

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 is available.

The new tablets enable us to improve the quality of the IPS data collected, so discontinuities (that is, step changes in the time series) arising from the introduction of tablet data collection in the IPS are possible. We have worked with academic experts and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Methodology Team to produce a method for detecting any such discontinuities.

We have continued to monitor the results as more data have become available. Further analysis using a longer series of data is required to determine whether there are any discontinuities, so some caution is still advised in the interpretation of data in this release.

Further methodological changes are planned to the estimates on international visitors in the IPS. These are weighting adjustments to address concerns about the imbalance (that is, large differences in numbers) in the IPS between the estimates of numbers of visitors arriving and departing for some nationalities. The new method has been developed in consultation with users and methodological experts, and is currently being finalised. The new method will be implemented as soon as possible, and the implementation date will be published shortly. A revised back series will also be published at this time. The changes in data collection methods and planned methodological changes were described in the [Travel trends 2017: recent data collection changes and planned methodological changes](#) article, in July 2018.

Please note that while the imbalance work is unlikely to affect long-term migrants in the IPS, we have committed to exploring whether the survey processes that cause the imbalance in international visitor estimates also impact on long-term migration further, as part of ONS Migration Statistics' [workplan](#) to understand different migration data sources.

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 Sept) 2019. Revised, final estimates for 2018 were published in [Travel trends 2018](#) on 24 May 2019.

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

An estimated 11.4 million visits to the UK were made in Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2019. The number of visits in Quarter 3 2019 is the highest recorded by the survey for the third quarter of a year. The second-highest is Quarter 3 2017 where an estimated 11.1 million visits to the UK were made.

**Figure 1: Visits to the UK by overseas residents increased by 5% in Quarter 3 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier**

Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits to the UK from overseas residents, Quarter 3 (July to September) 2014 to Quarter 3 2019

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Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits to the UK from overseas residents, Quarter 3 (July to September) 2014 to Quarter 3 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

**Notes:**

1. Q1 means Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar); Q2 for Quarter 2 (Apr to June); Q3 for Quarter 3 (July to Sept); Q4 for Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec).

Taking holidays was the most popular reason for visiting the UK in Quarter 3 2019, with 5.1 million visits. This was a 5% increase compared with the third quarter of 2018. Business visits increased to 2.1 million, 1% more than in 2018. Visits to friends and relatives increased by 8% to 3.4 million.

Different trends were observed for different areas of the world. Visits by North American residents increased by 13% to 1.8 million, and visits by residents of “other countries” (countries outside of Europe and North America) increased by 19% to 2.5 million. Visits by European residents decreased by 1% to 7.0 million.

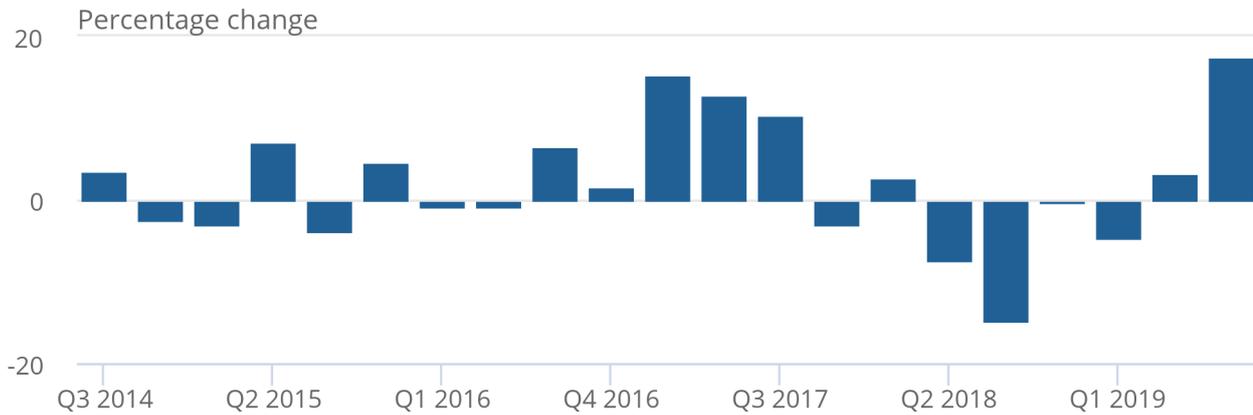
Estimated spending in the UK by overseas visitors grew by 18% to £8.4 billion in Quarter 3 2019 when compared with Quarter 3 2018. There was an increase of 31% in spending by residents of North America, while spending by European residents increased by 15% to £3.6 billion. Spending by residents of “other countries” increased by 14% to £3.1 billion.

**Figure 2: Spending in the UK by overseas residents increased by 18% in Quarter 3 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier**

Quarterly change from a year earlier in earnings from visits to the UK, Quarter 3 (July to September) 2014 to Quarter 3 2019

Figure 2: Spending in the UK by overseas residents increased by 18% in Quarter 3 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier

Quarterly change from a year earlier in earnings from visits to the UK, Quarter 3 (July to September) 2014 to Quarter 3 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Notes:

1. Q1 means Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar); Q2 for Quarter 2 (Apr to June); Q3 for Quarter 3 (July to Sept); Q4 for Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec).

## 4 . Visits abroad by UK residents

UK residents made 25.1 million visits abroad in Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2019, 4% more than the same quarter in 2018. Trends were similar for different areas of the world: there was a 4% increase in visits to North America (1.3 million visits), and visits to European countries increased by 3% (20.7 million visits). Visits to “other countries” increased by 8% to 3.1 million.

**Figure 3: Visits overseas by UK residents increased by 4% in Quarter 3 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier**

Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits abroad by UK residents, Quarter 3 (July to September) 2014 to Quarter 3 2019

Figure 3: Visits overseas by UK residents increased by 4% in Quarter 3 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier

Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits abroad by UK residents, Quarter 3 (July to September) 2014 to Quarter 3 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

**Notes:**

1. Q1 means Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar); Q2 for Quarter 2 (Apr to June); Q3 for Quarter 3 (July to Sept); Q4 for Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec).

Holidays continued to be the most common reason for UK residents’ visits abroad. In Quarter 3 2019, there were 17.8 million holidays, this increased by 4% when compared with a year previously. Visits to friends or relatives increased by 3% to 5.4 million, while business visits decreased by 6% to 1.5 million. The number of visits for miscellaneous reasons increased by 23%, although the numbers are smaller.

UK residents spent £18.1 billion during visits abroad in Quarter 3 2019, this was an increase of 10% when compared with the same period in 2018. Expenditure in Europe rose by 9%, and expenditure in “other countries” increased by 18%, while spending in North America increased by 4%.

## Figure 4: UK spending abroad increased by 10% when compared with the same period in 2018

Quarterly change from a year earlier in expenditure from UK residents' visits abroad, Quarter 3 (July to September) 2014 to Quarter 3 2019

### Figure 4: UK spending abroad increased by 10% when compared with the same period in 2018

Quarterly change from a year earlier in expenditure from UK residents' visits abroad, Quarter 3 (July to September) 2014 to Quarter 3 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

## 5 . What has changed in this release?

In September 2017, the 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 as a result of 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. Since April 2018, data collection has been conducted entirely on tablets. See the section “Things you need to know about this release” 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 October 2019 (published on 24 January 2020); the date of the next release will be announced shortly.
- [Travel trends](#), provides more detailed analysis of visits and spending, including analysis by demographics, towns in the UK visited and countries visited by residents or different parts of the UK. The latest release, Travel trends 2018 was published 24 May 2019. The next release, Travel trends 2019, is due to be published in May 2020.
- [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. Latest release Travelpac Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2019 published 24 January 2020.

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](#).

Note that, although data by the International Passenger Survey (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 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

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [International Passenger Survey QMI](#).

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: Things you need to know about 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 this 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](#).

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 occur because only a sample of travellers and not every traveller to and from the UK is interviewed on the survey. The sampling error is a measure of the expected difference between the true value of the figure being estimated and the value of the figure estimated only from the sample. Sampling errors are determined both by the sample design and by the sample size. Generally, the larger the sample supporting a particular estimate, the proportionately lower its sampling error.

The accuracy of the estimates is expressed in terms of confidence intervals. The confidence interval is a range within which the true value of a quantity lies with known probability, and the % confidence interval expresses this as a percentage of the estimate. Simplifying slightly, the 95% confidence interval represents the range around the estimate from the sample into which there are 19 chances out of 20 that the true figure would fall had all passengers been interviewed. This is obtained as plus or minus 1.96 multiplied by the sampling error.

The following guidelines are provided to aid in the interpretation of the estimates, and to enable their reliability to be assessed:

- % confidence interval below 10%: precise
- % confidence interval between 10% and 20%: reasonably precise
- % confidence interval between 20% and 40%: acceptable
- % confidence interval over 40% unreliable (these estimates should be used with caution for practical purposes).

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. Confidence intervals 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 2019 tables](#).

Table 1: Sampling errors, Quarter 3 (July to September) 2019

**Confidence Intervals relating to Overseas Travel and Tourism estimates, Q3 2019**

	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % the estimate)</b>
Overseas visitors to the UK		
Number of visits ('000s)	11,358	3.8%
Total earnings (£million)	8,430	6.6%
Number of visitor nights ('000s)	94,352	6.3%
UK residents going abroad		
Number of visits ('000s)	25,088	2.5%
Total expenditure (£million)	18,088	4.6%
Number of visitor nights ('000s)	271,079	4.5%

Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

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

One indication of the reliability of the key 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 2019](#).

## 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 2018 may be found in our 2018 annual report, [Travel trends](#).

## 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](mailto:socialsurveys@ons.gov.uk)

## Marketing agents

It is possible to commission more detailed analyses of the IPS data from marketing agents appointed by the 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](mailto:info@irn-research.com) Web: [www.irn-research.com](http://www.irn-research.com)

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## 11 . Background notes

1. 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.
2. Next publication: Travel Trends 2019 data will be published in May 2020.