

Article

Travel and tourism review: June 2021

Details of a review of travel and tourism statistics, including reasons for the review, progress so far and future developments.

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1 . Overview

In response to recommendations from the [Office for Statistics Regulation \(OSR\) compliance check into overseas travel and tourism statistics](#), the ONS have focused on improving communication and engagement with stakeholders of these statistics in the past year. We have sought to increase our understanding of the range of user needs and have worked closely with stakeholders to gather requirements for the purpose of improving travel and tourism data.

The ONS created a specific stakeholder engagement role to improve our communication and to help us better understand user needs. A [mailing list](#) to communicate our latest updates was established, and webinars have been run to inform users of developments and gather feedback. New stakeholders, who have previously not been engaged with these statistics, have been identified through these initiatives.

At the same time as these improvements to our communication and stakeholder engagement were taking place, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic occurred. A consequence of the pandemic was the suspension of the International Passenger Survey (IPS) from 16 March 2020. The IPS is the primary source of international travel and tourism statistics. While the IPS has been suspended, some encouraging work has been undertaken within the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and beyond to explore new data science techniques, methods, and sources to fill the data gap caused by the suspension. The outcome of this was that the [most recent publication of travel and tourism statistics](#) was based on administrative sources.

The ONS is committed to continuously improving our surveys and statistics; in addition to this travel and tourism development, we are currently implementing the ambitious [Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme](#) (CDCTP).

2 . Aims of the review

The review will pull together the work achieved since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic began, which includes the exploration of alternative data sources and ongoing work to improve the understanding of user needs. The aim is to identify a set of recommendations on the scope of any future improvements of travel and tourism statistics. This review is welcomed by stakeholders across the tourism sector.

The travel and tourism review is intended to be radical and ambitious in approaching the improvement of travel and tourism statistics. It provides the opportunity to gather a comprehensive understanding of user needs, and to explore how best they can be met in a changing environment.

The review will also investigate the availability of alternative data sources and statistical methods that could be used to produce travel and tourism statistics in the short and long term.

3 . Our review progress so far

Since the review began, we have:

- set up a dedicated review team that was fully resourced from February 2021
- established an expert panel consisting of important stakeholders across the government, academia, and the wider tourism sector to help steer the review
- engaged with a wide range of stakeholders using a range of mechanisms, including an online forum, mailing list, and one-on-one meetings to ensure we gather views from different types of users
- consulted with stakeholders to identify and prioritise user requirements both at broad topic and detailed variable level, including dimensions of quality such as timeliness and granularity
- identified possible alternative data sources, which can be explored in collecting travel and tourism information

4 . Current travel and tourism statistics

The [International Passenger Survey \(IPS\)](#) is currently the main source to measure international travel and tourism, and underpins the statistics we publish.

The data collected are used to understand patterns of UK travelers visiting overseas and international visitors spending time in the UK. Tourism agencies and the devolved administrations use these statistics to inform policy decisions, and the data feed into the UK National Accounts - in particular, trade and household expenditure statistics.

In recent years, the IPS has undergone improvements, which includes moving the survey from paper forms to collecting the data electronically. Additionally, in May 2020, new methodology was introduced with a revised back series to 2009 to improve the accuracy of the estimates and address underestimation issues for some nationalities.

We have moved away from using the IPS for migration purposes and are now focusing on [delivering administrative-based migration estimates](#), building on the work that has already taken place through our Population and Migration Statistics Transformation programme.

For domestic travel and tourism, the main data source used is the [Great Britain Tourism Survey \(GBTS\)](#), which measures the volume, value and profile of overnight trips taken by British residents to destinations in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (NI). There is also the [Great Britain Day Visits Survey \(GBDVS\)](#), which collects information on British residents' day visits to destinations in England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland additionally collects and produces [statistics on domestic overnight and day visits](#) by NI residents domestically, to the Republic of Ireland (RoI) and Great Britain.

5 . Future developments

We will publish our planned way forward for the future of travel and tourism statistics in Spring 2022.

If you would like to stay updated with our ongoing travel and tourism work and receive our bi-monthly newsletter, please sign up to our [mailing list](#). Alternatively, you can join our forum - a user group that will meet regularly throughout the review - by emailing us at Travel.and.Tourism@ons.gov.uk.

6 . Related links

[Coronavirus and the impact on the UK travel and tourism industry](#)

Article | 15 February 2021

Analysis of how industries related to travel and tourism in the UK have been affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, using data on business performance and the labour market.

[Understanding different migration data sources: August 2019 progress report](#)

Article | 21 August 2019

Examining the issues with comparing the UK's various migration data sources, our follow-up report to explain the differences between these sources.