

Statistical bulletin

# Overseas travel and tourism: January, February and March 2018 provisional results

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

- There were 2.5 million visits to the UK by overseas residents in January 2018 (15% fewer than in January 2017), 2.4 million visits in February 2018 (the same as February 2017) and 3.0 million visits in March 2018 (1% fewer than in March 2017).
- Overseas residents spent £1.5 billion on visits to the UK in January 2018 (6% less than in January 2017), £1.2 billion in February 2018 (no change from February 2017) and £1.8 billion in March 2018 (13% more than in March 2017).
- UK residents made 4.6 million visits abroad in January 2018 (4% fewer than in January 2017), 4.1 million visits abroad in February 2018 (7% fewer than in February 2017) and 4.6 million visits abroad in March 2018 (6% fewer than in March 2017).
- UK residents spent £2.7 billion on visits abroad in January 2018 (1% more than in January 2017), £2.6 billion on visits abroad in February 2018 (8% less than in February 2017) and £3.2 billion on visits abroad in March 2018 (3% more than in March 2017).

## 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) is in the process of transferring 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 ONS Methodology to produce a method for detecting any such discontinuities.

While analysis so far has found no detectable discontinuities, some caution is still advised in the interpretation of data in this release.

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 January, February and March 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?

UK residents consistently make more visits abroad than foreign residents make to the UK. The total amount spent by UK residents during visits abroad is also higher than the total spent by foreign residents visiting the UK. The numbers of visits and the amounts spent vary through the year, with more in the summer. This is the case both for UK residents and overseas residents. However, UK residents show a much sharper peak both in visits and spend during the month of August, which is traditionally the only complete month of the UK school summer holidays.

**Figure 1: Overseas residents' visits to the UK and UK residents' visits abroad**

March 2015 to March 2018

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March 2015 to March 2018



Source: International Passenger Survey – Office for National Statistics

**Figure 2: Spending by overseas residents in the UK and spending by UK residents overseas by month**

March 2015 to March 2018

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March 2015 to March 2018



Source: International Passenger Survey – Office for National Statistics

## 4 . Trends in visits to the UK by overseas residents

The figures used in the commentary in this section are sourced from the following monthly overseas travel and tourism datasets:

- Table 1 – Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month
- Table 2 – Purpose of overseas residents' visits to the UK by month
- Table 5 – Earnings in the UK and expenditure abroad by month

The estimated number of visits to the UK by overseas residents in January 2018 was 2.5 million, which is a decrease of 15% compared with January 2017. Overseas residents spent £1.5 billion on visits to the UK in January 2018, a decrease of 6% compared with January 2017.

There were an estimated 2.4 million visits to the UK by overseas residents in February 2018, which is the same as the number recorded for February 2017. Overseas residents spent £1.2 billion on visits to the UK in February 2018, which is the same as the figure recorded for February 2017.

Overseas residents made an estimated 3.0 million visits to the UK in March 2018, which is a decrease of 1% compared with March 2017. Overseas resident spent £1.8 billion in the UK in March 2018, an increase of 13% compared with March 2017.

During the period January to March 2018, there were 7.8 million visits to the UK, which is a decrease of 6% compared with the corresponding period a year earlier. Holiday visits decreased by 11% to 2.5 million for this period, while business visits increased by 1% to 2.1 million. For the period January to March 2018, spend in the UK by overseas residents increased 2% on the previous year to £4.4 billion.

**Table 1: Main visit and spending estimates for overseas residents' visits to the UK in March 2018**

	Overseas residents' visits to UK			
	Visits (thousands)	% change from year earlier	Earnings (£ million)	% change from year earlier
Non seasonally adjusted				
March 2018	2,978	-1	1,778	+13
January to March 2018	7,840	-6	4,450	+2
Year to date 2018	7,840	-6	4,450	+2
Latest 12 months	38,740	+1	24,610	+6
Seasonally adjusted				
October	3,070	-4	1,940	+3
November	3,290	-2	2,090	+3
December	3,110	-9	1,670	-13
January	2,980	-13	1,990	-5
February	3,250	+1	2,020	-0
March	3,400	-2	2,340	+11

Source: International Passenger Survey - Office for National Statistics

**Figure 3: Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month**

March 2015 to March 2018

Figure 3: Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month

March 2015 to March 2018



Source: International Passenger Survey – Office for National Statistics

## 5. Trends in overseas visits by UK residents (non-seasonally adjusted)

The figures used in the commentary in this section are sourced from the following monthly overseas travel and tourism datasets:

- Table 3 – UK residents' visits abroad by month
- Table 4 – Purpose of UK residents' visits abroad by month
- Table 5 – Earnings in the UK and expenditure abroad by month

UK residents made an estimated 4.6 million visits abroad in January 2018, a decrease of 4% compared with January 2017. UK residents spent an estimated £2.7 billion on visits abroad in January 2018, which is 1% more than in January 2017.

There were an estimated 4.1 million visits abroad by UK residents in February 2018, that is, 7% fewer than in February 2017. UK residents spent £2.6 billion on visits abroad in February 2018, which was 8% less than in February 2017.

UK residents made an estimated 4.6 million visits abroad in March 2018, which is 6% fewer than in March 2017. UK residents spent £3.2 billion on visits abroad in March 2018, an increase of 3% compared with March 2017.

During the period January to March 2018, there were 13.3 million visits abroad by UK residents, a decrease of 6% compared with the corresponding period a year earlier and they spent 1% less on these visits (£8.6 billion). There was a 1% fall in visits to North America and a 6% fall in visits to European countries. Visits to "other countries" (countries outside of Europe and North America) fell by 6%. Considering reasons for visit, holiday visits fell by 2%, business visits fell by 12% and visits to friends and relatives decreased by 9%.

**Table 2: Main visit and spending estimates for UK residents' visits abroad in March 2018**

	UK residents' visits abroad			
	Visits (thousands)	% change from year earlier	Expenditure (£ million)	% change from year earlier
Non seasonally adjusted				
March 2018	4,576	-6	3,219	+3
January to March 2018	13,320	-6	8,590	-1
Year to date 2018	13,320	-6	8,590	-1
Latest 12 months	71,980	+0	44,730	+0
Seasonally adjusted				
October	6,090	+0	3,590	-8
November	5,920	-1	3,720	-10
December	5,950	+0	3,750	+0
January	5,930	-2	3,720	+3
February	5,850	-5	3,710	-9
March	5,840	-6	3,930	+2

Source: International Passenger Survey - Office for National Statistics

## Figure 4: UK residents' visits abroad by month

March 2015 to March 2018

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March 2015 to March 2018



Source: International Passenger Survey – Office for National Statistics

## 6 . Links to related statistics

[Travel trends](#): the latest publication (Travel trends 2017) was published on 17 August 2018 – this provides final overseas travel and tourism estimates and more detailed analysis of visits and spending, including analysis by demographics, towns visited in the UK and countries visited by residents of different parts of the UK.

[Travelpac](#) is a dataset that allows you to conduct your own analyses of quarterly and annual data on main variables – the datasets are provided in SPSS and Excel.

[Overseas travel and tourism quarterly](#): the latest publication (for Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2018) was published on 5 September 2018 – this provides more detailed analysis of visits and spending, isolating aspects such as countries of visit, mode of travel used, nationality of visitors and regions of the UK visited; Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2016 figures can be found in Travel trends 2016.

[Overseas travel and tourism monthly](#): the previous publication (November to December 2017) was published on 23 March 2018 – this provides provisional results of visits to the UK by overseas residents, visits abroad by UK residents and spending by travellers, using provisional passenger traffic data.

## 7 . 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.

### Accuracy of IPS estimates

Figures for the most recent months are provisional and subject to revision in light of more accurate data on passenger figures becoming available at the end of each quarter and additional passenger data obtained at the end of each year.

International Passenger Survey (IPS) monthly estimates are revised in line with the IPS revisions policy. The revisions policy is available in the [IPS quality and methodology report](#), to assist you in the understanding of the cycle and frequency of data revisions. You are strongly advised to read this policy before using these data for research or policy-related purposes.

Planned revisions usually arise from the receipt of revised passenger traffic data. Unplanned revisions are made to correct errors to existing data, identified later in the quarterly and annual processing cycle. Those of significant magnitude will be highlighted and explained.

Revisions to published monthly IPS estimates can be expected at the following times in the normal overseas travel and tourism publication schedule:

- monthly estimates for the current reference year will usually be revised and statistically benchmarked across the quarter, following the publication of the quarterly estimates which that month falls within
- monthly and quarterly estimates for the current reference year will be revised in the survey year's annual data release (Travel trends)
- monthly estimates for the full calendar year will be statistically benchmarked as part of the annual data processing and the monthly estimates for the year will then be replaced in the monthly release, with the benchmarked estimate following publication of the annual 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 guide to statistical revisions](#).

Seasonally adjusted figures are no longer shown in the main figures in the publication, but continue to be presented in the tables.

The estimates produced from the IPS are subject to sampling errors that occur because not every traveller to and 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 lower its sampling error. The survey sample size is approximately 20,000 per month. However, as the intensity of the sampling varies at each port, figures of a similar magnitude will not necessarily have the same percentage sampling error.

Accuracy of the estimates is expressed in terms of confidence intervals. The confidence interval is a range within which the true value of a proportion lies with known probability. For example, the 95% confidence interval represents the range into which there are 19 chances out of 20 that the true figure would fall had all passengers been sampled. This is obtained as plus or minus 1.96 multiplied by the standard error.

**Table 3: Confidence intervals relating to overseas travel and tourism estimates in January, February and March 2018**

<b>Confidence intervals relating to travel and tourism estimates, January 2018</b>		
<b>January 2018 monthly estimates</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate)</b>
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	2,493	8.6%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	1,464	9.5%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	4,649	6.6%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	2,725	11.4%
<b>Confidence Intervals relating to Overseas Travel and Tourism estimates, February 2018</b>		
<b>February 2018 monthly estimates</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate)</b>
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	2,365	10.3%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	1,208	13.0%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	4,093	7.8%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	2,642	9.0%
<b>Confidence Intervals relating to Overseas Travel and Tourism estimates, March 2018</b>		
<b>March 2018 monthly estimates</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate)</b>
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	2,978	14.2%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	1,778	18.6%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	4,576	9.5%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	3,219	16.6%

Source: International Passenger Survey - Office for National Statistics

Confidence intervals for [quarterly](#) and [annual](#) estimates are provided in our relevant overseas travel and tourism publications.

One indication of the reliability of the main indicators in this release can be obtained by monitoring the size of revisions. Table 4 records 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)

**Table 4: Revisions to quarterly International Passenger Survey data over the last five years**

	Value in the latest period (2018 quarter 1, January to March 2018)	Revisions between first publications and estimates 3 years later	
		Averages over the last 5 years (bias)	Average over the last 5 years without regard to sign (average absolute revision)
GMAT	9,630	41.50	106.50
GMAX	17,350	212.50	284.50
GMAZ	6,350	*108.00	*143.00
GMBB	11,030	*141.00	*187.00

Source: International Passenger Survey - Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Units: GMAT and GMAX in thousands.

2. A statistical test has been applied to find out if the revision to each key indicator is statistically different from zero. An asterisk (\*) indicates where the mean revision has been significantly different from zero.

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 IPS revisions policy is available in the [Quality and Methodology Information](#) report. The most up-to-date and accurate estimates for all published months can be found in the latest edition of the [Overseas travel and tourism monthly statistical bulletin](#).

Note that, although data from the IPS feed into the calculation of migration statistics, the overseas travel and tourism publications do not provide any information relating to international migration.

## Other analyses

For general questions about the IPS and requests for [user-requested data analysis](#) (a service governed by our [income and charging policy](#)), please get in touch using the contact details accompanying this release.