

Statistical bulletin

Overseas travel and tourism: July, August, September 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

- UK residents made 7.2 million visits overseas in July 2018 (2% more than in July 2017), 9.3 million visits overseas in August 2018 (2% more than in August 2017) and 7.7 million visits overseas in September 2018 (3% fewer than in September 2017).
- UK residents spent £4.8 billion on visits overseas in July 2018 (6% more than in July 2017), £6.4 billion in August 2018 (2% more than in August 2017) and £5.2 billion in September 2018 (1% more than in September 2017).
- There were 3.9 million visits to the UK by overseas residents in July 2018 (3% fewer than in July 2017), 3.8 million visits in August 2018 (3% fewer than in August 2017) and 3.1 million visits in September 2018 (2% fewer than in September 2017).
- Overseas residents spent £2.4 billion on visits to the UK in July 2018 (17% less than in July 2017), £2.8 billion in August 2018 (9% less than in August 2017) and £2.0 billion in September 2018 (19% less than in September 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) survey 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 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 the Travel trends article. These are weighting adjustments to address concerns about the imbalance in the IPS between the estimates for different nationalities of numbers of visitors arriving and departing. It is expected that the new method will be implemented in 2019, and the date will be announced as soon as possible on the Statements section of the ONS website. 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 the [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.

Estimates are subject to sampling error, and confidence intervals are provided to help you interpret the estimates (see “Accuracy of IPS estimates” in the Quality and methodology section). Further guidance is available about [the quality of overseas travel and tourism estimates](#).

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

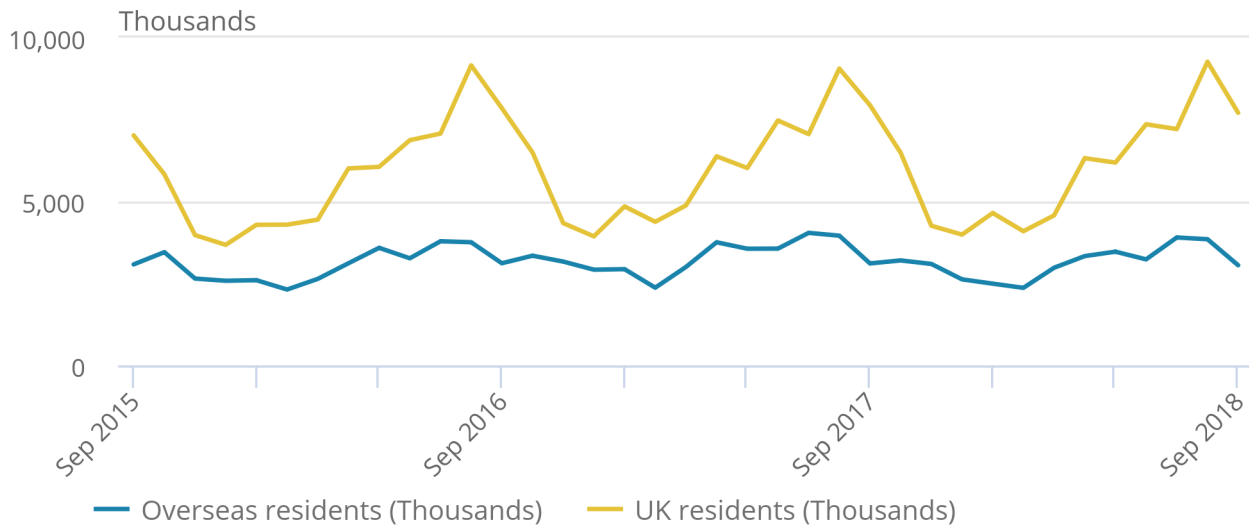
UK residents consistently make more visits abroad than foreign residents make to the UK. The total amount spent by UK residents during visits abroad is also higher than the total spent by foreign residents visiting the UK. The numbers of visits and the amounts spent vary through the year, with more in 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 by month

September 2015 to September 2018

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September 2015 to September 2018



Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

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

September 2015 to September 2018

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September 2015 to September 2018



Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

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

There were fewer visits to the UK by overseas residents in July, August and September 2018, compared with the corresponding periods of 2017. However, visitor numbers over the corresponding three-month period of 2017 were the highest ever recorded by the International Passenger Survey. Overall, visitor numbers for Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2018 were higher than those recorded for Quarter 3 in 2015 and 2016.

Overseas residents made an estimated 3.9 million visits to the UK in July 2018, which was 3% fewer than in July 2017. Overseas residents spent £2.4 billion on visits to the UK in July 2018, a decrease of 17% compared with July 2017.

There were an estimated 3.8 million visits to the UK by overseas residents in August 2018, which was a decrease of 3% compared with August 2017. Overseas residents spent £2.8 billion on visits to the UK in August 2018, which was 9% less than in August 2017.

The estimated number of visits to the UK by overseas residents in September 2018 was 3.1 million, which is a decrease of 2% compared with September 2017. Overseas residents spent £2.0 billion in the UK in September 2018, a decrease of 19% when compared with September 2017.

During the period July to September 2018, there were 10.8 million visits to the UK, which was 3% fewer than the corresponding period a year earlier. Holiday visits increased by 1% to 4.8 million for this period.

For the period July to September 2018, spend in the UK by overseas residents decreased 15% on the previous year to £7.1 billion. This should be seen in the context that record high spending was recorded for the corresponding period of 2017 (£8.4 billion).

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

	Visits (thousands)	% change from year earlier	Earnings (£ million)	% change from year earlier
Non seasonally adjusted				
Sep 2018	3,055	-2	1,973	-19
Jul to Sep 2018	10,810	-3	7,180	-15
Year to date 2018	28,680	-5	17,460	-9
Latest 12 months	37,600	-5	22,720	-8
Seasonally adjusted				
Apr	3,190	-12	1,960	-14
May	3,050	-2	1,920	-6
Jun	3,050	-8	1,800	-11
Jul	3,150	-4	1,780	-16
Aug	3,140	-3	1,900	-10
Sep	3,110	-1	1,650	-20

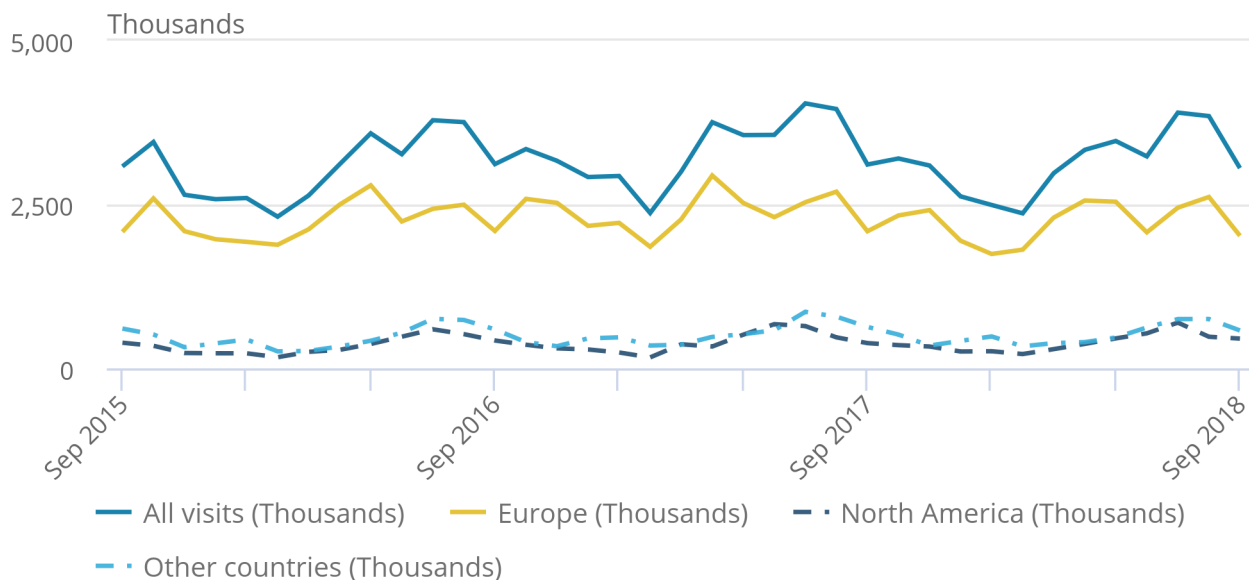
Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

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

September 2015 to September 2018

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

September 2015 to September 2018



Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

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

There were an estimated 7.2 million visits overseas by UK residents in July 2018, which was an increase of 2% compared with July 2017. UK residents spent £4.8 billion on visits overseas in July 2018, which was 6% more than in July 2017.

UK residents made an estimated 9.3 million visits overseas in August 2018, which was 2% more than in August 2017. They spent £6.4 billion on these visits, an increase of 2% compared with August 2017.

The estimated number of visits abroad by UK residents in September 2018 was 7.7 million, a decrease of 3% when compared with September 2017. UK residents spent £5.2 billion during these visits, an increase of 1% when compared with September 2017.

During the period July to September 2018, there were 24.2 million visits abroad by UK residents, which was a 1% increase to the corresponding period a year earlier, and they spent 3% more on these visits.

Split by area of visit, there were 1.3 million visits to North America, a decrease of 6%, and 2.8 million visits to "other countries" (countries outside North America and Europe), an increase of 7%. Visits to European countries remained at 20.1 million, the same as the corresponding period a year earlier. Considering reasons for visits, holiday visits increased by 1% from the same period the previous year. Business visits increased by 6% and visits to friends and relatives increased by 1%.

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

UK residents' visits abroad

	Visits (thousands)	% change from year earlier	Expenditure (£ million)	% change from year earlier
Non seasonally adjusted				
Sep 2018	7,708	-3	5,217	+1
Jul to Sep 2018	24,180	+1	16,410	+3
Year to date 2018	57,370	-1	36,630	+1
Latest 12 months	72,110	-1	45,230	+0
Seasonally adjusted				
Apr	6,070	+0	3,550	-6
May	6,070	+3	3,890	+17
Jun	6,040	-4	3,860	-6
Jul	6,090	+4	3,880	+7
Aug	6,170	+3	3,830	+2
Sep	6,040	-5	3,730	-0

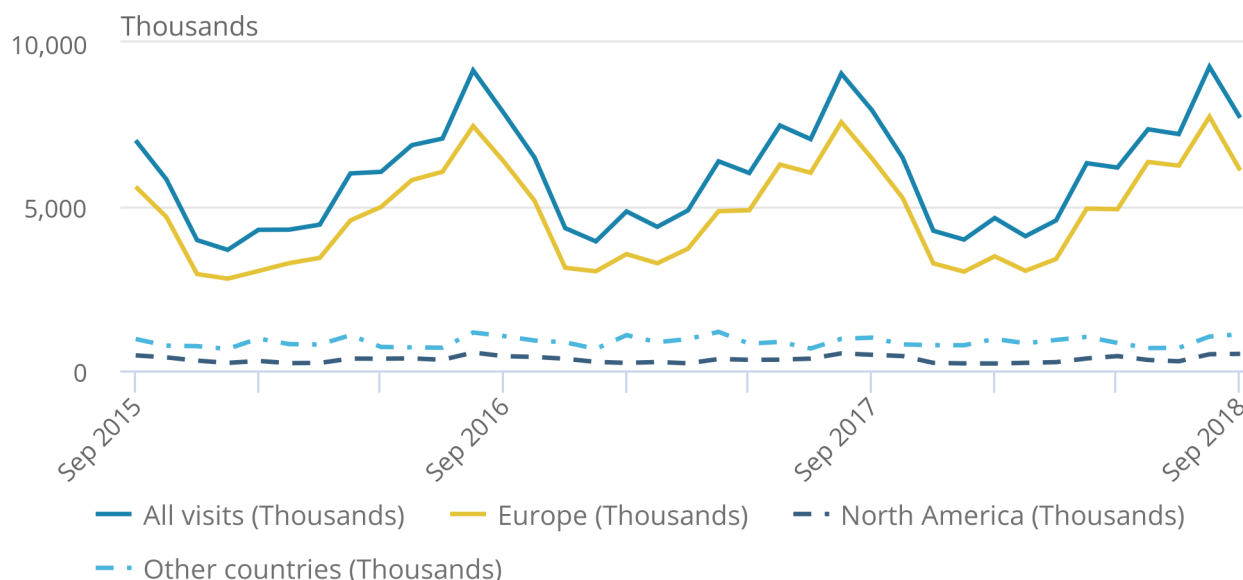
Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

Figure 4: UK residents' visits abroad by month

September 2015 to September 2018

Figure 4: UK residents' visits abroad by month

September 2015 to September 2018



Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

6 . Links to related statistics

[Travel trends](#): the latest publication (Travel trends 2017) was published on 17 August 2018, the next publication (Travel trends 2018) is currently due to be published in May 2019 – 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. The publication date of Travel trends could be subject to change, due to potential methodological changes outlined in Section 2: Things you need to know about this release.

[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 3, July to September 2018) was published on 17 January 2019 – 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.

[Overseas travel and tourism monthly](#): the latest publication (July, August and September 2018) was published on 17 January 2019 – 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

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 months are provisional and subject to revision in light of (a) more accurate data on passenger figures becoming available at the end of each quarter and (b) 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 this data for research or policy-related purposes.

Planned revisions usually arise from either 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 July, August and September 2018

Confidence Intervals relating to Overseas Travel and Tourism estimates, July 2018

July 2018 monthly estimates	Estimate	Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate)
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	3,891	8.3%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	2,395	8.7%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	7,409	5.3%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	4,904	5.7%

Confidence Intervals relating to Overseas Travel and Tourism estimates, August 2018

August 2018 monthly estimates	Estimate	Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate)
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	3,832	9.0%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	2,700	12.1%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	9,504	3.4%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	6,516	7.9%

Confidence Intervals relating to Overseas Travel and Tourism estimates, September 2018

September 2018 monthly estimates	Estimate	Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate)
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	3,044	10.1%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	1,932	8.7%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	7,891	5.0%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	5,321	6.4%

Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

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

Revisions between first publications and estimates 3 years later

Value in the latest period (2018 Quarter 3, July to September 2018)	Averages over the last 5 years (bias)	Average over the last 5 years without regard to sign (average absolute revision)
GMAT 9,400	46.50	103.50
GMAX 18,300	181.00	284.00
GMAZ 5,330	*121.5	*147.5
GMBB 11,450	*147.5	*193.5

Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

Notes

1. Units: GMAT and GMAX in thousands. [Back to table](#)
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. [Back to table](#)

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 by the International Passenger Survey (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.