

Article

# Travel trends: 2017

Annual estimates of travel and tourism visits to the UK and associated earnings and expenditure between the UK and the rest of the world.



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# 1 . Main points

- There was a record number of visits to the UK in 2017 and a record number of visits abroad by UK residents.
- There were 39.2 million visits by overseas residents to the UK in 2017, 4% more than in 2016.
- There were 72.8 million visits overseas by UK residents in 2017, an increase of 3% when compared with 2016.
- Overseas residents spent £24.5 billion on visits to the UK in 2017, an increase of 9% compared with 2016.
- UK residents spent £44.8 billion on visits overseas in 2017, which was 2% more than in 2016.
- The most frequent reason for visits was for holidays, both for UK residents visiting abroad and overseas residents visiting the UK.
- Business visits decreased in 2017, both for UK residents visiting abroad and overseas residents visiting the UK.
- With work ongoing to modernise the data collection approach underpinning Travel trends, this version of Travel trends publishes the main travel and tourism results while the full set of data, along with the Travelpac publication, will now be published on 3 August 2018.

## 2 . Things you need to know about this release

Travel trends is an annual report that provides estimates and profiles of travel and tourism visits (those of less than 12 months' duration) and associated earnings and expenditure between the UK and the rest of the world.

The International Passenger Survey (IPS) has been providing the source data for travel and tourism since 1961. The IPS is in the process of modernising its data collection approach 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 and this transition has required extensive additional data processing and quality assurance.

For this reason this edition of Travel trends includes the main results, but we are not publishing the full suite of tables. The tables not published in this edition will be added on 3 August 2018. The Travelpac publication will also be published on 3 August. More information about the tablet rollout and our ongoing development programme [is available](#).

The following tables are published in this release:

- Section 1 Travel and tourism, 1980 to 2017
- Section 4 Overseas residents' visits to the UK, 2017
- Section 5 UK residents' visits abroad, 2017
- Section 7 Confidence intervals

The following tables will be published on 3 August:

- Section 2 Overseas residents' visits to the UK, 2013 to 2017
- Section 3 UK residents' visits abroad, 2013 to 2017
- Section 6 Overseas travel and tourism, Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2017

The information provided in this report is used in a number of ways, including:

- to track earnings and expenditure, as an important input to measuring balance of payments
- to understand how the volume of visits and earnings to the UK develops, which can be compared with statistics from other countries to assess how effective the UK is in attracting visits from main parts of the world, for different purposes and among different demographic groups
- to help understand how particular events held in the UK (for example, the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympics and Royal Weddings) link to visits and spending, which can aid future decision-making
- to provide insights into how effective different parts of the UK are in attracting visits and earnings, in total and from different parts of the world and for different purposes
- to provide profiles of UK residents travelling to different parts of the world, to aid government and industry in developing policy and strategy

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.

The reported spend for visits include any spending associated (excluding fares) with the visit, which may 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 Section 5 Quality and methodology).

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 final estimates for 2017.

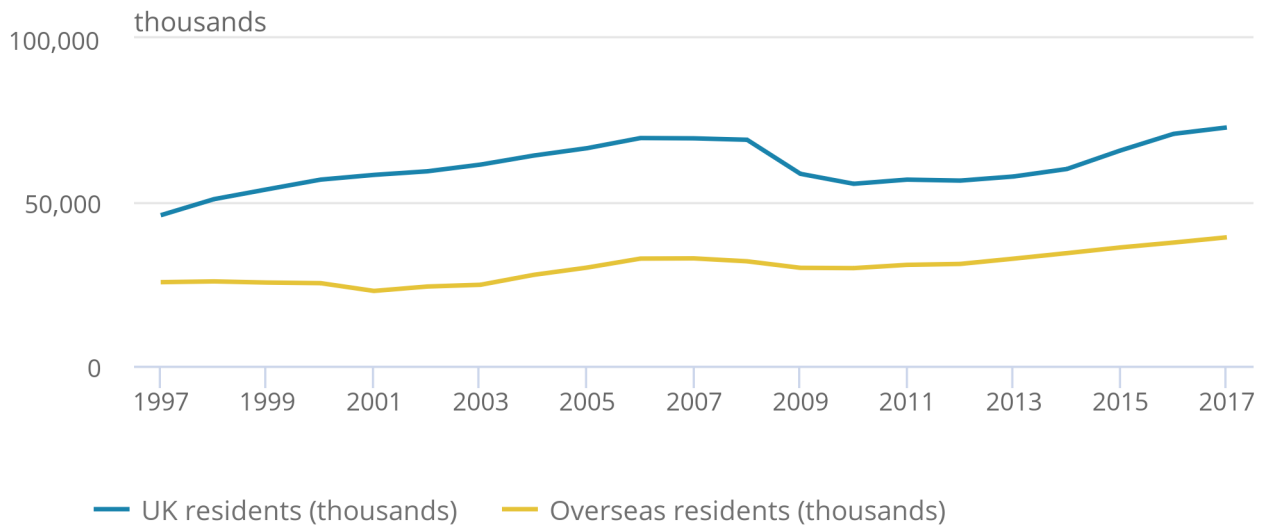
### **3 . UK trips abroad and visits to the UK continue to rise**

There were 72.8 million visits overseas by UK residents in 2017 (see Figure 1), an increase of 3% compared with 2016 and the highest figure recorded. The number of visits has increased each year since 2012.

There were 39.2 million visits by overseas residents to the UK in 2017 (see Figure 1), 4% more than in 2016 and the highest figure recorded. The number of visits has increased each year since 2010. Over a longer period there has been a general upward trend in the number of visits to the UK. In 1997 there were 25.5 million visits.

**Figure 1: Visits to and from the UK, 1997 to 2017**

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**Source: Office for National Statistics**

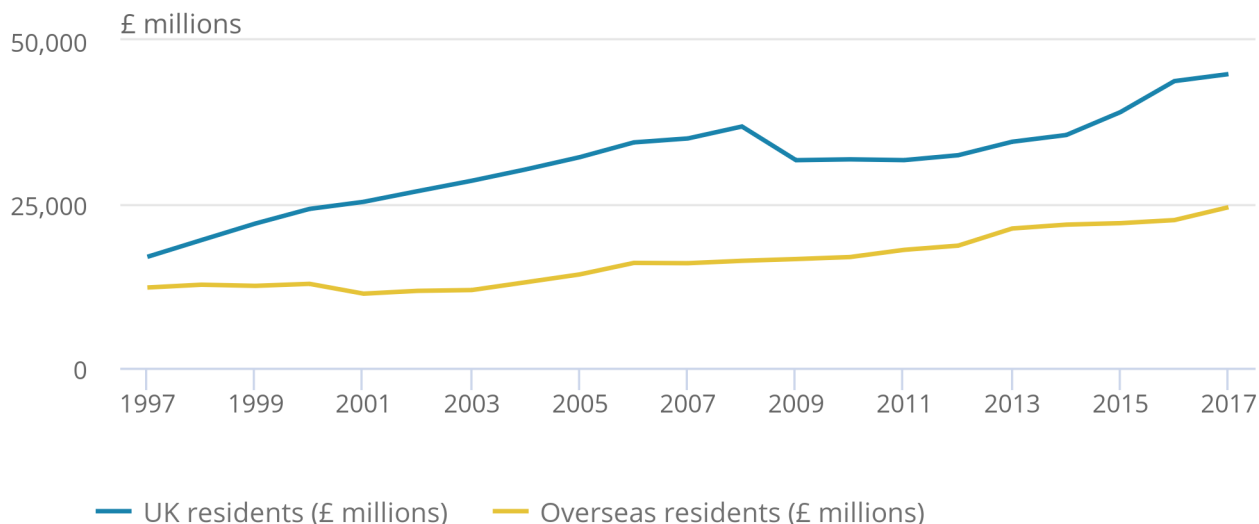
UK residents spent £44.8 billion on visits abroad in 2017, which was 2% more than in 2016 (see Figure 2). The increase in spending was similar to the increase in the number of visits (3%).

Overseas residents spent £24.5 billion on visits to the UK in 2017, an increase of 9% compared with 2016 (see Figure 2). The increase in spending was larger than the increase in the number of visits (4%).

The trends in spending by UK visitors abroad and overseas visitors to the UK broadly reflect the trends in visits.

**Figure 2: Spending on visits to and from the UK, 1997 to 2017**

Figure 2: Spending on visits to and from the UK, 1997 to 2017



Source: Office for National Statistics

## Holidays are still the most common reason for visiting the UK

There were 15.4 million holiday visits to the UK in 2017, an increase of 11% and accounting for 39% of the total visits. This makes holidays the most common reason for visiting the UK. The number of holiday visits in 2017 was 1.5 million more than in 2016. Visits to friends and family (12.0 million) and miscellaneous visits (3.1 million) increased in 2017. The number of business visits fell from 9.2 million in 2016 to 8.8 million in 2017, a decrease of 4%.

Overall, there have been increases in visits to the UK since 1997 for all these reasons for visits. This is despite falls in some years, notably in 2001 (due to Foot and Mouth disease as well as the events of 11 September that year) and 2009 (following the start of the economic downturn).

## UK residents' visits abroad continued to increase into 2017

There were 72.8 million visits overseas by UK residents in 2017, the highest figure recorded by the International Passenger Survey (IPS). The most common reason for travelling abroad was for holidays. There were 46.6 million holiday visits abroad by UK residents, 4% more than in 2016 and accounting for almost two-thirds (64%) of visits. By comparison, there were 29.1 million holiday visits abroad in 1997.

There were 17.6 million visits overseas to visit friends and family in 2017 (6% more than in 2016) and 6.8 million business visits in 2017 (5% fewer than in 2016). Consequently, there was a fall in business visits both by UK residents abroad and by overseas residents visiting the UK.

## 4 . What's changed in this release?

This edition of Travel trends is the first to include data collected by tablet, rather than the previous paper-based collection. 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 tablet in 2017 is therefore relatively low. More information can be found in a [separate note](#) on changes to data collection and planned methodological changes.

## 5 . Quality and methodology

The [International Passenger Survey \(IPS\) 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 estimates contained in Travel trends (as well as our other [Overseas Travel and Tourism statistics](#)) are subject to sampling errors, which are driven by the fact that IPS is a survey. It is important to understand the factors that dictate the quality of the estimates. Confidence intervals relating to a wide range of estimates are provided under the Accuracy of overseas travel and tourism estimates section.

### The collection of the IPS data

The key to producing reliable results from the IPS lies initially in the way the data are collected. Great emphasis is therefore placed upon the IPS interviewers to ensure they are able to capture data efficiently and accurately.

Nationally, IPS data are collected by a team of over 200 interviewers who are recruited and trained specifically to work on the IPS. Interviews are carried out on all days of the year, apart from Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

IPS interviews take place on a face-to-face basis. Until recently, responses were initially recorded on paper forms. In September 2017, data collection on tablets started to be phased in and this implementation was completed in April 2018. Now data are keyed directly into the collection program, which includes a series of electronic checks. Most of the data presented in this report, however, were collected on paper. For these cases, shortly after the interview has taken place, the data are transferred to a computer system in which electronic checks are made of the data input. The data are then transmitted to ONS headquarters where a series of further quality and accuracy checks are made on the data before processing and analysis.

Due to the layout and facilities at some seaports it is not always possible to interview passengers as they arrive. In such cases, IPS staff interview on board vessels leaving or returning to the UK, or on board the Eurotunnel Trains.

More information about the collection of IPS data can be found in the [IPS Overseas Travel and Tourism User Guide \(Volume 1\): Background and Methodology \(PDF, 423KB\)](#).

## IPS response rates

Sample surveys such as the IPS depend on achieving high levels of response from the public. Non-respondents often have different characteristics of travel and expenditure compared with those who do respond and this can lead to biases being introduced into the results.

The response rates for the air, sea and the Channel Tunnel samples are shown in Table D.1. These response rates relate to complete and partial interviews. The overall response rate in 2017 was 74.1%. Information about the construction of the IPS overseas travel and tourism response rates can be found in the [IPS Overseas Travel and Tourism User Guide \(Volume 1\): Background and Methodology \(PDF, 423KB\)](#). For information about the 2017 response rates contact [socialsurveys@ons.gov.uk](mailto:socialsurveys@ons.gov.uk).

**Table 1: IPS Response Rates for 2016 and 2017 estimates: % Of complete or partial responses**

		2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017
		Q1	Q1	Q2	Q2	Q3	Q3	Q4	Q4	2016	2017
Total IPS Response Rate	Arrivals	78.9	68.7	78.3	71.2	74.0	70.1	76.7	74.7	76.8	69.3
	Departures	80.5	75.8	80.8	76.4	78.0	73.9	79.7	76.6	79.7	77.4
	Total	79.8	72.9	79.7	74.3	76.3	72.3	78.4	75.9	78.4	74.1
IPS Response Rate (Air)	Arrivals	78.4	66.7	77.7	68.3	73.0	68.2	76.2	72.6	76.1	68.3
	Departures	80.0	74.7	80.3	74.9	77.4	72.2	79.7	75.2	79.3	76.1
	Total	79.3	71.5	79.2	72.3	75.5	70.5	78.3	74.2	77.9	73.0
IPS Response Rate (Sea)	Arrivals	84.0	84.0	88.8	89.6	82.1	86.3	84.6	88.7	84.7	88.0
	Departures	84.0	88.0	87.2	89.4	79.6	86.0	78.0	88.8	81.9	88.4
	Total	84.0	86.0	87.9	89.5	80.7	86.0	80.7	88.8	83.2	88.2
IPS Response Rate (Tunnel)	Arrivals	79.8	80.0	74.3	83.9	74.6	71.6	75.8	83.3	76.0	63.8
	Departures	85.3	85.8	79.2	90.6	84.2	88.4	80.8	89.2	82.3	89.5
	Total	82.4	82.4	76.7	86.4	79.3	79.8	78.1	86.3	79.0	74.9

Source: Office for National Statistics

## Accuracy of overseas travel and tourism estimates

Annual figures shown in this publication are final estimates, previous estimates provided in the monthly and quarterly publications are provisional and subject to revision in light of additional passenger data obtained at the end of each year.

IPS estimates are revised in line with the IPS revisions policy. The revisions policy is available in the [IPS Quality and Methodology Information report](#) to assist users in the understanding of 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 for 2017 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 the [ONS guide to statistical revisions](#).

Some of the series presented 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 for travel and tourism interviews.

Table E1 shows the 95% confidence intervals for the 2017 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 into which there are 19 chances out of 20 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 19 chances out of 20 that the true figure (if all travellers had been surveyed) would lie in the range 9,500 to 10,500.

**Table E1: IPS confidence intervals for 2017 estimates**

	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Relative 95% confidence interval (+/- % of the estimate)</b>
<b>Overseas visitors to the UK</b>		
Number of visits ('000s)	39,214	2.3%
Total earnings (£million)	24,507	3.3%
Number of visitor nights ('000s)	284,781	3.0%
<b>UK residents going abroad</b>		
Number of visits ('000s)	72,772	1.8%
Total expenditure (£million)	44,840	2.5%
Number of visitor nights ('000s)	743,469	2.5%

Source: Office for National Statistics

The confidence intervals dataset for 2017 shows estimates relating to various purposes for visit and region of the world, together with regions of the UK visited. Relative confidence intervals are also shown for estimates relating to individual country of visit to and from the UK.



Further guidance for readers is provided about the quality of [overseas travel and tourism estimates](#).

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) and
- expenditure abroad by UK residents (GMBB)

## Access to IPS data and analysis

### IPS results published by ONS

In addition to Travel trends, we also publish provisional [monthly](#) and [quarterly](#) results from the IPS that are available free of charge from our website. The most recent monthly results currently available are for December 2017, due to delays for processing and additional quality assurance.

The website also provides more information about the [International Passenger Survey methodology](#) including the current IPS questionnaire and interviewer instructions.

### Accessing datasets

1. To enable easier examination of the IPS data, a simplified version of the IPS dataset called Travepac, comprising 14 of the most widely used variables, is available. Data are available online for each year from 1993 onwards, in both SPSS and Excel formats. Travepac data for 2017 will be added on 3 August 2018 due to delays for processing and additional quality assurance.
2. Larger IPS datasets are available through the Data Archive at Essex University. Contact details are as follows:

Telephone: +44 (0) 1206 872143

Web: [Data Archive Homepage](#)