

Article

Overseas travel and tourism, provisional: January to March 2018

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 7.8 million visits to the UK in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2018, a 6% decrease when compared with the first quarter of 2017.
- Overseas residents spent £4.4 billion on their visits to the UK in the first quarter of 2018; this was 2% more than in Quarter 1 2017.
- UK residents made 13.3 million visits abroad in Quarter 1 2018, which was 6% fewer than in the corresponding period for the previous year.
- UK residents spent £8.6 billion on visits abroad in the first quarter on 2018; this was a decrease of 1% compared with Quarter 1 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 the first quarter (January to March) of 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?

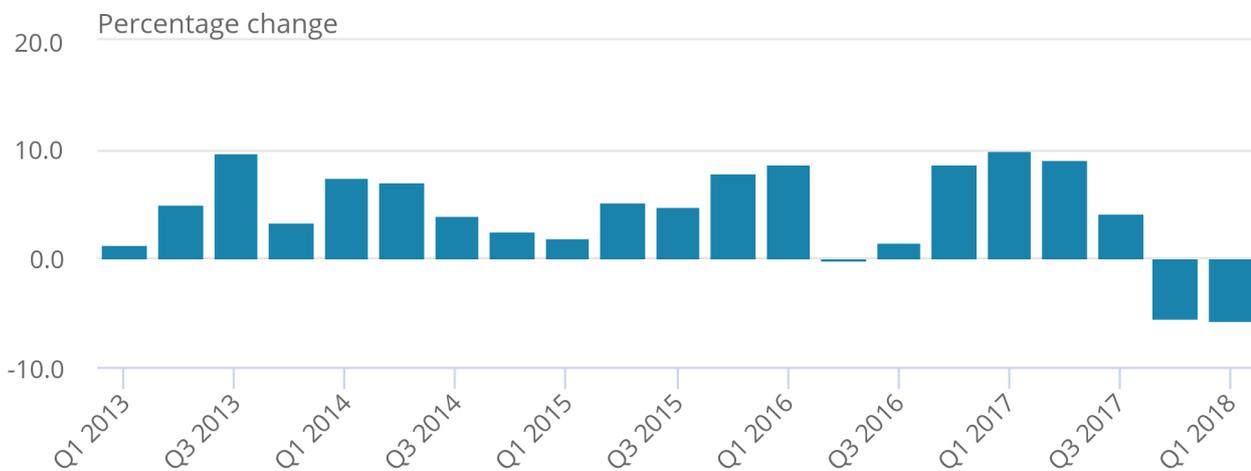
There were fewer international visits to the UK by overseas residents in the first quarter (January to March) of 2018 than a year previously. An estimated 7.8 million visits were made in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2018: a decrease of 6% when compared with the same period in 2017.

Figure 1: Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits to the UK from overseas residents

Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2013 to Quarter 1 2018

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Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2013 to Quarter 1 2018



Source: International Passenger Survey (IPS) - Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Q1 stands for Quarter 1 (January to March); Q2 for Quarter 2 (April to June); Q3 for Quarter 3 (July to September); and Q4 for Quarter 4 (October to December).

Visiting friends and relatives was the most popular reason for visiting the UK in Quarter 1 2018, with 2.6 million visits, only slightly more than the number of holiday visits (2.5 million). There was an 11% decrease in the number of holiday visits compared with the first quarter of 2017 and a decrease of 2% in visits to friends and relatives. There were 2.1 million business visits, 1% more than in 2017.

Visits from European residents decreased by 8%, while visits from residents of "other countries" (countries outside of Europe and North America) rose by 2%. The number of visits from North American residents decreased by 1%.

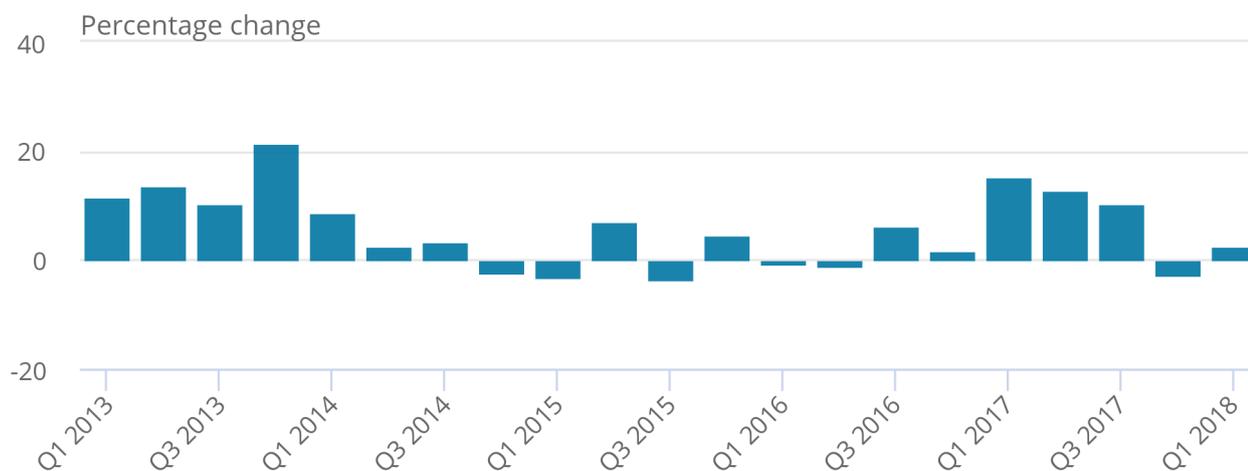
Estimated spending in the UK by overseas visitors rose by 2% to £4.4 billion in Quarter 1 2018 when compared with Quarter 1 2017. There was an 8% increase in spending by residents of North America, to £720 million, while spending by European residents increased by 4% to £2.3 billion. Spending by residents of “other countries” decreased by 3% to £1.4 billion.

Figure 2: Quarterly change from a year earlier in earnings from visits to the UK

Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2013 to Quarter 1 2018

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Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2013 to Quarter 1 2018



Source: International Passenger Survey (IPS) - Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Q1 stands for Quarter 1 (January to March); Q2 for Quarter 2 (April to June); Q3 for Quarter 3 (July to September); and Q4 for Quarter 4 (October to December).

4 . Visits abroad by UK residents

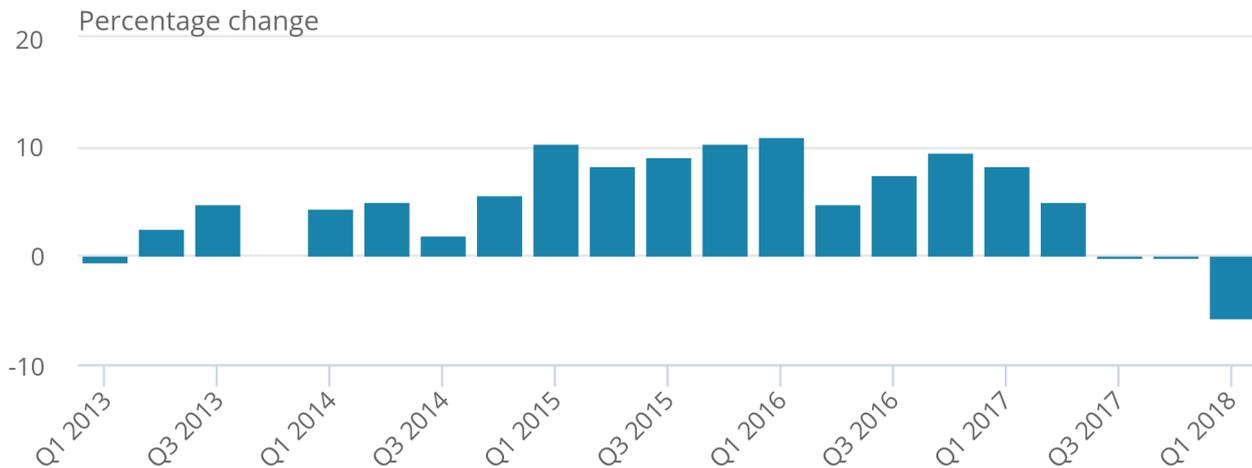
UK residents made 13.3 million visits abroad in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2018; this was a fall of 6% when compared with the same quarter in 2017. There was a 1% fall in visits to North America, a 6% fall in visits to European countries and a 6% fall in visits to “other countries”.

Figure 3: Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits abroad by UK residents

Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2013 to Quarter 1 2018

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Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2013 to Quarter 1 2018



Notes:

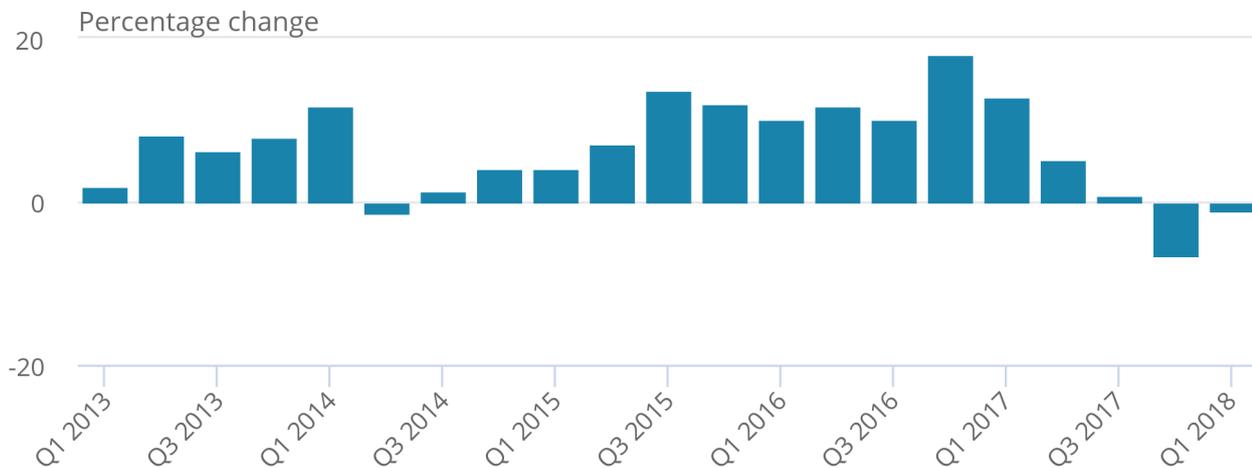
1. Q1 stands for Quarter 1 (January to March); Q2 for Quarter 2 (April to June); Q3 for Quarter 3 (July to September); and Q4 for Quarter 4 (October to December).

Holiday visits continued to be the most common reason for UK residents' visits abroad. In Quarter 1 2018, there were 7.6 million holidays, a decrease of 2% compared with the same quarter a year previously. Visits to friends or relatives decreased by 9% in this quarter, miscellaneous visits decreased by 19%, and business visits decreased by 12%.

UK residents spent £8.6 billion during visits abroad in Quarter 1 2018, a decrease of 1% compared with £8.7 billion spent in the same period of 2017. Expenditure in North America decreased by 5% and expenditure in "other countries" decreased by 10%. By contrast, spending in Europe rose by 6%.

Figure 4: Quarterly change from a year earlier in expenditure from UK residents' visits abroad

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Source: Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2013 to Quarter 1 2018

Notes:

1. Q1 stands for Quarter 1 (January to March); Q2 for Quarter 2 (April to June); Q3 for Quarter 3 (July to September); and Q4 for Quarter 4 (October to December).

5 . What's changed in this release?

In September 2017, 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 due to 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. The proportion of data collected by tablets has therefore increased over time. For the period covered in this release (January to March 2018), tablets accounted for approximately 65% of the weighted estimates of visits.

See also the Things you need to know about this release section 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 following publications:

- [Monthly overseas travel and tourism](#), latest release January, February and March 2018 (published on 5 September 2018); next release April, May and June 2018 (to be published 11 October 2018)
- [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; latest release Travel trends 2017 (published July 2018); next release Travel trends 2018 (to be published spring 2019)
- [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 1 2018 published 5 September 2018
- 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 report](#)

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

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.

9 . Accuracy of the results

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 these 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 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 its sampling error is. The survey sample size is approximately 70,000 per quarter.

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. These represent the interval in which there is a 19 out of 20 chance 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 a 19 out of 20 chance that the true figure (if all travellers had been surveyed) would lie in the range 9,500 to 10,500.

Table 1: Sampling errors, Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2018

	Estimate	Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % the estimate)
Overseas visitors to the UK		
Number of visits (thousands)	7,836	5.8%
Total earnings (£million)	4,450	6.0%
Number of visitor nights (thousands)	50,099	6.5%
UK residents going abroad		
Number of visits (thousands)	13,319	4.9%
Total earnings (£million)	8,587	7.8%
Number of visitor nights (thousands)	140,491	7.6%

Source: International Passenger Survey - Office for National Statistics

Sampling errors 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 1 \(Jan to Mar\) 2017 tables](#).

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)
- 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 1 \(Jan to Mar\) 2018](#).

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 2017 may be found in our 2017 annual report, Travel trends. A copy can be downloaded at [Travel trends: 2017](#).

Other analyses

For general questions about the IPS and requests for ad hoc data analysis (a service governed by our Income and Charging policy), contact us via email at socialsurveys@ons.gov.uk or by telephone on +44 (0)1633 455678.

Marketing agents

It is possible to commission more detailed analyses of the IPS data from marketing agents appointed by 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

Web: www.irn-research.com

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