

Statistical bulletin

Overseas travel and tourism: November and December 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 2.9 million visits to the UK by overseas residents in November 2018 (5% fewer than in November 2017) and 2.8 million visits in December 2018 (9% more than in December 2017).
- Overseas residents spent £1.6 billion on visits to the UK in November 2018 (10% less than in November 2017) and £1.7 billion on visits in December 2018 (9% more than in December 2017).
- UK residents made 4.3 million visits overseas in November 2018 (the same as in November 2017) and 3.8 million visits in December 2018 (4% less than December 2017).
- UK residents spent £2.6 billion on visits overseas in November 2018 (1% less than in November 2017) and spent £2.4 billion in December 2018 (9% more than in December 2017).

2 . Things you need to know about this release

This bulletin presents estimates of overseas visits to and from the UK. An overseas visitor means a person who, being permanently resident in a country outside the UK, visits the UK for a period of less than 12 months. UK citizens resident overseas for 12 months or more coming home on leave are included in this category. Visits abroad are visits for a period of less than 12 months by people permanently resident in the UK (who may be of foreign nationality).

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](#) is available.

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 are possible. We have worked with academic experts and Office for National Statistics (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.

The [Travel trends 2017: recent data collection changes and planned methodological changes](#) article describes further planned methodological changes. These are weighting adjustments to address concerns about the imbalance in the IPS between the estimates of numbers of visitors arriving and departing for different nationalities. The new method will be implemented in October 2019, when the results for the second quarter of 2019 are published. A revised back series will also be published at this time. More information about the planned changes will be published as soon as possible.

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 include any spending associated (excluding fares) with the visit, that 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 bulletin 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 background note: Accuracy of IPS estimates). Further guidance is available about the [quality of overseas travel and tourism estimates](#).

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

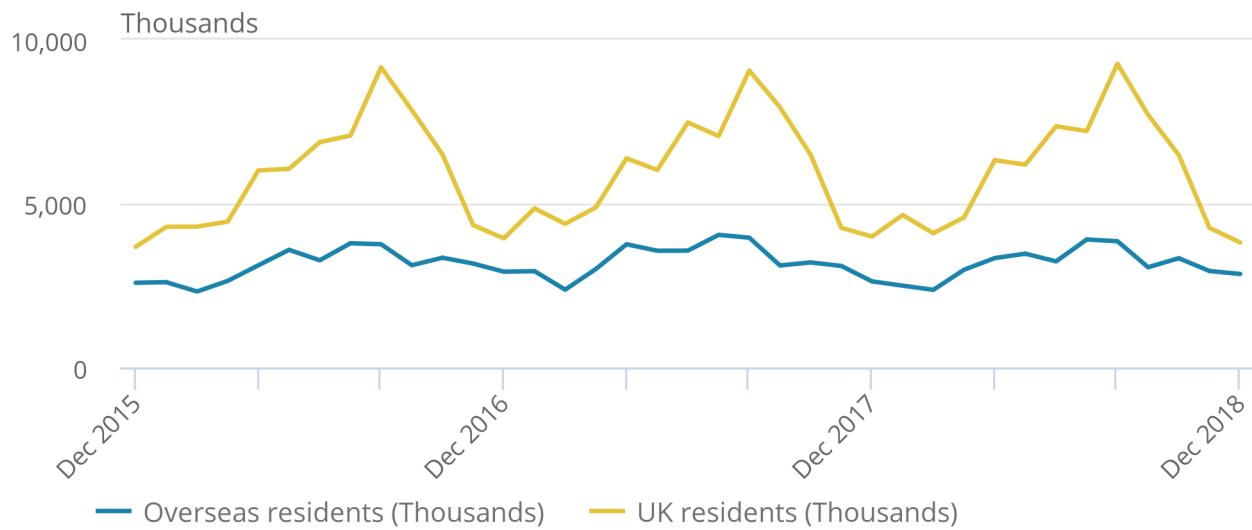
UK residents consistently make more visits abroad than foreign residents make to the UK. The total amount spent by UK residents during visits abroad is also higher than the total spent by foreign residents visiting the UK. The numbers of visits and the amounts spent vary through the year, with more in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

Overseas residents' visits to the UK and UK residents' visits abroad by month from December 2015 to December 2018

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Overseas residents' visits to the UK and UK residents' visits abroad by month from December 2015 to December 2018



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Figure 2: Patterns in spending closely track patterns in visits, both in visits to the UK by overseas residents and visits overseas by UK residents

Spending by overseas residents in the UK and spending by UK residents overseas by month from December 2015 to December 2018

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Spending by overseas residents in the UK and spending by UK residents overseas by month from December 2015 to December 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 below are sourced from the following monthly overseas travel and tourism reference tables:

- 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.

Overseas residents made an estimated 2.9 million visits to the UK in November 2018, which was 5% fewer than in November 2017. Overseas residents spent £1.6 billion on visits to the UK in November 2018 (10% less than in November 2017).

Overseas residents made an estimated 2.8 million visits in December 2018 (9% more than in December 2017). Overseas residents spent £1.7 billion on visits in December 2018 (9% more than in December 2017).

During the period October to December 2018 there were 9.1 million visits to the UK, which was 2% more than the corresponding period a year earlier. Spending in the UK by overseas residents remained the same as the previous year at £5.3 billion. Different trends were observed for different areas of the world: there was an increase of 5% in visits from North American residents to 1.0 million, while visits from European residents increased 2% to 6.8 million and visits from residents of "other countries" (countries outside Europe and America) increased 3% to 1.3 million. Considering the reasons for visiting the UK, holiday visits increased by 10% to 3.4 million for this period, business visits decreased 3% to 2.1 million and visits to friends and relatives was unchanged at 2.9 million.

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

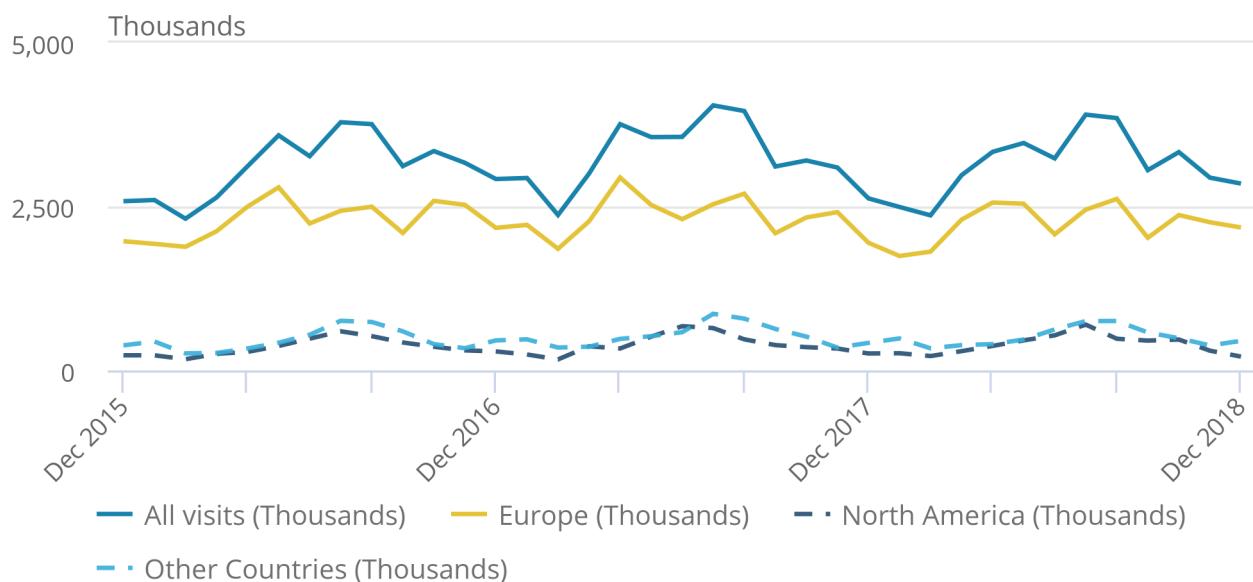
Overseas residents' visits to UK				
	Visits (Thousands)	% change from year earlier	Earnings (£ million)	% change from year earlier
Non seasonally adjusted				
Dec 2018	2,850	+9	1,680	+9
Oct to Dec 2018	9,120	+2	5,260	0
Year to date 2018	37,800	-4	22,720	-7
Latest 12 months	37,800	-4	22,720	-7
Seasonally adjusted				
Jul	3,150	-4	1,780	-16
Aug	3,150	-3	1,910	-9
Sep	3,120	-1	1,660	-19
Oct	3,210	+5	1,970	+4
Nov	3,120	-5	1,860	-10
Dec	3,230	+6	1,830	+9

Figure 3: Visits to the UK by overseas residents were 2% higher in the three months to December 2018 than in the same period a year previously

Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month from December 2015 to December 2018

Figure 3: Visits to the UK by overseas residents were 2% higher in the three months to December 2018 than in the same period a year previously

Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month from December 2015 to December 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 below are sourced from the following monthly overseas travel and tourism reference tables:

- 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 4.3 million visits overseas by UK residents in November 2018, which was the same as in November 2017. UK residents spent £2.6 billion on visits overseas in November 2018 (1% less than in November 2017).

UK residents made 3.8 million visits overseas in December 2018, which was 4% fewer than December 2017. They spent £2.4 billion on these visits, 9% more than in December 2017.

During the period October to December 2018 there were 14.5 million visits abroad by UK residents, which was 1% fewer than the corresponding period a year earlier. UK residents spent £9.2 billion on these visits, 7% more than in the same period of 2017. There were 11.2 million visits to European countries, a decrease of 3% of the same period a year earlier and 2.3 million visits to "other countries" (countries outside North America and Europe), a decrease of 2%. However, there was an increase in visits to North America of 21% to 1.1 million. Considering the reasons for visits, holiday visits increased by 2% (to 9.1 million) from the same period the previous year and business visits increased by 7% (to 1.7 million). Conversely, visits to friends and relatives decreased by 10% (to 3.4 million).

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

UK residents' visits abroad				
	Visits (Thousands)	% change from year earlier	Expenditure (£ million)	% change from year earlier
Non seasonally adjusted				
Dec 2018	3,810	-4	2,410	+9
Oct to Dec 2018	14,550	-1	9,190	+7
Year to date 2018	71,920	-1	45,820	+2
Latest 12 months	71,920	-1	45,820	+2
Seasonally adjusted				
Jul	6,060	+4	3,880	+7
Aug	6,160	+3	3,840	+2
Sep	6,020	-5	3,740	0
Oct	6,070	0	3,970	+12
Nov	6,000	+1	3,750	-1
Dec	5,870	-2	4,020	+9

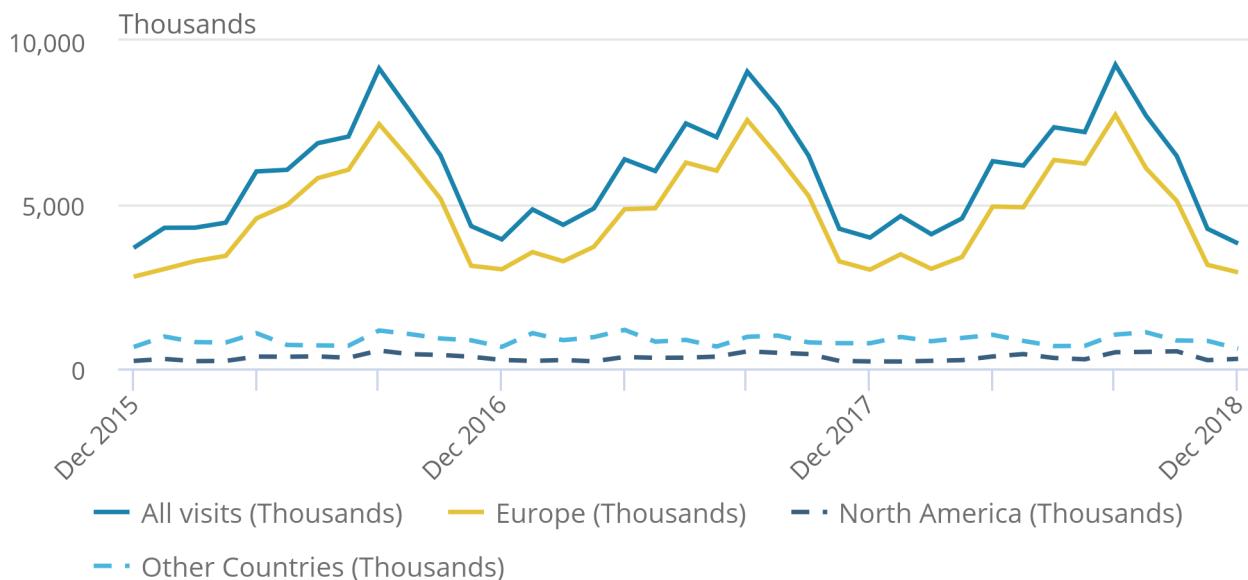
Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Figure 4: There were 1% fewer visits overseas by UK residents in the three months to December 2018 than in the same period a year previously

UK residents' visits abroad by month (non-seasonally adjusted) from December 2015 to December 2018

Figure 4: There were 1% fewer visits overseas by UK residents in the three months to December 2018 than in the same period a year previously

UK residents' visits abroad by month (non-seasonally adjusted) from December 2015 to December 2018



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

6 . Links to related statistics

[Travel trends](#): the latest article (Travel trends 2017) was published on 17 August 2018, the next article (Travel trends 2018) is due to be published in 24 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.

[Travelpac](#): 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 article (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 bulletin (November and December 2018) was published on 25 March 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 \(IPS\) 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 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 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.

Rewards 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 bulletin, 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 * the standard error.

Table 3: Confidence intervals relating to overseas travel and tourism estimates in December 2018
Confidence Intervals relating to Overseas Travel and Tourism estimates, November 2018

November 2018 monthly estimates	Estimate	Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate)
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	2,940	7.2%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	1,610	12.0%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	4,260	8.9%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	2,610	11.5%

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

December 2018 monthly estimates	Estimate	Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate)
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	2850	9.6%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	1,680	8.7%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	3,810	10.8%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	2,410	13.4%

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 Quarter 3 (Jul to Sept) 2018	Averages over the last five years (bias)	Average over the last five 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
GBMB 11,450	*147.5	*193.5

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.

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