

Article

# Overseas travel and tourism, provisional: January to March 2019

Visits to the UK by overseas residents, visits abroad by UK residents and spending by travellers, using provisional passenger traffic data.



Contact:  
Giles Horsfield  
socialsurveys@ons.gov.uk  
+44 (0)1633 455731

Release date:  
25 July 2019

Next release:  
30 August 2019

## Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Things you need to know about this release](#)
3. [What are the main trends in visits and spending?](#)
4. [Visits abroad by UK residents](#)
5. [What's changed in this release?](#)
6. [Other overseas travel and tourism releases](#)
7. [Publication tables](#)
8. [Quality and methodology](#)
9. [Accuracy of the results](#)
10. [Further statistics and other analyses](#)

# 1 . Main points

- Overseas residents made 8.0 million visits to the UK in Quarter 1 (January to March) 2019; this was an increase of 1% compared with Quarter 1 2018.
- Overseas residents spent £4.3 billion on their visits to the UK in Quarter 1 2019; this was 5% less than in Quarter 1 2018.
- UK residents made 13.6 million visits abroad in Quarter 1 2019, which was 2% more than the corresponding period the previous year.
- UK residents spent £8.5 billion on visits abroad in Quarter 1 2019; there was no change when compared with Quarter 1 2018.

## 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](#).

This article 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).

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.

The new tablets enable us to improve the quality of IPS data collected, so discontinuities (that is, step changes in the time series) arising from the introduction of tablet data collection in the IPS are possible. We have worked with academic experts and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Methodology team to produce a method for detecting any such discontinuities.

We have continued to monitor the results as more data have become available. Further analysis using a longer series of data is required to determine whether there are any discontinuities, so some caution is still advised in the interpretation of data in this release.

Further methodological changes are planned to the estimates on international visitors in the IPS. These are weighting adjustments to address concerns about the imbalance (that is, large differences in numbers) in the IPS between the estimates of numbers of visitors arriving and departing for some nationalities. The new method has been developed in consultation with users and methodological experts, and is currently being finalised. The new method will be implemented as soon as possible, and the implementation date will be published in advance. A revised back series will also be published at this time.

The changes in data collection methods and planned methodological changes were described in [Travel trends 2017: recent data collection changes and planned methodological changes](#) article, published in July 2018.

Please note that while the imbalance work is unlikely to affect long-term migrants in the IPS, we have committed to exploring whether the survey processes that cause the imbalance in international visitor estimates also impact on long-term migration further. This is part of the ONS Migration Statistics workplan to understand different migration data sources.

Estimates contained in this bulletin are produced from responses provided by international passengers arriving in and departing from the UK, sampled in 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 Quarter 1 (January to March) 2019. Revised, final estimates for 2018 were published in [Travel trends 2018](#) on 24 May 2019.

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

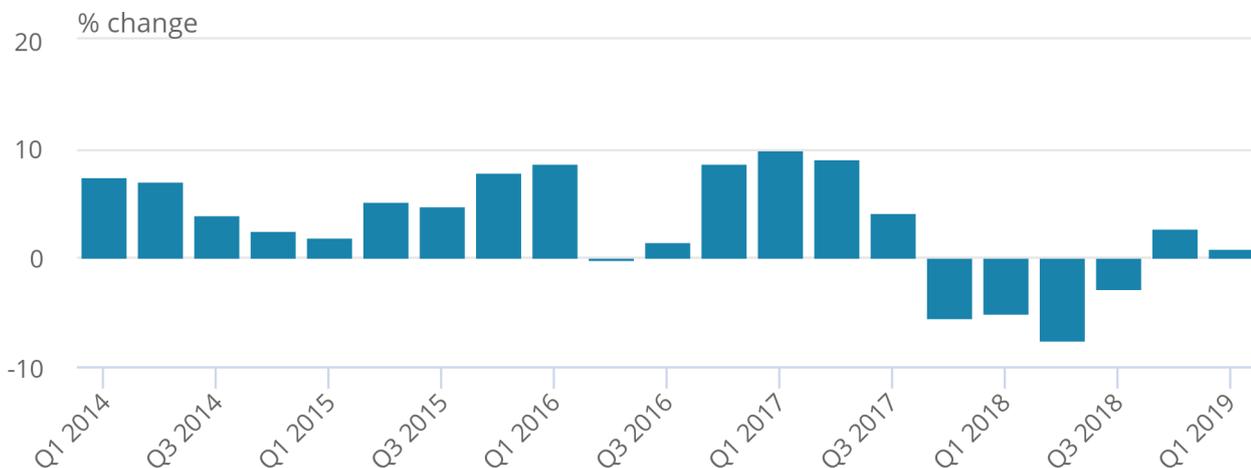
An estimated 8.0 million visits to the UK were made in Quarter 1 2019, which was an increase of 1% when compared with the same period in 2018, when there were 7.9 million visits. The number of visits in Quarter 1 2018 was lower than in Quarter 1 2017, when the number of visits was the highest ever recorded by the survey for the first quarter of the year.

**Figure 1: Visits to the UK by overseas residents increased by 1% in Quarter 1 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier**

Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits to the UK from overseas residents Quarter 1 (January to March) 2014 to Quarter 1 2019

Figure 1: Visits to the UK by overseas residents increased by 1% in Quarter 1 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier

Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits to the UK from overseas residents Quarter 1 (January to March) 2014 to Quarter 1 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Notes:

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

Taking holidays was the most popular reason for visiting the UK in Quarter 1 2019, with 2.7 million visits. This was a 9% increase compared with the Quarter 1 of 2018. Business visits decreased to 2.1 million, 1% fewer than in 2018. Visits to friends and relatives decreased by 3% to 2.5 million.

Different trends were observed from different areas of the world. Visits by European residents increased by 3%, and visits by North American residents increased by 1%. Visits by residents of “other countries” (countries outside of Europe and North America) fell by 7%.

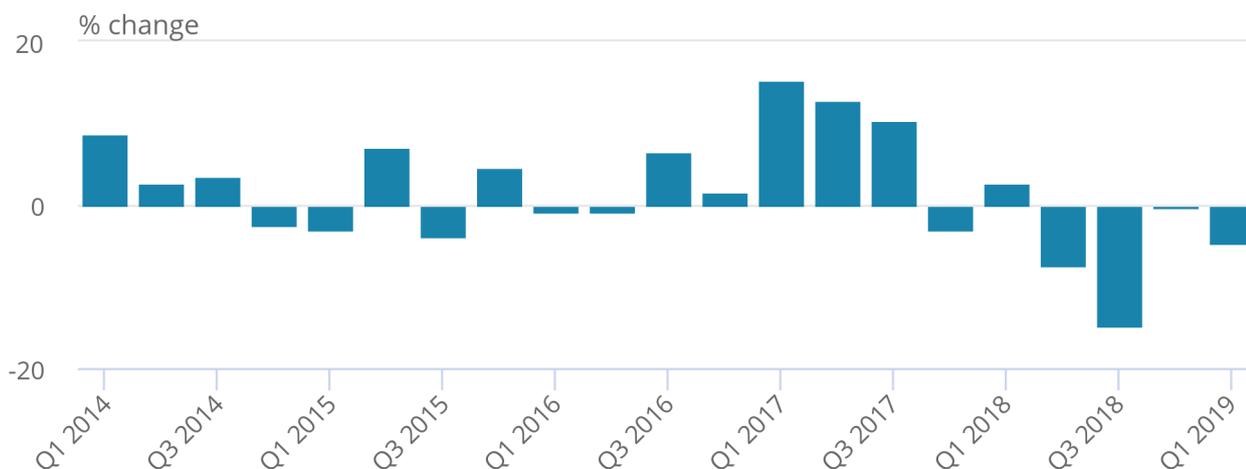
Estimated spending in the UK by overseas visitors fell by 5% to £4.3 billion in Quarter 1 2019 when compared with Quarter 1 2018. There was no change in spending by residents of North America, while spending by European residents decreased by 7% to £2.2 billion (2.3 billion in Quarter 1 2018). Spending by residents of “other countries” decreased by 2% to £1.4 billion.

**Figure 2: Spending in the UK by overseas residents decreased by 5% in quarter 1 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier**

Quarterly change from a year earlier in earnings from visits to the UK, Quarter 1 (January to March) 2014 to Quarter 1 2019

Figure 2: Spending in the UK by overseas residents decreased by 5% in quarter 1 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier

Quarterly change from a year earlier in earnings from visits to the UK, Quarter 1 (January to March) 2014 to Quarter 1 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Notes:

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

## 4 . Visits abroad by UK residents

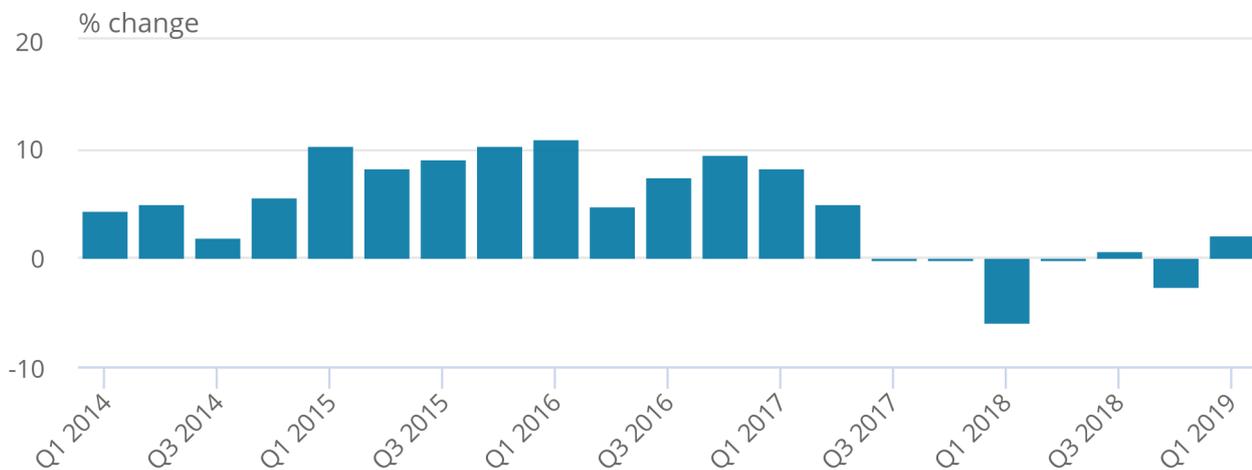
UK residents made 13.6 million visits abroad in Quarter 1 (January to March) 2019, 2% more than the same quarter in 2018. Trends were different for different areas of the world: visits to European countries increased by 4% (10.3 million visits), but there was a 15% decrease in visits to North America (0.6 million visits), and visits to “other countries” decreased by 1% to 2.7 million.

**Figure 3: Visits abroad by UK residents increased by 2% in Quarter 1 2019 when compared with the same period in the previous year**

Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits abroad by UK residents, Quarter 1 (January to March) 2014 to Quarter 1 2019

Figure 3: Visits abroad by UK residents increased by 2% in Quarter 1 2019 when compared with the same period in the previous year

Quarterly change from a year earlier in visits abroad by UK residents, Quarter 1 (January to March) 2014 to Quarter 1 2019



**Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey**

**Notes:**

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

Holidays continued to be the most common reason for UK residents' visits abroad. In Quarter 1 2019, there were 7.6 million holidays visits, this was similar to the same quarter a year previously. Business visits decreased by 8% to 1.5 million and visits to friends or relatives increased by 10% to 4.2 million. The number of visits for miscellaneous reasons decreased by 6%.

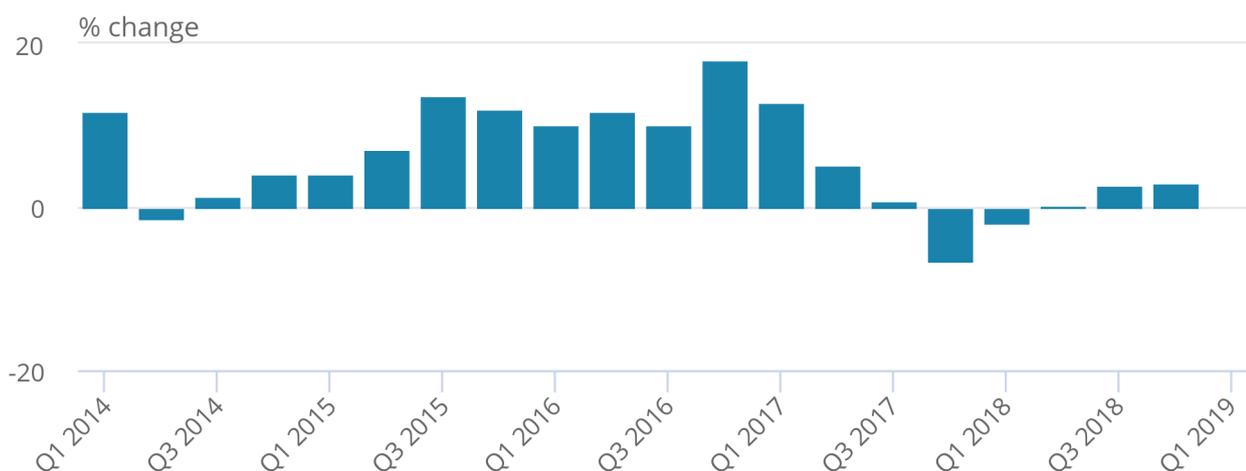
UK residents spent £8.5 billion during visits abroad in Quarter 1 2019, this was the same as the same period in 2018. Expenditure in Europe rose by 1%, and expenditure in “other countries” increased by 3%, while spending in North America decreased by 14%.

**Figure 4: UK spending abroad was unchanged when compared with the same period in 2018**

Quarterly change from a year earlier in expenditure from UK residents visits abroad, Quarter 1 (January to March) 2014 to Quarter 1 2019

## Figure 4: UK spending abroad was unchanged when compared with the same period in 2018

Quarterly change from a year earlier in expenditure from UK residents visits abroad, Quarter 1 (January to March) 2014 to Quarter 1 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Notes:

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

## 5 . What’s changed in this release?

In September 2017, the 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, and easier survey updates due to greater flexibility. 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 was completed in April 2018 when Heathrow Airport moved to tablets. Since April 2018 data collection has been conducted entirely on tablets. See the section Things you need to know about this release 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 publications:

- [Monthly overseas travel and tourism](#): the latest release was published on 26 June 2019; the date of the next release will be announced shortly.
- [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; the latest release was published 24 May 2019; the next release will be published in May 2020.
- [Travelpac](#): a dataset that allows you to conduct your own analysis of quarterly and annual data on important variables; the latest release was published 25 July 2019.

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 [IPS Quality and Methodology Information](#).

Note that, although data by the International Passenger Survey (IPS) also feeds 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 [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

It also outlines definitions and sample methodology.

## 9 . Accuracy of the results

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 Things you need to know about this release.

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 [IPS Quality and Methodology Information](#) to help users understand the cycle and frequency of data revisions. Users of this report are strongly advised to read the 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 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 [Guide to statistical revisions](#).

The main series are seasonally adjusted. This helps 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.

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 (January to March) 2019  
Confidence Intervals relating to Overseas Travel and Tourism estimates, Q1 2019

|                                    | <b>Estimate</b> | <b>Relative 95%<br/>Confidence Interval<br/>(+/- % the estimate)</b> |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| <b>Overseas visitors to the UK</b> | 7,957           | 7.6%   |
| Number of visits ('000s)           | 4,262           | 7.6%   |
| Total earnings (£million)          | 47,685          | 9.5%   |
| Number of visitor nights ('000s)   |                 |  |
| <b>UK residents going abroad</b>   | 13,568          | 5.3%   |
| Number of visits ('000s)           | 8,536           | 7.6%   |
| Total expenditure (£million)       | 136,074         | 8.3%   |
| Number of visitor nights ('000s)   |                 |  |

Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

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 2019 tables](#).

Further guidance for readers about quality can be found in [Overseas travel and tourism estimates \(PDF 404.84 KB\)](#).

One indication of the reliability of the key 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 which 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 2019](#).

## Monthly figures of Overseas travel and tourism

These are published in [Overseas travel and tourism](#).

### Further statistics

More detailed statistics covering 1980 to 2018 may be found in our 2018 annual report [Travel trends](#).

### Other analyses

For general questions about the IPS and requests for ad hoc data analysis (a service governed by our Income and Charging policy):

Telephone: +44 (0)1633 455678  
Email: [socialsurveys@ons.gov.uk](mailto:socialsurveys@ons.gov.uk)

### Marketing agents

It is possible to commission more detailed analyses of the IPS data from marketing agents appointed by the 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](mailto:info@irn-research.com)  
Web: [www.irn-research.com](http://www.irn-research.com)

MDS Transmodal 5-6 Hunters Walk  
Canal Street  
Chester  
CH1 4EB  
Telephone: +44 (0) 1244 348301  
Fax: +44 (0) 1244 348471  
Email: [enquiries@mdst.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@mdst.co.uk)  
Web: [www.mdst.co.uk](http://www.mdst.co.uk)