

Statistical bulletin

Overseas travel and tourism: November and December 2019 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 2019 (1% fewer than in November 2018) and 3.2 million visits in December 2019 (12% more than in December 2018).
- Overseas residents spent £1.9 billion on visits to the UK in November 2019 (21% more than in November 2018) and £2.3 billion on visits in December 2019 (38% more than December 2018).
- UK residents made 4.4 million visits overseas in November 2019 (5% more than in November 2018) and 3.9 million visits in December 2019 (4% more than in December 2018).
- UK residents spent £3.1 billion on visits overseas in November 2019 (21% more than in November 2018) and £2.4 billion on visits overseas in December 2019 (4% more than in December 2018).

2 . Things you need to know about this release

This bulletin presents estimates of overseas visits to and from the UK. An overseas visitor to the UK is 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](#).

Methodological changes to the estimates on international visitors in the International Passenger Survey (IPS) are planned. 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. The new method will be implemented as soon as possible, and the implementation date will be published shortly. A revised back series will also be published at this time.

The IPS has 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 of tablets](#) is available.

The tablets allow us to improve the quality of the IPS data collected. Discontinuities (that is, step changes in the time series) arising from the introduction of tablet data collection in the IPS are therefore 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. Some caution is still therefore advised in the interpretation of data in this release.

The changes in data collection methods and planned methodological changes were described in the [Travel trends 2017: recent data collection changes and planned methodological changes](#) article 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, as 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 on the IPS, as outlined in the [IPS Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\) report](#).

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 expenditure for visits includes any spending associated with the visit (excluding fares) that occurs 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 Accuracy of IPS estimates in [Section 7](#) for more information). Further guidance is available about the quality of overseas travel and tourism estimates in the [IPS QMI report](#).

3 . Overall trends in visits and spending

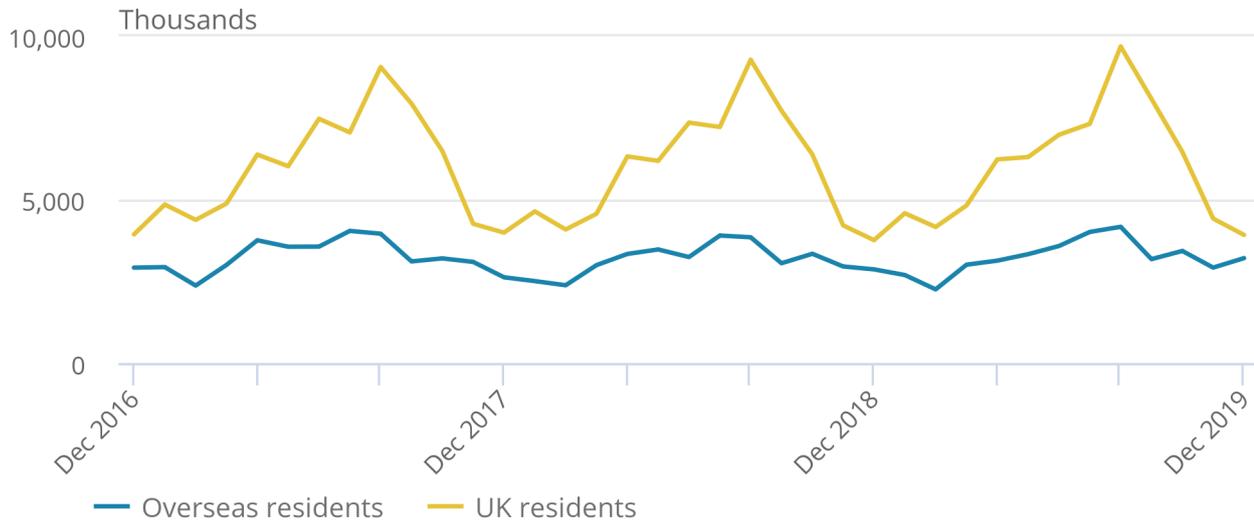
UK residents consistently make more visits abroad than foreign residents make to the UK (Figure 1). The total amount spent by UK residents during visits abroad is also higher than the total spent by foreign residents visiting the UK (Figure 2). The numbers of visits and the amounts spent vary through the year, with more in the summer. This is the case both for UK residents and foreign residents. However, UK residents showed a much sharper peak both in visits and expenditure during August 2019, 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 were greatest in the summer

Overseas residents' visits to the UK and UK residents' visits abroad by month, December 2016 to December 2019

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Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

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

Spending by overseas residents in the UK and spending by UK residents overseas by month, December 2016 to December 2019

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Spending by overseas residents in the UK and spending by UK residents overseas by month, December 2016 to December 2019



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:

- Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month – Table 1
- Purpose of overseas' residents' visits to the UK by month – Table 2
- Earnings in the UK and expenditure abroad by month – Table 5

Overseas residents made an estimated 2.9 million visits to the UK in November 2019, which was 1% fewer than in November 2018 (Figure 3). Overseas residents spent £1.9 billion on visits to the UK in November 2019, which was 21% more than in November 2018.

Overseas residents made an estimated 3.2 million visits to the UK in December 2019, which was 12% more than in December 2018 (Figure 3). Overseas residents spent £2.3 billion on visits to the UK in December 2019, which was 38% more than in December 2018.

During the period October to December 2019, there were 9.6 million visits to the UK, which was 4% more than in the corresponding period a year earlier. Overseas residents spent £6.6 billion in the UK over this period, which was 26% more than in the previous year.

Different trends were observed for different areas of the world for this three-month period: there was an increase of 19% in visits to the UK from North American residents to 1.1 million, and visits from residents of “other countries” (countries outside Europe and North America) increased by 16% to 1.5 million. Visits by European residents remained the same at 6.9 million.

Considering the reasons for visiting the UK, the number of holiday visits increased by 10% to 3.8 million for this period, compared with the previous year. Business visits decreased by 1% to 2.1 million, and visits to friends and relatives increased by 3% to 3.1 million.

Table 1: Main visit and spending estimates for overseas residents' visits to the UK in December 2019

	Visits (thousands)	% change from year earlier	Earnings (£ million)	% change from year earlier
Non-seasonally adjusted				
December 2019	3,210	+12	2,310	+38
October to December 2019	9,560	+4	6,570	+26
Year-to-date 2019	38,920	+3	25,490	+11
Latest 12 months	38,920	+3	25,490	+11
Seasonally adjusted				
July 2019	3,220	+2	2,120	+19
August 2019	3,350	+7	2,150	+13
September 2019	3,250	+4	2,110	+25
October 2019	3,330	+3	2,290	+18
November 2019	3,170	+1	2,250	+20
December 2019	3,620	+12	2,570	+40

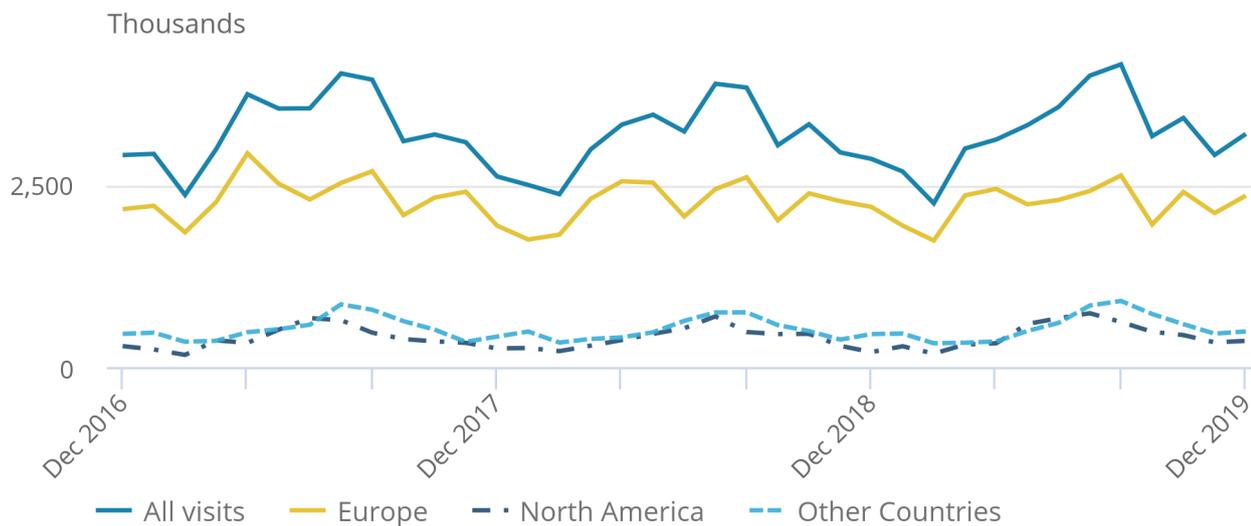
Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

Figure 3: Visits to the UK by overseas residents increased by 4% in the three months to December 2019, compared with the same period a year earlier

Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month, December 2016 to December 2019

Figure 3: Visits to the UK by overseas residents increased by 4% in the three months to December 2019, compared with the same period a year earlier

Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month, December 2016 to December 2019



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:

- UK residents' visits abroad by month – Table 3
- Purpose of UK residents' visits abroad by month – Table 4
- Earnings in the UK and expenditure abroad by month – Table 5

There were an estimated 4.4 million visits overseas by UK residents in November 2019, which was 5% more than in November 2018. UK residents spent £3.1 billion on visits overseas in November 2019, which was 21% more than in November 2018.

There were an estimated 3.9 million visits overseas by UK residents in December 2019, which was 4% more than in December 2018. UK residents spent £2.4 billion on visits overseas in December 2019, which was 4% more than in December 2018.

During the period October to December 2019, there were 14.8 million visits abroad by UK residents, which was 3% more than in the corresponding period a year earlier. UK residents spent £10.0 billion on these visits, which was 12% more than in the previous year.

There were 2.5 million visits to “other countries” (countries outside Europe and North America) over this three-month period, an increase of 6% when compared with the same period a year earlier. There were 11.4 million visits to European countries, which was an increase of 3%, while visits to North America decreased by 5% (at 0.9 million).

Considering the reasons for visits, holiday visits increased by 2% (to 9.2 million) from the same period in the previous year and business visits increased by 1% (to 1.7 million). Visits to friends and relatives also increased by 8% (at 3.6 million).

Table 2: Main visit and spending estimates for UK residents' visits abroad in December 2019

	Visits (thousands)	Change from year earlier (percentage)	Expenditure (£ million)	Change from year earlier (percentage)
Non-seasonally adjusted				
December 2019	3,920	+4	2,420	+4
October to December 2019	14,800	+3	9,960	+12
Year-to-date 2019	72,970	2	48,640	+7
Latest 12 months	72,970	2	48,640	+7
Seasonally adjusted				
July 2019	6,290	+3	4,060	+4
August 2019	6,340	+4	4,200	+11
September 2019	6,180	+7	4,250	+15
October 2019	6,100	1	4,270	+11
November 2019	6,140	3	4,290	+20
December 2019	6,110	+5	4,120	+5

Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

Figure 4: Visits overseas by UK residents increased by 3% in the three months to December 2019, compared with the same period a year earlier

UK residents' visits abroad by month, non-seasonally adjusted, December 2016 to December 2019

Figure 4: Visits overseas by UK residents increased by 3% in the three months to December 2019, compared with the same period a year earlier

UK residents' visits abroad by month, non-seasonally adjusted, December 2016 to December 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

6 . Links to related statistics

[Travel trends](#): the latest article ([Travel trends: 2018](#)) was published on 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, provided in SPSS and Excel format.

[Overseas travel and tourism quarterly](#): the latest article (for [Quarter 3 \(July to Sept\) 2019](#)) was published on 24 January 2020. 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.

7 . Quality and methodology

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [International Passenger Survey \(IPS\) QML](#).

The IPS QMI report outlines the definitions and sample methodology.

Accuracy of IPS estimates

This subsection 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 the Things you need to know about this release section.

Figures for the most recent months are provisional and subject to revision in light of more accurate data on passenger figures becoming available at the end of each quarter and additional passenger data obtained at the end of each year.

IPS monthly estimates are revised in line with the [IPS revisions policy](#). The revisions policy is available in the IPS QMI report to assist users in understanding the cycle and frequency of data revisions. Users are strongly advised to read this policy before using these 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 that are 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 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, 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.

The accuracy of the estimates is expressed in terms of [confidence intervals](#). The confidence interval is a range within which the true value of a quantity lies with known probability, and the % confidence interval expresses this as a percentage of the estimate. Simplifying slightly, the 95% confidence interval represents the range around the estimate from the sample into which there are 19 chances out of 20 that the true figure would fall had all passengers been interviewed. This is obtained as plus or minus 1.96 multiplied by the sampling error.

The following guidelines are provided to aid in the interpretation of the estimates, and to enable their reliability to be assessed:

- % confidence interval below 10%: precise
- % confidence interval between 10% and 20%: reasonably precise
- % confidence interval between 20% and 40%: acceptable
- % confidence interval over 40% unreliable (these estimates should be used with caution for practical purposes).

Tables 3a and 3b shows the 95% confidence intervals for the estimates of the total number of visits and expenditure for both overseas residents visiting the UK and UK residents going abroad.

Table 3a: Confidence intervals relating to overseas travel and tourism estimates
UK, November 2019

November 2019 monthly estimates	Estimate	Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate)
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	2,920	7.0%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	1,940	10.7%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	4,420	10.6%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	3,050	11.3%

Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

Table 3b: Confidence intervals relating to overseas travel and tourism estimates
UK, December 2019

December 2019 monthly estimates	Estimate	Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate)
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	3,210	8.8%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	2,310	14.8%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	3,920	9.5%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	2,420	12.9%

Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

Confidence intervals for [quarterly estimates](#) 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 three years later

Value in the latest period, Quarter 3 (July to Sept 2019)	Average over the last five years (bias)	Average over the last five years without regard to sign (average absolute revision)
GMAT 9,780	*69.5	*108.5
GMAX 18,840	*155.5	*264.5
GMAZ 6,360	*134.5	*160.5
GMBB 12,510	*118	*164

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](#)

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.

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](#).

Although data from the 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 data analysis](#) (a service governed by our [income and charging policy](#)), please get in touch using the contact details accompanying this release.