

Article

Overseas travel and tourism, provisional: January to March 2021

Quarterly estimates of visits to the UK by overseas residents, air visits abroad by UK residents and spending estimates by travellers, using the International Passenger Survey and administrative sources of passenger travel covering April to December 2020.

Contact:
Angie Osborn
socialsurveys@ons.gov.uk
+44 (0)1633 455270

Release date:
23 July 2021

Next release:
September 2021

Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [International Passenger Survey and the coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
3. [Visits to the UK: January to March 2021](#)
4. [Visits abroad by UK residents](#)
5. [Overseas travel and tourism data](#)
6. [Glossary](#)
7. [Data sources and quality](#)
8. [Related links](#)

1 . Main points

- Overseas residents made 195,000 visits by air to the UK in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2021; this was 96% less than Quarter 1 2020 as travel continues to be restricted because of coronavirus (COVID-19).
- Overseas residents spent £248 million on their visits to the UK in Quarter 1 2021; this was 94% less than in Quarter 1 2020.
- UK residents made 774,000 visits abroad by air in Quarter 1 2021, which was 94% fewer than the corresponding period the previous year, which is attributable to Covid-19.
- UK residents spent £817 million on visits abroad in the first quarter of 2021; this was 90% less than in Quarter 1 2020.
- This release only includes visits by air as insufficient sea and tunnel data were collected because of coronavirus restrictions.

2 . International Passenger Survey and the coronavirus (COVID-19)

This article analyses data from the International Passenger Survey (IPS), which collects details from overseas residents leaving the UK, and UK residents returning home. Sea and tunnel data are excluded as the numbers are too small; because of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions it wasn't possible to interview on board Dover ferries or the EuroTunnel. Overall, sea and tunnel numbers are much lower than pre-COVID and show a 75% drop in passengers.

The figures published in this article, for April to December 2020, are based on administrative sources and modelling, and the methods used are described in [Section 7: Data sources and quality](#).

3 . Visits to the UK: January to March 2021

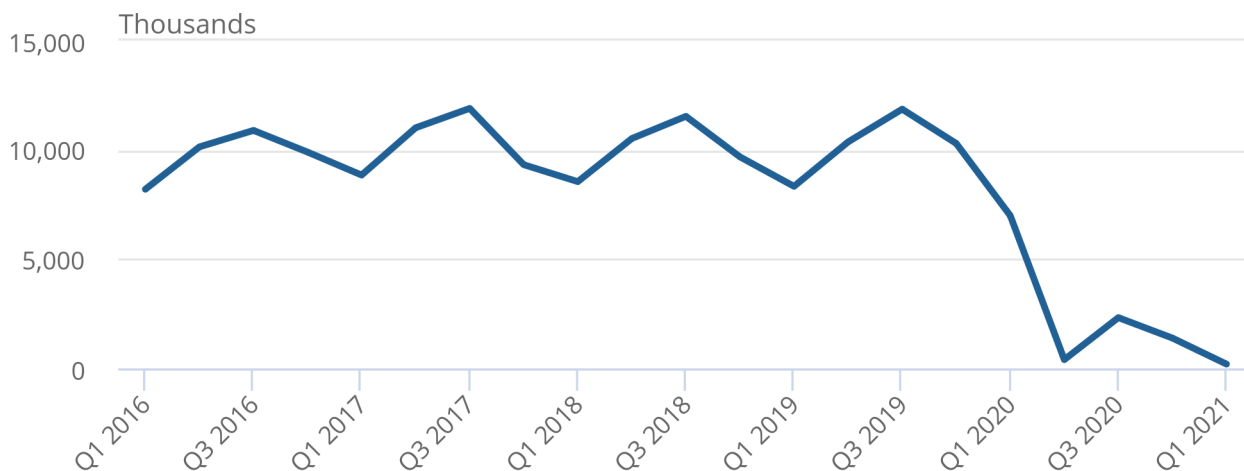
Overseas residents made a total of 195,000 visits to the UK during the first quarter of 2021, a decrease of 96% compared with the same period a year earlier.

Figure 1: Overseas residents' visits to the UK by quarter

Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 2021 (air only)

Figure 1: Overseas residents' visits to the UK by quarter

Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 2021 (air only)



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey and Overseas travel and tourism

Although all visits to the UK were low in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2021, most were made to visit friends and relatives (127,000). Very few holiday visits were taken (7,000) and business trips were also low at just 20,000.

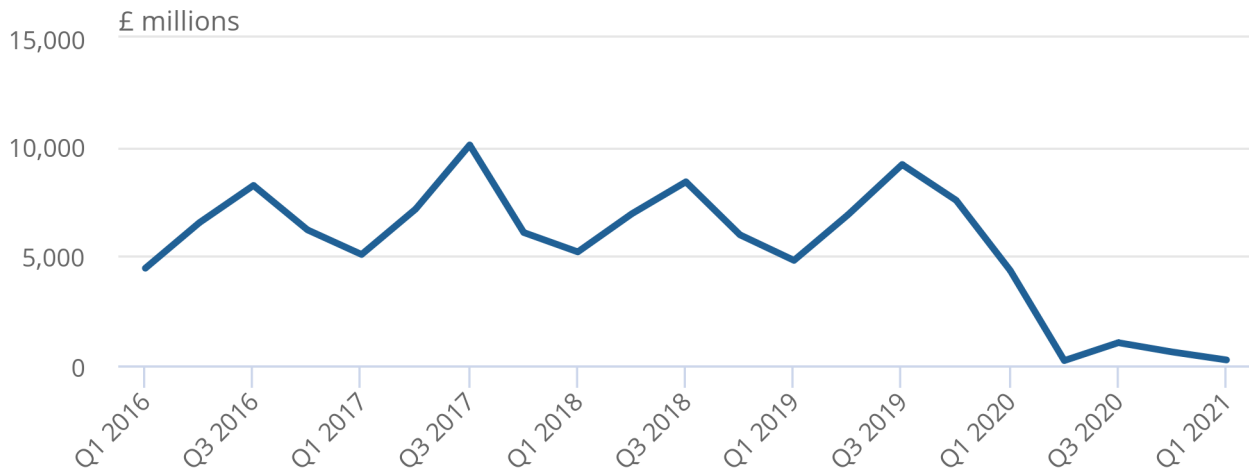
Estimated spending in the UK by overseas visitors decreased by 94% to £248 million in Quarter 1 2021 when compared with Quarter 1 2020. Similar levels of decrease were seen for all areas of the world.

Figure 2: Spending by overseas residents' in the UK by quarter

Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 2021 (air only)

Figure 2: Spending by overseas residents' in the UK by quarter

Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 2021 (air only)



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey and Overseas travel and tourism

4 . Visits abroad by UK residents

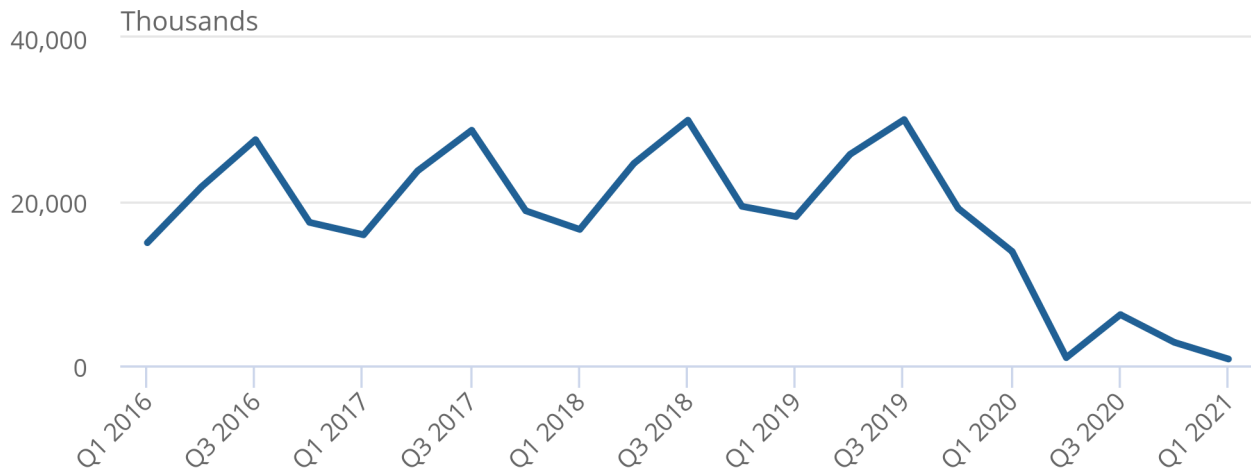
UK residents made 774,000 visits abroad by air in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2021, 94% fewer than the same quarter in 2020. The largest number of visits was made to Europe (396,000), but they still saw a fall of 95%.

Figure 3: UK residents' visits abroad by quarter

Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 2021 (air only)

Figure 3: UK residents' visits abroad by quarter

Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 2021 (air only)



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey and Overseas travel and tourism

Holidays were the least likely reason for UK residents' visits abroad. In Quarter 1 2021, there were just 49,000 holidays. Visits to friends or relatives were the most common reason for travelling accounting for 76% of all visits (587,000).

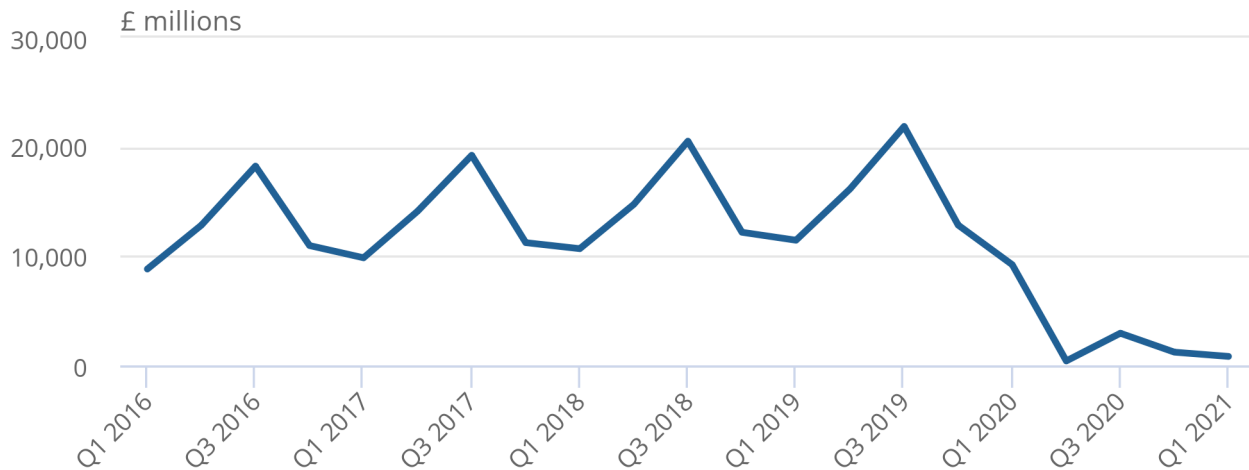
UK residents spent £817 million during visits abroad in Quarter 1 2021, this was a decrease of 90% when compared with the same period in 2020.

Figure 4: Spending by UK residents' abroad by quarter

Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 2021 (air only)

Figure 4: Spending by UK residents' abroad by quarter

Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 2021 (air only)



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey and Overseas travel and tourism

5 . Overseas travel and tourism data

[Estimates of UK residents' visits and spending abroad](#)

Dataset | Released 23 July 2021

Quarterly estimates of UK residents' visits and spending abroad from the International Passenger Survey, using administrative sources and modelling.

[Estimates of overseas residents' visits and spending in the UK](#)

Dataset | Released 23 July 2021

Quarterly estimates of overseas residents' visits and spending from the International Passenger Survey, using administrative sources and modelling.

6 . Glossary

Visits

The figures relate to the number of completed visits, not the number of visitors. Anyone entering or leaving more than once in the same period is counted on each visit.

Overseas visitor

An overseas visitor 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).

Visiting multiple countries

When a resident of the UK has visited more than one country, expenditure and stay are allocated to the country stayed in for the longest time.

Miscellaneous visits

Visits for miscellaneous purposes include those for study, to attend sporting events, for shopping, health, religious or other purposes, together with visits for more than one purpose when none predominates (for example, visits both on business and on holiday). Overseas visitors staying overnight in the UK on their way to other destinations are also included in miscellaneous purposes.

Earnings and expenditure

Earnings refer to spending in the UK by overseas residents, whereas expenditure refers to spending abroad by UK residents.

7 . Data sources and quality

The collection of the International Passenger Survey data

International Passenger Survey (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 at air and sea ports, on board vessels leaving or returning to the UK, or on board the Eurotunnel Trains. Interviews are carried out on all days of the year, apart from Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

Further guidance is available about the quality of overseas travel and tourism estimates in the IPS QMI report. This report will be updated shortly to reflect recent changes to the survey's processes.

Improved methodology for the estimates

We have introduced methodological improvements to the travel and tourism estimates from the IPS. These were introduced in the article [Travel Trends 2019](#) and relate to the survey's weighting process. The improvements are described in the article in [Improved methodology for the estimates](#) in outline. A detailed technical paper will be published in due course, setting out the changes comprehensively. These changes affect only travel and tourism and not estimates of long-term international migration.

Accuracy of the IPS estimates

The estimates presented in this article for the whole of 2020 must be treated with particular caution, since the methods used have not been fully scrutinised or tested.

Estimates for Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2021 are based on passengers travelling by air only and percentage differences shown are a comparison with visits by air during Quarter 1 2020. Both of these time periods saw data collection reduced by 2 weeks as interviewing ceased on 16 March 2020 and recommenced on 18 January 2021.

The accuracy of the estimates is expressed in terms of [confidence intervals which are shown in the data tables associated with this publication](#). For more information on how we measure and communicate uncertainty for our surveys, see our [Uncertainty and how we measure it page](#).

8 . Related links

[Travelpac: travel to and from the UK](#)

Dataset | Released 24 July 2020

Quarterly data on travel to and from the UK, taken from the International Passenger Survey (IPS). Includes details on age and sex of travellers, purpose and length of trip, and spending. These data are in a form suitable for small businesses and students. Travelpac comprises 14 of the most widely used variables, and the data are available for each year from 1993 onwards, in both SPSS and Excel formats.

[Overseas travel and tourism 2020](#)

Article | Released 24 May 2020

Annual estimates of travel and tourism visits to the UK (of less than 12 months duration) and associated earnings and expenditure between the UK and the rest of the world.

[Overseas travel and tourism, provisional: April to June 2020](#)

Article | Released 9 November 2020

Visits to the UK by overseas residents, visits abroad by UK residents and estimates of spending by travellers, using administrative sources of passenger travel data.

[Overseas travel and tourism: January, February and March 2020 provisional results](#)

Bulletin | Released 24 July 2020

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