

Statistical bulletin

Overseas travel and tourism, UK, provisional: July to September 2021

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

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

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1 . Main points

- Overseas residents made 1.3 million visits by air to the UK in Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2021; this was a decrease of 86% compared with Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2019, as travel continued to be restricted because of coronavirus (COVID-19).
- Overseas residents spent £1.2 billion on their visits to the UK in Quarter 3 2021; this was a decrease of 87% compared with Quarter 3 2019.
- UK residents made 6.1 million visits abroad by air in Quarter 3 2021; this was a decrease of 76% compared with Quarter 3 2019, which is attributable to coronavirus.
- UK residents spent £4.9 billion on visits abroad in Quarter 3 2021; this was a decrease of 78% compared with Quarter 3 2019.

This release only includes visits by air, as insufficient sea and Eurotunnel data were collected because of coronavirus restrictions.

2 . International Passenger Survey and coronavirus

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 Eurotunnel data are excluded as, because of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, it was not possible to interview on board Dover ferries or the Eurotunnel. However, overall sea and Eurotunnel numbers provided by administrative data are much lower than pre-coronavirus and show a 95% drop in passengers when compared with Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2019. Sea and Eurotunnel numbers are approximately 20% of all traffic pre-coronavirus.

The figures shown for April to December 2020, are based on administrative sources and modelling, and the methods used are described in [Overseas travel and tourism provisional: April to June 2021](#). This is because the IPS was not run during this period because of coronavirus.

3 . Overseas' residents visits to the UK

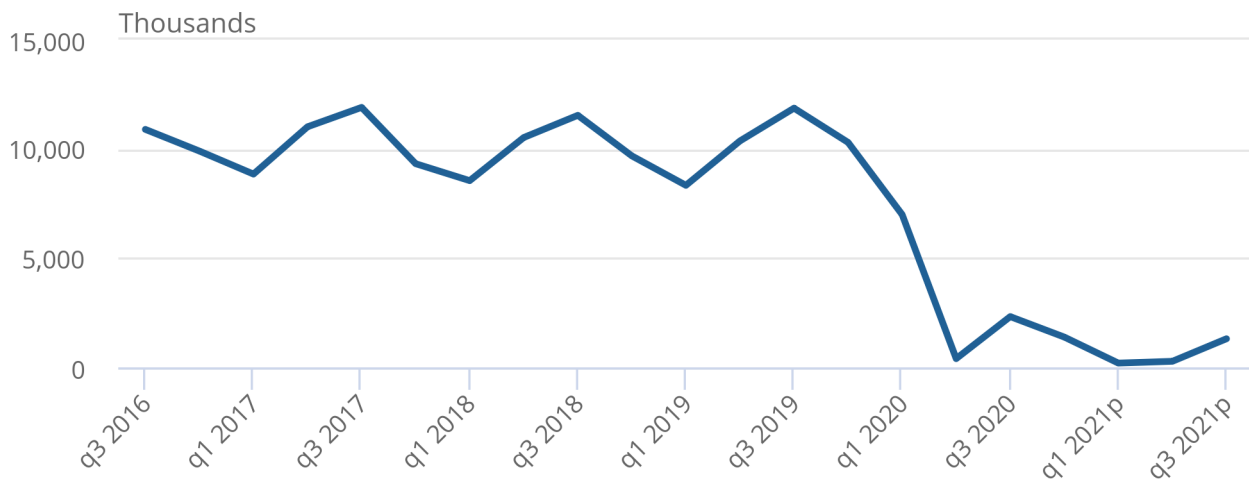
Overseas residents made a total of 1.3 million visits to the UK during Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2021, a decrease of 86% compared with Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2019.

Figure 1: Overseas residents' visits to the UK decreased by 86% when compared with Quarter 3 2019

Quarter 3 2016 (July to Sept) to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) to Quarter 3 2021, air only

Figure 1: Overseas residents' visits to the UK decreased by 86% when compared with Quarter 3 2019

Quarter 3 2016 (July to Sept) to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) to Quarter 3 2021, air only



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

Visits to the UK by overseas visitors were low in Quarter 3 2021 when compared with Quarter 3 2019. Visiting friends and relatives decreased by 70% to 872,000, holiday visits decreased by 95% to 198,000 and business trips decreased by 90% to 140,000.

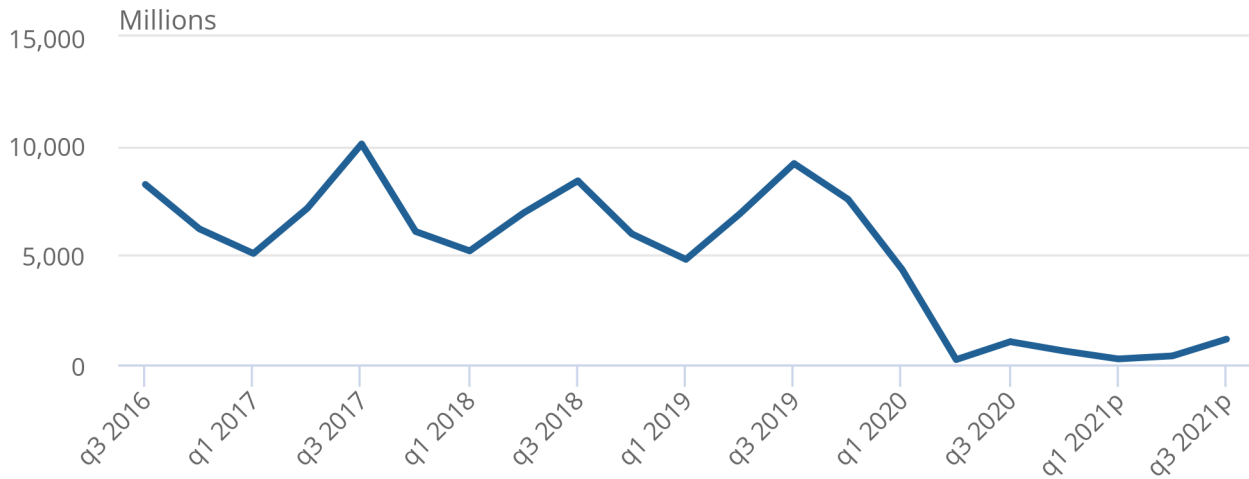
Estimated spending in the UK by overseas visitors decreased by 87% to £1.2 billion in Quarter 3 2021 when compared with Quarter 3 2019. Similar levels of decrease were seen for all areas of the world.

Figure 2: Spending by overseas residents in the UK decreased by 87% when compared with Quarter 3 2019

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) to Quarter 3 2021, air only

Figure 2: Spending by overseas residents in the UK decreased by 87% when compared with Quarter 3 2019

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) to Quarter 3 2021, air only



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

4 . Visits abroad by UK residents

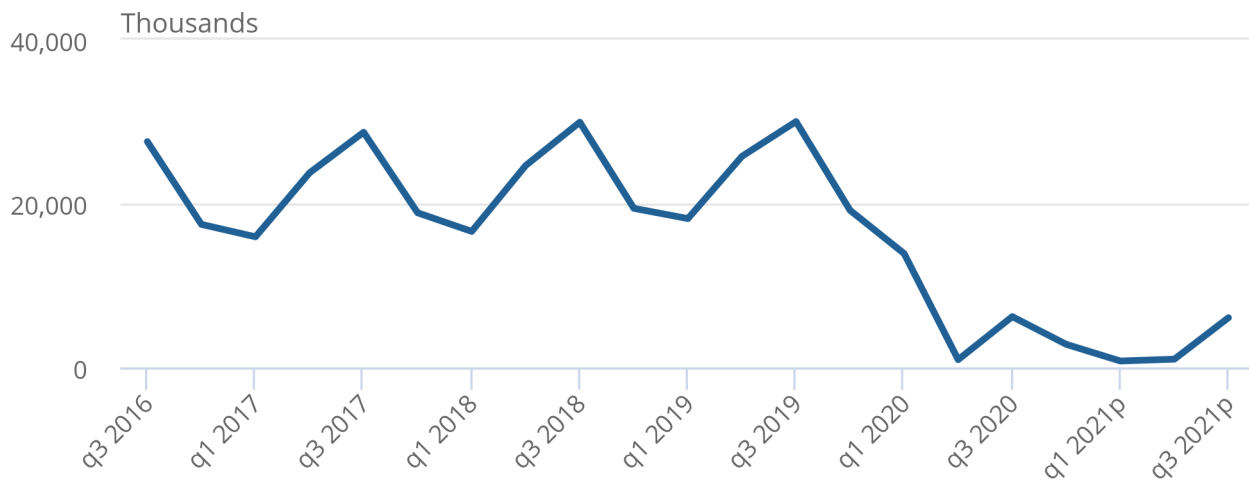
UK residents made 6.1 million visits abroad by air in Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2021, 76% fewer than Quarter 3 2019. The largest number of visits was made to Europe (5.4 million), a fall of 73%.

Figure 3: UK residents' visits abroad decreased by 76% when compared with Quarter 3 2019

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) to Quarter 3 2021, air only

Figure 3: UK residents' visits abroad decreased by 76% when compared with Quarter 3 2019

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) to Quarter 3 2021, air only



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

Business visits were the least likely reason for UK residents' visits abroad. In Quarter 3 2021, there were just 248,000 business trips. Holidays were the most common reason for travelling, accounting for 52% of all visits (3.1 million).

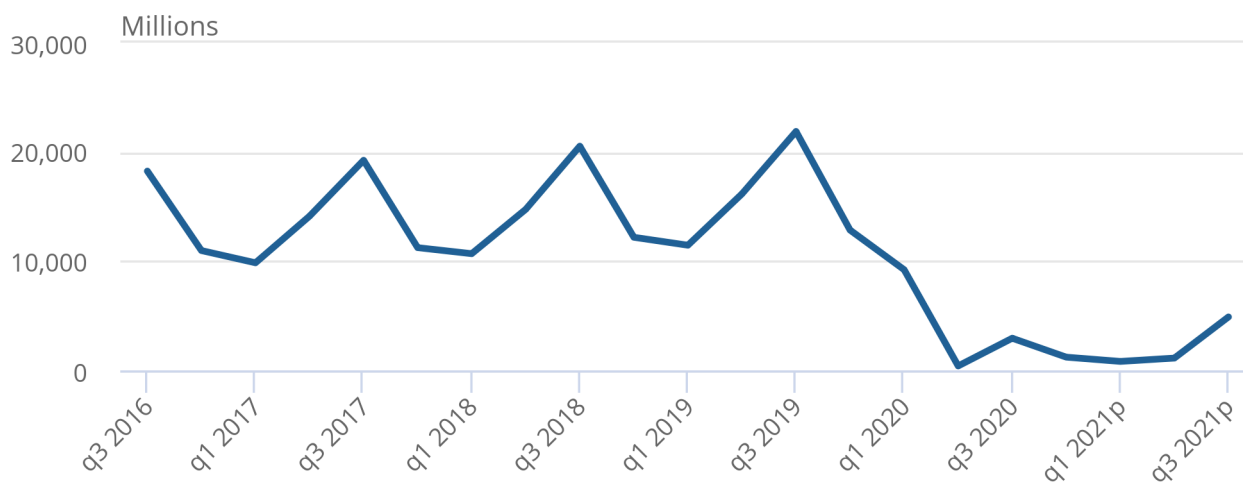
UK residents spent £4.9 billion during visits abroad in Quarter 3 2021, this was a decrease of 78% when compared with Quarter 3 2019.

Figure 4: Spending by UK residents abroad decreased by 78% when compared with Quarter 3 2019

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) to Quarter 3 2021, air only

Figure 4: Spending by UK residents abroad decreased by 78% when compared with Quarter 3 2019

Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2016 to Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 (all modes) and Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) to Quarter 3 2021, air only



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

5 . Travel and tourism review

We are currently reviewing the way travel and tourism statistics are produced. Our review provides the opportunity to gather a comprehensive understanding of user needs, and to explore how best they can be met in a changing environment.

The proposed approach represents a move towards a system that maximises the use of alternative data sources alongside survey data.

We have asked organisations and people who use travel and tourism statistics to provide feedback on this proposed approach through a user consultation exercise. This consultation phase has now closed and a report will be published based on the feedback received.

You can read more about our proposals and feedback on our approach in [Proposed future approach to measure travel and tourism statistics](#).

6 . Improved methodology for the estimates

We introduced methodological improvements to the travel and tourism estimates from the International Passenger Survey (IPS). These were explained in [Travel trends: 2019](#) and relate to the survey's weighting process. The improvements are described and outlined in [Improved methodology for the estimates](#). 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 3 (July to Sept) 2021 are based on passengers travelling by air only and percentage differences shown are a comparison with visits by air during Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2019.

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](#).

7 . Overseas travel and tourism data

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

Dataset | Released 7 February 2022

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

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

Dataset | Released 7 February 2022

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

[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 detail 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

8 . 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.

9 . Data sources and quality

The collection of the IPS 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

10 . Related links

[Overseas travel and tourism 2020](#)

Article | Released 24 May 2021

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 2021](#)

Article | Released 29 October 2021

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