

Statistical bulletin

Overseas travel and tourism: May 2022 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 2.7 million visits to the UK by overseas visitors in May 2022; this compares with just 86,000 visits by air in May 2021 when there were some travel restrictions in place.
- Overseas visitors' visits to the UK in May 2022 were significantly lower than pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels, down 21% from 3.4 million in May 2019.
- Overseas residents spent £2.1 billion in the UK in April 2022.
- UK residents made 6.0 million visits overseas in May 2022; this compares with 287,000 visits by air in May 2021.
- UK residents' visits overseas in May 2022 were lower than in May 2019, when there were 8.2 million visits overseas by UK residents (27% decrease).
- UK residents spent £4.7 billion while overseas in May 2022.

The estimates provided for 2022 should be treated with caution as the numbers are smaller than pre-coronavirus years. The data exclude the Eurotunnel as the Office for National Statistics (ONS) was unable to interview at this site. No estimates are included for any travel across the Irish border. Data for the first six months of 2021 are shown for air visits only.

2 . Trends in visits to the UK by overseas residents

In May 2022, there were an estimated 2.7 million visits to the UK, compared with 86,000 visits by air in May 2021 when some travel restrictions were in force.

Spending by overseas residents in May 2022 was estimated to be £2.1 billion, compared with £134 million spent during visits by air in May 2021.

The large increase in visits can be attributed to the easing of coronavirus (COVID-19) travel restrictions by May 2022, which were still in place in May 2021. Most travel restrictions have now been lifted worldwide.

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, travel to and from the UK was severely affected. As most travel restrictions are now lifted, it is worth looking at travel numbers pre-coronavirus to see how the latest figures compare.

In May 2019, there were an estimated 3.4 million visits to the UK with an estimated £2.3 billion being spent. Visits in May 2022 were down by 21% on this figure and spending was down by 10%.

In April 2022, visitor numbers were down 33% on pre-pandemic levels in April 2019. This shows visitor numbers are still short of pre-pandemic levels but are getting nearer.

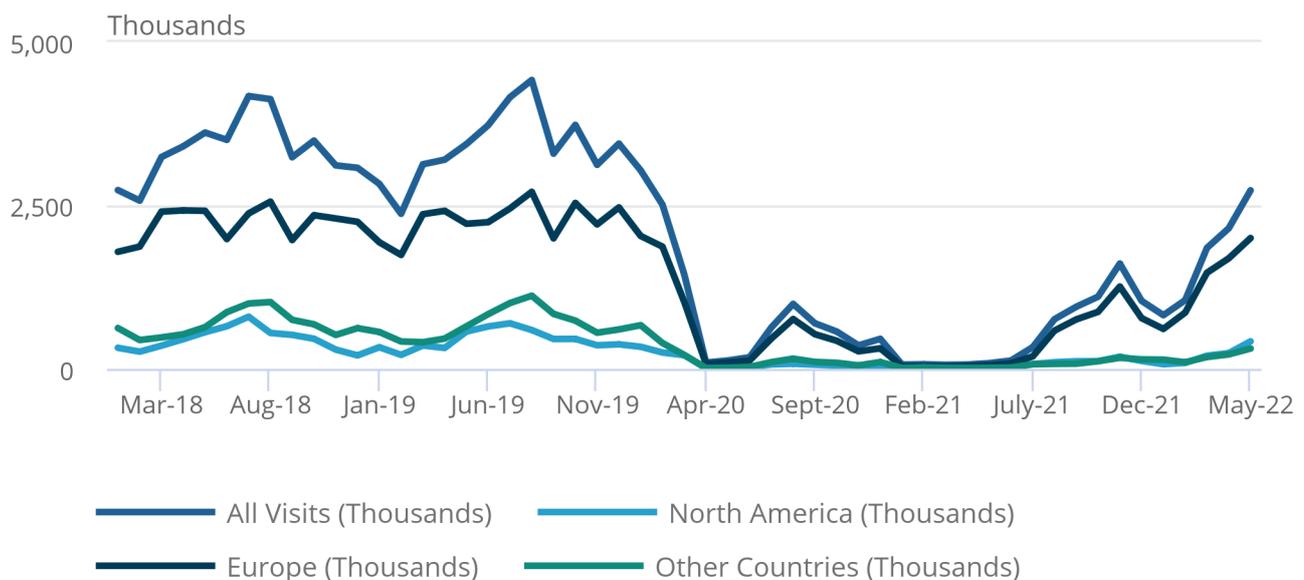
Holiday visits are back to the top of the list for reasons people visited the UK, with 1.0 million visits being made for this reason. This is 38% of the total. The next most common reason was visiting friends or relatives at 34%. This was the most popular reason for travel during the coronavirus pandemic.

Figure 1: European and North American residents helped to push visits to the UK in May 2022 up higher than the previous year

Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month, January 2018 to May 2022

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Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month, January 2018 to May 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

3 . Trends in overseas visits by UK residents

May 2022 saw UK residents make 6.0 million visits overseas. This compares with 287,000 visits by air in May last year.

The amount of money UK residents spent in May was £4.7 billion compared with £344 million spent during visits by air in May 2021.

As with visits to the UK, the lifting of coronavirus (COVID-19) travel restrictions can explain the large increase in numbers.

There were 8.2 million overseas visits made by UK residents in May 2019 before the coronavirus pandemic. These visitors spent an estimated £5.0 billion. In May 2022, visits were 27% down on these numbers and spending was down by 5%.

Visits abroad in April 2022 were 33% down on pre-pandemic levels. The fall in visits in May 2022 compared with pre-pandemic levels has seen an improvement but not as much as visits to the UK detailed in Section 2. This slower growth of UK residents travelling abroad could be influenced by the disruption at airports across the UK caused by staff shortages or by the rising cost of living. This could mean UK residents are more reluctant or less able to go abroad.

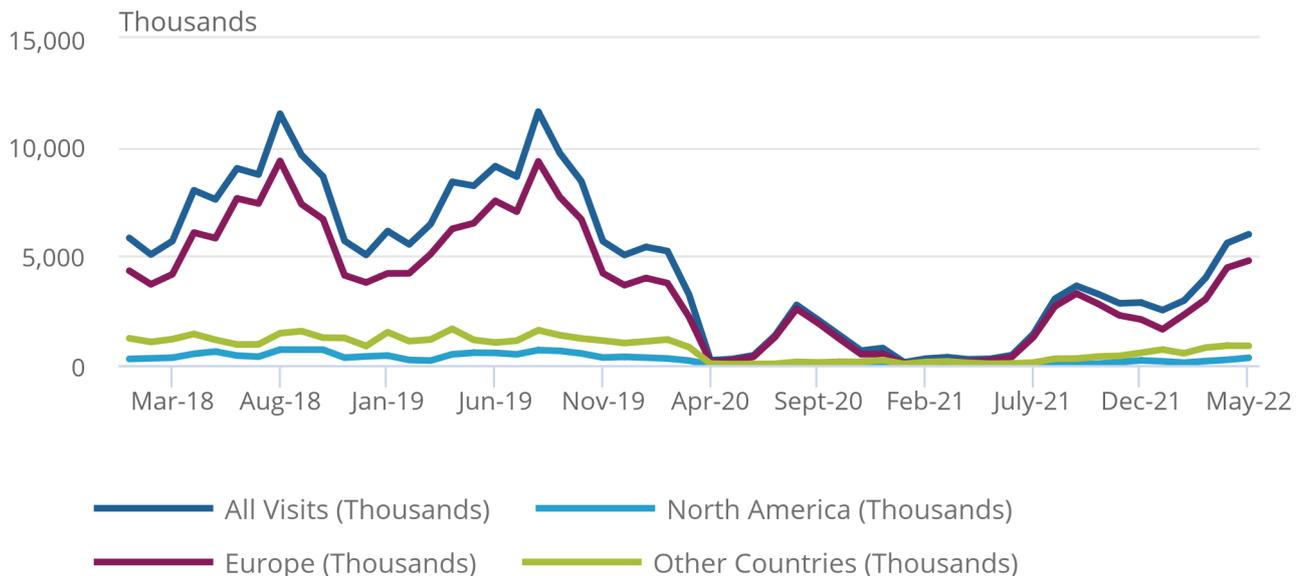
The most common reason for UK residents travelling overseas was going on holiday with 64% (3.9 million) of visits being made for this reason. After going on holiday, visiting friends or family was the next most common reason for travel. There were 1.5 million visits made for this reason in May 2022.

Figure 2: The number of UK residents' visits abroad increased between May 2021 and May 2022 but were 72 percent of the pre-pandemic numbers

UK residents' visits overseas by month, January 2018 to May 2022

Figure 2: The number of UK residents' visits abroad increased between May 2021 and May 2022 but were 72 percent of the pre-pandemic numbers

UK residents' visits overseas by month, January 2018 to May 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Notes:

1. The monthly figures for the first two quarters of 2021 (Jan to June) do not match the total quarterly figures as these estimates exclude visits and spend for sea travel.

4 . Overseas travel and tourism data

[Overseas travel and tourism monthly](#)

Dataset | Released 20 September 2022

Seasonally and non-seasonally adjusted estimates of completed international visits to and from the UK.

[Overseas travel and tourism time series](#)

Dataset | Released 20 September 2022

Seasonally and non-seasonally adjusted estimates of completed international visits to and from the UK. Based on International Passenger Survey data.

5 . 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.

Day visits

Trips that do not involve an overnight stay abroad by UK residents, as well as day trips to the UK by overseas residents, are included in the total figures for visits and expenditure. However, figures presented at lower levels of geography relate to overnight stays only.

Overseas visitor

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 who are 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 for other purposes, together with visits for more than one purpose, where 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, and expenditure refers to spending abroad by UK residents.

6 . Measuring the 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. They carry out interviews 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.

We have made methodological improvements to the travel and tourism estimates from the IPS. These relate to the survey's weighting process and were used to produce the data presented in this bulletin. The improvements were introduced in our [Travel trends: 2019 article](#) and are described in [Section 5: Improved methodology for the estimates](#). A detailed technical paper will be published in due course, comprehensively setting out the changes. These changes affect only travel and tourism and not estimates of long-term international migration.

The new method was used to produce final results for 2019 and a revised series for 2009 to 2018. The effects of the new method, and how these differ from the old, are presented in Section 6: Impacts of the new IPS methodology, in our [Travel trends: 2019 article](#).

7 . Data sources and quality

Methods used to produce these estimates

Apart from the time when the survey was not running (16 March 2020 to 18 January 2021), figures shown are produced from results of the International Passenger Survey (IPS). These results do not include any travel via the Eurotunnel vehicle trains, as the trains were isolated, and no interviewing could take place. It was also not possible to obtain any survey results from Dover to France until August 2021. It should be noted that there was very little travel-related traffic at that time. Results for when the survey was not operating were limited to totals, and the method used can be found in [Section 6 of our Overseas travel and tourism, provisional: April to June 2020 bulletin](#). Although traffic volumes have increased during 2021, figures should be treated with caution. This is because the numbers are much smaller than in the past and are subject to higher sampling errors than previous estimates released.

Accuracy of the IPS estimates

Estimates produced from the IPS are subject to sampling errors 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 in 2021 is much smaller than in previous years because of the travel restrictions resulting from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

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.

The estimates presented in this article make the best use of the available data and methods to produce estimates of international visits and spending. However, as noted, the numbers are small, and the results should be treated with caution.

Uncertainty

The accuracy of the estimates is expressed in terms of [confidence intervals](#). For more information on how we measure and communicate uncertainty for our surveys, see our [Uncertainty and how we measure it web page](#).

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)

Table 1 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 1: Confidence intervals relating to overseas travel and tourism estimates, May 2022

May 2022 monthly estimates	Estimate	Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate)
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	2,730	9.9%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	2,110	7.4%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	6,000	5.5%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	4,740	5.2%

Source: Office for National Statistics - International Passenger Survey

8 . Related links

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

Dataset | Released 1 July 2022

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.

[Travel trends: 2021](#)

Article | Released 15 June 2022

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, UK, provisional: July to September 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 7 February 2022

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

[Overseas travel and tourism: April 2022 provisional results](#)

Bulletin | Released 24 June 2022

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

9 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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