

Article

Travel trends: 2022

Annual estimates of completed international visits to and from the UK and earnings and expenditure associated with these visits.



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1 . Main points

- Overseas residents made 31.2 million visits to the UK in 2022; this was higher than in 2021 (6.4 million) and can be attributed to the easing of coronavirus (COVID-19) travel restrictions towards the end of 2021.
- Overseas residents spent £26.5 billion on their visits to the UK in 2022; this was an increase of £20.9 billion compared with visits in 2021.
- UK residents made 71.0 million visits abroad in 2022, this compares with total visits of 19.1 million in 2021.
- UK residents spent £58.5 billion on visits abroad in 2022; this was £43.0 billion more than in 2021.
- The most frequent reason for visits was for holidays, both for UK residents visiting abroad and overseas residents visiting the UK; this has reverted to a more traditional reason after the coronavirus pandemic, when the most common reason for travel was to see friends and relatives.

2 . Travel and tourism statistics and coronavirus (COVID-19)

Travel and tourism statistics are usually based on the results of the International Passenger Survey (IPS), but the survey was suspended on 16 March 2020 because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. No IPS data were collected from this date until the survey restarted on 18 January 2021.

For further details on how estimates for the missing data were produced see [Section 8: Data sources and quality](#). The data collected post-pandemic are not as complete as in other years and some tables have missing cells because of a limited number of visits to and from different countries.

Data collection was not restarted at the Eurotunnel vehicle terminal until July 2022.

3 . Overseas visits to the UK and UK visits abroad: 2022

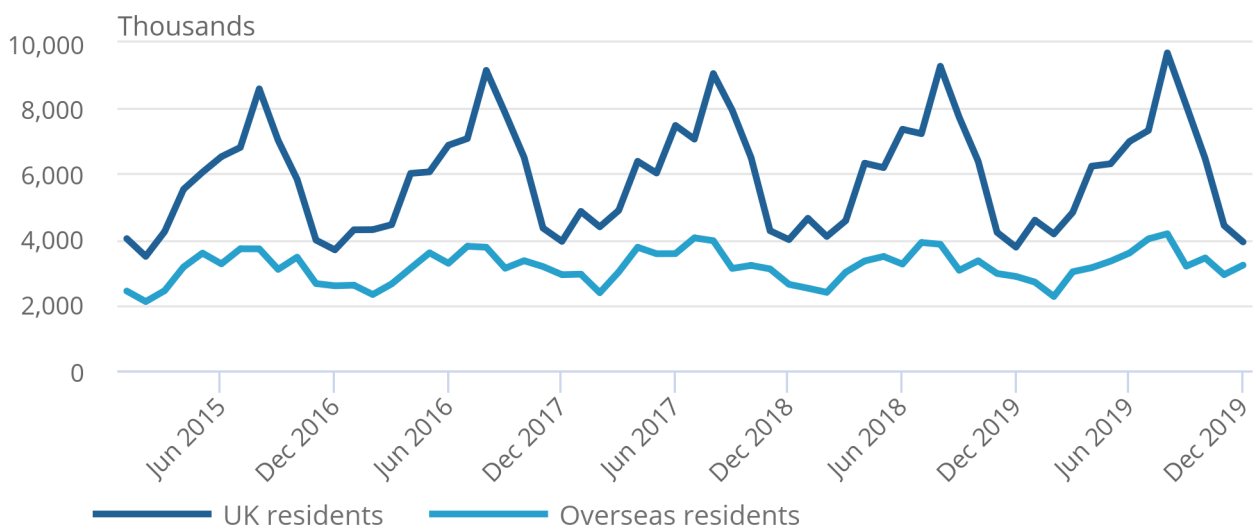
Normal seasonal trends in the last few years were disrupted because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. During 2022, a more usual pattern of visits emerged with most visits to and from the UK being in the summer months, peaking in August. The difference in travel patterns for 2021 and 2022 compared with pre-pandemic trends can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: Seasonal trend shown for visits to and from the UK pre-pandemic from 2015 to 2019

Overseas and UK residents' visits to and from the UK, January 2015 to December 2019

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Overseas and UK residents' visits to and from the UK, January 2015 to December 2019



Source: International Passenger Survey 2022 from the Office for National Statistics

Figure 2: More traditional pattern of visits emerging in 2022

Overseas and UK residents' visits to and from the UK, January 2021 to December 2022

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Overseas and UK residents' visits to and from the UK, January 2021 to December 2022



Source: International Passenger Survey 2022 from the Office for National Statistics

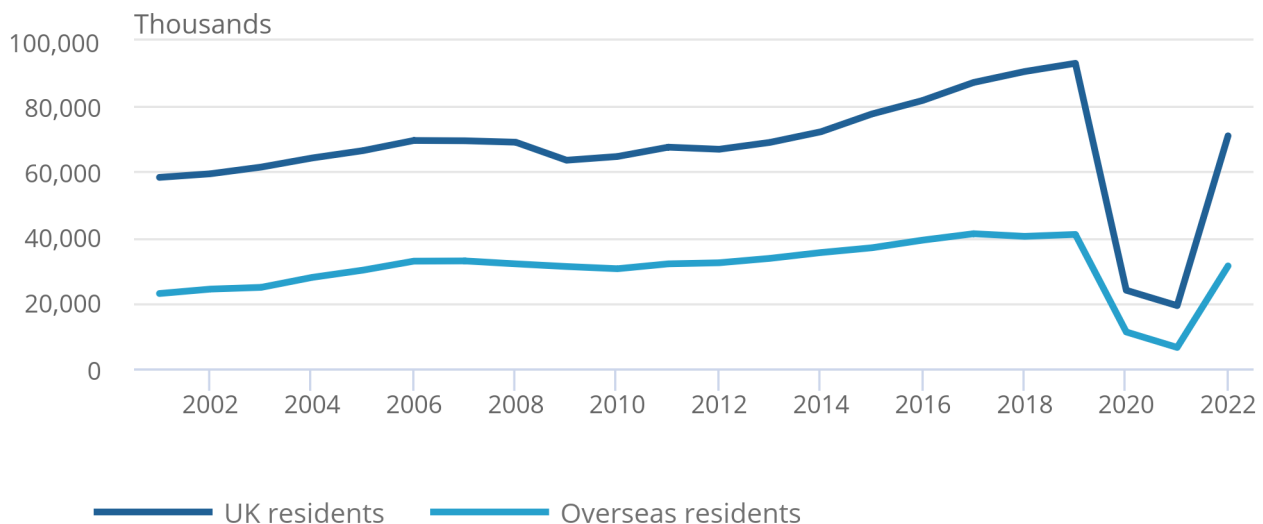
There were 31.2 million visits to the UK during 2022, an increase of 24.9 million visits compared with 2021 (Figure 3). UK residents' visits abroad in 2022 increased from 51.8 million to 71.0 million.

Figure 3: Visits to and from the UK are increasing but not back to the peak in 2019

Overseas and UK residents' visits to and from the UK, 2001 to 2022

Figure 3: Visits to and from the UK are increasing but not back to the peak in 2019

Overseas and UK residents' visits to and from the UK, 2001 to 2022



Source: International Travel and Tourism from the Office for National Statistics

Overseas spending in the UK increased from £5.6 billion in 2021 to £26.5 billion in 2022, an increase of £20.9 billion (Figure 4). This was a 7% decrease when compared with 2019. Overseas residents spent fewer days in the UK compared with 2021 but still one day longer than pre-pandemic years; an average of eight nights. Average spend per day was the same as in 2019 (£98 in 2019 and £100 in 2022) but average spend per visit remained high at £843; this was £696 in 2019 but £875 in 2021.

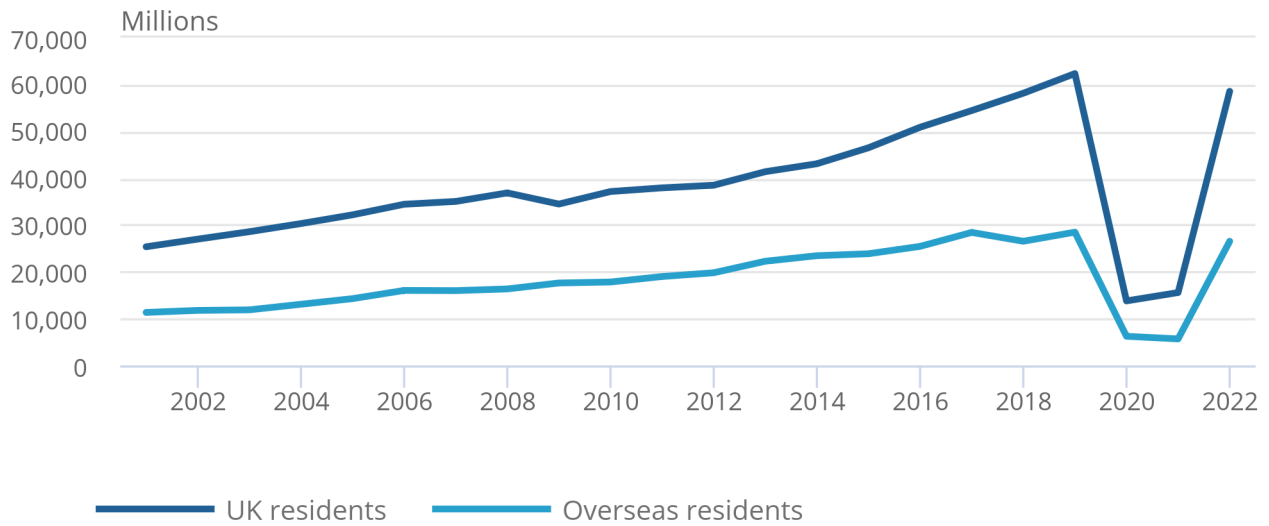
UK residents spent £58.5 billion on visits abroad in 2022, an increase of £43.0 billion compared with 2021. The average spend per visit was £823 in 2022, which was 2% more than in 2021, but 23% higher than 2019 (£670). As with overseas residents' visits, the average number of nights away decreased compared with the previous year to an average of 11 nights but this is still higher than in 2019 when it was an average of 10 days. The average spend per day rose from £69 in 2019 to £75 in 2022.

Figure 4: Spending on visits to and from the UK in 2022 is getting closer to pre-pandemic values

Overseas and UK residents spending on visits to and from the UK, 2001 to 2022

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Overseas and UK residents spending on visits to and from the UK, 2001 to 2022



Source: International Travel and Tourism from the Office for National Statistics

4 . Overseas residents' visits to the UK

As expected, visits to the UK by overseas visitors increased in 2022 when compared with 2021. These increased from 6.4 million in 2021 to 31.2 million in 2022 but was still lower than pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels when the number was estimated to be 40.9 million. This was a decrease of 24%.

There were 12.1 million holiday visits to the UK in 2022, which were 39% of the total visits. This makes holidays the most common reason for visiting the UK. This is a change from 2021 when visiting friends or relatives was the most popular reason for travel to the UK. The next most frequent reason for visiting was for visiting friends or relatives (11.8 million), which was more than twice as many visits for business reasons (5.1 million).

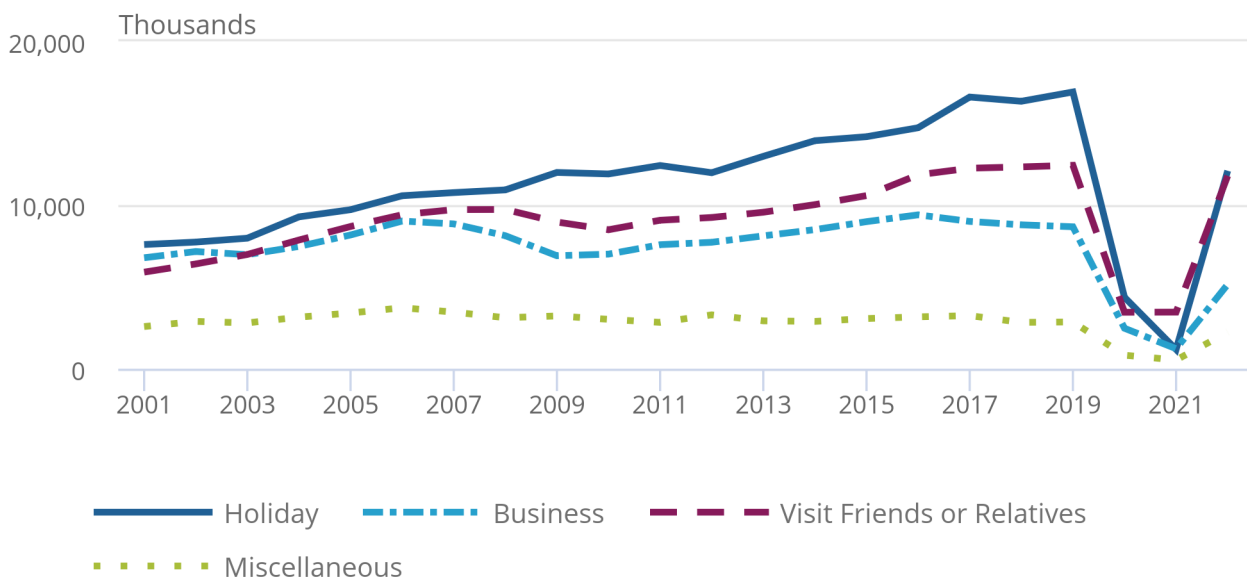
Visits by residents of North America have returned to pre-pandemic levels with holiday visits the most popular at 2.5 million out of a total 5.5 million visits. As would be expected, large increases were made by residents of all regions of the world between 2021 and 2022. Visits by those living in Europe were similar for both holiday and visiting friends and relatives (7.8 million and 7.9 million, respectively).

Figure 5: Holidays were the most frequent reason for visiting the UK in 2022

Overseas and UK residents' visits to and from the UK, January 2021 to December 2022

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Overseas and UK residents' visits to and from the UK, January 2021 to December 2022



Source: International Travel and Tourism from the Office for National Statistics

Of the 10 countries whose residents visited the UK the most frequently in 2022, eight were EU countries (Figure 6). The non-EU countries were the US and Canada.

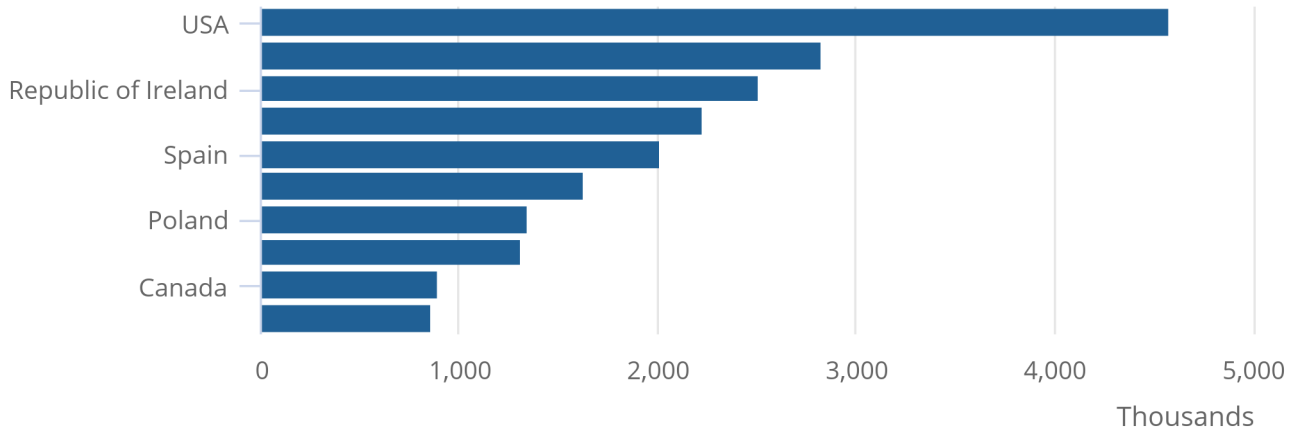
In the previous year, residents from the Republic of Ireland made the most visits to the UK, topping the US because of coronavirus travel restrictions experienced by US residents in the first half of 2021. In 2022, residents from the US made a total of 4.6 million visits. French residents (2.8 million visits) were the second most popular visitors to the UK. Canada made its way to the top 10 as Australian residents remained much lower than in previous years.

Figure 6: Residents of the US visited UK most in 2022, ahead of France and Republic of Ireland

Top 10 visiting countries to the UK, 2022

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Top 10 visiting countries to the UK, 2022



Source: International Passenger Survey 2022 from the Office for National Statistics

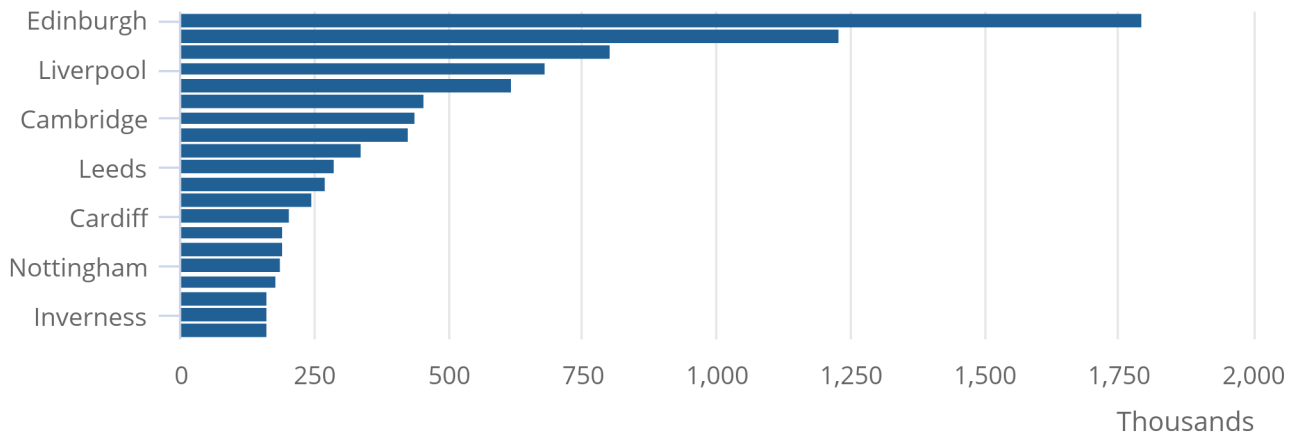
London attracted 16.1 million overnight visits in 2022, far more than any other town or city although the numbers were much smaller compared with 21.7 million in 2019. Overnight visits to cities other than London are shown in Figure 7. Edinburgh is back on top of the towns most visited outside of London, with 1.8 million visits, overtaking Manchester (1.2 million visits) and Birmingham (803,000). Some of the differences from 2021 are likely to be because of the reason for visiting has reverted to holidays and the return of visits from US residents.

Figure 7: Outside London, the towns most visited from overseas in 2022 were Edinburgh, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool

Top 20 UK towns visited for at least one night, excluding London, 2022

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Top 20 UK towns visited for at least one night, excluding London, 2022



Source: International Passenger Survey 2022 from the Office for National Statistics

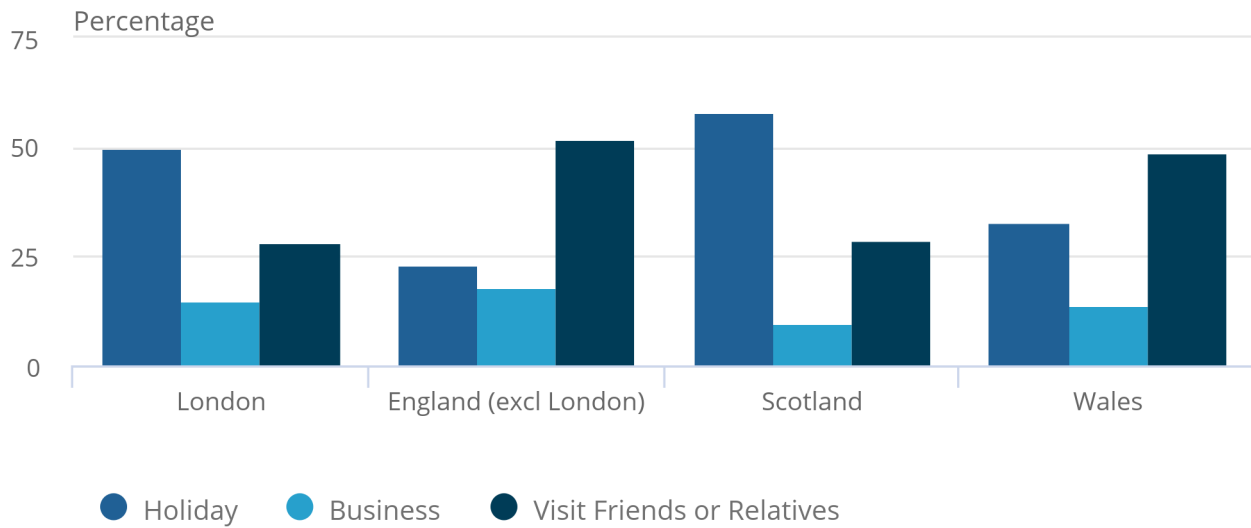
Overseas residents made 3.2 million overnight visits to Scotland in 2022, of which 58% were for holidays and 29% to visit friends or relatives (Figure 8). There were 686,000 overnight visits to Wales, where almost half were to visit friends or relatives and a third for holidays. Overnight holiday visits to London accounted for half of all visits with 28% to visit friends or relatives.

Figure 8: Scotland had the highest proportion of holiday visits compared with other regions of the UK

Proportion of purpose by regions of the UK, for overnights visits, 2022

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Proportion of purpose by regions of the UK, for overnights visits, 2022



Source: International Passenger Survey 2022 from the Office for National Statistics

5 . Visits abroad by UK residents

As with overseas residents' visits to the UK, UK residents' visits abroad increased between 2021 and 2022. There were 71.0 million visits overseas by UK residents in 2022, compared with 19.1 million visits in 2021.

When compared with pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels, visits abroad were still down. The number of visits in 2022 was 24% less than the peak in 2019, when there were 93.1 million visits.

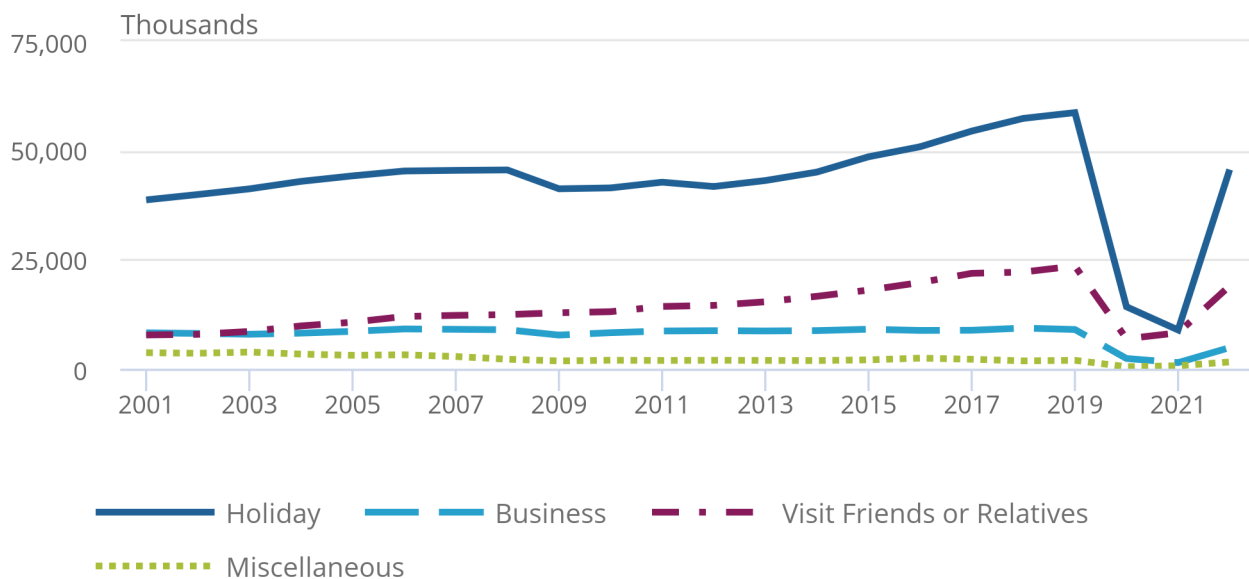
Holidays were the most popular reason for travelling abroad in 2022. There were 45.6 million holiday trips made by UK residents, 22% less than in 2019 and accounting for almost two-thirds of visits. There were 19.0 million visits overseas to visit friends or family in 2022 (19% fewer than in 2019) and 4.8 million business trips (46% fewer than in 2019).

Figure 9: Holidays were the most frequent reason for visits abroad in 2022

UK residents' visits abroad by purpose, 2001 to 2022

Figure 9: Holidays were the most frequent reason for visits abroad in 2022

UK residents' visits abroad by purpose, 2001 to 2022



Source: International Travel and Tourism from the Office for National Statistics

Europe was the most popular overseas destination visited in 2022, accounting for 79% (56.1 million) of the total visits abroad. However, this is a 23% decrease from 72.5 million in 2019. Visits to North America also fell when compared with 2019, from 5.6 million to 4.0 million visits. Visits to "other countries" (countries outside of Europe and North America) fell over the same period by 28% to 10.9 million.

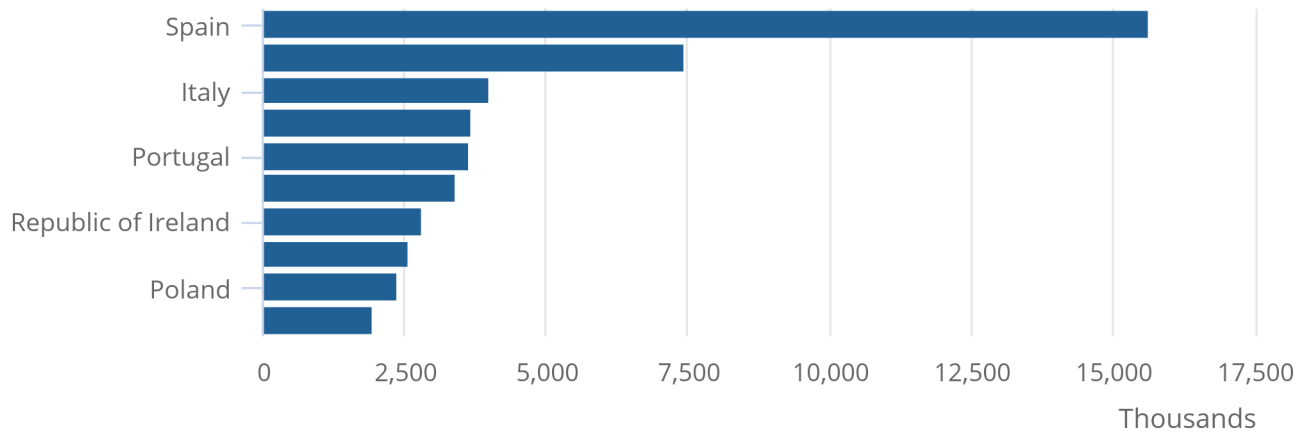
Spending continues to be near pre-pandemic levels in 2022. Estimated spending abroad by UK residents decreased by 6% from £62.3 billion in 2019 to £58.5 billion in 2022. Over half of the total spend was on holidays (£40.2 billion) with an additional £11.2 billion spent on visiting friends or relatives.

Figure 10: UK residents visited Spain the most in 2022, followed by France, Italy and Greece

Top 10 countries visited by UK residents for at least one night, 2022

Figure 10: UK residents visited Spain the most in 2022, followed by France, Italy and Greece

Top 10 countries visited by UK residents for at least one night, 2022



Source: International Passenger Survey 2022 from the Office for National Statistics

Spain and France remained the most popular countries for UK residents to visit abroad (Figure 10), but the United States dropped from 4th in 2019 to 6th in 2022 because of coronavirus travel restrictions. There were 15.6 million visits to Spain by UK residents in 2022, a decrease of 14% from 2019. Over a fifth of all visits abroad were to Spain (22%) with holidays the most popular reason. France was the second most popular country with 10% of the total visits abroad.

6 . Travel trends data

[Travel trends estimates: UK residents' visits abroad](#)

Dataset | Released 26 May 2023

Annual estimates on visits and spending by UK residents abroad, by purpose and region of visit. New methods were introduced for producing the 2019 estimates and where back dated to 2009. The datasets presented since then contain estimates produced using the new method. The other datasets presented on this page were produced using the previous method and are now superseded.

[Travel trends estimates: overseas residents in the UK](#)

Dataset | Released 26 May 2023

Annual estimates on visits and spending in the UK by overseas residents, by purpose and region of visit. New methods were introduced for producing the 2019 estimates and where back dated to 2009. The datasets presented since then contain estimates produced using the new method. The other datasets presented on this page were produced using the previous method and are now superseded.

[Travel trends estimates: overseas residents in the UK and UK residents abroad](#)

Dataset | Released 26 May 2023

Annual estimates on visits and spending of UK residents abroad and for overseas residents visiting the UK.

[Overseas travel and tourism, quarterly](#)

Dataset | Released 26 May 2023

Seasonally adjusted and non-seasonally adjusted estimates of completed international visits to and from the UK and earnings and expenditure associated with these visits.

[UK residents visits and expenditure abroad, quarterly](#)

Dataset | Released 26 May 2023

Seasonally adjusted and non-seasonally adjusted estimates of completed international visits and spending abroad by UK residents.

7 . 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.

8 . Data sources and quality

Methods used to produce these estimates

Apart from the time when the International Passenger Survey (IPS) was not running (16 March 2020 to 18 January 2021), figures shown are produced from results of the IPS. Although no interviewing took place on the Eurotunnel vehicle trains until July 2022, the passenger numbers for the whole year are included with the EuroStar data collected at the St Pancras terminal to provide an estimate of total visits.

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 IPS 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 as 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 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 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 but 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.

9 . Related links

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

Dataset | Released 26 May 2023

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

Visits to the UK by overseas residents, visits abroad by UK residents and spending estimates by travellers.

[Overseas travel and tourism, provisional: July to September 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 31 January 2023

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: December 2022 provisional results](#)

Bulletin | Released 26 April 2023

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

10 . Cite this article

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