

Article

Travel trends: 2023

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

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Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Overseas visits to the UK and UK visits abroad: 2023](#)
3. [Overseas residents' visits to the UK](#)
4. [Visits abroad by UK residents](#)
5. [Travel trends data](#)
6. [Glossary](#)
7. [Data sources and quality](#)
8. [Related links](#)
9. [Cite this article](#)

1 . Main points

- Overseas residents made 38.0 million visits to the UK in 2023; this was higher than in 2022 (31.2 million).
- Overseas residents spent £31.1 billion on their visits to the UK in 2023; this was an increase of £4.6 billion compared with visits in 2022.
- UK residents made 86.2 million visits abroad in 2023; this compares with total visits of 71.0 million in 2022.
- UK residents spent £72.4 billion on visits abroad in 2023; this was £13.9 billion more than in 2022.
- Holidays were the most popular reason for visits to London by overseas residents (53%); whereas the majority of other regions in the UK had more overseas residents visiting to see friends or relatives.
- UK residents visited Spain the most in 2023, accounting for 21% of all visits abroad; this was followed by France (11%), Italy (6%) and Greece (5%).
- Overseas residents' visits to the UK and UK residents' visits abroad remain lower than pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels from 2019; however, spending was higher in 2023 than in 2019 for both groups.

Estimates provided for 2021 and the start of 2022 should be treated with caution as the numbers are smaller than pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic years. From 2021 onwards, no estimates are included for any travel across the Irish border.

2 . Overseas visits to the UK and UK visits abroad: 2023

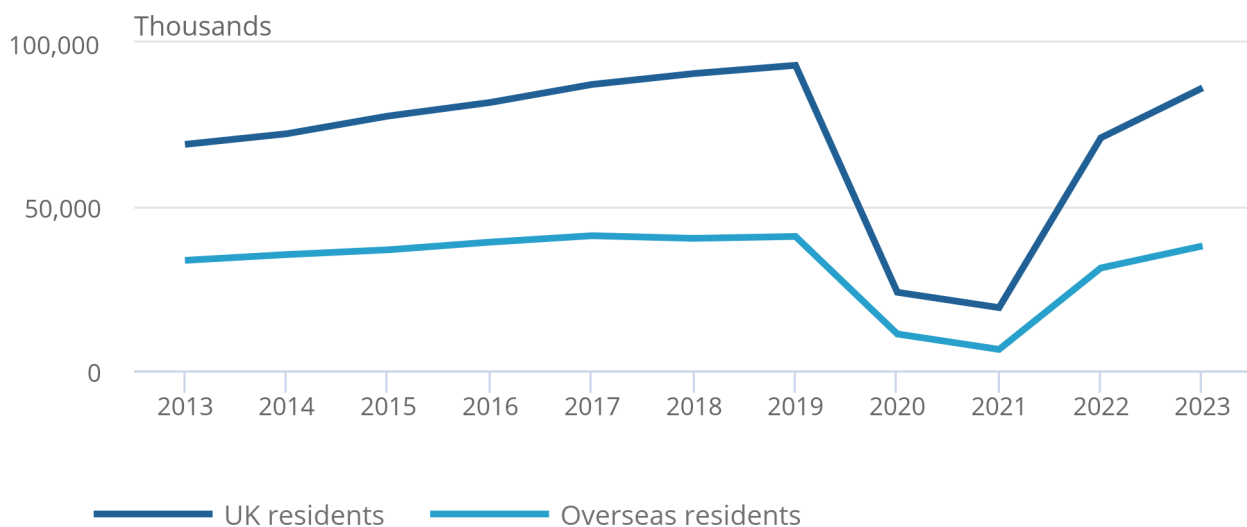
There were 38.0 million visits to the UK during 2023, an increase of 6.7 million visits compared with 2022. UK residents' visits abroad increased from 71.0 million in 2022 to 86.2 million in 2023. Despite travel and tourism trends now returning to their pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic pattern, visits to and from the UK remained lower than pre-coronavirus levels (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Visits to and from the UK continue to increase but remain lower than pre-coronavirus levels

Overseas and UK residents visits to and from the UK, 2013 to 2023

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Overseas and UK residents visits to and from the UK, 2013 to 2023



Source: International Passenger Survey 2023 from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Overseas residents' spending in the UK increased from £26.5 billion in 2022 to £31.1 billion in 2023, an increase of £4.6 billion (Figure 2). This was a 9% increase when compared with 2019.

Average spend per day was higher than pre-coronavirus levels (£98 in 2019 and £106 in 2023). Average spend per visit remained higher than pre-coronavirus levels at £814; this was £693 in 2019. The increase in spending per visit is likely driven by higher than average inflation over the same period.

UK residents spent £72.4 billion on visits abroad in 2023, an increase of £13.9 billion compared with 2022. This was a 16% increase when compared with 2019.

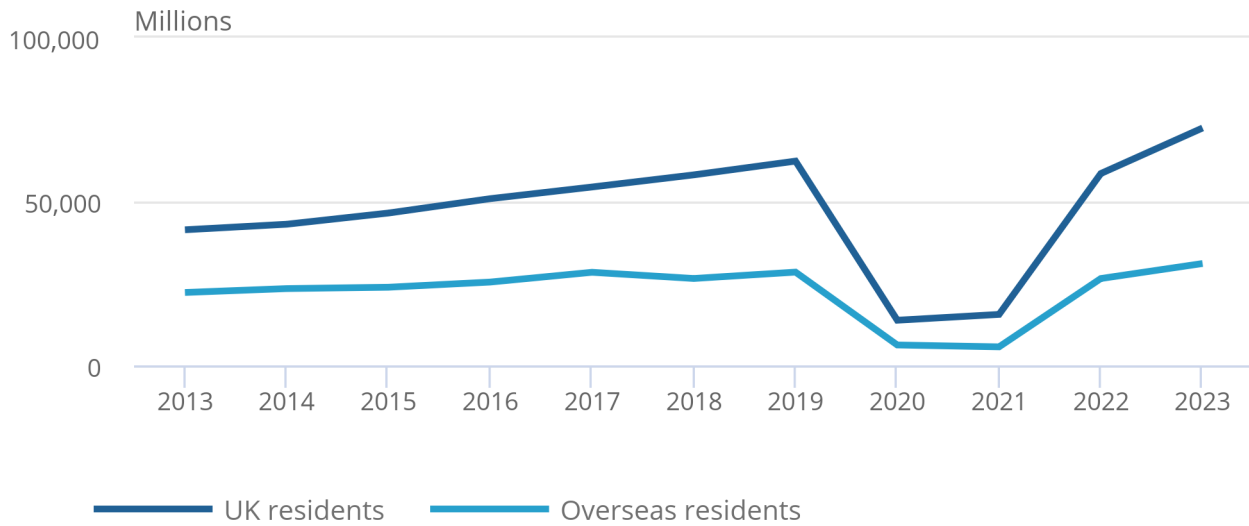
The average spend per visit was £839 in 2023, which was 2% more than in 2022 and 25% higher than 2019 (£669). The average spend per day rose from £75 in 2022 to £81 in 2023. This does not factor in inflation.

Figure 2: Spending on visits to and from the UK in 2023 were higher than pre-coronavirus values

Overseas and UK residents spending on visits to and from the UK, 2013 to 2023

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Overseas and UK residents spending on visits to and from the UK, 2013 to 2023



Source: International Passenger Survey 2023 from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest million.
2. We do not factor in inflation.

3 . Overseas residents' visits to the UK

The number of visits to the UK by overseas visitors increased in 2023 when compared with 2022. These increased from 31.2 million in 2022 to 38.0 million in 2023, but were 7% lower than pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels when the number was estimated to be 40.9 million.

Holidays were the most popular reason for visiting the UK in 2023, just as they were in 2019 (Figure 3). There were 15.9 million holiday visits to the UK by overseas residents, accounting for 42% of the total number of visits. The next most frequent reason for visiting was for visiting friends or relatives (12.8 million).

The number of visits for leisure reasons is now at similar levels to that seen in 2019, taking into account any uncertainty surrounding the International Passenger Survey (IPS) estimates. This is not yet the case for the number of business visits to the UK, which are still around 75% of 2019 levels. This smaller recovery in business trips could be attributed to the increase in remote connectivity.

Visits by residents of North America have continued to be higher than pre-coronavirus levels, with holiday visits the most popular at 3.0 million out of a total 6.1 million visits in 2023. Visits from residents in other parts of the world (not North America) remain below pre-coronavirus levels, but are much closer than they were in 2022. In 2019, there were 8.2 million visits to the UK from residents of countries outside North America and Europe (Other countries). Since the pandemic, travel by these residents had started to recover in 2022 (4.8 million visits) and further increased to 7.0 million visits in 2023.

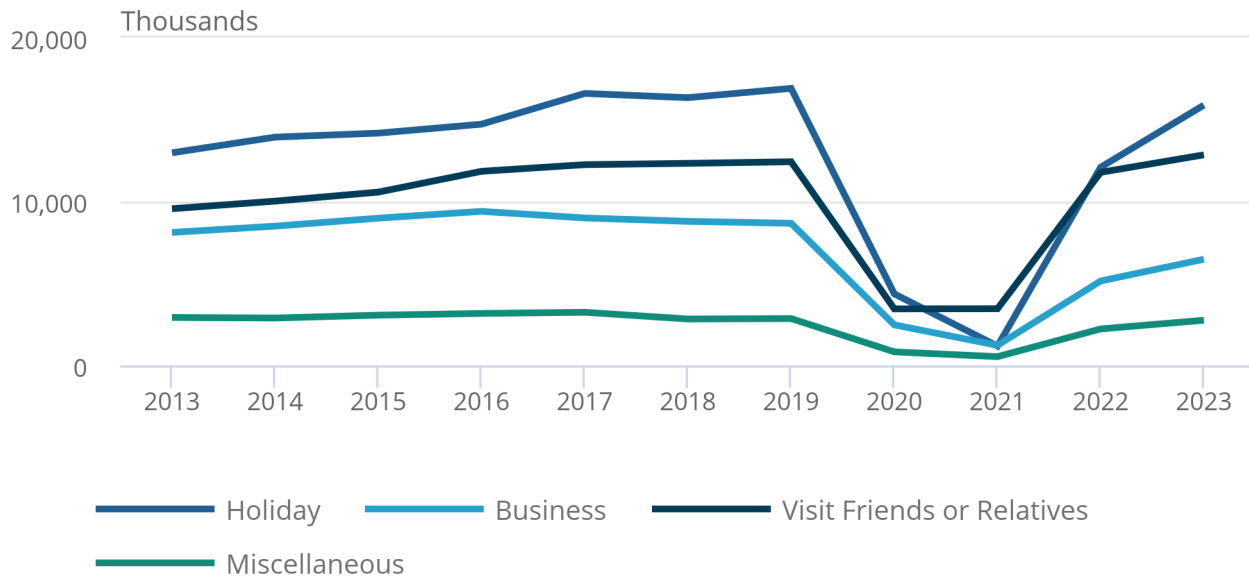
Spending was higher than pre-coronavirus levels in 2023, which could be attributed to the cost-of-living crisis taking place in the UK, as well as more visits being taken. Estimated spending in the UK by overseas residents increased by 17% from £26.5 billion in 2022 to £31.1 billion in 2023. Overseas residents spent £14.9 billion on holidays, with an additional £8.1 billion spent on visiting friends or relatives. This does not factor in inflation.

Figure 3: Holidays were the most frequent reason for visiting the UK in 2023

Overseas visits to the UK, 2013 to 2023

Figure 3: Holidays were the most frequent reason for visiting the UK in 2023

Overseas visits to the UK, 2013 to 2023



Source: International Passenger Survey 2023 from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Of the 10 countries whose residents visited the UK the most frequently in 2023, seven were EU countries (Figure 4). The non-EU countries were the United States, Australia and Canada.

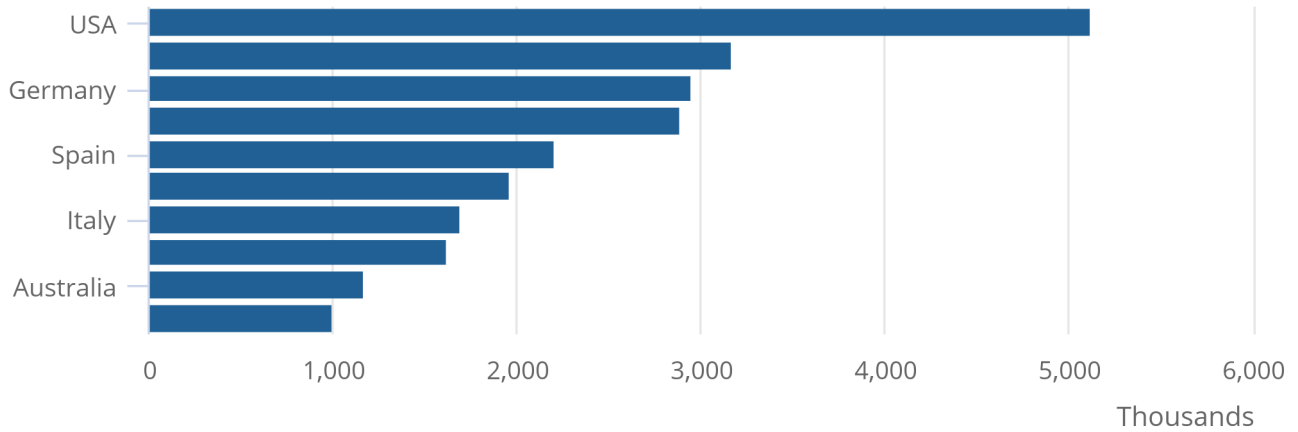
As in 2022, the United States remained the most frequent visitors in 2023, with 5.1 million visits. French residents (3.2 million visits) were the second most frequent visitors to the UK. Australia made its way back into the top 10, with a 62% increase in visits being made since 2022. The country last appeared in the top 10 back in 2019.

Figure 4: Residents of the United States visited the UK most in 2023, ahead of France and Germany

Top 10 visiting countries to the UK, 2023

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Top 10 visiting countries to the UK, 2023



Source: International Passenger Survey 2023 from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

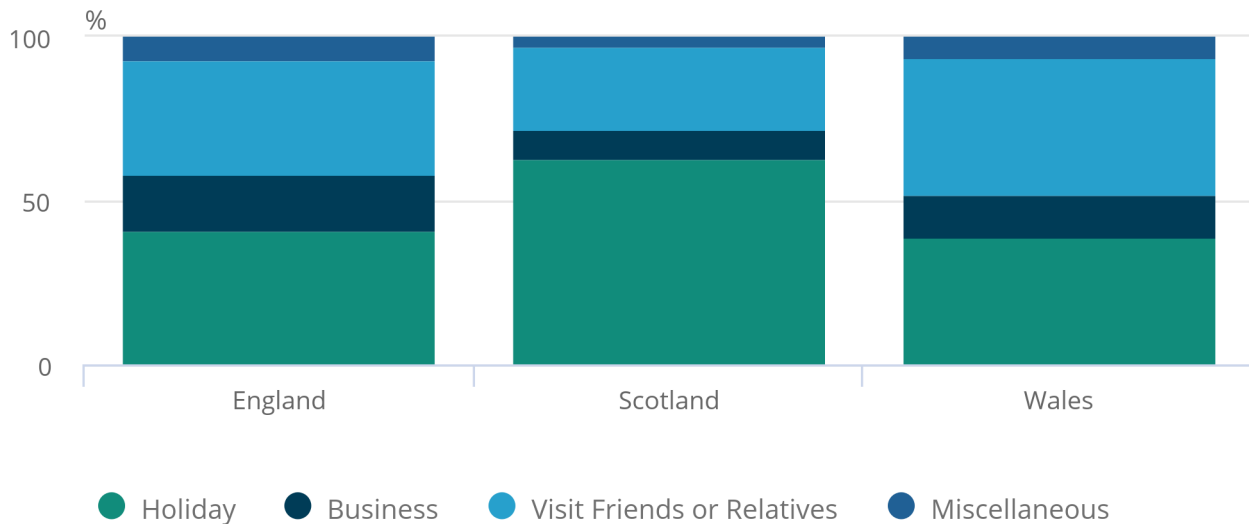
Most visits by overseas residents in 2023 were made to England (33.5 million), with holidays accounting for 41% of these visits and visiting friends or relatives a further 35% (Figure 6). Overseas residents made 4.0 million overnight visits to Scotland, of which 63% were for holidays and 25% to visit friends or relatives. There were 892,000 overnight visits to Wales, where 42% were to visit friends or relatives and 39% were for holidays.

Figure 5: Scotland had the highest proportion of overseas holiday visits compared with other regions of the UK

Proportion of purpose by regions of the UK, for overnight visits, 2023

Figure 5: Scotland had the highest proportion of overseas holiday visits compared with other regions of the UK

Proportion of purpose by regions of the UK, for overnight visits, 2023



Source: International Passenger Survey 2023 from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percentage.

The number of visits in 2023 to all regions of England remained lower than pre-coronavirus levels. In the West Midlands and South East, visits were around 20% lower, whereas in the North West and East of England, the number of visits was very close to that seen in 2019.

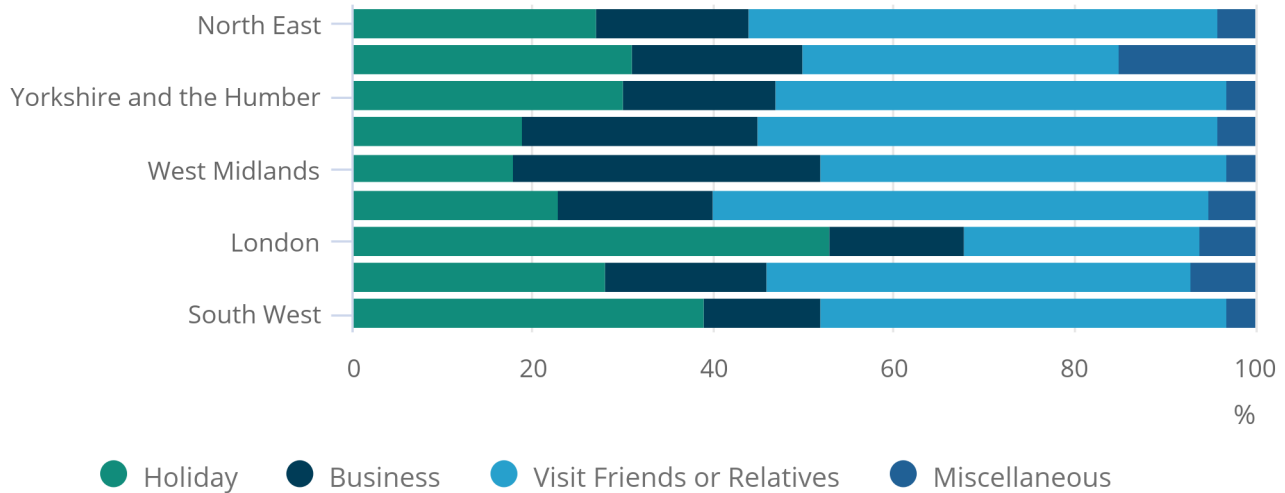
Overnight holiday visits to London accounted for about half of all visits (53%), with 26% to visit friends or relatives. In contrast, nearly half of all visits (55%) to the East of England were to visit friends or relatives, with 23% for holiday reasons (Figure 6). The majority of other regions in the UK had a similar pattern to the East of England, with visiting friends or relatives being the most popular reason.

Figure 6: London had the highest proportion of holiday visits compared with other regions of the UK

Proportion of purpose by regions of England, for overnights visits, 2023

Figure 6: London had the highest proportion of holiday visits compared with other regions of the UK

Proportion of purpose by regions of England, for overnights visits, 2023



Source: International Passenger Survey 2023 from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percentage.

London attracted 20.3 million overnight visits in 2023, far more than any other town or city and close to the number of visits seen in 2019 (21.7 million). Overnight visits to towns or cities other than London are shown in Figure 7.

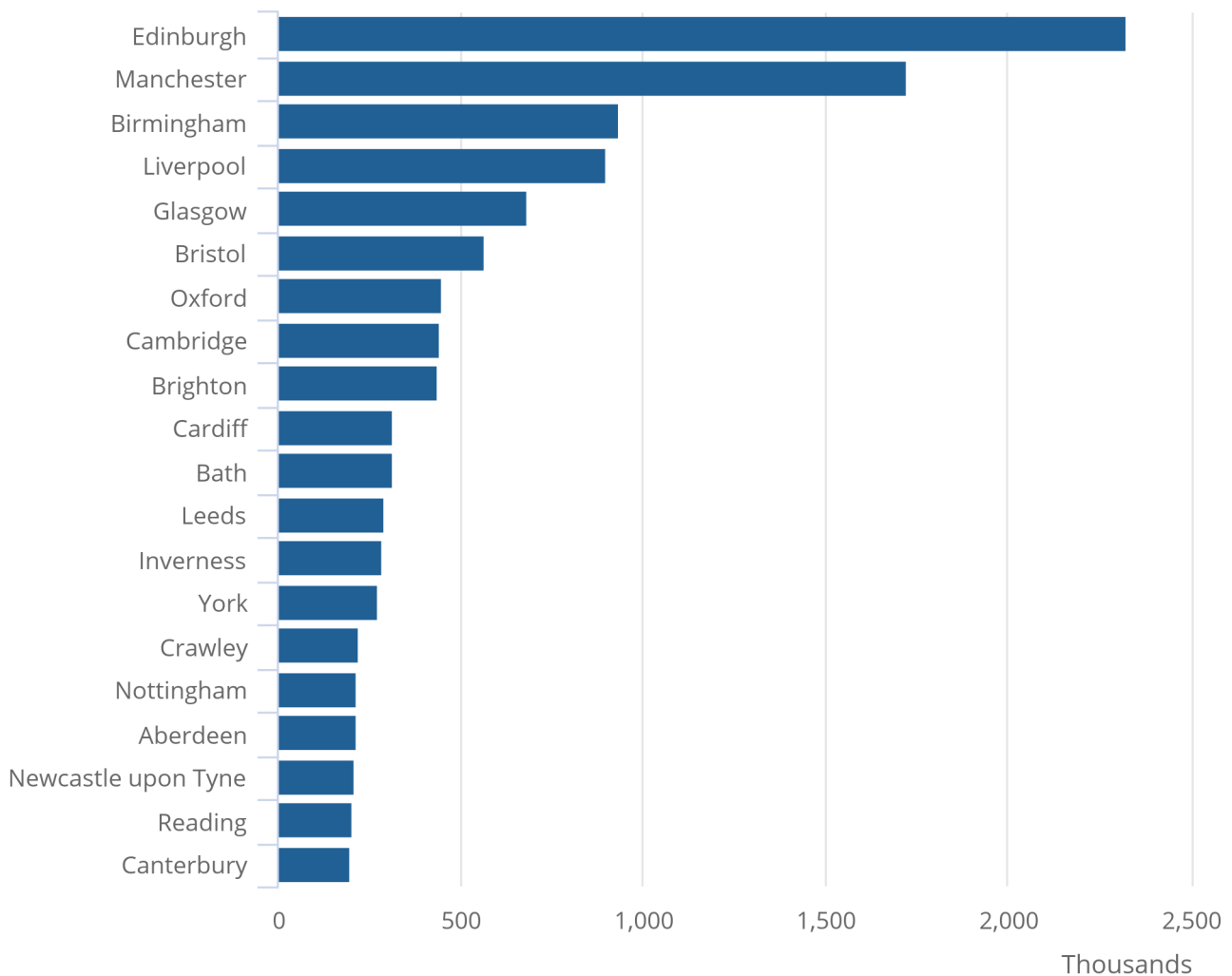
Edinburgh continues to be top of the towns or cities most visited outside of London, with 2.3 million visits, overtaking Manchester (1.7 million visits) and Birmingham (934,000). When excluding London, we see Crawley, Aberdeen and Canterbury enter the top 20 in 2023, with Southampton, Leicester and Luton failing to reach the top 20 when compared with 2022.

Figure 7: Outside London, the towns or cities most visited from overseas in 2023 were Edinburgh, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool

Top 20 UK towns or cities visited for at least one night, excluding London, 2023

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Top 20 UK towns or cities visited for at least one night, excluding London, 2023



Source: International Passenger Survey 2023 from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

4 . Visits abroad by UK residents

As with overseas residents' visits to the UK, UK residents' visits abroad increased between 2022 and 2023. There were 86.2 million visits overseas by UK residents in 2023, compared with 71.0 million visits in 2022.

When compared with pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels, visits abroad were still down. The number of visits in 2023 was 7% less than the peak in 2019, when there were 93.1 million visits. Disruption at some airports across the UK in 2023, caused by staff shortages and air traffic-control issues, could factor into this.

Holidays were the most popular reason for travelling abroad in 2023 (Figure 8). There were 55.5 million holiday trips made by UK residents, 5% less than in 2019 and accounting for almost two-thirds of visits. There were 22.5 million visits overseas to visit friends or relatives in 2023, a similar number to those taken in 2019, when any uncertainty surrounding the International Passenger Survey (IPS) estimates are considered.

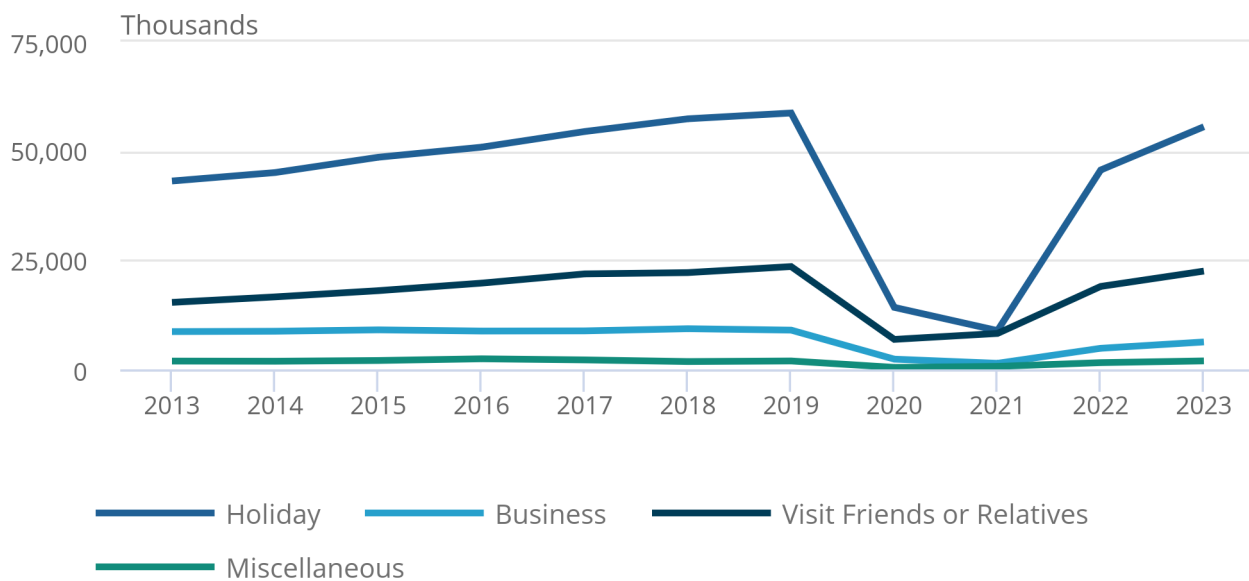
As with overseas residents visiting the UK for business reasons, this recovery is not yet seen in business trips taken abroad. In 2023, 6.3 million international business trips were taken by UK residents, 30% fewer than in 2019.

Figure 8: Holidays were the most frequent reason for visits abroad in 2023

UK residents visits abroad by purpose, 2013 to 2023

Figure 8: Holidays were the most frequent reason for visits abroad in 2023

UK residents visits abroad by purpose, 2013 to 2023



Source: International Passenger Survey 2023 from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Europe was the most popular overseas destination visited in 2023, accounting for 77% (66.7 million) of the total visits abroad. However, this was an 8% decrease from 72.5 million in 2019. There were over half a million more visits to North America in 2023 than in 2022, but the 4.5 million recorded for 2023 is still below the 5.6 million visits estimated in 2019. Visits to Other countries (countries outside of Europe and North America) increased by 37% when compared with 2022, showing similar levels to 2019 at around 15.0 million visits.

Going on holiday is the main purpose for UK residents' international visits, but the prevalence of other purposes continues to differ by destination. In 2023, just over half of all visits to North America were for a holiday, with 17% being for business and 31% to visit friends and relatives. In contrast, over two-thirds of all visits to Europe were holidays, with 22% to visit friends or relatives and only 7% for business. This distribution was different again for visits to Other countries, with 45% of visits being to visit friends and relatives compared with 47% for a holiday.

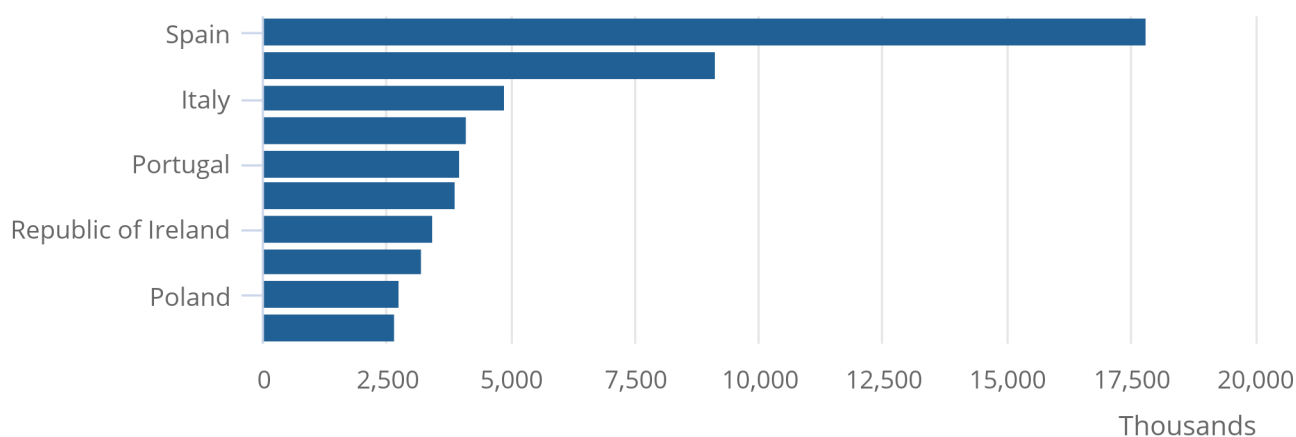
Spending was higher than pre-coronavirus levels in 2023. Estimated spending abroad by UK residents increased by 16% from £62.3 billion in 2019 to £72.4 billion in 2023. UK residents spent £50.0 billion on holidays, with an additional £13.9 billion spent on visiting friends or relatives. This does not factor in inflation.

Figure 9: UK residents visited Spain the most in 2023, followed by France, Italy and Greece

Top 10 countries visited by UK residents for at least one night, 2023

Figure 9: UK residents visited Spain the most in 2023, followed by France, Italy and Greece

Top 10 countries visited by UK residents for at least one night, 2023



Source: International Passenger Survey 2023 from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

The top 10 countries remained unchanged from 2022, with Spain remaining the most popular country visited by UK residents (Figure 9). There were 17.8 million visits to Spain by UK residents in 2023, making up 21% of total visits abroad. France was the second most popular country, with 9.2 million visits in 2023, making up 11% of total visits.

5 . Travel trends data

[Table of contents – travel and tourism](#)

Webpage | Released 17 May 2024

Tool to locate the datasets of overseas travel and tourism estimates.

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

Dataset | Released 17 May 2024

Annual estimates on visits and spending by UK residents abroad, by purpose and region of visit.

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

Dataset | Released 17 May 2024

Annual estimates on visits and spending in the UK by overseas residents, by purpose and region of visit.

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

Dataset | Released 17 May 2024

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

[Overseas travel and tourism, quarterly](#)

Dataset | Released 17 May 2024

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 17 May 2024

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

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

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 seaports, 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.

Sea and Eurotunnel data are excluded for the periods when it was not possible to interview on board Dover ferries or the Eurotunnel, because of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions. Interviewing restarted in Dover in July 2021 and on the Eurotunnel vehicles on trains in July 2022.

Further guidance is available about the quality of overseas travel and tourism estimates in our [IPS quality and methodology information \(QMI\) report](#).

Accuracy of the IPS estimates

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

Travel and tourism statistics are usually based on the results of the IPS. However, the IPS was suspended on 16 March 2020 because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The estimates presented in this article for April to December 2020 must be treated with caution because they were collected using administrative data and modelling, rather than the IPS.

Travel and tourism reform project

In May 2022, we published a report outlining the next steps for developing our travel and tourism statistics following a review of our data and methods. Please see our [Travel and tourism review: final report](#) for more information. Our next report ([Improving our travel and tourism statistics: changes from July 2024](#)) is due out on 14 June 2024 and will outline the changes to data collection and methods that we are introducing in 2024.

We have continued to progress our work in this area, including working with stakeholders to understand their needs. To stay up to date with our work, please [subscribe to our newsletter](#).

8 . Related links

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

Dataset | Released 17 May 2024

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.

[Overseas travel and tourism, monthly](#)

Dataset | Released 17 May 2024

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

[Overseas travel and tourism, provisional: July to September 2023](#)

Bulletin | Released 24 January 2024

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 time series](#)

Dataset | Released 17 May 2024

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

9 . Cite this article

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