

Statistical bulletin

Overseas travel and tourism: September 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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Notice

31 January 2023

We have identified and corrected an issue with data collected from the International Passenger Survey (IPS) from October 2021 to June 2022, linked to challenges collecting and publishing consistent data during the pandemic. Details of passenger numbers at the Eurotunnel have been removed from the estimates as the ONS was unable to interview at this site until July 2022. This has mainly impacted on visitor numbers from Europe which are lower than previously published. There are also revisions to visitor and spend data at individual country level.

Corrections have been made to the accompanying data tables.

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1 . Main points

- September 2022 saw a fall in visitor numbers to the UK compared with the previous month, 3.0 million down from 3.5 million in August 2022; this follows patterns from pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic years.
- Spending by overseas visitors was also down from £3.2 billion in August to £2.6 billion in September; this is typical of pre- coronavirus years following the peak in August.
- Visits and spending by UK residents overseas were down from the previous month; visits fell from 9.3 million in August to 8.4 million in September and spending fell from £8.4 billion to £7.4 billion, this is also expected from previous years' trends.
- Visits to the UK are still down compared with pre-coronavirus levels; visits were down 10% compared with 3.3 million in September 2019.
- UK residents' visits abroad also remain lower than pre- coronavirus levels - 13% down on the 9.7 million visits made in September 2019.

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

2 . Trends in visits to the UK by overseas residents

As in previous years, visits to the UK fell between August 2022 and September 2022, from 3.5 million in August to 3.0 million in September. This is to be expected after peak travel months of June, July and August.

Spending by overseas visitors also decreased from £3.2 billion in August to £2.6 billion in September.

Visits to the UK in September continue to be lower than pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels. In September 2019, there were an estimated 3.3 million visits to the UK compared with 3.0 million in September 2022, a 10% decrease. This fall is the smallest seen since the pandemic began.

Spending continues to be near pre-coronavirus levels in September 2022 (£2.6 billion), 1% higher than in September 2019 (£2.6 billion).

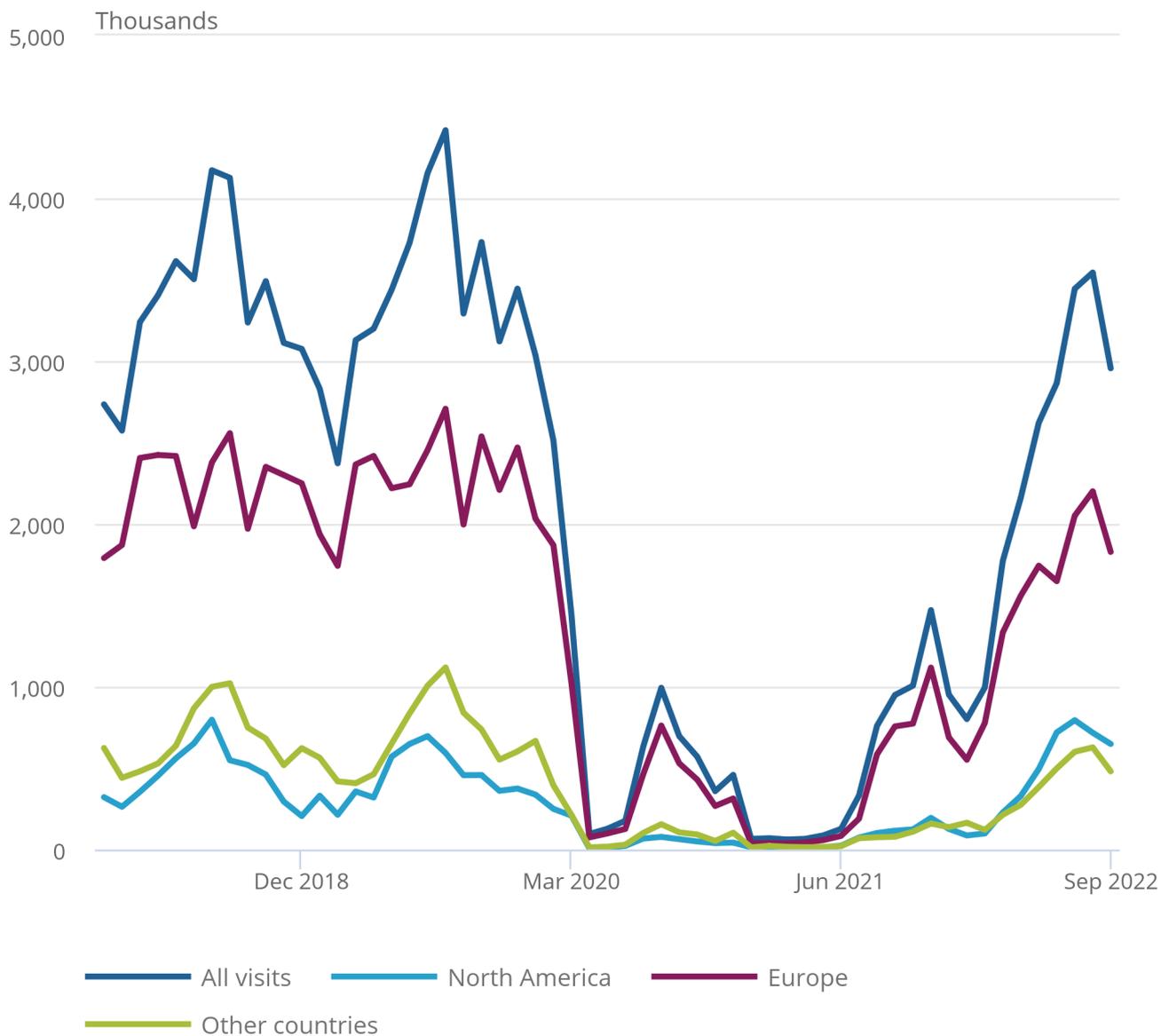
Holidays have been the main reason overseas residents visited the UK since April 2022 year. That trend continued in September, with 1.1 million visits (39% of the total). Visiting friends and relatives was the next most common reason for a visit to the UK, 35% of the total. Despite the overall decrease in visits, business trips rose from 359,000 in August to 566,000 in September, an increase of 58%.

Figure 1: Visits to the UK fell after summer holidays

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

Figure 1: Visits to the UK fell after summer holidays

Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month, January 2018 to September 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.

3 . Trends in overseas visits by UK residents

As with overseas residents' visits to the UK, UK residents' visits abroad fell between August 2022 and September 2022. The number of visits decreased from 9.3 million in August to 8.4 million in September. This fall is to be expected given most school holiday periods end in early September.

When compared with pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels, visits abroad are still down. In September 2022, UK residents made 8.4 million trips abroad, down 13% on the 9.7 million made in September 2019. In a similar pattern to overseas residents' visits to the UK this is the smallest difference between pre- and post-coronavirus numbers since the pandemic began.

The amount of money spent by UK residents abroad also fell from £8.4 billion in August 2022 to £7.4 billion in September 2022.

The number of visits abroad by UK residents was down by 13% on September 2019, but spending rose by 3% from £7.2 billion in September 2019 to £7.4 billion in September 2022. The fact that spending is slightly higher than pre-coronavirus levels despite visits being lower could be explained by the higher cost of living being experienced globally. The value of sterling is low, which would also have influenced spending abroad.

Most visits abroad were made to Europe; 83% of total visits (7.0 million).

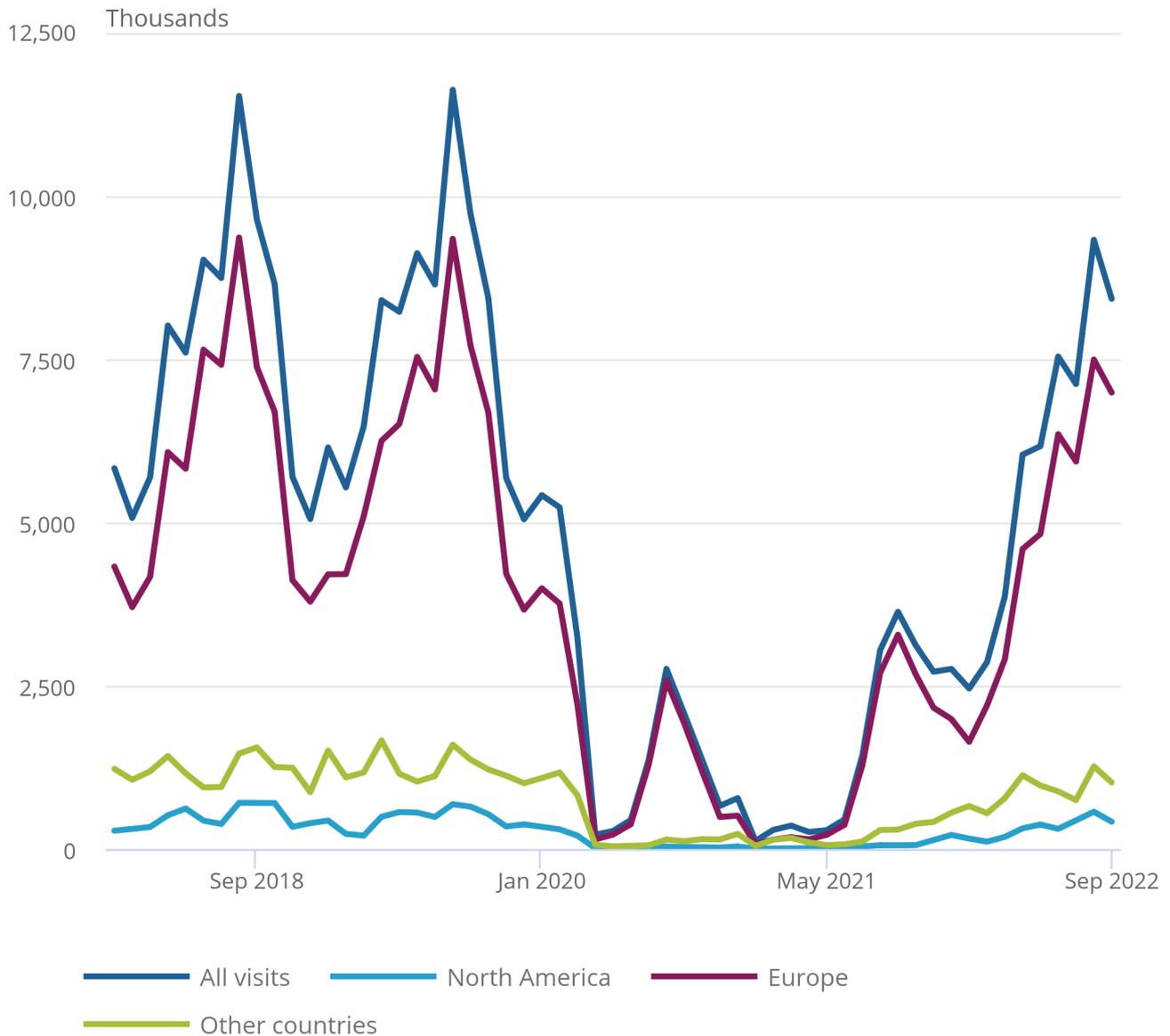
Going on holiday continued to be the most common reason for visits abroad in September 2022 with 67% (5.6 million) of the total. Despite overall visits being down, the number of visits made for business trips increased from 347,000 in August 2022 to 557,000 in September 2022.

Figure 2: The number of UK residents visits abroad fell in September 2022 after summer high

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

Figure 2: The number of UK residents visits abroad fell in September 2022 after summer high

UK residents' visits overseas by month, January 2018 to September 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 31 January 2023

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

[Overseas travel and tourism time series](#)

Dataset | Released 31 January 2023

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
- other purposes

These include 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. 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, onboard 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
- 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, 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.

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: Data sources and quality](#) 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, 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 bulletin make the best use of the available data and methods to produce estimates of international visits and spending. However, 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, September 2022

September 2022 monthly estimates	Estimate	Relative 95% confidence interval (+/- % of the estimate)
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	2,956	7.6%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	2,631	8.7%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	8,428	6.1%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	7,422	5.8%

Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

7 . Strengths and limitations

Strengths

A major strength of the International Passenger Survey (IPS) is that it is the main source of information in the UK on international travel and tourism, and associated earnings and expenditure. It has been running since 1961 so provides a comprehensive time series of travel and tourism, which can be useful for identifying long-term trends and patterns or undertaking time series analysis and forecasting. In addition, interviewing at the principal air, sea and tunnel routes and the use of a dedicated field force gives the survey some uniqueness.

Limitations

IPS survey data are subject to both sampling and non-sampling errors. About 90% of passengers entering and leaving the UK have a chance of being sampled in the survey. The remainder are either passengers travelling at night, when interviewing is suspended, or on those routes too small in volume or too expensive to be covered. Furthermore, the number of survey interviews on particular routes or for some main reason for visit such as playing sports and getting married, are sometimes small and consequently attract higher sampling errors. This also applies to visits to or from countries with low visit numbers.

8 . Related links

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

Dataset | Released 7 November 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 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: July and August 2022 provisional results](#)

Bulletin | Released 5 December 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

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 31 January 2023, ONS website, statistical bulletin, [Overseas travel and tourism: September 2022 provisional results](#)