

Statistical bulletin

Overseas travel and tourism: March 2019 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 2.9 million visits to the UK by overseas residents in March 2019 (2% fewer than in March 2018).
- Overseas residents spend £1.6 billion on visits to the UK in March 2019 (8% less than in March 2018).
- UK residents made 4.8 million visits overseas in March 2019 (4% more than in March 2018).
- UK residents spent £3.0 billion on visits overseas in March 2019 (7% less than in March 2018).

2 . Things you need to know about this release

This bulletin presents estimates of overseas visits to and from the UK. An overseas visitor means 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).

Overseas travel and tourism quarterly estimates are revised during the processing of the annual dataset. The most up-to-date and accurate estimates for the previous year's published quarters can be found in the latest edition of [Travel trends](#).

The International Passenger Survey (IPS) has recently transferred outputs from data collected on paper forms to an improved method using tablet computers. Tablet data collection was phased in gradually from September 2017 to April 2018. More [background information about the rollout](#) is available.

The new tablets allow us to improve the quality of the International Passenger Survey (IPS) data collected, so discontinuities (that is, step changes in the time series) arising from the introduction of tablet data collection in the IPS are possible. We have worked with academic experts and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Methodology team to produce a method for detecting any such discontinuities.

We have continued to monitor the results as more data have become available. Further analysis using a longer series of data is required to determine whether there are any discontinuities, so some caution is still advised in the interpretation of data in this release.

Further methodological changes are planned to the estimates on international visitors in the IPS. These are weighting adjustments to address concerns about the imbalance (that is, large differences in numbers) in the IPS between the estimates of numbers of visitors arriving and departing for some nationalities. The new method has been developed in consultation with users and methodological experts. We plan to implement the new method in autumn 2019, when the results for the second quarter (Apr to June) of 2019 are published. A revised back series will also be published at this time. More information about the planned changes will be published as soon as possible.

The changes in data collection methods and planned methodological changes were described in the [Travel trends 2017: recent data collection changes and planned methodological changes](#) article, in July 2018.

Please note that while the imbalance work is unlikely to affect long-term migrants in the IPS, we have committed to exploring whether the survey processes that cause the imbalance in international visitor estimates also impact on long-term migration further, as part of the ONS Migration Statistics' [workplan](#) to understand different migration data sources.

Estimates contained in this bulletin are produced from responses provided by international passengers arriving in and departing from the UK, sampled on our [International Passenger Survey](#) (IPS).

Responses to the survey are scaled up to represent all passengers using information on total international passenger traffic for the reporting period.

Estimates are based on interviews conducted when passengers end their visit. Any visits commencing in the reported month but not completed until later are not included in estimates for the reported month.

The reported spend for visits include any spending associated (excluding fares) with the visit, that occur before, during or after the trip.

Parts of the bulletin refer to countries visited abroad. It should be noted that if a UK resident visited more than one country on a trip abroad, the country recorded as visited in this bulletin is the country that was visited for the longest period.

Estimates are subject to sampling error and confidence intervals are provided to help you interpret the estimates (see Accuracy of IPS estimates for more information). Further guidance is available about the [quality of overseas travel and tourism estimates](#).

3 . Main trends in visits and spending

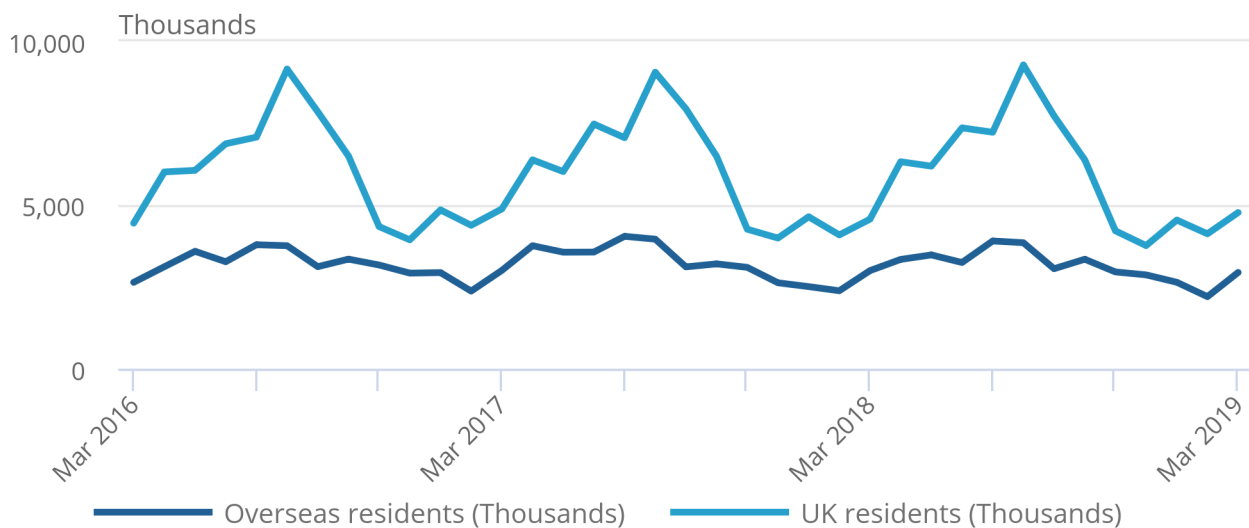
UK residents consistently make more visits abroad than foreign residents make to the UK. The total amount spent by UK residents during visits abroad is also higher than the total spent by foreign residents visiting the UK. The numbers of visits and the amounts spent vary through the year, with more in the summer. This is the case both for UK residents and overseas residents. However, UK residents show a much sharper peak both in visits and spend during the month of August, which is traditionally the only complete month of the UK school summer holidays.

Figure 1: Overseas residents' visits to the UK and UK residents' visits abroad are greatest in the summer

Overseas residents' visits to the UK and UK residents' visits abroad by month from March 2016 to March 2019

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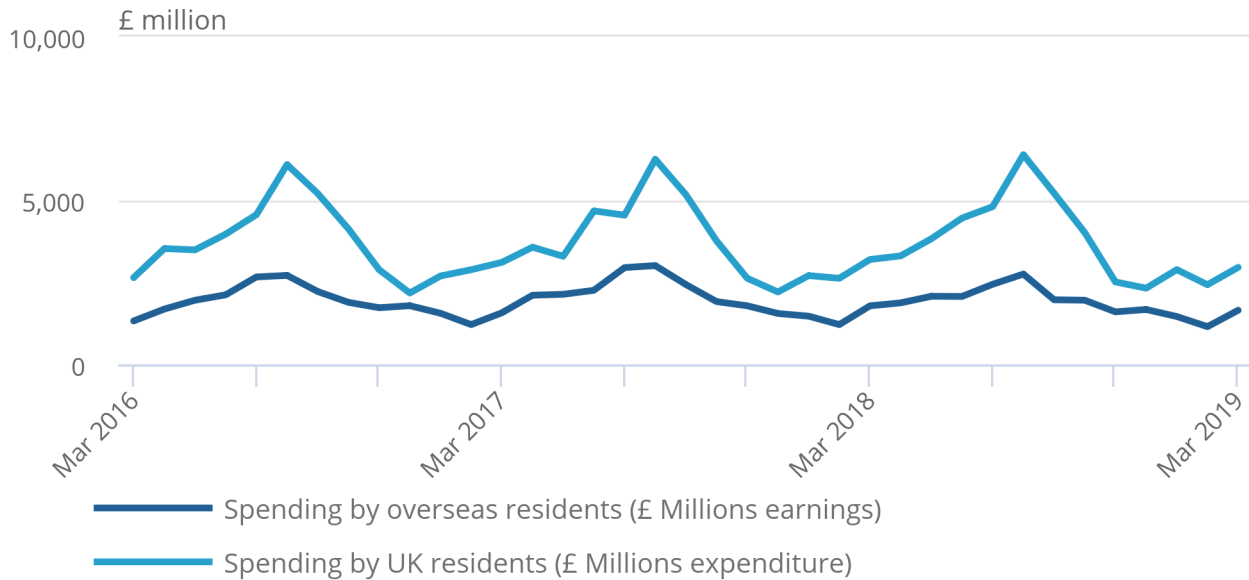
Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Figure 2: Patterns in spending over the year closely track patterns in visits to the UK, and visits overseas by UK residents

Spending by overseas residents in the UK and spending by UK residents overseas by month from March 2016 to March 2019

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Spending by overseas residents in the UK and spending by UK residents overseas by month from March 2016 to March 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

4 . Trends in visits to the UK by overseas residents

The figures used in the commentary in this section are sourced from the following monthly overseas travel and tourism datasets:

- Table 1 – Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month
- Table 2 – Purpose of overseas residents' visits to the UK by month
- Table 5 – Earnings in the UK and expenditure abroad by month

Overseas residents made an estimated 2.9 million visits to the UK in March 2019, which was 2% fewer than in March 2018. Overseas residents spent £1.6 billion on visits to the UK in March 2019, which was 8% less than in March 2018.

During the period January to March 2019, there were 7.8 million visits to the UK, which was 1% fewer than the corresponding period a year earlier. Overseas residents spent £4.3 billion in the UK over this period, which was 5% less than the previous year.

Different trends were observed for different areas of the world for this three-month period: there was an increase of 5% in visits from North American residents to 0.8 million, while visits from European residents remained the same at 5.9 million. Visits from residents of “other countries” (countries outside Europe and North America) decreased by 9% to 1.1 million.

Considering the reasons for visiting the UK, holiday visits increased by 7% to 2.7 million for this period, business visits decreased by 4% to 2.1 million and visits to friends and relatives decreased by 5% to 2.5 million.

Table 1: Main visit and spending estimates for overseas residents' visits to the UK in March 2019

Overseas residents' visits to UK

	Visits (Thousands)	% change from year earlier	Earnings (£ million)	% change from year earlier
Non seasonally adjusted				
March 2019	2,940	-2	1,650	-8
January to March 2019	7,780	-1	4,260	-5
Year to date 2019	7,780	-1	4,260	-5
Latest 12 months	37,800	-3	22,690	-8
Seasonally adjusted				
October 2018	3,210	+5	1,970	+3
November 2018	3,130	-5	1,870	-11
December 2018	3,280	+7	1,850	+9
January 2019	3,190	+5	1,950	-1
February 2019	3,060	-6	1,900	-6
March 2019	3,260	-3	2,070	-9

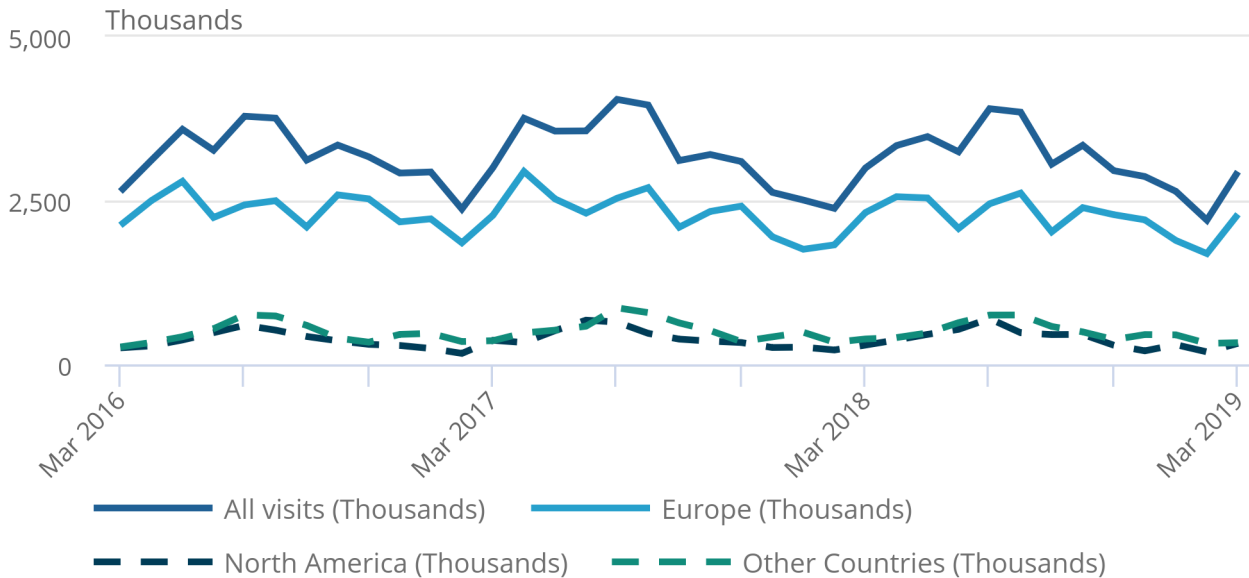
Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Figure 3: Visits to the UK by overseas residents increased by 1% in the three months to March 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier

Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month from March 2016 to March 2019

Figure 3: Visits to the UK by overseas residents increased by 1% in the three months to March 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier

Overseas residents' visits to the UK by month from March 2016 to March 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

5 . Trends in overseas visits by UK residents (non-seasonally adjusted)

The figures used in the commentary in this section are sourced from the following monthly overseas travel and tourism datasets:

- Table 3 – UK residents' visits abroad by month
- Table 4 – Purpose of UK residents' visits abroad by month
- Table 5 – Earnings in the UK and expenditure abroad by month

There were an estimated 4.8 million visits overseas by UK residents in March 2019, which was 4% more than in March 2018. UK residents spent £3.0 billion on visits overseas in March 2019, which was 7% less than in March 2018.

During the period January to March 2019, there were 13.4 million visits abroad by UK residents, which was 1% more than the corresponding period a year earlier. UK residents spent £8.3 billion on these visits, which was 3% less than the previous year.

There were 0.6 million visits to North America over this three-month period, which is a decrease of 14% when compared with the same period a year earlier. There were 2.7 million visits to "other countries" (countries outside North America and Europe), a decrease of 2%. However, there was an increase in visits to European countries of 3% to 10.2 million.

Considering the reasons for visits, holiday visits decreased by 2% (to 7.4 million) from the same period in the previous year, business visits decreased by 2% (to 1.6 million), while visits to friends and relatives increased by 9% (to 4.1 million).

Table 2: Main visit and spending estimates for UK residents' visits abroad in March 2019

UK residents' visits abroad

	Visits (Thousands)	% change from year earlier	Expenditure (£ million)	% change from year earlier
Non seasonally adjusted				
March 2019	4,770	+4	2,960	-7
January to March 2019	13,430	+1	8,280	-3
Year to date 2019	13,430	+1	8,280	-3
Latest 12 months	71,870	0	45,180	+1
Seasonally adjusted				
October 2018	6,000	-1	3,850	+8
November 2018	5,960	0	3,610	-4
December 2018	5,810	-4	3,870	+5
January 2019	5,950	-1	3,890	+7
February 2019	5,830	0	3,490	-7
March 2019	5,830	+1	3,600	-9

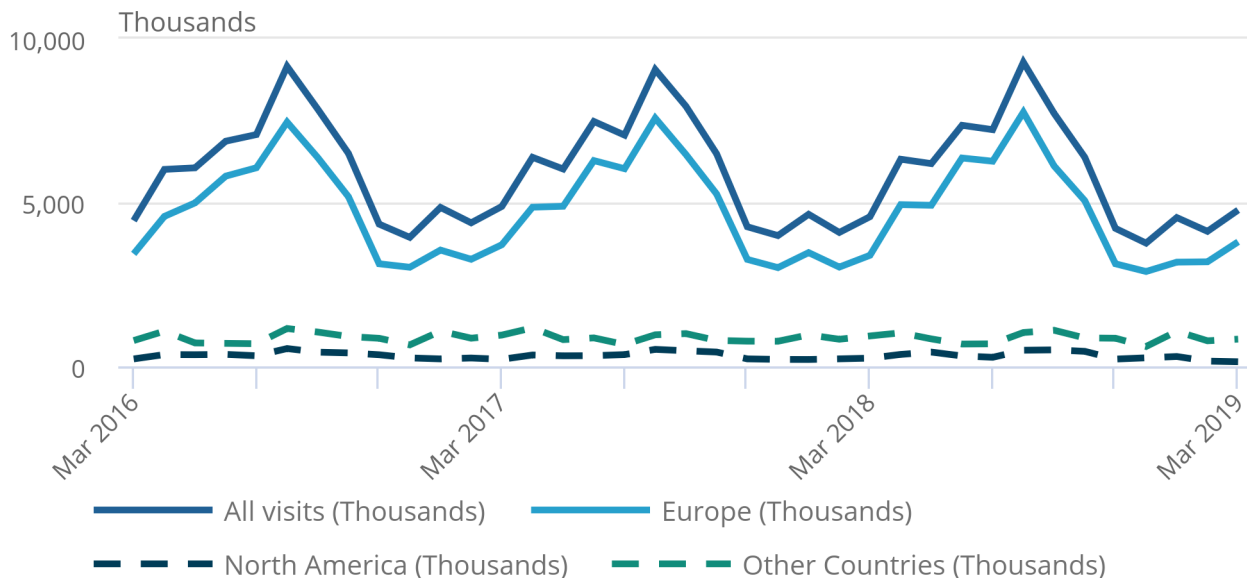
Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Figure 4: Visits overseas by UK residents increased by 4% in the three months to March 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier

UK residents' visits abroad by month (non-seasonally adjusted) from March 2016 to March 2019

Figure 4: Visits overseas by UK residents increased by 4% in the three months to March 2019 compared with the same period a year earlier

UK residents' visits abroad by month (non-seasonally adjusted) from March 2016 to March 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

6 . Links to related statistics

[Travel trends](#): the latest article (Travel trends 2018) was published on 24 May 2019. This provides final overseas travel and tourism estimates and more detailed analysis of visits and spending, including analysis by demographics, towns visited in the UK and countries visited by residents of different parts of the UK.

[Travelpac](#): a dataset that allows you to conduct your own analyses of quarterly and annual data on main variables – the datasets are provided in SPSS and Excel.

[Overseas travel and tourism quarterly](#): the latest article (for Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2018) was published on 24 May 2019, within our [Travel trends: 2018](#) publication. This provides more detailed analysis of visits and spending, isolating aspects such as countries of visit, mode of travel used, nationality of visitors and regions of the UK visited.

7 . Quality and methodology

The [International Passenger Survey \(IPS\) Quality and Methodology Information](#) report contains important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
- uses and users of the data
- how the output was created
- the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data

The International Passenger Survey Methodological Information outlines definitions and sample methodology.

Accuracy of IPS estimates

This section describes how revisions are carried out in the standard production cycle of the survey. Additional potential revisions, to be made on a one-off basis, are described in the Things you need to know about this release section.

Figures for the most recent months are provisional and subject to revision in light of more accurate data on passenger figures becoming available at the end of each quarter, and additional passenger data obtained at the end of each year.

International Passenger Survey (IPS) monthly estimates are revised in line with the IPS revisions policy. The revisions policy is available in the [IPS Quality and Methodology Information report](#), to assist you in the understanding of the cycle and frequency of data revisions. You are strongly advised to read this policy before using these data for research or policy-related purposes.

Planned revisions usually arise from the receipt of revised passenger traffic data. Unplanned revisions are made to correct errors to existing data, identified later in the quarterly and annual processing cycle. Those of significant magnitude will be highlighted and explained.

Revisions to published monthly IPS estimates can be expected at the following times in the normal overseas travel and tourism publication schedule:

- monthly estimates for the current reference year will usually be revised and statistically benchmarked across the quarter, following the publication of the quarterly estimates which that month falls within
- monthly and quarterly estimates for the current reference year will be revised in the survey year's annual data release (Travel trends)
- monthly estimates for the full calendar year will be statistically benchmarked as part of the annual data processing and the monthly estimates for the year will then be replaced in the monthly release, with the benchmarked estimate following publication of the annual report (Travel trends)

All other revisions will be regarded as unplanned and will be dealt with by non-standard releases. All revisions will be released in compliance with the same principles as other new information. Please refer to [our guide to statistical revisions](#).

Seasonally adjusted figures are no longer shown in the main figures in the bulletin but continue to be presented in the tables.

The estimates produced from the IPS are subject to sampling errors that occur because not every traveller to and 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 lower its sampling error. The survey sample size is approximately 20,000 per month. However, as the intensity of the sampling varies at each port, figures of a similar magnitude will not necessarily have the same percentage sampling error.

Accuracy of the estimates is expressed in terms of confidence intervals. The confidence interval is a range within which the true value of a proportion lies with known probability. For example, the 95% confidence interval represents the range into which there are 19 chances out of 20 that the true figure would fall had all passengers been sampled. This is obtained as plus or minus 1.96 multiplied by the standard error.

Table 3: Confidence intervals relating to overseas travel and tourism estimates in March 2019

March 2019 monthly estimates	Estimate	Relative 95% Confidence Interval (+/- % of the estimate)
Visits to UK by overseas residents (thousands)	2,940	10.9%
Earnings from visits to UK (£ million)	1,650	16.6%
Visits abroad by UK residents (thousands)	4,770	12.0%
Expenditure on visits abroad (£ million)	2,960	14.1%

Source: Office for National Statistics – International Passenger Survey

Confidence intervals for [quarterly](#) and [annual](#) estimates are provided in our relevant overseas travel and tourism publications.

One indication of the reliability of the main indicators in this release can be obtained by monitoring the size of revisions. Table 4 records the size and pattern of revisions to the quarterly IPS data that have occurred over the last five years to the following main seasonally adjusted estimates:

- the number of visits by overseas residents to the UK (GMAT)
- the number of visits abroad by UK residents (GMAX)
- earnings made from overseas residents in the UK (GMAZ)
- expenditure abroad by UK residents (GMBB)

Table 4: Revisions to quarterly International Passenger Survey data over the last five years

Revisions between first publications and estimates three years later

Value in the latest period Quarter 1 (January to March 2019)	Average over the last five years (bias)	Average over the last five years without regard to sign (average absolute revision)
GMAT 9,500	51.50	108.50
GMAX 17,610	152.00	255.00
GMAZ 5,920	*125	*151
GMBB 10,970	*116.5	*162.5

Source: International Passenger Survey - Office for National Statistics

Notes

1. Units: GMAT and GMAX in thousands.
2. A statistical test has been applied to find out if the revision to each key indicator is statistically different from zero. An asterisk (*) indicates where the mean revision has been significantly different from zero.

Note that estimates are subject to revision between the monthly statistical bulletin and the quarterly publication, and again when Travel trends is published. Revisions result from more accurate passenger figures being made available.

More information about the IPS revisions policy is available in the [Quality and Methodology Information](#) report. The most up-to-date and accurate estimates for all published months can be found in the latest edition of the [Overseas travel and tourism monthly statistical bulletin](#).

Note that, although data by the International Passenger Survey (IPS) feed into the calculation of migration statistics, the overseas travel and tourism publications do not provide any information relating to international migration.

Other analyses

For general questions about the IPS and requests for [user-requested data analysis](#) (a service governed by our [Income and charging policy](#)), please get in touch using the contact details accompanying this release.