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Coverage

United Kingdom

Theme

Travel and Tourism

Record number of tourist and short-term visits to & from the UK in 2006

Travel Trends 2006

There were a record number of tourist and business visits (that is, visits for less than 12 months) both to and from the United Kingdom in 2006, according to a report* published today by the Office for National Statistics.

Visits to the UK by overseas residents rose 9.2 per cent (to 32.7 million from 30.0 million in 2005) and UK residents' visits abroad rose 4.7 per cent (to 69.5 million from 66.4 million in 2005).

In 2006, the USA was the country with the most visits to the UK (3.9 million) followed by France, Germany, Irish Republic, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Poland, Belgium and Australia. Poland was the country with the biggest increase in the number of visits to the UK between 2002 and 2006 (0.2 million to 1.3 million, an increase of 1.1 million) followed by Spain (an increase of 1.0 million) Germany (0.9 million) and France (0.6 million).

In 2006 over one third of visits abroad were to Spain and France (14.4 million and 10.9 million respectively), but their proportion of the total number of visits is decreasing over time as other destinations become more popular. Visits to France fell by an average annual 2.7 per cent from 2002 to 2006 while visits to Greece, Mexico and Austria also declined over this period. In spite of a relatively low rate of growth in visits to Spain between 2002 and 2006, Spain had the largest absolute increase in visits (up by 1.9 million visits) followed by Poland (an increase of 1.1 million). Outside of Europe, India and Egypt had the strongest growth.

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* *Travel Trends* is available free on the National Statistics website:

www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=1391

Travel Trends presents the main annual results of the International Passenger Survey (IPS) which collects information on travel to and from the UK. It is the key guide to tourist travel patterns and shows why and how people travelled, where they stayed and how much they spent. Note that this publication does not address migration, either short-term or long-term. ONS produces separate publications relating to migration (see Background Notes, below, relating to an October 2007 publication focusing on short-term migration)

More key findings for 2006 include:

Mode of travel

- Air was by far the most used mode of travel, accounting for 75 per cent of visits to the UK and 81 per cent of visits abroad. Its dominance increased between 2005 and 2006 as trips made by air grew by 12 per cent to the UK and by 5.3 per cent for trips abroad.
- There was a rise of 3.9 per cent in sea travel between 2005 and 2006 (although neither sea nor channel tunnel travel is growing strongly in the long term).

Visits to the UK by overseas residents

- Visits to the UK were fairly evenly split between three purposes: holiday, to visit friends or relatives, and business.
- The average length of stay per visit to the UK in 2006 was eight nights.
- Almost a half of visits to the UK (15.6 million) involved an overnight stay in London. Edinburgh (1.3 million overnight visits), Manchester (0.9 million) and Birmingham (0.8 million) were the next most-visited cities.
- Seventy-one per cent of visits to UK were from European residents, 15 per cent from North America and 14 per cent from "other countries".

- Those from Europe grew most, notably from Poland, Spain, and Germany. Outside of Europe, the USA and Australia had the largest growth from 2002.
- There was variety between visits from the three regions of Europe, North America and “other countries”. European and North American residents stayed seven nights and nine nights respectively on an average visit while those from “other countries” stayed an average of 16 nights.
- Those from North America and “other countries” were much more likely than Europeans to visit London (nearly two-thirds of the former involved a stay in London, compared with 41 per cent of Europeans). Further, North Americans were more likely to visit Scotland.
- North American residents spent most per day on visits to the UK: £82 compared with £53 by European residents and £56 by residents of “other countries”. An average visit from a North American resident involved nearly double the spend of an average visit from a European. However, the biggest spend per trip was from residents of “other countries”, due to their longer length of stay.

Visits abroad by UK residents

- Compared with visits to the UK, visits abroad were much more likely to be for holiday (almost two-thirds of trips abroad were for this purpose) and almost a half (49 per cent) were for duration of 4-13 nights.
- The average length of stay abroad in 2006 was ten nights.
- Seventy-nine per cent of visits abroad by UK residents were to Europe, although that proportion is down slightly compared with 2002.

- The countries visited for specific purposes showed quite strong variation. The Irish Republic, France, Spain and Poland were the top four countries visited for the purpose of visiting friends or relatives. For business trips the most-visited countries were France, Germany, USA and Irish Republic. For holidays Spain and France were the most popular, followed by Italy, USA, Greece, Irish Republic, Portugal, Turkey, Netherlands and Cyprus.
- Forty-two per cent of holidays abroad by UK residents involved a package holiday. The percentage was highest (56 per cent) when holidaying in “other countries”, and lowest (35 per cent) when visiting North America.
- Forty per cent of holidays in Europe were package but as travellers to Europe increasingly turn to independent holidays the number has declined from 17.8 million in 2002 to 14.9 million in 2006.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. The annual *Travel Trends* publication from the Office for National Statistics provides key findings from the International Passenger Survey relating to trends in travel and tourism on visits for any reason of less than twelve months by overseas residents to the UK, and UK residents abroad.
2. *Travel Trends* does not provide any information relating to international migration (either 'long term' migration involving stays of more than 12 months, or 'short term' migration).
3. In October 2007 ONS produced estimates of short-term migration for the first time, referring to the year to mid-2004 and mid-2005. These estimates have been published as experimental statistics and are available in the link below:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/STM_Research_Report.pdf

These estimates are based on the United Nations definition of short-term migration, visits between 3 and 12 months for purposes of work or study. Additional estimates based on broader definitions were also published. There is some overlap between the definitions used for short-term migrants and that used for tourists as defined by *Travel trends*. A discussion of the relationship between the definitions used for short-term migration and ONS visitors is available in a feasibility report on short-term migration published in January 2007, available at the link below:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/Short-termMigrationFeasibilityReport.pdf>

4. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
5. **National Statistics** are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown copyright 2008.