

The Annual Survey of Visits to Visitor Attractions - About the Survey

The Annual Survey of Visits to Visitor Attractions began in 1989 and was designed in order to monitor the performance of visitor attractions, in particular, measuring the number of visitors to each attraction and analysing how this has changed over time. VisitEngland jointly sponsors this survey with Historic England.

BDRC has managed the survey for VisitEngland since 2008.

How is the information collected?

The Annual survey aims to contact every visitor attraction in England in order to collect annual visitor information.

For the purpose of this research a Visitor Attraction is defined as:

...an attraction where it is feasible to charge admission for the sole purpose of sightseeing. The attraction must be a permanently established excursion destination, a primary purpose of which is to allow access for entertainment, interest, or education; rather than being primarily a retail outlet or a venue for sporting, theatrical, or film performances. It must be open to the public, without prior booking, for published periods each year, and should be capable of attracting day visitors or tourists as well as local residents. In addition, the attraction must be a single business, under a single management, so that it is capable of answering the economic questions on revenue, employment etc.

Attractions are given the opportunity to respond to the survey either online or by post. An effort is made to get as many attractions to respond to the survey as possible through telephone, email and postal reminders.

Sample sizes vary by year and details can be found in the annual report, but currently approx. 5,500 attractions are invited to participate, with a response rate of 25-30% (1,608 in 2014). In 2012, a review of the list of attractions invited to participate in the survey was conducted, and some clearly not fitting the definition (for example, small parish churches and art galleries with a primarily retail focus) were removed. While Country Parks continue to be included in the survey sample, it is not always possible for these attractions to exclude visitors who have visited the park in such a way that falls outside our visitor attraction definition. Where this is the case they are not included in the list of 'most visited' attractions.

For the first time in 2009, data supplied by ALVA (The Association of Leading Visitor Attractions) was used for a number of major attractions where The Annual Survey of Visits to Visitor Attractions' data was unavailable. Data from other organisations including Historic England, the National Trust, destination organisations and museums groups may also be used where data from the survey is unavailable.

What are the survey limitations?

The Annual Survey of Visits to Visitor Attractions is a self-completion survey, which means all visitor numbers are provided by the attractions themselves and VisitEngland is not responsible for the accuracy of the numbers provided, and responses are not verified beyond a basic 'sense check'.

It is important to highlight that major individual attractions can have a significant impact upon the proportion of visits within each region and attraction category. Their participation or non-participation in the survey year-on-year can result in significant fluctuations in the data within each region and attraction category.

We do not include estimates of non-responding attractions. Therefore these figures do not represent the total market.

How are annual changes calculated?

Attractions are asked to compare their gross revenue for the last two years and detail the overall percentage change. It should be noted that the average changes are calculated from percentage changes reported per attraction, not changes in actual revenue figures.

Survey Outputs & Reporting

The principal output of the Annual Survey is the written report which focuses upon trend data, including indexing of visits data back to 1989 (by region and attraction category). We also provide a separate report of attraction-by-attraction visitor numbers, populated by attractions willing to provide permission for their admissions data to be published.

Where attractions have provided estimates rather than exact visitor numbers this is highlighted.

VisitEngland also runs the Tourism Business Monitor, which monitors business performance and confidence among Visitor Attractions and Accommodation businesses in England at key times throughout the year. Results and further information can be found here: www.visitengland.com/biz/resources/insights-and-statistics/research-topics/business-confidence-and-performance/tourism-business-monitor

For more detailed information on this survey please contact annualattractionssurvey@visitengland.org