

Overnight Tourism Data for Towns, Local Authorities and Counties Analysis of GB Tourism Survey Data 2006 - 2010

Background

The UK (now GB) Tourism Survey was originally designed to provide accurate data about the volume and value of domestic overnight tourism for the country as a whole and for its constituent nations. With a contact sample of 100,000 respondents annually, generating information about some 18,000 trips taken in Great Britain, the survey provides extremely robust annual data at the national level, and even at regional level, annual results are generally based on 1000 – 2000 actual trips, allowing us a high degree of confidence in the accuracy of the data.

Increasingly however, there is a demand for information below the regional level, with a requirement to understand the importance of tourism for towns, local authorities and counties. The problem with this is that while it is possible to analyse GBTS survey at this level (in the past we have done this to produce our annual “Top Towns” analysis, a listing of the 20 most visited towns in England), the underlying base sizes can become very low for the smaller towns and authorities.

New Analysis

In order to respond to the demand for greater geographical aggregation - while taking into account the sample size issues we face - we have developed a new analysis of our domestic overnight tourism data. Rather than considering individual years, this considers three year averages (summing the results for a three year period together and dividing by three to establish the average annual visitor volume / value for that period).

Data is provided for the three periods 2006 – 2008, 2007 – 2009, and 2008 – 2010, and figures are shown for total overnight tourism (considering all trip purposes – holiday, business and visiting friends and relatives) and separately for holiday travel. This will be updated each year as new data becomes available.

Results are provided for local authorities, for counties and for towns (note that there is some overlap with local authorities in the “towns” analysis, but this is useful for understanding the importance of individual destinations within some of the larger authority areas).

This analysis is published as an excel spreadsheet on our website here: http://www.visitengland.org/insight-statistics/major-tourism-surveys/overnightvisitors/UKTS2010/LA_County_2006_2010.aspx

How Robust Is the Data?

Even using three year averages, base sizes remain low for many of the individual towns and local authorities. The analysis includes a user guide, which explains how to estimate the underlying base size based on the number of reported trips – and also provides a guide to margins of error for different base sizes.

Our recommendation is that when interpreting this data, users should refer both to the margins of error, and also to the degree of variation in the five year period to come to a “common sense” view of what the figures mean.

For Example

Table 1, below, is an excerpt from the analysis, which shows that the average annual visitor numbers for Coventry over the past five years are in the range 518,000 to 544,000. The margin of error on these results is around +/-15%, which means that statistically, we can be 95% confident that the true value for these results 440,000 to 625,000.

However, the consistency of the figures over the five year period suggests that a “common sense” view might be that the true value really is likely to be in the region of 520,000 – 540,000, but that it is not possible to identify any clear trend over the five year period.

Table 1

	Total	Total	Total
	Trips	Trips	Trips
	2006-8	2007-9	2008-10
	thousands	thousands	thousands
<i>England</i>	98265	98724	97516
Birmingham	2279	2314	2241
Coventry	544	518	528

The same approach can be taken when looking at the position of individual local authorities relative to others. Based on Table 2, we can say with some certainty that Coventry has fewer visitors than local authorities like Manchester and Birmingham, and more than places such as Stoke-on-Trent or Peterborough. However, from these results, we cannot be certain that in the period 2008 – 2010 Coventry had more visitors than the Derbyshire Dales or Chester, or fewer than Exeter and Cambridge – rather, we would need to conclude that these local authorities are broadly similar in their numbers of domestic overnight trips.

Table 2

	Total	Total	Total
	Trips	Trips	Trips
	2006-8	2007-9	2008-10
	thousands	thousands	thousands
<i>England</i>	98265	98724	97516
City of London	2823	2856	2952
Manchester	2372	2445	2409
Birmingham	2279	2314	2241
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Camden	388	477	549
Herefordshire, County of	521	511	547
Cambridge	421	471	538
Exeter	612	585	536
Coventry	544	518	528
Derbyshire Dales	556	528	526
Chester	526	531	524
Sedgemoor	535	575	515
Lancaster	497	536	504
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Stoke-on-Trent	314	329	317
Croydon	316	350	314
Peterborough	380	360	312

In Summary

In an ideal world, the sample size of the GB Tourism Survey would be increased to be able to provide more robust data at differing levels of geography, but the fact is that this would be a very costly exercise, requiring us to more than double the existing sample size.

We believe that despite the caveats, the solution that we have provided – three year averages, with a five year context which we will add to each year – is still a major step forward in delivering sub-regional tourism statistics, which we hope will be useful to many people and organisations.

Please contact us with any questions or comments at VEResearch@visitengland.org