



GBTS Methodology and quality information

This document has been designed to accompany the April-December 2021 release of the Great Britain Tourism Survey (GBTS) by VisitEngland (and the project partners VisitScotland and Visit Wales) on 25 October 2021. Though some of this information will be relevant to future survey outputs.

The GBTS survey is the main estimate for the volume and value of domestic overnight tourism trips taken by British residents in Great Britain. From 2021 the statistics are based on an online survey that replaces the face to face version of Great Britain Tourism Survey, which ran until the end of 2019. Further information regarding the GBTS prior to 2021 is available on our website.

Further information on the background of this project and methodology changes from 2021 are available in the following documents on our website:

- GB Domestic Travel Statistics – briefing
- Background Quality Report (GBTS 2021)

Please note as part of the redesign of the GBTS survey and a move to an online methodology the survey was combined with the Great Britain Day Visits Survey (GBDVS). Results for the GBDVS will be reported separately at a later date, currently planned for mid December 2022.

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Methodology

In 2019, the producers of the official domestic tourist statistics, VisitEngland, VisitScotland and Visit Wales, undertook a review of the requirements for producing the statistics to help future-proof the data collection methods, whilst maintaining the reliability and robustness of the information reported.

Substantial changes were introduced as part of a new combined online survey method collecting data on both domestic overnight trips (GBTS) as well as domestic day trips (GBDVS). This represents a fundamental change in the way data is collected for overnight trips moving from the previous in-home face to face survey method to an online survey method which, from 2021.

The sample for the combined online survey is a non-probability based sample design sourced from 4 ESOMAR accredited online panel providers and includes quotas for key demographic variables and region of residence to make the overall sample as representative as possible of the GB population. The target annual contact sample for the survey of overnight visitors is 60,000 completed interviews.

Fieldwork for the survey started in April 2021 (it should be noted that overnight tourism was not permitted in Scotland for the first two weeks of April 21 and so estimations reflect that no trips were taken during that period). The number of GB respondents for the period April to December 2021 was 47,008. Not every person who is interviewed will have taken an eligible overnight trip and so the base sizes used for trip estimation is lower than the number of interviews. Trip base sizes are published in the Background Quality Report GBTS (2021). In the future, trip base sizes will be published in the relevant annual Background Quality Report.

A revised weighting scheme has been introduced from 2021 to improve efficiency, whilst making the results as representative as possible of the GB population. However, the use of a non-probability online sample limits the extent to which the survey responses are truly representative of the full GB population, a limitation of all online sample surveys.

The new weighting scheme uses the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) mapped to approximated social grade for population statistics, for the purpose of quotas and weighting to the GB population. The change to using NS-SEC as the population statistics source will impact the estimation and reporting of trips compared to previous reporting of social grade used for GBTS in 2019 and previous years. We are still assessing the impact of these changes and this may result in a re-release of statistics for 2021.

There have also been changes in the methods for imputations and data edits and to the calculations to provide monthly trip and spend estimates. More detail on these and further changes to survey method, sample design and estimation approaches can be found in the Background Quality Report GBTS (2021).

Comparability and coherence

Statistics for domestic overnight tourism had been collected in a broadly similar way since 1989, initially through the United Kingdom Tourism Survey (UKTS), and since 2011 through the Great Britain Tourism Survey (GBTS). As the names suggests UKTS considered the whole of the UK, and are not directly comparable with the GBTS from 2011, which considers residents of Great Britain only.

From 2021 definition and survey methodology changes have been introduced meaning that results published for April 2021 onwards are not directly comparable with data published for 2019 and previous years. Below we have noted some of the main definition and methodology changes impacting comparability. Please refer to the Background Quality Report GBTS (2021) for more comprehensive information on all changes.

Definitions

The new combined survey includes revised questions and qualifying criteria to help align the key measures of trips, nights and expenditure with internationally agreed definitions for overnight tourism trips.

This will enable more accurate reporting of tourism specific trips and improve comparability with trips reported by other destinations using the internationally agreed definitions. The GBTS (and GBDVS) surveys collect information on specific destinations visited in GB which enables trips and spend estimates to be calculated for Great Britain, the individual nations of England, Scotland and Wales, and sub-national geographies, subject to sample size limitations.

Methodology

As part of the GBTS survey, respondents are asked about any overnight trips they have taken in the 4 full weeks prior to their date of interview (reference period). Trip and expenditure estimates are reported for individual calendar months as well as for quarterly and annual periods. As the interview reference periods do not exactly correspond with calendar months and each month may contain a 4 or 5 week reporting period, an adjustment is made using a Seasonal Smoothing Factor to increase comparability of data across years.

The monthly estimates are subject to limitations on sample size and seasonal fluctuations in trip taking across the year. Data collection in 2020 and early 2021 was impacted due to COVID-19. In addition, the monthly pattern of visits in 2021 will have also been influenced by any COVID-19 restrictions in place limiting travel at different times of the year. Users are advised to be aware of these limitations when making comparisons.

From 2021 the GBTS survey captures some information previously collected (but note the limitations on comparability) but also includes new questions to capture more detailed information on activities undertaken, information on booking methods and timescales and enhanced information on responder profiles including protected characteristics. It is envisaged that this additional information will be of value for users of the survey.

Alternative sources

As GBTS data collection was paused in periods due to the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to the end of March 2021 and due to the methodology and definition changes to GBTS from 2021 there are limited opportunities to gain a complete picture of domestic overnight tourism overtime from GBTS alone.

To gain insight into the domestic tourism landscape during periods where GBTS is unavailable and unable to do so VisitEngland publishes and makes available data from a number of different information sources including:

Domestic Sentiment Tracker

<https://www.visitbritain.org/domestic-sentiment-tracker>

The Domestic Sentiment Tracker is a tracking survey to understand domestic intent to take short breaks and holidays both within the UK and abroad. The survey has run in waves since May 2020. The survey addresses: the likelihood of UK residents to travel; when and where they plan to go; specific trip details such as accommodation type and activities undertaken and the type of reassurances they're seeking from the sector.

Bank Holiday Trip Tracker

<https://www.visitbritain.org/bank-holiday-trip-tracker>

This survey is more specific to major bank holidays, but focuses on trip intention during these periods since 2007

Visits to Visitor attractions

<https://www.visitbritain.org/annual-survey-visits-visitor-attractions-latest-results>

An audit of English visitor attractions, recording visitor numbers since 2000.

Accommodation Occupancy

<https://www.visitbritain.org/accommodation-occupancy-latest-results>

Every month, the England Occupancy Survey (EOS) measures bedroom and bedspace occupancy across the serviced accommodation sector, including mostly hotels, with a very small proportion of serviced apartments and larger B&Bs/guesthouses. Data is available back to 1997.

Further data sources available to users may also be available from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) or other specific government departments such as the Department for Transport.

Accuracy

The statistics produced from the Great Britain Tourism Survey in 2019 and previous years have been designated as official statistics, which provides reassurance to users that the statistics are produced to the very highest professional standards of trustworthiness, quality and value, set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics (2009), as produced by the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA).

Due to the changes in methodology and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey results for 2021 have been badged as experimental statistics. The new survey and statistics have undergone a comprehensive programme of quality assurance including piloting of the survey, analysis of changes to the trip definitions, testing the impact of the new weighting scheme and a review of caps and imputation rules. Changes to the survey methodology and estimation have taken account of advice from the Methodology Advisory Service of Office for National Statistics.

As the statistics are produced using a non-probability online survey method they are subject to the limitations and potential sources of bias and error associated with such surveys. These include:

- Coverage error due to part of the GB population not having online access.
- Sampling error. Using a sample to measure the behaviour of the full GB population.
- Sample bias including differences between people with online access and who are online panel members compared to those who are not.
- Measurement error due to respondents entering incorrect values
- Non-response error including survey refusals and drop-outs and the availability of don't know and prefer not to say options

The GBTS data are weighted to correct for any imperfections in the achieved sample that might lead to bias and to rectify any differences between the sample and the target GB population. The survey uses a mix of accredited online panels to mitigate for possible panel specific biases, and the mix of panels is kept consistent over time.

Demographic quotas are used to align the sample with GB population. The survey script and data processing include bespoke checks to verify the accuracy of responses. Imputation is used to cover missing data and caps are used to minimise the impact of extreme values that are entered. It is not possible to measure standard sample errors due to the non-probability sample being used, but base sizes are reported for eligible trips and users are advised to consider and be cautious of small base sizes particularly for monthly data and lower level geographies when drawing inferences from the statistics.

Further details of quality assurance and trip base sizes are provided in the 2021 Background Quality Report GBTS (2021).

Relevance

These statistics are used both within and outside the UK Government (and devolved administrations) to monitor domestic tourism demand and measure the contribution and impact of domestic tourism on the visitor economy. A key purpose of these statistics is to uncover insights into market trends over time.

The estimates released for 2021 will provide insights on the impact of COVID-19 on visitor levels and provide a baseline to measure performance across subsequent years. The full data set provides additional information on visitor profiles and trip characteristics that is relevant for tourism planning, policy making and marketing.

Some of the key potential users are:

- tourism businesses and industry representative bodies
- local authorities
- professional tourism consultants and organisations
- students, academics and universities
- individual citizens and private companies
- national and local media
- Eurostat and international statistical authorities

We are planning to engage with users of the statistics to check the new survey information meets their needs and we encourage users of the statistics to contact us to let us know how they use the data.

Timeliness and punctuality

All outputs adhere to the Code of Practice (2009) produced by the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) by pre-announcing the date of publication through the upcoming calendar. We aim to publish data as soon as possible after the relevant research time period.

Disruption to the new combined GBTS and GBDVS survey due to COVID-19 and the need for comprehensive testing and quality assuring of the new experimental statistics have resulted in the reporting of 2021 statistics to be later than normal. 2022 data is expected in the Spring of 2023. It is anticipated that future results will be published on a monthly basis with a time lag of c **7-8 weeks** reflecting the 4 weekly reference period used to ask about trips taken and to allow for quality assurance checks and reporting timescales.

As per the Code of Practice, VisitEngland releases data under pre-release access to a small group of people 24 hours ahead of publication. These individuals are listed on our website.