

# International Passenger Survey (IPS) VisitBritain Q&A

May 2017

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Please note this document has been developed by VisitBritain with every care taken to ensure accuracy. Some of the answers give only a simplified explanation rather than a thorough analysed response. For more in-depth and precise explanations, please contact the Office for National Statistics (ONS) who run the IPS. Please note that the ONS do not bear any responsibility for some of the explanations reported here.

## Key concepts

- **What is the difference between a visitor and a tourist?**

A visitor is any person visiting a country other than in which he has his usual place of residence and in which he spends less than a year, for any reason other than following an occupation remunerated from within the country visited. A tourist is a visitor who spends at least a night in the country visited. (UNWTO definition)

- **Do the spend figures include the cost of getting to the UK?**

No, expenditure figures do not include the cost of getting to the UK. They only include all the money spent on anything within the UK.

## Methodology

- **How many overseas visitors are interviewed each year?**

The overall sample size of the IPS (overseas and UK residents coming in and out the UK) is about a quarter of a million, representing about 0.2% of travellers. VisitBritain publishes sample size on our analysis.

- **Why can't we get the "real" information from immigration / landing cards or visas issued instead of relying on a sample survey?**

Overseas visitors with an EU passport do not complete a landing card and data collected from these cards is confidential and not aimed to record tourism information. In addition, the landing cards are completed on day of arrival so no expenditure or town visited data can be collected.

The majority of visitors to the UK do not require a visa and amongst those who do, not all who apply will definitely travel and applications are made before travel so again would supply no information on expenditure or towns visited.

IPS generates the UK government's official statistics and is the one source of information consistent across all markets.

# Methodology

- **Are all IPS inbound tourism figures based on interviews with foreign nationals?**

No, they are not. A British expat who lives abroad and comes to the UK is recorded as an overseas visitor. The UK inbound tourism statistics are based on overseas residents visiting the UK for any reason other than following an occupation remunerated from within the UK.

- **Are all ports and airports surveyed?**

The IPS is based on face-to-face interviews with a sample of passengers travelling via the principal airports, sea routes and the Channel Tunnel. The ONS continually monitor passenger flows to ensure the IPS remains consistent, amended interviewer locations as necessary.

# Management of the IPS

- **Who decides which questions are included on the IPS?**

The IPS is a continuous survey carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) the results of which are used by a number of Government Departments such as Home Office, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, Department for Culture, Media & Sport, Department for Transport and VisitBritain who can submit and sponsor questions.

The final decision is made by the ONS who insures that the length of the questionnaire is not increased, as it would affect the response rate and the quality of the survey.

## Timing of results

- **Why can we not use monthly IPS figures per country of origin, UK regions visited or purpose of visit?**

The monthly data is only an estimate and it cannot give reliable results when broken down at this detailed level (the sample sizes are too small) because the survey sample is only designed to be balanced and representative over a full quarter. A single quarter is the minimum period over which most detailed analysis of the data can be made.

- **Why does it take so long for VisitBritain requested questions to produce IPS data?**

VisitBritain submits a request for questions to the ONS in the first half of year each year. This enables the ONS to pilot and feedback to VisitBritain on any issues and propose solutions. In June a pilot of these potential new questions is run. By the end of the summer a final decision is made on which questions will be included in the IPS of the following year. VisitBritain receives the results in the annual data released by the ONS, usually around May of the following year.

## Notes for interpreting UK level data

- **Why do the average expenditures published on your website not match the calculation ‘Spend/Visits’ or ‘Spend/Nights’?**

When calculating the two spend averages (spend per day, spend per visit) the expenditure of nil night transit visitors and of visitors departing directly from the Channel Islands must be excluded as no visits numbers are recorded for these 2 types of visitors.

- **Why is the IPS data different to the data we get from other sources e.g. from the governments of countries where visitors come from?**

Please be aware definitions and methodology other surveys differ. For example some surveys would record day transit visitors, which the IPS does not. There will also be some differences how expenditure on package holiday is treated to exclude the cost of travelling to Britain, for example. In addition, some surveys base their results on nationality rather than on country of residence. The IPS is the official government survey and in order to be consistent in our measure of UK inbound tourism, all the overseas VisitBritain offices adopt the IPS results as the official measure of their market.

## Notes for interpreting UK level data

- **Why is the number of Study visitors very low but there is a large number of foreign students in the UK?**

Overseas Study visitors stay less than one year in the UK. An overseas visitor who studies for their degree in the UK will stay in the country more than one year. Therefore they would not be included in the IPS as an overseas visitor but as an UK resident.

- **Why does the IPS not include those we might anyway target or consider as "tourists" like the long-term study visitors?**

The IPS records these foreign students as UK residents as they stay in the UK more than a year and they won't appear as overseas visitors. This is in line with the international definition of a tourist.

# Business visitors

Business visitors are anyone travelling in a business or official capacity for purposes related to their work/profession or in some other official capacity. 'Business' implies a continuation of the respondent's normal/main occupation during this visit. The respondent will not become part of the labour force of the UK. Overseas Business visitors include:

- Self-employed and professional people who are going to work in the UK and will be paid a fee there for a specific project, but are not based there.
- Those with an official role, salaried or expenses only, at sports and cultural events, e.g. judge, manning stands, umpire.
- Anyone who is travelling as a representative of an organisation in their country of residence, even if unpaid, e.g. mayors, trade union delegates, peace group.
- Entertainers, writers, management/computer/architectural consultants, people performing in sports and arts in a professional capacity, and others who receive a fee for a particular task in the UK but are not full employees there.
- Anyone travelling on behalf of his own company or practice which is maintained in his home country during a visit abroad.
- Respondents receiving a salary from their employer in their country of residence while they study in the UK.
- Coach-drivers and couriers, taking groups on tour or going to pick up groups.
- Teachers travelling with school parties.
- Lorry drivers who are on duty.
- Respondents whose main reason for visit is to attend a trade fair or exhibition and those whose main reason is to attend a conference or large business meeting.

# Those travelling for Miscellaneous reasons

IPS identifies a long list of candidates for the category of Miscellaneous as a reason for visiting the UK. These include:

- Looking for work
- Au pair
- Shopping
- Join/accompany
- Medical treatment
- Overnight transit
- To look for a place to live
- Selling/buying a house (not for business)
- To get married, even if travelling on a package
- To bring a child to school
- To renew a visa, permit
- To fulfil conditions for retaining residence permit
- To take an examination
- Watching any event for pleasure (including a sporting event)
- Work experience
- To receive an honour
- To do research for own interest, not as part of profession/job
- To live in a religious community
- To take part in a competition – not amateur sports player/arts performer
- Voluntary work
- Working holiday (if both work/business and holiday are considered main reasons)
- Flight only trips
- Attending graduation

## Use of regional data

- **Why can we not compare regional data before and after 1999?**

Prior to 01 April 1999 data on visitors to and from Republic of Ireland was provided by Irish CSO (Central Statistics Office). This was based on a self-completion questionnaire. Data provided on purpose of visit, quarter, mode (air/sea) but nothing on age, duration of stay or regions of UK visited.

- **Why do visits numbers for parts of the UK usually add to more than the totals?**

Because some visitors stay in more than one place e.g. someone who spends a night in Cumbria counts as a visit to Cumbria. The same person may also spend a night in London, hence counted as a visit to London. But there has been only one visit to England even though the components add to two. Although visits cannot be summed across UK regions, the amount of spending and the number of nights can.

## Use of regional data

- **How accurate is the Regional data?**

The regional data has to be interpreted with lots of caution, as the IPS has never been designed to be able to produce highly accurate results at regional level. Whilst the survey gives good precision at the national level, regional breakdowns of the data will almost inevitably lead to less reliable results. We have to bear in mind that although the IPS matches accurately the overall volume of overseas visitors coming to the UK, the IPS does not give a precise picture of where these overseas visitors stayed during their stay in the UK. This is because some interviews are not done in a few regional airports. For example until 2005 no interviews were carried at Prestwick and Liverpool airports, which may have resulted into less accurate estimates for Scotland and Northern England.



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