International sea passenger numbers fell for a second year in 2016, decreasing by 4 per cent from 23.0 to 22.0 million.

Domestic sea passenger numbers increased marginally by 1 per cent to 42.2 million.

International Passengers

- In 2016 the total number of international short sea passengers decreased by 5 per cent to 20.0 million.
- Cruise passengers increased by 5 per cent to 2.0 million, after fluctuating growth in recent years.

UK Domestic and international sea passengers, 2006-2016

Domestic Passengers

- Total passenger numbers on domestic routes increased marginally to 42.2 million. This figure has changed little in recent years; passenger numbers were only 1 per cent higher than those in 2006.
- Within this total, Domestic sea crossing passenger numbers decreased by 1 per cent to 3.5 million. Over the past decade domestic sea crossing passenger numbers have had an overall downward trend.
Sea Passengers on International Routes

Summary

The total number of sea passengers on international routes is comprised of passengers on international short sea (ferry) routes, cruises and long sea journeys.

In 2016 international sea passenger numbers decreased by 4 per cent to 22.0 million. This figure has remained fairly stable over the previous five years following a general decreasing trend.

International Short Sea Journeys

In 2016 the number of international short sea passengers decreased by 5 per cent to 20.0 million, compared to 2015. This follows a longer period of decline between 1995 and 2012, following the opening of the Channel Tunnel in 1994.

The number of passengers travelling via the Channel Tunnel decreased by 1 per cent to 20.6 million. This is marginally higher than the number of sea passengers.

Since opening in 1994, the trends in the number of passengers travelling via the Channel Tunnel and by sea have steadily converged. The volume of Channel Tunnel passengers exceeded the volume of passengers on international short sea journeys in 2012. However, sea passengers then outnumbered Channel Tunnel passengers by a small margin until 2016.

UK International short sea passengers and Channel Tunnel passengers, 1966-2016

Detailed statistics on Channel Tunnel and international short sea passengers can be found in web table SPAS0301
Passenger numbers at Thames and Kent ports decreased by 8 per cent to 12.0 million. This port group remained the busiest in 2016, accounting for 60 per cent of all international short sea passenger movements.

The number of passengers travelling through East Coast ports in 2016 fell by 1 per cent to 2.3 million.

In 2016 2.7 million passengers travelled through the West Coast ports: a decrease of 2 per cent.

The number of passengers who travelled through South Coast ports in 2016 increased by 1 per cent to 3.0 million.

Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by port group can be found in web table SPAS0101.
International Short Sea Journeys by Route

France is the most popular country of destination for UK international short sea routes, and has been since the series began in 1950. In 2016, 73 per cent of international short sea journeys were between the UK and France. Passenger numbers on these routes totalled 14.7 million; 6 per cent lower than in 2015.

The second most popular destination was the Irish Republic; these routes accounted for 13 per cent of all UK international short sea passengers. In 2016 these routes carried 2.7 million passengers; a decrease of 2 per cent on the previous year.

Over the last decade short sea passenger numbers have fallen by 15 per cent. The volume of passengers to all destinations declined, except to the Netherlands which increased by 3 per cent. However passengers to the Netherlands represented just 10 per cent of all international short sea passengers in 2016.

UK international short sea passengers by country of origin/destination, 2016 compared to 2006

Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by country can be found in web table SPAS0103
Top 5 short-sea routes by passenger number (millions), 2016

Over the past decade the Dover-Calais route has continued to handle the largest amount of passengers of all international short sea ferry routes.

In 2016 the number of passengers on the Dover-Calais route decreased by 7 per cent to 9.1 million, compared to 2015. This follows a fall in the previous two years, and over the last decade the route has declined from 11.6 million passengers in 2006.

In 2006 Dover-Dunkirk became the second busiest route between France and the UK. In 2016, the number travelling on the Dover-Dunkirk route decreased by 10 per cent to 2.9 million, following a 27 per cent increase between 2014 and 2015.

Passenger numbers on the Holyhead-Dublin route decreased by 2 per cent to 1.9 million compared with 2015. This is a similar pattern to falling passenger numbers on the other West Coast routes with the Irish Republic.

The number of passengers using the Portsmouth-Caen route fell 2 per cent to 1.0 million passengers. This is the first fall in passenger numbers since 2013.

Passenger numbers on the Harwich-Hook of Holland route have grown year on year since 2011. In 2016 these numbers rose by 1 per cent to 0.7 million.

Possible Disruption at Calais

There were service disruptions in March 2016 and to a lesser degree in September 2016, which affected the Dover-Calais route. Passenger numbers on the Dover-Calais route decreased by 0.7 million, whilst the number travelling on the alternative Dover-Dunkirk route also decreased 0.3 million.

Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by route can be found in web table SPAS0102
Seasonal trends in International Short Sea Journeys

International short sea journeys tend to be highly seasonal due to factors such as holiday making and weather patterns.

The third quarter of 2016 (July-September) was the busiest in terms of total international short sea passenger traffic. The least busy period of the year was the first quarter (January-March).

In the third quarter of 2016 passenger numbers through Thames and Kent ports were 2.0 million higher than in the first quarter of the year. The third quarter of the year accounted for 36 per cent of annual passengers, while the first quarter handled just over half as many (19 per cent).

Proportionally, South Coast ports have the greatest variability in passenger numbers between quarters. In 2016, 43 per cent annual passenger traffic through South Coast ports travelled in the third quarter, compared with 13 per cent in the first quarter. This represents a difference of 0.9 million passengers.

**International short sea passengers by port group and quarter, 2012 - 2016**

Million Passengers

![Graph showing passenger numbers by port group and quarter from 2012 to 2016.](image)

Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by port group and quarter can be found in web table SPAS0105.
Cruise passenger numbers increased to 2.0 million in 2016, a 5 per cent increase from 2015, and nearly twice as many as in 2006. This is a return to the historic trend of largely continuous growth and is the second consecutive year of record breaking cruise passenger numbers.

The majority of cruise passengers passed through Southampton. In 2016 the number of passengers through Southampton increased by 3 per cent to 1.7 million - a third consecutive year of growth. Southampton continues to increase its share of the cruise market, from 65 per cent of passengers in 2006, to 85 per cent in 2016.

Long sea passenger numbers increased to 59 thousand in 2016, an 11 per cent increase from 2015. This is more than twice the amount of long sea passengers in 2000 (27 thousand).

Long sea figures vary greatly over time, in part because operators can use these trips to reposition vessels around the world as needed. The number of long sea passengers increased through the early 2000s to 82 thousand in 2008 before falling to 44 thousand in 2011, and then rose again to 84 thousand in 2014.

**Cruise and long sea passengers, 2000 - 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cruise Passengers</th>
<th>Long Sea Passengers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1,985</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2,840</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>3,320</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>3,525</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>3,770</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the long sea passengers were travelling on the Southampton to New York route: 69 per cent in 2016.

Detailed statistics on cruise and long sea passengers by port group can be found in web table [SPAS0101](#).
Sea Passengers on Domestic Routes

Summary
The total number of sea passengers on domestic routes comprises of passengers on domestic sea crossings, inter-island domestic routes and river ferries.

The total number of sea passengers on domestic routes in 2016 increased by 1 per cent to 42.2 million. There was also a 1 per cent increase in passengers on river ferries to 20.0 million.

The largest components of domestic sea passenger numbers in 2016 were river ferry journeys (47 per cent) and inter-island (44 per cent).

Domestic Sea Passenger Routes in 2016

Passengers on Inter-island Domestic Routes
Passenger numbers on inter-island domestic routes increased by 2 per cent to 18.7 million.

Scottish inter-island routes increased by 3 per cent to 8.1 million, reversing the drop of 3 per cent in 2015.

Passenger numbers between Hampshire and the Isle of Wight increased by 1 per cent to 8.8 million. Other inter island routes however fell by 1 per cent to 1.8 million in 2016, with some changes in reporting (see note on page 10).

Passengers on River Ferries
Passenger numbers on river ferries increased by 1 per cent to 20.0 million. In the last decade passenger numbers have increased by 11 per cent with consecutive increases in the three years preceding 2014.

In 2013 the passenger numbers rose by 5 per cent, primarily as the result of improved reporting methods, and rose again in 2016 following two consecutive years of falling passenger numbers.

Definitions
Inter-island: Covers routes between the mainland and UK islands, such as Isle of Skye and the Isle of Wight. It also covers internal ferry routes on lochs such as Strangford to Portaferry in Northern Ireland.

River ferries: Figures for river ferries are collected annually from the operators. Routes are generally included in this statistical release when the passenger km figure is greater than 500 passenger kms.
Domestic Sea Crossings
In 2016 traffic between the UK mainland and Northern Ireland increased 2 per cent to 2.0 million passengers. Cairnryan-Belfast remained the most popular route with 1.2 million passengers, an increase of 8 per cent. Troon-Larne ferries were stopped in 2016 by the operator.

Total traffic between the UK mainland and the Isle of Man increased by 4 per cent to 0.5 million. Overall the number of journeys between the UK mainland and the Channel Islands decreased by 15 per cent to 0.3 million, with Poole routes falling in passenger numbers by 15 per cent to 0.2 million compared with the previous year. The number of passengers at Portsmouth travelling on routes to the Channel Islands increased compared to the previous year, to 53 thousand passengers. There were no Channel Island passengers at Weymouth in 2016, following Condor Ferries’ switch of operations to Poole in March 2015.

UK’s top 5 busiest domestic sea crossing routes, 2003 - 2016

Seasonal trends in Domestic Sea Crossing Journeys
As with international destinations, passenger numbers on routes with Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands have the highest volumes in the third quarter of the year (July-September) and lowest in the first quarter.

Of the three groups, routes to Northern Ireland had the least variability between quarters, with 37 per cent of passengers in 2016 travelling in the third quarter and 17 per cent travelling in the first quarter.

Many ferry operators work to a winter timetable during the first quarter due to the small number of passengers travelling.

Detailed statistics on Domestic Sea Passengers can be found in web tables SPAS0201 (annual) and SPAS0202 (quarterly).
The data for International Short-Sea passengers is collected from ferry operators, and is validated and published in aggregate on a monthly basis. At the end of the reference year the annual data is then validated for a final time for this publication. The proportional allocation of passengers between some routes was also estimated.

Data for international ferry passenger routes, domestic sea crossings and inter-island routes are collected regularly from operators. Data for crossings to Orkney and Shetland and Scottish inter-island routes, are supplied by the Scottish Government. These data sets are checked in detail by Department for Transport statisticians and considered to be very robust.

As a result of improvements in the accuracy of recording for foot passengers on the Cowes ferry, the number of passengers recorded for 2016 (included in 'other inter-island journeys') is not directly comparable with previous years, though the impact on the overall number of domestic passengers is likely to be small.

Passenger numbers on river ferries are collected from operators and cover major routes, which are reviewed periodically. Data are considered to be fit for purpose.

The cruise and long sea data are also supplied by operators and are regularly reviewed. The data are considered to be fit for purpose. In 2016, one cruise operator was non-responsive, and their passenger numbers have been estimated based upon historical returns.

International figures include passengers on routes beginning or ending in Great Britain or Northern Ireland. Routes with foreign countries beginning or ending in the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man are not included.

Some passengers travel between Great Britain and St Malo in France by going to the Channel Islands on one vessel and then transferring to another. Prior to 2016, where these passengers could be distinguished from other traffic they were subtracted from the domestic route with the Channel Islands and added to the direct international route between Great Britain and France. From 2016 onward these passenger numbers are attributed to the domestic route with the Channel Islands rather than the direct international route. The main routes affected are Poole-St Malo and Weymouth-St Malo. In recent years these routes accounted for less than 0.1 per cent of the total international short sea traffic.

We would welcome any feedback on these statistics by email to maritime.stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk.
The web tables for sea passenger statistics can be found at:

Full guidance on the methods used in the publication of these releases, and the quality of the data, can be found in the Technical Note at:

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https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-release-access-lists-for-maritime-and-shipping-series

Provisional summary totals for international sea passenger traffic are released monthly via the DfT website at:

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