



Department  
for Transport

# Sea Passenger Statistics 2019: Short Sea Routes

## About this release

This statistical release presents statistics on short sea passengers to and from the UK in 2019. This includes:

**International short sea routes:** These include all ferry routes within Europe.

**Domestic short sea major routes:** These include all routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

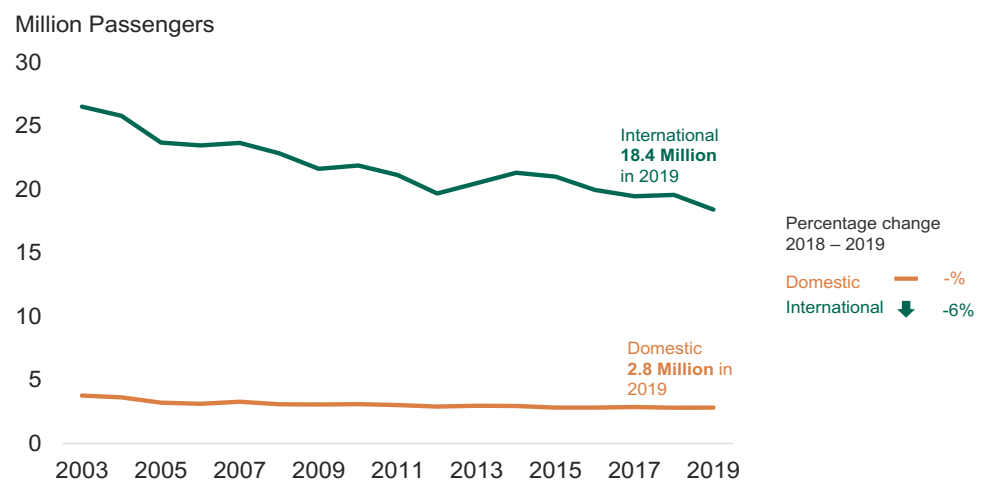
These do not include data on routes between Great Britain and Scottish islands, domestic river crossings and inter-island routes. These are scheduled to be published in November 2020 along with statistics on cruises and long sea journeys.

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**International short sea passenger numbers decreased 6% to 18.4 million in 2019 continuing the long term decline seen since 2014.**

**UK international and domestic short sea passenger numbers, 2003 - 2019 ([SPAS0101](#) and [SPAS0201](#))**



**Domestic short sea passenger numbers for major routes have stayed stable at 2.8 million in 2019 and have decreased by 8% overall in the last ten years.**



## Breakdown of scheduled publications of sea passenger statistics for 2019

### Sea Passenger Statistics 2019: Short Sea Routes

This statistical release presents statistics on short sea passengers to and from the UK in 2019.

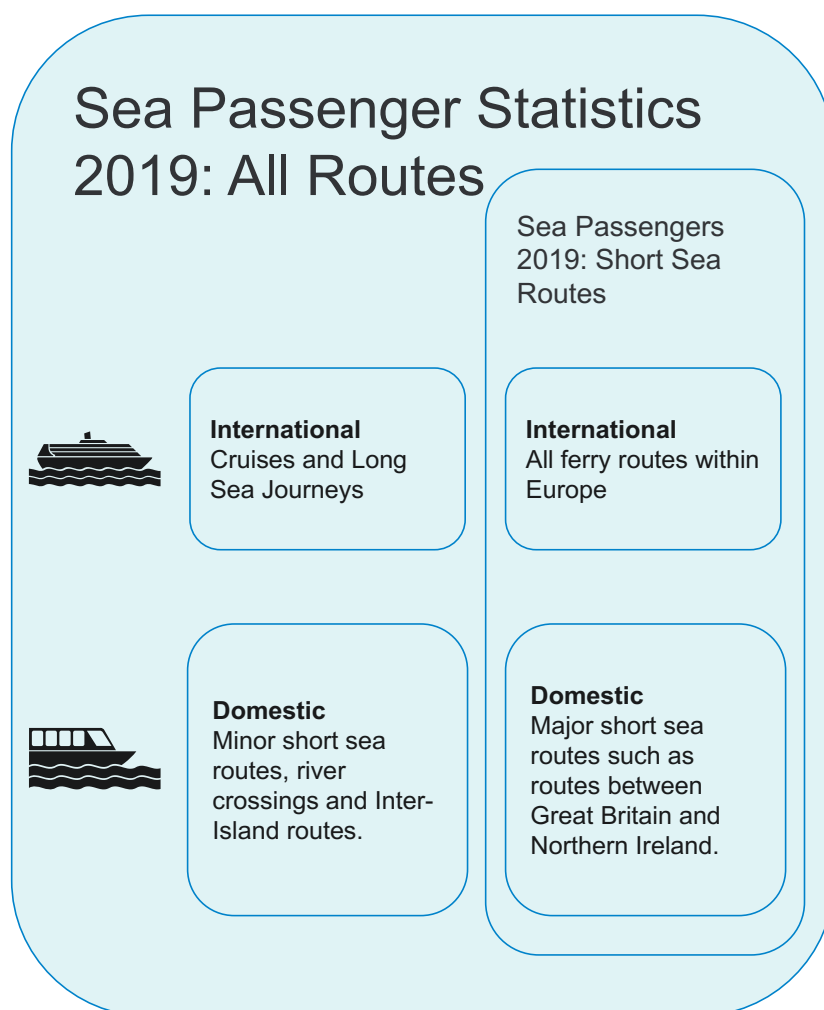
This includes:

#### International short sea routes:

These include all ferry routes between the UK and the rest of Europe.

**Domestic short sea major routes:** All ferry routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

Other domestic short sea routes, including routes between Great Britain and the Orkney and Shetland Islands, are not included in this release and are scheduled to be published in November 2020.



### Sea Passenger Statistics 2019: All Routes (Planned publication date: November 2020)

This statistical release will present the complete statistics on all sea passengers to and from the UK in 2019. In addition to the **short sea passenger statistics** included in this publication, it will also include:

**International routes:** These include all passengers travelling for pleasure on **cruiises** and **long sea journeys** to and from the UK.

**Domestic routes:** All other short sea passenger routes, including routes between Great Britain and the Orkney and Shetland Islands, **domestic river** crossings and **inter-island routes**. These will be added to the previously published major short sea routes for a complete picture of domestic routes.

Data is collected from ferry and cruise operators and council government sources. For more details on collection and definitions, please see the [Sea Passenger Statistics: Notes and Definitions](#).

## Passengers on International Short Sea Routes

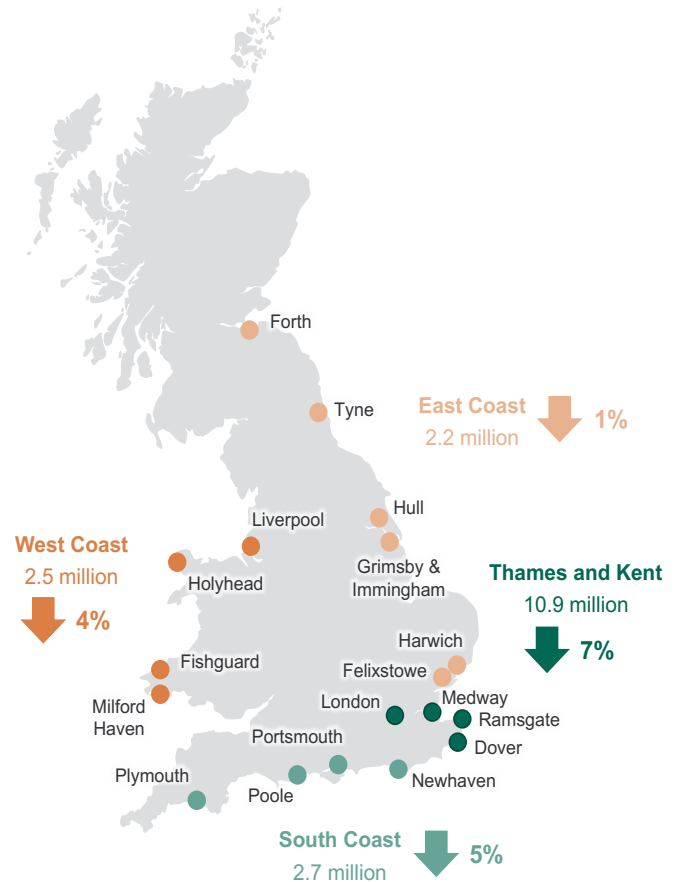
In 2019, the number of international short sea passengers decreased by 6% to 18.4 million, compared to 19.6 million in 2018.

This decrease was largely driven by a 7% decrease in international passenger numbers through the Thames and Kent port group. There were notable decreases of 6% and 11% in the number of passengers travelling between Dover - Calais and Dover - Dunkirk, respectively.

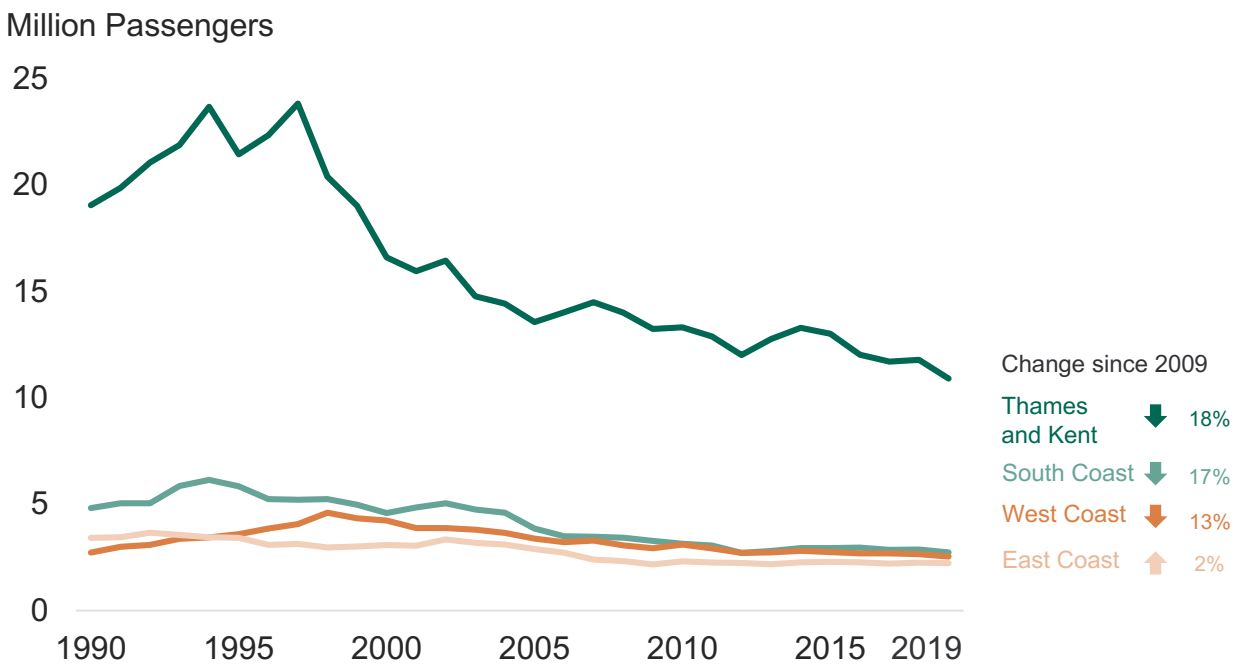
The total number of international short sea passengers has decreased by 15% since 2009.

The West Coast and South Coast port groups also experienced decreased international passenger numbers of 4% and 5% respectively. All port groups experienced a decrease in 2019 and as such have an effect on overall international passengers.

### UK international short sea passengers by port group in 2019 and change from 2018 ([SPAS0101](#))



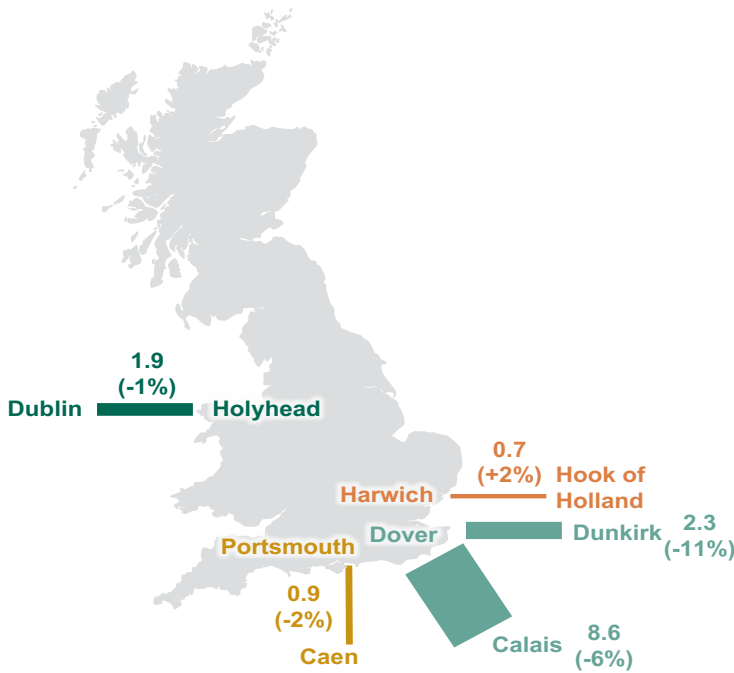
### UK international short sea passengers by port group, 1990 - 2019 and 10 year change ([SPAS0101](#))



Statistics on international short sea passengers by port group can be found in web table [SPAS0101](#).

## Top 5 international short sea routes

### Top 5 international short sea routes by number of passengers (millions) in 2019 and change from 2018 ([SPAS0102](#))



The top 5 international short sea routes accounted for 78% of all international short sea passengers in 2019.

Over the last decade, Dover - Calais has consistently been the busiest route with around 47% of the annual international short sea passenger traffic in 2019. 8.6 million passengers travelled on this route in 2019, a 6% decline on 2018 and 17% lower than a decade ago.

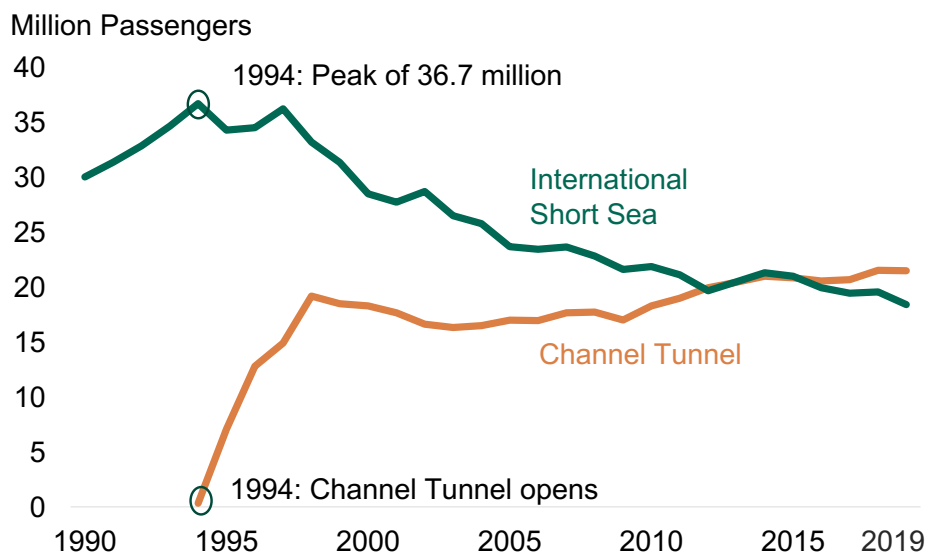
Passenger numbers on the second largest route, Dover - Dunkirk, decreased 11% to 2.3 million passengers in 2019, continuing the decline seen since 2015.

Whilst following the long term trend, the larger than usual declines in 2019 could be related to the UK's process of leaving the EU affecting passengers' decisions to travel.

In 2019, Holyhead - Dublin passenger numbers fell by 1% to 1.9 million, 3% fewer than a decade previous (when taking into account passenger numbers for the now discontinued Dun Laoghaire route).

The number of passengers travelling via the Channel Tunnel was 21.5 million in 2019, stable from the previous year. Passenger numbers on international short sea routes were lower than those through the Channel Tunnel for the fourth consecutive year, and the fifth time since the Tunnel opened.

### International short sea passengers and Channel Tunnel passengers, 1990 - 2019 ([SPAS0101](#))



Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by route can be found in web table [SPAS0102](#). Channel Tunnel figures are supplied to the Department for Transport by Office of Rail and Road.

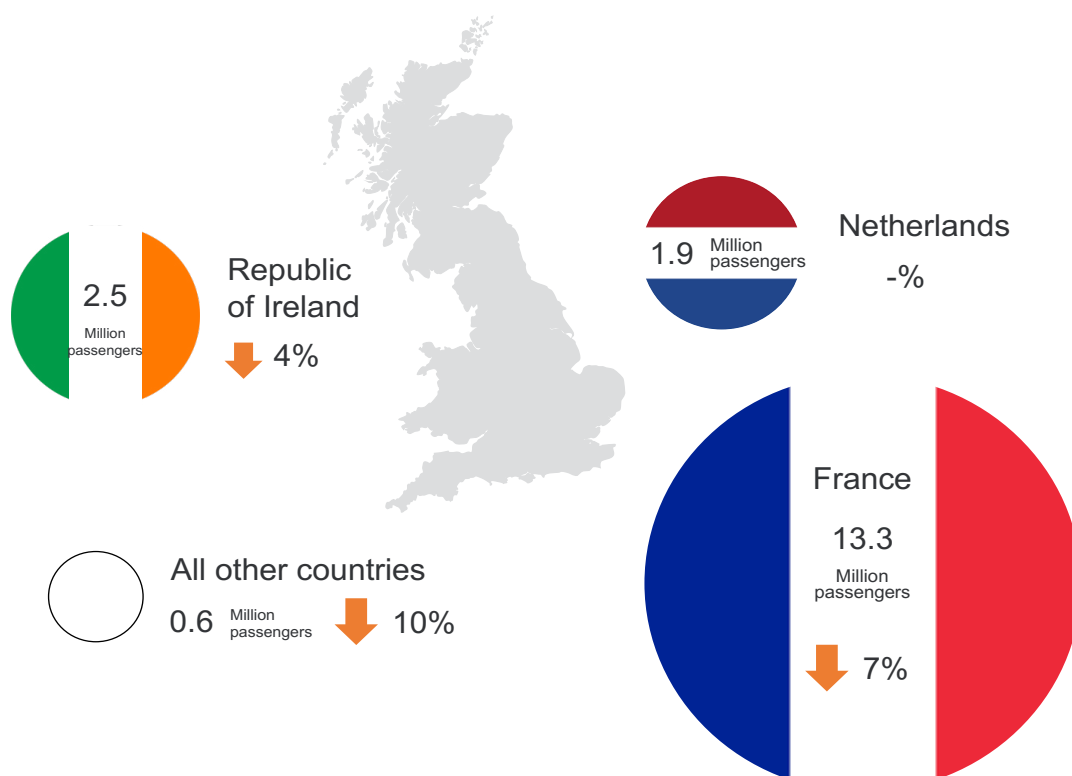
## Top 5 foreign countries of origin/destination

In 2019, passenger numbers on routes with France decreased 7% to 13.3 million. Routes with France have consistently made up the majority of international short sea passenger numbers, accounting for 72% of the total in 2019, similar to previous years.

The ranking of the top three countries, France, the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands, has been consistent since the beginning of the DfT time series in 1998.

Since 2009, passenger numbers with France and the Republic of Ireland have decreased by 17% and 13% respectively, reflecting the total 10 year decrease of 15% for international short sea passenger numbers. In contrast, passenger numbers with the Netherlands have increased 14% over the same period, although the trend has remained stable at 1.9 million passengers since 2015.

**UK international short sea passengers by country of origin/destination in 2019 and change from 2018 ([SPAS0108](#)).**



## Seasonal trends ([SPAS0107](#)).

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

International short sea passenger numbers are consistently highest in July and August and lowest in January. Although the exact monthly proportion fluctuates between different years, in general the distribution remains similar from year to year.

Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by country can be found in [SPAS0108](#). Statistics on international short sea passengers by month can be found in [SPAS0107](#).

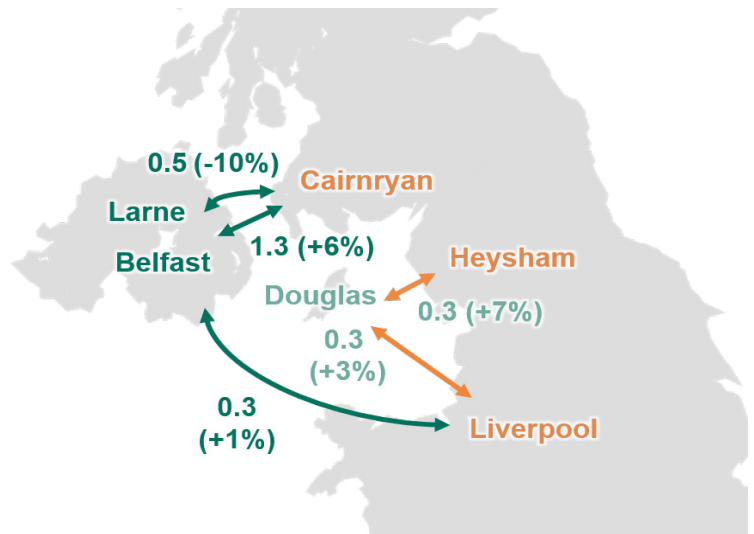
## Passengers on Major Domestic Short Sea Routes

In 2019, 2.8 million passengers travelled on major domestic short sea routes, stable from the year before. There was a 3% increase in passengers travelling between Great Britain and the Isle of Man and a 13% decrease in passengers travelling between Great Britain and the Channel Islands, but this has not had an impact on the overall number of passengers travelling on major domestic short sea routes as the majority (74%) of passengers travel between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

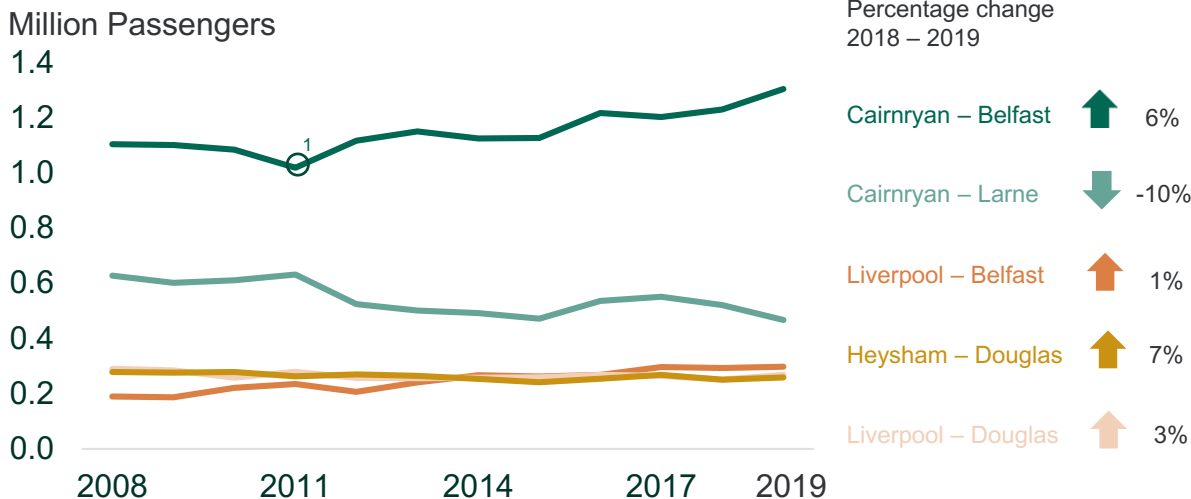
Cairnryan - Belfast is consistently the busiest domestic short sea route, with passenger numbers increasing 6% in 2019 to 1.3 million. Continuing the increase seen since 2012.

As with international short sea traffic, passenger numbers on domestic short sea routes vary over the course of the year, with the highest passenger numbers in the third quarter and the lowest in the first. Several ferry operators work to a different winter timetable due to the small number of passengers travelling.

### Top 5 busiest UK domestic short sea routes in 2019 by number of passengers (millions) and change from 2018 (SPAS0201).



### Top 5 busiest UK domestic sea crossing routes, 2008 - 2019 (SPAS0201).



<sup>1</sup>Passengers on the Cairnryan-Belfast route travelled from Stranraer to Belfast before 2012.

Detailed statistics on domestic sea passengers can be found in web tables [SPAS0201](#).

## Related Statistics

These Sea Passenger statistics do not provide information about the individuals travelling through UK Ports. Additional information on the origin of passengers is available from the [ONS International Passenger Survey](#), monthly figures.

The ONS International Passenger Survey publish overseas residents' visits to the UK by month with a breakdown of geographical areas (e.g. EU15 including all countries that joined the EU prior to 2004), as well as information on UK residents visits abroad and where their destination is, again segmented using the same geographical areas. This survey also produces a table on the earnings in the UK and expenditure abroad.

### ONS International Passenger Survey



In 2018, there were 37.9 million visits to the UK by overseas residents, these overseas residents spent £22.9 billion on visits to the UK.

In the same period, UK residents made 71.7 million visits overseas and spent £45.4 billion on these visits.

## Strengths and Weaknesses of the Data

- ▶ The data for international and domestic short sea passengers is collected from ferry operators and is validated 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 is occasionally estimated.
- ▶ Validation processes focus on comparing reference periods with the same period in the previous year, to allow for seasonal differences. Anomalies are followed up with the operators.
- ▶ Passengers are counted in both directions. It is not possible to distinguish passengers travelling by foot from those in vehicles or those travelling as the driver of a goods vehicle. Data on the number of vehicles travelling through sea ports can be found in the [Port Freight Statistics](#) series.
- ▶ Data collection is limited to vessels over 100 gross tonnes and so does not include services operated by small boats.
- ▶ 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. From 2016 onwards, these passenger numbers are attributed to the domestic route with the Channel Islands rather than the direct international route. Please see the [Sea Passengers Notes and Guidance](#) for more details.

## Changes to Sea Passengers Statistics

- ▶ In 2018, the Department carried out a review of the content of the annual sea passenger statistics, including the data tables published as part of this release.
- ▶ Following a consultation with users, the decision was made to discontinue a number of the previously published data tables where there was little user interest or the information included was already covered in other tables.
- ▶ Please refer to the [User Feedback Summary](#) for further information, including a list of retained and discontinued tables.

## Background Notes

- ▶ We would welcome any **feedback** on these statistics by email to [maritime.stats@dft.gov.uk](mailto:maritime.stats@dft.gov.uk). We will attempt to address any comments in a subsequent release.
- ▶ The web tables for sea passenger statistics can be found at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/maritime-and-shipping-statistics#data-tables-associated-with-this-series>
- ▶ Provisional summary totals for international sea passenger traffic are released monthly in table SPAS017 available via the DfT website at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/spas01-uk-international-sea-passengers#table-spas0107>
- ▶ Full guidance on the methods used in the publication of these releases, and the quality of the data, and known users and uses of the statistics can be found in the documents available at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maritime-and-shipping-statistics-guidance>
- ▶ The sea passenger statistics are National Statistics. This means they are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs.
- ▶ These statistics were [designated as National statistics](#) in February 2013.
- ▶ Details of ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-release-access-lists-for-maritime-and-shipping->



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