



Department for Transport

Sea Passenger Statistics 2020: Short Sea Routes

About this release

This release presents statistics on short sea passengers to and from the UK in 2020. This includes:

International short sea routes: Including all ferry routes within Europe.

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

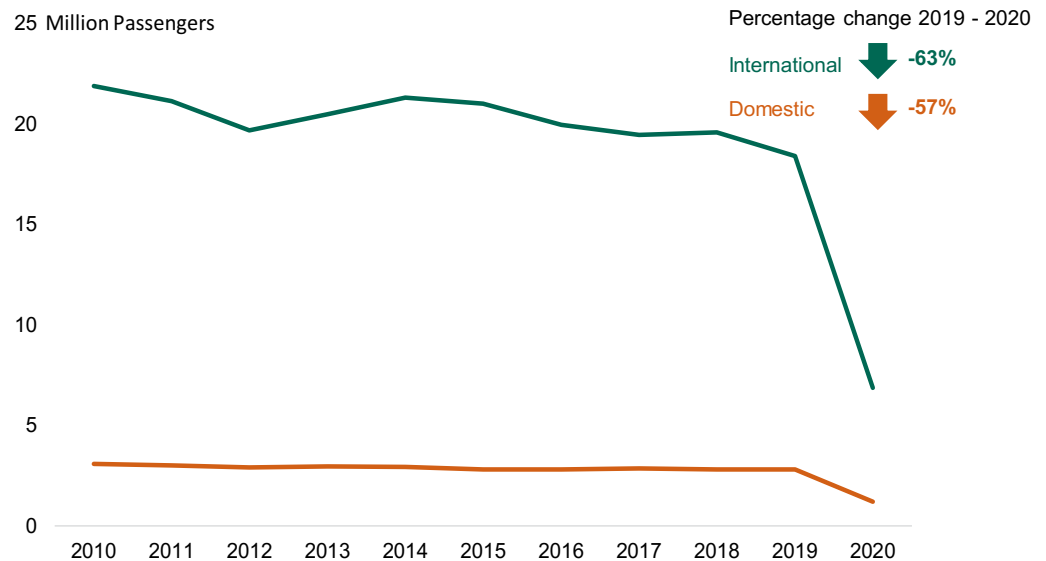
These do not include data on routes between Great Britain and Scottish islands, domestic river crossings and inter-island routes. These are scheduled to be published in November 2021 along with statistics on cruises and long sea journeys.

In this publication

- International short sea routes** 3
- Major domestic routes** 8
- Annex** 10
- Strengths & Weaknesses** 11
- Background Notes**. 12

In 2020 the coronavirus pandemic affected both international and domestic short sea passenger numbers. There was a marked decrease in sea passengers in 2020 compared to previous years.

UK international and domestic short sea passenger numbers, 2010 - 2020 ([SPAS0101](#), [SPAS0201](#))



- ▶ International short sea passenger numbers decreased by 63% to 6.9 million in 2020 compared to 18.4 million in 2019.
- ▶ Domestic short sea passenger numbers decreased by 57% to 1.2 million in 2020 compared to 2.8 million in 2019.

Impact of the coronavirus pandemic:

This release covers the period of the government’s announcement, and implementation, of measures to limit the impact and transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). Since March 2020, measures particularly relevant to sea travel included the introduction of lockdown, self-isolation, and subsequent international travel policies. This release presents the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on international short sea routes and on major domestic routes. It should be noted that these sea passenger statistics include tourist, leisure and business travel, as well as freight drivers accompanying cargo. Freight drivers are exempt from many of the travel restrictions the government put in place to ensure continual flow of freight.

Breakdown of scheduled publications of sea passenger statistics for 2020



Sea Passenger Statistics 2020: Short Sea Routes

This statistical release presents statistics on short sea passengers to and from the UK in 2020. This includes the top row of the above visualisation.

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.

Sea Passenger Statistics 2020: All Routes (Planned publication date: November 2021)

This statistical release will present the complete statistics on all sea passengers to and from the UK in 2020. This includes all parts of the above visualisation. 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 **cruises** 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.

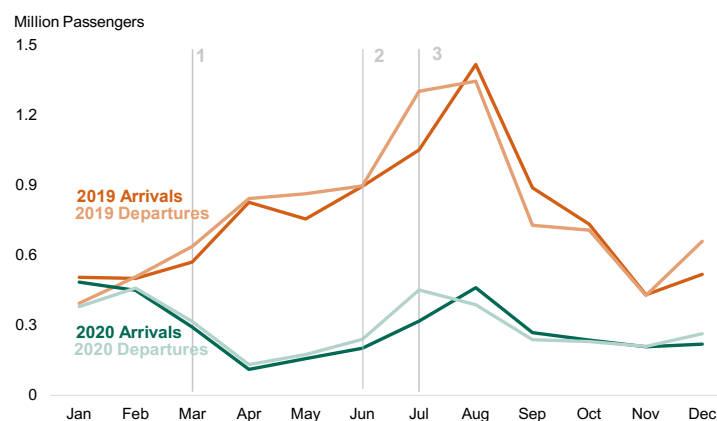
Data is collected from ferry and cruise operators and council government sources. For more details on collection and definitions, please see the [Sea Passenger Statistics: Notes and Definitions](#).

Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on international short sea passenger routes

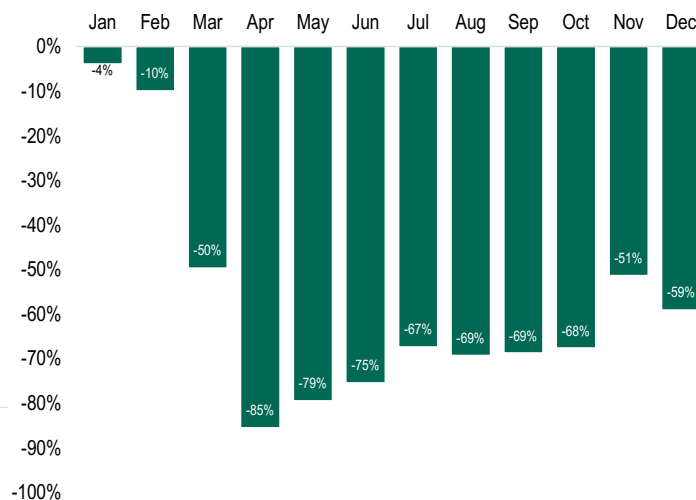
Overall trends compared with 2019 ([SPAS0107](#))

In 2020, the number of short sea passengers on international routes decreased by 63% to 6.9 million compared to 18.4 million in 2019.

International short sea passengers by month, 2019 and 2020



Percentage change in international short sea passengers by month compared to 2019



1. Foreign and Commonwealth Office advised against all non-essential international travel & introduction of UK-wide lockdown
2. Persons travelling to UK from outside the Common Travel Area required to self-isolate for 14 days.
3. Introduction of travel corridors

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic started to be seen in March 2020 when international short sea passenger figures decreased 50% to 609,000, compared to March 2019. This coincided with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office advising against all non-essential international travel on 17th March, and later the introduction of the first nationwide lockdown on 23rd March 2020. The largest year-on-year monthly fall was in April 2020, the first full month following the national lockdown, when the total number of international sea passengers were down 85% compared to the same month in 2019.

Passenger statistics include freight drivers accompanying cargo. Freight drivers were exempt from many of the international travel restrictions introduced from March onwards. DfT publishes port freight statistics, including figures for the number of road goods vehicles in [PORT0201](#). Annual 2020 port freight statistics will be published in August 2021; the Sea Passengers All Routes 2020 publication (due for release in November 2021) will incorporate more comparison to port freight trends after they are published.

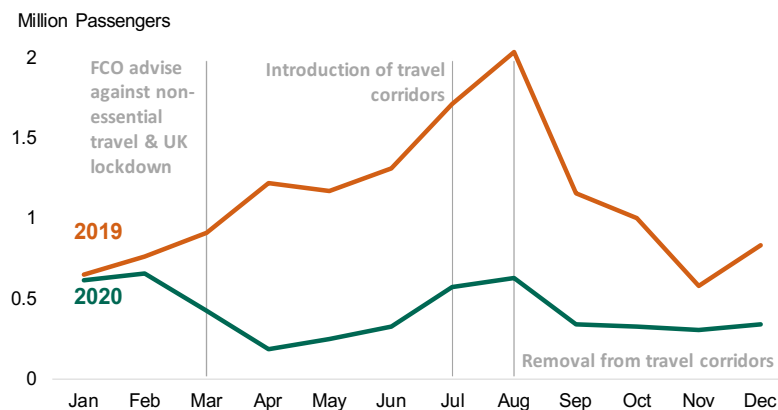
Following April, sea passenger traffic recovered slowly and increased substantially in July before levelling off in August. These are usually peak months for sea passenger traffic, however, in 2020 volumes remained largely down on the previous year. There is an observable peak in departures in July and arrivals in August that might coincide with departing and returning from holidays. The increase in passengers occurred alongside the introduction of the 14-day self-isolation requirement (on 8 June) and travel corridors for most countries that sea passengers travel to and from (on 10 July). Please see the timeline provided in the annex for more details.

At the end of July and throughout August, Spain, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium were removed from the travel corridor exempt list. This may have contributed to a levelling-off of passenger figures in August 2020 which saw a 69% reduction compared to August 2019. From September to November passenger figures steadily decreased, as is usual in the autumn months. In November there was a 51% reduction compared to the same month in 2019. This marked the smallest gap between 2020 and 2019 figures since March. December saw a slight increase in traffic but this increase was lower than usually expected for December; and therefore, this month was still down 59% compared to December 2019.

Trends by country of origin and departure ([SPAS0108](#), [SPAS0107](#))

In 2020, passenger numbers to and from all countries with short sea routes were affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Whilst travel corridor policies did not apply to the Republic of Ireland as it is part of the Common Travel Area, France, Netherlands, and Spain were included then removed from the travel corridors exempt list (requiring self-isolation for 14 days) between July and August. Whilst all four countries shown below saw similar decreases of around 60% over 2020 compared to the previous year, the profile of passenger trends over the months within 2020 was variable.

France: annual decrease of 63%

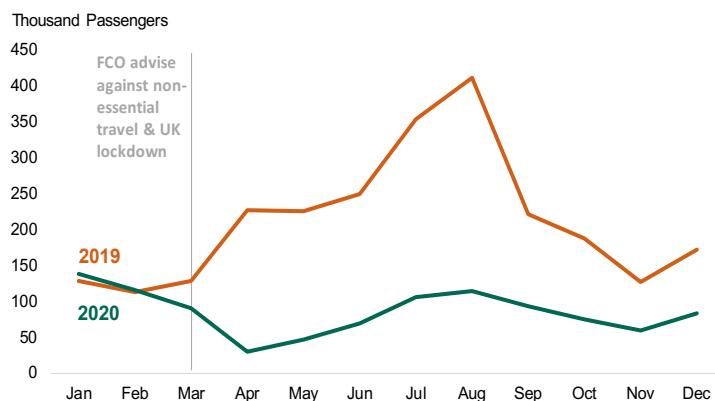


International short sea passenger traffic between the UK and France behaved in the same way as the overall monthly international trends, with a noticeable uplift in passengers in July with the introduction of travel corridors and a levelling off in August when the travel corridor with France was removed.

Related Statistics on International Travel

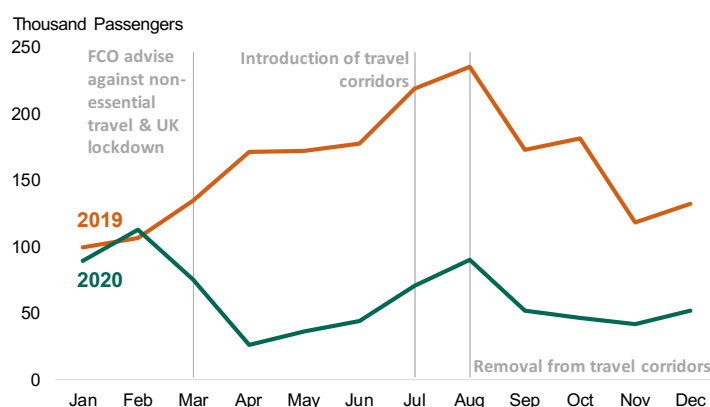
[Further statistics relating to passenger arrivals since the COVID-19 outbreak are published quarterly by the Home Office.](#) This release uses Border and Immigration Transactions (BITD) data to compare the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on international passenger arrivals across air, sea and rail. Although Home Office statistics exclude travel from the Common Travel Area (an open borders area comprising the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands.), while DfT sea passenger statistics do not, the percentage changes detailed in this sea passenger statistical release are in line with trends seen in the Home Office statistics. Home Office data shows that, on the whole, international travel by sea to the UK was relatively less reduced than air and rail over the reported months. This might be linked to the proportion of maritime freight within the overall sea passenger traffic.

Republic of Ireland: annual decrease of 60%



Passenger traffic between the UK and the Republic of Ireland did not exhibit the same trends as other countries and stayed around 70% down on 2019 throughout the summer months. The increase in passenger numbers throughout summer 2020 could be attributed to a usual summer peak, or an increase in confidence to travel.

Netherlands: annual decrease of 61%



International short sea passenger traffic between the UK and the Netherlands showed a similar pattern to France and overall monthly trends with a noticeable uplift of passengers in July and August with the introduction of travel corridors. Following August, and the Netherlands' removal from the exempt list, passenger numbers decreased until November and saw a slight increase in December.

Spain: annual decrease of 62%



Spain saw the largest decrease of these four countries for the period of April to June, around 96% down on 2019. This may be related to the type of passengers who use Spanish ferries and the division between freight and leisure passenger traffic. Passenger traffic did not see a further increase in August after the removal of Spain from the travel corridors, and continued to decline for the rest of 2020. Because passenger traffic to and from Spain is highly seasonal and usually sees a large decrease of passengers in November, volumes for November and December 2020 were much closer to 2019.

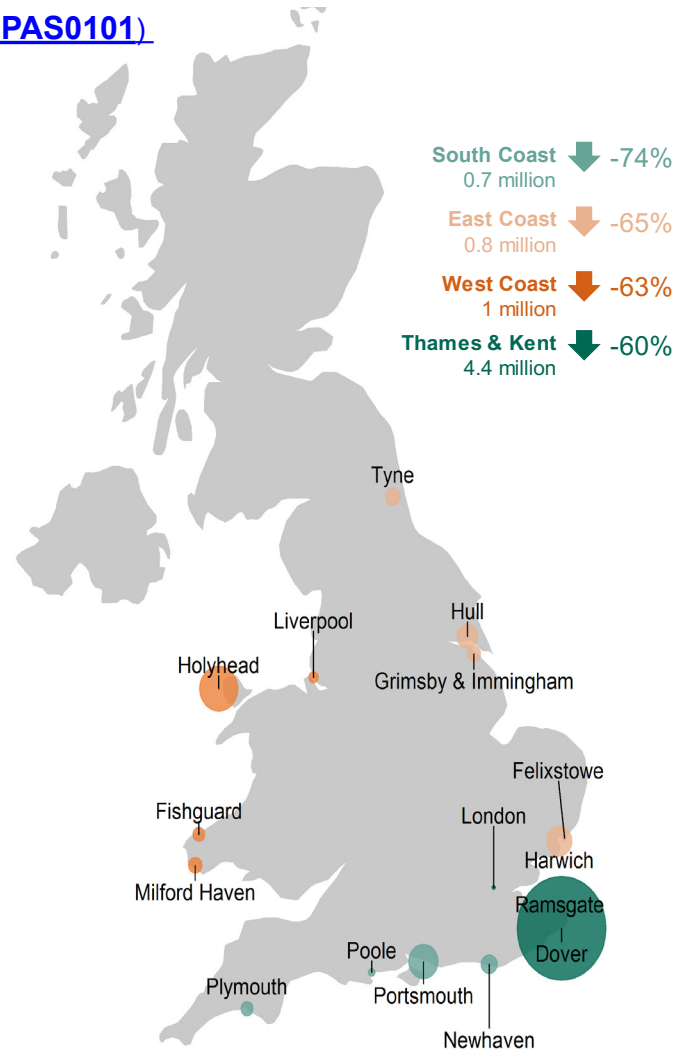
International short sea passengers, trends by port and port group ([SPAS0101](#))

In 2020, the number of international short sea passengers decreased by 63% to 6.9 million, compared to 18.4 million in 2019.

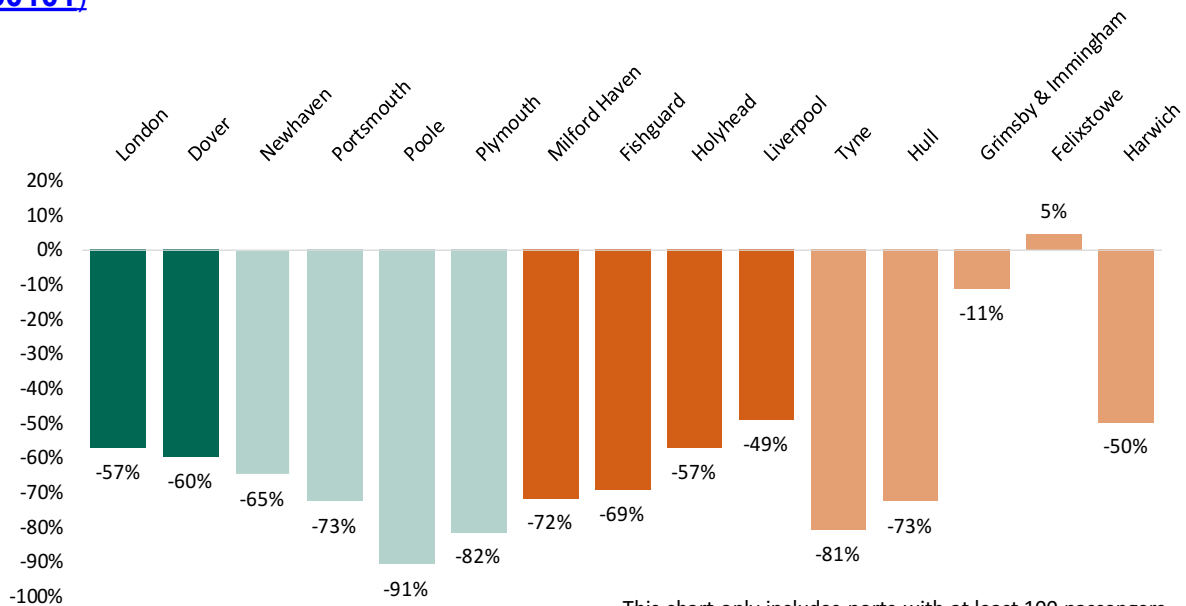
This decrease is linked to the coronavirus pandemic and the implementation of travel restrictions across 2020. Thames & Kent reported the smallest decrease of passengers, a 60% decrease to 4.4 million passengers in 2020. The South Coast port group reported the largest decrease of passengers, a 74% decrease to 0.7 million in 2020. The East and West Coast port groups also experienced decreased international passenger numbers of 65% and 63% respectively compared to 2019.

In 2020 nearly all ports saw a decrease in passenger numbers compared to 2019. Dover, the port with the largest international short sea passenger numbers, decreased by 60% from 10.9 million in 2019 to 4.3 million in 2020. Felixstowe saw a 5% increase in passengers in 2020 compared to 2019. Traffic into Felixstowe was likely unaffected because international sea routes at Felixstowe are all freight and therefore not impacted by international travel restrictions for leisure passengers.

UK international short sea passengers by port group in 2020 and change from 2019 ([SPAS0101](#))



UK international short sea passengers by ports and port group, percentage change 2019-2020 ([SPAS0101](#))



This chart only includes ports with at least 100 passengers

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

Top 5 international short sea routes [\(SPAS0102\)](#)

Passenger numbers on most routes were affected by the coronavirus pandemic and saw large decreases in numbers compared to 2019. The top 5 routes accounted for 84% of all international short sea passengers in 2020.

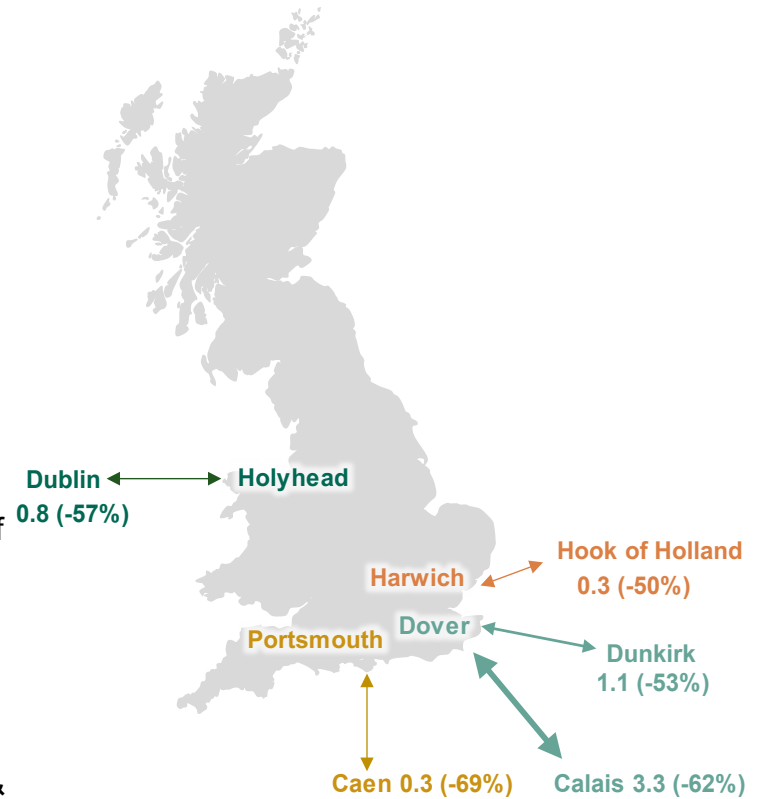
In 2020 Dover - Calais, historically the busiest route, accounted for around 48% of the annual international short sea passenger traffic. In 2020, 3.3 million passengers travelled on this route, a 62% decline on 2019 and 68% lower than in 2010. On the second largest route, Dover - Dunkirk, passenger numbers decreased 53% to 1.1 million in 2020. Portsmouth - Caen decreased 69% compared to 2019 and reported similar passenger numbers as Harwich - Hook of Holland (0.3 million).

Passenger numbers on some routes were less affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Compared to 2019, passenger numbers at: Harwich - Rotterdam decreased 18%, Grimsby & Imminham - Hook of Holland decreased 4%, and Felixstowe - Vlaardingen increased 5%. These three routes carried only freight passengers.

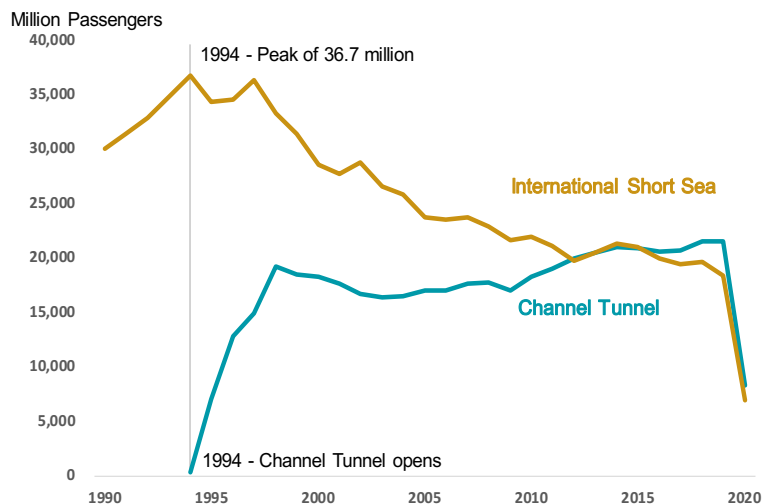
International short sea passengers and Channel Tunnel passengers

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic can also be seen in the Channel Tunnel passenger figures. In 2020 8.3 million passengers travelled via the Channel Tunnel, a 62% decrease compared to 2019. In 2020, passenger numbers on international short sea routes were lower than those through the Channel Tunnel for the fifth consecutive year, and the sixth time since the Tunnel opened.

Top 5 international short sea routes by number of passengers (millions) in 2020 and change from 2019 [\(SPAS0102\)](#)



International short sea passengers and Channel Tunnel passengers, 1990 - 2020 [\(SPAS0101\)](#)



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.

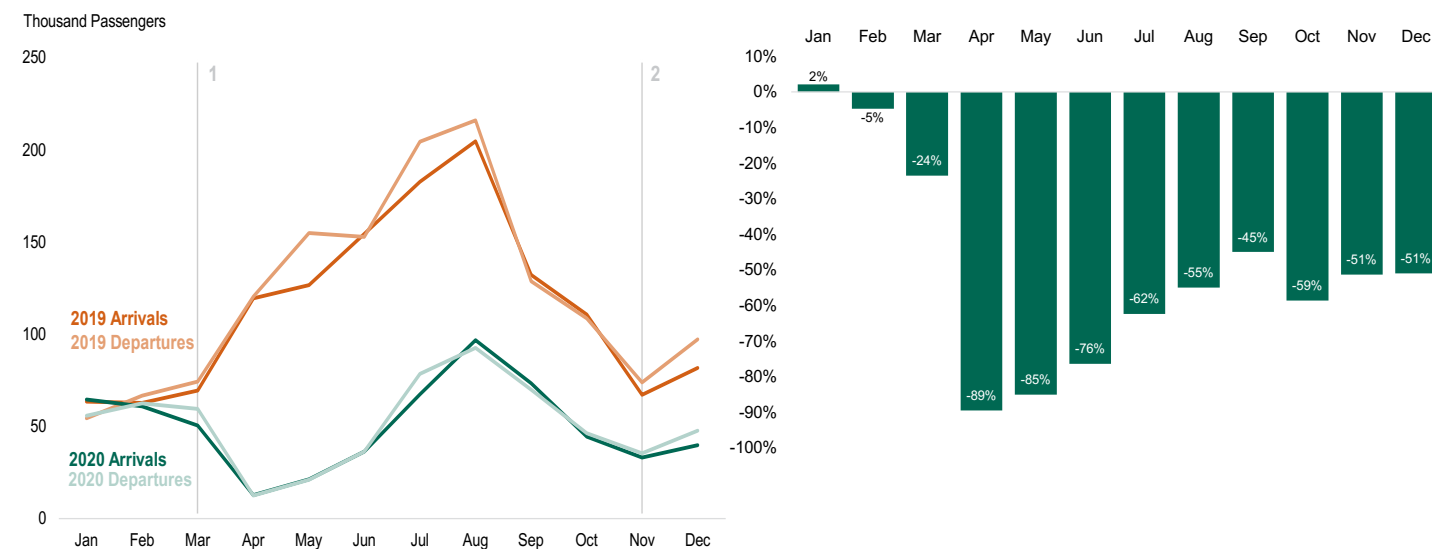
Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on major domestic routes (SPAS0201)

Overall trends compared to 2019

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic can also be seen in sea passenger figures on major domestic routes. In 2020, the number of short sea passengers on major domestic routes decreased by 57% to 1.2 million, compared to 2.8 million in 2019.

Domestic short sea passengers by month, 2019 and

Percentage change in domestic short sea passengers by month compared to 2019



1. Introduction of UK-wide lockdown

2. Introduction of national restrictions (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales)

Compared to international sea passengers, domestic passenger figures fell less dramatically in March 2020, with a 24% reduction on March 2019. The impact of national lockdown could be seen in April when passenger figures decreased to 25,000 – down 90% on April 2019 figures. Domestic sea passenger figures continued to be much lower than 2019 figures throughout the year.

From May until August there was a steady increase in sea passengers, with the gap between domestic sea passenger figures in the previous year getting smaller each month. Overall, the summer period, especially in August, was less depressed for domestic short sea passenger traffic than international short sea passenger traffic. This could suggest that people switched to more domestic summer holidays than usual (see box below). Domestic sea passenger figures in September were down 45% compared to the same month in 2019, this was the smallest gap between 2020 monthly passenger figures and passenger figures in the previous year. Although many travel restrictions were related to international travel, sea passengers on major domestic routes saw a large drop in 2020. This may be related to other factors during the coronavirus pandemic such as reduced confidence and reduced appetite to travel.

Related Statistics

- For more information regarding research into travel behaviour during the lockdown period and intentions to travel in the future, please see the [Department for Transport's All Change Travel Tracker - Wave 1](#).
- This summary presents analysis and headline findings from a UK-wide survey commissioned by the Department for Transport and undertaken during May-June 2020. One finding details that many of those surveyed expected to spend holidays in the UK rather than go abroad and expected to use international travel modes less often in 2020/2021.

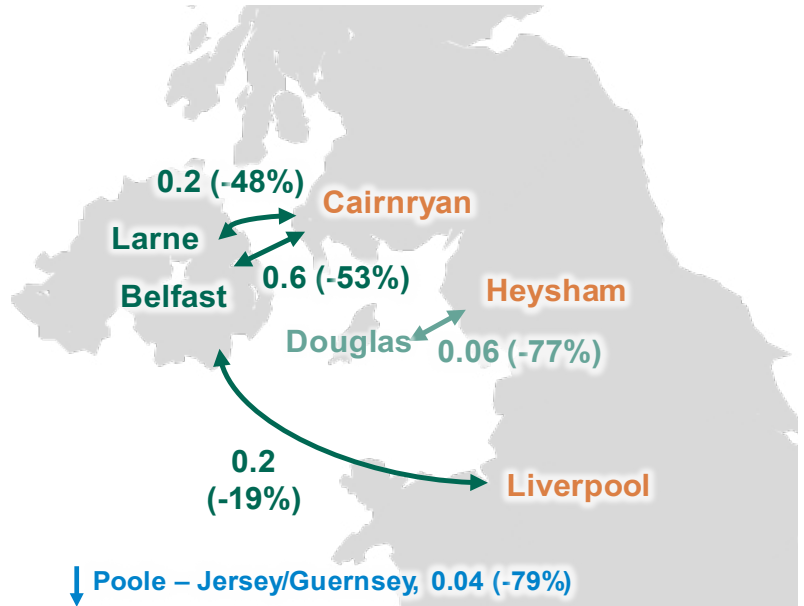
Trends by domestic route

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic was linked to a 57% decrease in passengers, to 1.2 million, travelling on domestic short sea routes.

Domestic sea crossings from Great Britain to Northern Ireland saw a 47% decrease compared to 2019. Cairnryan - Belfast is consistently the busiest domestic short sea route. In 2020 this route saw 0.6 million passengers, a decrease of 53% on 2019. Poole - Jersey/Guernsey entered the top 5 with 40,000 passengers travelling in 2020, a decrease of 79% compared to 2019. This takes the place of Liverpool - Douglas (Isle of Man) which saw the largest reduction in domestic passengers in 2020, a 98% decrease on 2019.

Operators report, due to lockdown restrictions in the Republic of Ireland that differ from the UK, that passengers previously travelling on routes such as Holyhead - Dublin, have switched to Liverpool - Belfast. This might explain the small decrease, compared to other routes, it experienced in 2020 (-19%).

Top 5 UK domestic short sea routes in 2020 by number of passengers (millions) and change from 2019 ([SPAS0201](#)).

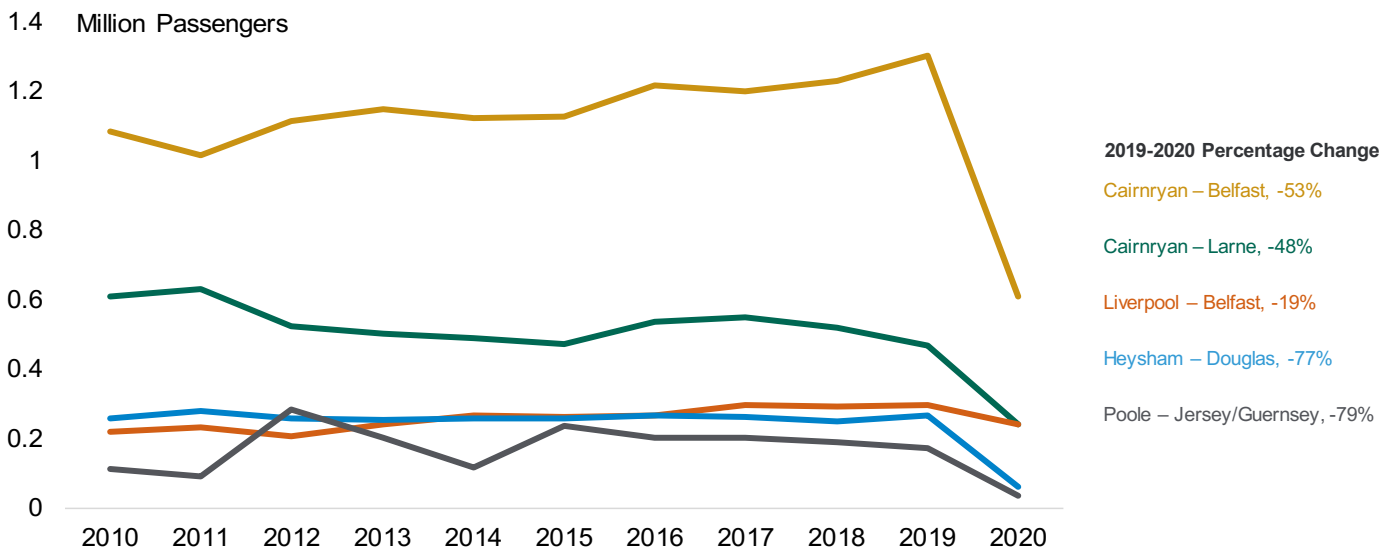


Note on 2020 domestic short sea traffic to the Isle of Man

From 9am Monday 23rd March 2020 the Isle of Man closed borders to all passenger traffic except for essential key workers and the repatriation of residents. On 20th July 2020 the border restriction was eased slightly to allow residents to travel off island for non-essential purposes but with a requirement to self-isolate for 14 days upon return.

This has meant that there has been no visitor traffic, except allowances for residents, to the island at all since March 2020.

Top 5 busiest UK domestic sea crossing routes, 2010 - 2020 ([SPAS0201](#)).



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](#).

Annex: Timeline of coronavirus events affecting sea travel

The following table presents a timeline of coronavirus events affecting sea travel since March 2020. Up-to-date information on international travel requirements and border measures for each UK nation can be found at the following links:

- England: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-corridors>
- Wales: <https://gov.wales/exemptions-self-isolation-coronavirus-covid-19-html>
- Scotland: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-public-health-checks-at-borders/pages/self-isolation/#full-history>
- Northern Ireland: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-countries-and-territories-exemptions>

Coronavirus events affecting sea travel	Date of Introduction	Month of Introduction
Foreign and Commonwealth Office advised against all non-essential international travel	17/3/2020	March
UK lockdown applied	23/3/2020	March
Persons travelling to the UK from outside the Common Travel Area (UK, Ireland and Crown Dependencies) required to self-isolate for 14 days	8/6/2020	June
Travel corridors introduced, allowing travel into the UK from countries on an exempt list without the need to self-isolate. France, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands, which usually make up the majority of 'Other EU' short sea passenger volumes, were originally included in the exempt list.	10/7/2020	July
Spain <i>removed</i> from exempt list (i.e. no longer part of travel corridors and self-isolation required) (UK)	26/7/2020	July
Belgium <i>removed</i> from exempt list (England)	3/8/2020	August
Belgium <i>removed</i> from exempt list (Wales)	6/8/2020	August
Belgium <i>removed</i> from exempt list (Scotland & Northern Ireland)	8/8/2020	August
France and Netherlands <i>removed</i> from exempt list (UK)	15/8/2020	August
Denmark <i>removed</i> from exempt list (UK)	26/9/2020	September
Denmark <i>added</i> to exempt list (UK)	25/10/2020	October
England lockdown applied	5/11/2020	November
Denmark <i>removed</i> from exempt list (UK)	6/11/2020	November
England lockdown removed	2/12/2020	December
Self-isolation period on arrival changed from 14 days to 10 days (Wales)	10/12/2020	December
Self-isolation period on arrival changed from 14 days to 10 days (UK)	14/12/2020	December
Test to release, to shorten the self-isolation period for international arrivals, was introduced	15/12/2020	December
Varying Christmas travel guidelines across the UK	Christmas	December

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.

The International Passenger Survey was suspended from 16 March 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic. For more detail about the creation of new estimates using alternative data sources please see: [The impact of suspending the International Passenger Survey on UK Trade and Overseas Travel and Tourism statistics](#)

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 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 sea-passenger.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 SPAS0107 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-series>



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