



Department for Transport

Sea Passenger Statistics: Final 2015

About this release

This statistical release presents final statistics on sea passengers on both international and domestic routes to and from the UK in 2015.

International passengers are broken down into those on short sea (ferry) routes and passengers travelling for pleasure on cruises and long sea journeys.

Domestic passengers include those on domestic sea crossings, river ferries and inter-island journeys.

These statistics include all vehicle drivers, their passengers and foot passengers on ferries.

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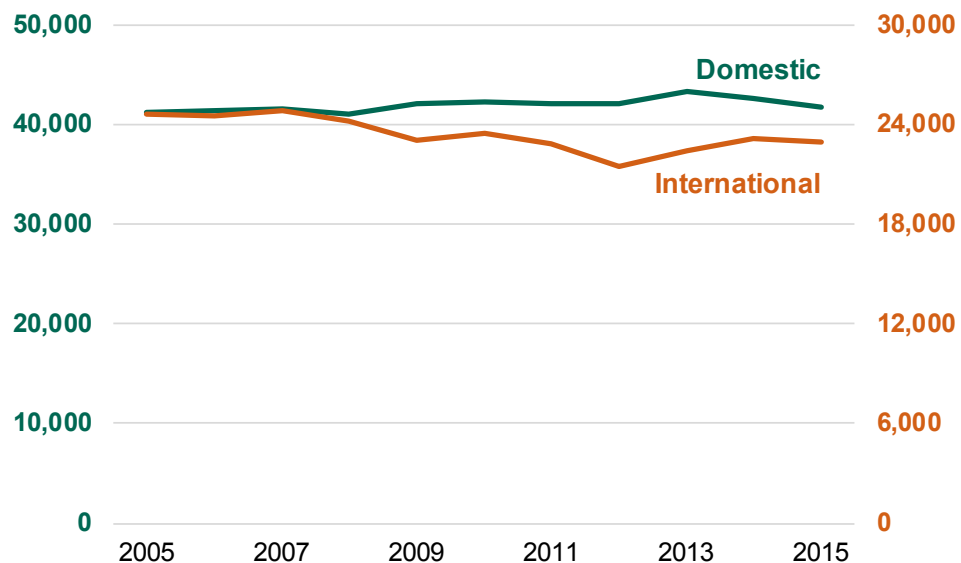
International sea passenger numbers remained broadly stable, decreasing by 1 per cent from 23.2 to 23.0 million.

Domestic sea passenger numbers decreased slightly by 2 per cent from 42.7 to 41.7 million.

International Passengers

- In 2015 the total number of **international short sea passengers decreased** by 1 per cent to 21.0 million.
- **Cruise passengers increased** by 7 per cent to 1.9 million, after fluctuating growth in recent years.

Domestic and international sea passengers (thousands), 2005-2015



Domestic Passengers

- Total passenger numbers on **domestic routes decreased by 2 per cent to 41.7 million**. This figure has changed little in recent years; passenger numbers were only 1 per cent higher than those in 2005.
- **Domestic sea crossing** passenger numbers **decreased by 2 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 2015 **international sea passenger** numbers **decreased by 1 per cent to 23.0 million**. This figure has remained fairly stable over the previous five years following a general decreasing trend.

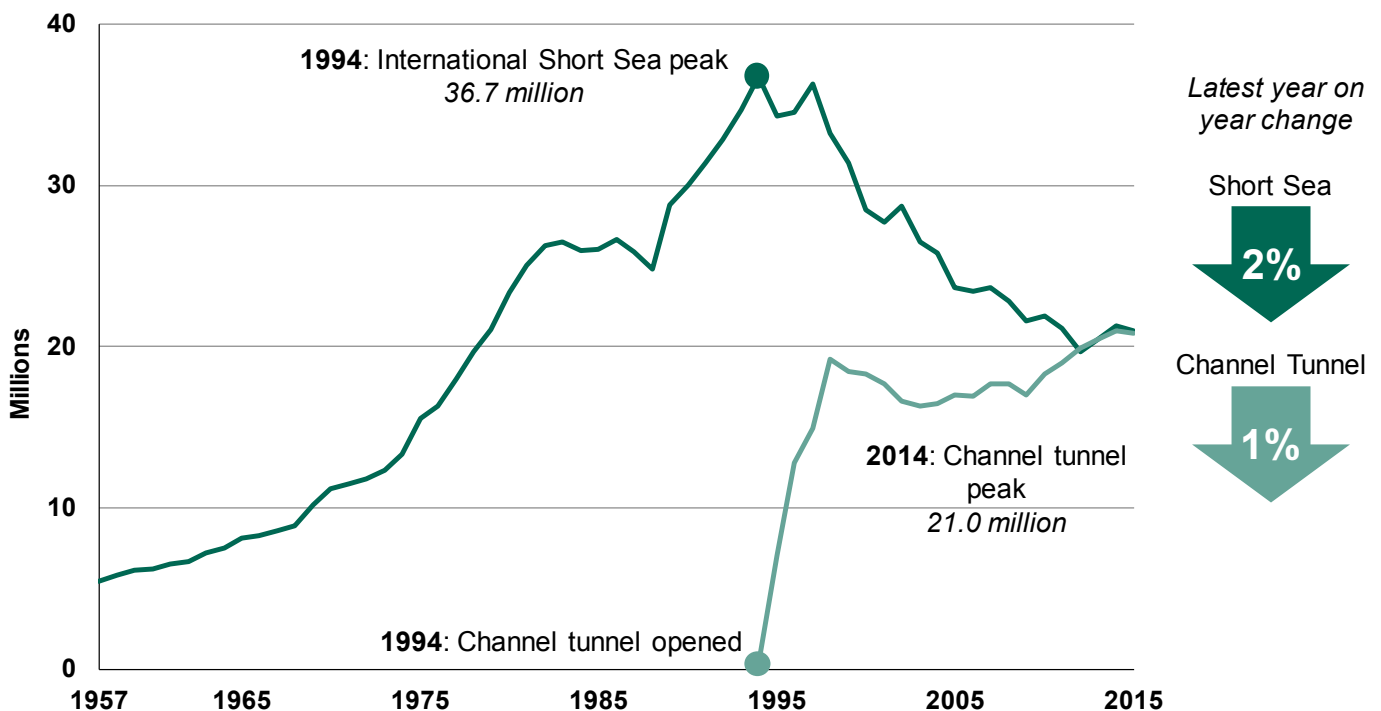
International Short Sea Journeys

In 2015 the number of **international short sea passengers decreased by 1 per cent to 21.0 million**, compared to 2014. This follows a longer period of decline between 1995 and 2012 of 14.6 million passengers, following the opening of the Channel Tunnel in 1994.

The number of passengers travelling via the **Channel Tunnel decreased by 1 per cent to 20.9 million**. This is marginally fewer 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 have outnumbered Channel Tunnel passengers by a small margin in the years since then.

International short sea passengers and Channel Tunnel passengers, 1957-2015



Detailed statistics on Channel Tunnel and international short sea passengers can be found in web table [SPAS0301](#)

International Short Sea Journeys by Port Group

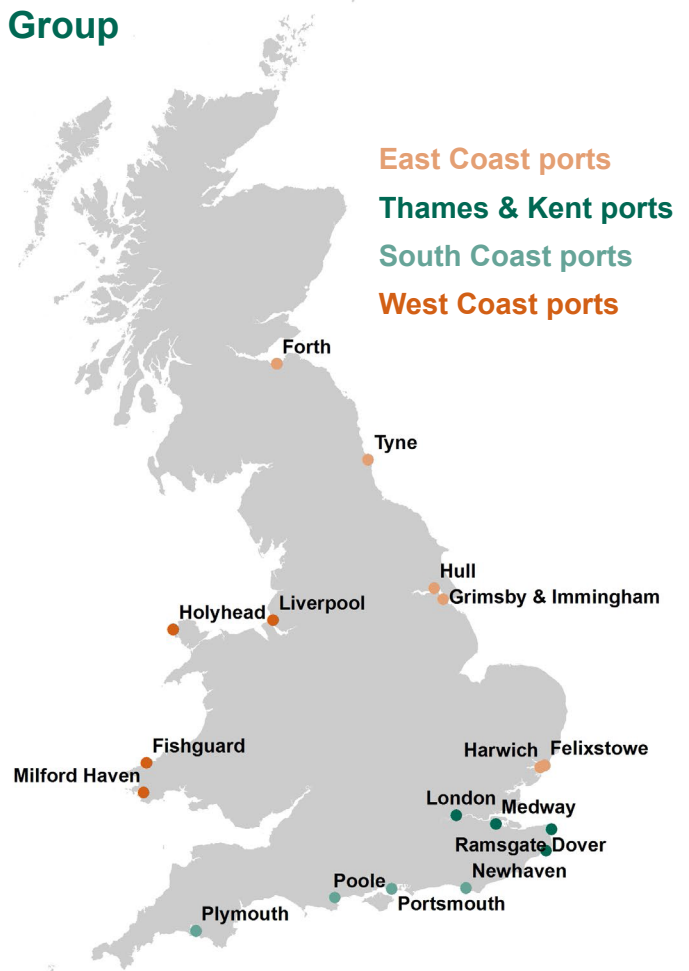
Passenger numbers at **Thames and Kent** ports **decreased by 2 per cent to 13.0 million**.

This port group remained the **busiest** in 2015, accounting for 62 per cent of all international short sea passenger movements.

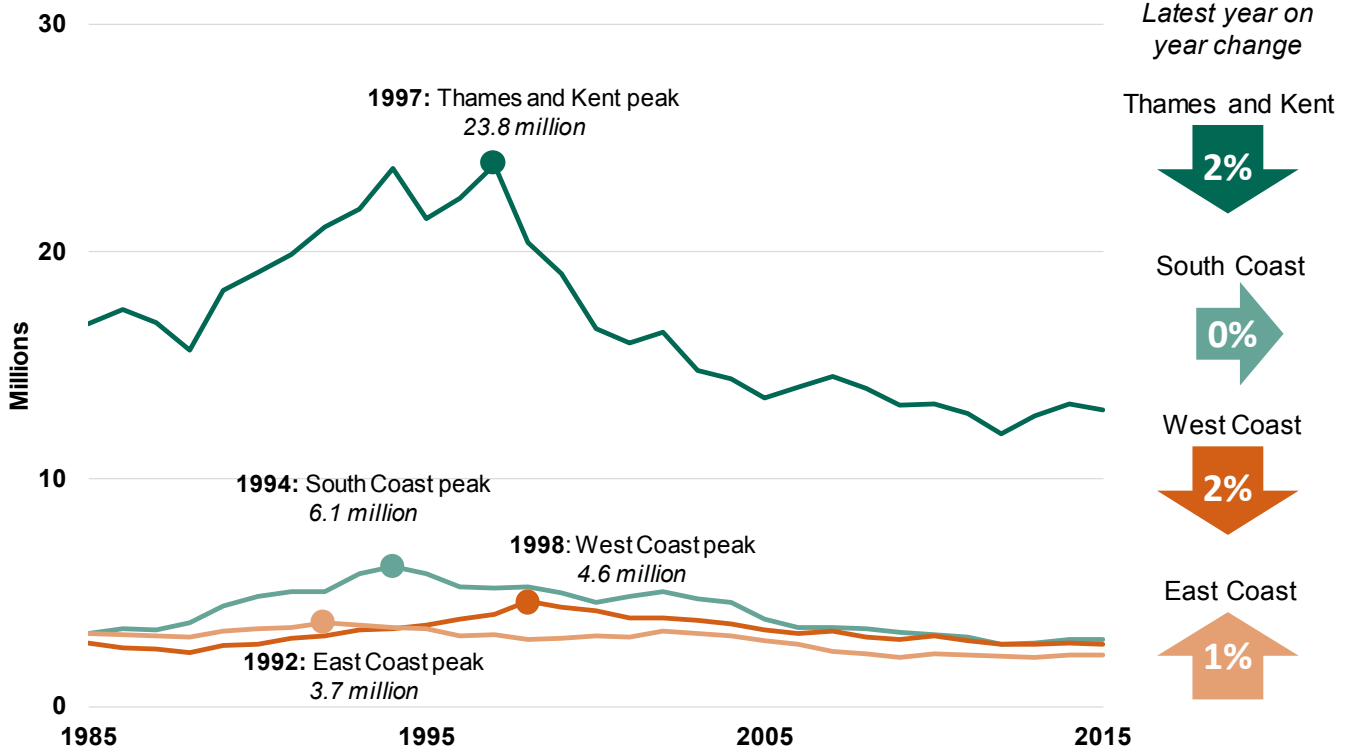
The number of passengers travelling through **East Coast** ports **increased by 1 per cent to 2.3 million**.

In 2015 **2.8 million passengers** travelled through the **West Coast** ports: a **decrease of 2 per cent**.

The number of passengers who travelled through **South Coast** ports remained similar to the previous year at **2.9 million**.



International short sea passengers by port group, 1985 - 2015



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

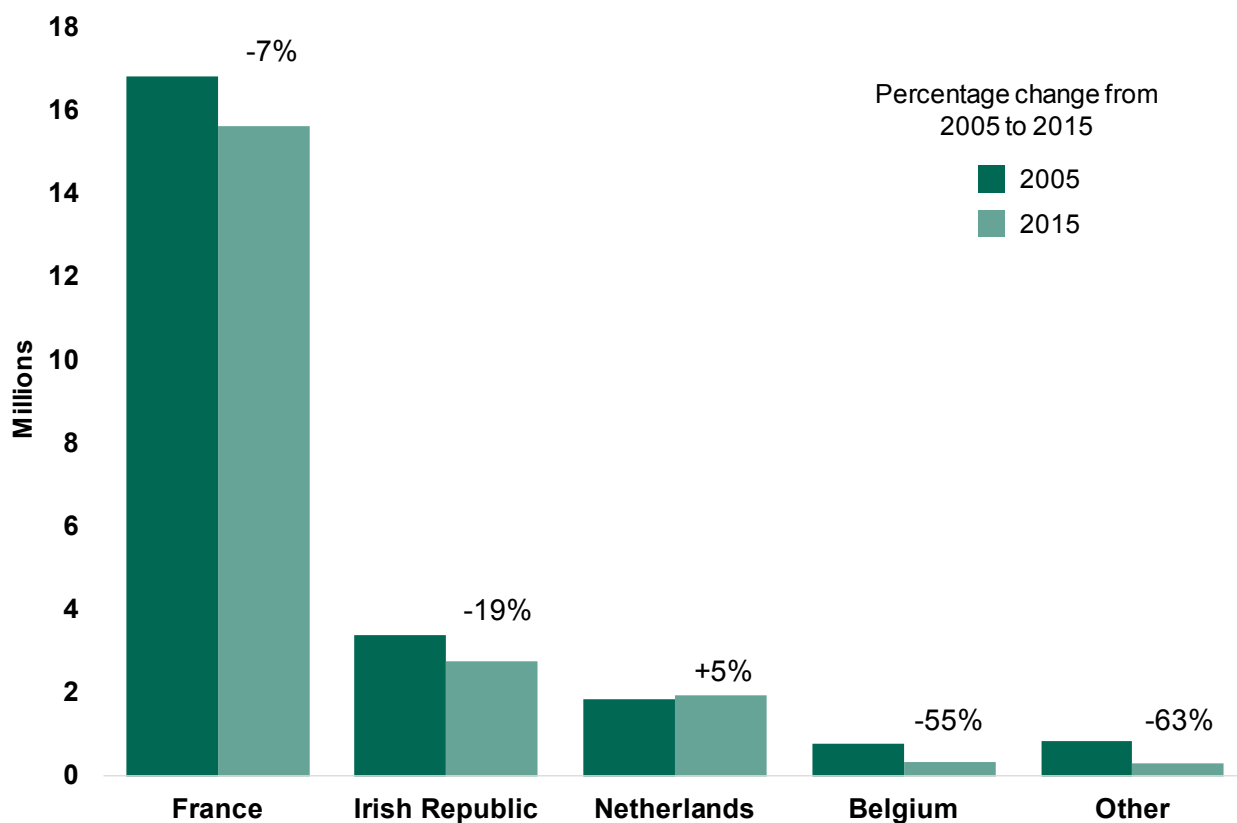
International Short Sea Journeys by Route

France is the most popular country of destination for UK international short sea routes, and has been since the series began in 1950. In 2015, **74 per cent** of international short sea journeys were between the UK and France. Passenger numbers on these routes totalled **15.6 million**; **1 per cent lower** than in 2014.

The second most popular destination was **the Irish Republic**; these routes accounted for **13 per cent** of all UK international short sea passengers. In 2015 these routes carried **2.8 million** passengers; a **decrease of 2 per cent** on the previous year.

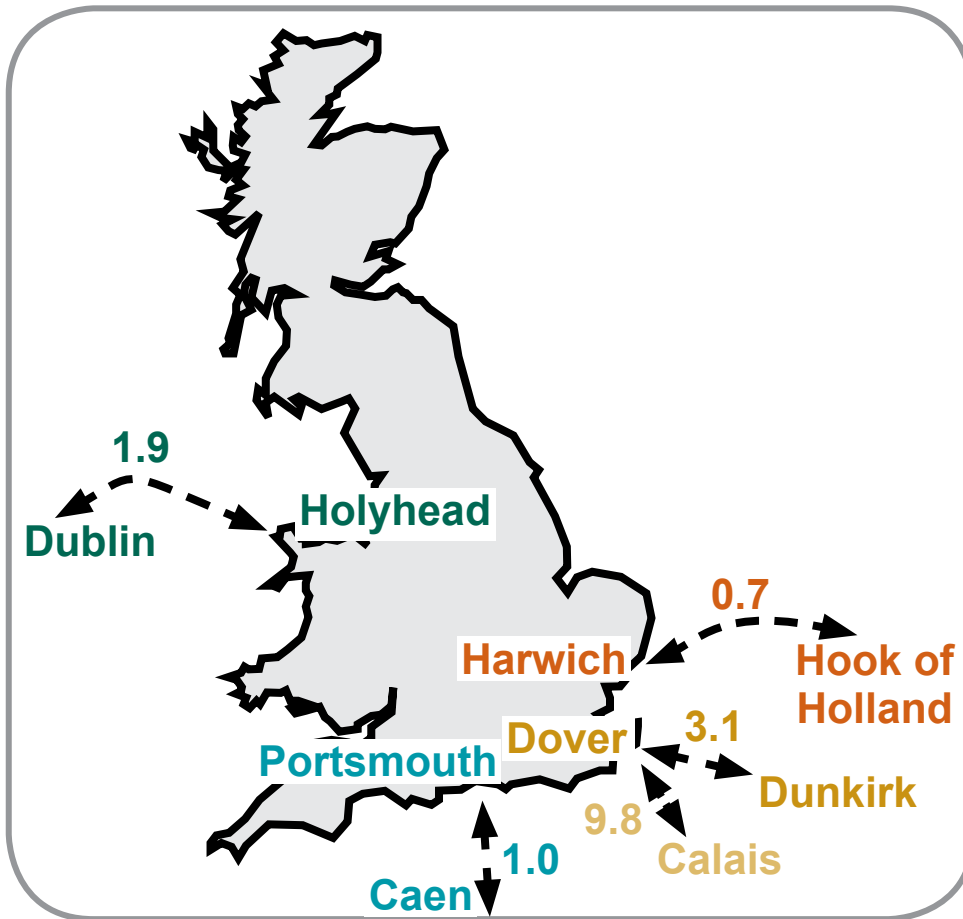
Over the last decade short sea passenger numbers have **fallen by 11 per cent**. The volume of passengers to all destinations declined, except to the **Netherlands** which **increased by 5 per cent**. However passengers to the Netherlands represented just 9 per cent of all international short sea passengers in 2015.

UK international short sea passengers by country of origin/destination, 2015 compared to 2005



Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by port group can be found in web table [SPAS0103](#).

Top 5 short-sea routes by passenger number (millions), 2015



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 2015 the number of passengers on the **Dover-Calais** route **decreased by 9 per cent to 9.8 million**, compared to 2014.

This follows growth in the last two years, but over the last decade the route has declined at an average rate of 2 per cent per year.

In 2006 **Dover-Dunkirk** became the second busiest route between France and the UK. Passenger numbers on this route have since increased at an average annual rate of 9 per cent, making it one of the fastest growing routes. In 2015, the number travelling on the Dover-Dunkirk route **increased by 0.6 million (27 per cent) to 3.1 million**.

Passenger numbers on the **Holyhead-Dublin** route **increased by 5 per cent to 1.9 million** compared with 2014. This may reflect falling passenger numbers on the other West Coast routes with the Irish Republic.

The number of passengers using the **Portsmouth-Caen** route **rose 3 per cent to 1.0 million passengers**. This is the second consecutive year-on-year increase.

Passenger numbers on the **Harwich-Hook of Holland** route have grown year on year since 2012. In 2015 these numbers **rose by 15 per cent to 0.7 million** compared to the previous year.

Possible Disruption at Calais

There were service disruptions in summer 2015 which effected the Dover-Calais route. Passenger numbers on the Dover-Calais route decreased by 0.9 million, whilst the number travelling on the alternative Dover-Dunkirk route increased by 0.6 million.

This may reflect passengers avoiding the Dover-Calais route, however it is possible that this could also be the start of an unrelated trend change. We will not be able to determine this until data for 2016 becomes available.

Seasonal trends in International Short Sea Journeys

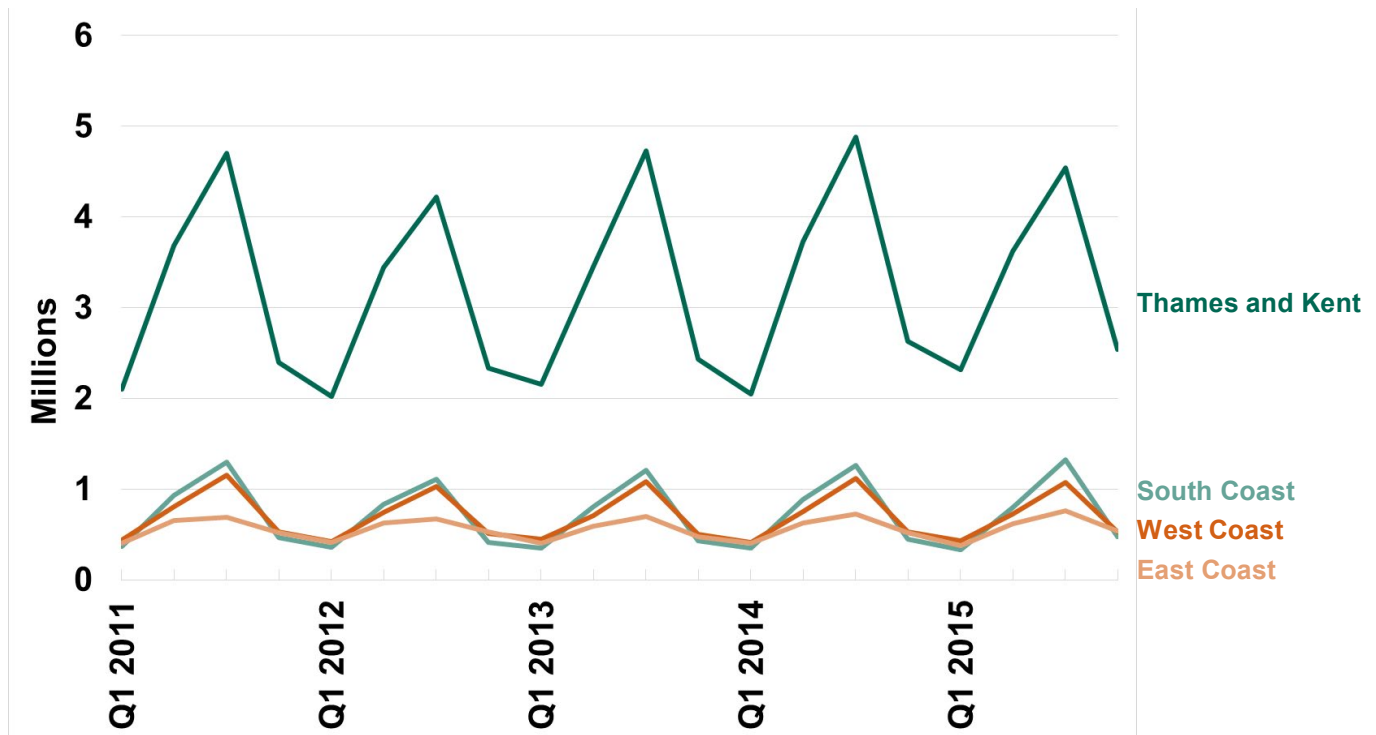
International short sea journeys tend to be highly seasonal due to factors such as holiday making and weather patterns.

The third quarter of 2015 (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 2015 passenger numbers through **Thames and Kent** ports were 2.2 million higher than in the first quarter of the year. The third quarter of the year accounted for 35 per cent of annual passengers, while the first quarter handled half as many (18 per cent).

Proportionally, **South Coast** ports have the greatest variability in passenger numbers between quarters. In 2015 nearly half of all annual passenger traffic through South Coast ports travelled in the third quarter, compared with 11 per cent in the first quarter. This represents a four-fold difference of 1.0 million passengers.

International short sea passengers by port group and quarter, 2011 - 2015



Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by port group can be found in web table [SPAS0105](#).

Cruise and Long Sea Passengers

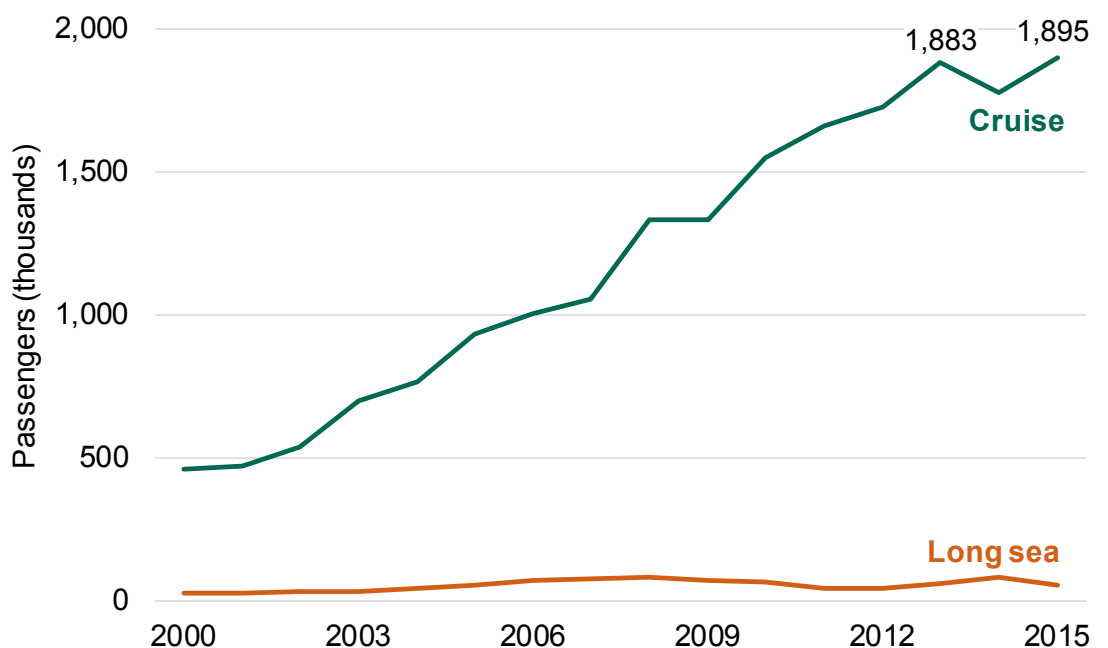
Definition

Cruise passenger figures include all passengers on international cruise journeys who start and finish their cruise journey at a UK port as well as cruises which begin or end at a European or Mediterranean port.

Cruise passenger numbers increased to 1.9 million in 2015, a 7 per cent increase on 2014. This is a return to the historic trend of largely continuous growth and is the highest number of cruise passengers recorded - the previous peak was in 2013.

The majority of cruise passengers (83 per cent) passed through **Southampton**. In 2015 the number of passengers through Southampton **increased by 13 per cent to 1.6 million** - surpassing the previous peak of 1.5 million passengers in 2012. Passenger numbers through Southampton consistently increased from 2000 to 2012, before two years of decline, until the peak in 2015.

Cruise and long sea passengers, 2000 - 2015



Definition

Long sea voyage passengers are those travelling on one-way scheduled voyages to and from ports outside Europe/Mediterranean. In general, the long sea passengers were travelling on the Southampton to New York route: over 80 per cent in 2015.

Long sea passenger numbers declined by 36 per cent to 53 thousand in 2015. This follows the highest number of long sea passengers since the mid-1970s, in 2014.

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 a peak of 82 thousand in 2008 before falling to 44 thousand in 2011. Passenger numbers in 2015 were similar to those in 2005.

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

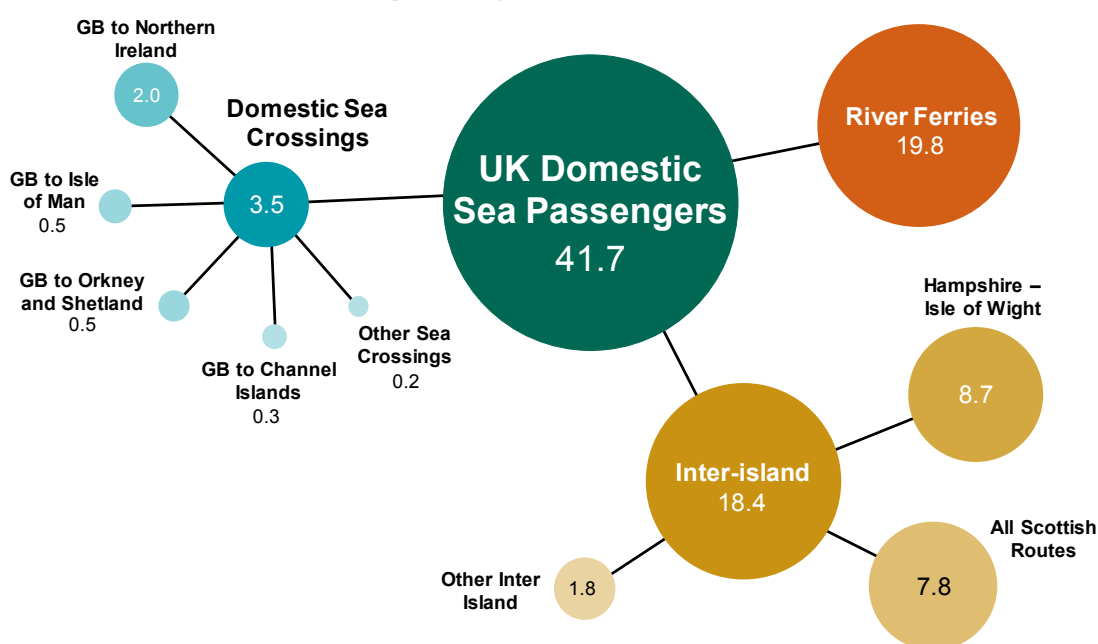
Summary

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 2015 was **41.7 million**, a decrease of **2 per cent** on 2014. Much of this decrease is due to a **4 per cent decrease in passengers on river ferries**.

The largest components of domestic sea passenger numbers in 2015 were river ferry journeys (47 per cent) and inter-island (44 per cent).

Domestic Sea Passengers by Route (millions)



Passengers on Inter-island Domestic Routes

Passenger numbers on **inter-island domestic routes** remained stable at 18.4 million.

Scottish inter-island routes decreased by 3 per cent to 7.9 million, following two years of increasing passenger numbers.

Passenger numbers between **Hampshire and the Isle of Wight** remained stable at 8.7 million, as did **other inter island** routes, at 1.8 million, after the downward trend of recent years.

Passengers on River Ferries

Passenger numbers on **river ferries** decreased by 4 per cent to 19.8 million. In the last decade passenger numbers have increased by 7 per cent with consecutive increases in the three years preceding 2014, however the fall in 2015 is the second consecutive yearly decrease.

In 2013 the passenger numbers rose by 5 per cent, primarily as the result of improved reporting methods.

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.

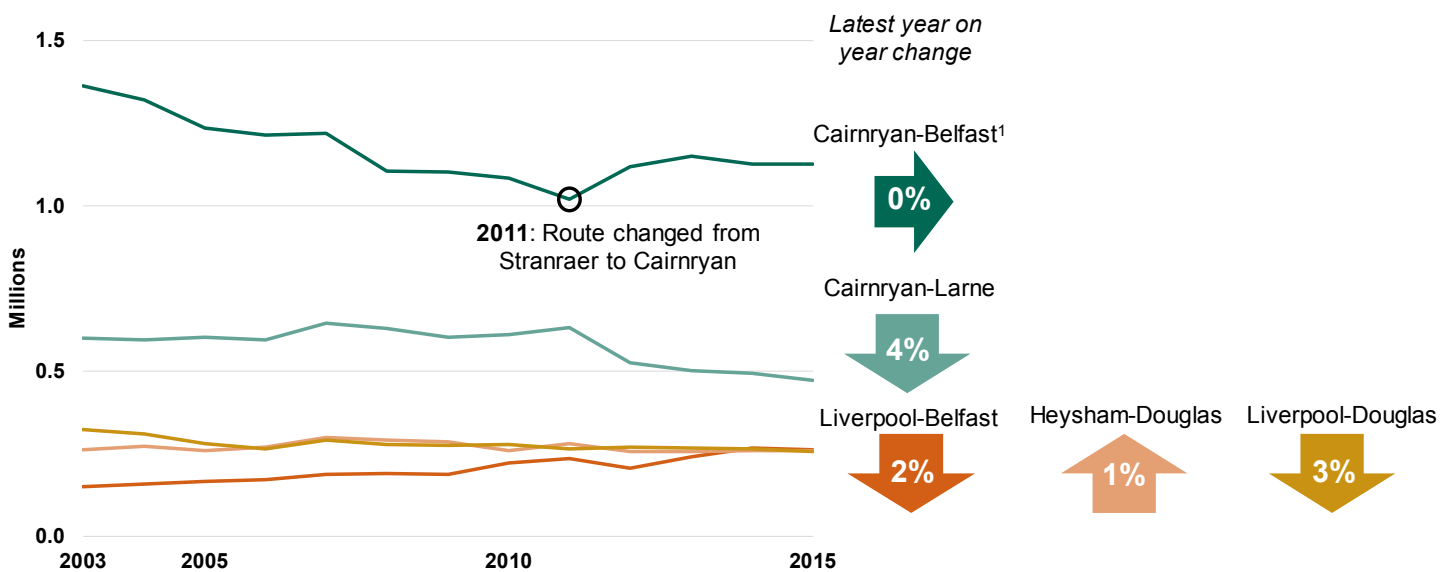
Domestic Sea Crossings

In 2015 traffic between the UK mainland and **Northern Ireland** decreased 3 per cent to 2.0 million passengers. **Cairnryan-Belfast** remained the most popular route with 1.1 million passengers, a similar number to the previous year.

Total traffic between the UK mainland and **the Isle of Man** increased by 3 per cent to 0.5 million.

Overall the number of journeys between the UK mainland and **the Channel Islands** decreased by 13 per cent to 0.3 million. As has previously occurred, there was a large shift in the traffic on these routes, with **Weymouth** routes falling by 173 thousand (91 per cent) and **Poole** routes subsequently increasing by 121 thousand (104 per cent) compared with the previous year. The number of passengers at **Portsmouth** travelling on routes to the Channel Islands also increased compared to the previous year, increasing by 7.0 thousand passengers (18 per cent).

UK's top 5 busiest domestic sea crossing routes, 2003 - 2015



1. Passengers on the Cairnryan-Belfast route travelled from Stranraer to Belfast before 2012.

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 39 per cent of passengers in 2015 travelling in the third quarter and 15 per cent travelling in the first quarter.

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

Detailed statistics on Domestic Sea Passengers can be found in web tables [SPAS0201](#) and [SPAS0202](#).

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Data

- ▶ 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.
- ▶ 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.

Background Notes

- ▶ 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>
- ▶ 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:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maritime-and-shipping-statistics-guidance>
- ▶ National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs.
- ▶ 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>
- ▶ Provisional summary totals for international sea passenger traffic are released monthly via the DfT website at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/spas01-uk-international-sea-passengers#table-spas0107>