



Department for Transport

Sea Passenger Statistics: All Routes 2017 (Final)

About this release

This statistical release presents final statistics on sea passengers on both international and domestic routes to and from the UK in 2017.

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.

In this publication

- Short Sea Journeys p3
- Cruise and Long Sea Journeys p9
- Domestic Journeys p10
- Strengths & Weaknesses p12
- Background Notes p13

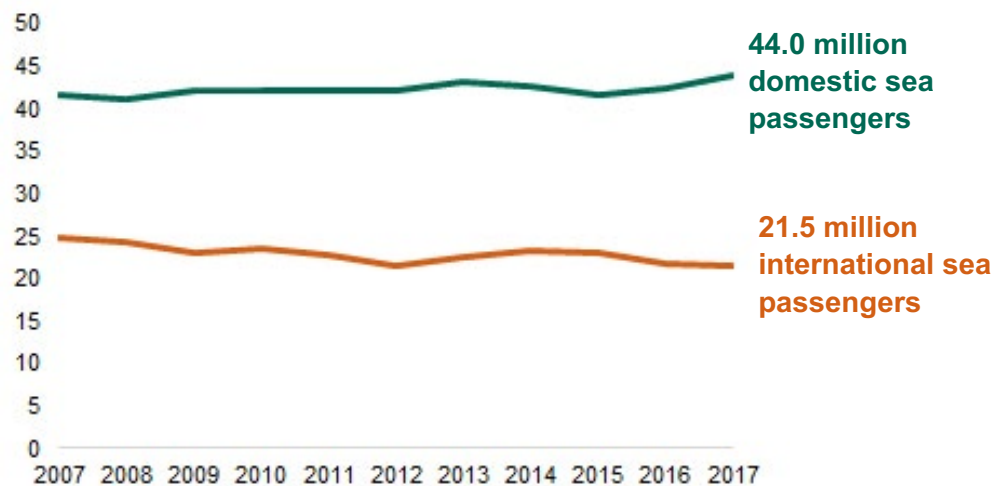
International sea passenger numbers fell for a third consecutive year in 2017, decreasing by 2% from 21.9 to 21.5 million.

Domestic sea passenger numbers increased by 4% to 44.0 million.

International passengers

- ▶ In 2017 the total number of international short sea passengers (ferry routes) decreased by 2% to 19.5 million.
- ▶ Cruise passenger numbers increased by 4% to 1.9 million compared to 2016, after fluctuating growth in recent years.

UK Domestic and international sea passengers, 2007-2017 (Table [SPAS0501](#))



Domestic passengers

- ▶ The total number of sea passengers on domestic routes in 2017 saw an increase of 4% (from 42.4 million to 44.0 million).
- ▶ Within this total, river ferries increased by 7% to 21.5 million (see the domestic chapter for further information) and domestic sea crossings increased by 1% to 3.5 million.



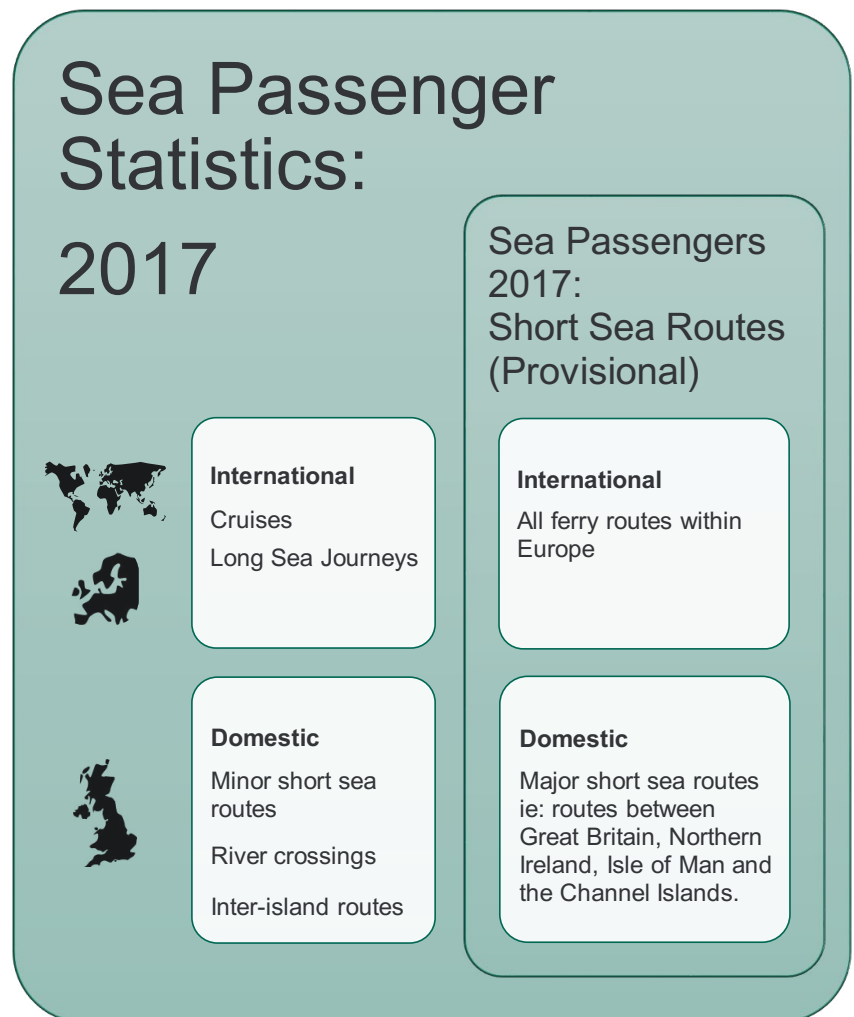
Breakdown of publications for current and upcoming sea passenger statistics

Sea Passenger Statistics 2017: All Routes (Final)

This statistical release presents the complete statistics on all sea passengers to and from the UK in 2017. In addition to the **short sea passenger statistics** previously published in February 2018, it also includes:

International routes: These include all passengers travelling for pleasure on **crises** 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 have been added to the previously published major short sea routes for a complete picture of domestic routes.



Sea Passenger Statistics 2018: Short Sea Routes (Provisional, February 2019)

This statistical release will present statistics on short sea passengers to and from the UK in 2018, including:

International short sea routes: These include all ferry routes within 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 will be published in the Sea Passenger Statistics 2018: All Routes (Final) publication in November 2019.

Changes to these statistics.

The department is currently reviewing the content of the annual sea passenger statistics including the data tables published as part of this release. The '[note to users](#)' document sets out changes to the tables published as part of the 2017 statistics and proposed changes that will impact the next statistical publication.

Passengers on International Short Sea Routes

In 2017 the number of international short sea passengers decreased by 2% to 19.5 million, from 20.0 million in 2016.

Since peaks in the 1990s the overall trend in international short sea passenger numbers has been generally downward. The decrease in 2017 is similar to those in recent years.

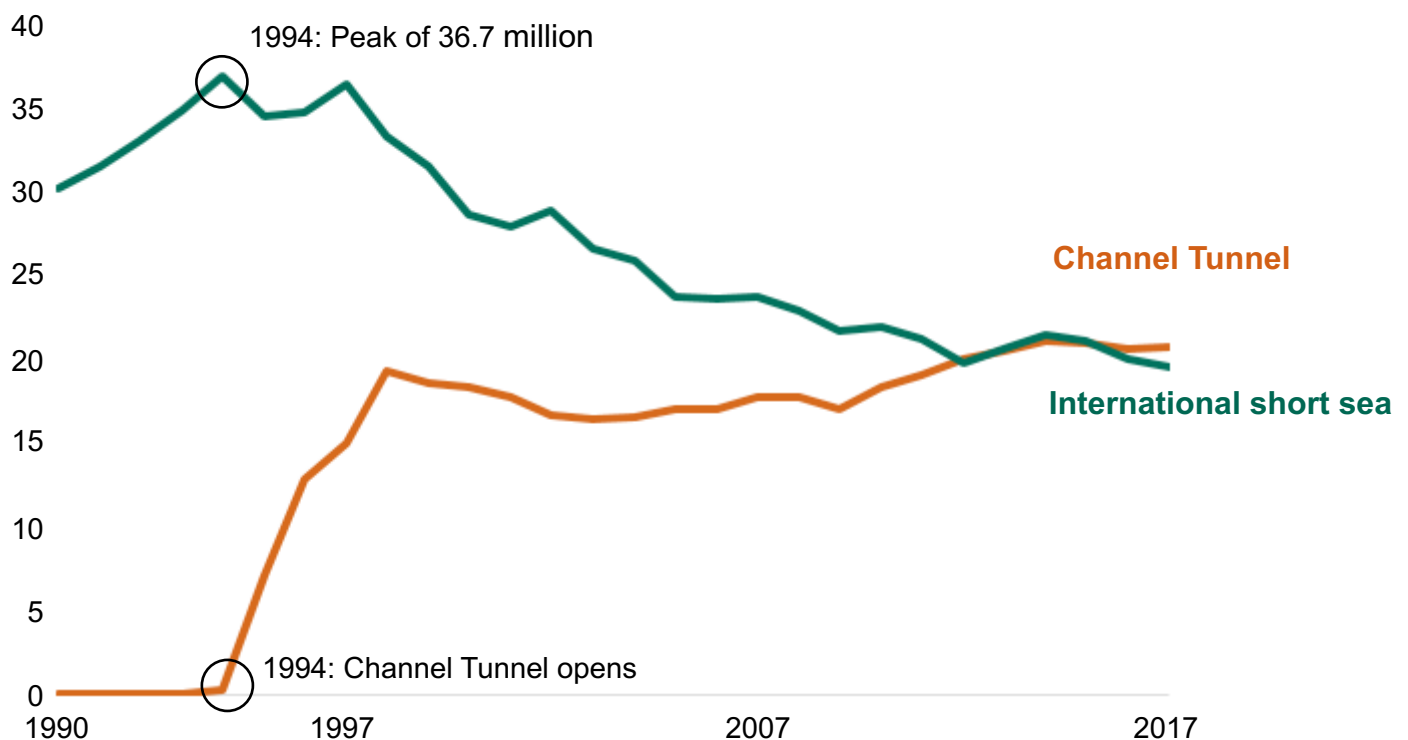
The busiest route remains Dover-Calais, with this route accounting for 46% of international short sea passenger numbers in 2017. In 2017 traffic on this route decreased 1% from 2016 to 9.0 million.

Conversely, the number of passengers travelling via the Channel Tunnel increased by 1% to 20.7 million. In 2017, passenger numbers on international short sea routes were lower than those through the Channel Tunnel for the second consecutive year, and the third time since the Tunnel opened.

International short sea passengers and Channel Tunnel passengers, 1990-2017

([Table SPAS0101](#))

Million passengers



Statistics on Channel Tunnel and international short sea passengers can be found in web table [SPAS0101](#).

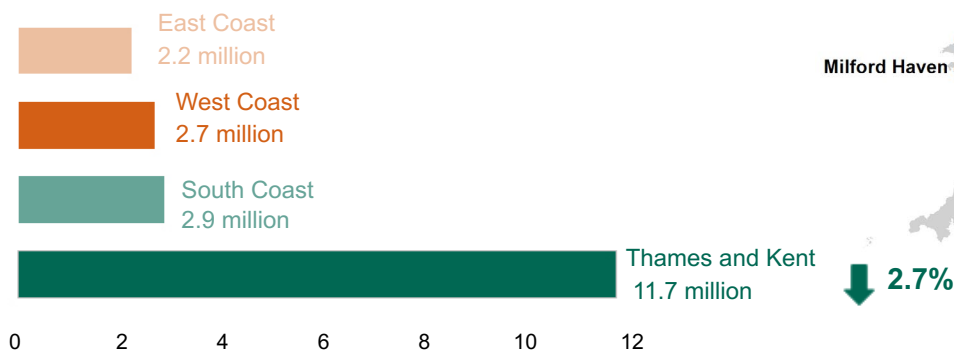
Port group activity

In 2017 passenger numbers through the Thames and Kent port group decreased by 3% compared with the previous year to 11.7 million passengers.

Thames and Kent accounted for 60% of total international short sea passenger numbers in 2017. This large proportion means trends in this group are often reflected in the total.

In the last 10 years, the number of passengers through each port group has decreased between 8% to 19%. The total number of international short sea passengers decreased by 18% over this period.

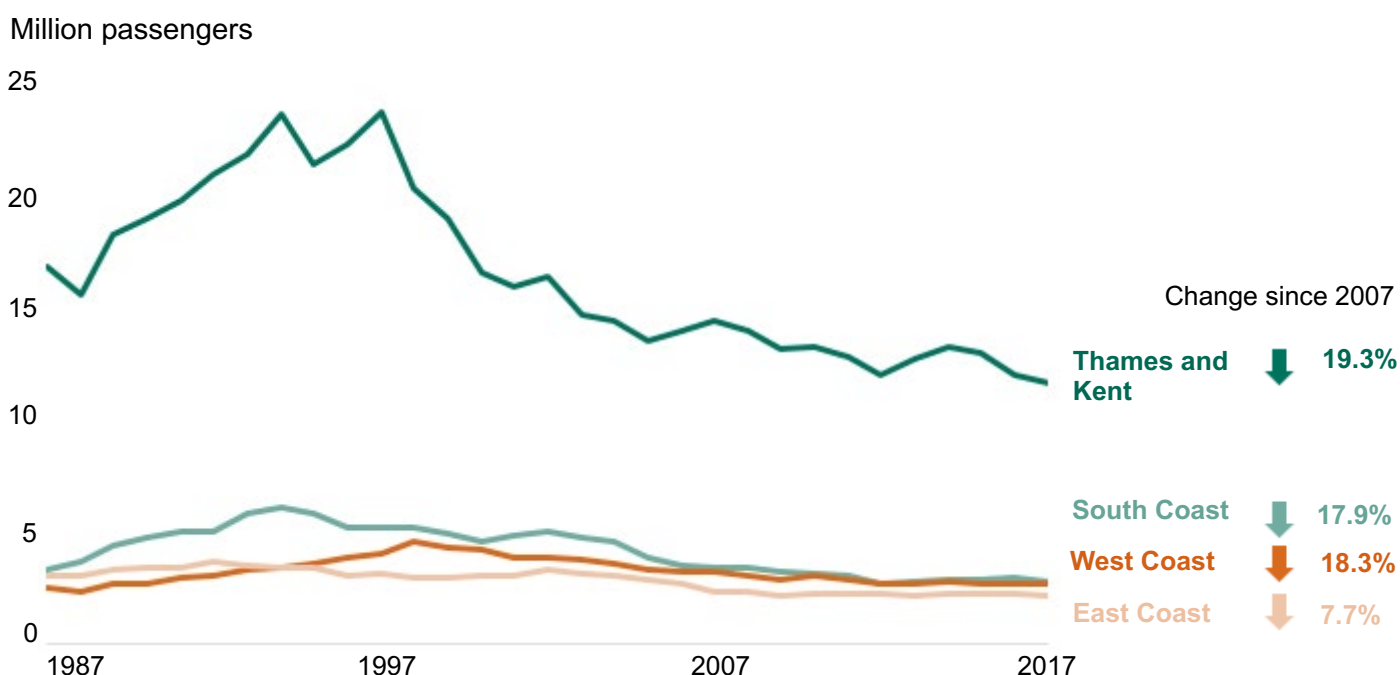
UK international short sea passengers by port group, 2017 and most recent year on year change (Table SPAS0101)



UK ports serving international short sea routes

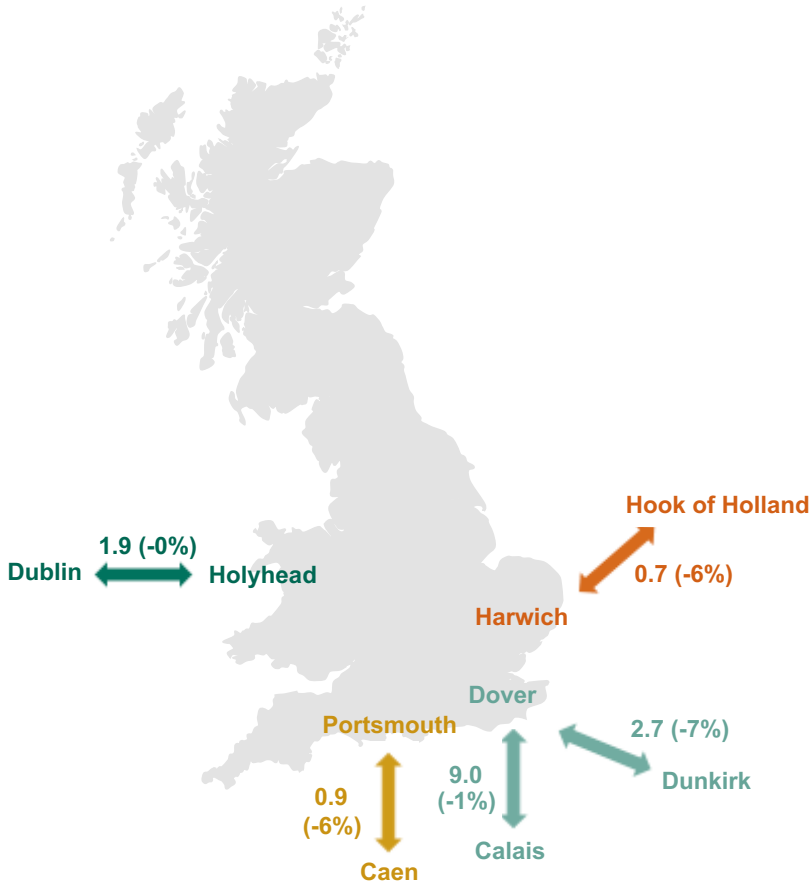


UK international short sea passengers by port group 1987 - 2017 and 10 year change (Table SPAS0101)



Top 5 international short sea routes

Top 5 international short sea routes by passenger number (millions) in 2017 and latest year on year change ([Table SPAS0102](#))

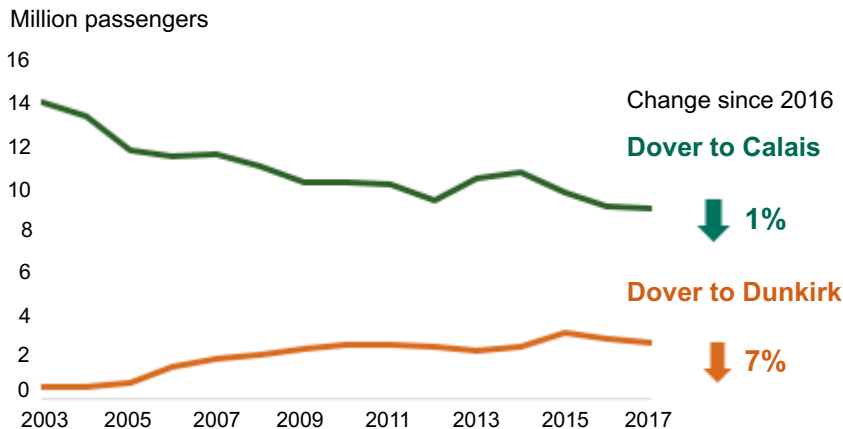


The top 5 international short sea routes accounted for 78% of all international short sea passengers in 2017.

Over the last decade Dover-Calais has consistently been the busiest route with between 46 and 51% of the annual international short sea passenger traffic. However, passenger numbers on this route in 2017 were 22% lower than a decade previous and 2017 saw a 1% decrease to 9.0 million passengers.

In 2017, Holyhead-Dublin passenger numbers remained level at 1.9 million, a 10 year increase of 37%.

UK international short sea passengers on Dover-Calais and Dover-Dunkirk routes 2003-2017 ([Table SPAS0102](#))



Passengers on the second largest route, Dover-Dunkirk, decreased 7% to 2.7 million passengers in 2017.

In 2015, there was increased traffic on the Dover-Dunkirk route, 27% higher than the year before. The decrease in 2017, compared to 2016, may therefore in part reflect a return to pre-2015 levels.

Despite this, passenger numbers on the Dover-Dunkirk route have increased 38% over the last 10 years.

Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by route and port group can be found in web table [SPAS0102](#). This table includes Channel Tunnel passengers for comparison.

Top 5 foreign countries of origin/destination

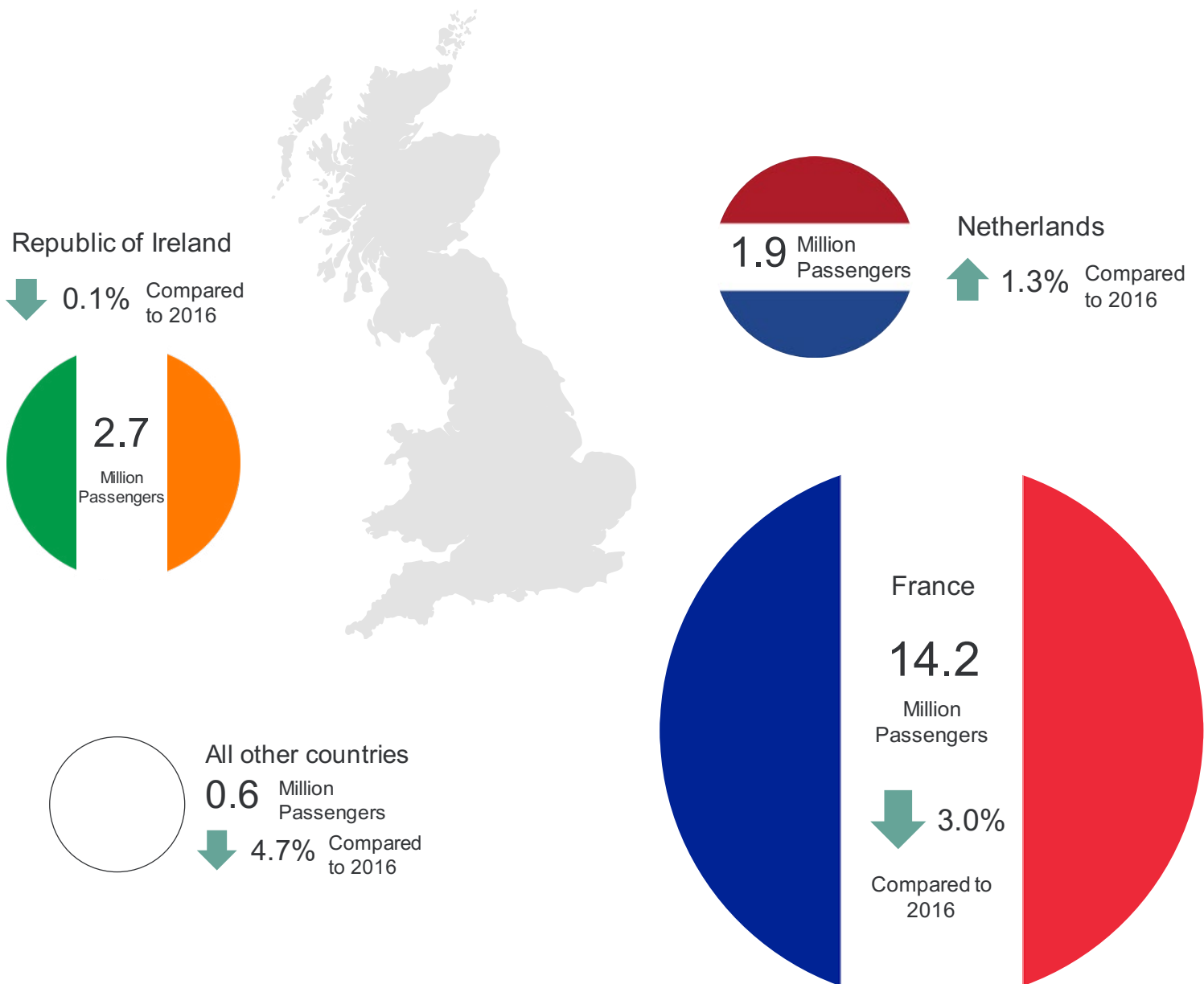
In 2017 passenger numbers on routes with France decreased 3.0% to 14.2 million. Routes with France have consistently made up the majority of international short sea passenger numbers, accounting for 73% of the total in 2016 and 2017.

The ranking of the top three countries has been consistent over the decade from 2007 to 2017, with France, the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands continuously being the top three.

Since 2007, passenger numbers for France and Ireland have decreased 18% for both countries, while passenger numbers with the Netherlands increased by 17%.

UK international short sea passengers by country of origin/destination in 2017

([Table SPAS0103](#))



Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by country can be found in [SPAS0103](#).

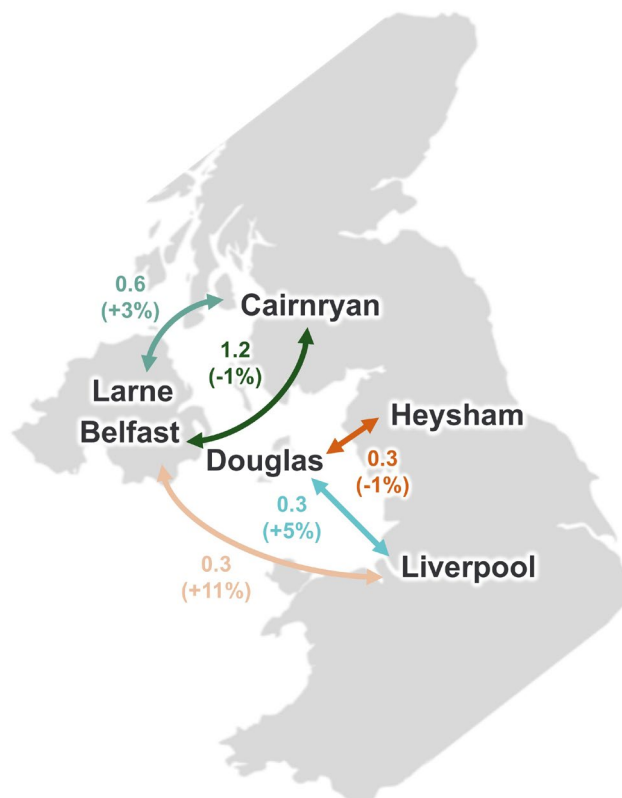
Passengers on Domestic Short Sea Routes

In 2017 the busiest domestic short sea route was Cairnryan-Belfast with 1.2 million passengers, a decrease of 1% on the year before. This route (previously Stranraer - Belfast before 2012) is consistently the busiest domestic short sea route.

Compared with the year before, passenger numbers on the Cairnryan-Larne route in 2017 increased 3% to 0.6 million.

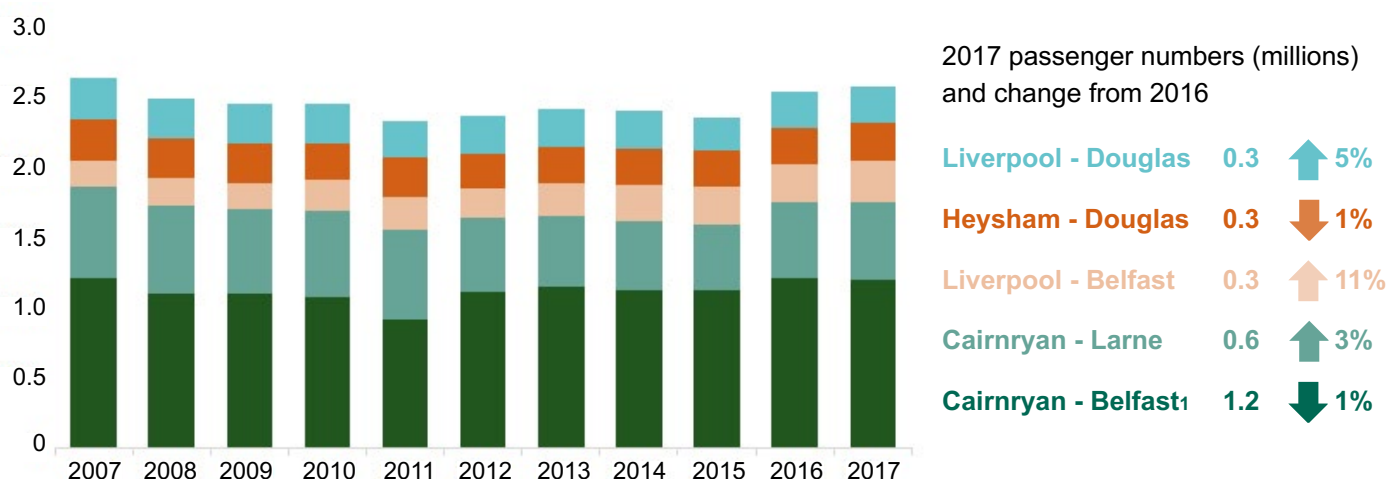
The Liverpool - Belfast route showed the largest change for the major routes with an 11% increase from 2016 to 0.3 million passengers.

Top 5 busiest UK domestic sea crossing routes in 2017 by passenger number (millions) and change from 2016 ([Table SPAS0201](#))



Top 5 busiest UK domestic sea crossing routes 2007 - 2017 ([Table SPAS0201](#))

Million passengers



¹Passengers 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](#) and [SPAS0202](#).

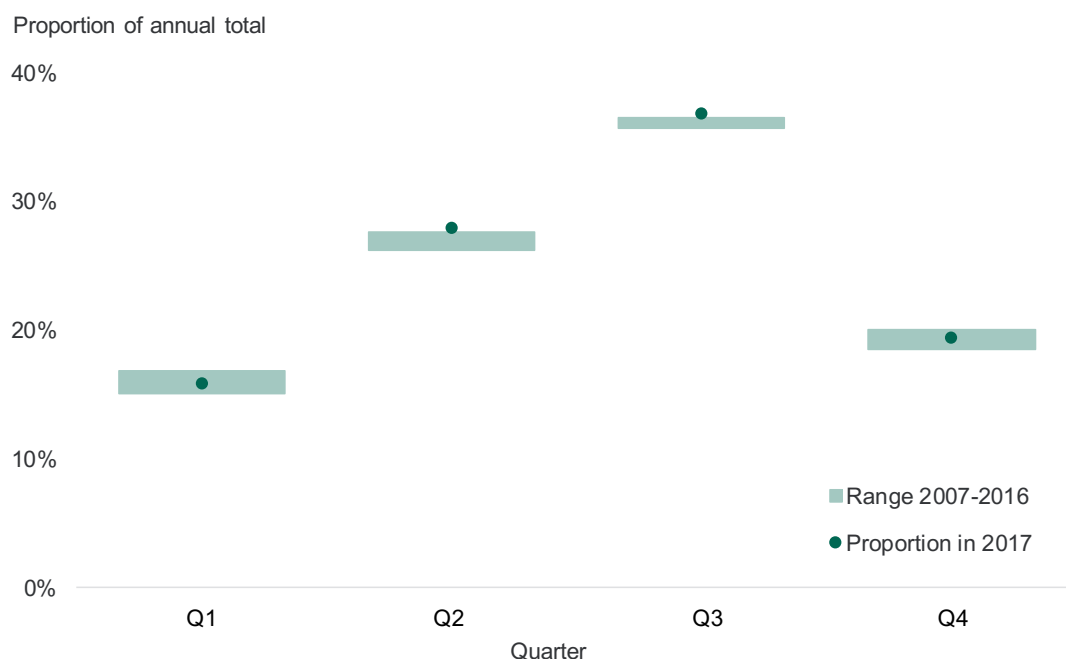
Seasonal Variation on Short Sea Routes

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

In 2017, the third quarter (July - September) accounted for 37% of the total international short sea passenger numbers while the first quarter only accounted for 16%.

Although the exact proportion fluctuates between different years, in general the quarterly distribution remains relatively similar, with the highest passenger numbers in the third quarter and the lowest in the first.

Quarterly proportion of international annual short sea passenger total in 2017 against the range of proportions over 2007-2016 ([Table SPAS0105](#))



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

Of the five busiest routes in 2017, Liverpool-Douglas has the largest proportional difference between busy and quiet quarters with 50% of passengers travelling in the third quarter and only 0.2% in the first quarter.

The greatest difference in terms of passenger numbers is Cairnryan-Belfast, with 268 thousand more passengers in the third quarter than in the first.

Detailed statistics for international sea passengers by quarter can be found in [SPAS0105](#). Quarterly domestic sea passenger statistics can be found in [SPAS0202](#).

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 between a UK port and a European or Mediterranean port.

Definition

Long sea voyage passengers are those travelling on one-way scheduled voyages to and from ports outside Europe/Mediterranean. All long sea passengers in 2017 travelled from Southampton.

Revisions

2016 cruise passenger figures have been revised since publication in 2017 to remove instances of double counting. Previously, the total cruise passenger figure for 2016 was stated as 2.0 million passengers. This has been corrected to 1.8 million passengers in 2016.

Passengers on cruises

Cruise passenger numbers increased to 1.9 million in 2017, nearly twice as many as in 2007.

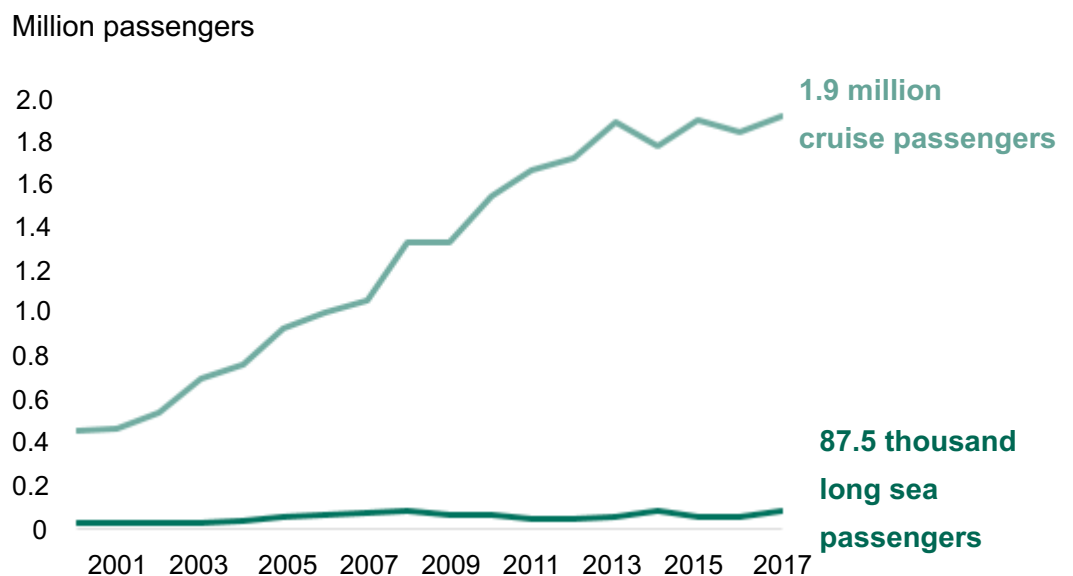
The majority of these cruise passengers passed through Southampton, with 86% of all passengers recorded beginning or ending their voyage there in 2017. The number of passengers through Southampton increased by 3% to 1.6 million in 2017, the highest recorded in recent years. Other ports, such as Newcastle and Dover, also experienced increased cruise traffic in 2017.

Passengers on long sea voyages

Long sea passenger numbers increased to 87.5 thousand in 2017, a 47% increase from 2016 and a 15% increase from 2007. This is more than three times the amount of long sea passengers in 2000 (28.5 thousand).

Long sea figures vary greatly over time, in part because operators can use these trips to reposition vessels around the world as needed.

Cruise and long sea passengers, 2000 - 2017 ([Table SPAS0101](#))



Detailed statistics on cruise and long sea passengers by port group can be found in web tables [SPAS0101](#) and [SPAS0105](#).

Sea Passengers on Domestic Routes

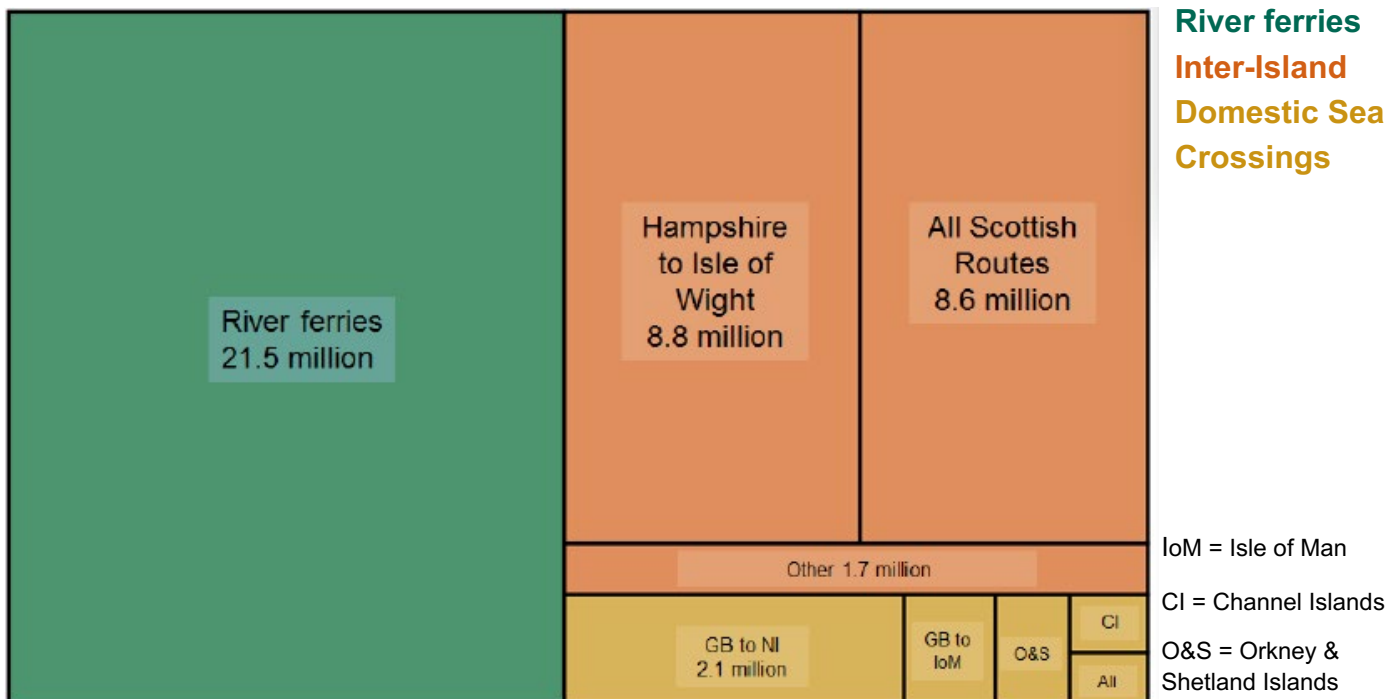
Summary

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 2017 saw an increase of 4% (from 42.4 million to 44.0 million). This increase is partly due to a 7% increase in passengers on river ferries to 21.5 million.

The largest components of domestic sea passenger numbers in 2017 were river ferry journeys (49%) and inter-island (43%).

Domestic sea passenger routes in 2017



Passengers on inter-island domestic routes

Passenger numbers on inter-island domestic routes broadly remained similar compared to 2016 (18.9 to 19.0 million).

Scottish inter-island routes increased by 4% to 8.6 million, a continued increase since 2015. See the Transport Scotland [Water Transport](#) statistics for further information (including figures for individual routes).

Passenger numbers between Hampshire and the Isle of Wight broadly remained similar (8.8 million). Other inter-island routes fell by 9% to 1.7 million in 2017, partly due to the Cowes to East Cowes service being out of operation for a number of periods in 2017.

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.

Passengers on river ferries

Passenger numbers on river ferries increased by 7% to 21.5 million. In the last decade passenger numbers have increased by 18% with the biggest increase being between 2016 and 2017. There have been some fluctuations in passenger numbers for river ferries due to changes and improvements in operator reporting methods. In 2013 the passenger numbers rose by 5%, and in 2017 passenger numbers rose by 7%, including as a result of improved reporting methods.

Definition

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. Most of the river ferry passengers are on journeys made along the River Thames. See the [Technical Note](#) for a breakdown of the routes that are included.

Domestic sea crossings

In 2017 traffic between the UK mainland and Northern Ireland increased 1% to 2.1 million passengers. Cairnryan-Belfast remained the most popular route with 1.2 million passengers, which broadly remained the same since 2016. The Cairnryan to Larne route saw an increase of 17% compared to 2015 and a 3% increase compared to 2016. One of the factors that could have contributed to the increase in the Cairnryan-Larne route is the closure of the Troon-Larne route in 2016.

Total traffic between the UK mainland and the Isle of Man increased by 3% to 0.6 million.

Overall the number of journeys between the UK mainland and the Channel Islands broadly remained similar (0.3 million), with Poole routes increasing in passenger numbers to 0.2 million (an increase of 1% compared to last year). The number of passengers at Portsmouth travelling on routes to the Channel Islands decreased by 8% compared to the previous year, to 0.5 million passengers. There were no Channel Island passengers at Weymouth in 2017, following Condor Ferries' switch of operations to Poole in March 2015.

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

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Data

- ▶ **International short-sea passengers.** Data 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 is occasionally estimated.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ The **cruise and long sea** data are also supplied by operators, typically on an annual basis, and are regularly reviewed. A small amount of data is imputed where operators do not provide returns. The data are considered to be fit for purpose - comparisons with industry figures show similar trends although the annual totals can differ.
- ▶ 2016 cruise passenger figures have been revised to reflect additional information provided by operators during 2018, which led to the identification of a number of duplicate returns in the originally published figures.
- ▶ Data for **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 'GB to Orkney & Shetland' (2013 to 2016) and 'all Scottish routes' (2015 to 2016) have been revised due to improvements in data processing, though the overall impact of these changes on the total passenger numbers is minimal.
- ▶ As a result of one of the Cowes to East Cowes services being out of operation for a number of periods in 2017, the passenger numbers for the other inter-island routes are low compared to previous year. We have also estimated the number of passengers travelling in vehicles for this route. This estimation takes into account the periods the service was unavailable.
- ▶ Passenger numbers on **river ferries** are collected from operators and cover major routes, which are reviewed periodically. Although there have been occasional changes in operator reporting methods the data are considered to be fit for purpose.
- ▶ 2017 saw an increase of 7% in the number of river cruise passengers. This increase should be treated with caution, as a methodological change in the way in which one of the larger operators collected the data for 2017 is likely to explain part of the increase.

Background Notes

- ▶ We would welcome any **feedback** on these statistics by email to 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 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, can be found in the Technical Note 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.
- ▶ 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>



To hear more about DfT statistics publications as they are released please follow us on Twitter via our @DfTstats account: <http://www.twitter.com/DfTstats>. TWITTER, TWEET, RETWEET and the Twitter logo are trademarks of Twitter, Inc. or its affiliates.