



Department for Transport

Sea Passenger Statistics: All Routes 2018 (Final)

About this release

This statistical release presents final statistics on sea passengers on both international and domestic routes to and from the UK for 2018.

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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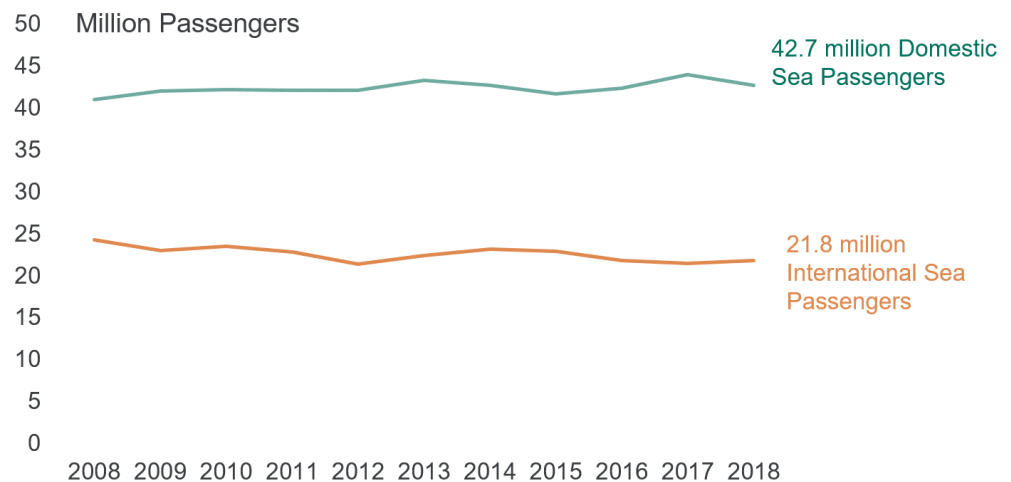
International sea passenger numbers increased for the first time in three years in 2018, increasing by 2% to 21.8 million.

Domestic sea passenger numbers decreased by 3% to 42.7 million.

International passengers

- ▶ In 2018 the total number of international short sea passengers (ferry routes) stayed relatively stable 19.6 million.
- ▶ Cruise passenger numbers increased by 15% to 2.2 million compared to 2017, continuing a broad upward trend in recent years.

UK Domestic and international sea passengers, 2008 -2018 (Tables SPAS0101 and SPAS0201)



Domestic passengers

- ▶ The total number of sea passengers on domestic routes in 2018 saw a decrease of 3% (from 44.0 million to 42.7 million).
- ▶ Within this total, river ferries decreased by 4% to 20.6 million and domestic sea crossings has remained steady at 3.5 million.



Breakdown of publications for current and upcoming sea passenger statistics

Sea Passenger Statistics 2018: All Routes

This statistical release presents the complete statistics on all sea passengers to and from the UK in 2018. In addition to the **short sea passenger statistics** previously published in February 2019, 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



International

Cruises
Long Sea Journeys



Domestic

Minor short sea routes
River crossings
Inter-island routes

Sea Passengers 2018: Short Sea Routes (Provisional)

International

All ferry routes within Europe

Domestic

Major short sea routes ie: routes between Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

Sea Passenger Statistics 2019: Short Sea Routes (February 2020)

This statistical release will present statistics on short sea passengers to and from the UK in 2019, 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 2019: All Routes publication in November 2020.

Changes to these statistics.

In 2018, the Department reviewed the content of the annual sea passenger statistics including the data tables published as part of this release. The [summary of user feedback](#) document sets out changes to the tables published as part of the 2017 and 2018 statistical releases, and from this point on.

Passengers on International Short Sea Routes

In 2018 the number of international short sea passengers has stayed stable, with a 1% increase to 19.6 million from 19.5 million in 2017.

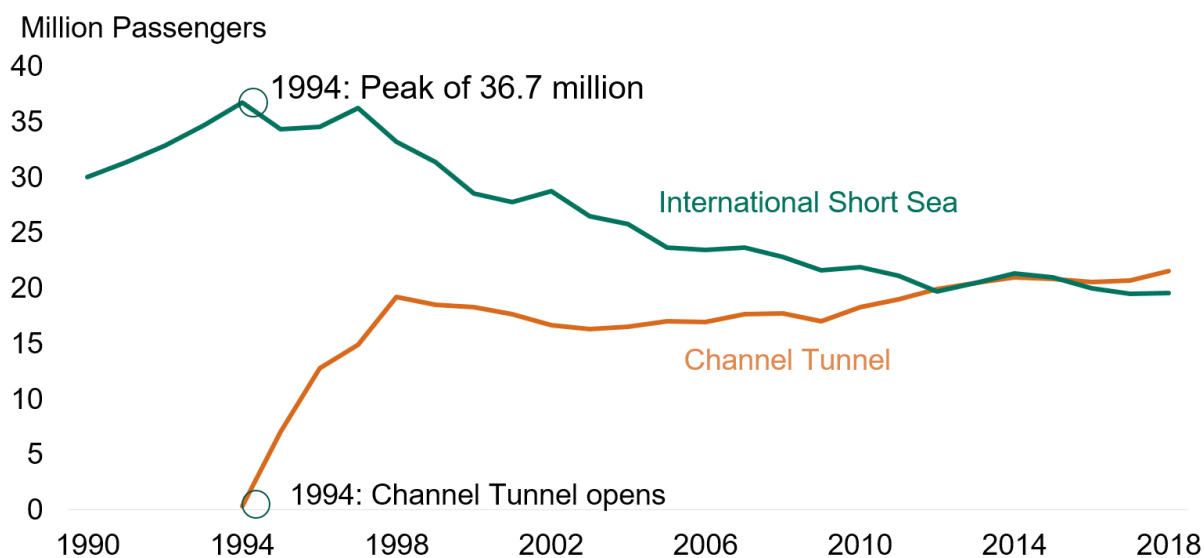
Since peaks in the 1990s the overall trend in international short sea passenger numbers has been generally downward.

The busiest route remains Dover-Calais, with this route accounting for 47% of international short sea passenger numbers in 2018. In 2018 traffic on this route increased 1% from 2017 to 9.2 million.

The number of passengers travelling via the Channel Tunnel increased by 4% to 21.6 million. In 2018, passenger numbers on international short sea routes were lower than those through the Channel Tunnel for the third consecutive year, and the fourth time since the Tunnel opened.

International short sea passengers and Channel Tunnel passengers, 1990-2018

([Table SPAS0101](#))



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

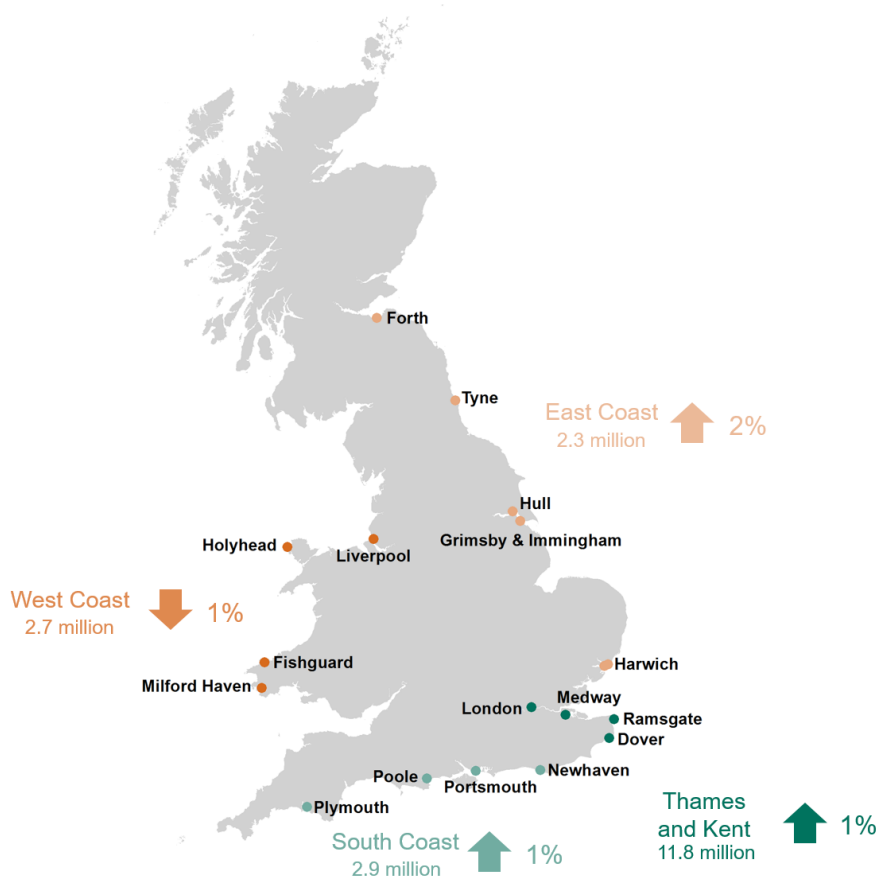
Port group activity

In 2018 passenger numbers through the Thames and Kent port group increased by 1% compared with the previous year to 11.8 million passengers.

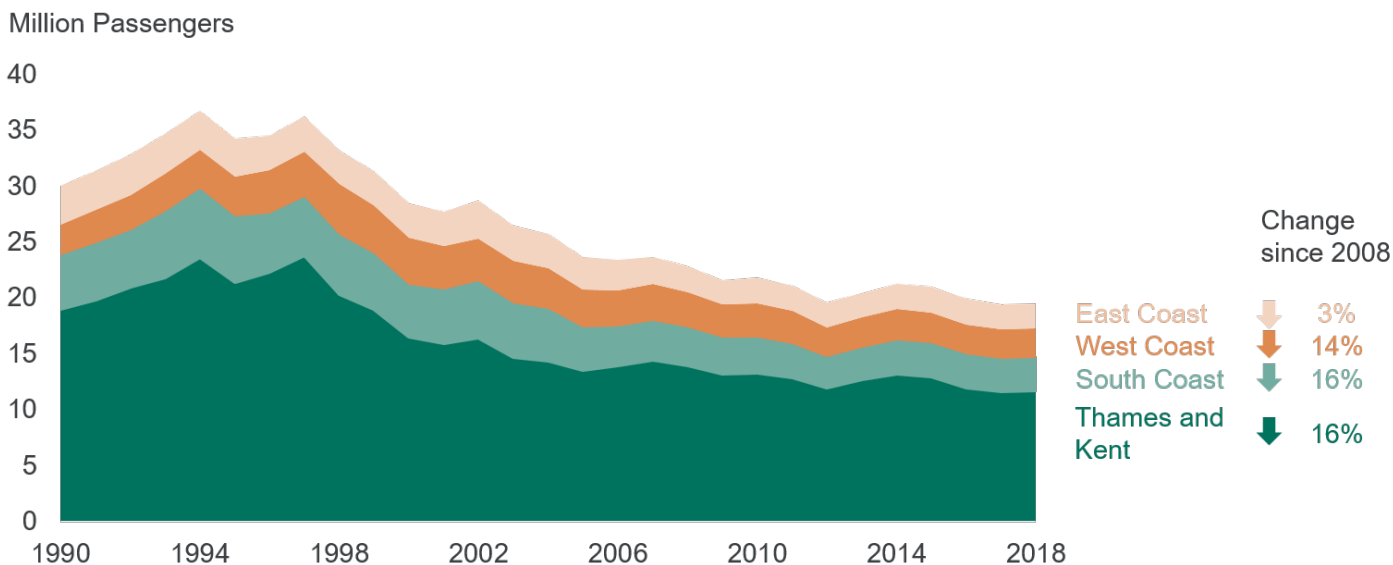
Thames and Kent accounted for 60% of total international short sea passenger numbers in 2018. This large proportion means trends in this group are often reflected in the total.

In the last 10 years, the number of passengers through each port group has decreased between 3% and 16%. The total number of international short sea passengers decreased by 14% over this period.

UK international short sea passengers by port group, 2018 and most recent year on year change ([Table SPAS0101](#))

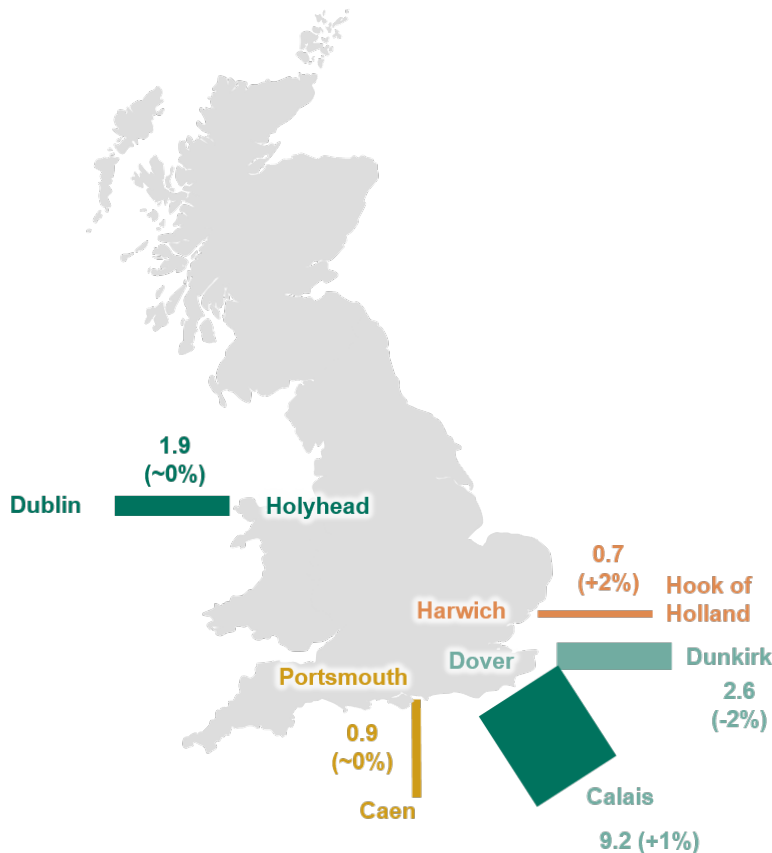


UK international short sea passengers by port group 1990 - 2018 and 10 year change ([Table SPAS0101](#))



Top 5 international short sea routes

Top 5 international short sea routes by passenger number (millions) in 2018 and latest year on year change ([Table SPAS0102](#))



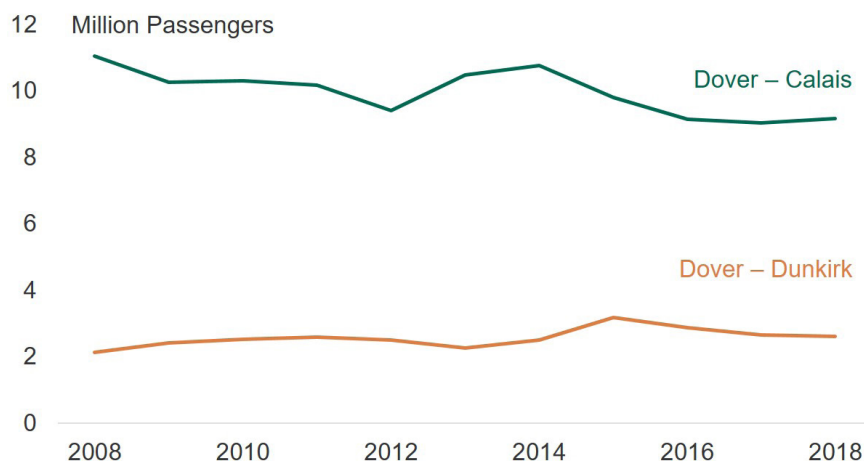
The top 5 international short sea routes accounted for 78% of all international short sea passengers in 2018.

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 2018 were 17% lower than a decade previous whilst 2018 saw a 1% increase to 9.2 million passengers.

Passenger numbers on the second largest route, Dover - Dunkirk, decreased 2% to 2.6 million passengers in 2018, but have increased 23% over the 10 years to 2018.

In 2018, Holyhead-Dublin passenger numbers remained level at 1.9 million, 4% fewer than a decade previous (when taking into account passenger numbers for the now discontinued Dun Laoghaire route).

UK international short sea passengers on Dover-Calais and Dover-Dunkirk routes 2008-2018 ([Table SPAS0102](#))



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

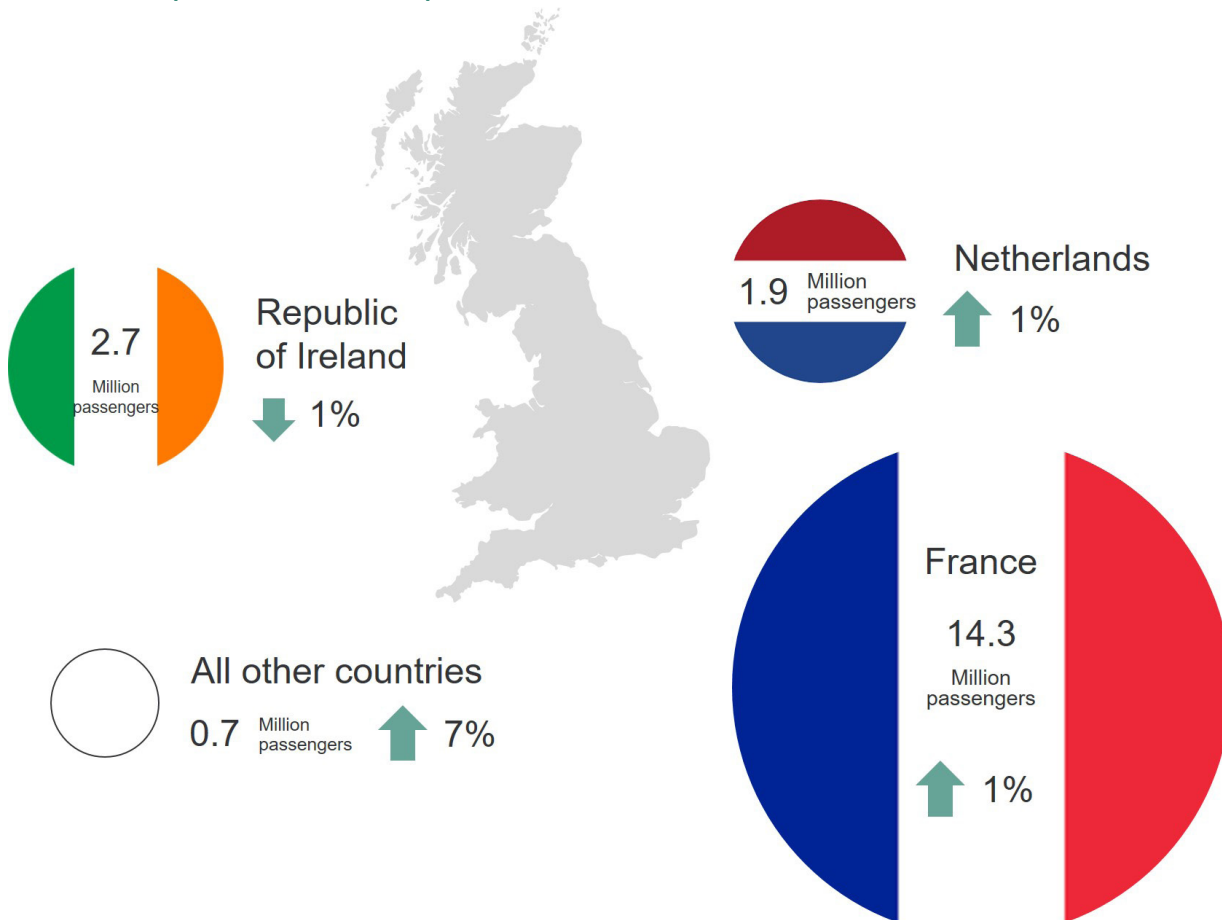
Top 5 foreign countries of origin/destination

In 2018 passenger numbers on routes with France increased 1% to 14.3 million compared to 2017 (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 2017 and 2018.

The ranking of the top three countries has been consistent over the decade from 2008 to 2018, with France, the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands continuously being the top three.

Since 2008, passenger numbers for France and Ireland have decreased 15% for France and 14% Ireland, while passenger numbers with the Netherlands increased by 16%.

UK international short sea passengers by country of origin/destination in 2018 and change from 2017 ([Table SPAS0108](#))



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

Seasonal trends ([SPAS0107](#))

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

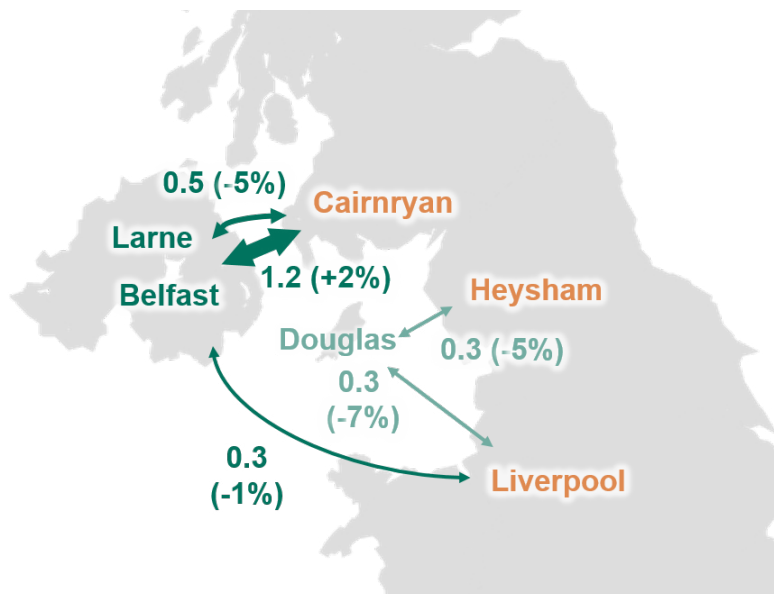
International short sea passenger numbers are consistently highest in the third quarter and lowest in the first. Although the exact quarterly proportion fluctuates between different years, in general the distribution remains similar from year to year.

Passengers on Domestic Short Sea Routes

Top 5 busiest UK domestic sea crossing routes in 2018 by passenger number (millions) and change from 2017 ([Table SPAS0201](#))

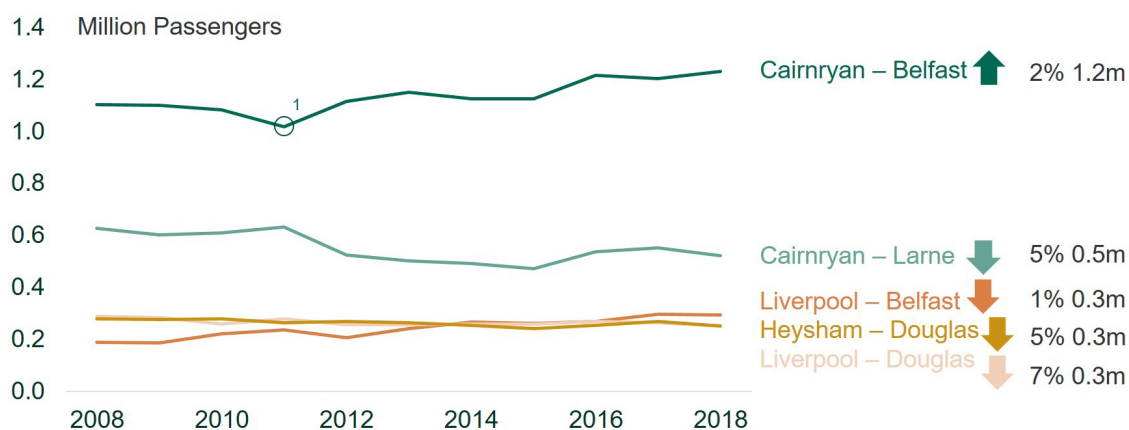
In 2018 the busiest domestic short sea route was Cairnryan-Belfast with 1.2 million passengers, an increase of 2% on the year before. This route (previously Stranraer - Belfast before 2012) is consistently the busiest domestic short sea route.

Compared with the year before, passenger numbers on the Cairnryan-Larne route in 2018 decreased 5% to 0.5 million.



Top 5 busiest UK domestic sea crossing routes 2008 - 2018

([Table SPAS0201](#))



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

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

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 between a UK port and a European or Mediterranean port. Transit passengers, who do not embark or disembark from a UK port, are not included in these figures.

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 2018 travelled from Southampton.

Passengers on cruises

Cruise passenger numbers increased to 2.2 million in 2018, a 66% increase compared to 2008.

The majority of all cruise passengers passed through Southampton, with 86% of all cruises passing through there in 2018. The number of passengers through Southampton increased by 16% to 1.9 million in 2018, the highest recorded in recent years. Other ports, such as Harwich and Dover, also experienced increased cruise traffic in 2018.

Passengers on long sea voyages

Long sea passenger numbers decreased to 66,000 in 2018, a 24% decrease from 2017 and a 19% decrease from 2008.

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 - 2018 ([Table SPAS0101](#))



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

Sea Passengers on Domestic Routes

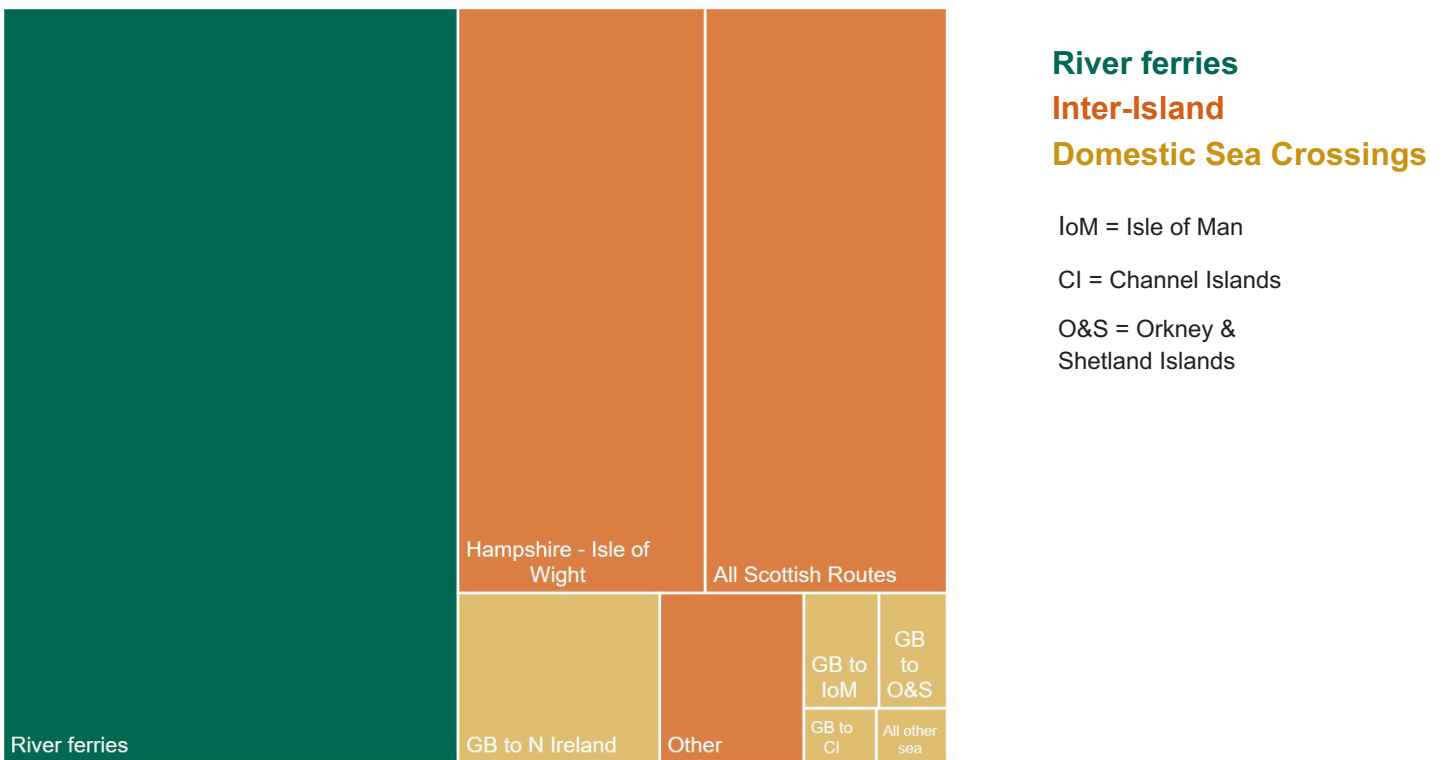
Summary

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

The total number of sea passengers on domestic routes in 2018 saw an decrease of 3% (from 44.0 million in 2017 to 42.7 million). This decrease is partly due to a 4% decrease in passengers on river ferries to 20.6 million.

The largest components of domestic sea passenger numbers in 2018 were river ferry journeys (48%) and inter-island (44%).

Domestic sea passenger routes in 2018



Passengers on inter-island domestic routes

Passenger numbers on inter-island domestic routes have decreased 2% from 19.0 million in 2017, to 18.6 million in 2018. Scottish inter-island routes stayed relatively stable at 8.5 million. See the Transport Scotland [Water Transport](#) statistics for further information (including figures for individual routes).

Passenger numbers between Hampshire and the Isle of Wight remained broadly similar (8.7 million). Other inter-island routes fell by 11% to 1.5 million in 2018, partly due to the Cowes to East Cowes service being out of operation for a number of periods in 2018.

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 decreased by 4% to 20.6 million between 2017 and 2018. In the last decade passenger numbers have increased by 8% 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.

Domestic sea crossings

In 2018 traffic between the UK mainland and Northern Ireland remained stable at around 2.1 million passengers. Cairnryan-Belfast remained the most popular route with 1.2 million passengers, which broadly remained the same since 2017. The Cairnryan to Larne route saw a decrease of 5% compared to 2017 and a 3% decrease compared to 2016. Total traffic between the UK mainland and the Isle of Man decreased by 6% to 0.5 million.

Overall the number of journeys between the UK mainland and the Channel Islands has decreased by 6% to 0.2 million, with Poole routes decreasing in passenger numbers to 0.19 million (a decrease of 7% compared to 2017). The number of passengers at Portsmouth travelling on routes to the Channel Islands has stayed relatively stable at around 48,000. There were no Channel Island passengers at Weymouth in 2018, following Condor Ferries' switch of operations to Poole in March 2015.

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.

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

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.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ As a result of one of the Cowes to East Cowes services being out of operation for a number of periods in 2017 and 2018, the passenger numbers for the other inter-island routes are low compared to previous years. This number also includes the number of passengers traveling in vehicles that has been estimated by the operator.
- ▶ 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.

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:
www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/sea-passenger-statistics-spas
- ▶ Provisional summary totals for international sea passenger traffic are released monthly in table SPAS017 available via the DfT website at:
www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/sea-passenger-statistics-spas#all-uk-international-short-sea-long-sea-and-cruise-passengers
- ▶ 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 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.
- ▶ 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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