



Department for Transport

Sea Passenger Statistics: All Routes 2019

About this release

This statistical release presents final statistics on sea passengers on both international and domestic routes to and from the UK for 2019.

International passengers are those that travel on international routes. These are broken down into short sea (ferry) routes and passengers on cruises and long sea journeys.

Domestic passengers travel on domestic routes, including domestic sea crossings, river ferries and inter-island journeys.

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

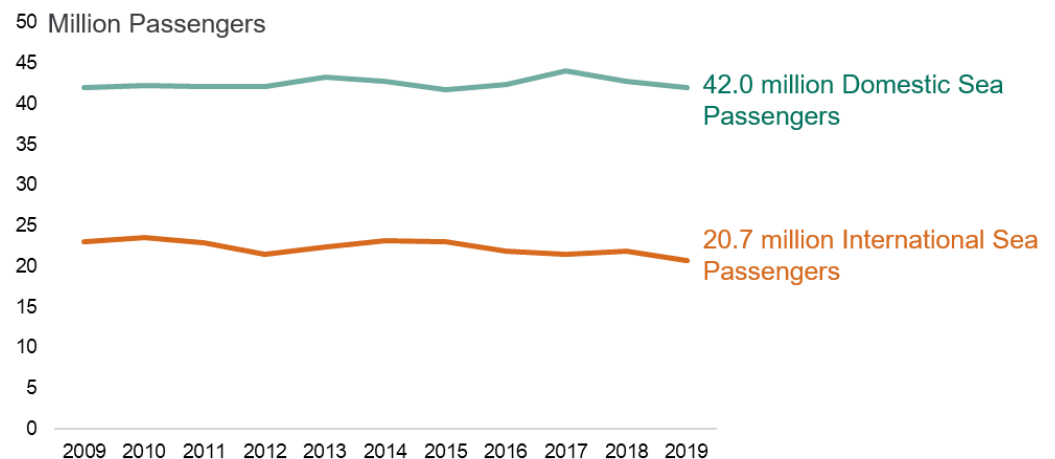
In this publication

- International Short Sea Journeys p3
- Cruise and Long Sea Journeys p7
- Domestic Journeys p8
- Strengths & Weaknesses p10
- Background
- Notes p11

International sea passenger numbers decreased by 5% to 20.7 million in 2019.

Domestic sea passenger numbers decreased by 2% to 42.0 million.

UK Domestic and international sea passengers, 2009 - 2019
(Tables SPAS0101 and SPAS0201)



International passengers

- ▶ In 2019 the total number of international short sea passengers (ferry routes) decreased by 6% to 18.4 million compared to 2018.
- ▶ Cruise passenger numbers remained broadly stable at 2.2 million in 2019, this is a 63% increase when compared to 2009.

Domestic passengers

- ▶ The total number of sea passengers on domestic routes in 2019 saw a decrease of 2% (from 42.7 million to 42.0 million).
- ▶ Within this total, river ferries decreased by 7% to 19.2 million and domestic sea crossings has remained steady at 3.5 million.

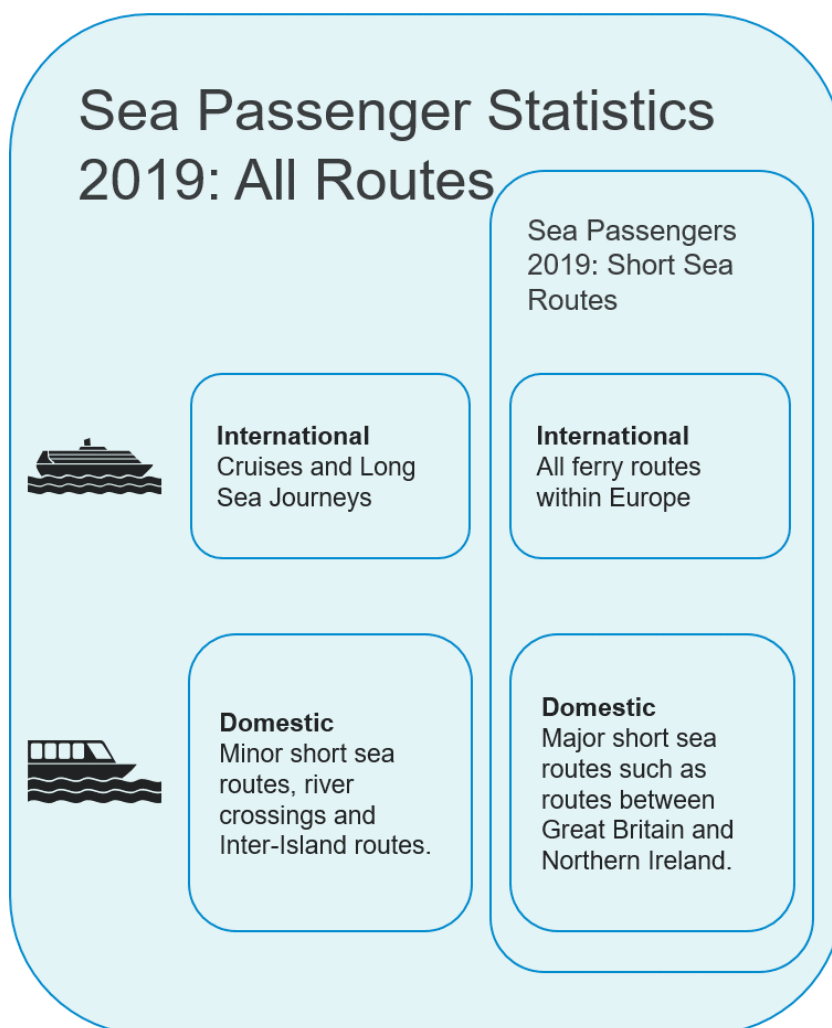
Breakdown of publications for current and upcoming sea passenger statistics

Sea Passenger Statistics 2019: All Routes

This statistical release presents the complete statistics on all sea passengers to and from the UK in 2019. In addition to the **short sea passenger statistics** previously published in February 2020, it also includes:

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 have been added to the previously published major short sea routes for a complete picture of domestic routes.



Sea Passenger Statistics 2020: Short Sea Routes (February 2021)

This statistical release will present statistics on short sea passengers to and from the UK in 2020, 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 2020: All Routes publication in November 2021.

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

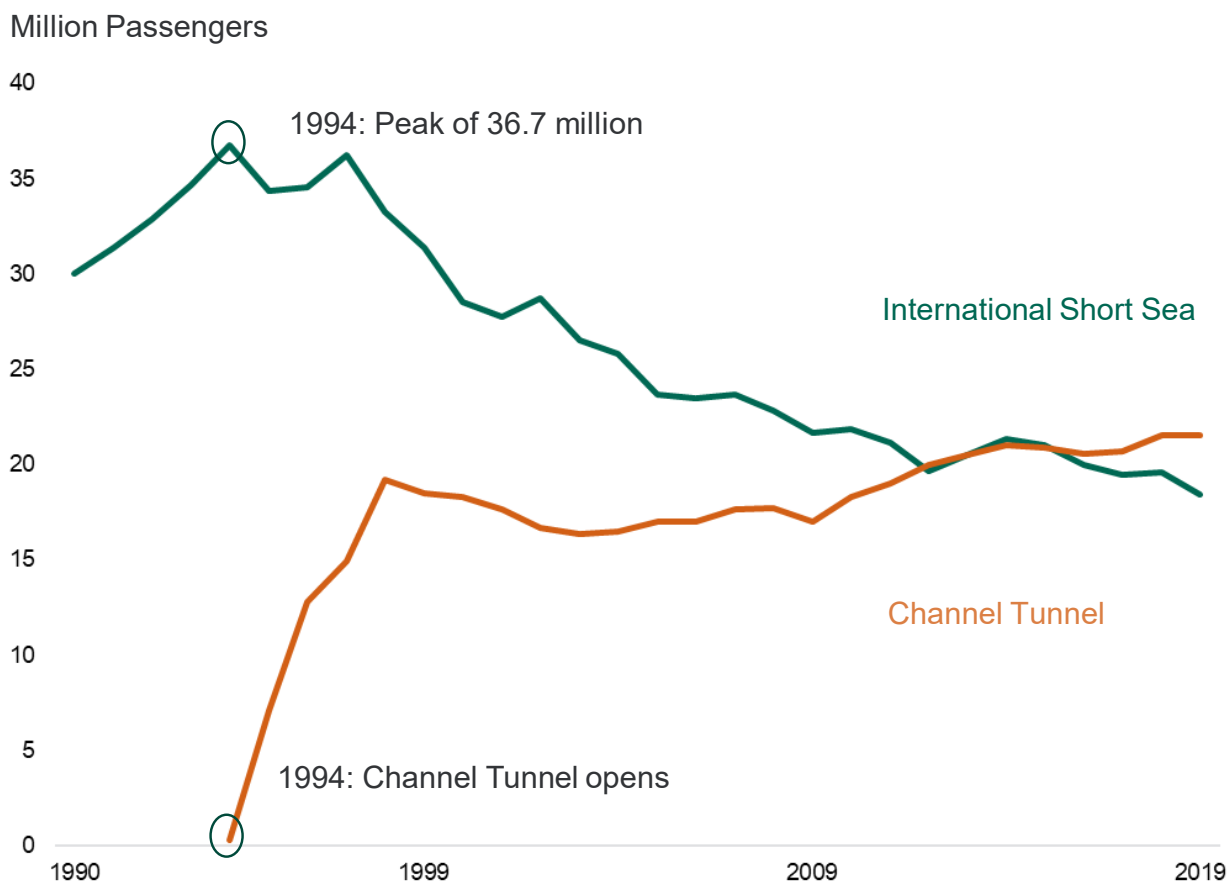
Since peaks in the 1990s the overall trend in international short sea passenger numbers has been generally downward.

Over the last decade, Dover - Calais has consistently been the busiest route, with it accounting for 47% of international short sea passenger numbers in 2019. 8.6 million passengers travelled on this route in 2019, a 6% decline on 2018 and 17% lower than in 2009.

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

([Table SPAS0101](#))



Statistics on Channel Tunnel and international short sea passengers can be found in web table [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 the Office of Rail and Road.

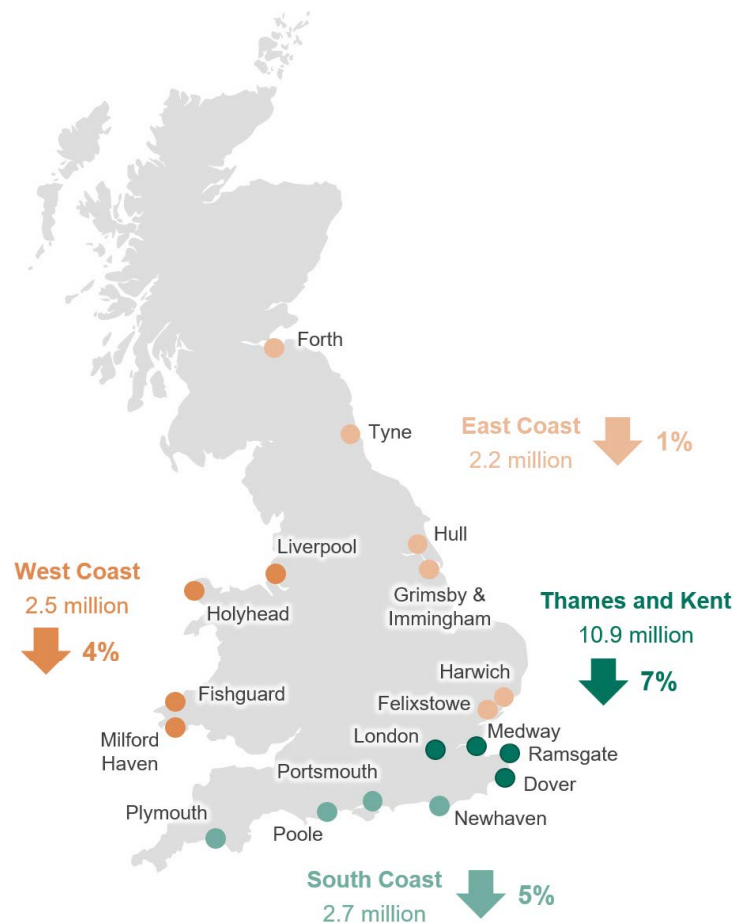
Trends by port group

The decrease in short sea international passenger numbers was largely driven by a 7% decrease in international short sea 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 Thames and Kent port group made up 59% of total short sea international passengers in 2019.

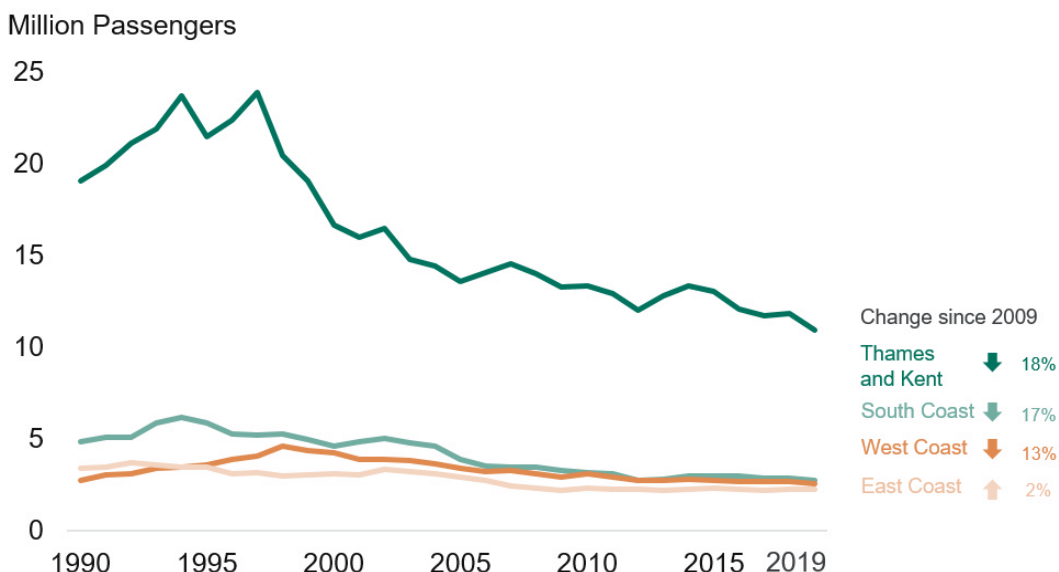
The total number of international short sea passengers has decreased by 15% since 2009. This drop can be seen across almost all port groups, with only East Coast showing a small increase of 2% since 2009.

All port groups experienced a decrease in international short sea passengers in 2019, contributing to an overall decrease in short sea international passengers. The West Coast and South Coast saw decreases of 4% and 5% respectively, while the East Coast had a lesser drop of 1%.

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



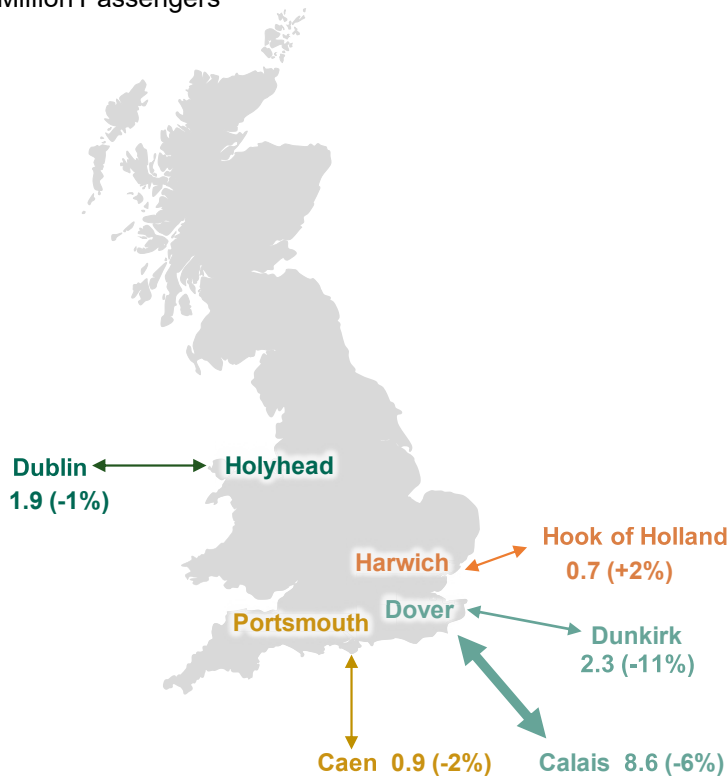
UK international short sea passengers by port group 1990 - 2019 and 10 year change (Table SPAS0101)



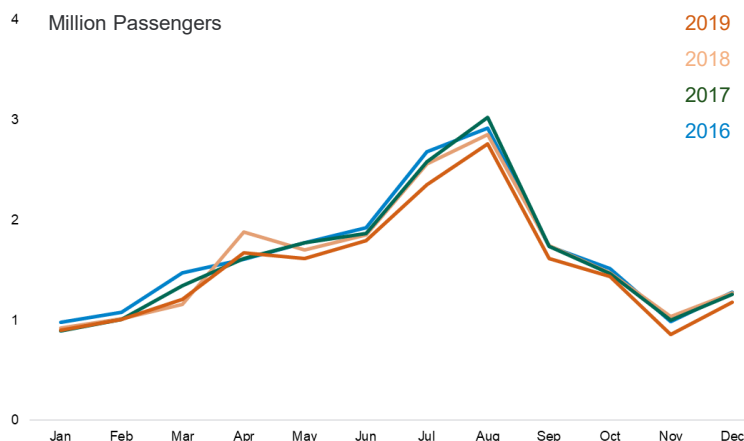
Top 5 international short sea routes

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

Million Passengers



UK international short sea passengers by month, 2016 – 2019 ([Table SPAS0107](#))



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 in 2009. Passengers on this route have been in decline since they peaked at 10.8 million in 2014.

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

Whilst following the long term trend of declining short sea passenger numbers, 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 in 2009 (when taking into account passenger numbers for the now discontinued Dun Laoghaire route).

Seasonal trends

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 months of July and August, with the lowest sea passenger numbers seen in January, February and November. Although the exact monthly proportions fluctuate between different years, in general the distribution remains similar from year to year.

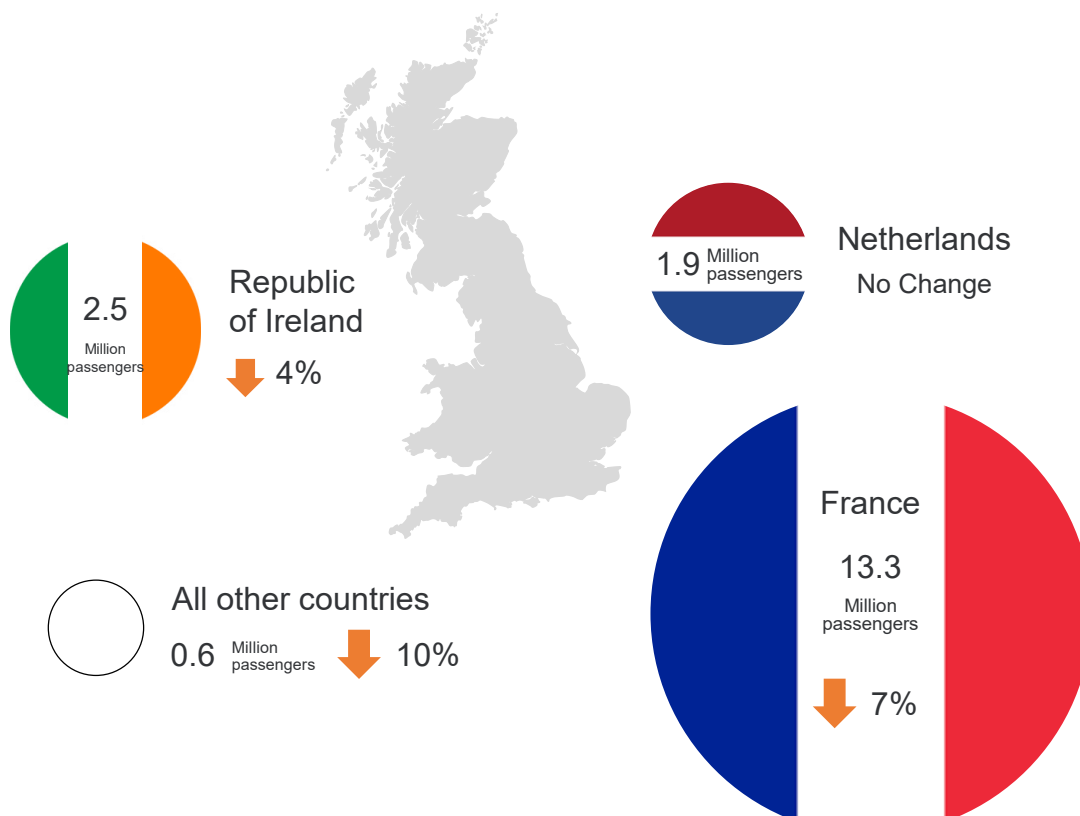
Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by route and port group can be found in web table [SPAS0102](#).

Top 5 foreign countries of origin/destination

In 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 ([Table SPAS0108](#))



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](#).

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. Like other sea passengers, cruise passengers are included at both departure and arrival if their journey begins and ends at a UK seaport. 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.

Passengers on cruises

Cruise passenger numbers remained broadly stable at 2.2 million in 2019, this is a 63% increase when compared to 2009.

The majority of all cruise passengers passed through Southampton, with the port accounting for 83% of all cruises passengers in 2019. The number of passengers through Southampton decreased by 5% to 1.8 million in 2019, however this is the second highest cruise passenger figure on record for a UK port. Dover saw an increase in cruise passengers when compared to 2018, driven in part by more sailings to and from this port, new vessels operating at this port, and in part a larger operator providing figures this year that haven't been provided previously.

Harwich saw a decrease in passengers due to less operators beginning or ending cruises at this port.

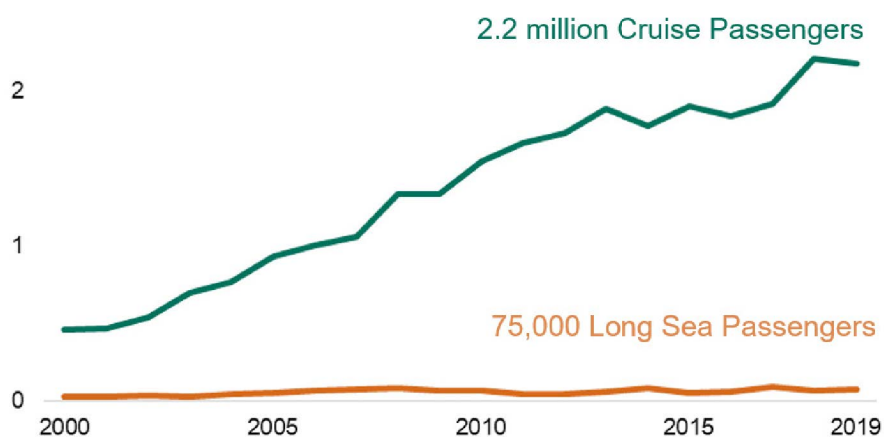
Passengers on long sea voyages

Long sea passenger numbers increased to 75,000 in 2019, a 13% increase from 2018 and a 8% increase from 2009. The majority of long sea passengers in 2019 travelled from Southampton.

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 - 2019 ([Table SPAS0101](#))

3 Million Passengers



A larger operator returned figures this year that haven't been provided previously, with vessels operating at the port of Dover. This has contributed to an increase in cruise passengers at this port. Furlough of port employees for Aberdeen and Inverness due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic means that figures for these ports could not be included in 2019. Both reporting issues mentioned are assessed to be small compared to the total and do not impact the overall trends for cruises and long sea passengers.

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

Sea Passengers on Domestic Routes

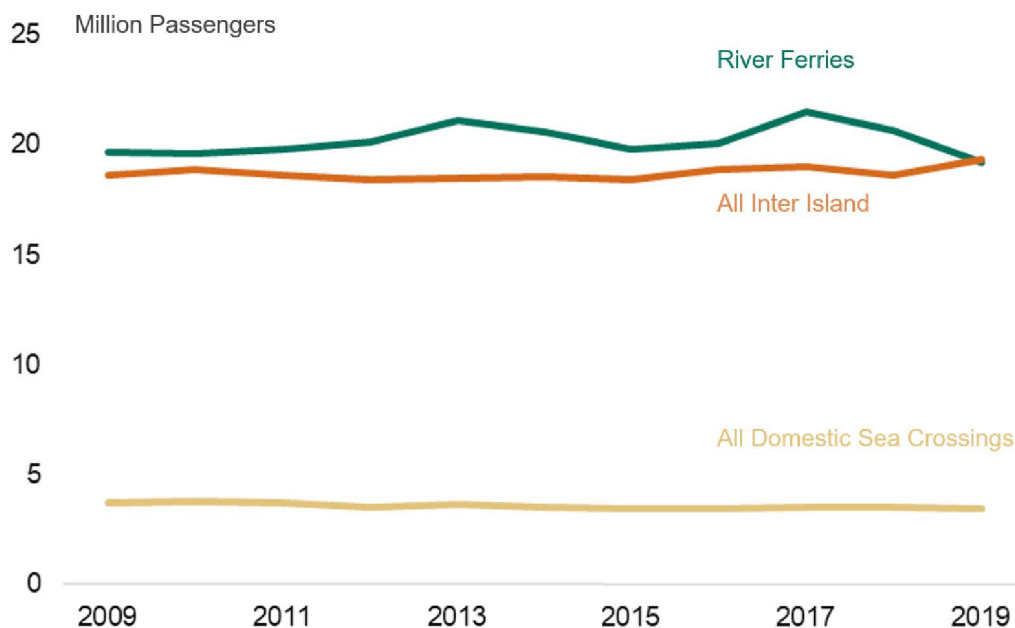
Summary

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 2019 saw a decrease of 2% (from 42.7 million in 2018 to 42.0 million). This decrease is mainly due to a 7% decrease in passengers on river ferries to 19.2 million.

The largest components of domestic sea passenger numbers in 2019 were inter-island journeys (46.0%) and river ferries (45.7%).

UK domestic sea passengers by type of route, 2009 - 2019 ([Table SPAS0201](#))



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. 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.

Passengers on inter-island domestic routes

Passenger numbers on inter-island domestic routes have increased 4% from 18.6 million in 2018, to 19.3 million in 2019. Scottish inter-island routes stayed relatively stable at 8.6 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 stable at 8.7 million. Other inter-island routes increased by 42% to 2.1 million in 2019, this increase was due to lower passenger numbers on the Cowes to East Cowes routes in 2017 and 2018 caused by unoperational services during this time period.

Passengers on river ferries

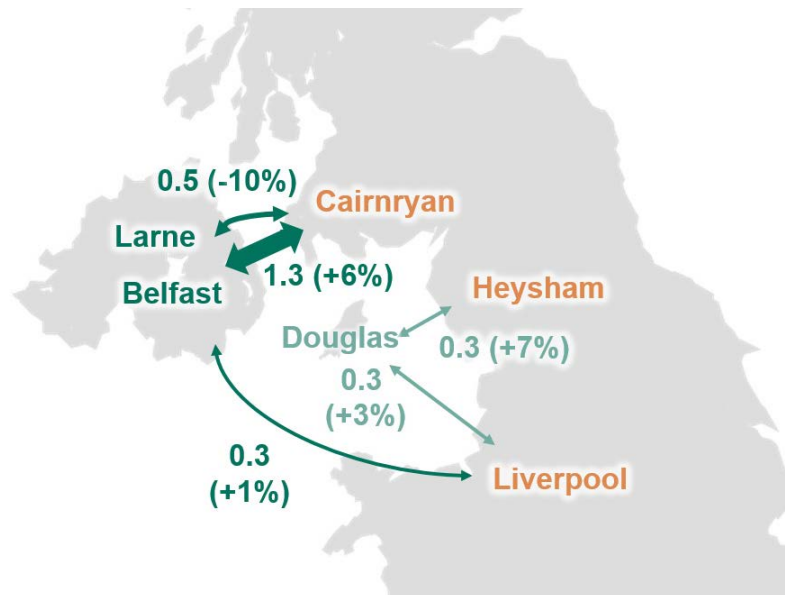
Passenger numbers on river ferries decreased by 7% to 19.2 million between 2018 and 2019. This is the lowest passenger number for river ferries since 2008. This reduction in passenger numbers was due to specific routes being unoperational for periods of 2019. There have also been some fluctuations in passenger numbers in the last decade for river ferries due to changes and improvements in operator reporting methods.

Domestic sea crossings

In 2019 traffic between the UK mainland and Northern Ireland was stable at around 2.1 million passengers. Cairnryan-Belfast remained the most popular route with 1.3 million passengers, a 6% increase on the same route in 2018. This route (previously Stranraer - Belfast before 2012) is consistently the busiest domestic short sea route and has seen an 18% increase in passenger numbers since 2009.

The Cairnryan to Larne route saw a decrease for the third year in a row, falling by 10% compared to 2018 to 470,000 passengers. This route has also had a 22% decrease in passengers since 2009.

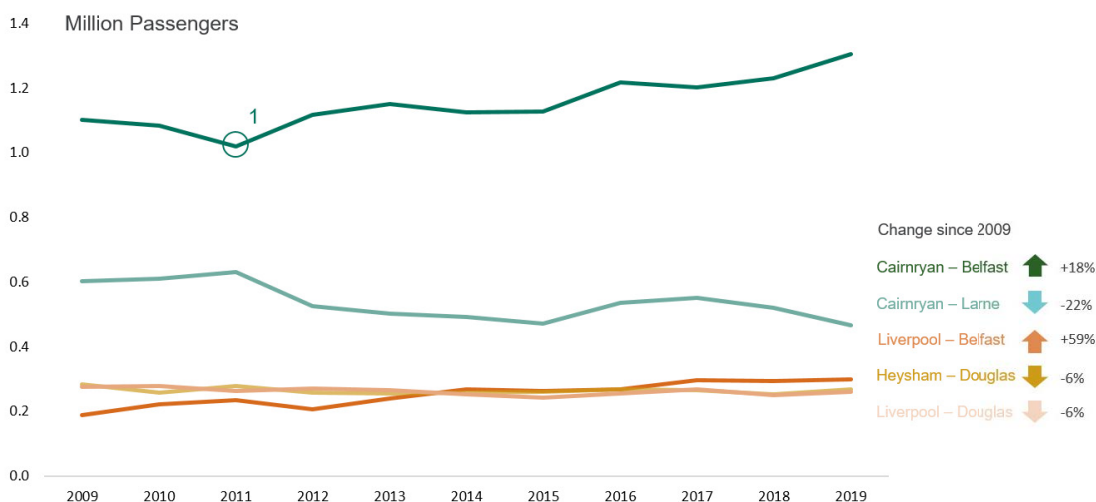
Top 5 busiest UK domestic sea crossing routes in 2019 by passenger number (millions) and change from 2018 ([Table SPAS0201](#))



Total traffic between the UK mainland and the Isle of Man increased by 3% to 537,000 passengers in 2019, however this is 5% down on the 2009 figure of 564,000 passengers.

Overall the number of journeys between the UK mainland and the Channel Islands has decreased by 13% to 208,000. This is driven by a decrease in both Poole and Portsmouth routes. Poole routes passenger numbers fell to 172,000 (a decrease of 10% compared to 2018). Portsmouth routes' passenger numbers fell by 25% compared to 2018 to 36,000, driven by a decrease in sailings on these routes.

Top 5 busiest UK domestic sea crossing routes 2009 - 2019 and change from 2009 ([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 web tables [SPAS0201](#).

Other Information

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](#), with monthly figures available.

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 2019, there were 40.9 million visits to the UK by overseas residents, these overseas residents spent £28.4 billion on visits to the UK.

In the same period, UK residents made 93.1 million visits overseas and spent £62.3 billion on these visits.

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% 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. In 2019 the ports of Aberdeen and Inverness' figures could not be included due to port employees being furloughed as an impact of the coronavirus pandemic. These ports' figures in 2018 totalled 1,700 passengers, therefore this gap in reporting is expected to have no impact on overall trends. A larger operator returned figures this year that haven't been provided previously, with vessels operating at the port of Dover. This has contributed to an increase in cruise passengers at this port.

- ▶ 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 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:
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>



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