Great Britain Tourism Survey (GBTS)
Methodology and Quality – 2021 Revised

Insight Department | September 2023
Methodology

In 2019, the producers of the domestic tourist statistics, VisitScotland, VisitWales, and VisitEngland, undertook a review of the requirements and methods for producing the statistics to help future-proof the data collection methods, whilst maintaining the reliability and robustness of the information reported. As a result, substantial changes were introduced as part of a new combined online survey method collecting data on both domestic overnight trips as well as domestic day trips. This represents a fundamental change in the way data is collected for overnight visits including moving to an online-panel, non-probability survey methodology from the previous face-to-face non-probability methodology.

The sample for the combined online survey is sourced from 4 ESOMAR accredited online panel providers and includes quotas for key demographic variables and region of residence to make the overall sample as representative as possible of GB population. The target annual sample size for GBTS is 60,000 completed interviews. It was not possible to collect data for the first 3 months of 2021 because of the lockdown and travel restrictions in place due to Covid 19. Fieldwork started in England and Wales at the start of April 2021 and in Scotland 2 weeks later and the number of interviews achieved for the period April to December 2021 is 47,008 including 6,662 interviews with Scottish residents.

As part of the survey changes, a revised weighting scheme has been introduced to improve efficiency, whilst making the results as representative as possible of the GB population. However, the use of a non-probability online sample limits the extent to which the survey responses are truly representative of the full GB population, a limitation of all online sample surveys. The new weighting scheme uses the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) mapped to approximated social grade for population statistics, for the purpose of quotas and weighting to the GB population. The change to using NS-SEC as the population statistics source will impact the estimation and reporting of trips compared to the previous reporting of social grade used for GBTS in 2019 and previous years.

This latest output of the GBTS data is a revision, after two decisions were made to firstly apply additional caps to volume and spend and to secondly calibrate the historical data. These decisions were taken independently from each other and were in response to different data queries. Volume and spend caps were applied to the 2021 data to manage the impact of unusually large trips or spend. Analysis was conducted on 2021 data to assess the impact of these outliers, some of which accounted for up to 30% of monthly spend or volume for a nation in a particular month. Following this analysis, the caps were agreed and applied, thus reducing the impact of any outlier trips.
Definitions

To qualify as an eligible GB Domestic Overnight Trip the following criteria must be met:

• involved a stay of at least one night in the nations of Great Britain
• not taken on a frequent basis – takes place less often than once a week
• GB Domestic Overnight Holiday Trips – the main purpose of the trip was for holiday, pleasure or leisure
• GB Domestic Overnight VFR Trips – the main purpose of the trip was for visiting friends and relatives, including VFR trips that were combined with a holiday.
• GB Domestic Overnight Business Trips – the main purpose of the trip was for business
• GB Domestic Overnight Miscellaneous Trips – the main purpose of the trip was for any other type of trip taken not covered by the above classifications including personal events, public events, study, medical, religious reasons and any overnight stays in the UK as part of any overseas trip.
• **Volume** - an estimate of what the grossed-up number of overnight trips undertaken by the population within the time would be if the quota sample is representative of the whole GB population
• **Value** - an estimate of what the total expenditure relating to the volume of overnight visits undertaken by the population would be if the quota sample is representative of the whole GB population
• **Bednights** - an estimate of what the grossed-up number of nights spent on overnight trips undertaken by the population would be if the quota sample is representative of the whole GB population.

• Definitions of Lifestage segments*:-
  • Pre-Nesters – 16-34, no children
  • Families – 16-64, with children
  • Older Independents – 35-64, no children
  • Retirement Age – 65+

These qualifying criteria and definitions have been revised to align with agreed international standards which impacts on comparability of the published domestic overnight tourism estimates for 2021 and for 2019 and previous years.

*Please note the definition of life stages has been amended from previously published reports to bring consistency between Scotland, England and Wales reporting. Pre-Nesters remains the same, but changes have been made to the definition of Families, Older Independents and Empty Nesters (terminology has also been changed to Retirement Age).
Methodology (cont)

Following this, the 2021 data was calibrated to bring estimates for 2021 into line with 2022 data, following a change applied to the questionnaire in 2022. A change to the wording of a question, applied in 2022, altered the volume of overnight tourism trips. To bring the historical data in line with 2022, it was agreed a back calibration would be applied between April 2021 and April 2022. Further details about these volume and spend caps as well as the calibration can be found in section 4.5 of the Background Quality Report.

There have also been changes in the methods for imputations and data edits and to the calculations to provide monthly trip and spend estimates.

Further details of the changes to survey method, sample design and estimation approaches are available in the GBTS 2021 Background Quality Report.

Comparability and coherence

Statistics for domestic overnight tourism have been collected in a broadly similar way since 1989, initially through the United Kingdom Tourism Survey (UKTS), and since 2011 through the Great Britain Tourism Survey (GBTS). However, the changes in survey methodology introduced in 2021, together with the interruption in data collection in 2020 and early 2021 due to Covid-19, means that results published from April 2021 onwards are not directly comparable with data published for 2019 and previous years.

As part of the survey, respondents are asked about any overnight trips they have taken in the 4 full weeks prior to their date of interview (reference period). Estimates are reported for individual calendar months as well as for quarterly and annual periods. As the interview reference periods do not exactly correspond with calendar months and each month may contain a 4- or 5-week reporting period, an adjustment is made using a seasonal smoothing factor to improve monthly comparisons within and between years. The monthly estimates are subject to limitations on sample size and seasonal fluctuations in trip taking across the year. The monthly pattern of visits in 2021 will have also been influenced by any Covid-19 restrictions in place limiting travel at different times of the year. Users are advised to be aware of these limitations when making month on month comparisons.

The new combined survey includes revised questions to help align the key measures of trips, nights and expenditure with internationally agreed definitions for overnight tourism trips. This will enable more accurate reporting of tourism specific trips and improve comparability with trips reported by other destinations using the internationally agreed definitions. The new combined GBTS and GBDVS survey collects information on specific destinations visited in GB. This enables trips and spend estimates to be calculated for Great Britain, the individual nations of Scotland, England and Wales, and sub-national geographies, subject to sample size limitations.
Accuracy

The statistics produced from the Great Britain Tourism Survey in 2019 and previous years have been designated as official statistics, which provides reassurance to users that the statistics are produced to the very highest professional standards of trustworthiness, quality and value, set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics. Due to the changes in methodology and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the survey results for 2021 have been badged as experimental statistics. The intention is to return to official statistics status in the near future.

As the statistics are produced using a non-probability online survey method, they are subject to the limitations and potential sources of bias and error associated with such surveys. These include:
- Coverage error due to the small part of the GB population that does not have online access.
- Sample bias including differences due to those with online access and those that are online panel members compared to those who are not.
- Measurement error due to respondents entering incorrect values.
- Non-response error including survey refusals and drop-outs and the availability of don’t know and prefer not to say options.

The GBTS data are weighted to correct for any imperfections in the achieved sample that might lead to bias and to rectify any differences between the sample and the target population. The survey uses a mix of panel partners to mitigate for possible panel specific biases, and keeping this panel mix consistent over time.

The survey script and data processing includes bespoke checks to verify the accuracy of responses. Imputation is used to cover missing data and caps are used to minimise the impact of extreme values that are entered. It is not possible to measure standard sample errors due to the non-probability sample being used, but base sizes are reported for eligible trip takers and users are advised to consider and be cautious of small base sizes particularly for monthly data and lower-level geographies when drawing inferences from the statistics.

Take a look at the Background Quality Report for details of quality assurance and trip base sizes.
Relevance

These statistics are used both within and outside VisitScotland to monitor domestic tourism demand and measure the contribution and impact of domestic tourism on the visitor economy. A key purpose of the GBTS is to uncover insights into market trends over time. The estimates released for 2021 will provide insights on the impact of Covid-19 on visitor levels and provide a baseline to measure performance across subsequent years. The full data set provides additional information on visitor profiles and trip characteristics for visits to Scotland and for the wider GB domestic market that is relevant for tourism planning, policy making and marketing.

Some of the key potential users are:

- Tourism businesses and industry representative bodies
- VisitScotland and the Scottish Government
- Ministers
- Local authorities
- Professional tourism consultants and organisations
- Students, academics and universities
- Individual citizens and private companies
- National and local media
- Eurostat and international statistical authorities

Timeliness and punctuality

It is anticipated that future results for Scotland will be published on a quarterly basis with a time lag of circa 9-10 weeks reflecting the 4 weekly reference period used to ask about trips taken and to allow for quality assurance checks and reporting timescales.

Accessibility and clarity

The statistics will be published on the www.visitscotland.org website at 9.30am on the day of publication.
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CONTACT US

Insight Department
research@visitscotland.com  visitscotland.org

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