

Travel trends

KEY POINTS

- International travel has continued to increase with a record increase in 2004, with particular recovery in travel to South East Asia after the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic. Travel abroad by United Kingdom (UK) residents followed the international trend and also continued to increase in 2004 and 2005.
- More males than females travelled from the UK and were, on average, between 35 and 44 years of age.
- Around two-thirds of UK residents travelled for holidays in 2005, the majority to the European Union (EU).
- Since 2003, visits to tropical destinations increased by 28% compared to a decrease of 0.2% for visits to EU15. All other regions saw an overall increase except Sub-Saharan and Southern Africa.
- The number of visits made to see friends and relatives continued to increase at a higher rate (23% since 2003).

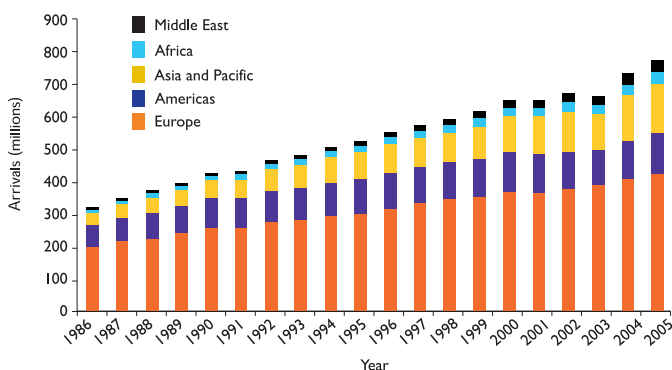
Sources of data

- **World Tourism Organization (WTO).** *Tourism Highlights, edition 2006*. Madrid: WTO; 2006. Available from <http://www.world-tourism.org/facts/menu.html>.
- **World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).** *UNWTO World Tourism Barometer 2006; 4 (2)*. Available from <http://www.world-tourism.org/facts/menu.html>.
- **Office for National Statistics.** *The International Passenger Survey, Travepac dataset 2004 and 2005*. (Available at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14013>). Country groupings in this chapter have been classified as much as possible in the same way as those in *Health information for overseas travel*¹ and are detailed in appendix A. For clarity, the groupings used by the ONS have been detailed in appendix B of this report.
- **Office for National Statistics.** *Travel trends 2004. A report on the International Passenger Survey*. London: ONS; 2005. Available at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_transport/traveltrends2004.pdf.

Global summary

In 2004, there were 764 million international tourist arrivals worldwide, representing a record increase (since 1980 when the current detailed collection of data began) of 10%, compared to 2003 when the number of arrivals had reached a plateau [figure 1]. In 2004, Asia and the Pacific, and the Middle East regions saw the largest increases in arrivals (27% and 23% respectively), although all world regions saw an increase compared to 2003. The large increase in 2004 was mainly a result of the depressed figures in 2003 due to the conflict in Iraq, SARS, and a persistently weak economy in Europe. Compared to the figure for 2002, however, there was still an increase of 64 million tourist arrivals so recovery of tourism did not take long. Tourism to Asia recovered in 2004 after SARS (144.2 million arrivals, 27% increase), despite the new threat of avian influenza, and visits to the United States increased by 11% in 2004 compared to successive decreases

FIGURE 1: International tourist arrivals by region of destination, 1986 - 2005



in the previous three years after the events of 9/11. In 2005, recovery of international tourism continued (although not on the same scale), with 806 million international arrivals recorded (an increase of 5.5% compared to 2004). All regions saw an increase in international arrivals in 2005 with Africa, Asia and Pacific, and the Middle East regions having the highest increases (8.6%, 7.8%, and 7.7% respectively).

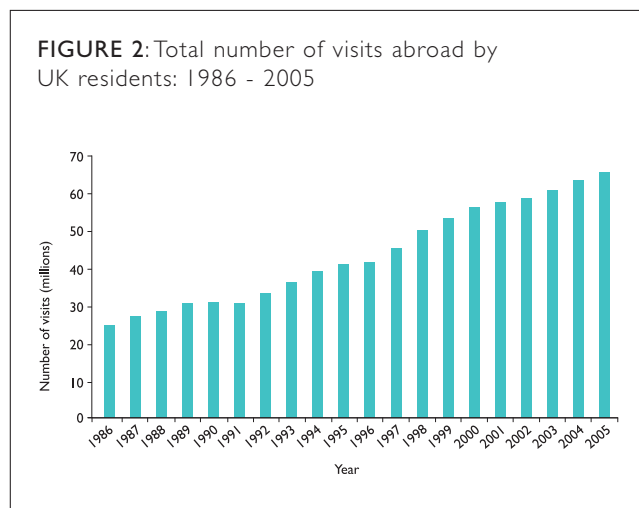
France was the most visited destination in both 2004 and 2005 (with 75 million arrivals in 2004, rising to 76 million in 2005), and has been the most visited country over the last few years, although the number of arrivals has not changed significantly since 2002. In general, Europe reported the lowest growth in international arrivals in 2004 and 2005 (4% to 424 million and 4% to 442 million respectively) compared to other regions. Within Europe, however, some countries became more popular destinations to visit such as Turkey (26% increase [16.8 million arrivals] in 2004 followed by a 20% increase [20.3 million] in 2005) and the Czech Republic (19.4% increase in arrivals in 2004).

Other countries included in the top ten destinations in terms of international arrivals (in 2004 and 2005 respectively), were Spain (52.4 million, 55.6 million), United States (46.1 million, 49.4 million), China (41.8 million, 46.8 million), Italy (37.1 million, 36.5 million), United Kingdom (27.8 million, 30 million), Mexico (20.6 million, 21.9 million), Germany (20.1 million, 21.5 million), Turkey (see above), and Austria (19.4 million, 20 million).

Travel trends in United Kingdom residents

How many UK residents travel abroad?

The number of visits abroad made by UK residents has continued to rise over recent years (three-fold since the 1980s) with an estimated 66.4 million visits in 2005 compared to 64.2 million in 2004 [figure 2]. This represented a 3.4% growth in the number of visits compared to 2004, following a previous increase of 4.5% in 2004 compared to 2003.

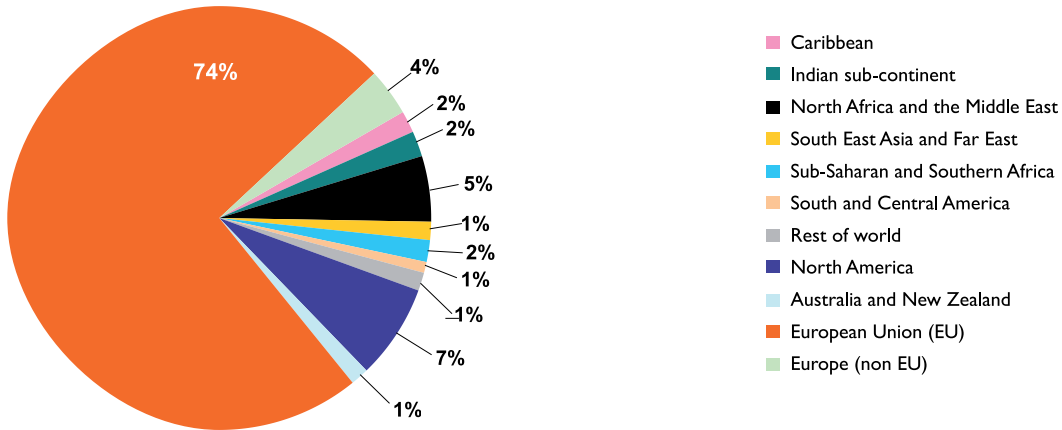


Where do UK residents travel?

The prime destinations for UK residents are countries in the European Union (EU) and this trend has continued since 1993, accounting for around 70% of visits abroad each year. In 2004, however, ten additional countries achieved EU status (EU25)² and this has affected the trend slightly. In 2005, 74% of visits by UK residents were to countries in the EU [figure 3], compared to 75% in 2004; if the extra ten countries were not included (EU15*), the proportion would be 68% (compared to 70% in 2004). Overall, since 2003, visits to the EU15 have decreased by 0.2%.

* EU15 refers to the original 15 countries in the EU before accession of ten additional countries in 2004. The UK is one of the countries included in EU15 but as this report is referring to UK visits abroad, only 14 countries are actually represented.

FIGURE 3: Visits abroad by UK residents by region of the world: 2005 (N=66.4 million)

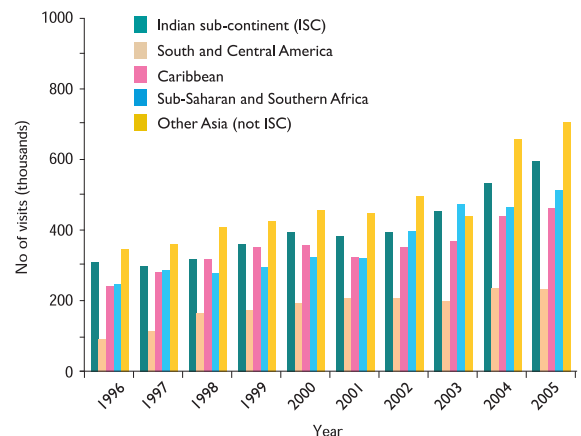


France and Spain, including the Balearic and Canary Islands, were the most frequently visited countries in 2004 and 2005 (with slightly reduced numbers in 2005). It seems that with the expansion of the EU, and those new countries being more accessible to travellers, UK residents are choosing to travel to new destinations within Europe and so in the next few years the patterns of travel may change. One country that has particularly seen an increase in tourism by UK residents is Turkey, where there was a 21.6% rise in the number of visits (1,366,916) in 2005 compared to 2004 and a 26% rise in the total since 2003.

In 2004, visits to Sub-Saharan and Southern Africa decreased by 2%. Reasons for this decrease are not obvious but one explanation could be the continued demise of the security and economic situation in some southern African countries such as Zimbabwe during that time, as well as continued problems with drought and food shortages in some countries within the African continent. Tourism to this region seemed to have recovered somewhat in 2005, however, with an 11% increase in the number of visits compared to 2004.

Since 1996, the number of visits to tropical countries has continued to increase at an average annual rate of 8% compared to only 4% for the EU15 (5.4% using the figure for EU25) [figure 4]. Since 2003, visits to tropical destinations increased by 28% while visits to the EU15 have decreased by 0.2% (8% increase for EU25). The largest increase was seen in the number of visits to ‘Other Asia’ (includes the countries of South East Asia), which have increased by 56% since 2003. This probably partly reflects the recovery of travel to South East Asia after the outbreak of SARS in 2003 and the Bali bombings in late 2002. Other regions where large increases in the number of visits have been seen since 2003, were the Indian sub-continent† (ISC) (28%) and the Caribbean (24%). The largest average annual increase (12%) since 1996 was seen in the number of visits to South and Central America.

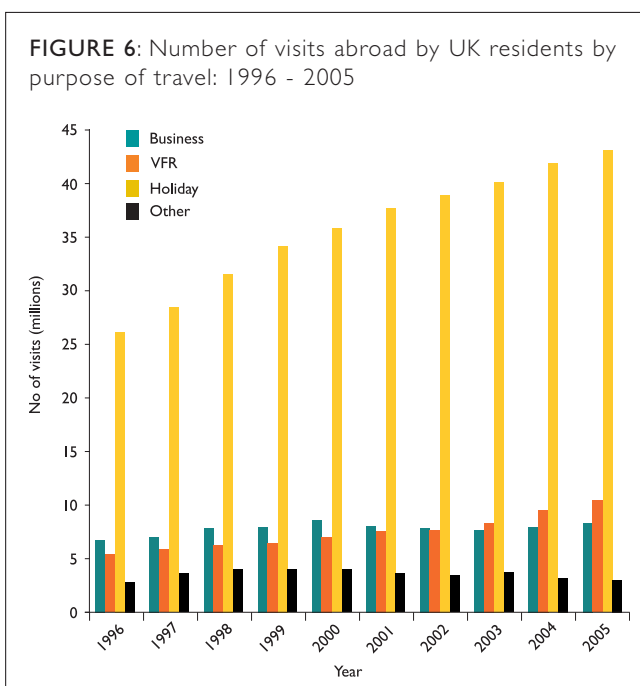
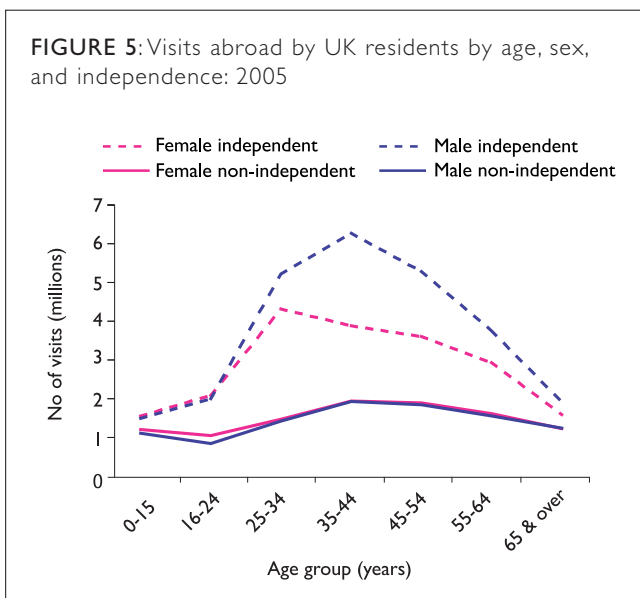
FIGURE 4: Number of visits abroad by UK residents to tropical regions of the world: 1996 - 2005



† Indian sub-continent includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka only

Who travels?

In 2005, more males (54%) travelled than females, and the most common age group for travellers of both sexes was 35 - 44 years; this is also comparable with 2004. Seventy-one percent of males travelled independently compared to 64% of females and this varied slightly by age group [figure 5]. Females tended to travel independently at a slightly younger age than males. The differences seen between the sexes may be partly explained by the fact that the majority of business travellers are male and travel independently.



Why do UK residents travel?

In 2005, 66% of visits made by UK residents were for holidays, 1% less than in 2004 [figure 6]. This proportion has been consistent since 1996, fluctuating between 63% and 67% each year, with an average annual increase of 6%. Of all holiday visits made in 2005, 57% of travellers travelled independently (*ie* not as part of a package holiday) compared to 54% in 2004 and less than 50% in the mid to late-1990s. This may be the result of cheaper flights being more available over the last ten years (particularly within Europe) allowing more flexibility and choice for travellers while choosing a holiday.

Since 1996, the number of visits made by travellers visiting friends and relatives (VFRs) has been increasing steadily on average by nearly 8% each year. In 2003, it became the second most popular purpose of travel and has remained so, overtaking business visits for the first time. Since then, VFRs have increased by just over 23%. An increase in international migration, including migration to the UK in recent years^{3,4}, means that there are more people living in countries where they were not born but who go back to their country of origin at intervals. This subgroup of the travelling population is likely to further increase in the coming years; in recognition of this the Travel Health Surveillance Section of the Centre for Infections expanded its remit in 2005 to cover the health of migrants, and changed its title to the Travel and Migrant Health Section. (More information about migration health is available in the Agency's report *Migrant health: a baseline report - 2006*⁵.)

Visits for business purposes have seen an increase since 2003, despite remaining the third most popular purpose for travel with an 8% increase in visits, possibly due to the recovery in travel to South East Asia. Travel for 'other' purposes[†] was the fourth most popular category for travel and decreased by 20% since 2003.

[†] Visits for 'other' purposes include those for study, to attend sporting events, for shopping, health, religious or other purposes, together with visits for more than one purpose when none predominates.

For how long do UK residents travel?

In 2005, residents from the United Kingdom stayed, on average, ten nights during their visits abroad. Length of stay is affected by country or region visited, for example, travellers to EU countries tend to make more visits of shorter duration, whereas travellers to countries further afield, such as Australia and New Zealand, stay for much longer⁶. There are also those who buy properties abroad, eg in Spain and France and may stay there for long periods, particularly after retirement.

Length of stay is also affected by purpose of visit. It can be seen in figure 7 that just over half of all business visits are of short duration (one to three nights) and, although visits to see friends and relatives are typically between four and 13 nights, a higher proportion of VFR visits (14%) are 28 days or more in duration compared to only 3% of holiday and business visits.

References

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FIGURE 7: Number of visits abroad by UK residents by purpose and duration of visit: 2005

