Tourism statistics

This article provides information on recent statistics in relation to tourism in the European Union (EU). Tourism plays an important role in the EU because of its economic and employment potential, as well as its social and environmental implications. Tourism statistics are not only used to monitor the EU’s tourism policies but also its regional and sustainable development policies.

In 2016, one in ten enterprises in the European non-financial business economy belonged to the tourism industries. These 2.4 million enterprises employed an estimated 13.6 million persons. Enterprises in industries with tourism related activities accounted for 9.5 % of the persons employed in the whole non-financial business economy and 21.7 % of persons employed in the services sector. The tourism industries’ shares in total turnover and value added at factor cost were relatively lower, with the tourism industries accounting for 3.9 % of the turnover and 5.8 % of the value added of the non-financial business economy.

**Bed places in the EU-27: Italy and France predominate**

In 2018 36 % of all bed places in the EU-27 are concentrated in Italy and France

It is estimated that there were over 600 000 tourist accommodation establishments active within the EU-27 in 2018 and that together they provided nearly 28.3 million bed places (see Table 1). More than one third (36.1 %) of all the bed places in the EU-27 were concentrated in just two of the EU Member States, namely Italy and France (5.1 million bed places each), followed by Spain and Germany (3.6 and 3.5 million bed places respectively).
During recent years, the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation establishments has generally shown an upward trend (see Figure 1). However, there was a short-lived downturn in the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation establishments in 2008 and 2009 as a consequence of the financial and economic crisis: the number of tourism nights in the EU-27 fell by 0.2 % in 2008 and by a further 2.8 % in 2009. In 2010, however, the number of nights spent started recovering and reached a peak of 2.8 billion nights in 2018, up by 2.7 % compared with 2017.
In 2018, Spain was the most common tourism destination in the EU for non-residents (people travelling outside their country), with 301 million nights spent in tourist accommodation establishments, or 22.6% of the EU-27 total (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). Nearly 7 out of 10 from these 301 million nights spent in Spain were concentrated in three regions: Canarias (Canary Islands), Illes Balears (Balearic Islands) and Cataluña (Catalonia), (see also the article "Tourism statistics at regional level ").

Across the EU, the top four most popular destinations for non-residents were Spain, Italy (217 million nights), France (141 million nights) and Greece (103 million nights), which together accounted for more than half (57.2%) of the total nights spent by non-residents in the EU-27. The least common destinations were Luxembourg, Lithuania and Latvia; the effect of the size of these Member States should be considered when interpreting these values.
Figure 2: Tourism destinations — nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments, 2018 (million nights spent in the country by non-residents) Source: Eurostat (tour_occ_ninat)
Figure 3: Share of nights spent at EU-27 tourist accommodation by tourists travelling outside their own country of residence, 2018 (% of all nights spent in EU-27 tourist accommodation establishments)

The number of nights spent (by residents and non-residents) can be put into perspective by making a comparison with the size of each country in population terms, providing an indicator of tourism intensity. In 2018, using this measure, the Mediterranean destinations of Croatia, Malta and Cyprus were on top, with 22, 21 and 20, respectively, nights spent per inhabitant (see Figure 4), followed by Austria (14 nights spent per inhabitant), Greece (11 nights spent per inhabitant) and Spain (10 nights spent per inhabitant).
Figure 4: Tourism intensity, 2018 (nights spent by residents and non-residents at tourist accommodation establishments per inhabitant) Source: Eurostat (tour_occ_ninat)

Tourism participation: More than nine out of ten residents of Finland participated in tourism

64% of EU residents made at least one personal trip in 2018

It is estimated that 64.1% of the EU-27’s population aged 15 or over took part in tourism for personal purposes in 2018, in other words they made at least one tourist trip for personal purposes during the year. Again, large differences can be observed between the EU Member States, as this participation rate ranged from 27.0% in Romania to 91.0% in Finland (see Figure 5).
Tourism trips: Residents of Luxembourg, Belgium, Malta and Slovenia made more outbound than domestic trips

Seven out of ten trips of EU residents were inside their own country

Residents (aged 15 and above) from within the EU-27 made an estimated 1.1 billion tourism trips in 2018, for personal or business purposes. More than half (54.8 %) of the total number of trips made were short trips of one to three nights (see Table 2), while 70.5 % of all trips made were to domestic destinations, with the remainder abroad.
In four EU Member States, over half of the total number of tourism trips made in 2018 were to destinations abroad; this was the case for Luxembourg (98 %), Belgium (78 %), Malta (72 %), and Slovenia (61 %). However, less than one out of five trips taken by residents of Romania (6 %), Spain (11 %), Portugal (12 %), Greece (13 %) and Bulgaria (18 %) were abroad. These figures appear to be influenced by both the size of the Member States and their geographical location (smaller and more northerly countries tended to report a higher propensity for their residents to travel abroad).

EU residents showed a preference to travel in the summer months with nearly one in four of their trips made in July or August (see also article "Seasonality in tourism demand").

Nights spent abroad by EU-27 residents: Luxembourg leads in nights per inhabitant

Residents of Germany and France spent more than half of the total number of nights spent abroad by EU-27 residents in 2018.

EU-27 residents spent an estimated 2.6 billion nights abroad on tourism trips in 2018 (see Figure 6). German residents spent 911 million nights on trips outside of Germany in 2018, while residents of France spent 400 million nights abroad; residents from these two EU Member States accounted for more than half (51.0 %) of the total number of nights spent abroad by EU-27 residents.

Table 2: Tourism trips of residents (aged 15 years or more), 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of trips (thousands)</th>
<th>Breakdown of all trips by destination and duration (%)</th>
<th>Share of the population (aged 15+) taking part in tourism trips for personal purposes (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU-27 (†)</td>
<td>1 130 624</td>
<td>311 063</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>16 693</td>
<td>7 008</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>5 090</td>
<td>2 748</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechia</td>
<td>34 569</td>
<td>13 189</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>18 875</td>
<td>10 380</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>287 879</td>
<td>132 289</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>6 468</td>
<td>1 109</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>15 941</td>
<td>10 110</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>6 565</td>
<td>1 834</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>155 370</td>
<td>110 284</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>220 225</td>
<td>96 403</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>5 255</td>
<td>2 754</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>68 186</td>
<td>35 285</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>3 001</td>
<td>1 171</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia (†)</td>
<td>3 952</td>
<td>1 922</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>4 885</td>
<td>1 950</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>2 555</td>
<td>1 167</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>19 230</td>
<td>12 506</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>44 551</td>
<td>21 165</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria (†)</td>
<td>24 391</td>
<td>13 395</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland (†)</td>
<td>57 910</td>
<td>30 364</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>18 298</td>
<td>12 846</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania (†)</td>
<td>17 902</td>
<td>11 251</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>5 191</td>
<td>3 203</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>12 423</td>
<td>7 497</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>39 602</td>
<td>27 837</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>54 541</td>
<td>31 882</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom(†)</td>
<td>27 084</td>
<td>17 813</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>21 946</td>
<td>9 605</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>4 541</td>
<td>2 322</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(†) Estimate made for the purpose of this publication, using the latest available data for the EU Member States.
(‡) Share of the population (aged 15+) taking part in tourism trips for personal purposes: 2017.
(§) Number of trips: 2017.
(¶) Share of the population (aged 15+) taking part in tourism trips for personal purposes: 2016.
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: tour_dem_tttot and tour_dem_totot)
When taking into account a country’s size in terms of its population, Luxembourg was the EU Member State whose residents spent the most nights abroad per inhabitant (an average of 31.3 nights in 2018), followed by Sweden (17.2 nights) and Cyprus (16.5 nights). At the other end of the spectrum, residents of Romania, Greece, Bulgaria and Portugal spent, on average, less than two nights abroad in 2018 (see Figure 7).
Tourism expenditure: highest spending by German residents

Germans were the biggest EU spenders on international travel, totaling EUR 80.9 billion in 2018

The economic importance of international tourism can be measured by looking at the ratio of international travel receipts relative to GDP; these data are from balance of payments statistics and include business travel, as well as travel for pleasure. In 2018, the ratio of travel receipts to GDP was highest, among the EU Member States, in Croatia (18.4 %), Cyprus (13.9 %) and Malta (12.7 %), confirming the importance of tourism to these countries (see Table 3). In absolute terms, the highest international travel receipts in 2018 were recorded in Spain (EUR 69.0 billion) and France (EUR 55.5 billion), followed by Italy (EUR 41.7 billion) and Germany (EUR 36.4 billion).
Germany recorded the highest level of expenditure on international travel, totaling EUR 80.9 billion in 2018, followed by France (EUR 40.5 billion), Italy (EUR 25.5 billion) and Spain (EUR 22.7 billion).

Spain was the EU Member State with the highest level of net receipts from travel in 2018 (EUR 46.3 billion), while Germany recorded the biggest deficit (EUR -44.5 billion).

Source data for tables and graphs
- Tourism statistics: tables and figures

Data sources
Tourism, in a statistical context, refers to the activity of visitors taking a trip to a destination outside their usual environment, for less than a year. It can be for any main purpose, including business, leisure or other personal reasons other than to be employed by a resident person, household or enterprise in the place visited.

Tourism statistics in the EU consist of two main components: on the one hand, statistics relating to capacity and occupancy of collective tourist accommodation; on the other, statistics relating to tourism demand. In most EU Member States, the former are collected via surveys filled in by accommodation establishments, while the latter are mainly collected via traveller surveys at border crossings or through household surveys.

Statistics on the capacity of collective tourist accommodation include the number of establishments, the number of bedrooms and the number of bed places. These statistics are available by establishment type or by region and are compiled annually. Statistics on the occupancy of collective tourist accommodation refer to the number of arrivals (at accommodation establishments) and the number of nights spent by residents and non-residents, separated into establishment type or region; annual and monthly statistical series are available. In addition, statistics on the use of bedrooms and bed places (occupancy rates) are compiled.

Statistics on tourism demand are collected in relation to the number of tourism trips made (and the number of nights spent on those trips), separated by:

- destination country;
- purpose
- length of stay;
- accommodation type;
- departure month;
- transport mode;
- expenditure.

The data are also analysed by the socio-demographic characteristics of the tourist:

- sex;
- age group;
- educational attainment level (optional);
- household income (optional);
- activity status (optional).

Up to 2013, tourism statistics were limited to at least one overnight stay; as of reference year 2014, outbound same-day visits are also covered by official European statistics.

Data from a range of other official sources may be used to study tourism. These statistics include:

- **structural business statistics (SBS)** and **short-term business statistics (STS)** which may be used to provide additional information on tourism flows and on the economic performance of certain tourism-related sectors;
- data on employment in the tourism accommodation sector from the **labour force survey (LFS)**, analysed by working time (full/part-time), working status, age, level of education, sex, permanency and seniority of work with the same employer (annual and quarterly data);
- data on personal travel receipts and expenditure from the **balance of payments**;
- **transport statistics** (for example, air passenger transport).

**Context**

According to a United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) publication titled ‘International Tourism Highlights’, the EU is a major tourist destination, with four of its Member States among the world’s top 10 destinations. Tourism has the potential to contribute towards employment and economic growth, as well as to development in rural, peripheral or less-developed areas. These characteristics drive the demand for reliable and harmonised statistics within this field, as well as within the wider context of regional policy and sustainable development policy areas.

Tourism can play a significant role in the development of European regions. Infrastructure created for tourism purposes contributes to local development, while jobs that are created or maintained can help counteract industrial or rural decline. Sustainable tourism involves the preservation and enhancement of cultural and natural heritage, ranging from the arts to local gastronomy or the preservation of biodiversity.
In 2006, the European Commission adopted a Communication titled ‘A renewed EU tourism policy: towards a stronger partnership for European tourism’ (COM(2006) 134 final). It addressed a range of challenges that will shape tourism in the coming years, including Europe’s ageing population, growing external competition, consumer demand for more specialised tourism, and the need to develop more sustainable and environmentally-friendly tourism practices. It argued that more competitive tourism supply and sustainable destinations would help raise tourist satisfaction and secure Europe’s position as the world’s leading tourist destination. It was followed in October 2007 by another Communication, titled ‘Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism’ (COM(2007) 621 final), which proposed actions in relation to the sustainable management of destinations, the integration of sustainability concerns by businesses, and the awareness of sustainability issues among tourists.

The Lisbon Treaty acknowledged the importance of tourism — outlining a specific competence for the EU in this field and allowing for decisions to be taken by a qualified majority. An article within the Treaty specifies that the EU ‘shall complement the action of the Member States in the tourism sector, in particular by promoting the competitiveness of Union undertakings in that sector’. ‘Europe, the world’s No 1 tourist destination — a new political framework for tourism in Europe’ (COM(2010) 352 final) was adopted by the European Commission in June 2010. This Communication seeks to encourage a coordinated approach for initiatives linked to tourism and defined a new framework for actions to increase the competitiveness of tourism and its capacity for sustainable growth. It proposed a number of European or multinational initiatives — including a consolidation of the socioeconomic knowledge base for tourism — aimed at achieving these objectives.

Other articles
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- Tourism statistics at regional level
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- Tourism (tour)

Dedicated section
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- Capacity and occupancy of tourist accommodation establishments (ESMS metadata file — tour_occ_esms)
- Methodological manual for tourism statistics
- Projects and studies, see Methodology for tourism statistics and Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA)

Legislation
- Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism (Communication from the European Commission, October 2007)
External links

- European Commission — Directorate-General (DG) for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs — Tourism

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