Tourism statistics

Data from December 2018.
Planned article update: December 2019.

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 2015, one in ten enterprises in the European non-financial business economy belonged to the tourism industries. These 2.4 million enterprises employed an estimated 12.7 million persons. Enterprises in industries with tourism related activities accounted for 9.2% of the persons employed in the whole non-financial business economy and 21.5% 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 3.8% of the turnover and 5.7% of the value added of the non-financial business economy.

Bed places in the EU-28: France and Italy predominate

In 2017 one third of all bed places in the EU-28 are concentrated in France and Italy

It is estimated that there were over 656 thousand tourist accommodation establishments active within the EU-28 in 2017 and that together they provided more than 31.5 million bed places (see Table 1). Nearly one third (32.0%) of all the bed places in the EU-28 were concentrated in just two of the EU Member States, namely France (5.1 million bed places) and Italy (5.0 million bed places), followed by the United Kingdom, Spain and Germany.
More than half (57.6%) of the total nights spent by non-residents in the EU-28 were spent in Spain, the United Kingdom, Italy and France.

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-28 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 3.1 billion nights in 2017, up by 5.2% compared with 2016.
In 2017, Spain was the most common tourism destination in the EU for non-residents (people travelling outside their country), with 306 million nights spent in tourist accommodation establishments, or 20.0% of the EU-28 total (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). Nearly 7 out of 10 from these 306 million nights spent in Spain were concentrated in three regions: Canarias (Canary Islands), Illes Balears (Balearic Islands) and Cataluña (Catalonia), (see also article "Tourism statistics at regional level").

Across the EU, the top four most popular destinations for non-residents were Spain, the United Kingdom (213 million nights, estimation based on 2017 monthly data), Italy (211 million nights) and France (133 million nights), which together accounted for more than half (57.6%) of the total nights spent by non-residents in the EU-28. The least common destinations were Luxembourg 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, 2017 (million nights spent in the country by non-residents) Source: Eurostat (tour_occ_ninat)
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 2017, using this measure, the Mediterranean destinations of Malta, Croatia and Cyprus were on top, with around 20 nights spent per inhabitant (see Figure 4), followed by Austria (14 nights spent per inhabitant), Greece and Spain (both with 10 nights spent per inhabitant).
Figure 4: Tourism intensity, 2017 (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.

62% of EU residents made at least one personal trip in 2017.

It is estimated that 62.0% of the EU-28's population aged 15 or over took part in tourism for personal purposes in 2017, 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 26.8% in Romania to 91.3% in Finland (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Share of population participating in tourism, 2017 (% of population aged 15 years or more) Source: Eurostat (tour_dem_tttot)
Tourism trips: Residents of Luxembourg, Belgium, Malta, Slovenia and Cyprus made more outbound than domestic trips

Nearly three out of four trips of EU residents were inside their own country

Residents (aged 15 and above) from within the EU-28 made an estimated 1.3 billion tourism trips in 2017, for personal or business purposes. Half (50.2%) of the total number of trips made were short trips of one to three nights (see Table 2), while nearly three quarters (73.3%) of all trips made were to domestic destinations, with the remainder abroad.

Table 2: Tourism trips of residents (aged 15 years or more), 2017

In some EU Member States, over half of the total number of tourism trips made in 2017 were to destinations abroad; this was the case for Luxembourg, Belgium, Malta, Slovenia and Cyprus. However, less than 10% of the trips taken by residents of Romania and Spain 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-28 residents: Luxembourg leads in nights per inhabitant

Residents of Germany and the United Kingdom spent nearly half of the total number of nights...
EU-28 residents spent an estimated 2.8 billion nights abroad on tourism trips in 2017 (see Figure 6). German residents spent 798 million nights on trips outside of Germany in 2017, while residents of the United Kingdom spent 564 million nights abroad (UK data are for 2013); residents from these two EU Member States accounted for almost half (48.7%) of the total number of nights spent abroad by EU-28 residents.

Figure 6: Share of nights spent during outbound holidays of Europeans, by country of residence of the tourist, 2017 (% of nights spent abroad by residents of the EU-28)

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 26.1 nights in 2017), followed by Sweden (21.4 nights) and Cyprus (19.9 nights). At the other end of the spectrum, residents of Romania, Greece and Bulgaria spent, on average, less than one night abroad in 2017 (see Figure 7).
Tourism expenditure: highest spending by German residents

Germans were the biggest EU spenders on international travel, totaling EUR 78.8 billion in 2017.

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 2017, the ratio of travel receipts to GDP was highest, among the EU Member States, in Croatia (19.3 %), Cyprus (14.1 %) and Malta (13.7 %), confirming the importance of tourism to these countries (see Table 3). In absolute terms, the highest international travel receipts in 2017 were recorded in Spain (EUR 60.3 billion), France (EUR 53.7 billion) and the United Kingdom (EUR 45.3 billion), followed by Italy (EUR 39.2 billion) and Germany (EUR 35.3 billion).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ratio of Travel Receipts to GDP (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>EU-28 (*)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>Cyprus</td>
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<td>Netherlands</td>
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<td>Ireland</td>
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<td>Finland</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>Denmark (*)</td>
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<td>Austria</td>
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<td>Malta</td>
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<td>Latvia</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Poland</td>
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<td>Hungary</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<td>Portugal</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Bulgaria</td>
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<td>Greece</td>
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<td>Romania</td>
<td>16.1</td>
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<td>Switzerland (*)</td>
<td>14.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>6.5</td>
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(*) Estimate made for the purpose of this publication, using the latest available data for the EU Member States.
(*) 2016.
(*) 2013.
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: tour_dem_tntot and demo_pjanbroad)
Germany recorded the highest level of expenditure on international travel, totaling EUR 78.8 billion in 2017, followed by the United Kingdom (EUR 63.2 billion) and France (EUR 36.7 billion).

Spain was the EU Member State with the highest level of net receipts from travel in 2017 (EUR 40.6 billion), while Germany recorded the biggest deficit (EUR -43.6 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. This data will soon be analysed in a new Statistics explained article.

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 ‘Tourism highlights’, the EU is a major tourist destination, with five 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
- All articles on tourism statistics
- Tourism statistics at regional level
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- Tourism

Methodology
- Annual data on trips of EU residents (ESMS metadata file — tour_dem_esms)
- 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

View this article online at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Tourism_statistics