Tourism has the potential to play a significant role in the economic aspirations of many EU regions and can be of particular importance in remote/peripheral regions, such as the EU’s coastal, mountainous or outermost regions. Infrastructure that is created for tourism purposes contributes to local and regional development, while jobs that are created or maintained can help counteract industrial or rural decline. However, (mass) tourism can have negative consequences, as excess demand puts a strain on local infrastructure and may be a nuisance to local communities, while increasing numbers of tourists may impact the environment locally (for example, noise, pollution, waste and wastewater, habitat loss) and globally (through transport-related emissions).

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) publication, Tourism highlights, 2017 marked the most rapid growth in global tourist arrivals since 2010. European Union (EU) Member States are among the world’s leading tourist destinations. The wealth of European cultures, the variety of its landscapes and the quality of its tourist infrastructure are likely to be among the varied reasons why tourists take their holidays in Europe.

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 is important to note that this definition is wider than the common

Source: Eurostat
everyday definition, insofar as it encompasses not only private, leisure trips but also visits to family and friends and business trips. This is primarily because tourism is viewed from an economic perspective, whereby holiday-makers and people making business trips have broadly similar consumption patterns, for example, transport, accommodation and restaurant/catering services.

This chapter presents regional patterns of tourism across the EU. Its main focus is the provision of tourist accommodation, as measured by the number of nights spent; it concludes with a special focus on experimental statistics that seek to make use of new methods for producing detailed territorial information.

**Number of overnight stays**

The number of tourist nights spent (otherwise referred to as overnight stays) provides information relating to the total number of nights spent by all guests/tourists in a tourist accommodation establishment. It therefore reflects both the length of stay and the number of visitors and is considered a key indicator for analysing the tourism sector.

Figure 1 provides an analysis of the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation, by degree of urbanisation; the information presented covers both resident and non-resident tourists staying in all types of rented tourist accommodation. In 2017, the total number of nights spent in EU-28 tourist accommodation was relatively evenly distributed: the highest share was recorded for cities (37.7 %), while fewer nights were spent in towns and suburbs (32.2 %) and in rural areas (30.1 %).

Cities were the most popular destination for tourists in 12 of the 28 EU Member States (see Figure 1): in 2017, they accounted for almost two thirds of the total nights spent in Latvia (64.9 %) and the United Kingdom (63.2 %; 2016 data) and for more than half of the nights spent in another Baltic Member State — Estonia (55.7 %). By contrast, more than half of the tourist nights spent in Spain (51.4 %) and Malta (51.2 %) were in towns and suburbs, while an additional six Member States also reported that towns and suburbs were their most popular destination (although they did not account for an overall majority of tourist nights spent). In a similar vein, more than half of all tourist nights spent in Denmark (53.5 %) were in rural areas, with this share rising to almost two thirds in Croatia (64.6 %), Greece (64.8 %), and Austria (66.5 %) — those nights spent in Denmark, Greece and Croatia were in predominantly coastal regions, while those spent in Austria were in predominantly alpine regions.
In Bulgaria, coastal areas accounted for more than four out of five nights spent by non-residents, while the corresponding share among residents was just above one third.

Coastal areas, from a statistical context, consist of local administrative units or municipalities that border the sea, or have at least half of their total surface area within 10 km of the sea. Note that five EU Member States — Czechia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria and Slovakia — are landlocked (and are therefore have no coastline).

The beauty, culture and diversity of the EU’s coastal areas have made them a preferred destination for many holidaymakers (both resident and non-resident). Increasing numbers of tourists have led to concerns around the sustainable development of coastal areas, especially those characterised by high-density building and expanding environmental footprints. In 2017, just over half (50.3 %) of the EU-28’s tourist accommodation establishments were located in coastal areas, while their capacity — in terms of bed places — was somewhat lower, at 46.5 %.

In 2017, coastal areas accounted for 45.7 % of the total nights spent in EU-28 tourist accommodation. The inclination of holidaymakers to visit coastal areas was generally higher in southern EU Member States that are characterised by climatic conditions conducive to beach holidays. In 2017, coastal areas accounted for more than three quarters of the total nights spent in tourist accommodation across Malta, Cyprus, Greece, Croatia, Portugal and Spain; this was also the case in Denmark, Latvia and Estonia — where the capital cities lie within 10 km of the sea.

Figure 2 presents information on nights spent in coastal tourist accommodation, with an analysis for residents and non-residents. In 2017, approximately half (50.6 %) of the total nights spent by non-residents in the EU-28 were in coastal areas, while a greater proportion (59.1 %) of the nights spent by residents were in non-coastal areas — perhaps reflecting a higher proportion of nights spent by residents being linked to business travel or short-breaks in towns and cities.
In the popular southern holiday destinations of Greece, Cyprus, Portugal and Spain, non-residents were more likely (than residents) to visit coastal areas. In 2017, almost 9 out of every 10 (87.8%) nights spent by non-residents in Spain were in coastal areas, whereas the corresponding share for residents was less than three fifths (58.5%). A similar situation was observed in two popular eastern holiday destinations, Croatia and Bulgaria; the disparity between the shares for residents and non-residents was even greater in Bulgaria than in Spain, as 81.0% of nights spent by non-residents in Bulgaria were in coastal areas, compared with 36.7% for residents. By contrast, residents of the four largest EU Member States — United Kingdom (2016 data), Germany, France and Italy — were more inclined (than non-residents) to spend time in domestic coastal areas, as were residents of Belgium, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia.

![Figure 2: Nights spent in coastal tourist accommodation, 2017 (% of total nights spent, by residents and non-residents) Source: Eurostat (tour_occ_ninatc)](image)

Having analysed the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation by degree of urbanisation and for coastal areas, the remainder of this chapter focuses on the more traditional territorial typology, namely, regional statistics based on NUTS.

The three most popular tourist destinations in the EU were Canarias and Cataluña in Spain and the Adriatic coastal region of Jadranska Hrvatska in Croatia

The top 20 tourist regions in the EU — in terms of nights spent in tourist accommodation by resident and international tourists in NUTS level 2 regions — are shown in Figure 3. The ranking for 2017 was dominated by coastal regions: the highest number of nights spent in tourist accommodation was recorded in the Spanish island destination of Canarias (104.4 million), followed by Cataluña (also Spain; 83.0 million nights spent) and the Adriatic coastal region of Jadranska Hrvatska (Croatia; 81.9 million nights spent).
International (non-resident) tourists accounted for a majority of the nights spent in many of the EU’s most popular tourist destinations. This was most notably the case in Jadranska Hrvatska — where almost 19 out of every 20 nights spent in rented tourist accommodation (94.2 %) were attributed to non-residents — as well as Illés Balears (Spain; 91.0 %), Tirol (Austria; 90.5 %), Canarias (89.1 %) and Inner London — West (88.9 %). These regions characterised by their high number of international tourists may face considerable pressures in terms of the environment and sustainability, especially as most non-resident tourists tend to travel during high/peak seasons.

By contrast, national residents accounted for a majority of the nights spent in 6 out of the 20 most popular tourist regions in the EU. Four of these were located in the southern half of France — Provence-Alpes, Rhône-Alpes, Languedoc-Roussillon and Aquitaine — underlining that a relatively high proportion of French tourists holiday in their own country. This was most notably the case in Aquitaine and Languedoc-Roussillon, where the number of nights spent by French residents was more than three times as high as that recorded for international tourists. The other two regions (among the top 20) where the number of nights spent by residents outnumbered that for international tourists were the northern Italian region of Emilia-Romagna and the southern German region of Oberbayern.

Figure 3: Top tourist regions in the EU, 2017 (million nights spent in tourist accommodation, by NUTS 2 regions)

Source: Eurostat (tour_occ_nin2)

Tourism pressures in the EU were largely concentrated in coastal regions (principally, but not exclusively, in the Mediterranean), Alpine regions, and (capital) city regions.
annual increases since 2009. The number of nights spent by inbound international (non-resident) tourists grew at a faster pace than the number of nights spent by domestic (resident) tourists in recent years; by 2017, their numbers were almost balanced, as non-resident tourists accounted for 49.1% of the total nights spent in the EU-28.

In 2017, at least 15.0 million nights were spent by residents and non-residents in tourist accommodation across 55 out of the 276 NUTS level 2 regions for which data are available (as shown by the darkest shade in Map 1). By contrast, most of the EU regions with relatively low numbers of nights spent could be characterised as rural regions (for example, parts of mainland Greece or eastern Poland).

Aside from the top 20 tourist regions — already shown in Figure 3 — there were four more regions where the total number of nights spent was 30.0 million or more: the German capital city region of Berlin; Ireland (2016 data), only national data available; the Dutch capital city region of Noord-Holland; Inner London — East (in the United Kingdom), which joined its neighbouring capital city region of Inner London — West.

Outside the EU (but among the non-member countries shown in Map 1), there were three statistical regions which recorded at least 15.0 million nights spent in tourist accommodation, all of which were located in Turkey (2016 data): Antalya, Isparta, Burdur (56.9 million); İstanbul (15.4 million); Aydın, Denizli, Muğla, which includes the coastal resorts of Bodrum and Marmaris (15.3 million).
Map 1: Nights spent in tourist accommodation, 2017 (million nights spent by residents and non-residents in tourist accommodation, by NUTS 2 regions) Source: Eurostat (tour_occ_nin2)
Tourism pressures were compounded by a lack of space in many capital city regions

Since the advent of mass tourism in the 1950s and 1960s, EU regions have been affected by tourism in different ways: while some regions continue to receive very few visitors, others have seen their numbers of tourists grow considerably; while some regions receive a steady flow of tourists year-round, many others receive the vast majority of their visitors during a single season.

Sustainable tourism involves the preservation and enhancement of cultural and natural heritage, including the arts, gastronomy or the preservation of biodiversity. The success of tourism is, in the long-term, closely linked to its sustainability, with the quality of destinations often influenced by their natural and cultural environment and/or integration into the local community.

Tourism density — defined here as the relationship between the total number of nights spent and the total area of each region — provides one measure that may be used to analyse sustainability issues. In 2017, tourism density in the EU-28 averaged 708 nights spent per square kilometre (km$^2$). Map 2 shows that tourism density usually peaked in those regions where space was at a premium: capital city regions, other major metropolitan regions, and some coastal (particularly island) regions. By contrast, tourism density was often quite low in eastern and northern regions of the EU.

In 2017, regional tourism density was above 10 000 nights spent per km$^2$ in 15 different NUTS level 2 regions of the EU (as shown by the darkest shade of blue in Map 2). By far the highest tourism density ratios were recorded in four out of the five capital city regions in the United Kingdom (2016 data), with the highest ratio in Inner London — West (288 015 overnight stays per km$^2$). The next highest ratios — within the range of 30 000-40 000 overnight stays per km$^2$ — were also recorded in capital city regions, namely those of: Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Malta (a single region at this level of detail) and Austria, as well as the fifth capital city region in the United Kingdom, Outer London — West and North West (2016 data).
Nights spent in tourist accommodation relative to total area, 2017
(nights spent by residents and non-residents in tourist accommodation per km², by NUTS 2 regions)

Map 2: Nights spent in tourist accommodation relative to total area, 2017 (nights spent by residents and non-residents in tourist accommodation per km², by NUTS 2 regions)

Source: Eurostat
Some of the highest levels of tourism intensity were recorded in island and mountainous regions

Tourism intensity — defined here as the total number of nights spent in tourist accommodation per 1 000 inhabitants — provides an alternative measure for analysing tourism pressures. In 2016, there were 5 985 nights spent in EU-28 tourist accommodation establishments per 1 000 inhabitants (in other words, an average of almost six nights per inhabitant). Tourism intensity was at least five times as high as the EU-28 average in 13 different NUTS level 2 regions — the vast majority of which were island or mountainous regions, for example: three island regions in Greece — Notio Aigaio, Ionia Nisia and Kriti; two island regions in Spain — Illés Balears and Canarias; two mountainous regions in Italy — Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano/Bozen and Provincia Autonoma di Trento; and two Alpine regions in Austria — Tirol and Salzburg.

A high share of the most rapid growth rates for nights spent in tourist accommodation were recorded in capital city and metropolitan regions

Map 3 presents an analysis based on the average annual change in the total number of nights spent in tourist accommodation during the period 2007-2017. Across the EU-28, the total number of nights spent by residents and non-residents rose, on average, by 3.1 % per annum. Relatively high growth rates were recorded in the Baltic Member States, Slovenia and Croatia, as well as the vast majority of regions in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Poland and the United Kingdom. By contrast, there was a slower than average pace to developments in most of the Benelux regions, as well as much of Czechia, Germany, Spain, Italy, Austria, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden; below average change was also recorded in Ireland (national data), Cyprus and Malta (both single regions at this level of detail).

In 35 out of 259 regions for which data are available across the EU, the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation grew by at least 6.0 % per annum during the period 2007-2017 (as shown by the darkest shade of blue in Map 3). It is interesting to note that:

- many of the regions with the fastest growth rates were either capital city or metropolitan regions — for example, the number of nights spent in Hamburg and Berlin rose at a faster pace than in any other region of Germany, while Norte (that includes Porto) recorded the highest growth rate in Portugal;
- among the top 20 tourist regions in the EU (as shown in Figure 3), the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation only increased at a faster pace than the EU-28 average in:
  - four French regions — Rhône-Alpes, Aquitaine, Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur and Languedoc-Roussillon;
  - Jadranska Hrvatska in Croatia;
  - Lombardia in Italy;
  - London (growth rate only available for London as a whole, NUTS level 1).

By contrast, the overall number of nights spent in tourist accommodation fell in 16 out of 259 regions between 2007 and 2017. The average decline in the number of nights spent was more than 1.0 % per annum in seven of these: Sjælland and Nordjylland (in Denmark); Ireland (2008-2016), only national data available; four regions in Italy — Umbria, Abruzzo, Marche and Molise — the latter recording the biggest contraction for any region in the EU (down 4.0 % per annum).
Average annual rate of change in nights spent in tourist accommodation, 2007-2017
(%, by NUTS 2 regions)

Map 3: Average annual rate of change in nights spent in tourist accommodation, 2007-2017 (%,
by NUTS 2 regions)Source: Eurostat (tour_occ_nin2)
Experimental statistics: increased geographical granularity for tourism accommodation data

The bulk of the statistics presented in this chapter for nights spent in tourism accommodation are based on regular reporting by accommodation establishments to national statistical authorities. The latter transmit their data, annually, to Eurostat with a regional breakdown at NUTS level 2. As of 2021, similar data will be transmitted at the more detailed territorial level of NUTS 3. However, in the meantime alternative sources and methods are being explored for producing much more detailed geographical information.

Tourism is predominantly a local or regional phenomenon. Data currently available at a national level and for NUTS level 2 regions cannot provide the necessary level of detail for monitoring the sustainability of tourism, which requires information for smaller areas to enable an analysis of the impact of tourists vis-à-vis the number of permanent inhabitants; this is equally true if monitoring the impact of tourism on various environmental issues, such as water shortages or waste treatment.

Using a technique called dasymetric mapping, geospatial data — in this case, points of interest on GPS navigational devices — is used as auxiliary information to redistribute the total number of nights spent in tourist accommodation at more detailed geographical levels. The three maps below illustrate the potential added value of these experimental statistics (data refer to 2015; note there is no information available for the United Kingdom):

- Map 4a shows the level of detail currently available (NUTS level 2 regions);
- Map 4b shows the additional detail that may be obtained from experimental statistics (NUTS level 3 regions); note, for instance, the improved granularity (detail) in Andalusia (Spain) or the identification of tourism hotspots in Sicily (Italy);
- Map 4c is based on 10 kilometre square (10 km²) grids and provides a level of detail that is closer to that often requested by users — namely, individual destinations. It allows tourism hotspots in and around capital city regions to be identified, as well as coastal tourism or tourism activity in river valleys (for example, the Loire or Rhône valleys in France). The latter is of particular interest, insofar as rivers often serve as administrative borders, whereby traditional data sources fail to capture concentrations of tourism, as results are usually fragmented (split between two or more administrative regions).

These data are of a very explorative nature and have yet to be published by Eurostat. However, during the course of 2019, they will be loaded onto the Eurostat website and included under a section on experimental statistics.

Maps 4a-c: Geographical granularity of data for nights spent in tourist accommodation, 2015
Source data for figures and maps

Tourism at regional level

Data sources

Eurostat’s tourism statistics consist of two main components: on the one hand, statistics relating to the 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 usually collected via traveller surveys at border crossings or through household surveys.

Since 2012, the legal basis for the collection of tourism statistics has been a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning European statistics on tourism ((EU) No 692/2011) and a European Commission implementing regulation ((EU) No 1051/2011).

Tourism statistics may be analysed according to the tourist’s country of residence (not the tourist’s citizenship). Domestic tourism covers the activities of residents who stay in their own country (but outside their usual environment) and this may be contrasted with the activities of international tourists (also referred to as inbound or non-resident tourists).

Tourist accommodation establishments are local kind-of-activity units. They include all types of tourist accommodation providing, as a paid service, accommodation for tourists, regardless of whether or not the provision of tourist accommodation is the main or a secondary activity. These establishments are defined according to the activity classification, NACE, as units providing, short-term or short-stay accommodation services as a paid service:

- hotels and similar accommodation (NACE Group 55.1) — includes accommodation provided by hotels, resort hotels, suite/apartment hotels, motels;
- holiday and other short-stay accommodation (NACE Group 55.2) — includes holiday homes, visitor flats and bungalows, cottages and cabins without housekeeping services, youth hostels and mountain refuges;
- camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks and trailer parks (NACE Group 55.3) — includes the provision of accommodation in campgrounds, trailer parks, recreational camps, and fishing and hunting camps for short-stay visitors.

Regional tourism statistics are only available from suppliers of tourism services and are collected through surveys of tourist accommodation establishments. These surveys provide information that covers accommodation capacity (counts of establishments, rooms and bed places) and occupancy (the number of arrivals and nights spent): the data may be analysed by NUTS level 2 regions, by degree of urbanisation, and for coastal/non-coastal areas.

There are a range of alternative sources that may be used to analyse tourism, including:

- short-term business statistics (STS) — monthly, quarterly and annual data providing indices for analysing developments in the tourism accommodation sector for turnover, production, employment, hours worked, wages and salaries and producer prices;
- structural business statistics (SBS) — annual data for analysing the economic structure and performance of tourism-related activities;
- labour force survey (LFS) statistics — quarterly and annual data on employment in the tourism accommodation sector, with analyses by working time, working status, age, level of education, sex, or contract duration;
- balance of payments statistics — quarterly and annual data on personal and business travel receipts and expenditure; and,
- transport statistics — monthly, quarterly and annual data on air, maritime, rail and road passenger transport.

For more information:

Dedicated section on tourism
Tourism — methodology

Context
The EU’s competence in the area of tourism is one of support and coordination in relation to the actions of individual EU Member States. Policymakers seek to maintain Europe’s leading position as a tourist destination while supporting the contribution made by tourism related activities to overall growth and employment.

A European Commission communication Europe, the world’s No. 1 tourist destination — a new political framework for tourism in Europe (COM(2010) 352 final) was adopted in June 2010 and remains in force. It provides a framework for the development of tourism within Europe, with four priority areas for action, namely to: stimulate competitiveness; promote sustainable and responsible tourism; consolidate Europe’s image as a collection of sustainable, high-quality destinations; maximise the potential of policies/financial instruments for developing tourism in the EU.

The European Commission has encouraged the diversification of Europe’s tourism offer through initiatives relating to maritime/coastal tourism, sustainable tourism, cultural tourism, tourism for all, accessible tourism, low-season tourism or collaborative tourism. To enhance the visibility of Europe as a tourist destination and increase international tourist arrivals, the European Commission undertakes a wide range of communication and promotion activities; it is providing considerable funding to tourism related activities during the period 2014-2020. Furthermore, the European Commission provides ad-hoc grants to the European Travel Commission (ETC), a non-profit organisation responsible for promoting Europe as an international tourist destination through reports, handbooks and websites (such as visiteurope.com). In 2018, the ETC coordinated the EU-China tourism year, designed to increase visitor numbers and investments on both sides, while providing an opportunity for European and Chinese citizens to get to know each other.

In its communication on maritime and coastal tourism A European strategy for more growth and jobs in coastal and maritime tourism (COM(2014) 86 final), the European Commission reflected on the diversity of the EU’s coastal regions and their capacity to generate wealth and jobs by fostering ‘a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe’ in line with the Blue growth strategy — opportunities for marine and maritime sustainable growth (COM(2012) 494 final). With this in mind, policymakers are seeking to redefine ‘mass-tourism’ and to develop new forms of ‘niche’ tourism which focus on sustainable solutions from an economic, social and environmental point of view.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) supports the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism. While tourism is not directly mentioned among its thematic objectives, investments in tourism can be supported if they contribute towards investment priorities or wider development and growth strategies, for example, by: promoting less favoured/peripheral regions; connecting coastal regions to the hinterland; supporting initiatives that extend the traditional tourism season; developing high value added niche markets.

Other articles
- Tourism introduced
- Tourism industries — economic analysis
- Tourism statistics
- Tourism trips of Europeans (online publication)

Publications
- Eurostat regional yearbook

Tourism statistics at regional level
Recent Eurostat publications on tourism
Tourism satellite accounts

Main tables
Regional statistics (t_reg), see:
Regional tourism statistics (t_reg_tour)
Tourism (t_tour), see:
Annual data on tourism industries (t_tour_inda)
Occupancy of tourist accommodation establishments (t_tour_occ)
Nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments by NUTS 2 regions (tgs00111)
Nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments by degree of urbanisation (from 2012 onwards) (tin00179)

Database
Regional statistics by NUTS classification (reg), see:
Regional tourism statistics (reg_tour)
Occupancy in collective accommodation establishments: domestic and inbound tourism (reg_tour_occ)
Tourism (tour), see:
Annual data on tourism industries (tour_inda)
Occupancy of tourism accommodation establishments (tour_occ)
Nights spent by residents and non-residents (tour_occ_n)

Dedicated section
Regions and cities
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Data visualisation
Eurostat statistical atlas (Chapter 10)
Regional statistics illustrated

Methodology
Methodological manual on territorial typologies — Eurostat — 2018 edition
Tourism — Methodology — Metadata, manuals and guidelines
Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSAs) in Europe — 2013 edition
Occupancy of tourist accommodation establishments (ESMS metadata file — tour_occ_esms)
Legislation

- **Council Directive 95/57/EC** of 23 November 1995 on the collection of statistical information in the field of tourism


External links

- **Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism** — Communication from the Commission COM(2007) 621 final of 19 October 2007

- **Europe, the world’s No 1 tourist destination** — a new political framework for tourism in Europe — Communication from the Commission COM(2010) 352 final of 30 June 2010

- **European Commission — Growth — Overview of EU tourism policy**

- **European Commission — Regional policy — Tourism**

- **UNWTO tourism highlights**

Maps can be explored interactively using [Eurostat’s statistical atlas](#) (see [user manual](#)).

This article forms part of Eurostat’s annual flagship publication, the [Eurostat regional yearbook](#).