

Australian Social Trends September 2010

Holidaying abroad

www.abs.gov.au/socialtrends

Holidaying abroad

The number of Australian residents travelling overseas for trips of less than a year has grown at an unprecedented rate over recent years. In the 12 months to June 2010, 6.8 million overseas trips were made by Australians, up from 2.1 million two decades earlier. In per capita terms, this was the equivalent to 31 trips overseas for every 100 Australian residents in 2009–10, up from 12 trips per 100 residents in 1989–90.

A number of interrelated factors have contributed to the increase in overseas travel. These include the greater affordability of overseas holidays and accommodation (due in part to the strength of the Australian dollar and increasing competition among airlines), as well as the greater marketing and online facilitation of booking and travel information. The globalised nature of many of these changes has also contributed to the increase of short-term overseas visitors to Australia, with visitor arrivals to Australia having also increased considerably over the last 10 years.

The reasons for short-term overseas travel (as collected from passenger cards) range from holidays to visiting friends and relatives to business, employment and education purposes. In this article, the reasons for travel have been broadly categorised into 'holiday' (includes holiday and visiting family and friends) and 'business' (includes business, employment, conference, education and accompanying a business traveller). In the 12 months to June 2010, holidays accounted for 82% of overseas trips of less than 12 months, while business accounted for 17%.

Data source and definitions

This article uses data from the overseas arrivals and departures (OAD) collection. These data count the movements of people from incoming and outgoing passenger cards. These data and other information available from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship serve as the source of OAD.

Australian resident is self-defined by travellers when completing an incoming or outgoing passenger card.

Continental Europe refers to all countries in Northern, Western, Southern and Eastern Europe, excluding the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Departures refers to the number of movements of travellers rather than the number of travellers.

Main destination is the country which the traveller intends to spend most time. Overseas travellers may visit more than one country on the trip, whilst the data only captures the main destination and not any other countries visited.

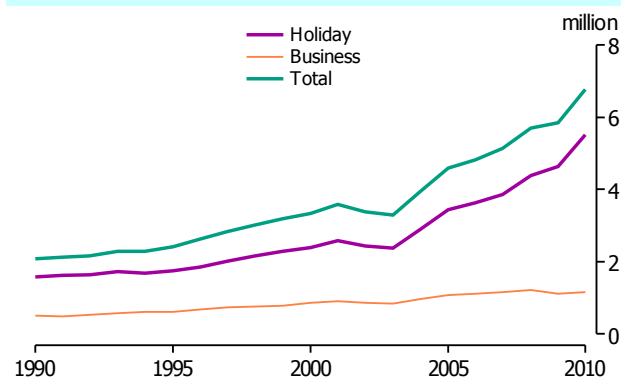
Passenger card refers to the card that incoming and outgoing travellers fill in and provide customs upon entering or exiting Australia.

Reason for travel refers to the five main reasons for travel (business, employment, education, convention/conference, holiday, visiting family/friends) have been grouped into two sub-groups; business travel/employment/education (which also contains data for conventions and conferences), and holiday/visiting family and friends. Where this information was not stated (around 3% of cases) these records have been excluded from calculations of proportions although they are included in overall numbers.

Short-term refers to the intention to stay abroad for less than 12 months.

Source: ABS [Overseas Arrivals and Departures](#) (cat. no. 3401.0)

Short-term departures by Australian residents(a)



(a) Year ending June.

Source: ABS 1990-2010 Overseas Arrivals and Departures collection

Travel trends

The annual number of short-term departures by Australian residents has grown particularly rapidly from 2003–04 onwards. Since July 2003, the annual increase in the number of departures by Australians averaged 11% per year, compared with 4% per year in the 13 years prior. Travel for holidays has driven the overall increase, growing 13% per year on average since 2003–04 compared with 4% for business.

Holidays in the Asia Pacific region have been consistently more popular than to other regions. In the year to June 2010, South East Asia and Oceania accounted for over half (53%) of all overseas holidays by Australians with 2.9 million departures to these regions.

Short-term departures by Australian residents – 2009-10

Country of main stay	Total short-term departures		For holiday (a)	Average growth since 1999-2000(b)
	'000	%	%	% per year
New Zealand	1 064.0	15.7	80.8	7.7
Indonesia	652.8	9.6	92.9	9.8
United States of America	634.6	9.4	77.9	5.4
Continental Europe	610.6	9.0	83.9	5.9
UK & Ireland	489.6	7.2	85.4	3.2
Thailand	432.0	6.4	92.9	11.3
China(c)	305.9	4.5	65.7	13.5
Fiji	286.4	4.2	93.7	10.3
Singapore	246.2	3.6	62.8	5.4
Malaysia	239.2	3.5	80.8	6.6
All other countries	1 809.0	26.7	78.2	7.5
Total	6 770.5	100.0	81.6	7.3

(a) Proportion of total short-term departures where person stated main reason was for 'holiday' or 'visiting friends/relatives'.

(b) Of total short-term departures.

(c) Excludes Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

Source: ABS 2009-10 Overseas Arrivals and Departures collection

While the volume of visits to these closer regions dominates the international market for Australians, the growth in departures to other regions has also been strong in percentage terms.

Main destinations

New Zealand was the leading destination for short-term travellers in 2009-10 with 1.1 million departures by Australians (16% of all short-term departures). Growth in departures to New Zealand averaged 7.7% per year over the last decade, similar to the overall growth of departures (7.3%).

Indonesia (including Bali) was the second most popular destination in 2009-10 with 653,000 short-term departures, followed by the USA with 635,000. Over the last decade, Indonesia has overtaken the USA as the number two destination for Australians, with average annual growth of 9.8% per year, compared with 5.4% to the USA.

Continental Europe was the destination for 611,000 departures in 2009-10, ahead of the UK and Ireland with 490,000 departures. The relatively slower growth in departures to UK and Ireland (3.2%) compared with 5.9% per year to the rest of Europe has led to the UK and Ireland falling from third to fifth most popular destination over the last decade.

The remainder of the top ten destinations were in the Asia and Pacific region, with 432,000 departures to Thailand, 306,000 to China and 286,000 to Fiji. Departures to these three countries grew the fastest of all major destinations with average growth of each exceeding 10% per year over the last decade.

Who is travelling?

Whilst travel overseas is popular amongst people across most demographic groups, there are some noticeable differences.

...sex

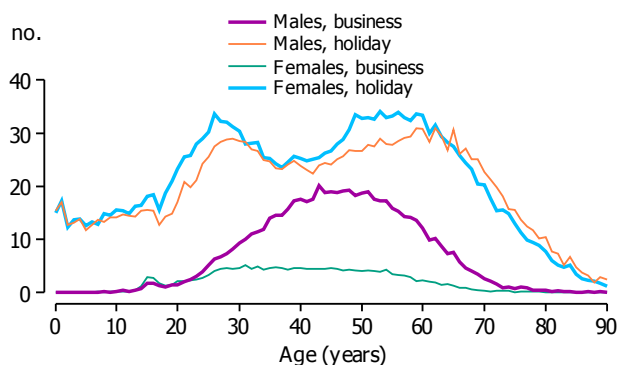
Men were overall slightly more likely than women to travel overseas with 33 trips for every 100 males in the population, compared with 29 trips per 100 Australian females. The difference is due to the higher rate of men travelling for business (8.0 departures per 100 males, compared with 2.4 business departures of women per 100 females). Conversely, women were slightly more likely to be travelling for a holiday (26 female and 24 male departures per 100 respective populations).

...age

The age at which people were most likely to go overseas for holiday shows two peaks – the first around age 26 years for women and 29 years for men, then a longer peak of around 49-60 years for women and late 50s and early 60s for men. For business trips, the peak for males was between the ages of 40 and 50 years.

Among the broad section of the younger peak (aged 20-34 years), the most popular destinations for holidays were New Zealand (15%), Indonesia (11%) and USA and Thailand (10% each).

Short-term departures by Australian residents, per 100 resident population, by age – 2010(a)



(a) Year ending June.

Source: ABS 2010 Overseas Arrivals and Departures collection

In the older age peak (50–60 years), holidays to New Zealand was also the most popular (16%), while Europe was the second most common holiday destination (11%) and Indonesia was third with 10% of trips in 2009–10.

For Australian residents aged in their 40s travelling for business, New Zealand was the main destination (17%), followed by the USA (12%) and China (10%).

...overseas born

While overseas born Australians make up around one quarter (26%) of the population, they account for around two-fifths (42%) of travellers making short-term departures from Australia. In 2009–10, nearly half (49 trips per 100 overseas born residents) of overseas born residents of Australia took a short-term trip abroad. This compares with 24 trips for every 100 Australian born residents. The growth in departures by overseas born residents over the decade was slightly greater than that of the Australian born population, increasing by 17 trips for every 100 overseas born residents compared with 11 trips for every 100 Australian born residents.

Australian residents born in New Zealand, China, India and Malaysia made up the majority of the short-term departures of overseas born Australians in the year to June 2010. Malaysian born Australians had the highest per capita travel ratio with 93 departures for every 100 Malaysian born Australians. New Zealand born Australians followed with 83 departures per 100, while China and India had ratios of 56 and 45 per 100 respective populations.

Length of stay

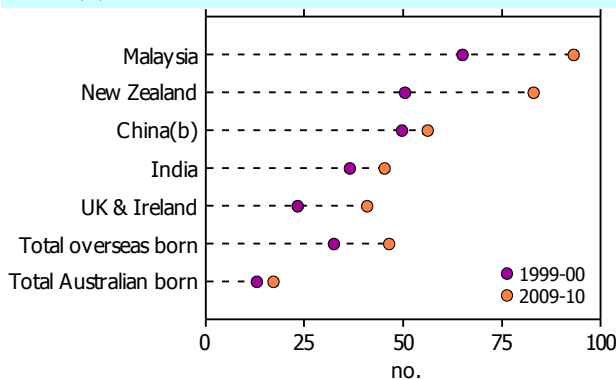
In the year to June 2010, the median duration of stay for Australian travellers abroad was 14 days. However, the length of stay overseas can depend on the country being visited and the purpose of the trip. Holiday and business travel to countries closer to Australia, such as Hong Kong and Singapore, are shorter in duration with the median length of stay for those travelling for business being seven and six days respectively, and holiday makers for up to 14 days. The duration of holiday and business travel to countries with longer travel distances such as France, Germany and England tend to be longer, with those travelling for business typically staying 11–16 days, while those travelling for holidays tending to stay more than a month.

...extended holidays

In 2009–10, there were 220,000 holiday departures by Australian residents leaving for three months or more (13 or more weeks), making up 4.8% of all Australian holidays abroad. As with all short-term departures, there was one peak in younger age groups with around 1.7 departures per 100 people aged in their 20s, and another in older ages with 2.1 departures per 100 people aged in their 60s.

Holidays with an intended length of three months or more have grown by just 2.0% per year on average over the last two decades compared with 6.8% per year for those going for an intended time of less than three months. This coincides with a shift towards shorter stays in more distant destinations. For example, in 1989–90, 23% of residents departing for a holiday in the UK and Ireland were going for three months or more compared with just 8% in 2009–10.

Number of trips per 100 people, by country of birth(a)

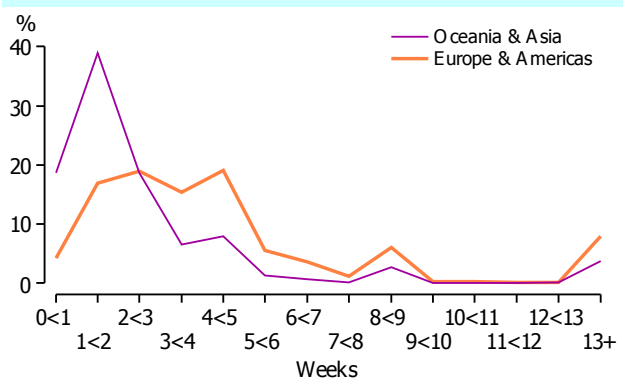


(a) Number of trips per 100 people of respective resident population in Australia.

(b) Excludes Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

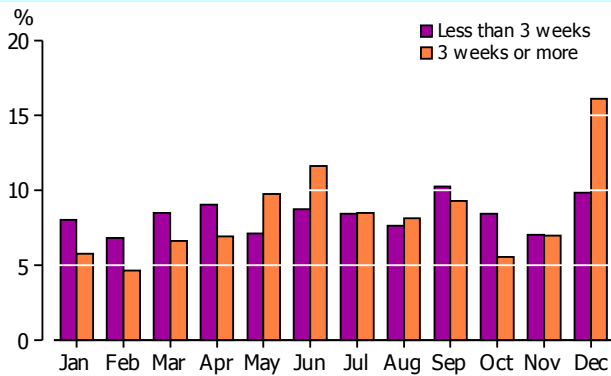
Source: ABS Overseas Arrivals and Departures collection and ABS Migration, Australia (cat. no. 3412.0)

Length of intended stay by Australian residents, to selected regions – 2009-10



Source: ABS 2009-10 Overseas Arrivals and Departures collection

Total short-term departures for holidays, month of departure(a)



(a) Average of 10 years to June 2010.

Source: ABS Overseas Arrivals and Departures collection and ABS [Migration, Australia](#) (cat. no. 3412.0)

Monthly pattern

Over the last decade, the most popular month of departure for Australians travelling overseas was December with 13% of all departures leaving in this peak holiday month. However, the monthly pattern was strongly associated with the destination and duration of trips. For example, of Australian residents holidaying in New Zealand for a period of more than three weeks, almost one-third (31%) left Australia in December. In contrast, people holidaying in Europe were more likely to leave for the northern summer, with more departing in June (18%) than any other month.

Recent trends in short-term arrivals and departures

Up until 2008, short-term arrivals of overseas visitors to Australia had always been greater than the short-term departures of Australians. However, over the last two years this has turned around, with over one million more departures by Australians (6.8 million) than arrivals by overseas people (5.7 million) in 2009–10.

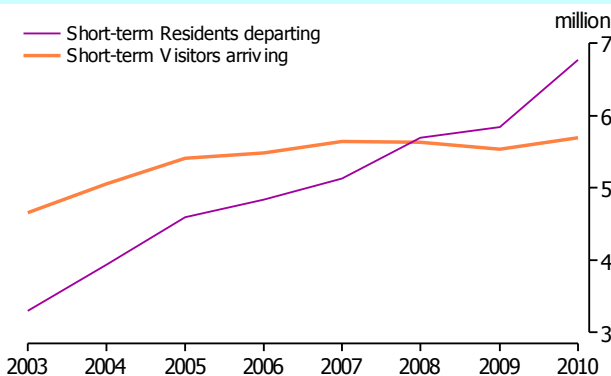
This change coincided with the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), which, in most developed economies led to simultaneous and severe recessions. In Australia, however, the GFC caused only a relatively brief and mild economic downturn.

So while this has slowed the number of overseas tourists to Australia, the number of Australians going overseas does not appear to have been negatively affected. Furthermore, the general softening of global demand for overseas travel following the GFC led to holiday and airfare discounting, and this may have appeared to offer greater value to Australians travelling abroad.¹

Endnotes

- 1 Tourism Australia, 2009, [Tourism Australia Global Market Monitor, August 2009](#), viewed 31 August 2010, <www.tourism.australia.com/en-au/>.

Total short-term arrivals and departures(a)



(a) Year ending June.

Source: ABS Overseas Arrivals and Departures collection and ABS [Migration, Australia](#) (cat. no. 3412.0)