



In this Bulletin: passenger arrivals and departures

This Bulletin provides a commentary on the trends in passenger arrivals and departures to and from St Helena, focusing on air transport since the start of the first scheduled air service in October 2017. It uses the statistics on passenger arrivals and departures that are compiled and released by the St Helena’s Statistics Office on a monthly basis, in the file ‘Arrivals and Departures’ on the St Helena Statistics website at: www.sainthelena.gov.sh/statistics-data.

Arrivals at St Helena

The number of passengers arriving at St Helena in 2019 was 5,135, slightly higher than 2018, which was 5,091. The number of arrivals by air was 4,261, some 12% (or 445 passengers) higher than 2018, which was 3,816. The number of arrivals by air in both 2018 and 2019 was higher than the number of arrivals by the RMS St Helena in any previous year.

Chart 1. Passenger arrivals to St Helena, January 2015 to December 2019 (excluding day visitors on cruise ships)

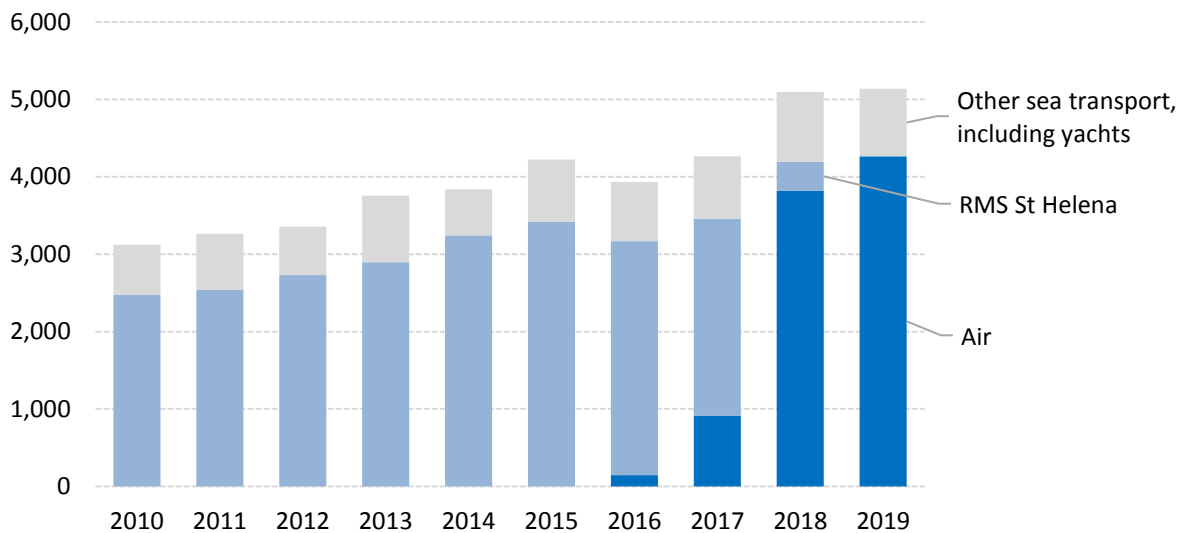


Chart 2 illustrates the highly seasonal nature of passenger arrivals, both for the months just before Christmas (especially December), when St Helenians living abroad often come to visit family and friends, and for the warm period early in the calendar year, which tends to be the most popular season for tourism and arrivals by yacht. The period between June and September/October has consistently recorded the lowest number of passenger arrivals, although it is more pronounced since the start of air operations. The chart also illustrates the reduction in international travel from March 2020, caused by the outbreak of the infectious viral disease known as COVID-19 or Coronavirus.

There were just 60 arrivals in April 2020; in the last 10 years, only two months have been lower, September 2010 (30) and July 2012 (23), when there were disruptions to the regular schedule of the RMS St Helena.

Chart 2. Monthly passenger arrivals to St Helena, all forms of transport excluding day visitors on cruise ships, January 2015 to April 2020

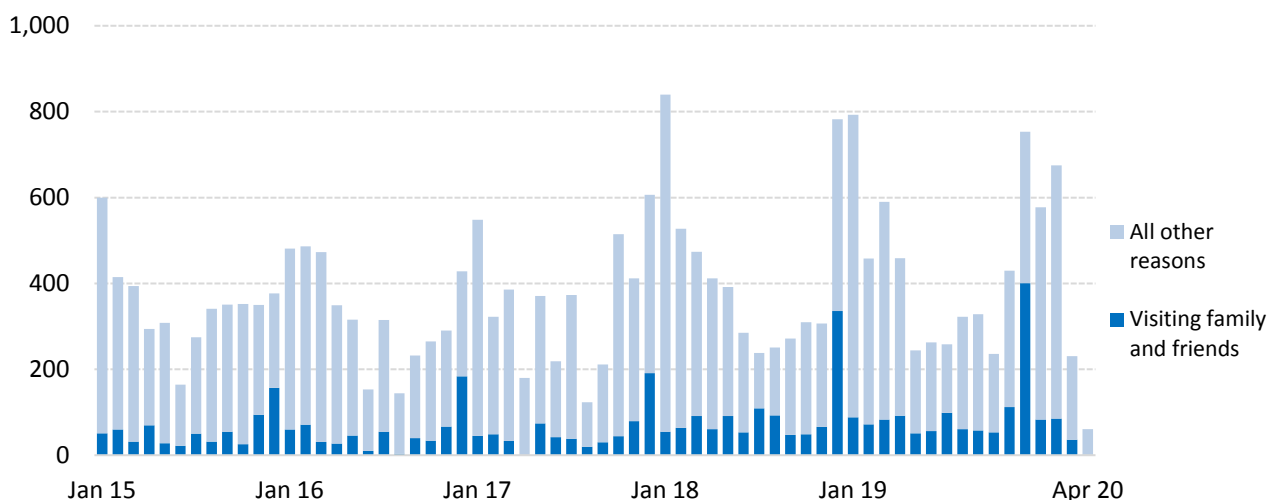


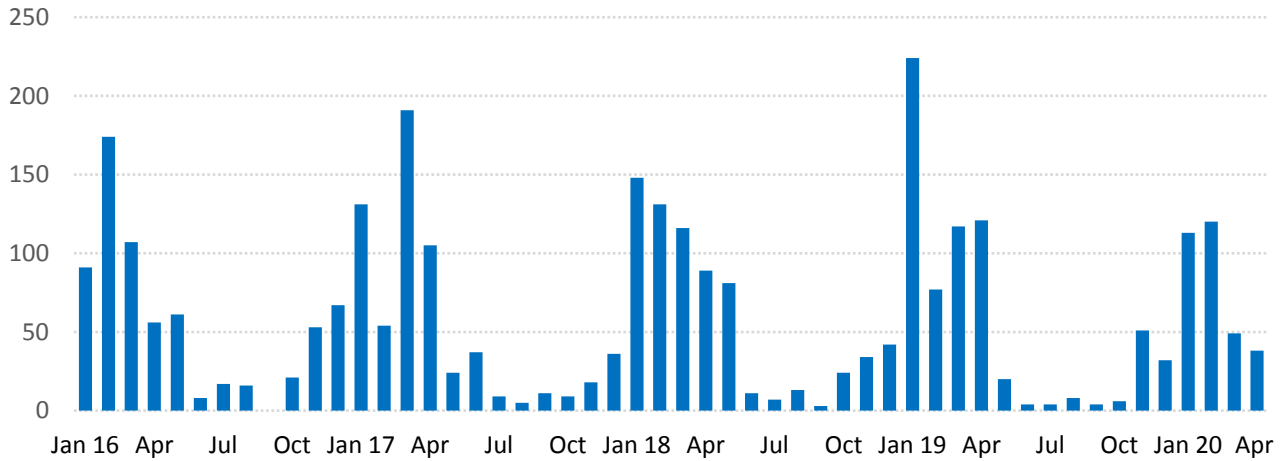
Table 1 further illustrates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on arrivals, up to April 2020. Passenger arrivals dropped to 231 in March 2020, 259 less than the previous March, and to 60 in April, 399 lower than the previous April.

Table 1. Passenger arrivals for January to April, 2015-2020 (excluding day arrivals from cruise ships)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
January	600	481	548	840	793	577
February	415	486	322	527	458	675
March	394	473	386	474	590	231
April	294	349	180	412	459	60
Total	1,703	1,789	1,436	2,253	2,300	1,543

The first few months of the year is the 'yacht season', with an increase in arrivals and departures on their way to various destinations in the Caribbean and elsewhere (Chart 3). COVID-19 has changed the usual pattern, with only 320 arrivals in the first four months of 2020 compared to 539 in the same months of 2019 and 484 in the same months of 2018. Typically, arrivals by yacht stay in St Helena's harbour for around six days on average but, during the COVID-19 crisis, they have stayed much longer on St Helena. The 14 people that departed by yacht in April, for example, stayed for an average 39 days (or more than a month), largely because of restrictions on yacht arrivals imposed by yacht destination countries.

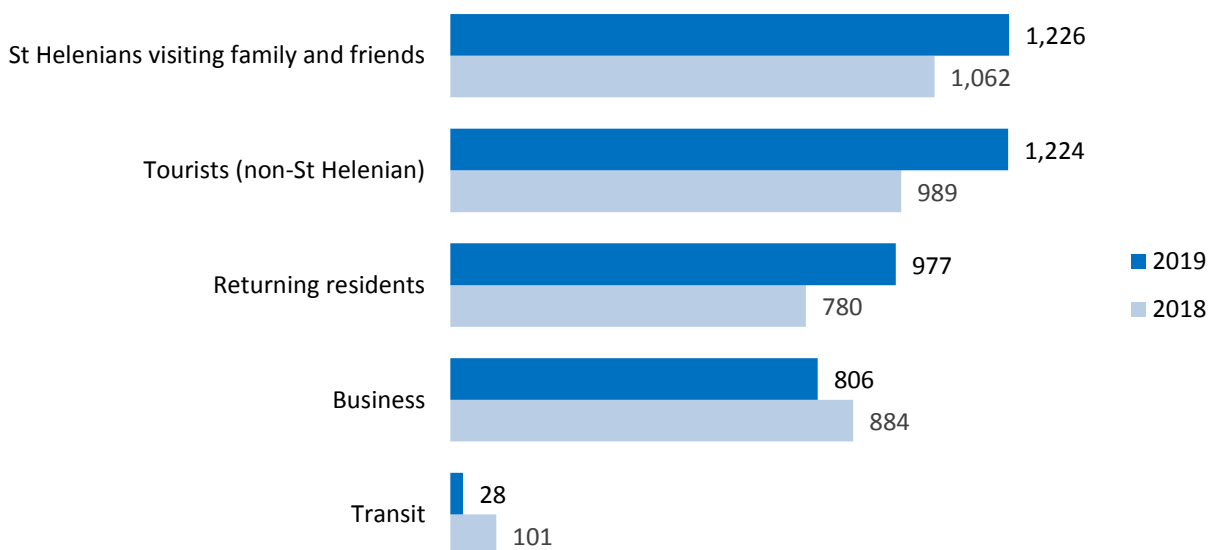
Chart 3. Arrivals by yacht, January 2016 to April 2020



Arrivals by air

Of those arriving by air in 2019, almost 60% came for a leisure purpose: 1,224 for tourism, and 1,226 St Helenians visiting family and friends (Chart 4). Returning residents were 23%, business visitors (including long-term employees of St Helena Government) were 19%, and there was a very small number of transit passengers (0.7%), typically joining or leaving sea transport. The number of non-saint tourists and St Helenians visiting family and friends by air grew by 23.8% and 15.4% respectively compared to 2018. The number of business visitors and arrivals using the Island for transit purposes by air both fell, by 78 and 73 people respectively.

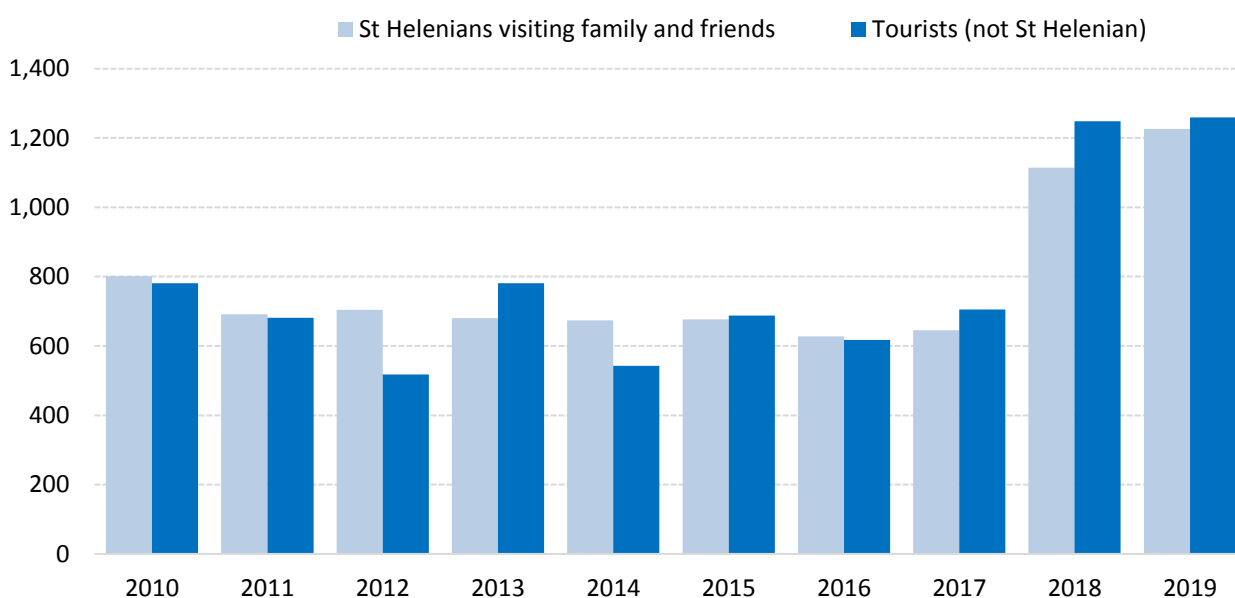
Chart 4. Purpose of arrivals to St Helena by air, 2018 and 2019



Arrivals for a leisure purpose

There are two main reasons for leisure arrivals, either tourism, or St Helenians who live abroad who come to visit family and friends. Arrivals for a leisure purpose have increased significantly since the air service began in late 2017, and it is the reason for the majority of arrivals at St Helena (57% in 2019). Chart 5 shows the total number of leisure arrivals by all forms of transport (apart from day visitors on cruise ships) since 2010. Leisure visitors have almost doubled in 2018 and 2019 compared to 2010 to 2017, for both St Helenians visiting family and friends and for tourists.

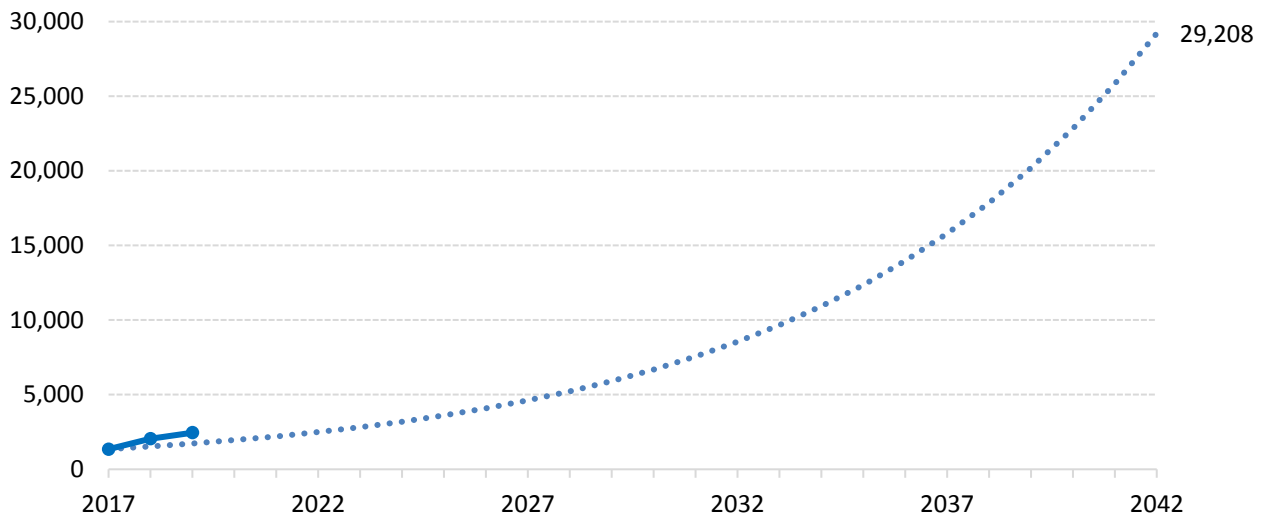
Chart 5 Arrivals at St Helena for a leisure purpose, 2010 to 2019, excluding day visitors on cruise ships



A common question about the new air service is whether St Helena is 'on-track' to meet one of the key assumptions of the Air Access business case, developed prior to construction of the Airport, that the number of leisure arrivals will be 29,208 after 25 years of airport operations (i.e. by 2042).¹ The average number of leisure arrivals from 2010 to 2017 – before scheduled flights started – was around 1,350, which can be used as the baseline. To get to 29,208 in 25 years requires an average annual growth rate of around 13% (Chart 6). In 2018, there were 2,051 leisure arrivals by air (excluding the arrivals on the RMS St Helena in January of that year), an increase of 52% over the 1,350 baseline. In 2019 there were 2,450 leisure arrivals by air (1,224 tourists and 1,226 St Helenians visiting family and friends), an annual increase of 19% compared to the year before. Both annual growth rates are higher than the 13% annual average required; for 2019, the growth rate of the number of tourist arrivals was 24%, higher than the growth in the number of St Helenians visiting family and friends, which was 15%.

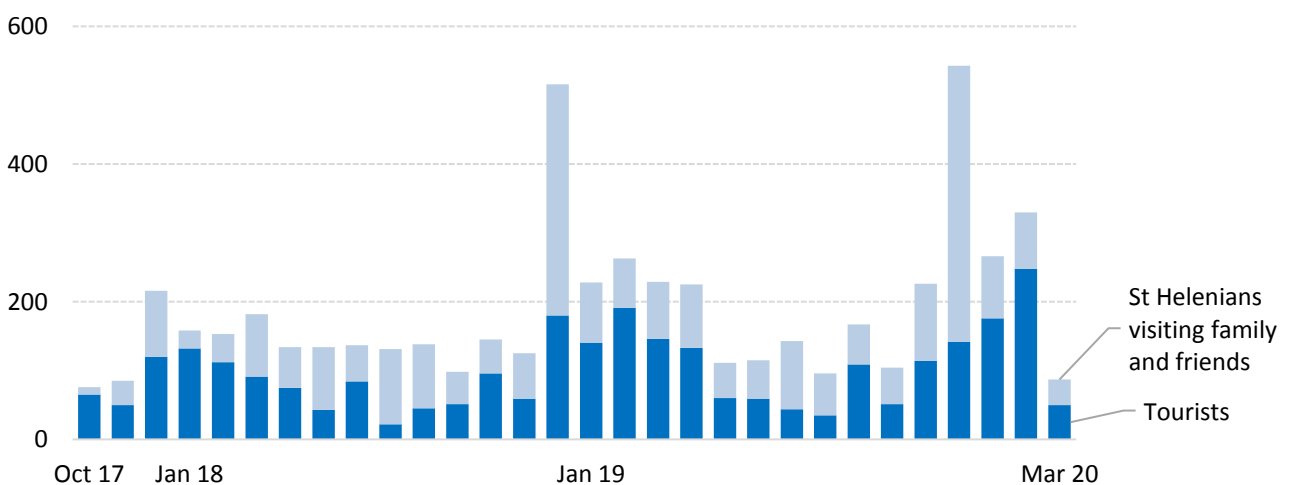
¹ UK National Audit Office report 'Realising the benefits of the St Helena Airport, 2016, p. 22

Chart 6. Number of leisure arrivals by air in 2017, 2018 and 2019, compared to a constant growth rate trajectory to 29,208 arrivals in 2042



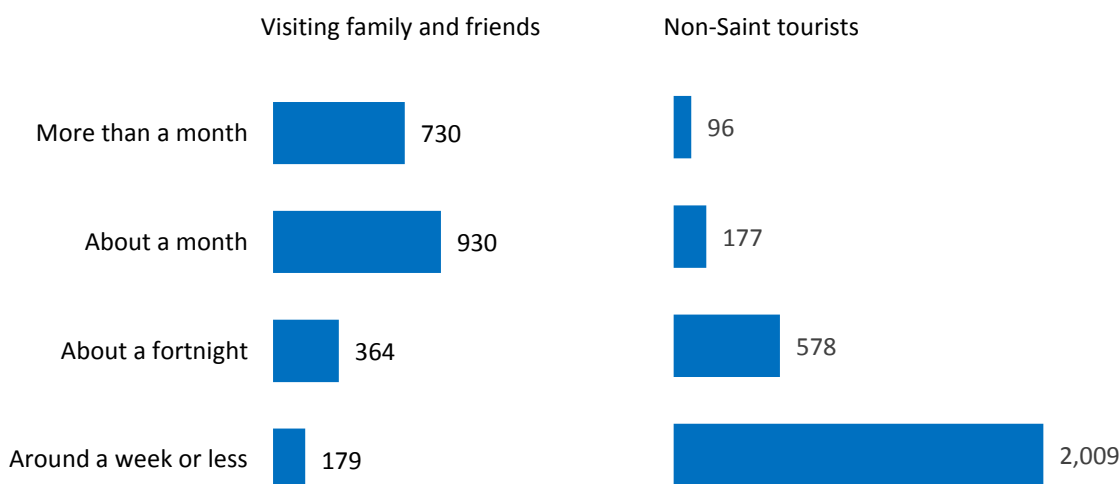
Leisure arrivals for December, January and February were higher in 2019 than in 2018 (Chart 7). In particular, there were 401 arrivals of Saints visiting family and friends in the peak month of December, 64 (or 19%) more than the previous December and there were 247 tourist arrivals in the peak month for tourism of February (when whale sharks are usually present), 56 (or 30%) more than the previous February. There is still a long way to go to 2042, of course, and it is too early to be able to tell with any certainty whether St Helena is on or off-track to have the number of leisure visitors in 2042 that is consistent with the planning assumptions. And it is already clear that there will be a significant impact on the number of leisure visitors in 2020 because of the International travel restrictions being imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chart 7. Number of leisure arrivals by air from October 2017 to March 2020



St Helenians who visit the Island to see family and friends tend to stay much longer than tourists. Chart 8 shows the number of leisure arrivals by air by length of stay since scheduled air operations began in October 2017. Most St Helenians visiting family and friends stay for about a month or more, and most tourists stay for about a week or less (a week or less is up to nine days, about a fortnight is 10 to 17 nights, about a month is 18 to 32 nights, more than a month is 33 nights or more).

Chart 8. Length of stay of leisure visitors leaving St Helena between October 2017 and March 2020 who arrived by air

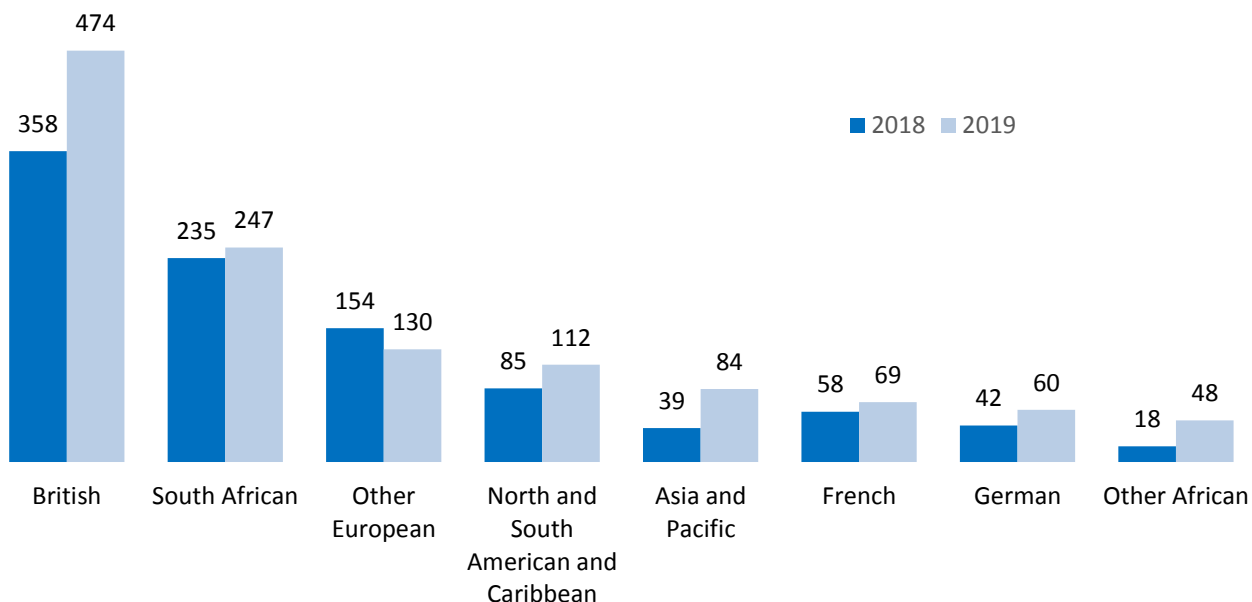


Tourism

The predominant nationality of tourists was British in both 2018 and 2019 (Chart 9), accounting for 39% of all tourists arrivals in 2019. The number of British tourists increased significantly between the two years, by 116 or 32%. Apart from British, South Africans and Europeans account for a further 41% of tourist arrivals.

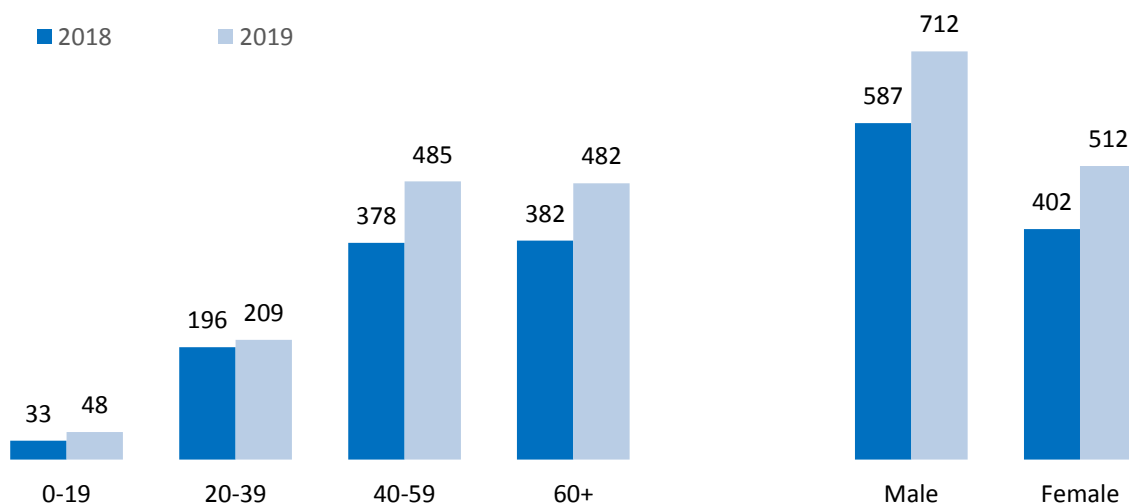
Tourist numbers increased in 2019 in all nationality groups, apart from 'other European', which decreased slightly by 24 or 15%. Tourist arrivals from the 'Asia and Pacific' grouping more than doubled, from 39 in 2018 to 84 in 2019. There was also a notable increase in 2019 in tourist arrivals from African countries other than South Africa, although numbers remain quite small and the increase was largely due to the size of the group accompanying the holiday visit by the Vice President of Angola.

Chart 9. Nationality of tourists (non-St Helenian) arriving by air in 2018 and 2019



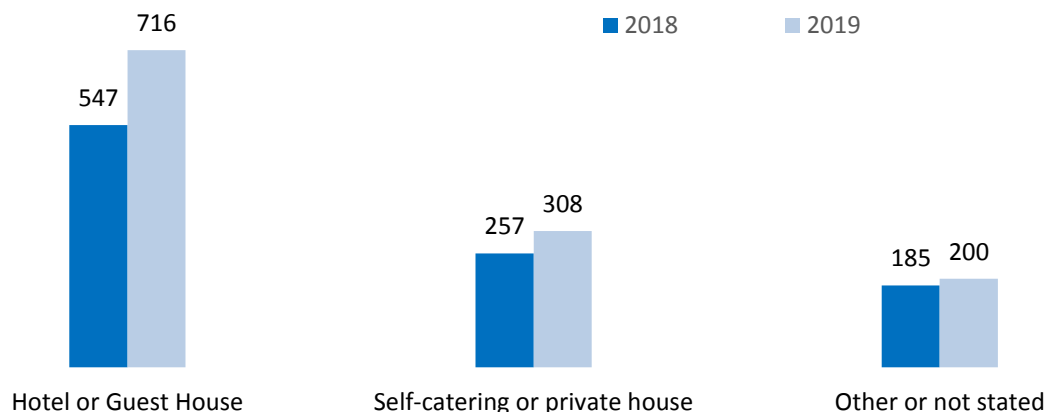
Almost 60% of all tourists are male, a pattern observed in both 2018 and 2019, and almost 80% of all tourists are aged 40 or older, also in both 2018 and 2019. So far, St Helena has not been a tourist destination for children, with less than 4% of tourists arrivals aged under 20 (Chart 10).

Chart 10. Age and sex of tourist arrivals by air, 2018 and 2019



In 2019, around 58% of tourists stated that they would be staying in a hotel or guesthouse, with 25% stating that they will stay in self-catering or private accommodation. The pattern was similar in 2018.

Chart 11. Stated accommodation type of tourist arrivals by air, number, 2018 and 2019



Visitor spending

An export occurs when someone who lives abroad purchases something from a resident of St Helena, whether the purchase is for goods that can be shipped, like fish and coffee, or whether it is a purchase of a service by visitors, like a hotel room, a guided tour, or a meal in a restaurant. The value of these services are calculated by multiplying estimates of daily expenditure of visitors from a survey of departing visitors at the Airport (administered by the Tourism Department of Enterprise St Helena for the last two years) with estimates of the total number of nights spent on St Helena by departing visitors. Table 2 provides the details, including visitors arriving by either sea or air departing in the year shown (it includes, for example, some visitors who left on the RMS St Helena in January and February of 2018). Chart 12 shows the range of total visitor expenditure for 2018 and 2019.

Table 2. Nights spent and expenditures of different categories of visitor, 2018 and 2019

	2018	2019
Nights spent of people departing in year	34,351	44,604
Visiting family and friends	20,927	29,903
Tourists	11,292	12,609
Short-term business visitors	2,132	2,092
Range estimate of average daily expenditures		
Visiting family and friends	£80-110	£80-110
Tourists	£140-190	£140-190
Short-term business visitors	£110-150	£110-150
Range estimate of total annual expenditures (exports of services to visitors)	£3.5-4.4m	£4.8-6.0m
Visiting family and friends	£1.7-2.3m	£2.4-3.3m
Tourists	£1.6-2.1m	£1.8-2.4m
Short-term business visitors	£0.2-0.3m	£0.2-0.3m

Note: estimates of visitor expenditure in this table are provisional and may be revised significantly as more data become available

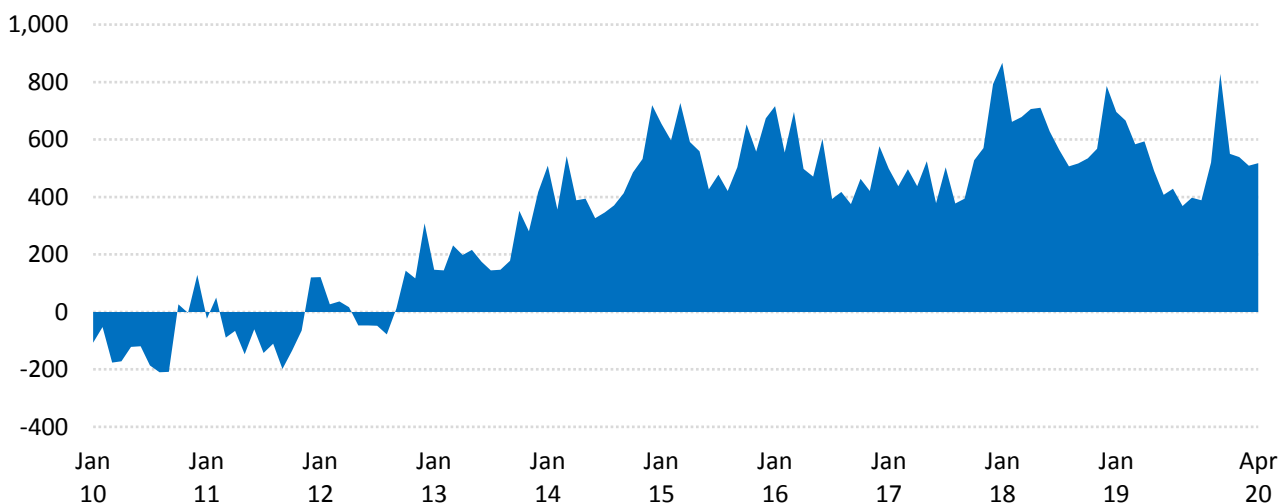
Chart 12. Range estimates of total exports of visitor services (visitor expenditure) on St Helena, 2018 and 2019.



Net arrivals

Chart 13 illustrates the cumulative number of net arrivals to St Helena (i.e. total arrivals less total departures) by all forms of transport, since the beginning of 2010 to the end of April 2020. The start of Airport construction, around 2013, corresponds with an increase in net arrivals as more people arrived to the Island than left the Island. After the large number of arrivals at the end of 2017, when the regular air service started and the RMS St Helena made its last voyage, there was a drop during 2018, as departures exceeded arrivals. There were seasonal peaks in arrivals around the Christmas periods in both 2018 and 2019. At the end of April 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic severely limited arrivals and departures to and from St Helena, there are more than 500 more people on St Helena than there were at the beginning of 2010.

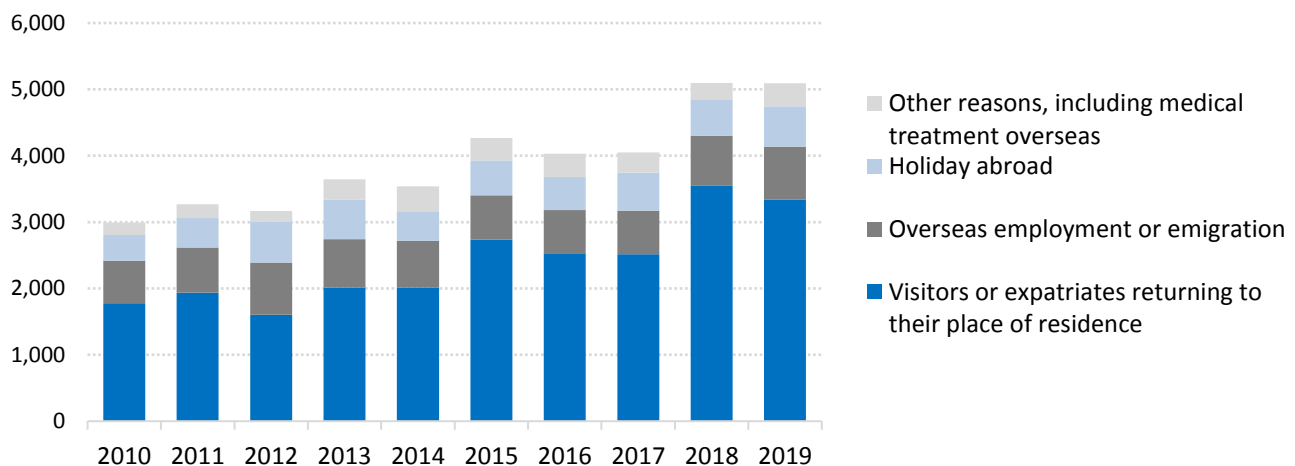
Chart 13. Cumulative net passenger arrivals (arrivals less departures), January 2010 to April 2020



Departures

The number of people departing St Helena has increased in 2018 and 2019, to over 5,000 in each year, corresponding to the start of scheduled air operations (Chart 14). The most common reason for departing St Helena is to return to a place of residence, which are departures of people who arrived for a temporary stay, either short-term visitors or longer-term expatriates. Note that this category excludes those who arrived for a temporary stay or holiday during a period of work overseas, since these are recorded as departing for overseas employment by the Immigration Service. Departures of people who are emigrating overseas permanently are also included in this category. In 2018, there is slight peak in the departures to return to a place of residence category, which coincides with the return of temporary Airport construction workers.

Chart 14. Reason for leaving St Helena, 2010 to 2019



Methodology

The classification of arrivals and departures into purpose of visit or departure is based on the records created by Immigration Officers.

For arrivals, tourism/holiday includes short-term visitors or departures (i.e. less than six months) for tourism or holiday purposes, and it includes St Helenians making short-term visits to St Helena to see family and friends, both those that live permanently abroad and those who are away for a period of overseas employment. Day visitors arriving on cruise ships are not included in either arrivals or departures. Business and employment includes short-term and long-term arrivals who arrive for work purposes, including those employed by St Helena Government on contract (and their families). Returning residents are people who are returning to their normal place of residence (this excludes those returning for the purpose of business or employment, who are classed as business). It also includes people returning permanently from periods of overseas employment. Transit includes those for whom St Helena is not their final destination; it includes most arrivals by yacht and any people transiting to or from a ship via air.

For departures, the reason for leaving St Helena is categorised into tourism or holiday, medical treatment overseas (including persons accompanying patients), emigration or employment of St Helenians and their families (usually in the UK or on Ascension Island or the Falkland Islands), to return to a place of residence, or for other reasons (such as business, training, or transit).

The primary data source is the arrival and departure records maintained by the Immigration Office of the Police Directorate, supplemented by reports from the Airport Directorate. Estimates are provisional, and may be revised in subsequent months.

Have questions or comments?

Please get in touch: we are Neil Fantom, Statistical Commissioner, Kelly Clingham and Justine Joshua, Senior Statistical Assistants, and Bertina Benjamin, Statistical Assistant. You can find us in person at the Statistics Office on the **first floor of the Castle**, Jamestown, at the back of the main courtyard. You can also contact us by telephone: our direct line is **22138** or via the Castle switchboard on 22470. If calling from overseas, the international dialling code for St Helena is +290. Our general office e-mail address is **statistics@sainthelena.gov.sh**, or you can email team members directly (the format is `firstname.lastname@sainthelena.gov.sh`).