ABTA Travel Trends Report 2015

ABTA Travel Trends 2015

Contents

2014 Market Overview 2
2015 Market Outlook 3
2015 Domestic Outlook 4

Key Trends 2015

1. *The affluent leave cautious optimism behind* 5
2. *Holidays working harder* 5
3. *Trying somewhere new* 5
4. *Living like a local* 5
5. *Destination celebrations: the rise of the celebration group holiday* 6
6. *No break for city breaks* 6
7. *Fitness and sport* 6
8. *Wellness holidays* 6
9. *Cruise and river cruise* 7

Observations from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office 8

ABTA Destinations to Watch 2015 10

- Austria 11
- Botswana 12
- Cuba 13
- Dominican Republic 14
- La Gomera (Spain) 15
- Latvia 16
- Japan 17
- Norway 18
- Pacific Coast (USA) 19
- Singapore 20
- The Netherlands 21
- The Peloponnese (Greece) 22

Foreign & Commonwealth Office General Advice 23

Research referenced throughout the report is taken from the ABTA Consumer Trends survey 2014 unless otherwise specified. Consumer research was conducted by Arkenford Ltd (www.Arkenford.co.uk) who specialise in tourism and leisure market research. The ABTA Consumer Trends survey generated response from a nationally representative sample of 2001 consumers using an online research methodology and related to holiday booking habits in the 12 months to July 2014. Fieldwork was conducted in July 2014.
2014 Market Overview

2014 saw a mixed picture from a consumer confidence and sales perspective. The year began with a buoyant traditional peak booking season from January to March with ABTA Members reporting high consumer confidence and strong early season sales. During the year, that confidence softened with a warm, dry summer likely to have had an impact on the ‘lates’ market.

Notwithstanding the late softening, ABTA’s Members’ turnover held steady at £31.5 billion for the 2013/14 financial year, which ended on 30th June 2014.

ABTA research showed that there has been a small decline in the percentage of people taking holidays in 2014, with the figure standing at 80%, compared to 83% in 2013; however this was offset by a small increase in people taking a greater number of breaks abroad. The average spend in the UK before going on holiday also increased during 2014 from £206 to £224. The package holiday prospered in 2014, continuing its growth with half (51%) of the population taking an overseas package.

The most popular overseas destinations in 2014 for British travellers were: Spain, France, Italy, The USA, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, The Netherlands, Belgium and Ireland. Morocco, Tunisia and Poland also saw an increase in visits by British holidaymakers. A real success story for 2014 was Italy which rose to take the third sport, overtaking the USA, in the most popular destinations for British holidaymakers according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS), due to the popularity of city and other short breaks.

A number of holiday destinations were affected by political, social and economic unrest in 2014. In May, the Foreign Office advised against all but essential travel to key areas of Kenya causing some British holidaymakers to be repatriated. Thailand came into the spotlight, due both to protests taking place in Bangkok and to the high profile murder of two tourists on the island of Kao Tao, which is popular with backpackers. The Ebola outbreak has caused widespread global concern and, despite at the time of publication being confined to West Africa, has had a slight impact on bookings and travel to many other African destinations. Unrest in Syria and the Middle East led to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office updating their travel advice to show an increased threat towards British nationals globally. The public and industry were also shocked and saddened by the disappearance of Malaysian Flight MH370 and, shortly afterwards by the shooting down of MH17, which raised questions over the safety of flying over certain areas.

Issues in the UK also had an impact on holidaymakers and a change to the way schools are allowed to grant discretionary leave led to debate over school holiday pricing with ABTA called on to explain the nature of supply and demand and how it affects the travel industry. In September the Scottish referendum may also have impacted the holiday plans of Scotland’s residents with a fall in the number of holidays taken by people in Scotland from 3.6 to 2.5 breaks per person in 2014.

The peer-to-peer industry grew in 2014 and was the subject of much debate within the travel industry. Desire for authentic experiences and the perception of lower prices are driving the growth of this sector and marketing agency JWT London stated that 36% of people have tried a peer-to-peer service (from all sectors), up from 22% in 2013, with 72% saying they were interested in trying it soon. The Government has, as of December 2014, just completed a review of the sharing economy which will ultimately impact the future of businesses such as Airbnb in the UK.
**2015 Market Outlook**

Consumer confidence is continuing to return slowly to the market and to the UK economy with some ABTA Members reporting a positive but measured outlook. Reports indicate that recovery is being driven by more affluent consumers and that the cautious optimism that has characterised recent years is now ingrained as the ‘new normal’ for the rest of the market. How these signs of confidence translate for people will be a key issue in the lead-up to 2015’s general election.

This tentative recovery is reflected in the findings of ABTA’s Consumer Trends Survey 2014 which shows that more consumers are planning to spend more on their holidays in 2015 than those looking to cut back; 20% state they will spend more on holidays and only 15% say they are planning to spend less.

Those in the social category ‘AB’, where recovery is more apparent, are more likely than average to state that they will be spending more on holidays in 2015 – 29% of ‘A’ holidaymakers and 24% of ‘B’ holidaymakers stated this. Additional growth is also set to come from those aged 25-34 who are the most positive about 2015 with three in ten (30%) saying they will spend more on holidays and only 14% saying they will spend less.

In the rest of the market, the search for value rather than the lowest prices is set to continue with holidaymakers making their holidays work harder, looking to combine holidays with wellness, family time, relaxation and new experiences. Barclaycard’s Consumer Spending Report\(^1\) showed that although total holiday spend is up overall, people are buying holidays ‘little and often’, which is reflected in the rise of city breaks seen elsewhere in this report.

A strong pound in 2014 meant that day-to-day expenses for British holidaymakers came down in many favourite destinations and it is likely that this will boost visitor numbers into 2015 with Europe, the USA and Japan (which is included later in this report as a ‘Destination to watch’) likely to benefit.

The annual family holiday of seven nights or more overseas was a staple in 2014, accounting for 0.8 of the 3.0 holidays taken per person, and this is expected to continue in 2015 as holidays remain an important part of the family calendar. Families seeking to have more control over their budgets will play a role in the continued growth of all-inclusive holidays; 20% of people are planning an all-inclusive holiday in 2015 rising to 25% of people with a young family. The abolition of Air Passenger Duty (APD) for children under 12 from 1 May 2015 will also provide some financial respite for families and will support the annual family break and the visiting friends and relatives market.

City breaks will continue their popularity in 2015 and short haul, short break destinations will feel the benefit of this. Italy is expected to remain popular as are other established favourites such as Barcelona and Paris. Eastern European cities such as Ljubljana should see a boost from holidaymakers looking to try somewhere new that is also still easily accessible – Istanbul is also hotly tipped.

Popular long haul destinations for 2015 will include the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Canada and Thailand. Flying long haul will become more affordable in April 2015 due to the removal of APD bands C and D; this is expected to save UK passengers £200m a year. Wider availability of new aircraft, such as Boeing’s Dreamliner and Airbus A380 is also making long haul travel more attractive and will continue to support popular routes to destinations including Cancun and Dubai.

---

Domestic Outlook
Domestic tourism enjoyed a good year with ABTA research showing that nearly seven in ten (68%) consumers took at least one UK holiday. As well as pleasant summer weather, domestic tourism in 2014 was boosted by high profile events including the Tour de France Grand Départ in Yorkshire, Essex and London, and The Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

The domestic package holiday was a real success story in 2014 and is expected to continue its strong growth into 2015. A quarter (24%) of people took a package holiday in the UK in 2014, up from 18% in 2013, 23% in 2012 and double the number in 2011 when only 12% of consumers said they had taken a domestic package holiday.

The popularity of shorter breaks in the UK continues to grow and some ABTA Members have increased the destinations and breaks on offer for a shorter holiday in 2015. The UK city break is a key part of this trend and the domestic capitals London, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast are all popular destinations.

A desire for luxury was apparent in the domestic market in 2014 and will be highlighted by a high number of luxury hotel openings in 2015 including Turner Prize Winner Grayson Perry’s ‘A House for Essex’.

ABTA Members are reporting that packages incorporating special events and festivals are a growth area for 2015 with holidaymakers building breaks around events such as Royal Ascot, the Grand National and the Great Yorkshire Show. Large numbers of boutique festivals have sprung up in recent years and are enjoyed by all age groups.

In 2015, the Rugby World Cup in September and October is set to be a major event for domestic tourism in 13 English and Welsh destinations across 44 days.

Key anniversaries in 2015 include the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta which will put Salisbury Cathedral and Lincoln Cathedral into the spotlight. The Channel Islands also expect to see large numbers of visitors to the islands to celebrate the 70th anniversary of their liberation with special commemorative events throughout the year.

The ‘set-jetting’ trend has also provided a real boost for domestic tourism in recent years with popular television programmes such as Game of Thrones and Downton Abbey boosting visitor numbers to Northern Ireland and to stately homes in 2014. Classic television programmes are also inspiring travel to destinations including Castle Howard (location of Brideshead Revisited) and Morse’s Oxford.

Food and drink lovers are also in for a treat in 2015 as the street food and microbrewery trends of recent years go from strength to strength with VisitEngland highlighting artisanal gin and whisky distilleries and boutique vineyards opening in the Isles of Scilly, the Cotswolds and the Lake District.
**Key Trends 2015**

1. *The affluent leave cautious optimism behind*

Affluent consumers are breaking away from the cautious optimism that has dominated the market for the last couple of years. Whilst this group remains relatively small, it looks set to drive some growth in the travel industry in 2015. In 2014, people took an average of 3.0 holidays per person, however those in social class ‘A’ took 4.7 holidays per person. This is a marked increase from 2013 when this group took 3.6 holidays per person and is likely to continue into 2015.

Package holidays in particular are very popular with affluent holidaymakers with two thirds (66%) of those in social class ‘A’ taking a package holiday in 2014 compared to an average of 51%. Long haul destinations including The Maldives, The Caribbean and Mauritius are popular destinations as are safari tours. Affluent holidaymakers will also boost the ski market with research from the Ski Club of Great Britain indicating a growth in the numbers of ‘lapsed skiers’ returning to the slopes in 2014/15 as the economy starts to improve.

2. *Holidays working harder*

Whilst a small group of consumers are feeling more affluent, for most other people cautious optimism remains and many of these holidaymakers are looking to ensure they maximise their expenditure and leisure time. This is driving the ‘hard working holiday’ which is characterised by holidaymakers combining elements such as events, shows or experiences with their holiday as well as multi-centre holidays; challenge holidays and activity holidays – these include the added benefit of coming home with a new skill such as cookery or painting. The group and wellness holidays discussed later in this report are also key indicators of this trend.

With the search for value ingrained as the new normal, this holiday mindset is set to continue for years to come. Stopover cities and countries that can offer a variety of activities could benefit from this trend. Cruises will also be popular as they allow people to visit a number of destinations within one holiday.

3. *Trying somewhere new*

People have been playing it safe for the last few years with their holiday choices, but research shows that many British holidaymakers are planning to explore new destinations in 2015; over a third (35%) think they will take a holiday to a country they have never been to before.

Holidaymakers who prefer to stick to tried and trusted destinations may also look to try something new in 2015 and almost half (48%) are quite likely or practically certain they will visit a resort or city they have never been to before in a country they have already visited, for example visiting Verona instead of Venice or Menorca instead of Malaga.

4. *Living like a local*

‘Living like a local’ has become an essential part of getting under the skin of a destination for many travellers. They are looking for more authentic holiday experiences and many holiday companies are now offering people the chance to enjoy hidden gems alongside traditional tourist attractions. Travel
professionals, blogs and social media are also popular ways to uncover hidden hotspots and there are tangible benefits for communities and the local environment as demand for ‘authentic experiences’ strengthens.

5. Destination celebrations: the rise of the celebration group holiday

The destination celebration has become a real player in the travel market with the desire to commemorate, celebrate and share experiences expected to drive an increased number of group holidays in 2015. This will build on numbers seen in 2014 when 20% of people took an adult only group holiday and 19% of people also went away with their extended family.

Groups may choose destinations with special significance such as the World War One battlefields or with memories, the scenes of childhood holidays for example.

The destination celebration is also apparent in the rise of overseas weddings and hen and stag dos; one in five weddings now takes place abroad according to Mintel with Cyprus and Rhodes attracting the biggest overseas weddings parties according to Thomson Weddings.

6. No break for city breaks

City breaks overtook beach holidays as the most popular type of holiday in 2014 and are expected to hold the top spot into 2015 with 43% planning a city break and 42% planning a beach holiday.

The dominance of city breaks is likely to be due to an increase in low cost flights to a variety of destinations, as well as the strength of the pound against the Euro in 2014 making this type of holiday more appealing to a wide range of people. City breaks are most popular with people aged 25-44 and this age group also choose them due to the constraints of taking time away from work.

The most popular city break destinations include Amsterdam, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Barcelona and Dublin.

7. Fitness and Sport

According to ABTA research, 6% of people are planning a sporting holiday in 2015 and 5% an adventure or challenge break. 4% of people are also planning a trip abroad to see a major sporting event. Much has been made of the rise of the MAMILs (Middle Aged Men in Lycra) with the 2012 Olympics and this year’s Grand Depart in Yorkshire inspiring the nation to get active. Brits look set to take this trend on holiday in 2015 with some ABTA Members reporting a notable increase in people incorporating sport or fitness activities into their breaks.

8. Wellness holidays

Wellness and spa breaks are also a trend for 2015 and The Global Wellness Institute² recently reported that the sector is worth $494 billion globally, a growth of 13% in one year with the UK in the top ten countries for wellness breaks.

Wellness breaks are incorporating a wide range of activities including spa, yoga, detox, fitness and stress relief. They are particularly popular with people who lead busy working lives and seek to recharge on holiday. Wellness breaks are also popular with single travellers.

Destinations prized for their natural beauty or remote location are often chosen for wellness holidays, such as Oman, Arizona, Costa Rica and Indonesia.

9. Cruise and river cruise

Cruise looks set for a strong year in 2015. 10% of people are planning a cruise holiday for 2015, compared to the 7% who took one in 2014. In 2015, cruise holidays will be most popular with the older end of the market, 18% of over 65s and 13% of people aged 55-64 are planning to take one.

Earlier in 2014, Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) UK & Ireland revealed that a cruise in the Mediterranean was the most popular choice for British passengers but that the Mediterranean was set to be overtaken by Northern Europe with Norway (which is included later in this report as a ‘Destination to watch’) seeing a particularly large increase in passengers during the last decade.

River cruising is playing an important part in the continued growth of the cruise market with the majority of river cruises heading to Europe, reflecting the trend for city breaks seen elsewhere in the market. This is also testament to the ease of getting to many of these destinations through the number of air and train routes that are readily available. CLIA UK & Ireland is reporting that the European river cruise sector grew 22%, making it the fastest growing sector in the British travel industry. For some ABTA Members, demand is outstripping supply when it comes to popular routes such as the Rhine, the Danube and the Moselle, and Viking River Cruises launched 16 new ships in March 2014 to cope with this demand.
Observations from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

In 2014 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) supported thousands of British nationals in difficulty overseas, from helping people who had lost their passport or had it stolen to visiting individuals in hospital. The FCO and ABTA continued to work together over the course of the year to encourage British nationals to prepare fully before travelling.

One example of this was a joint campaign launched in June 2014 to warn young people of the consequences for both themselves and their families of travelling abroad without appropriate travel insurance. This was based on research showing that 38% of young people think taking out insurance is not necessary when they travel overseas, often leaving their families to pick up the pieces when things go wrong. The FCO also supported important ABTA travel safety campaigns on issues such as safe swimming and winter sports.

Supporting British nationals abroad

Between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 FCO staff handled 17,517 consular assistance cases around the world. While there was a drop in some serious types of case, some areas showed an increase.

The highest number of cases were recorded in Spain, the USA and Thailand – all of which are countries with high volumes of British visitors. Spain alone saw more than 3,500 assistance cases, from arrests, hospitalisations and deaths to cases of assault.

The FCO also issued more than 30,000 emergency travel documents to British nationals, the majority going to individuals who had lost their passport or had it stolen.

Hospitalisations and deaths

The FCO dealt with over 3,000 hospitalisation cases worldwide in 2013/14, with the highest number recorded in Spain. The overall number of hospitalisation cases fell compared to the year before, including in popular holiday hotspots such as Greece, Portugal and Cyprus.

The total number of deaths of British nationals overseas recorded by the FCO was significantly lower in 2013/14 than the previous year, falling by 34% from 6,193 to 4,110 cases. This was due largely to a change in the way our consular staff record cases: we no longer record death notifications (where
we have had no other involvement) as consular cases. The country with the highest number of deaths of British nationals recorded was Spain (856 cases), followed by Thailand (362) and France (346).

**Arrests**

There was a slight decrease (17 cases) in the number of British nationals arrested overseas between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 compared to the previous year. Out of a total of 5,418 arrests, most cases were handled in Spain (1,389), followed by the USA (1,153) and the United Arab Emirates (261). Although the total number of arrests globally decreased, some countries saw an increase, including the Philippines, Egypt and France.

There was also an increase in arrests specifically related to drug offences, which rose by 7% to 717 following a significant drop the year before (when there were 669 cases). However, the number of cases remains low compared to recent years. On drugs our message is clear: don’t take the risk.

**Mental health**

There was a 15% rise in recorded cases involving British nationals with mental health needs between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014, with a total of 442 cases globally. The countries with the highest number of cases were Spain, France and the USA.

For anyone experiencing difficulties with their mental health while abroad, the nearest British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate may be able to offer assistance.
TRAVEL TRENDS 2015
DESTINATIONS TO WATCH

AUSTRIA
Sing along all year long as the "Sound of Music" turns 50

BOTSWANA
Characterful Caribbean, enjoy a beach holiday with old world charm

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
The safari destination for 2015

CUBA
There's nowhere like Japan and a better exchange rate means no better time to visit

JAPAN
Thanks to new direct flights, this Caribbean paradise is closer than ever in 2015

LAE GOMERA
For all year round sun away from the crowds, try the undiscovered Canary Island

LATVIA
City break in medieval Riga or enjoy the beautiful Baltic in 2015

NORWAY
For spectacular and unspoilt countryside, get on the Twin Peaks trail

PACIFIC COAST
Try the fastest growing cruise destination for "Frozen" landscapes and fjords

THE NETHERLANDS
A summer of celebrations for Van Gogh in Amsterdam and the Grand Départ!

THE PELOPONNESSE
Beautiful, historic and with new direct flights, visit mainland Greece this year

SINGAPORE
Turning 50 this year to a host of celebrations, go raise a Singapore sling

abta.com/traveltrends2015
Austria

Everybody’s favourite family movie the Sound Of Music celebrates its 50th birthday in 2015 and Julie Andrews’ fans will be heading off to Salzburg in October for a Gala festival featuring special surprise guests and lots of music from the film. The Austrian capital Vienna is a spectacular and picture perfect combination of baroque and early 20th century architecture and is one of the most sophisticated cities in Europe. In 2015 the city is celebrating 150 years of one of its key architectural features, the Ringstrasse, lined with monuments and parks, with a series of concerts and other cultural events. Music lovers will be truly spoilt in 2015 as Vienna also hosts the 60th Eurovision contest in May. All these cultural delights, plus the best cakes and coffee in the world, beautiful countryside and world class ski resorts, make Austria the perfect year round destination.

Laws and customs – ‘Did you know’ facts and FCO Advice

- There are complex driving laws in Austria, especially for caravan and motor-home owners.
- There is a danger of avalanches in some areas. Even during summer time this danger still exists for snow covered areas.
- You are advised not to carry your passport around with you. Leave it in your hotel safe and carry a photocopy of your passport instead.
- Make sure your travel insurance covers any winter/mountain activities you plan to undertake.
- If you need to contact the emergency services call 112.
Botswana

Fans of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency books and TV series will be heading off to the capital of Botswana Gabarone to experience first-hand the country where these charming books are set. But the main draw for visitors to Botswana remains the incredible countryside and the safari opportunities on offer with plentiful and varied wildlife on view. Most famous are the wetlands of the Okavango Delta with game available all year round but Linyanti comes a close second. Makgadikgadi has spectacular salt pans and is home to everyone’s favourite cute animal the Meercat. From November to May visitors should head to the Central Kalahari and Nxai when vast herds of migratory beasts can be seen on the move. Finally Tuli in the south east has excellent and varied game opportunities and can easily be combined as a twin centre holiday with neighbouring South Africa.

Laws and customs – ‘Did you know’ facts and FCO Advice

- Wildlife and livestock on roads are a hazard, particularly at night.
- Carry some form of identification with you at all times. A photocopy of your passport is sufficient.
- Attacks on tourists are rare, but you should take sensible precautions to protect yourself from petty and violent crime.
Cuba

In July 2015 the place to be will be Santiago de Cuba, which celebrates its 500th birthday with festivals and parties in a typically flamboyant Cuban style. Visitors to the island must also sample the capital Havana’s old world charm and the iconic American cars from the 30s, 40s and 50s and sip a Cuba Libre in Hemingway’s old hang out, the Bodeguita del Medio. If you’re looking for a beach break the main resort is Varadero, a short transfer from Havana with a selection of good value, high quality, 4 and 5 star hotels, candlelit restaurants in beach front caves and characterful cocktail bars. Guardalavaca in the east of the island has over 20km of snow white beaches with the option, for the more active, to go scuba diving or hiking through the rainforest and waterfalls of the neighbouring Mensura National Park. On 17 December 2014 President Obama lifted the travel restrictions for US citizens that have been in place since the 1950s. Before this Cuba was by far the most popular Caribbean island for US holidaymakers so get to this lovely island in 2015 before the Americans arrive in large numbers.

Laws and customs – ‘Did you know’ facts and FCO Advice

- The hurricane season in Cuba normally runs from June to November. You should monitor weather updates and track the progress of approaching storms.
- You must take out comprehensive travel and medical insurance before you travel and will be expected to present your insurance policy on arrival in the country.
- Crime levels are low and mainly in the form of opportunistic theft.
- Be cautious when travelling in Cuba. Driving standards are variable.
- Dengue Fever is endemic to Latin America and the Caribbean. There have been recent reports of cholera. Chikungunya virus has also been detected in the Caribbean, including Cuba.
Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic is set to take its place in the spotlight in 2015 with new BA direct flights from Gatwick and First Choice from Glasgow to Punta Cana, as well as the opening of new luxury hotels in Santo Domingo and Punta Cana. One of the best times to visit is from January to March when you can head off north east to Samana for a more relaxed vibe and watch some of the 10,000 humpback whales who come to the waters off the island to breed. Puerto Plata and Punta Cana are the islands two main resort areas with lively or quiet choices but all are characterised by some of the most perfect beaches in the Caribbean. Inland you can enjoy lush mountains and spectacular waterfalls as well as the chance to abseil into the dramatic cave complex of Cueva Fun-Fun in Hato Mayor.

Laws and customs – ‘Did you know’ facts and FCO Advice

- The hurricane season in the Dominican Republic runs from June to November. You should monitor weather updates and track the progress of approaching storms.
- Most visits are trouble-free, but there are incidents of crime and violence.
- There are severe penalties for all drug-related offences.
- Credit card cloning and fraud are common. It’s generally safer to use cash.
Japan

Traditionally thought of as an expensive destination, the pound has increased in value against the yen by 30% in the past year making it a good time to visit. This now makes it better value than countries such as USA, Mexico and Dubai, according to a recent Post Office report. British visitors will also benefit from tax free shopping which was introduced in October 2014. The capital Tokyo is one of the world’s greatest cities, combining space age architecture, ancient buildings and amazing cuisine. Tokyo has the greatest number of Michelin starred restaurants of any city in the world but also delicious, healthy, street food. Next, travel from Tokyo to Kanazawa on the super-fast Japanese bullet train, which will open a new line in 2015, slashing the journey from 4 to 2.5 hours to see old Japan. Japan’s unique architectural heritage will be on show in March after the reopening of the newly restored Hijemi castle, which is only a short train ride from Japan’s beautiful ancient capital Kyoto, also a must visit for any first time traveller to Japan.

Laws and customs – ‘Did you know’ facts and FCO Advice

- The typhoon season runs from June to December with most activity between July and September. You should monitor the progress of approaching storms and follow instructions issued by the local authorities, including any evacuation orders.
- There may be some disruption to transport and other infrastructure in the parts of north-eastern Honshu most affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Check with the local authorities or your travel company before you go.
- There is a continuous risk of earthquakes and tsunamis throughout Japan. Latest warnings and advisories are published on the Japan Meteorological Agency website.
La Gomera (Spain)

The Canary Islands are a firm favourite with UK holidaymakers particularly those looking for winter sun. Temperatures rarely dip below the mid twenty degrees centigrade all year round. In 2015 discerning holidaymakers will take the short ferry ride from Tenerife to the beautiful, unspoilt island of La Gomera. It also features for the first time in the brochures of Thomas Cook. La Gomera offers a range of attractions including the Unesco World Heritage site, Garajonay National Park, subtropical rain forest and wildlife species that are unique to the island. La Gomera is largely undiscovered and is perfect for holidaymakers who don’t want the bright lights and glitz of a busy resort. They will love unwinding in its relaxed main resort Playa de Santiago or on one of the island’s many unspoilt beaches. There’s also plenty to do for the more active, with miles of walking trails throughout the beautiful interior or scuba diving over La Gomera’s spectacular coral reefs.

Laws and customs – ‘Did you know’ facts and FCO Advice

- Keep a copy of your passport somewhere safe. Be aware that you must provide ID (your passport) if requested by a Police Officer.
- There have been several deaths in Spain as a result of falls from balconies. Don’t take any unnecessary risks, especially when under the influence of drink or drugs.
- Take care when swimming in the sea. Some beaches, especially around Spanish Islands, may have strong undercurrents.
- If you need to contact the emergency services call 112.
- Be alert to the existence of street crime. Thieves tend to target money and passports so don’t keep them all in one place.
- Visit [https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/spain](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/spain) for more information.
Latvia

Following on from its successful year as a European Capital of Culture in 2014, Riga is set to take centre stage again in 2015 as it hosts Europride, the leading LGBT event in the European gay and lesbian calendar. Riga is a UNESCO world heritage site offering a combination of beautiful medieval and art nouveau buildings. After a few days sampling the delights of the capital holidaymakers would be well advised to head off down the coast to the region of Kurzeme, which is famous locally for its unspoilt forests, lakes, rivers and waterfalls. Kurzeme also has long stretches of sandy beaches and in the summer months hosts numerous events including the Summer Sound music festival in the main town Liepaja. Active travellers can also make use of the wide range of cycle paths throughout the region or go windsurfing and kayaking in the Baltic Sea.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laws and customs – ‘Did you know’ facts and FCO Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• For identification purposes, you should carry a photocopy of your passport at all times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Drivers should carry original vehicle registration documents when crossing the border into Latvia (including motorcycles). Using a mobile phone whilst driving is prohibited unless using a hands-free device, and winter tyres are required between 1 December and 1 March.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There are on the spot fines for those found travelling on public transport without a ticket or with a ticket which has not been validated. Tickets can be brought from the driver or from shops/kiosks but must be validated using machines within the bus or tram.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There have been reports of petty theft and robbery. Beware of pickpockets, avoid unlit streets and parks at night, and be extra vigilant if walking alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Visit <a href="https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/latvia">https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/latvia</a> for more information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Norway

In 2015 savvy parents throughout the UK will delight their kids if they tell them they’re off to the land of Frozen, one of the most successful children’s films of the last two years. Norway is a stunning destination with the most spectacular coastline in Europe, its fjords offer an awe inspiring representation of the best that nature has to offer. Cruising is one of the best ways to see the country and UK holidaymakers clearly agree, with numbers growing from 37,000 to 218,000 in the last decade. On land holidaymakers should start their trip in the capital Oslo, a buzzing, affluent, attractive city and then head north for a chance to see nature’s free light show, the Aurora Borealis and the pretty towns of Tromso and Bergen, which can also now be reached by direct flights from the UK. In March 2015, visitors to Svalbard will also be able to see the last solar eclipse visible in Europe before 2026. Finally make sure that you will be seen as the best parents on the planet by taking the kids on a sled ride to see the Sami people and their reindeer.

Laws and customs – ‘Did you know’ facts and FCO Advice

- Petty crime does occur but at a low level compared to other European countries.
- There is a risk of avalanche activity. Follow local advice, stay on piste and only ski in recommended areas.
- Drugs and drink driving laws are stricter in Norway than in the UK.
- Don’t become involved with drugs of any kind. Possession of even small quantities can lead to heavy fines and/or imprisonment.
- Road distances are great and driving takes longer than you think. Narrow and winding roads may be hazardous and impassable, especially in winter. Winter tyres are mandatory from around 1 November to 15 April (exact dates vary from year to year).
- Visit https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/norway for more information, including specific information and advice on Arctic travel.
Pacific North West (USA)

Television viewers of a certain age had some great news in 2014 with the announcement that the cult series Twin Peaks will return in early 2016. In 2015 fans wanting to get an early first hand taste of the spectacular countryside featured in Twin Peaks will be heading to the Pacific North West states of Washington, Oregon and northern California which are characterised by dense temperate forests, snow-capped mountains, deep crystal clear lakes and spectacular rivers. The Colombian River Gorge in Oregon is a must visit area and is designated a National Scenic Area, or area of outstanding natural beauty and is the largest in the USA. The coastline is also especially beautiful with hundreds of miles of unspoiléd beaches and rivers that team with fish and other wildlife. Once you’ve had your fill of nature, head to Seattle home of grunge and the skinny latte; it still has a thriving alternative music scene and night life. Or head off to bohemian Portland on Icelandair flights which launch in May.

Laws and customs – ‘Did you know’ facts and FCO Advice

- The hurricane season in the USA normally runs from June to November and can affect coastal regions.
- The US Visa Waiver Programme (VWP) allows most British Citizen passport holders to visit the US for up to 90 days without a visa, but you may need to get authorisation from the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (ESTA) before you travel.
- You should be alert to the dangers of car and street crime.
- Laws vary from state to state in the USA. When you are physically present in a state, even temporarily, you are subject to that state’s laws.
- You must carry a passport showing that you have leave to enter or remain with you at all times.
Singapore

Singapore will be celebrating 50 years of independence in 2015. The former British colony effortlessly combines old world charm, epitomised by the Raffles hotel, and 21st century sophistication. Visitors to Singapore cannot fail to be impressed from the moment they arrive at Changi airport, regularly voted the best in the world with its roof top swimming pool, indoor waterfall and butterfly garden. Throughout the year Singapore will be hosting a number of sporting events including the Southeast Asian Games in June, Singapore Grand Prix in September and the WTA Tennis Finals in October. Culture will also be given its due in 2015 with the opening of a brand new visual arts hub in the National Gallery of Singapore. The island is a melting pot of various cultures with delicious cuisines to match and offers some of the best retail experiences in South East Asia; it’s also an ideal stopover for travel to and from Australasia.

Laws and customs – ‘Did you know’ facts and FCO Advice

- Possession of even very small quantities of drugs can lead to imprisonment, corporal punishment or the death penalty.
- Be aware of the risk of street crime, particularly bag snatching. Violent crime is rare.
- The offence of ‘outrage of modesty’ (molestation) can result in a fine, jail or corporal punishment. Scams involving false claims of molest are thought to exist.
- There is a risk from Dengue fever.
The Netherlands

With the rise in popularity of city breaks, many culture lovers will be heading over the North Sea to Holland in 2015, celebrating the life and work of Vincent Van Gogh who died 125 years ago in 1890. Many of Van Gogh’s paintings can be found in Amsterdam where coffee houses, canals and a laid back vibe retain a strong hold on UK holidaymakers. But there is much more to Holland than just the capital, with the administrative centre of The Hague and the medieval city of Maastricht both well worth a visit, as is the city of Utrecht which will be in the spotlight this June hosting the opening stages of the world’s greatest bike race, the Tour de France. Perhaps the best time to visit Holland is in the spring when large swathes of the countryside are painted with the rainbow colours of millions of tulips in bloom, as gorgeous as any of Van Gogh’s finest paintings.

Laws and customs – ‘Did you know’ facts and FCO Advice

- Everybody over the age of 14 is required to show a valid identity document on request.
- Be alert to the existence of street crime in cities.
- Don’t carry or use drugs. The Netherlands has a reputation for being tolerant on the use of so-called ‘soft drugs’. In reality drugs are prohibited and this tolerance exists only for designated premises in the major cities.
- If you need to contact the emergency services call 112.
- Visit [https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/netherlands](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/netherlands) for more information.
The Peloponnese (Greece)

The British love affair with Greece’s islands goes back over many years, but in 2015 ABTA is tipping the Peloponnese on the mainland. With direct flights into Kalamata and plans to turn the airport of Tripoli into a low cost hub, this previously difficult to access area will be only a short flight from the UK. Plans to reopen and renovate the region’s extensive rail network will also help to open up this beautiful region to holidaymakers. The Peloponnese is one of the most historic parts of Greece with numerous archaeological sites and was home to Sparta, city of Helen of Troy and the fiercest warriors in ancient Greece. Apart from beautiful rugged countryside the area has one of Greece’s most attractive towns, Nafplion, the spectacular castle of Monemvasia and what is regarded as one of the best resorts in the country, the Costa Navarino.

Laws and customs – ‘Did you know’ facts and FCO Advice

- Most visits are trouble-free, but you should take sensible precautions to protect yourself and your belongings.
- Carry a copy of your passport or other photographic ID which confirms British nationality at all times.
- There are regular strikes in Greece. These are sometimes called at short notice and can cause disruption to public transport in and out of Greece (including air travel and ports).
- You should avoid any demonstrations and follow the advice given by local security authorities.
- The Greek police will not accept rowdy or indecent behaviour, especially where excessive drinking is involved. Greek courts impose heavy fines or prison sentences on people who behave indecently.
- If you need to contact the emergency services call 112. Calling 999 from a UK mobile in Greece will automatically transfer you to the Greek emergency services.
General travel advice

The FCO has a simple message for travellers heading overseas: to help ensure you have the best time possible, make the necessary preparations before you go. Here are some key steps to take:

- Fully research the destination you intend to visit before travelling. It is a good idea to find out the local laws and customs of the relevant country – there may be serious penalties for breaking a law that might seem trivial at home. For more information visit [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice).

- Whatever your age or fitness level, take out comprehensive travel insurance and ensure you are covered for all of the activities you intend to do, such as moped or quad bike hire. Remember that most insurers won’t pay out if you injure yourself or others when under the influence of alcohol.

- If travelling within the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland, get a free European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) to give you free or reduced cost emergency care. You still need full travel insurance though as the EHIC doesn’t cover other costs such as returning you to the UK. You can call 112 to contact the emergency services in any EU country.

- Research the health risks of the country you are visiting as soon as possible before travelling, so you can get the right vaccinations and take other preventative measures if required (e.g. malaria tablets). Visit [http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/travelhealth/Pages/Travelhealthhome.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/travelhealth/Pages/Travelhealthhome.aspx) for more information.

- Check your passport is valid for your full trip (some countries require 6 months validity from the end of your visit), and has next of kin details filled in. Be sure you have all necessary visas.

- Don’t take risks with the law abroad – or you could end up throwing years of your life away in a foreign prison. Many countries have a zero-tolerance approach to offences involving drugs and alcohol and sentences can be long.

- Take enough money with you, and make sure you have access to emergency funds. Don’t keep all your money in the same place.

- Value your passport and keep it safe. Make two photocopies of your passport – leave one with friends or family and take the second with you, or store it online using a secure data storage site.

- Tell family or friends in the UK where you are going, and leave emergency contact details with them.

- If you plan to drive overseas, familiarise yourself with local driving laws and make sure your licence is current and valid where you are going.

- Find out where the nearest British Embassy or Consulate will be and note the contact details. For more information visit [https://www.gov.uk/government/world](https://www.gov.uk/government/world).

- For more information visit [https://www.gov.uk/knowbeforeyougo](https://www.gov.uk/knowbeforeyougo). If you have any enquiries for FCO consular staff before you go or while abroad you can ask questions via the FCO’s Twitter service [@FCOtravel](https://twitter.com/FCOtravel). This service adds to the ways that British people travelling or living overseas can already get in touch with the FCO: by emailing the travel advice team or contacting local consular staff.

*The FCO travel advice provided in this report is up-to-date at the time of writing and is subject to change.*
### What the FCO can and cannot do to help British nationals abroad

The FCO’s priority is protecting the welfare of British nationals abroad, and consular staff overseas will do their best to assist people when they suffer serious problems abroad. However, it is important to know what the FCO can and cannot do to help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The FCO can:</th>
<th>The FCO cannot:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue you with an emergency travel document</td>
<td>Help you enter a country if you do not have a valid passport or necessary visas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide information about transferring money</td>
<td>Give you legal advice or translate documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide help if you have suffered rape or serious sexual or physical assault, are a victim of crime, are ill or in hospital</td>
<td>Investigate crimes or get you out of prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give you a list of local lawyers, interpreters, doctors or funeral directors</td>
<td>Get you better treatment in hospital or prison than is given to local people, but we will raise concerns if treatment falls below internationally recognised standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact you if you are detained abroad</td>
<td>Pay any bills or give you money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact friends and family back home for you if you wish</td>
<td>Make travel arrangements for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide help in cases of forced marriage</td>
<td>Assist people affected by parental child abduction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>