

## Tourism trends quarterly bulletin Visitor statistics for the peak season 2008: (Q3)

### **Introduction**

This bulletin provides the key findings of the tourism monitor for the peak season which was July 14<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008. Where possible, comparisons are made with previous research dating back to 2002.

Before focusing on travel to and from the Isle of Wight, it is worth looking at trends within international and domestic travel. For the second year in succession, there has been a slight decline in international travel during July and August (-1.2%).<sup>1</sup> Travel abroad by UK residents reached 15.2 million trips, down by 2% on 2007. Visits to the UK from residents abroad were level with last year at 6.7 million, but remain 7% below 2006. Figures for domestic travel.<sup>2</sup> (July only – August not available) show that staying trips across the UK were down by 4% but within England these were down by 8% versus 2007.

Consumer confidence was at a very low level; it was around half the level of the 2007 peak season and on a downward trend. In addition, the proportion concerned about employment prospects has risen significantly. Petrol prices continued to increase and some operators were adding fuel surcharges, pushing up the cost of foreign holidays; in addition, Sterling remained weak against the Euro. Alongside this there were several travel companies that collapsed during the peak season, the most notable and publicised was the XL Leisure Group.

The weather across the UK was unseasonably wet during this peak season and August was the dullest on record for almost 100 years. This, combined with the low level of consumer confidence, made for a difficult trading period.

The Island featured a strong schedule of events to boost tourism and was well placed to attract domestic holidaymakers who had decided to stay in the UK rather than holiday abroad. However against this negative economic backdrop, it is not surprising to see that the total number of visitors to the Island decreased by 4% versus last year, to an estimated 600,000 visits. Domestic staying visits were also down by 4%, in line with the decline seen in domestic UK travel but the Isle of Wight fared better than domestic tourism across England.

Within this total there were some sectors where increases were achieved and there was evidence of the economic climate and weather affecting the mix of visitors coming to the Island.

During the peak season, domestic holiday/short break visits are the most important category both in terms of volume and value. There were an estimated 253,000 which is a fall of 4.5% versus last year. This fall was due to a reduction in longer holidays, whilst short breaks increased versus last year, suggesting that visitors have traded down to a shorter holiday rather than miss out altogether. Short breaks reached a new record high level:

- Domestic long holidays (5+ nights) reached 145,000, a significant fall versus last year (-12%);
- Domestic short breaks increased to 108,000: 8% ahead of last year and 4% up on the previous high point for short breaks in the summer peak season, recorded in 2006.

N.B. Data included in this bulletin is taken from research conducted on board the six ferry routes to the Island. Isle of Wight Tourism, Shanklin weather centre and Medina Valley Centre supply additional data.

1. International travel trends are taken from the IPS, a government survey. Data is not seasonally adjusted.
2. UKTS data from Visit Britain.

Other key points in this summer peak were:

- Staying visits to friends/relatives decreased by 5% returning to the level seen in 2006.
- Domestic day trips decreased by 4% to 222,000.
- Staying visits by overseas residents increased but these were offset by a decrease in day visits, hence total trips by overseas residents decreased by 5%.
- Business visits (day and staying) increased.
- 147,000 new or lapsed (for 5+ years) visitors came to the Island on a leisure trip, over 60% were staying visitors. (Domestic and overseas residents combined.)
- Just over half of all leisure visitors (52%) went to an attraction; certain types of visitors were much more likely to visit attractions: new visitors to the Island (63%); family groups (69%) and those on a main holiday (86%) or short break (62%). There was an increase in the percentage visiting free attractions, up 6 points to 17%, suggesting that visitors were searching for lower budget activities.

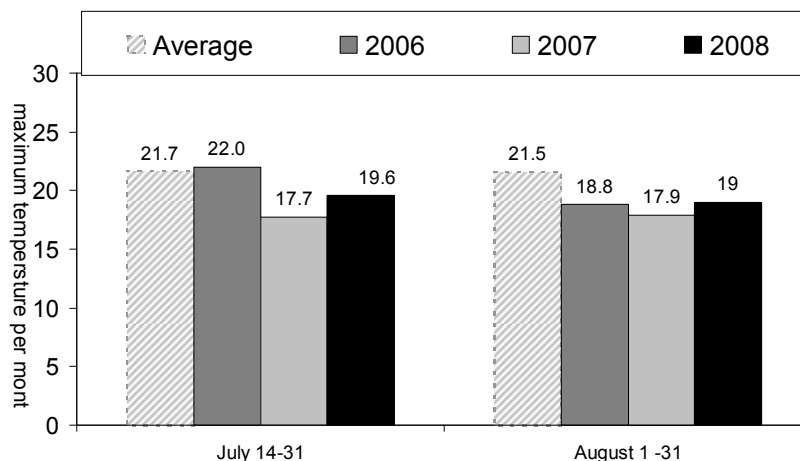
This mix of visitors to the Island contributed an estimated £105 million to the Island economy during the peak season. This is 2% down on last year (excluding inflation).

### Weather

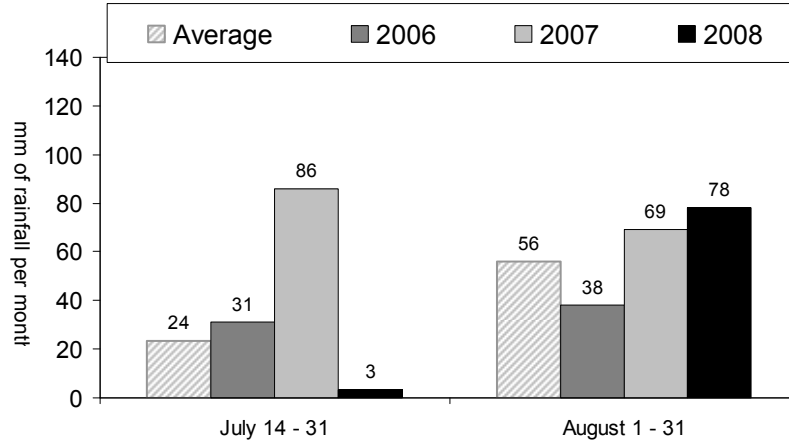
The weather in the latter half of July was an improvement on early July, when the Island experienced double the usual rainfall. In the second part of the month sunshine hours were just below average resulting in temperatures a little below average but there was very little rain. This was a vast improvement on late July last year.

August brought a complete change and a return to the unseasonably wet and cool weather seen in early July. This was the wettest August since 1969; maximum temperatures were the lowest since 1992 and it was the dullest August in more than 20 years. This weather created a difficult trading environment, particularly for any spontaneous trips such as day trips or last minute holidays.

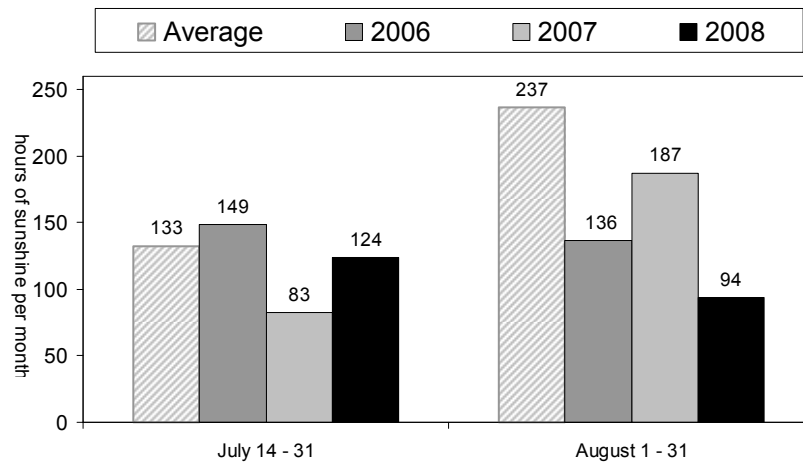
**Maximum temperatures on the Isle of Wight  
Peak season 2008 vs. long term average and recent years**



### Rainfall on the Isle of Wight Peak season 2008 vs. long term average and recent years



### Sunshine on the Isle of Wight Peak season 2008 vs. long term average and recent years



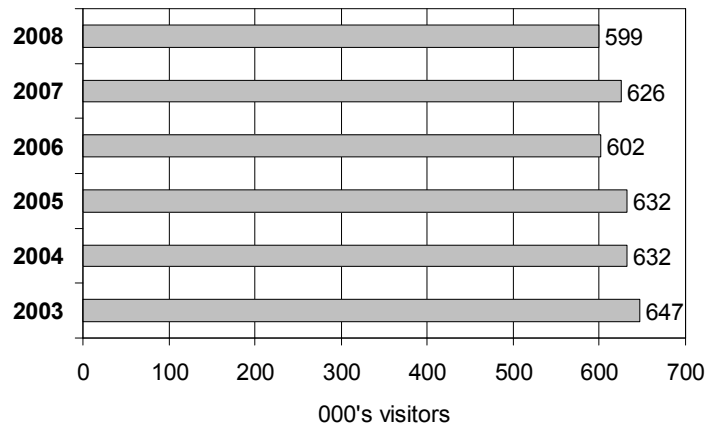
### Total travel across the Solent

During the summer peak season total travel across the Solent (residents and visitors combined) was down 4% versus last year and down by 6% since summer 1996. This fall is due to a reduction in both travel by visitors and by residents, although it is the number of visitors which has fallen the most (visitor travel -4.3%; resident travel -2.2%).

### Total visitors to the Isle of Wight

Over the seven week summer peak, it is estimated that just under 600,000 visits were made to the Island. This is 4% below 2007 but level with 2006.

**Estimated number of total visitors  
Peak season 2008 vs. previous years**



Some customer segments increased whilst others decreased in number and these changes are discussed in the remainder of this report .

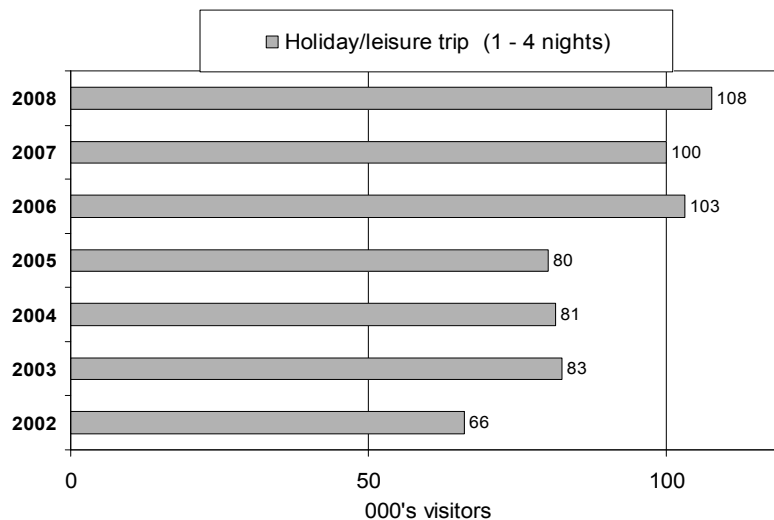
### Estimated number of domestic leisure short breaks

An important customer segment is domestic short break visitors (staying 1 – 4 nights). These reached an estimated 108,000, a record high during the peak season. This is an 8% rise on last year and 4% ahead of the previous high point recorded in 2006. This is the third year when the volume of short breaks has remained significantly ahead of the levels which were the norm from 2001 to 2005.

Further analysis of short breaks shows that it is the 4 night stays which fuelled the increase, there was a decline in the 1-3 night stays.

The expansion of this customer segment, away from longer holidays (see below) to short stays suggests that, during times of lower financial confidence, people are trading down to shorter holidays rather than not take a holiday at all.

**Estimated number of domestic short break leisure visitors  
Peak season 2008 vs. previous years**

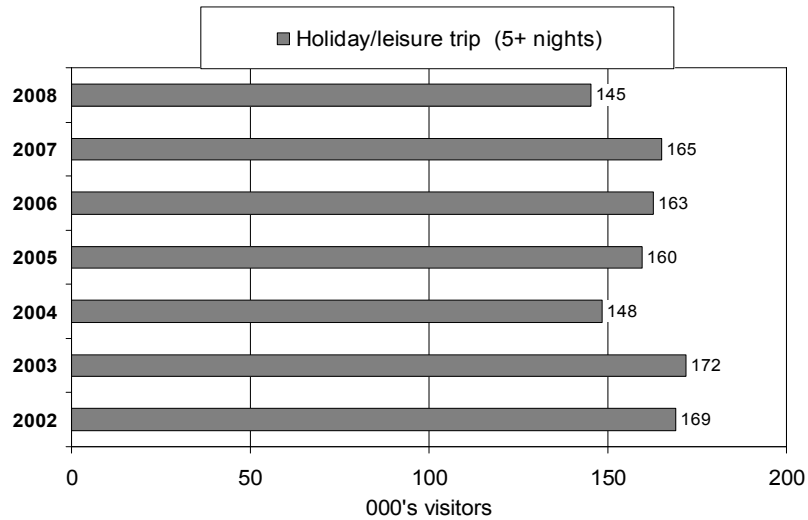


### Estimated number of longer stay domestic leisure visitors

During this short peak season, domestic visitors on longer holidays (5+ nights duration) are extremely important to the tourist business. Their high value arises from the length of time they spend on the Island, hence their need for accommodation/food, plus their propensity to visit attractions.

It is estimated that 145,000 long holidays were taken on the Island during the peak season. Whilst this is still the largest group of visitors at this time of year, this is a significant drop versus 2007 (-12%) and 2006 (-11%) and, after a period of growth in this sector, takes longer holidays back to the level seen in 2004.

### Estimated number of domestic longer stay leisure visitors Peak season 2008 vs. previous years

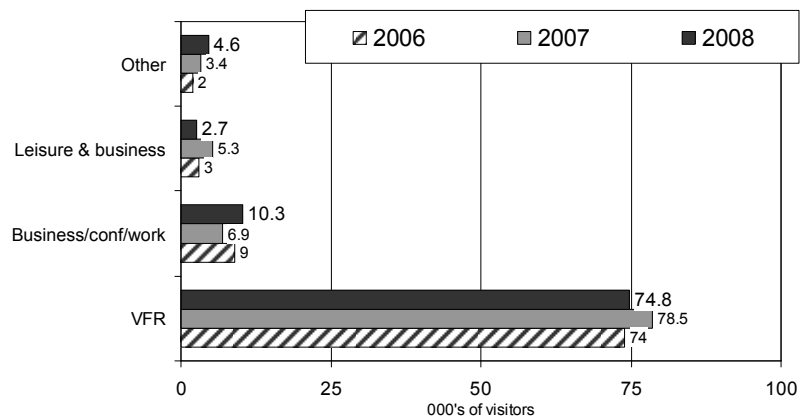


### Other domestic staying visitors

The other key motivation to visit the Island on a staying trip is to visit friends/relatives. There were 75,000 visits, down by 5% versus last year but level with 2006.

Staying business visits plus combined business and leisure visits are traditionally at a very low level during the peak season – together these reached 13,000 visits, up by 6% on the last two years.

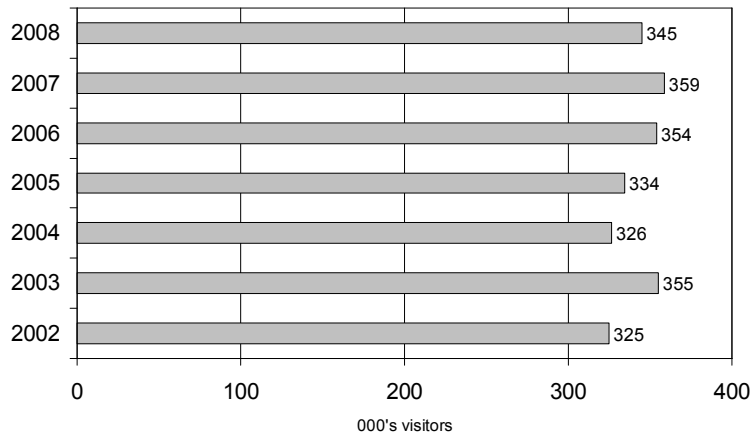
### Purpose of other domestic staying visits Peak season 2008 vs. previous years



## Total number of domestic staying visitors

Taking all types of domestic staying visits into account, there were an estimated 345,000 staying visitors, a fall of 4% versus last year and 2% below 2006 but ahead of the previous two years. To recap, this fall is due to fewer longer holidays and a slight reduction in VFR trips.

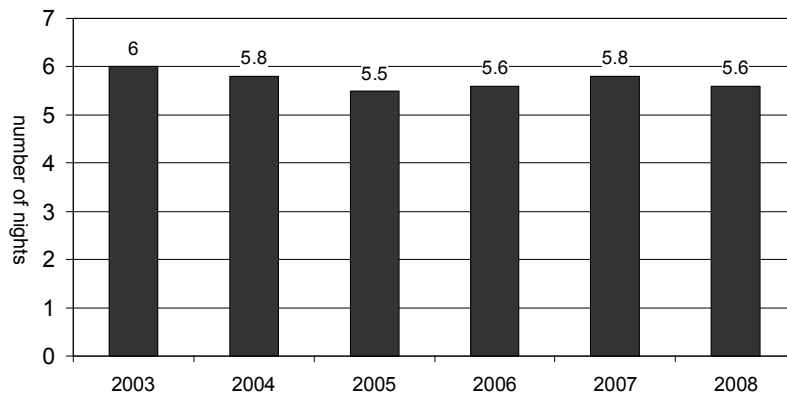
Estimated number of domestic staying visitors  
Peak season 2008 vs. previous years



## Average length of stay

The peak season average length of all domestic staying trips was 5.6 nights, which is at a similar level to the previous four years. Whilst the number of longer stay holidays has declined, the duration of these remained very similar to last year, at 8.7 nights. Short breaks were very slightly longer than last year, at 2.9 nights versus 2.7 nights; this combined with the increased number helped to limit the overall decrease in length of stay.

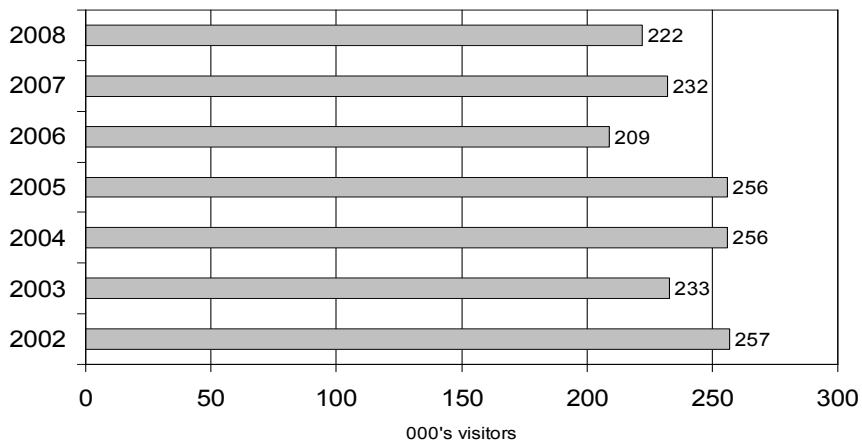
Average length of stay  
Peak season 2008 vs. previous years



### Estimated number of domestic day trips

Day visits are an important part of the tourism business during the peak season, bringing additional visitors and revenue even when accommodation may be filled to capacity. Given the very wet weather, it is not surprising to see that the number of day visitors fell slightly versus last year, down 4% to an estimated 222,000, however this remains up on 2006 by 6%.

**Estimated number of domestic day visitors  
Peak season 2008 vs. previous years**



Two thirds of these day trips were leisure day visits (150,000) and the majority of these (75%) were day trips starting from home (112,000); the remainder were day trips taken by people whilst they were holidaying nearby on the mainland. The spontaneous nature of these trips combined with the wet weather resulted in a decrease for both types (-12% day trips from home; -14% day trips whilst on holiday).

During the peak season, business and work related day trips are a small part of the market, however these did increase by significantly to reach 42,000.

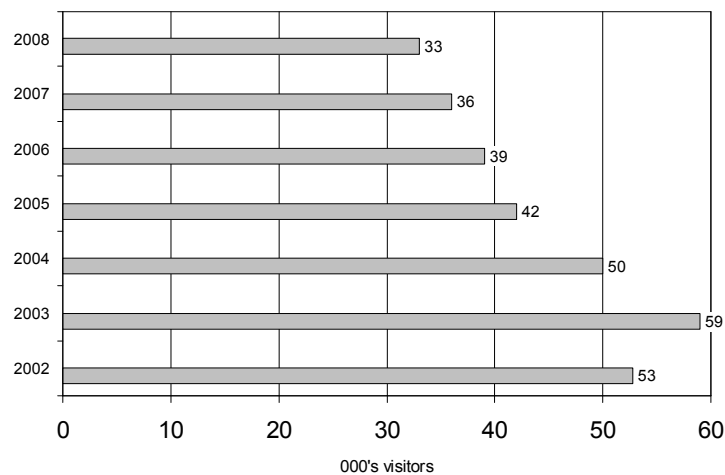
VFR day trips also tend to be at a low level in the peak season, there were 26,000, a slight decrease on last year.

### Estimated number of visitors from overseas residents

The number of residents from overseas visiting the Island in the peak season has been declining for a number of years. This reached a high point in 2003 but, since that time has declined each summer. This year visitor numbers declined by 9%.

As a proportion of total visits, visitors from overseas make up a very small part – approximately 5%.

**Estimated number of overseas visitors  
Peak season 2008 vs. previous years**



The fall in visitors was due to a decline of 8,000 day visitors, taking these to their lowest level in recent years; staying visitors from overseas increased by 4,000.

000's trips	2005	2006	2007	2008
Staying trips	23	26	17	21
Day trips	18	13	19	11

N.B. These estimates are based on small sample sizes

Main reasons for these visits included:

- Holidays/short breaks – 13,000;
- Leisure day visits – 10,000;
- Visits to friends/relatives – day and staying combined – 5,000.

N.B. All estimates of overseas residents visiting are based on small sample sizes which results in fluctuations from year to year

New versus repeat visits to the Island

Day and staying leisure visitors are asked when they last visited the Isle of Wight, if at all. The following data excludes those visiting friends and relatives as these are, by definition, likely to be repeat visitors. (4% of VFR visitors were on their first visit to the Island.) The survey identifies first time visitors, those who are recent repeat visitors (in the last year and within the last 5 years), and lapsed visitors who have visited before but not in the last 5 years.

The Island has a loyal following with almost two fifths of both leisure day visitors and holidaymakers on a second or subsequent visit in the last 12 months. However this proportion is down considerably from the peak season last year (-9 points for leisure day visits; -10 points for holidays).

Day visitors: this peak season, there has been a slight increase in the number of new leisure day visitors - almost a fifth of day visitors were on their first trip to the Island. In addition the proportion of long term lapsed (5+ years ago ) visitors and recently lapsed (1 – 5 years ago) visitors increased slightly.

Holidays/Short breaks: 17% were on their first visit, in line with last year. There was a big increase in recently lapsed visitors (+8 points) and a small increase in long term lapsed visitors.

	<b>Leisure Day visitors (not VFR)</b>	
	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
First visit to Island	16%	19%
Visited before in last 12 months	48%	39%
Visited before 12 months to 5 years ago	22%	25%
Visited before but more than 5 years ago	15%	17%

	<b>Short break/holiday visitors (not VFR)</b>	
	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
First visit to Island	18%	17%
Visited before in last 12 months	48%	38%
Visited before 12 months to 5 years ago	19%	27%
Visited before but more than 5 years ago	16%	18%

Based upon these visitor patterns, it is estimated that 147,000 new or lapsed (5+ years) visitors came to the Island during the peak season; over 60% of these were higher value holiday/short break visitors, the remainder were day visitors.

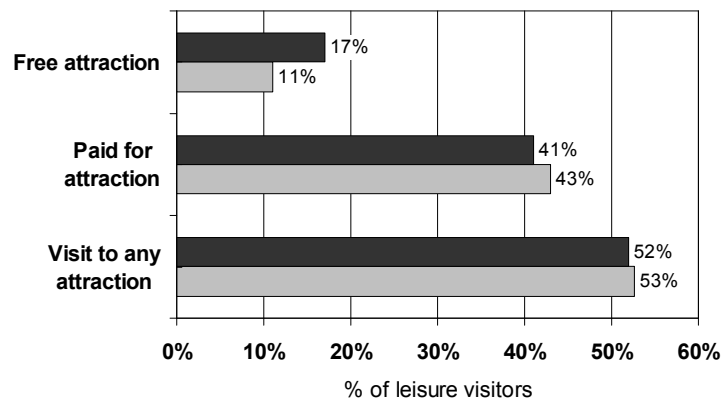
<b>000's new/lapsed 5+ years visitors</b>	<b>Leisure Day visitors (not VFR)</b>	<b>Short break/holiday visitors (not VFR)</b>

First visit to Island	29	46
Visited before but more than 5 years ago	26	46
All new or lapsed (5+ years) visitors	55	92

## Visits to attractions

Propensity to visit any attraction was in line with last year at 52%; 43% visited attractions charging a fee and 17% a free attraction. It is the increased propensity to visit free attractions which is a marked change since last year – this may reflect visitors' need to find additional indoor activities due to the poor weather or it could be a sign that people were searching out lower budget activities.

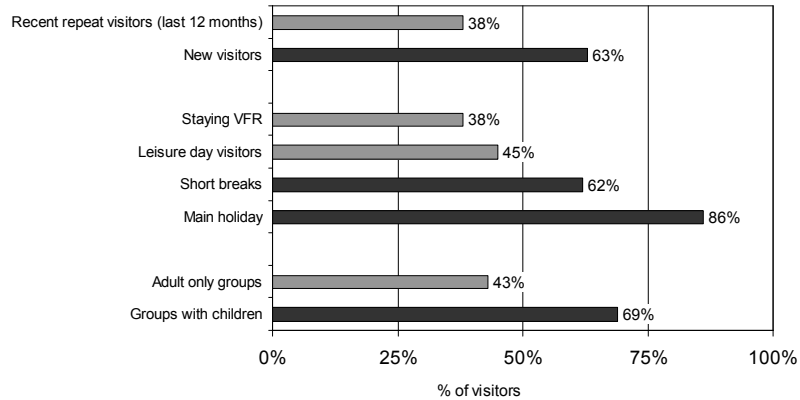
**Estimated visits to types of attractions  
Peak season 2008 versus 2007**



Propensity to visit attractions differs considerably between various visitor segments:

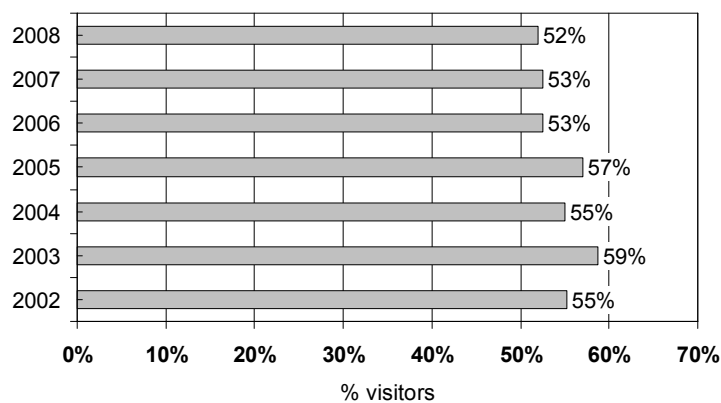
- New visitors to the Island were much more likely to visit attractions (63%) than those regular visitors who have been at least once before in the last 12 months (38%);
- Visitor groups with children were much more likely to visit an attraction: 69% of these did so whereas only 43% of adult only groups went to an attraction;
- Holiday and short break visitors were more likely to visit attractions (86% and 62%) than leisure day visitors (45%) or those visiting friends/relatives (38%).

## Estimated visits to attractions Peak season 2008



Looking at the trend over the longer term, visits to any attractions have been at the same level over the last three years; prior to this propensity to visit fluctuated around a slightly higher level.

## Estimated visits to any type of attraction Peak season 2008 vs. previous years



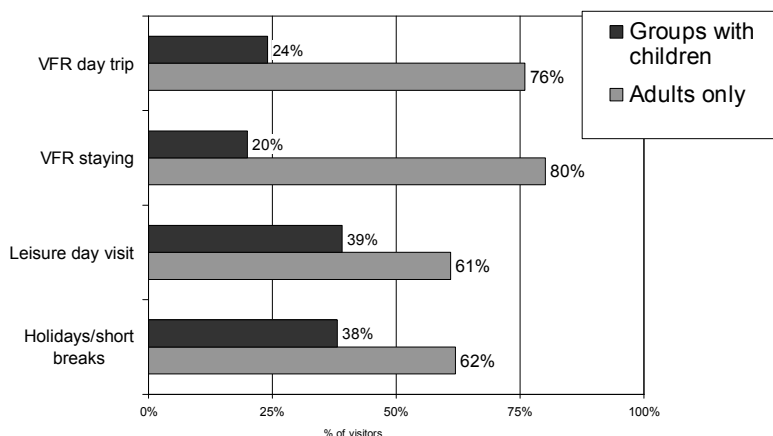
### Importance of families

Visitors are asked about the presence of children in their travelling party. Any under the age of 14 are noted. This age was decided upon as it was felt that children's needs/desires change considerably above this age.

Adult only groups dominate the visitor market, even during this short peak season. The highest incidence of families was amongst the two biggest visitor groups, those taking a holiday/short break and those on a leisure day visit: almost two fifths had children in their group.

Amongst those visiting friends/relatives, the presence of families was lower.

### Presence of children in party Peak season 2008 (domestic visitors)



### Mode of transport

All visitors are asked how they travel to the mainland terminal and around the Island. Mode of travel on board the ferry is also recorded and used to estimate the overall split between visitors travelling as car, coach and foot passengers.

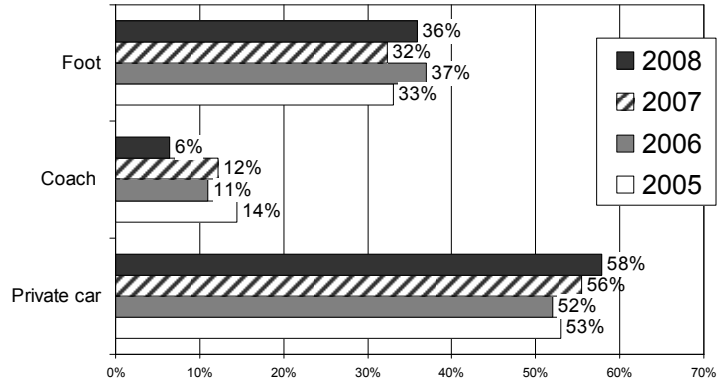
N.B. This question was added to the survey in 2005.

### Mode of travel on board the ferry

Over half the visitors travel by car and this has gained importance over the 4 year period. This summer 58% travelled to the Island by car.

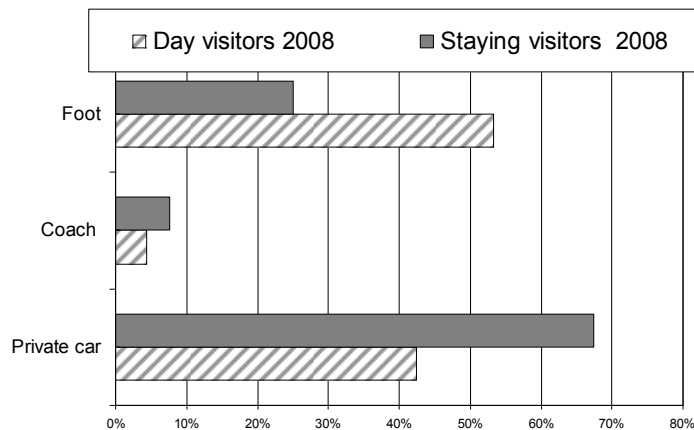
The proportion travelling on foot has fluctuated a little but hovers around a third, this summer it rose slightly to 36%. Travel by coach dropped several points to 6% of visitors.

### Mode of travel to/from the Island Peak season 2008 vs. previous years



The travel patterns of day and staying visitors are quite different; the car dominates travel for staying visitors –two thirds arrived by car- but amongst foot passengers car use reduced to two fifths and the majority travelled by foot. Use of coaches was at a similar low level amongst day and staying visitors.

**Mode of travel to/from the Island  
Peak season 2008**

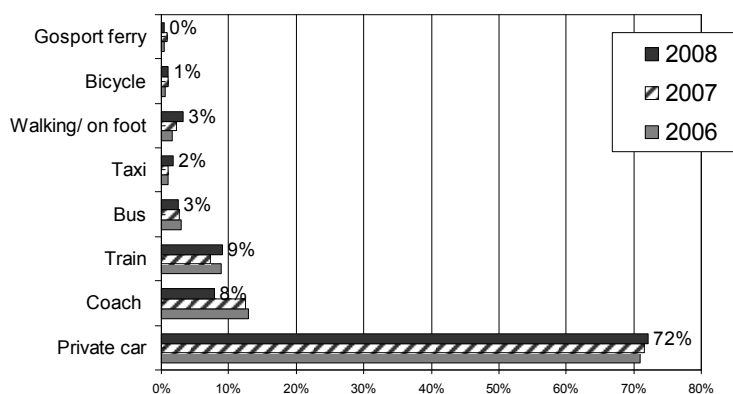


Mode of transport to the mainland terminal

The majority of visitors travelled to the mainland port by car (72%), excluding those who were given a lift to the port, it is estimated that 12% needed mainland car parking. Car use is level with last year. Train travel was at 9% followed by coach travel at 8%.

Choice of transport to the mainland terminal by day and staying visitors was very similar.

**Transport used to travel to the mainland terminal  
Peak season 2008 vs. previous years**

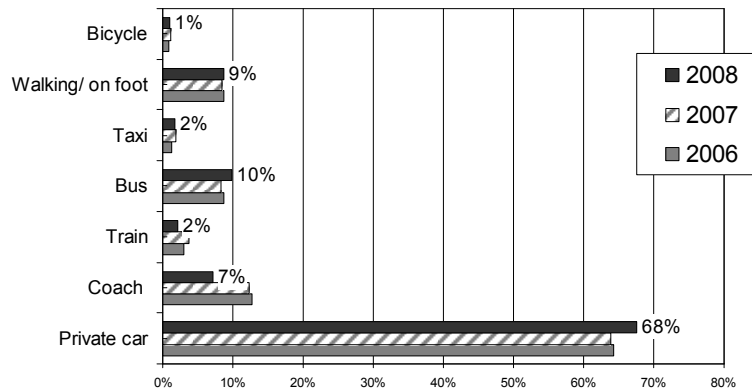


N.B. It is assumed that anyone travelling with their own car on the ferry uses that as their main mode of transport to the port. Likewise, those travelling with a coach on the ferry are assumed to travel by coach to the port.

## Mode of transport to travel around the Island

Once on the Island, visitors continue to travel primarily by car, two thirds chose the car to travel around. Local bus services were used by 10%, up slightly on previous years, and 9% walked.

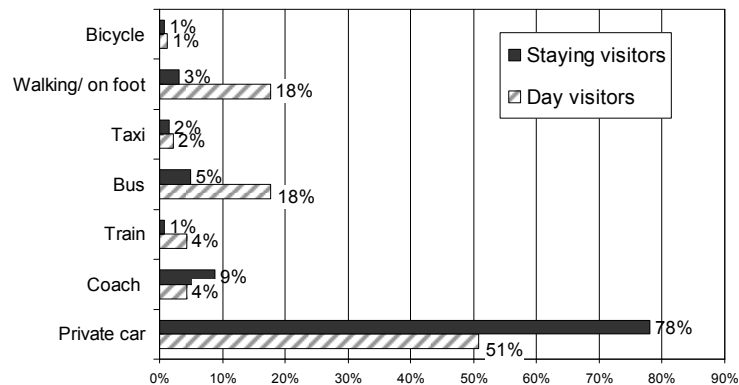
Transport used to travel around the Island  
Peak season 2008 vs. previous years



Choice of travel differs between day and staying visitors:

- Day visitors were much more likely to walk and made more use of public transport than staying visitors. Versus last summer, use of cars was up by 7 points and of buses by 3 points, which may reflect the need to shelter from inclement weather;
- Staying visitors travelled predominately by private car.

Transport used to travel around the Island  
Day versus staying visitors  
Peak season 2008



N.B. It is assumed that anyone travelling with their own car on the ferry uses that as their main mode of transport around the Island. Likewise, those travelling with a coach on the ferry are assumed to travel by coach on the Island.



## Value of tourism

The value of tourism during this peak period is estimated at £105 million, which is 2% down on the peak season last year (excluding inflation).

Whilst visitor numbers fell by 4%, the value has reduced to a lesser degree. This is due to the increase in short breaks, particularly those lasting 4 nights, increased business trips and the increase in overseas residents on staying visits.

Staying trips were worth £96 million, the vast majority of which, £88 million, was from domestic staying trips. Day trips contributed £9 million, again most of this was derived from domestic day trips.

Staying trips	
All domestic staying trips	£88 million
All overseas staying trips	£8 million
<u>All staying trips</u>	<u>£96 million</u>
Day trips	
All domestic day trips	£8.5 million
All overseas day trips	£0.5 million
<u>All domestic day trips</u>	<u>£9 million</u>

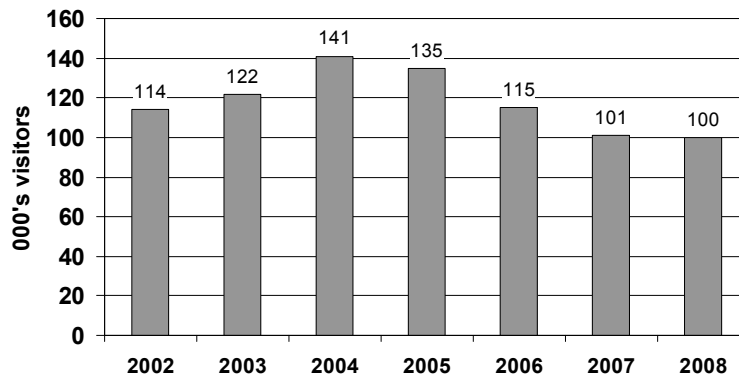
N.B. Spending by visitors is based on visitors arriving by ferry; base value figures are taken from UKTS estimates produced for the Isle of Wight and the GB Leisure Day Visits survey estimates. These are adjusted annually for inflation using the RPI (all items RP04).

## Activity at Island Tourist Information Centres

There were 100,000 visitors to the Island TIC's during the peak season, which is level with last year.

The average spend per head was up significantly on last year. This was £12.88, an increase of 70%; this is due in part to a wider range of high value products for Island residents.

Number of visitors to TIC offices  
Peak season 2008 vs. previous years



## islandbreaks.co.uk website activity

There were 160,640 visits to the website during the period from 14<sup>th</sup> July to 31<sup>st</sup> August. Whilst the figures for July were up on last year (+14% for the month), visits to the site in August were down (-8%).

## Occupancy statistics

The Isle of Wight occupancy statistics for the peak summer season 2008 will be issued in a separate bulletin.