



TRAVEL BY AUSTRALIANS

YEAR ENDING MARCH 2020

OVERNIGHT SPEND ▲6%
\$78.8 BILLION

OVERNIGHT TRIPS ▲3%
112.3 MILLION

NIGHTS ▲5%
405 MILLION

Domestic overnight tourism results showed considerable growth for the year ending March 2020, despite the effects of the Australian 2019–20 summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.

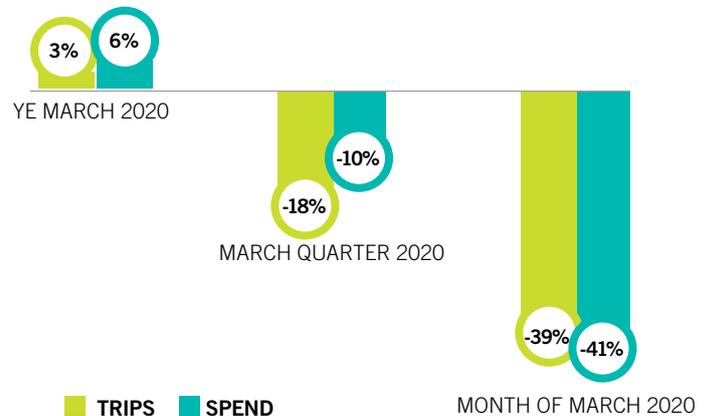
In the year to March 2020, Australian residents spent a total of \$78.8 billion on domestic overnight travel, up 6% on the previous year. The number of overnight trips taken by Australians had also increased by 3% to 112.3 million, with 405 million nights away from home. This highlights the strong growth in domestic tourism through 2019, with 12% growth for both trips and nights. A sharp decline in domestic travel followed over the March quarter of 2020.

The combination of Australian bushfires and COVID-19 had a significant impact on visitors in the March quarter. Overnight visitors fell 18% in the quarter while spend fell 10%. The Australian bushfires showed their impact on domestic overnight travel results in January and February of 2020, with a decline in trips of 6% and 7% compared with the same month in the previous year. Without any time for recovery, the effects of COVID-19 were even greater. By March, visitor numbers plummeted by 39% and spend fell significantly, down 41% or by \$2.6 billion.

TABLE 1: DOMESTIC OVERNIGHT TRIPS AND SPEND, MARCH QUARTER 2019–20

OVERNIGHT VISITORS ('000)			
	2019	2020	CHANGE
JANUARY	11,290	10,657	▼ 6%
FEBRUARY	8,140	7,548	▼ 7%
MARCH	10,053	6,116	▼ 39%
MARCH QUARTER	29,483	24,321	▼ 18%
OVERNIGHT SPEND (\$ BILLIONS)			
	2019	2020	CHANGE
JANUARY	\$8.5	\$9.3	▲ 9%
FEBRUARY	\$5.0	\$4.7	▼ 5%
MARCH	\$6.4	\$3.8	▼ 41%
MARCH QUARTER	\$19.8	\$17.9	▼ 10%

FIGURE 1: OVERNIGHT TRIPS AND SPEND – CHANGE ON PREVIOUS YEAR



IMPACTS OF 2019–20 BUSHFIRES ON TRAVEL

IMPACTS TO THE STATES AND TERRITORIES

Over the summer of 2019–20, hundreds of bushfires burnt across all states and territories of Australia, particularly in the southeast of the country. This had a greater tourism impact on some states and regions than others, with visitors deterred from some locations due to immediate fire threats, road closures or reduced air quality. January 2020 results¹ saw the sharpest fall in visitor numbers in New South Wales (NSW), dropping 16% from January 2019 to 3.3 million trips. At this time, NSW had many fires burning out of control, impacting multiple regions including the South Coast, Sydney’s far west and between Canberra and the Victorian border. Trips to South Australia also dropped (down 7% to 750,000) where fires heavily impacted Kangaroo Island and parts of the mainland including the Adelaide Hills. Queensland (down 6% to 2.2 million) had also seen a decline over this period.

February results saw a recovery in trips for NSW with conditions improving for some areas (such as the Blue Mountains). There was almost no change in visitation on the previous year (down 1%). The hardest hit state at this time was the ACT, with visitor numbers down 34% to 184,000. The region was experiencing some of its worst air quality on record and a State of Emergency was declared early in the month due to fires threatening Canberra.



Domestic travel to Victoria and South Australia was also heavily affected (down 14% and 11% respectively), with Melbourne also experiencing hazardous air-quality levels.

TABLE 2: VISITORS BY STATE FOR JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2020²

	JAN		FEB	
	VISITORS (000')	CHANGE	VISITORS (000')	CHANGE
NSW	3,325	-16%	2,402	-1%
VIC	3,058	2%	1,976	-14%
QLD	2,214	-6%	1,549	-3%
SA	749	-7%	524	-11%
WA	1,095	10%	751	-4%
TAS	396	12%	258	-5%
NT ⁴	np	np	98	-1%
ACT	228	22%	184	-34%

IMPACTS TO PLANNED TRIPS

Over the March quarter, 13% of Australians who had trips planned from Christmas onwards changed their travel plans due to the bushfires⁵. This was greater for Australians residing in NSW (18%). Many of the trips planned or taken between Christmas 2019 and the time of interview were either cancelled or cut short (55%). More positively, others chose to delay their trip to another time (28%) or travel elsewhere (15%).

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON TRAVEL

The first confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported in Australia on 25 January 2020. By 11 March, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a pandemic. In late March, Australia imposed strict social distancing rules, closed down non-essential services such as restaurants, pubs and tour operators, and stopped all non-essential travel between state and territory borders. All of these measures had a significant impact on domestic tourism. By March, overnight trips and spend had fallen significantly (down 39% and 41% respectively) compared with the previous year.

This downturn was experienced across all states and territories.

TABLE 3: VISITORS AND SPEND BY STATE FOR MARCH 2020³

	MARCH			
	VISITORS (000')	CHANGE	SPEND (\$M)	CHANGE
NSW	2,010	-35%	1,128	-37%
VIC	1,704	-41%	882	-41%
QLD	1,138	-45%	721	-50%
SA	490	-29%	307	-31%
WA	571	-39%	388	-39%
TAS	193	-46%	205	-33%
NT	76	-19%	74	-33%
ACT	146	-47%	111	-32%

During March 2020, survey respondents were asked about the impacts of COVID-19 on their domestic and international travel plans. One-in-three residents had changed travel plans for trips within Australia (both past and future). For those that had past trips impacted:

- 66% cancelled the trip and didn't go anywhere else
- 28% delayed or postponed the trip and didn't go anywhere else
- 6% cancelled a trip they were already on.

However, there was more of a propensity to postpone rather than cancel those domestic trips planned in the future. This has been increasing as restrictions are being lifted and there is more certainty around travel. Survey respondents reported that:

- 55% were cancelling a trip, and not planning on going anywhere else
- 45% were delaying or postponing a trip
- 3% were changing the location of a trip within Australia⁶.

Further, one-in-four residents had changed their overseas travel plans. Most of these changes were to trips planned in the future (85%). Almost half (48%) cancelled their trips altogether, while a similar proportion postponed their plans (46%), and a small minority had to cut short their trip while travelling (3%). For those that cancelled their trip, 58% had paid for either flights, accommodation and/or tours in advance. Of those who had made payments, 69% had received a full or partial refund but 33% had not received a refund⁷.



FUTURE TRAVEL

While March quarter results showed a large reduction in tourism, Australia's success to date in 'flattening the curve' of COVID-19 has provided the opportunity to slowly ease restrictions and re-open some state borders for non-essential travel. A continuation along this path would provide potential for a gradual recovery of Australia's tourism industry, with domestic tourism contributing 70% of total tourism dollars generated (\$107 billion) during 2019 prior to the pandemic. With outbound travel by Australian residents limited, there is also potential for Australians to redirect some of the \$65.5 billion they spent overseas in 2019 on travel within Australia.

TRAVEL INTENTIONS

Data collected in the NVS during May and June of 2020 on domestic travel intentions showed that:

- more than one-quarter of Australian residents (29%) planned to take either a domestic day or overnight trip within the next month
- over half (53%) planned to take a domestic trip within the next 3 months
- most (80%) intended to undertake a domestic trip within the next 12 months.

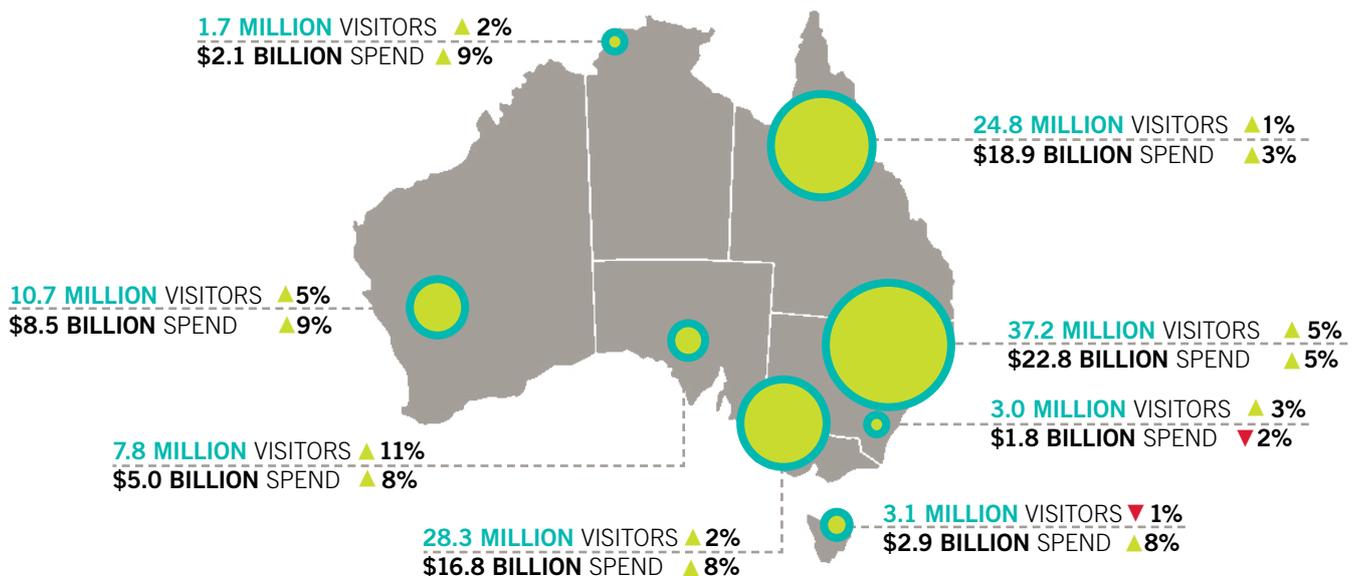
Of the Australians planning a domestic trip, 59% were planning to take the trip in their own state or territory, while 34% were planning to travel interstate and 4% were planning to travel both intrastate and interstate.

Results also showed that while 14% of Australian residents are planning to travel less in Australia in the coming year, 16% are looking to travel more and 60% about the same as before the COVID-19 global health pandemic.

STATE AND TERRITORY RESULTS FOR YEAR ENDING MARCH 2020

Almost all states and territories recorded growth in domestic overnight visitation and spend during the year ending March 2020.

FIGURE 4: OVERNIGHT TRIPS AND SPEND BY STATE, YE MARCH 2020⁸



1 January results includes trips that ended in January, therefore will include some trips that also fell in December if they returned home in January.

2, 3 Total number of visitors by state will be greater than total number of visitors for Australia.

4 Np = not for publication, sample for Northern Territory January results are too small to provide reliable estimates.

5 Asked of respondents in the NVS from 21 January to 15 March 2020.

6, 7 Sum adds to more than 100 as some respondents had more than one trip planned.

8 Total number of visitors by state will be greater than total number of visitors for Australia.