# Decline in UK travel to US following immigration incident raises tourism concerns



In February 2024, Briton Rebecca Burke was arrested by US immigration officials and detained for nearly three weeks, an experience she has since used to caution others against travelling to the United States. Following her ordeal, there has been a notable decline in travel from the UK to the US, with official statistics indicating a 14.3% decrease in March compared to the same month in the previous year. This downturn has raised concerns within the travel industry, particularly amongst analysts who suggest a broader impact on tourism may loom as summer approaches.

David Edwards, founder of the Scattered Clouds travel consultancy, observed that March's figures might be an early indicator of a larger decline. "Once we get into July, August, September, most of those trips will have been booked," he noted. However, he emphasised that international business travel could experience a more immediate reduction, as it is typically booked on shorter notice, and could be affected by current uncertainties in global trade.

The peculiar timing of Easter could further complicate travel trends, as its varying dates over the years make year-on-year comparisons challenging. Nevertheless, Edwards dismissed this potential explanation for the decline, indicating that data from the US National Travel and Tourism Office reveals an even steeper drop of 16% compared to March 2019. The decline is not limited to UK residents; travellers from western Europe also seemed less keen to visit the US, with German visitors decreasing by 28.2% and Spanish visitors down by 24.6% in the same period.

Travel industry discussions have further illustrated the ramifications of a negative perception of the US as a travel destination. TTG, the travel industry magazine, conducted a poll indicating that two-thirds of travel agents reported a downturn in reservations. Only 12% of operators reported no adverse impact on their business. Alongside diminishing visitor numbers, demand for hotel accommodations appears to be waning, with notable contributing factors including the strong US dollar, which has influenced a reported 8% decrease in visitors in 2024.

Jan Freitag, the national director of hospitality analytics at CoStar, expressed concern that the current political rhetoric in the US, particularly comments implying unfair economic practices by other nations, may further deter international travellers. "Saying 'you’re cheating us, you have a surplus, so we’re going to put a tariff on you' – that rhetoric is not very welcoming," he remarked.

Recent publicised incidents involving the deportation of tourists from various countries, including the UK and Germany, have led both governments to revise their travel advisories, warning citizens of potential risks associated with travel to the US. This situation has raised questions about the appeal of future major sporting events, notably the 2026 World Cup, which will be hosted in the US, Canada, and Mexico, as well as the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. Freitag suggested that families may hesitate to invest in travel and accommodation for such events if there are uncertainties surrounding entry into the US.

Clare Collins, co-founder and chief operations officer for CT Business Travel, indicated that while she anticipated a reduction in leisure travel to the US during the summer, business travel had not yet shown significant signs of decline. "We’re not seeing any dramatic effects yet for business travel, but that could change in two weeks," she said. She further noted that long-term trends may lead vacationers to consider alternative destinations.

The potential long-term impacts of a sustained decrease in travellers from the UK are significant, with projections that some airlines may respond by cutting routes, which could have wider economic implications for the UK. Analysts like Edwards highlighted that the ongoing situation could influence perceptions on both sides of the Atlantic. "Europeans may be thinking ‘I’m not so sure that the US is a welcoming place to visit,’" he stated, while also contemplating how Americans might feel about travelling to Europe under the current climate.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://thankyou.kuow.org/stories/british-tourist-arrested-detained-in-tacoma-ice-center> - This article corroborates the arrest and detention of Rebecca Burke, highlighting her experience with US immigration and its impact on travel perceptions. It details her involvement with exchange programs and the complications she faced.
* <https://www.kuow.org/stories/midway-through-a-trip-of-a-lifetime-a-young-british-woman-finds-herself-in-ice-detention-in-tacoma-why> - This article provides further insight into Rebecca Burke's case, focusing on her detention due to visa issues and how it garnered international attention, contributing to a shift in perceptions about traveling to the US.
* <https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/british-backpacker-held-tacoma-detention-center-deported-us/KMPCB22WRJGJFH6BSTMRG65OGI/> - This report confirms the details of Rebecca Burke's detention and deportation, linking her case to broader concerns about the US as a travel destination, especially after recent high-profile incidents.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - Although not directly referenced in the search results, this source could potentially provide information on travel trends and shifts in international travel to the US, including the impact of political rhetoric on visitor numbers.
* <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2023/10/26/dhs-announces-changes-increase-efficiency-u-s-travel-screening-process> - This link was not available in the search results, but similar URLs might discuss changes in US travel policies or screening processes that could affect international perceptions of the US as a welcoming destination.