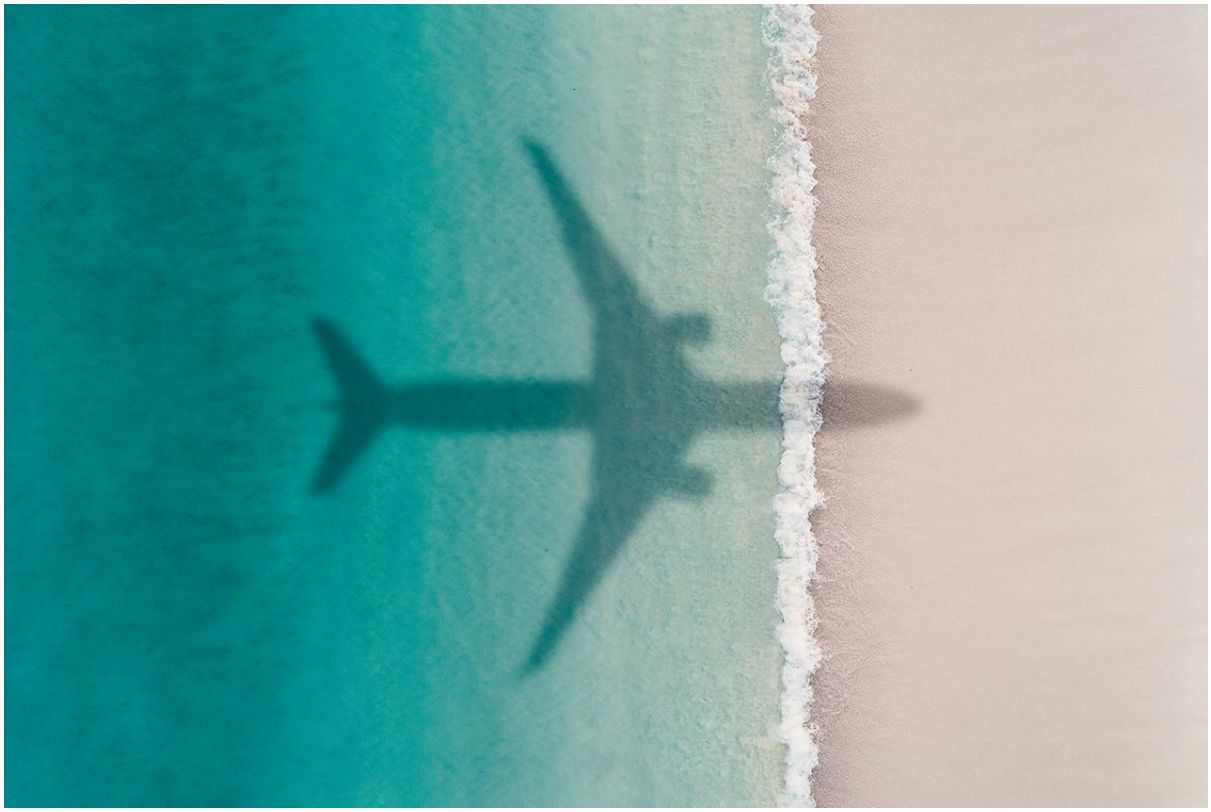
ABOUT THE COLLECTION OF

INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVAL STATISTICS



INTERNATIONAL ARRIVALS/FOREIGN AIR AND SEA ARRIVALS

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The Research & Statistics Department of the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism has collected international visitor arrival data for decades with official statistical records dating back to 1949. Data collection was originally recorded for Nassau/Paradise Island (New Providence) and in later years starting in 1957, other islands in The Bahamas.

The Statistics Department has always worked closely with the Department of Immigration on the collection of the arrivals using administrative data that is governed by the Immigration Act of the Bahamas. The legal framework that governs the collection of the data by the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism's Research and Statistics Department is based on the Immigration Act of the Bahamas.

The original Immigration Act of the Bahamas was introduced in 1967 and governs the collection of any necessary information that is needed for the processing of individuals entering the borders of the country. This section of the Act states "34. (1) The master of every ship or aircraft arriving in The Bahamas, and the local representative of any such ship or aircraft shall, if so required by an Immigration Officer, as soon as practicable after the arrival of such ship or aircraft and before any passenger or member of the crew has landed in The Bahamas, deliver to an Immigration Officer a list showing separately — (a) the names and particulars of the passengers on board the ship; (b) the names of the passengers whose journey by that ship or aircraft is to be completed in The Bahamas; (c) the names and particulars of any other person (including persons rescued at sea and stowaways) on board the ship or aircraft: Provided that an Immigration Officer may allow any person on board the ship or aircraft to land, without prejudice to any other provision of this Act, before such lists are duly delivered" (Statute Law of The Bahamas Ch. 191 page 28, Immigration Part VII Supplementary Provisions relating to Immigration Control, Original Service 2001).

Moreover, the Immigration Act also states "36. (1) Every passenger arriving in or departing from The Bahamas shall complete and deliver to the person prescribed a declaration in the prescribed form. (2) It shall be the duty of the owner of the ship or aircraft in or from which any passenger embarks or disembarks to provide such passengers at such owner's expense with the prescribed form" (Statute Law of The Bahamas Ch. 191 page 29, Immigration Part VII Supplementary Provisions relating to Immigration Control, Original Service 2001).

Furthermore, the Immigration Act states the following regarding cruise ships or any ship "36A. (1) Notwithstanding any other law or in addition thereto, the master of every (cruise) ship arriving or departing The Bahamas shall submit a landing card, or in lieu thereof transmit electronically a manifest, to the port or ports of every passenger and crew on board his ship in the prescribed form (Statute Law of The Bahamas Ch. 191 page 29, Immigration Part VII Supplementary Provisions relating to Immigration Control, Original Service 2001).

The Immigration Act has undergone various changes over the years with recent updates dealing with the upcoming introduction of the Digital Immigration card. The new digital immigration card will cover the collection of administrative data for three primary government agencies: the Department of Immigration, The Bahamas Customs Department and the Bahamas Ministry

of Tourism. For this reason, changes have been made to the Immigration Act to encompass any additional information required.

In addition to the Immigration Act, The Research and Statistics Department is governed by the Statistics Act of The Bahamas which gives guidelines on official statistics. The Statistics Act was originally formulated in 1973 and governed the collection of statistics in the country. The Statistics Act was updated and gazetted on March 26, 2021 (Official Gazette Bahamas, March 26, 2021). According to the Official Gazette, Bahamas "The purpose of this Act is to develop a National Statistical Strategy and National Statistical System to facilitate the establishment of standards for collecting, compiling, analysing and publishing official statistics" (Official Gazette Bahamas, Ch.33, Statistics, pg. 5). The Research and Statistics Department falls under the National Statistical System as it produces, compiles and disseminates "official statistics" to the public.

Moreover, the Statistics Act governs the release of individual level data and affirms that official statistics must be released in a format that completely protects the confidential information of individuals. In addition to The Statistics Act, the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism has confidentiality clauses in the contracts of every employee that governs the disclosure of information obtained during employment. Furthermore, the data processing partner of the Research and Statistics Department that helps process stopover and day visitor data, signed a contract of non-disclosure of individual level immigration card data to anyone that is outside of the Department of Immigration or its assigns.

In addition to the legal regulatory frameworks and controls in place like the Immigration Act and the Statistics Act, The Research and Statistics Department is governed by the standards and definitions that are set out in the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008 (IRTS 2008) that was created to standardize tourism statistics across countries to facilitate the ease of comparability.

PURPOSE OF COLLECTION OF VISITOR ARRIVALS

Decades ago, the government of The Bahamas realized that it was imperative that they begin to document the number of International Visitor Arrivals to The Bahamas. At present, the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism collects arrival data on inbound tourism by compiling information on inbound visitors. This task was facilitated with the paper immigration card that had to be filled out by arrivals entering The Bahamas through the various ports of entry by air or sea.

Objectives Of Data Collection

1. Collect air and sea arrivals by Port of Entry (port entered Bahamas) and Place of Stay (Island stayed during trip).
2. Collect accurate International Arrivals by island
3. Collect accurate International Arrivals by country of residence
4. Collect accurate International Arrivals by trip purpose
5. Collect accurate International Arrivals by mode of transport/arrival
6. Collect accurate International Arrivals by average length of stay

7. Collect accurate International Arrivals by type of accommodation
8. Collect international arrival data on stopover visitors
9. Collect international arrival data on excursionists that are visiting The Bahamas for the day
10. Collect international arrival data on excursionists that are cruise visitors
11. Compile aggregated visitor demographics based on visitor arrivals so that the government of The Bahamas can make informed policy decisions for the country based on evidence based quantitative data with the view to grow the economy.
12. Compile aggregated visitor arrival data needed by other government agencies that will assist them with their work.
13. Compile aggregated visitor arrival data that can assist the Tourism Industry to help grow businesses and by extension the economy of The Bahamas.
14. To collect, compile and distribute aggregated data analytics and market intelligence that are relevant, accurate, and timely to help with consumer marketing efforts by the Ministry of Tourism

METHODOLOGY

In the early years, arrivals were collected using the Immigration Card and the standards used for the compilation of this data was based on globally accepted rules that governed Immigration border controls across countries. In 2008, the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics (IRTS) was introduced by the United Nations and statistical agencies across the globe were encouraged to adhere to the definitions therein to make it easier to compare statistics across countries.

The International Recommendation for Tourism Statistics (IRTS) 2008, that is used by the Research & Statistics Department, governs the classification of visitors. According to the IRTS 2008, "A visitor is a traveller taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited. (IRTS 2008, Chapter 2, section A 2.9, pg.10)." Moreover, according to the IRTS 2008, "A visitor (domestic, inbound or outbound) is classified as a tourist (or overnight visitor) if his/her trip includes an overnight stay, or as a same-day visitor (or excursionist) otherwise (IRTS 2008, Chapter 2, section A 2.13, pg.10)." In the Bahamian vernacular, a tourist is a stopover visitor/stayover visitor and excursionists are same day visitors, i.e., day or cruise visitors. Cruise visitors use the ship for their accommodations.

Because all travellers coming into the various ports of entry are not visitors, the Immigration card is an important tool to categorise the various types of travellers coming into the country. The Immigration Card was designed with codes that made it easier for the immigration officers to categorise the type of traveller, i.e., stopover visitor, day visitor, transit, permanent residents, etc. The separation of the type of traveller was especially important for the Statistics Department of the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism who were interested in collecting information on International Arrivals in accordance with the International Recommendation for Tourism Statistics (IRTS) 2008.

The Research and Statistics Department uses the Administrative Records of the Department of Immigration (including the Immigration card), Bahamas Customs Department, Port Authorities, cruise lines/cruise ships to generate the number of international visitor arrivals.

The information on visitor arrivals is collected daily by Immigration Officers at all the borders and ports of entry throughout the islands of The Bahamas using the immigration cards and the border control system of the Department of Immigration. In some islands of the Bahamas, where there are no Immigration Officers, Bahamas Customs Officers perform the role of the Immigration Officers. Once the Immigration Officers have processed each traveller, the Immigration cards are sent to the Immigration Scanning Unit, which is a part of the Research and Statistics Department located at the Lynden Pindling Airport (LPIA). The cards are then scanned and further processed.

The air and sea arrivals are collected by port of entry from Immigration, Customs, and the Port Authorities, etc. Cruise arrival data is entered into the in-house designed Cruise Arrivals Database that has built in queries and reports that make cross-checking cruise arrivals across the islands of the Bahamas by day and cruise ship easier. Summary counts of foreign air, and sea arrivals including cruise arrivals from the Cruise Database are then placed into the in-house designed foreign air and sea arrivals database that also have built in queries and reports. Visitor Arrivals are then run from this database and placed into the various Excel spreadsheets.

While all the air and sea arrivals are being entered into the Foreign Arrivals Database the Scanning team at LPIA ensures that all immigration cards have come in from the various islands so that they can be scanned and placed into the SQL Island Trends Database. After the Immigration cards are scanned, they are uploaded via a secure shared drive to the data partner, an Accounting and Data Analytics firm. This data partner has a contractual obligation with the Ministry of Tourism for assisting with the processing of the immigration cards and signed a confidentiality contract that guarantees their agreement to protect confidential information.

After immigration cards are scanned, the data is further checked and cleaned across databases to ensure data accuracy and quality control. After data cleaning of the SQL database, Stopover/Stayover arrivals are ready to be pulled from the Island Trends Platform which is updated frequently with the scanned immigration cards.

Data Cleaning

The air and sea arrivals are collected from the various Immigration and Customs offices all over the country and compiled by Port of Entry. While this compilation is being done, the actual immigration cards are simultaneously sent into the Ministry of Tourism offices at LPIA from all over the Bahamas. The cards are then scanned and uploaded to our data processing partner. The data is sent directly into our Island Trends Platform into a storage folder in the database managed by our partner. Our Partner's Data Analytics Department then takes these scanned cards and uses ICR technology to lift the data off the cards and put them into an SQL server database stored in Microsoft Azure Cloud for further cleaning and processing.

The data that is scanned is then cross-checked with the information that was already obtained from the Immigration and Customs offices to check for the count accuracy.

Moreover, the cruise arrival data is also collected from the various sources already mentioned and cross checked by day thoroughly using the cruise database. The cruise arrivals are entered by day, port of entry and cruise ship. The cruise data has to be cross-checked using the data from the various sources, i.e., Immigration, Customs, Ship manifests, Port authority offices all over the Bahamas to determine 1st, 2nd 3rd etc. ports of call within the destination. This cross-checking procedure prevents duplications, etc.

Validation and Consistency Checks

The Bahamas Ministry of Tourisms' Research and Statistics Team conduct monthly checks of the data for consistency and quality control. The Research & Statistics Team work closely with the data analytics team to fix any data issues that may be observed during these quality control checks. The Statistics team has meetings biweekly or every two weeks with the data processing partner to discuss data quality and consistency.

Missing or Invalid data

Missing Values or invalid data are flagged, and every available method is used to resolve where possible, i.e. through validation, editing, imputation, or revisions as new data comes in. For instance, if a visitor does not tick the country of residence box on the immigration card but they give their zip code or postal code, efforts are made to assign the corresponding country. Invalid data that cannot be resolved using the rules that have been developed are classified as unknown or missing.

Revisions to Arrival Data

Revisions to stopover visitors are made on a monthly basis every month as immigration cards come in and footnotes documenting this procedure are stated throughout publications. Moreover, revisions to arrivals/stopover/stayover data occurs as immigration cards come into our office at LPIA and/or the Department of Immigration or the Port Authorities give additional information that require changes to be made.

Seasonal or Other Adjustments

Arrival visitor counts are seasonal by nature, but this is always taken into consideration as data is compiled into monthly reports complete with trend data analysis by comparative periods.

Quality Control Procedures:

1. The Scanning Team of the Research Statistics Department at LPIA have been trained in the collection and processing of the printed version of the Immigration cards.
2. In the Island Trends SQL Database, post processing scripts are run by the data partner to further clean the scanned data as necessary. Many rules are also integrated in the cleaning process to ensure that travelers that are not visitors are separated out from visitors, e.g. permit holders, etc.
3. The Statistics Team of the Research Statistics Department have been trained in the collection and compilation of the foreign arrival data by air and sea.
4. The Statistics team collects the air and sea arrivals from all the ports of entry and the data is entered into the Foreign air and sea arrivals database by island. At this point the

foreign arrivals are not yet divided into stopover visitors, and excursionists (day and cruise visitors) but are merely stated as air and sea arrivals until they can be broken out. Once the immigration cards come in, they are scanned and placed into the Island Trends Platform, the data is cross checked with the air and sea arrivals to ensure that there are no cards missing.

5. Since immigration cards are primarily still paper based, it takes a while for all the immigration cards to come into New Providence to be scanned and processed with the ICR technology that was developed by the Ministry of Tourism's data Partner. So, an arrivals report is produced that allows for the checking of the data across databases the statistical databases.

6. The Statistics team collects the cruise arrival data by island, port of entry (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, port of call and up) and cruise ship. Cruise arrivals are compiled using the manifests that are sent into immigration by the cruise ships. These manifests usually include the date, itinerary of the ship, count of passengers, and numbers getting off the ship to stay in the destination. The information is entered into the in-house Cruise Arrival Database by date, count, port itinerary, etc. Cruise arrivals are always cross checked by date, port of entry, cruise ship, using all the sources of data so that visitors are not double counted by 1st port of entry or any port within the Bahamas. Cruise arrivals are collected by every port that was visited in the Bahamas. The Statistics Department sometimes uses the cruise agents for the various cruise lines to help clarify cruise ship ports visited during a particular cruise itinerary if it is necessary.

Software Used in Data Processing

Immigration Border Control System, Scanner Software developed by KAB Scan, ICR technology (developed by our data partner) to extract data off the cards, SQL Island Trends Database Platform, Microsoft Access Databases (Foreign Arrivals Database, Cruise Arrivals database, Airline Tracking Database), and Microsoft suite of products (Excel, Word, PowerPoint) for reporting.

Data Sources for Collection of Arrivals:

The information on International Tourist Arrivals is collected by using a number of sources. The International Arrivals are collected from the Department of Immigration, the Bahamas Customs Department in islands where there are no immigration officers and the Port Authorities all over the country. The agents for the cruise lines are also used at times when necessary for clarifications across ports.

Limitations of Data Collection:

1. The air and sea arrivals are collected from The Bahamas Immigration Departments all over the various islands in the country and immigration officers are often changed and this may cause procedures to not be completely understood or embraced by newer officers.
2. The air and sea arrivals may be collected by Bahamas Customs in some islands where there are no Immigration Officers and this may cause a few differences in the collection procedures.

3. The arrival data by port of entry is collected by the immigration offices all over the country before they are sent by plane or boat into New Providence to LPIA so that they can be scanned. This can cause delays in processing stopover and day visitors as this relies on the scanning of the immigration cards.
4. There is a possibility that immigration cards can be misplaced before the actual cards reach LPIA to be scanned to produce the stopover and day visitor statistics. The good thing is that air and sea arrivals are collected before cards are sent and so lost cards can be mitigated.
5. Visitors do not always fill out every field on the Immigration card and this can cause Non-responses and ultimately missing values. In instances where missing data can be imputed, for example with missing airlines, this is done using other data sources during the scanning process.
6. The accommodation list used to place stopovers in the proper island is finite and always has to be updated to take into consideration new hotels, vacation rentals, etc.

Data Dissemination to Internal and External Clients

Arrivals are disseminated using the following:

- Tourismtoday.com under the Statistics menu heading
- E-mails that come in
- Face to face contact through office visits, presentations, virtual meetings etc.
- Phone Calls with clients
- Research & Statistics "Island Trends Statistical Platform" (Used by BTO Managers and Industry Partners)

The reports on International Tourist Arrivals/Foreign Air and Sea Arrivals are produced monthly and are posted under Statistics to the tourismtoday.com website for dissemination to the public. The Release Schedule is as follows for all clients:

24th of every Month: In-house to Minister of Tourism, Director General, Permanent Secretary Deputy Director General

Before the 30th of the Month: Other government agencies and the public. This includes the posting to the tourismtoday.com website for publicly disseminated reports.

Monthly: Aggregated Monthly data is available to Industry partners like the Promotion Boards & their members that have access to the Island Trends Platform through their login access.

If you have any questions, please use the contact information below.

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