

A tale of Two Cities

London and New York City are two of the world's most popular city destinations. What challenges do both face in maintaining their positions as world-class cities for business and pleasure? And what can be done to ensure these challenges are met? In the following two pieces, [Paul Hopper](#), Managing Director of the London Tourist Board, and [Cristyne L. Nicholas](#), CEO and President of NYC & Company, address these issues in detail. Here, we introduce their contributions by looking at the key visitation statistics for both cities.

In July 2001, the Economist Intelligence Unit released its twice-yearly report on the world's most and least expensive cities. The report found that the average price of a three-course dinner for four in NYC was \$525, while in London it was \$477. Four best seats at a cinema, meanwhile, cost \$52.94 in London and only \$36 in New York. This seems to conflict with the 'Dollar-Pound' rule, which says that one dollar should buy you in the States roughly what one pound buys you in the UK. Despite the individual price differences claimed by the EIU's report, the overall cost of visiting either city was found to be remarkably similar. In the report's list of the world's ten dearest cities, London was ranked sixth and New York City seventh (just behind Tokyo, Osaka Kobe, Hong Kong, Libreville and Oslo). But how many visits are both cities attracting, and how much are visitors actually spending?

In comparing the headline statistics in Figure 1, below, a number of interesting findings emerge. First, while London attracted 28 million visits in 1999,

NYC achieved 36.66 million. (It should be noted that each city counts according to its own definition of a 'visit': for the London Tourist Board, a 'Visitor Trip' is 'a stay of one or more nights away from home for holiday, visits to friends and relatives (VFR), business, attending a conference or any other purpose, except such things as boarding education or semi-permanent employment'. For NYC & Company, a 'Visitor' is 'one who travels 50+ miles (excluding commuting) or stays overnight. NYC residents are excluded.'). Second, London's level of overseas visitation in 1999 was almost exactly double that of NYC's, weighing in with an impressive 13.2 million visits. Despite its dominance in terms of sheer visitation numbers, however, London's overseas visitors only stayed an average of 2.3 nights. And while NYC only attracted just under half the number of international visits as London in 1999, its international guests stayed on average 4.7 nights longer, and spent an average of just over £20 more per head than London's.



International visitors still flock to London ... but only stay an average of 2.3 nights

Figure 1: Visitors to London and NYC, international and domestic - key statistics (1999)

	All visits (international and domestic)			International visits only		
	Total visits	Hotel occupancy	Total visitor expenditure	Total visits	Average length of stay	Total visitor expenditure
London	28 million	81%	£7.91 billion	13.2 million	2.3 nights	£6.71 billion
NYC	36.66 million	81.2%	£10.94 billion	6.55 million	7 nights	£4.65 billion

Sources: London Tourist Board, NYC & Company

Figures 2 and 3: Purpose of international visits (1999)



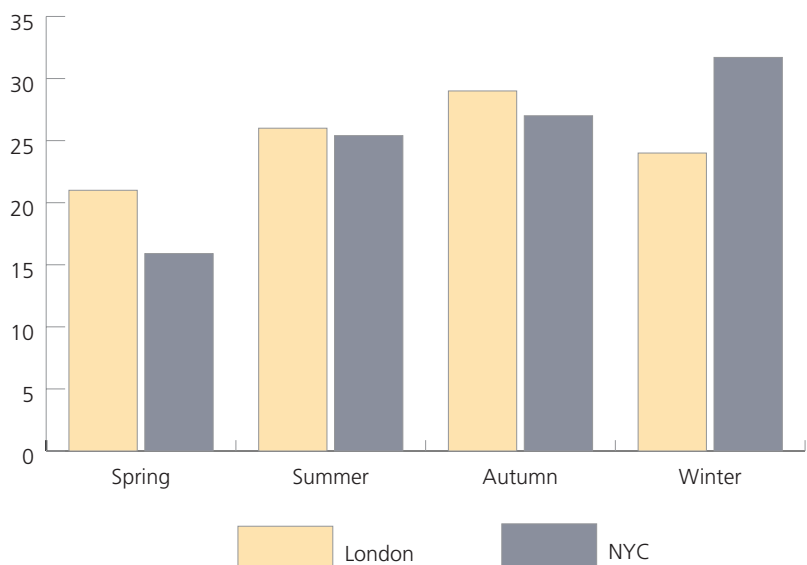
Sources: London Tourist Board, NYC & Company

Who, why and when?

What draws international visitors to London and NYC? For a start, 18.8% of all international visits to London and 22% of all international visits to NYC are Visits to Friends and Relatives (VFR); the two cities score similarly as holiday destinations, with vacations accounting for 47.9% of London's international visits, compared with 43% of NYC's. At first glance of Figures 2 and 3, above, the one significant difference appears to be between London's proportion of international business tourists (22.8%) and the equivalent figure for NYC (32%). In real terms, however, in 1999 London welcomed just over 3 million business visitors, 50% up on NYC, which attracted 2.096 million.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the large proportion of holidaymakers among its international guests, Figure 4 shows that Summer and Autumn are easily London's most successful seasons. NYC, in contrast, follows a very different pattern. It appears to ride roughshod over the winter gloom, which, as any resident of America's eastern seaboard will tell you, can be very severe indeed. Why does it fare so much better in its long, cold, snowy winters than London? Is it because NYC is more of a shopping town, or at least perceived as such?

Figure 4: Seasonality of visits to London and NYC (1999)



Sources: London Tourist Board, NYC & Company

New York City has fewer international visitors than London ... but they stay longer and spend more



Photograph courtesy of Joaquin Villarraga (NYC & Company)

Strategic challenges

We asked two figures who play key roles in promoting London and NYC to outline the challenges they face in remaining world-class destinations for business and pleasure. The first is Paul Hopper, Managing Director of the London Tourist Board and Convention Bureau, who was asked to comment on the particular challenges faced by London: access, value for money, tourism's position on the national political agenda, and the city's infrastructure. Our second contributor is Cristyne L. Nicholas, President and CEO of NYC & Company, and as such Paul Hopper's New York City counterpart. Cristyne looks at the tourism transformation undergone by NYC in recent years, and thanks to progress in a number of critical areas. Among the improvements made by the city over recent years, she reports, are a significant reduction in crime, an improvement in transport services, and an increase in partnership-based promotional activity among the city's tourism operators.