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Britain lost 977 licensed hospitality venues over 12 months, leaving fewer than 100,000

NielsenIQ said rising costs kept closures ahead of new openings before the crucial Christmas trading period

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Britain lost 977 licensed hospitality venues in the 12 months to September 2026, leaving the country with 98,319 premises authorized to sell alcohol, according to data released by NielsenIQ on Friday, October 30. The decline amounted to 1% over the year and worked out to an average net loss of 19 venues a week as the industry moved toward the Christmas trading period.

The figures point to a sector that is still shrinking even with new businesses opening. NielsenIQ said the third quarter alone produced a net loss of 245 licensed premises. That happened despite 2,191 new openings during the period, showing that closures continued to outpace launches.

The data adds to signs of pressure across Britain’s hospitality market, where pubs, bars, restaurants and other licensed operators have been dealing with rising costs. NielsenIQ linked the latest fall in venue numbers to those cost pressures, which are weighing on businesses at a time of year that is usually important for cash flow and seasonal demand.

The timing matters because the final weeks of the year are a critical stretch for many hospitality operators. Christmas trading often brings a jump in group bookings, office gatherings and higher evening foot traffic. A smaller base of licensed venues means the sector is entering that period with fewer sites in operation than it had a year earlier.

For drinks companies, the contraction could have wider effects beyond hospitality itself. Fewer licensed premises can mean fewer outlets for beer, wine and spirits sold for immediate consumption, which may limit distribution opportunities and reshape sales plans for suppliers during the holiday push. The effect is likely to vary by region and operator type, but the direction of travel points to a narrower on-premise market.

The figures also suggest that the market is not simply freezing. Openings are still taking place in meaningful numbers, which indicates that some operators continue to see room for investment. But the overall balance remains negative, and the net decline shows that new sites are not yet offsetting the number of closures.

With the total number of licensed premises now below 100,000, the data gives suppliers, landlords and investors another measure of the strain facing Britain’s hospitality economy. It also underscores how closely the fortunes of pubs, bars and

restaurants are tied to the drinks trade, where every closure can remove a point of sale and every surviving venue becomes more important heading into the busiest social drinking period of the year.