vinetur

UK Hospitality Sees Fewer Visits but Longer Stays and Higher Spending on Premium Drinks

Shift toward quality, mindful drinking and premium experiences contrasts with regional disparities and ongoing industry challenges across the country

Wednesday, September 10, 2025



Recent data from the UK hospitality sector shows that consumers are going out less frequently, but when they do, they tend to stay longer and spend more on premium drinks. The Oxford Market Watch report from The Oxford Partnership, which analyzed trends in the four weeks leading up to the end of August, found that average dwell times in bars and restaurants increased by 12.5% compared to the previous year. However, overall footfall declined, indicating that fewer people are visiting venues, even as those who do are making their visits count.

Alison Jordan, CEO of The Oxford Partnership, said that while people are choosing to stay out longer and opt for higher-quality drinks, the industry faces challenges. “People are staying out longer and increasingly choosing premium options when they do, but that optimism is offset by a steady erosion of outlet numbers and uneven regional performance,” she said.

Bartenders across the country have noticed this shift firsthand. Vasile Sicu, head bartender at Manifest Restaurant and Bar in Liverpool, described a move away from excessive drinking and generic bar experiences. He said guests now look for quality drinks, healthier choices, and venues with a welcoming atmosphere. “Craft cocktails, low-alcohol or alcohol-free drinks, and locally made beers are popular because they feel special,” Sicu explained. “Bars with good vibes, cool design, and a sense of story or community are winning over loud, crowded, impersonal spots. It’s less about getting wasted and more about enjoying the night in a fun, meaningful and memorable way.”

Market data supports these observations. Premium Lager and World Lager both gained market share in recent weeks—up 1.7 and 3.9 percentage points respectively—while Stout saw a significant increase of 14 percentage points. In contrast, traditional categories such as Core Lager, World 4% beers, Ale, and Craft beer lost ground.

The trend toward mindful drinking is also evident in the growing popularity of no- and low-alcohol beverages. Sales in this category jumped 15.9% over the August Bank Holiday weekend. Jordan Hemsil, restaurant manager at the Forest Side Hotel in Grasmere, noted a clear shift away from high-alcohol options this summer. He expects continued growth in the “low and no” movement through 2025, with more innovation in mocktails using local ingredients and infusion techniques.

Hemsil pointed out that balancing value with premiumization remains a challenge for operators. Venues must remain attractive to consumers facing cost pressures while also capitalizing on occasions when people are willing to spend more.

Regional differences remain pronounced across the UK hospitality landscape. London and the South East have shown resilience due to tourism and a higher concentration of premium venues. Scotland experienced the steepest decline in hospitality outlets so far this year—a drop of 3%—highlighting uneven recovery across regions.

Consumer spending patterns also varied by region. The South West led drink spending with a 13.7% increase year-to-date; the West Midlands saw a short-term uplift of 7.3%. Scotland performed well on food spend with a 16.7% increase year-to-date. However, Northern Ireland recorded a 5.7% decline in drinks spend on an annual basis, while the North East saw double-digit falls in food expenditure. Even London felt pressure on consumer budgets for dining out: food spend there dropped by 2.3% over the last four weeks.

The August Bank Holiday provided some relief for the sector as sales rose by 3.4% compared to an average summer weekend. No- and low-alcohol drinks were among the top performers during this period with sales up nearly 16%, followed by cider at just over 10%. Premium and World Lagers also saw notable gains.

Despite these positive signs for certain categories and regions, structural pressures persist for UK hospitality businesses as they adapt to changing consumer habits and economic realities.