

Retail footfall defies the odds as January sees first annual uplift since 2016

10 months ago



The latest footfall data from retail experts [MRI Software](#) shows that footfall rose by +1.4% in January 2025 compared to last year in all UK retail destinations led by a +1.8% boost in shopping centre footfall, followed by a +1.4% rise in retail parks, and by +1.1% in high streets.

Retail footfall defied seasonal expectations, rising by +1.4% year on year in all UK retail destinations. Despite heavy snowfall and two named storms, shopping centres led the charge with a +1.8% increase in footfall followed by retail parks (+1.4%) and high streets (+1.1%).

The last time footfall rose annually in January was in 2016 (+1.2%), outside of the pandemic period, and may well signal the year kicking off with a strong return to office as businesses encourage employees back.

Month on month, the usual post-holiday decline saw footfall fall by almost a fifth in all UK retail destinations. This was driven by a sharp decline in the second week of the month when schools and offices reopened however it was likely amplified as heavy snow and travel disruptions affected much of the UK. High streets experienced the steepest drop in footfall from December to January falling by -22.4%, this was followed by a -21.7% decline in shopping centre activity, and by -16.5% in retail parks.

The return to office was evident throughout January despite adverse weather with weekday footfall rising by +1.6% compared to last year whereas weekend footfall fell by -3.5%. As businesses encourage employees back to the office, the impact on retail and leisure establishments within towns and cities will be noticeable. MRI Software's Central London Back to Office benchmark highlighted a +1.4% year on year uplift in footfall throughout January with much of this driven by a +4.4% increase during the early evening

period (17:00-20:00) – an encouraging sign as January typically tends to be the month of austerity but, with an increase in after work activity, retail leaders should be looking at strategies on how they can capitalise on this growth.

[MRI Software's Consumer Pulse report](#) revealed that evening shopping (post 5pm) is the most common time for office workers to visit retail destinations with around 34% choosing to do so. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays see the highest overlap in office work and shopping activity, with 58% of respondents attending work weekly on Tuesdays and aligning retail visits for midweek convenience. On days when employees work from the office, 31% of respondents stated they visit high streets during lunch hours, the highest among all destinations, highlighting their proximity and convenience during work breaks.

As we head into February, the impact of the Autumn Budget is likely to start being felt by both consumers and retailers alike. In early January, retailers reported on post-Christmas trading and along with this many announced they would be increasing their product prices including [Next, Tesco, Amazon and Greggs](#). This aligns with retailer sentiment gathered from MRI Software's Insights from the Inside* which recently revealed that 39.4% of retailers surveyed were planning to increase product prices over the next month. A small number of brands have recently announced high street store closures and as these brands rethink their physical presence amidst financial pressures, the key remains in understanding the data and trends shaping these decisions – from operational and strategic insights to overall market trends.

** A weekly survey of over 700 store managers which provides insights from the shop floor around how external factors and consumer behaviour are impacting both footfall and spending.*

| January 2025 – UK | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| % Change | OnLocation Footfall Index | High Street Index | Retail Park Index | Shopping Centre Index |
| Monthly | -20.8% | -22.4% | -16.5% | -21.7% |
| Annual | +1.4% | +1.1% | +1.4% | +1.8% |