

Footfall trends rise across UK retail, but budget fallout set to hit consumers and stores from April

4 months ago



Retail footfall remained upbeat in March as overall visitor activity rose by 4.6% from the month before. This uplift was predominantly driven by a 7% rise in high streets followed by a 4.3% increase in retail parks; both trends were influenced by the fourth week of the month which coincided with payday and Mother's Day. Shopping centre activity, however, fell marginally by -0.1% from the month prior.

Despite the shift in Easter holiday timings this year, footfall remained 2.6% higher than last year with strong activity recorded in high streets (+3.2%), retail parks (+2.6%), and shopping centres (+1.1%). This was mainly driven by the final week of the month where footfall was 7% higher in all UK retail destinations however this is in comparison to Easter weekend last year and will be abnormally higher due to retail stores and destinations remaining closed on Easter Sunday.

The return to office continues to support retail recovery as MRI Software's Central London Back to Office benchmark revealed a 10.3% uplift in March compared to February and also saw a 5.6% increase from 2024 levels. This is particularly encouraging for retail stores and destinations operating in office dense locations and aligns with MRI Software's Insights from the Inside* which revealed that 52.6% of retailers surveyed stated they had also noticed an increase in weekday sales compared to this time last year. Regional cities outside of London are also mirroring this trend with a 6% uplift recorded year on year. Interestingly, market and historic towns typically known for their landmarks and tourist spots also experienced strong footfall during March with rises of 10.4% and 7.2% recorded, respectively. This could be influenced by the positive change in weather conditions but may also align with footfall from nearby offices impacting these town types or remote employees visiting cafes/restaurants and co-working spaces

for a change of scenery.

However, the retail sector is not without its challenges. Heading into April there is no steering away from the fact that retailers, as well as many other sectors, are about to be hit with a £5.56bn bill, as reported in the latest [Yoobic and Retail Economics report](#), following the measures implemented during the Autumn budget in 2024. While £1.76bn will be absorbed by retailers themselves, it's estimated that £1.72bn will be passed onto the consumer through price increases. The remaining £2.08bn is likely to be invested by retail leaders in cost optimisation projects that will drive operational efficiencies with digital transformation strategies set to deliver high impact in terms of cost and productivity. In addition to the increase in certain household bills, including energy and council tax, also set to impact the consumer this month, it's important for retail leaders to have the latest trends analysis in relation to their portfolio's performance at their fingertips to be able to adapt swiftly.

** 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*

March 2025 - UK				
% Change	OnLocation Footfall Index	High Street Index	Retail Park Index	Shopping Centre Index
Monthly	+4.6%	+7.0%	+4.3%	-0.1%
Annual	+3.2%	+2.6%	+1.1%	+2.6%