

Forestry Statistics: Chapter 6 Social 2025

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The Research Agency of the
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Introduction

This chapter contains statistics on the number and profile of visits to all woodlands from household surveys.

The statistics in this chapter need to be viewed in the context of broader changes in the UK population, with an increasing and ageing population. In recent years, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affected visits to the outdoors.

Information on visits to forests and woodlands are derived from multiple sources, these include:

- [The Public Opinion of Forestry surveys](#);
- [The People and Nature Survey for England](#);
- [The National Survey for Wales](#);
- [Welsh People and Nature Survey](#);
- [Scotland's People and Nature Survey](#); and
- [The People in the Outdoors Monitor for Northern Ireland](#).

Geographical coverage for social statistics varies. Estimates are presented at country level and, where possible, UK or GB totals are included. Most of the statistics presented in this chapter have been previously released, either by Forest Research or by other organisations. Figures for earlier years have not been revised from those previously published. For further details on revisions, data sources and methodology see the Social Section of Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

The frequency with which the estimates in this chapter are updated varies depending on the data sources used. Whilst some of the information presented is now several years old, it represents the latest available data

and has been included to provide a more rounded picture of the social use of forests in the UK.

Figures in tables have been independently rounded, so may not add to the totals shown. Percentage changes quoted in this release are based on unrounded figures.

Key findings

The main findings are:

- There were an estimated 237 million visits to woodlands in Scotland in 2023/24.
- There were an estimated 507 million visits to woodlands in England in 2023/24.
- Around 66% of visits to woodlands in England in 2024/25 were within 2 miles from the starting point of the journey.
- “To get fresh air” and “For physical health and exercise” were important reasons for visiting woodlands in England.
- Walking was the most common activity on visits to woodland in England.
- Over two thirds (70%) of respondents in the UK had visited forests or woodlands in the last few years. Of these, 32% in the UK reported an increase in the number of visits in the last 12 months; no change was reported by 49% and a decrease reported by 17%.
- Around three-fifths (61%) of respondents who had visited forests or woodlands in the UK in the last few years reported an increase in their level of happiness when in forests and woodlands since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

6.1 Outdoor recreation and environmental attitude surveys

The information shown below in Table 6.1 has been obtained from the following general population household surveys:

- [Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment](#) (England, 2009/10 to 2017/18),
- [People and Nature Survey](#) (England, 2020/21 to present),
- [Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey](#) (2014/15),
- [National Survey for Wales](#) (2016/17 to 2018/19),
- [Welsh People and Nature Survey](#) (2021/22),
- [Scottish Recreation Survey](#) (2012/13), and
- [Scotland's People and Nature Survey](#) (2013/14, 2017/18, 2019/20, 2023/24).

It is likely that differences in survey design and methodology have contributed to a considerable proportion of the differences in results between these surveys. The figures in Table 6.1 should not be interpreted as time trends but instead as separate results from each survey. Further information on the differences between surveys is provided in the Recreation section of Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

In common with all sample-based surveys, the results from each survey are subject to the effects of chance, depending on the particular survey method used and the sample achieved, thus confidence limits apply to all results from these surveys.

Results from the latest People and Nature Survey for England estimate a total of 507 million visits to forests and woodland in England in 2023/24 (Table 6.1).

The Welsh People and Nature Survey estimated a total of 52 million visits to woodlands by Welsh residents in 2021/22.

Scotland's People and Nature Survey reports an estimated total of 237 million visits to woodlands in Scotland in 2023/24 (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Number of visits to woodland by journey starting point, Great Britain, 2012/13 to 2023/24

million visits

Year	England	Wales	Scotland
2012/13	357	[x]	62
2013/14	378	[x]	90
2014/15	417	68	[x]
2015/16	446	[x]	[x]
2016/17	439	[x]	[x]
2017/18	437	[x]	117
2018/19	368	[x]	[x]
2019/20	[x]	[x]	123
2020/21	600	[x]	[x]
2021/22	507	52	[x]
2022/23	501	[x]	[x]
2023/24	507	[x]	237

Sources:

England 2012/13 to 2018/19: Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), Natural England, carried out by Kantar;

England 2020/21 to 2023/24: People and Nature Survey (PaNS), Natural England, carried out by Kantar;

Wales 2014/15: Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey carried out by TNS; Wales 2021/22: Welsh People and Nature Survey carried out by Kantar;

Scotland 2012/13: Scottish Recreation Survey (ScRS), carried out by TNS;

Scotland 2013/14, 2017/18, 2019/20, 2023/24: Scotland's People and Nature Survey (SPANS), carried out by TNS.

Notes:

1. MENE covered trips taken in England, including those from holiday bases, by respondents living in England. Results relate to 12-month periods from March to February.
2. PaNS covers all trips to green and natural spaces in England where forest or woodland was the main destination of their most recent visit in the last 14 days. Results relate to 12-month periods from April to March.
3. The Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey totals shown are for trips with woodland as the main destination.
4. Scotland's People and Nature Survey replaced the Scottish Recreation Survey in 2013. For further information see the Social section in Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology. Both surveys covered visits to the outdoors for leisure and recreation in Scotland by people living in Scotland. The total shown is for all trips that included a visit to woodland.
5. In each survey, visits to overseas destinations are excluded.
6. [x]: data not available
7. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

6.2 People and Nature Survey (PaNS) for England

In April 2020, fieldwork commenced on the People and Nature Survey (PaNS), which includes collecting information on visits to green and natural spaces in England.

Tables 6.2a to 6.2e show the main characteristics of visits to woodlands in 2021/22 to 2023/24. In 2023/24, walking was the main mode of transport for around two thirds (63%) of visits to woodland (Table 6.2a).

Table 6.2a: Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by their main mode of transport, England, 2021/22 to 2023/24

per cent of respondents

Main mode of transport	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
On foot/walking	51	60	63
Car/van/motorbike	39	33	27
Bicycle/mountain bike	3	5	5
Public transport (e.g. train, bus, coach)	5	3	4
Mobility aid (such as wheelchair or mobility scooter)	[low]	[low]	[low]

Source: People and Nature Survey (PaNS), Natural England.

Note:

1. Trips where forest or woodland was the main destination of the most recent visit to green and natural spaces in the last 14 days.
2. Respondents that answered "Other" are not shown in the table.
3. [low] = less than 0.5%
4. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

Around 69% of visits to woodland in 2023/24 were within 2 miles distance travelled from starting point (Table 6.2b).

Table 6.2b: Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by distance travelled, England, 2021/22 to 2023/24

per cent of respondents

Distance travelled (one way)	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Less than 1 mile	38	38	43
1-2 miles	25	25	26
3-10 miles	26	28	21
11-50 miles	9	8	8
More than 50 miles	1	2	2

Source: People and Nature Survey (PaNS), Natural England.

Note:

1. Trips where forest or woodland was the main destination of the most recent visit to green and natural spaces in the last 14 days.
2. Respondents that answered "Don't know" are not shown in the table.
3. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

"For physical health and exercise" (54%) was the most popular reason for visiting woodlands in England in 2023/24, followed by "To get fresh air" (53%) and "For mental health and wellbeing" (45%).

Table 6.2c: Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by motivation for visit, England, 2021/22 to 2023/24

per cent of respondents

Motivation for visit	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
For physical health and exercise	57	52	54
To get fresh air	55	58	53
For mental health and well being	37	43	45
To walk a dog	32	38	38
To connect to nature / watch wildlife	29	34	28
To get a break from TV / other electronic devices	9	9	8
To look after children / other family members	8	7	7
To learn something new / challenge myself / explore a new place	6	4	5
To take a lunch break / break from work	6	3	4
To help someone else get outside	7	3	4
Because I was advised to spend time outdoors by GP or other health professional	3	1	3
For other reasons (specify)	3	5	3

Source: People and Nature Survey (PaNS), Natural England.

Note:

1. Trips where forest or woodland was the main destination of the most recent visit to green and natural spaces in the last 14 days.

2. Respondents that answered “Prefer not to say” and “Don’t know” are not shown in the table.
3. Respondents were able to select more than one option, so results do not sum to 100%.
4. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

Walking was the most popular activity undertaken on visits to woodland in England across all years of the People and Nature Surveys (Table 6.2d).

Table 6.2d: Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by activity, England, 2021/22 to 2023/24

per cent of respondents

Activity	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Walking (including taking a dog for a walk)	75	81	76
Wildlife watching	34	31	30
Eating or drinking out / picnicking	14	16	17
Cycling or running	10	10	13
Playing with children	12	12	11
Visiting an attraction	8	6	6
Appreciating scenery from a car	5	6	5
Sports and games	4	5	4
Horse-riding	2	2	3
Boating, water sports or swimming outdoors	4	2	3
Fishing	3	3	2
Shooting / hunting	2	1	2
Any Other outdoor activities (specify)	2	2	1

Source: People and Nature Survey (PaNS), Natural England.

Note:

1. Trips where forest or woodland was the main destination of the most recent visit to green and natural spaces in the last 14 days.
2. Respondents were able to select more than one option, so results do not sum to 100%.
3. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

Most visits to woodlands in England (82%) lasted up to 2 hours in 2023/24 (Table 6.2e).

Table 6.2e: Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by duration of visit, England, 2021/22 to 2023/24

per cent of respondents

Duration of visit	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Up to 30 minutes	14	11	20
Over 30 minutes and up to an hour	34	35	29
Over 1 hour and up to 2 hours	32	32	33
Over 2 hours and up to 3 hours	12	13	13
Over 3 hours and up to 5 hours	5	6	3
Over 5 hours	3	3	2

Source: People and Nature Survey (PaNS), Natural England.

Note:

1. Trips where forest or woodland was the main destination of the most recent visit to green and natural spaces in the last 14 days.
2. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

6.3 National Survey for Wales (NSfW)

The National Survey for Wales began in March 2016 and replaced a number of separate surveys of households in Wales, including the [Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey](#) (WORS). The survey is completed by around 12,000 people each year and covers a wide range of topics.

Table 6.3 shows the reasons provided for their visit to the outdoors by respondents who stated that the main destination of the visit was woodland. “For fresh air or to enjoy pleasant weather” and “For health or exercise” were the most important reasons reported for visits to woodlands in Wales.

Table 6.3: Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by motivation for visit, Wales, 2016/17 to 2018/19

per cent of respondents

Motivation for visit	2016/17	2018/19
For health or exercise	47	55
For fresh air or to enjoy pleasant weather	50	47
For pleasure / enjoyment	42	42
To spend time with family	39	41
To relax and unwind	34	41
To enjoy scenery and wildlife	38	39
To exercise the dog	38	30
For peace and quiet	22	29
To spend time with friends	16	22

Source: National Survey for Wales (Welsh Government).

Note:

1. Trips where forest or woodland was the main destination.
2. Respondents were able to select more than one option, so results do not sum to 100%.

6.4 Scottish People and Nature Survey (SPANS)

The [Scottish People and Nature Survey](#) (SPANS), carried out by NatureScot, gathers information on outdoor recreation and the use, value and enjoyment provided by the natural environment in Scotland. The survey ran in 2013/14, 2017/18, 2019/20 and 2023/24 (with approximately 12,000 people each year), replacing the Scottish Recreation Survey which was conducted annually between 2003 and 2012.

In 2023/24, 39% of respondents to the Scottish People and Nature Survey visited woodland on their last visit to the outdoors for leisure and recreation.

Based on this proportion, there were 237 million visits to woodland in 2023/24.

6.5 Public Opinion of Forestry Survey

Woodland visitors

The [Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys](#) obtains people's attitudes to forestry and forestry-related issues, including visits to woodland. The latest surveys (for the UK and England, for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland) were run in 2023.

All surveys run until 2019 were conducted using face-to-face interviewing. The restrictions in place across the UK in early 2021 as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to a change in methodology for the 3 surveys conducted that year. The 2021 survey in Scotland changed to use telephone interviews, whilst the surveys across the UK and in Wales changed to use an online methodology. For the 2023 survey, Scotland and Northern Ireland changed to an online methodology, meaning all four surveys in 2023 were conducted online. For 2025, surveys for UK/England, Scotland and Wales were fielded with an online methodology. It is not possible to quantify the extent to which any changes observed in the survey are a result of COVID-19 restrictions (either on the survey design or on the behaviour of respondents).

The results shown in Tables 6.4 to 6.6 and Figures 6.1 and 6.2 have been taken from the UK and country reports on the latest surveys in 2025 and from surveys in earlier years.

In the UK 2025 survey, over two thirds (70%) of respondents said that they had visited woodland in the last few years for walks, picnics or other recreation (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4: Proportion of respondents who visited woodland, UK, 2009 to 2025

Year	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	UK
2009	77	[x]	57	[x]	77
2010	[x]	[x]	[x]	72	[x]
2011	68	68	75	[x]	67
2013	65	64	76	[x]	66
2014	[x]	[x]	[x]	75	[x]
2015	55	64	78	[x]	56
2017	62	72	84	[x]	61
2019	63	77	[x]	78	63
2021	69	63	86	[x]	69
2023	74	72	79	83	74
2025	69	68	90	[x]	70

Source: Public Opinion of Forestry 2009 to 2025: UK and England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Base:

UK =2,000 respondents (2009 to 2019), 5,000 respondents (2021); 11,100 (2023); 10,300 (2025);

Wales and Scotland = 1,000 respondents (all years);

Northern Ireland = 1,000 respondents (all years).

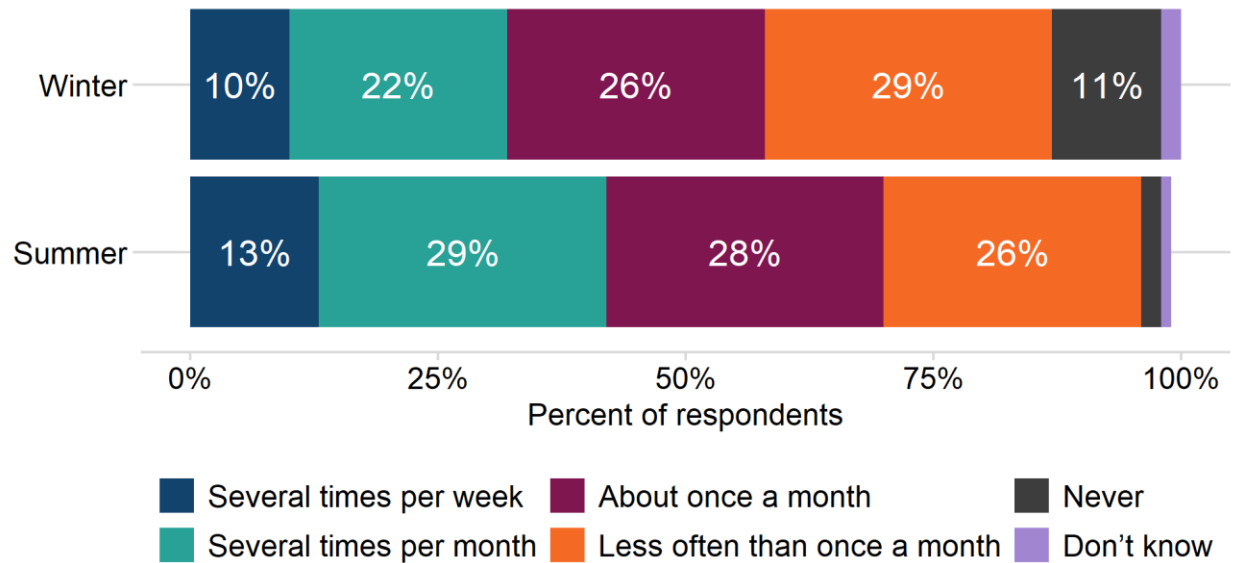
Note:

1. UK, England and Northern Ireland: visits in the last few years. Wales (from 2015) and Scotland (from 2017): visits in the last 12 months.

2. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 4.6\%$ for surveys with around 1,000 respondents, $\pm 2.1\%$ for around 5,000 respondents and $\pm 1.4\%$ for around 10,000-11,000 respondents.
3. [x] = data not available (survey not run that year or question not asked).
4. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

Survey respondents who had visited woodlands in the last few years were asked how frequently they had visited during the previous summer and winter. Figure 6.1, which presents UK results for the 2025 survey, shows that respondents visited much more often during the summer, with 70% of respondents visiting at least once a month in the summer compared to 58% in the winter.

Figure 6.1: Proportion of respondents and frequency of visits to woodlands in the last few years, UK, 2025



Source: Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2025: UK and England.

Base: approximately 7,200 respondents who had visited woodlands in the last few years.

Note:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 1.7\%$.
2. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

In the UK Public Opinion of Forestry survey in 2025, 70% of respondents aged 16 to 34 said that they had visited woodland in the last few years for walks, picnics or other recreation (Table 6.5). This compares with 72% of respondents aged 35 to 54 and 67% of those aged 55 or over.

Table 6.5 Proportion of respondents who visited woodland by age group¹, UK, 2007 to 2025

per cent of respondents

Year	Aged 16 to 34	Aged 35 to 54	Aged 55 and over	Total
2007	79	82	69	77
2009	78	84	69	77
2011	65	74	63	67
2013	62	75	60	66
2015	54	62	53	56
2017	60	68	55	61
2019	61	71	56	63
2021	77	71	62	69
2023	75	77	70	74
2025	70	72	67	70

Source: UK Public Opinion of Forestry surveys, 2007 to 2025.

Base: 4,000 (2007); 2,000 (2009 to 2019); 5,000 (2021), 11,100 (2023), 10,300 (2025).

Notes:

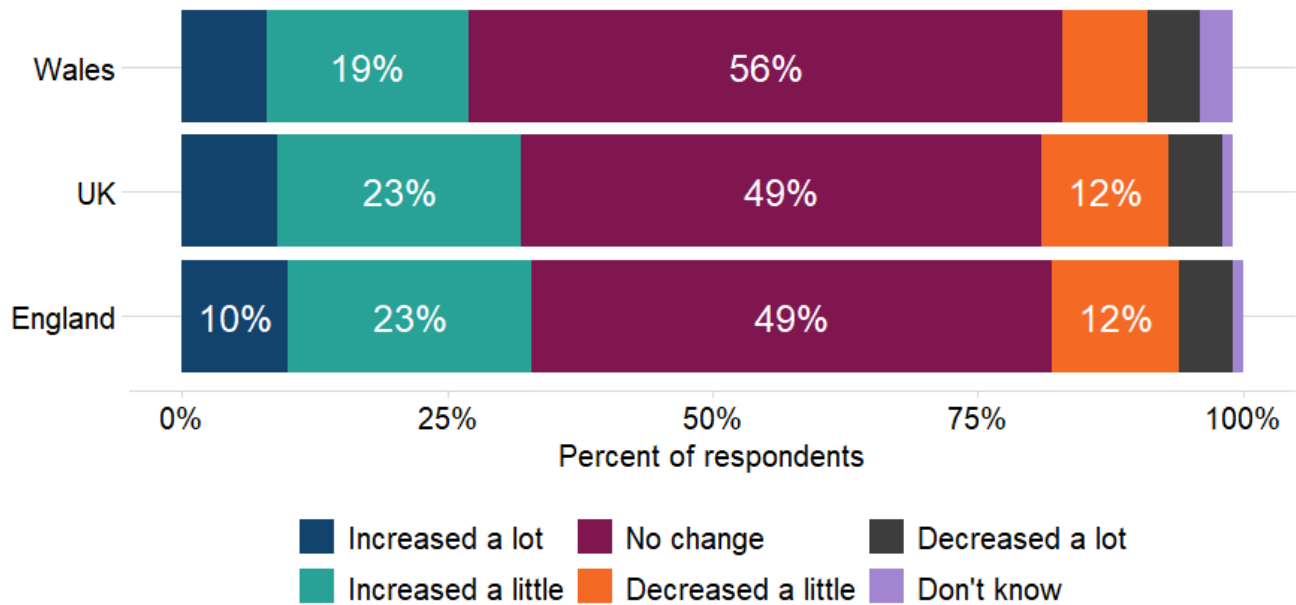
1. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.
2. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 3.5\%$ for surveys with around 2,000 respondents, $\pm 2.1\%$ for surveys with around 5,000 respondents and $\pm 1.4\%$ for around 10,000-11,000.

The 2025 Public Opinion of Forestry surveys included questions on how the number, duration and distance travelled to forests and woodlands had changed over the last 12 months.

In the UK/England and Wales surveys, respondents were asked how the number of visits to forests and woodlands had changed in the last 12

months. Thirty-two percent (32%) of respondents to the UK survey (who had visited woodlands in the last few years) reported an increase in the number of visits they had made, 49% reported no change and 17% reported a decrease (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Change in number of visits to woodlands over last 12 months, UK, 2025



Source: Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys 2025: UK and England, and Wales.

Base:

All respondents to the UK survey who had visited woodlands in the last few years (UK: approximately 7,200; England: approximately 6,100).

All respondents to the Wales survey who had visited woodlands in the last few years (approximately 700)

Note:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 5.4\%$ (Wales), $\pm 1.9\%$ (England) and $\pm 1.7\%$ (UK).
2. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

The UK survey in 2025 also asked how views on forests and woodlands had changed since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked about their feeling of connection to forests and woodlands, 58% of respondents reported an increase, 39% reported no change, and 3% reported a decrease.

Around three-fifths (61%) of respondents who had visited woodlands reported an increase in their level of happiness when in forests and woodlands. Just over one third (36%) reported that their level of happiness stayed about the same while few reported a decrease (3%).

When asked about the amount of time they had taken to appreciate forests and woodlands, 60% of respondents reported spending more time appreciating forest and woodlands compared with before the COVID-19 pandemic. 36% reported no change and 4% reported a decrease.

Table 6.6: Proportion of respondents and views of forest and woodlands since before the coronavirus pandemic, UK, 2025

per cent of respondents

Statement	Significantly increased	Some increase	Stayed the same	Some decrease	Significantly decreased
Your feeling of connection to forests and woodlands	23	34	39	3	1
Your level of happiness when in forests and woodlands	27	34	36	2	[low]
The amount of time you take to appreciate forests and woodlands	26	34	36	3	1

Source: Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2025: UK and England.

Base: All respondents who had visited woodlands in the last few years (approximately 7,200).

Note:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 1.7\%$.
2. [low] = less than 0.5%.
3. These figures are outside the scope of Accredited Official Statistics. For further information see Chapter 10: Sources and Methodology.

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