Spending Momentum Index

Australia

Australia SMI ends 2023 virtually flat, potentially signaling spending stability

The Visa Australia Spending Momentum Index (SMI) dropped 0.1 points in December to 90.4, in the index's lowest month-over-month point loss of 2023. Although December marked the fourth consecutive month of decline, the rate of fall has been steadily narrowing, suggesting that consumer spending may be stabilising as Australians adapt to higher prices and interest rates. This was reflected in both the discretionary and non-discretionary SMIs, which recorded small changes in the past few months.

For the other two spend categories (i.e., restaurant and fuel), spending momentum rose modestly. The fuel SMI grew in tandem with increasing fuel prices; however, despite elevated fuel costs, the fuel SMI was still significantly below 100, suggesting that consumers have adjusted their behaviour by driving less. At the same time, the restaurant SMI increased due to high food prices, but also remained below 100. The fall in the number of seated diners has narrowed in recent months, according to data from OpenTable that point to a stabilisation in consumer behaviour for dining-out services. Interestingly, growth in the number of seated diners saw a year-on-year surge on Christmas Day and New Year's Eve, suggesting that Australian consumers are still willing to splurge on special occasions.

Based on data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics,[1] the labour market remains tight and the unit labour costs are still high. Rent inflation is expected to be elevated, as housing supply is not keeping up with demand. As such, the Reserve Bank of Australia is likely to keep interest rates high for a longer period of time, which could dampen spending momentum in the near term.

30 January 2024

December SMI at a glance

Latest index reading

Nationwide momentum:
Change from previous month

Total
-0.1
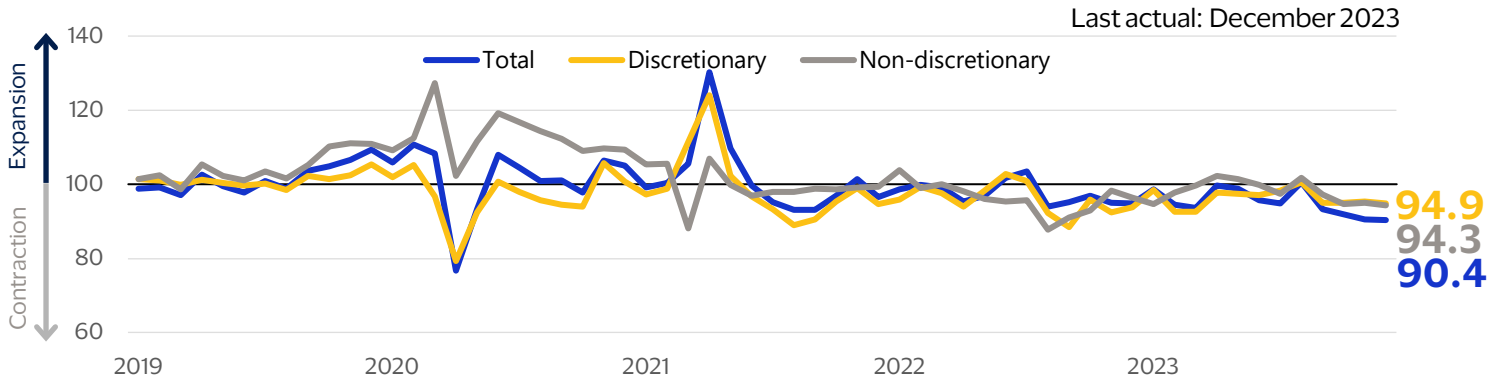
Discretionary
-0.4

Non-discretionary
-0.7

Spending Momentum Index

(Seasonally adjusted,* ≥100 = expansion, <100 = contraction)

Last actual: December 2023

*The discretionary and non-discretionary categories exclude restaurant and fuel spending; both restaurant and fuel are included in the total SMI. See additional definitions of spending categories on page 3. Source: Visa Business and Economic Insights. The Visa Australia SMI measures the current month relative to the same month last year. The national readings of the index are based on year-over-year (YoY) changes in consumer spending with Visa bankcards.

VISA

Visa Public

About the Visa Australia Spending Momentum Index

First released in August 2021, the Visa SMI is an economic indicator to gauge the health of consumer spending. The Visa SMI delivers insight into what drives upturns and downturns in spending by measuring the breadth of the momentum supporting these trends.

Currently available in eight countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, Ireland, Italy, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States), the SMI provides a consistent method across countries to measure global spending trends.

A sample pulled from the Visa network

The SMI leverages the power of the Visa network utilising a sample of depersonalised and aggregated spending data from Visa-branded credit and debit credentials. This makes it a timelier read on consumer spending compared to other consumer spending measures (e.g. retail sales and personal consumption expenditures).

Tracks upturns and downturns in consumer spending

The resulting sample data is then aggregated using a diffusion index framework where index values are scored from 0 to 200. When the Visa SMI rises above 100, the consumer spending momentum is strengthening and when it falls below 100, the spending momentum is weakening as fewer consumers are spending more relative to the previous year.

A better way to track the economic recovery

SMI has correlation with key macroeconomic indicators, including retail sales, unemployment and household income. The SMI does not take into account the volume of payments nor does it rely on all Visa credentials, and therefore does not reflect Visa's operational or financial performance. The SMI can assess the variation in spend down to a geographic (national, state, city and county) and industry vertical level.

Spending Categories*:

Discretionary (airlines, lodging, auto rental, appliance retail, computer retail, fashion retail, florist, general department store, home goods retail, leisure goods retail, luxury goods retail, repurposed goods retail, sporting goods retail, attractions & amusements, duty free, entertainment, gambling, marina services, sport & recreation, transportation, travel agencies, construction services, electric goods repair, home repair services, personal services, professional services, spa/beauty services, telecommunication, charity, direct marketing, education, membership clubs).

Non-discretionary (medical/health services, pharmacy, food retail, supermarkets, postal/courier, utilities, education, tolls/fees, wholesale).

Methodology

The Visa Spending Momentum Index (SMI) measures the breadth of year-over-year change in household spending within an economy, including the share of households with increased spending compared with those where spending was stable or declined. The index is generated using proprietary techniques that extract economic signals from business-related noise inherent in VisaNet transaction data, such as portfolio flips, routing changes, or evolving acceptance across geographies or merchant segments. Regional and national aggregates are population-weighted averages.

The resulting sample data is then aggregated using a diffusion index framework in which index values are scored from 0 to 200. Values above 100 indicate broad-based net acceleration in economic momentum. Values below 100 indicate contraction on an annual basis. To ensure compliance with Visa's confidentiality obligations and with applicable laws, any market or competitor data that does not meet Visa Inc.'s minimum benchmarking requirements will not be shared.

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*The discretionary and non-discretionary categories exclude restaurant and fuel spending; both restaurant and fuel are included in the total SMI.

Footnotes

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/unemployment-rate-remains-39-december

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