



External Overnight Trips To Northern Ireland 2018

Published 06 June 2019



2.8m
trips



11.8m
nights



£669m
spent

The key points are:

- there were an estimated 2.8 million overnight trips to Northern Ireland by external visitors in 2018. This is 6% higher compared to the 2017 estimate (2.7 million external overnight trips); associated with these overnight trips were an estimated 11.8 million nights;
- external visitors spent an estimated £669 million. This is an increase of 2% when compared to the 2017 estimate (£657m);
- the survey estimates that the top five places of origin for external visitors were England, Republic of Ireland, Scotland, United States of America and Germany;
- 37% (1.0m) overnight trips by external visitors were for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes in 2018;
- users should note that there were no statistically significant changes in the key indicators (estimated overnight trips, nights and expenditure) between 2017 and 2018. However, there has been a statistically significant increase over the longer term since 2016.

[Click here for definitions of tourism statistics common terms used in this report](#)

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National Statistics Status

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

These statistics were designated as National Statistics in May 2017 following a full assessment against the Code of Practice. Since the assessment by the UK Statistics Authority, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have also made improvements such as the following:

- The Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NIPS) has been made more accessible by improving the wording of questions and updating survey software to improve the presentation.
- Increased accessibility by publishing data in open source format
- Increased awareness of statistics by allowing users to sign up to a mailing list that means they are informed of any new statistical releases.



Household Travel Survey 2018 data quality issue

Data from the 2018 Household Travel Survey (HTS), provided by Central Statistics Office (CSO) and relating to the number of visitors coming to Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland, should be considered as **interim data that may be subject to future revision**. In 2018 the HTS was suspended due to quality issues in the collected data. Against a backdrop of falling response rates, it was observed that there was a non-response issue affecting the survey estimates in 2018. In order to address the non-response bias in the 2018 HTS sample the CSO has adjusted the weights of respondents within the sample design, for all four quarters of 2018.

Following quality checks on the methodology change and the data itself, **NISRA feel the data provided by CSO is of suitable quality to report on. We ask users to be aware there is potential for future revision, but we don't feel this is likely to change the overall message of the publication or the key statistics. We advise users that are particularly interested in the number of visitors from ROI to use the figures with caution and look at the patterns over the last few years rather than focussing on short term changes.**

*****Update 24/06/2019 A report containing full details of the issues in the HTS, and the interim solution, is available on the CSO website and can be accessed [here](#)*****

If a future revision occurs we will make users aware of any impact on the statistics in this publication.

More details can be found in the background notes section of this publication.

Main estimates for external overnight trips to Northern Ireland

Table 1 shows the trend in the three headline statistics (estimated overnight trips, nights and expenditure since 2013) with regards to external overnight trips in Northern Ireland. Users should note that there were no statistically significant changes in the key variables (estimated overnight trips, nights and expenditure) between 2017 and 2018. However, there have been some significant changes over time and these are displayed in more detail for each market in the next section; 'Indicator 30: Total Spend by External Visitors' of the draft Programme for Government shows a significant increase from the baseline year (2015) to 2018.

As overnight tourism statistics are survey based estimates they are subject to associated confidence intervals (see background notes).

Table 1: Estimated number of external overnight trips, nights and expenditure in Northern Ireland 2013-2018

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	% Change (2017-18)
Overall Trips (000s)	2,089	2,179	2,301	2,587	2,658	2,809	+6%
95% CI lower limit (000s)	2,006	2,100	2,219	2,483	2,566	2,706	
95% CI upper limit (000s)	2,172	2,257	2,384	2,691	2,750	2,913	
Overall Nights (000s)	9,817	10,033	10,680	11,361	11,646	11,776	+1%
Overall Expenditure (£M)	524	507	545	613	657	669	+2%
95% CI lower limit (£M)	448	472	502	558	609	633	
95% CI upper limit (£M)	599	543	588	668	704	705	

Figures derived from Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NIPS) conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), the Survey of Overseas Travellers (SOT) conducted on behalf of Fáilte Ireland, the Household Travel Survey (HTS) conducted by Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey (CHS) conducted by NISRA.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the estimated number of external overnight trips and associated expenditure in Northern Ireland from 2013 to 2018. The graphs also show margins of errors around the published estimates.

Figure 1: Estimated number of external overnight trips in Northern Ireland 2013-2018

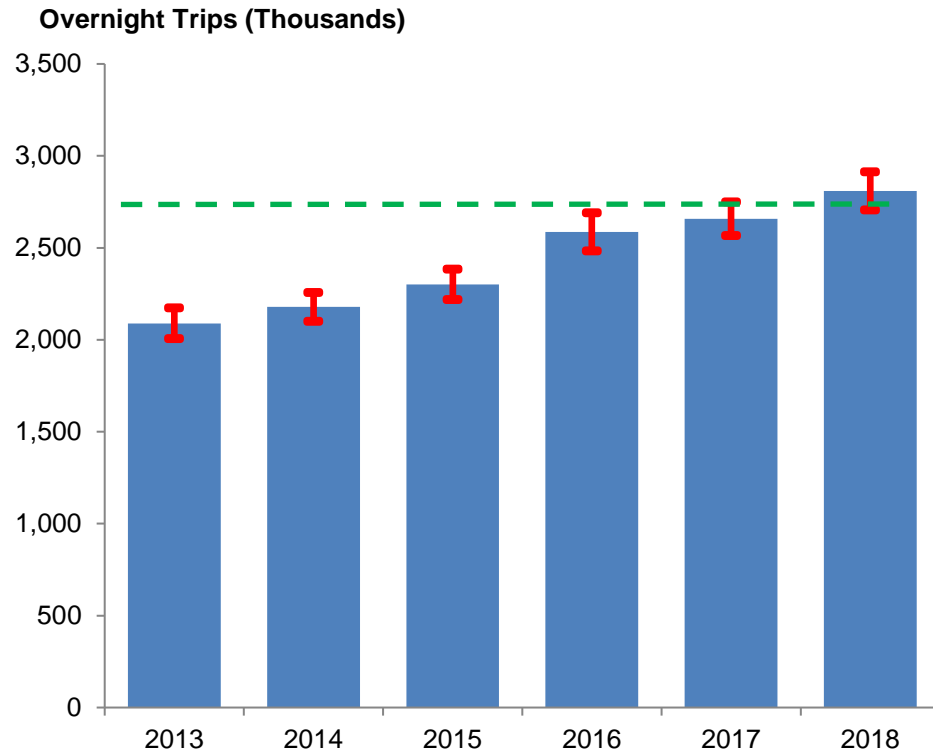
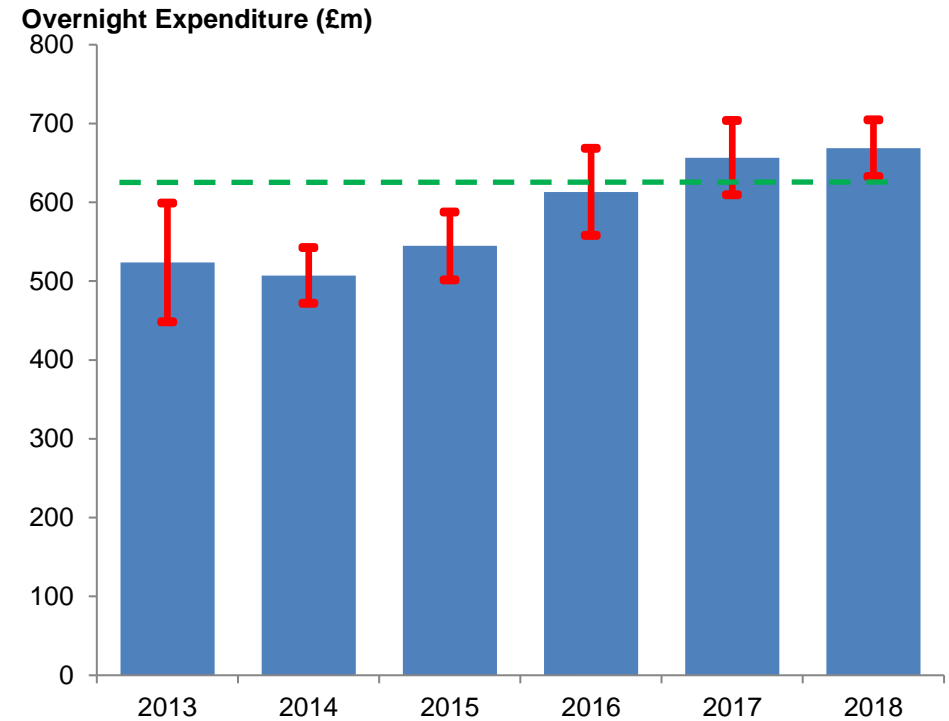


Figure 2: Estimated expenditure associated with external overnight trips in Northern Ireland 2013-2018



What you can say....

Whilst there has been no statistically significant change in the number of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland and associated expenditure between 2017 and 2018; the sources point to a general upwards trend from 2013

What you cannot say....

There was a definite increase from 2,658,000 to 2,809,000 overnight trips and associated expenditure also increasing by 2% from £657m to £669m between 2017 and 2018

Introduction

This report provides statistics on external overnight trips (tourists from Great Britain, Republic of Ireland and elsewhere) to Northern Ireland during 2018. A full picture of all tourism activity can be found in the [Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics Publication](#).

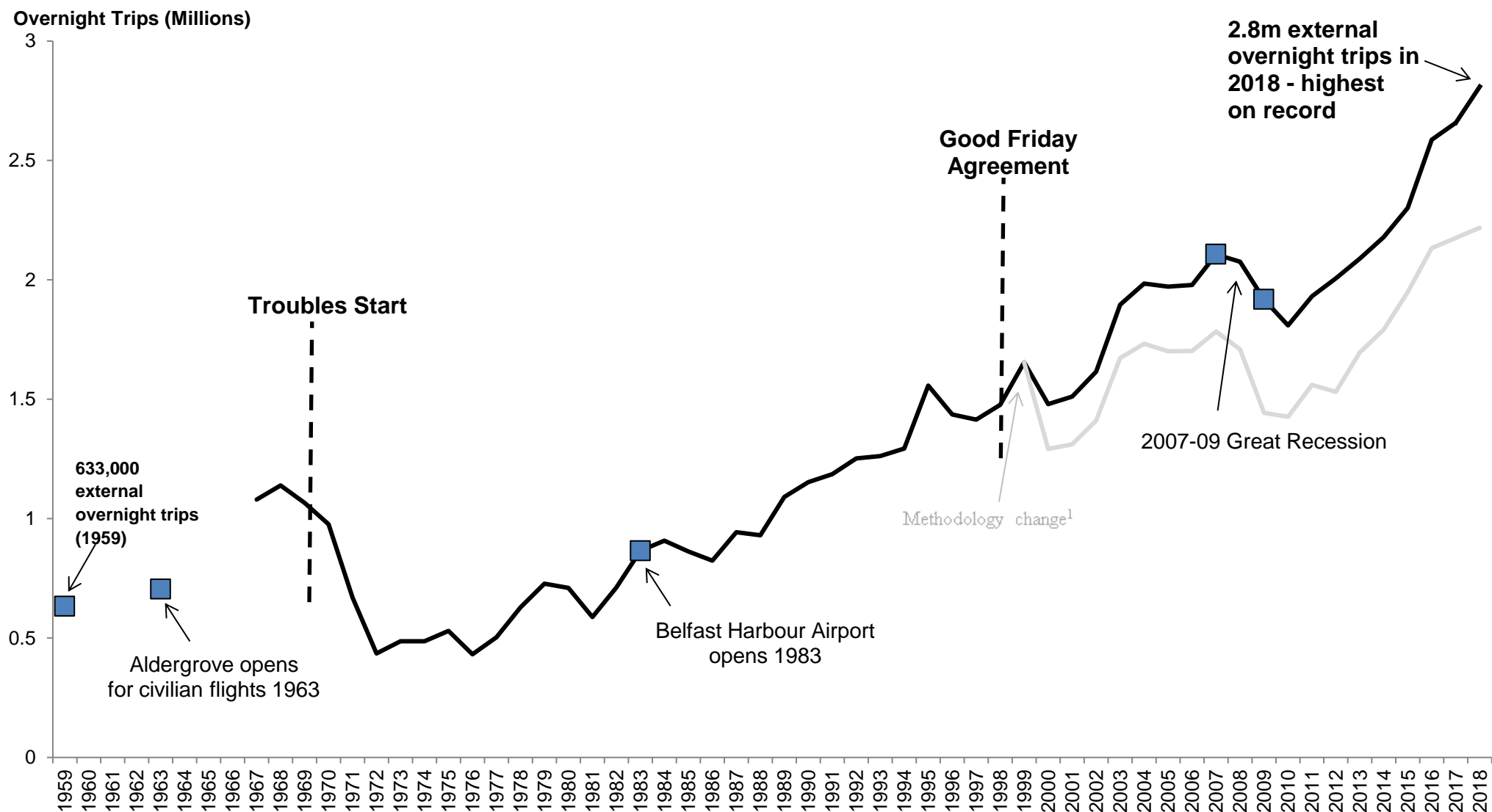
A number of sample surveys capture information from a subset of the population, in order to estimate the headline statistics of external overnight trips, associated nights and expenditure. The results from sample surveys are always estimates and not precise figures. This means that they are subject to margins of error which can have an impact on how the estimates should be interpreted, especially regarding comparisons over the short term.

This report aims to present statistics on external overnight trips to Northern Ireland in a clear manner. We endeavour to inform users of when changes in estimates over time may be due to sampling and would not be seen as statistically significant; and indeed when there have been statistically significant changes in the estimates.

Table 1 shows an estimated 2.8 million external overnight trips to Northern Ireland in 2018. The estimated number of external overnight trips increased by 6% from 2.7 million in 2017. The longer term trend suggests that there has been a steady increase in the number of external overnight trips from 2013. These estimates should be seen in the context of the longer time series shown in Figure 3 (overleaf).

Periods such as The Troubles and The 2007-2009 Great Recession are seen to have had a negative impact. It should be noted 2018 has had the highest recorded estimated number of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland.

Figure 3: Estimated annual external overnight trips to Northern Ireland (1959-2018)



Note: There have been minor changes to the methodology and sources used to measure external overnight trips to Northern Ireland, but the graph still paints a representative picture of the trend over time. Figures for residents of the Republic of Ireland have been included from 2000 onwards (RoI made up approximately 13% of the total external overnight trips in 2000 and 21% in 2018).

¹The faint grey line shows the trend had the figures for residents of the Republic of Ireland not been included; users can see that when the overnight trips from the Republic of Ireland are removed the volume of estimated external overnight trips to NI drops; however, the general upward trend remains the same. This is the longest timescale available as data for NI tourism begins in 1959.

External overnight trips to Northern Ireland by place of origin

Information regarding external overnight trips to Northern Ireland (NI) was broken out by place of origin (also referred to as main markets); which are Great Britain (GB), the Republic of Ireland (RoI), Other Europe and Other Overseas.

The longer trend over time would suggest an increase in overnight trips by visitors from Great Britain, Mainland Europe and Other Overseas markets. (Figure 4)

Figure 4: External overnight trips to Northern Ireland by main market 2013 – 2018

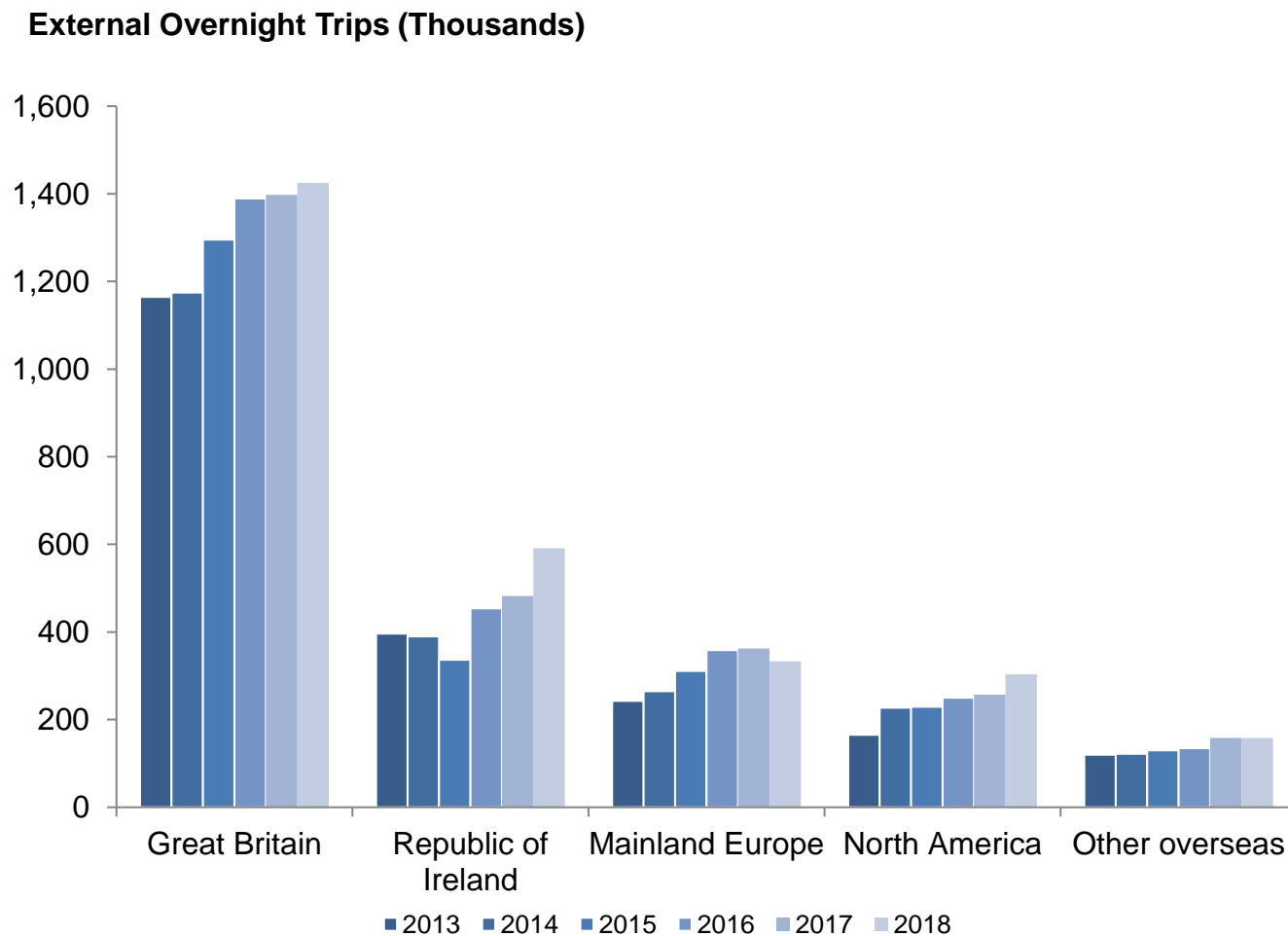
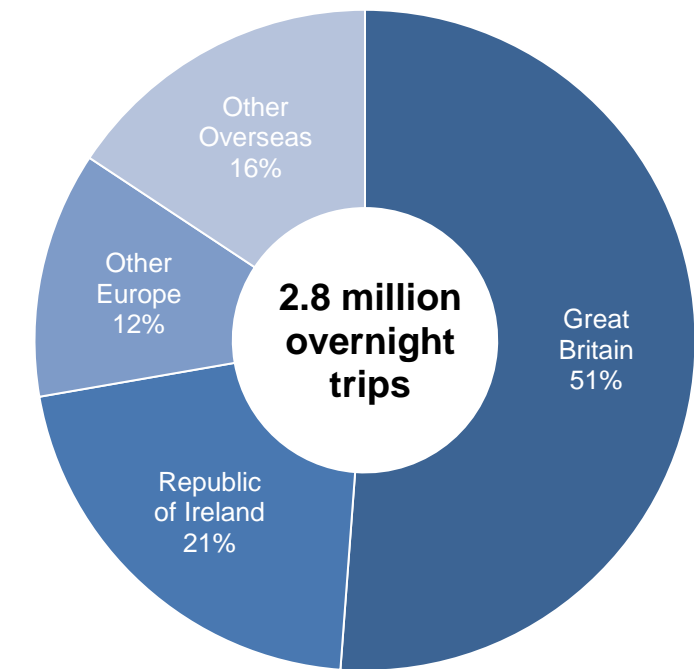


Figure 5: Breakdown by place of origin 2018



During 2018, of all estimated external overnight trips to NI, 51% were from GB. A further 21% of overnight trips were from residents of the Republic of Ireland; and 12% and 16% from Other Europe and Other Overseas respectively.

Top ten places of origin of external overnight visitors to Northern Ireland 2018

Figure 6 shows the place of origin of external visitors taking overnight trips to Northern Ireland during 2018. The most popular places of origin being England, followed by the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. Although these are neighbouring Northern Ireland, places as far as USA, Canada and Australia are also in the Top Ten.

Figure 6: Top ten places of origin of overnight visitors to Northern Ireland 2018



Expenditure of external overnight trips in Northern Ireland

Figure 7: Rolling 12 months expenditure of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland Q1 2013 – Q4 2018 (Non Zero Axis)

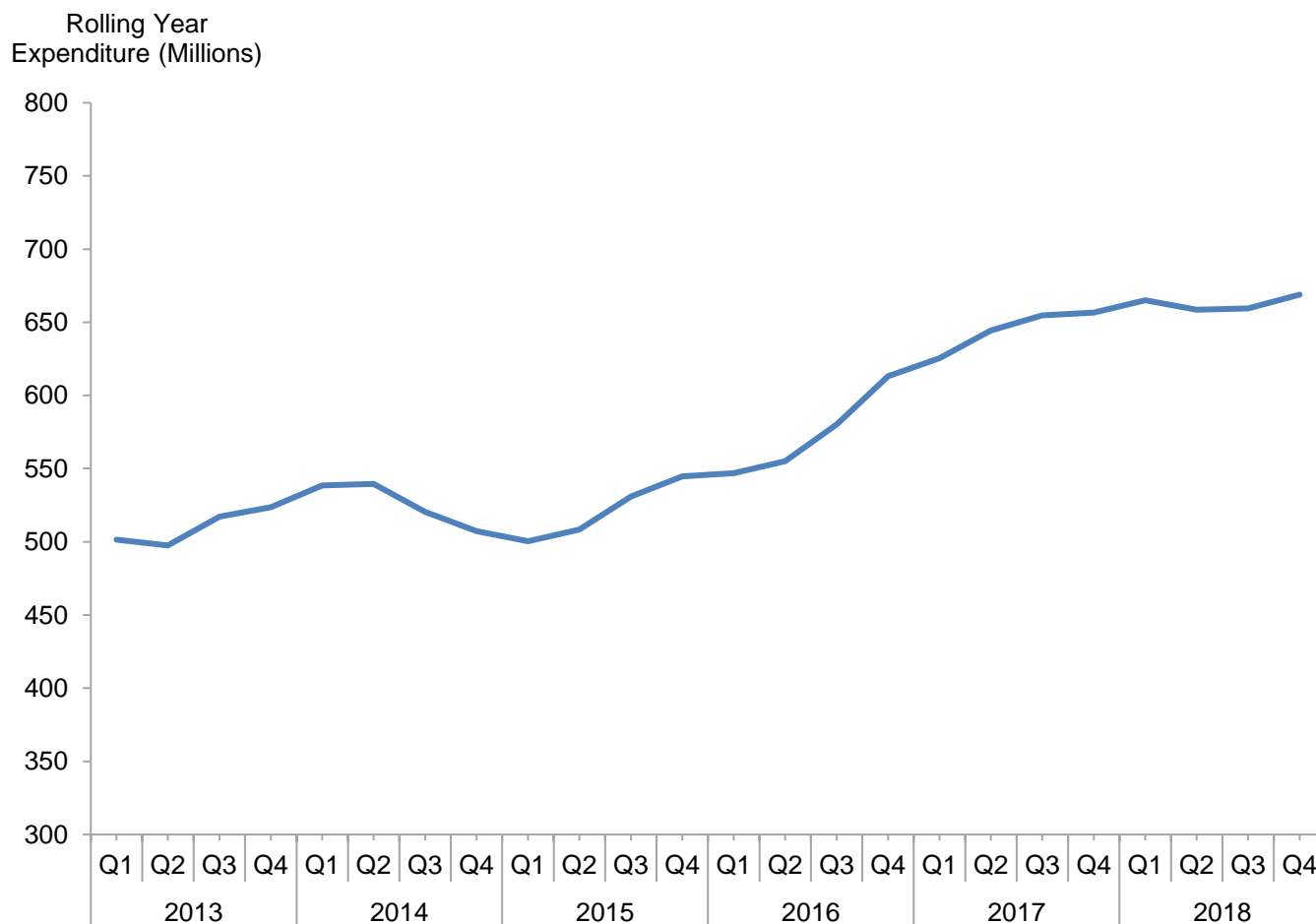


Figure 7 shows the rolling year (twelve months) estimated expenditure of external overnight trips from Q1 2013 to Q4 2018. In 2018 total estimated expenditure of external overnight trips was £669 million.

Looking at the long term trend from 2013 onwards, the estimated expenditure reflects the trend in estimated number of overnight trips and nights, with all three estimates displaying an upward trend in external tourism activity between 2013 and 2018.

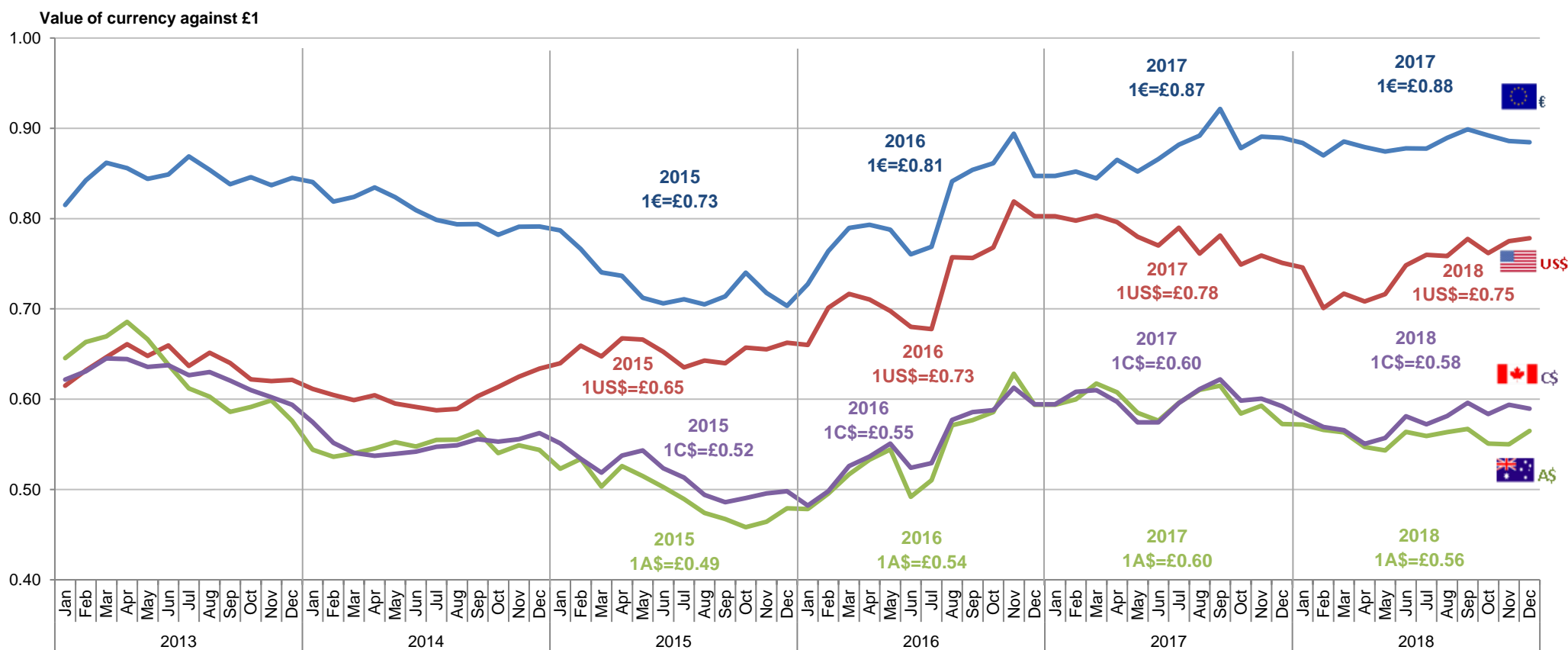
Users should note that whilst there has been growth in estimated expenditure over the years, estimates year on year often fall within the 95% confidence limits. However, the estimated expenditure of £669 million in 2018 is a statistically significant increase from the estimated expenditure of £545 million in 2015.

Exchange rates of sterling against other currencies, mainly the Euro and US, Canadian and Australian Dollars, can influence external expenditure. An idea of how exchange rates may impact the value of expenditure is explained on the following page.

Exchange rates of Sterling against other currencies

It is important for users to note the changes in value of sterling against other currencies around the world, and the impact that this may have on making a location more or less desirable for visitors. For example, a strong sterling against the euro may influence those in Great Britain to travel to the Euro zone area; similarly it can have the opposite influence on those from euro countries and make sterling areas less appealing. In contrast, a weak sterling against the euro may encourage those in sterling areas to take trips within the sterling area, whilst also making it more appealing for those from the Euro zone area to visit sterling areas.

Figure 8: Monthly exchange rates – currency against £1 January 2013 to December 2018 (non-zero axis) (showing average annual exchange rates for 2015 to 2018)

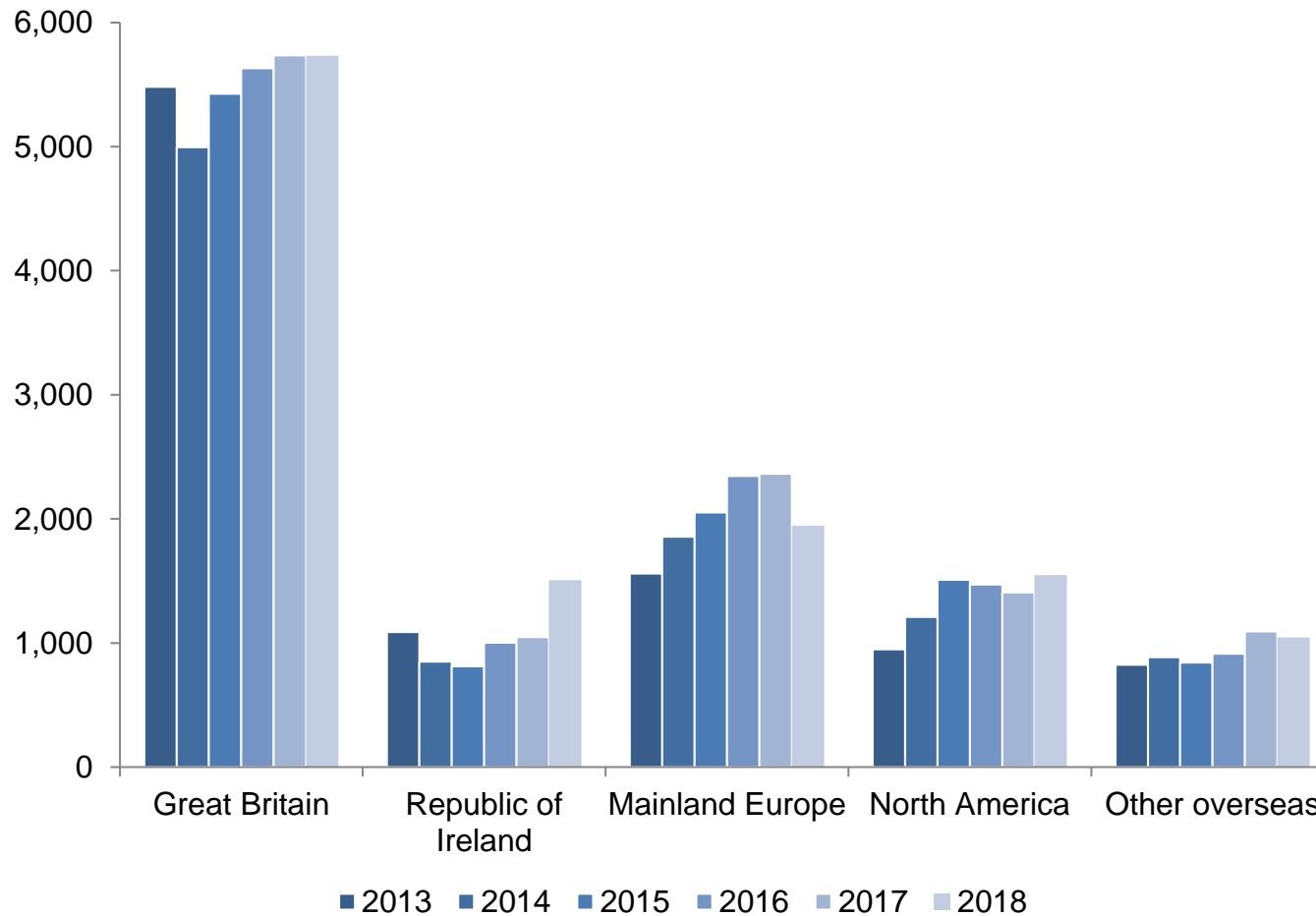


Source: [Financial Times](https://www.ft.com).

Estimated number of nights spent by external visitors in Northern Ireland

Figure 9: Number of nights spent by external visitors in Northern Ireland by main market 2013 – 2018

Number of Nights (Thousands)



Associated with the number of external overnight trips in 2018 were an estimated 11.8 million nights spent in Northern Ireland through these overnight trips (Figure 9).

The average number of nights spent in NI has fallen from 2013 (4.7 nights) to 2018 (4.2 nights) suggesting that although there are more external overnight trips being taken in NI, visitors are staying for shorter periods of time.

Estimated reason for visit of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland

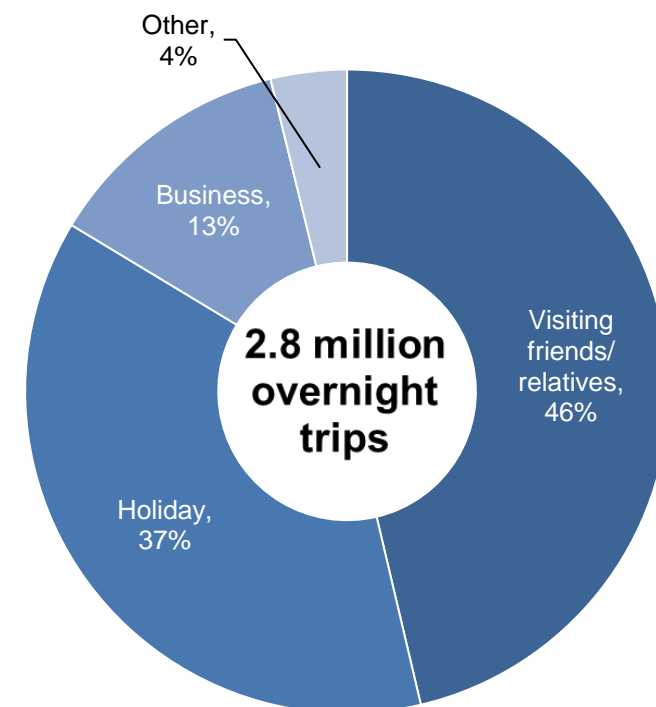
Of all estimated overnight trips to Northern Ireland in 2018, almost half (46%) were to visit friends and relatives. Around a third (37%) came to NI for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes. Some 13% came to NI for business purposes, and 4% for other reasons.

There were an estimated 1.3 million external overnight trips for **visiting friends and relatives** in 2018, making up 46% of all external overnight trips in NI during 2018. Perhaps linked to our proximity, the majority of overnight trips from England (56%) and Scotland (58%) were to visit friends and relatives (Figure 11a).

There were an estimated 1.0 million external overnight trips for **holiday / pleasure / leisure** purposes during 2018, making up 37% of all external overnight trips. Many of the places of origin were above this level. External overnight trips for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes made up 74%, 66% and 62% of all external overnight trips from Italy, Germany and the United States of America respectively (Figure 11b).

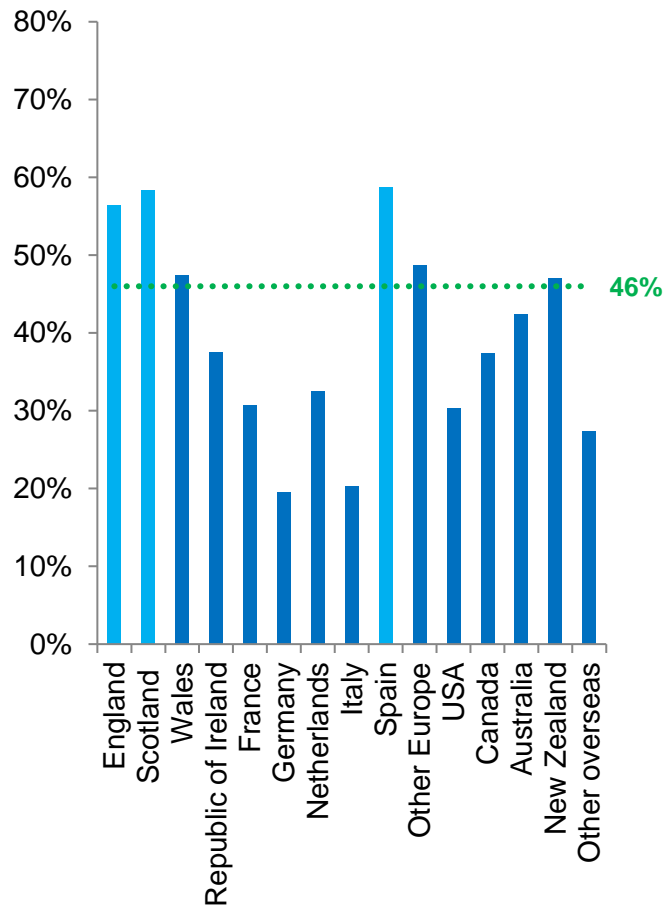
An estimated 0.46 (16%) million external overnight trips were for **business & other** purposes in 2018. External overnight trips for business & other purposes made up 25%, 20% and 19% of all external overnight trips from Wales, England and the republic of Ireland respectively (Figure 11c).

Figure 10: Reason for overnight trip 2018



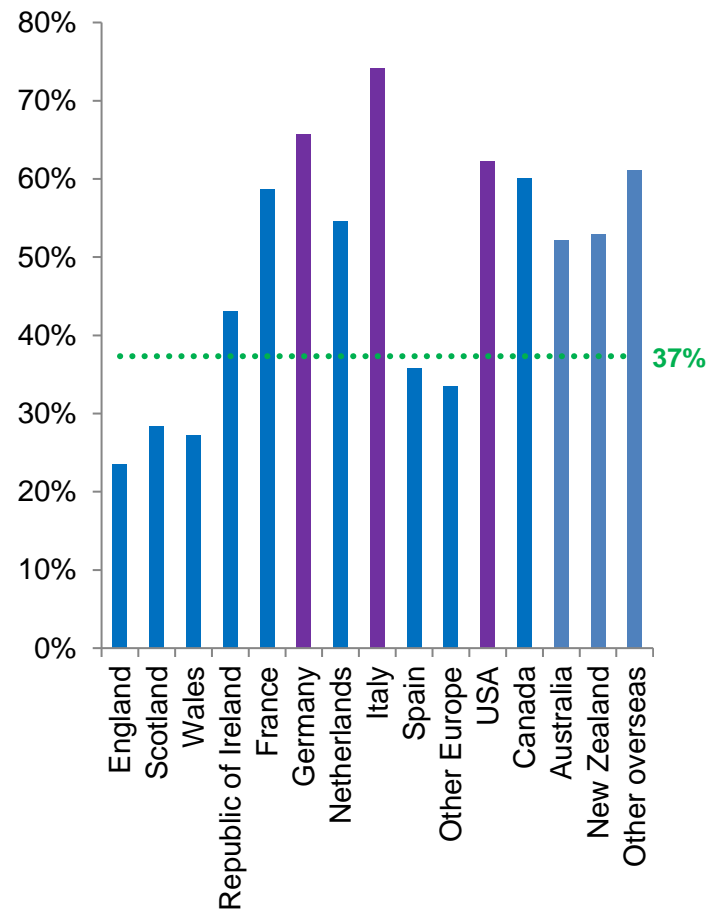
Figures 11a – 11c: Reason for external overnight trip in Northern Ireland by place of origin 2018

11a. Visiting Friends / Relatives



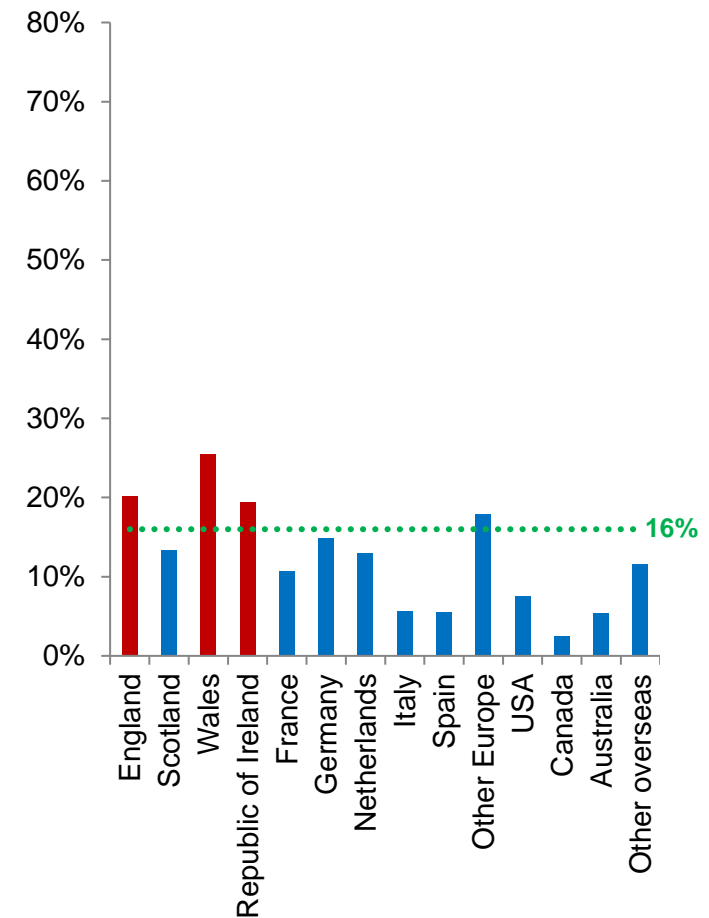
Spain,
Scotland,
England

11b. Holiday / Pleasure / Leisure



Italy,
Germany,
USA

11c. Business

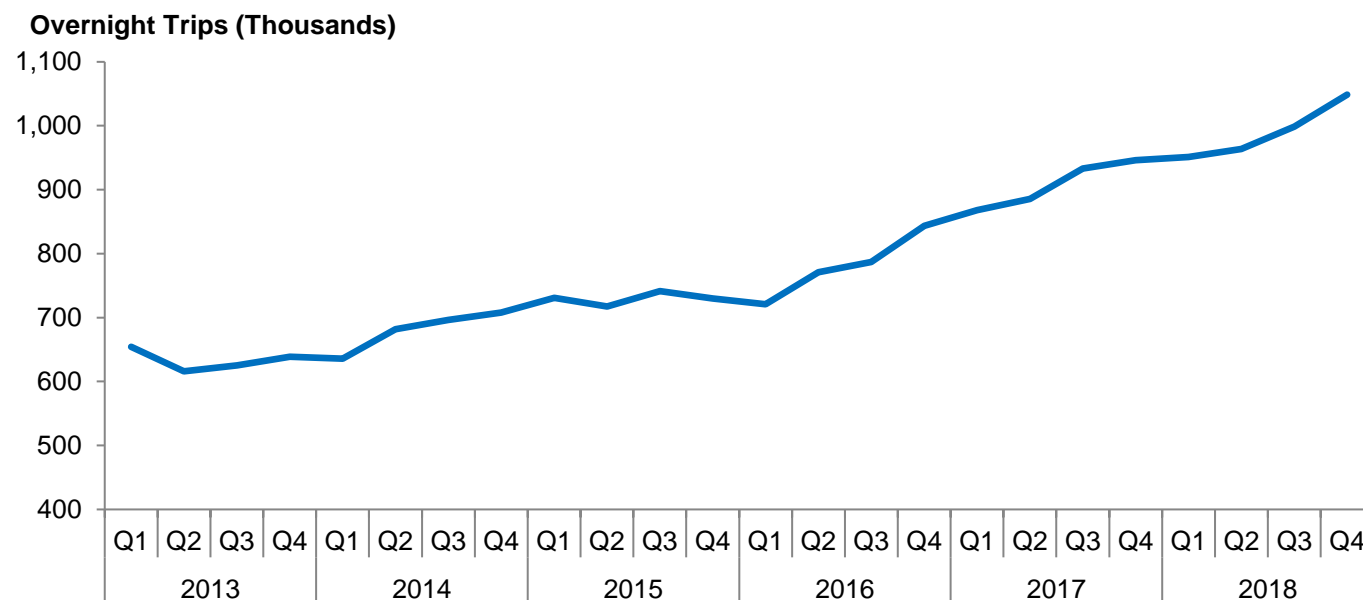


Wales,
England,
Republic of Ireland

..... External Overnight Trips Average

Estimated external overnight trips to Northern Ireland for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes

Figure 12: Rolling 12 months number of external trips for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes, Q1 2013- Q4 2018 (Non Zero Axis)



The estimated number of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes has increased year on year from 639,000 external overnight trips in 2013 to 1,049,000 external overnight trips during 2018 (Figure 12). Following this trend, the estimated number of nights and value of expenditure associated with these external overnight trips have also shown an increase from 2013 to 2018.

Factors that may have influenced external overnight visitors coming to NI for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes include the Giant's Causeway (number one visitor attraction in NI 2018), Titanic Belfast (number two visitor attraction in NI 2018), the Causeway Coastal Route and Game of Thrones.

Figure 13: What influenced external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes to come to NI 2018?



Giant's Causeway 28%



Titanic Belfast 26%



Causeway Coastal Route 12%



Game of Thrones 9%

Some information is captured on factors that influence people to come to Northern Ireland (Figure 13). Reflecting the Visitor Attraction Survey, the Giant's Causeway was the most influential factor for external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes during 2018 (28%), followed by Titanic Belfast (26%).

Activities that overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure participate in whilst staying in Northern Ireland can be split into two categories; 'sporting activities' and 'leisure / sightseeing / cultural / historical activities'.

Figure 14a shows the top five sporting activities that external overnight visitors to Northern Ireland for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes participated in whilst in Northern Ireland during 2018. Just over 12% went hiking / cross country walking, followed by 5% attending or participating in an organised sporting event (e.g. motor sport / rugby / football / Gaelic games).

Figure 14a: What sporting activities did external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes participate in when in NI 2018?

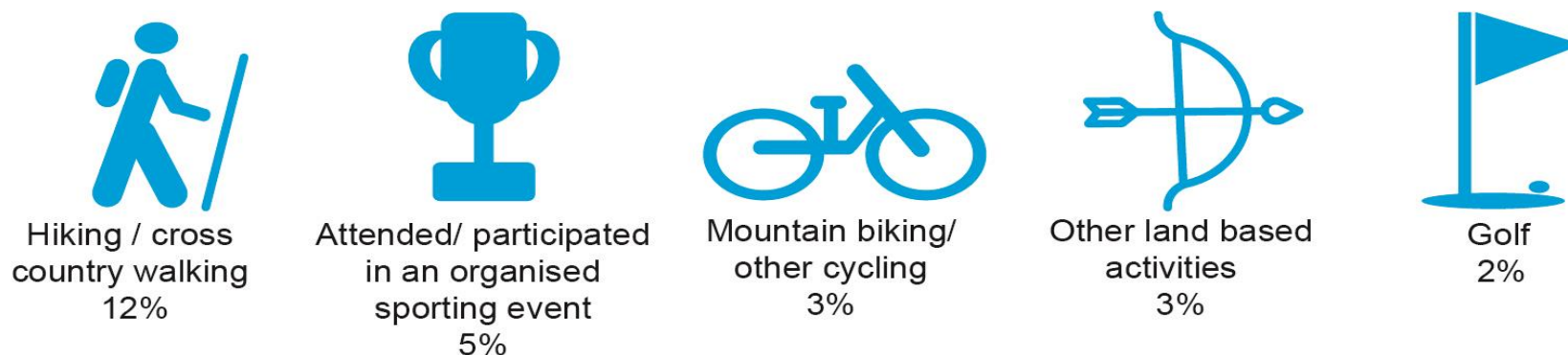
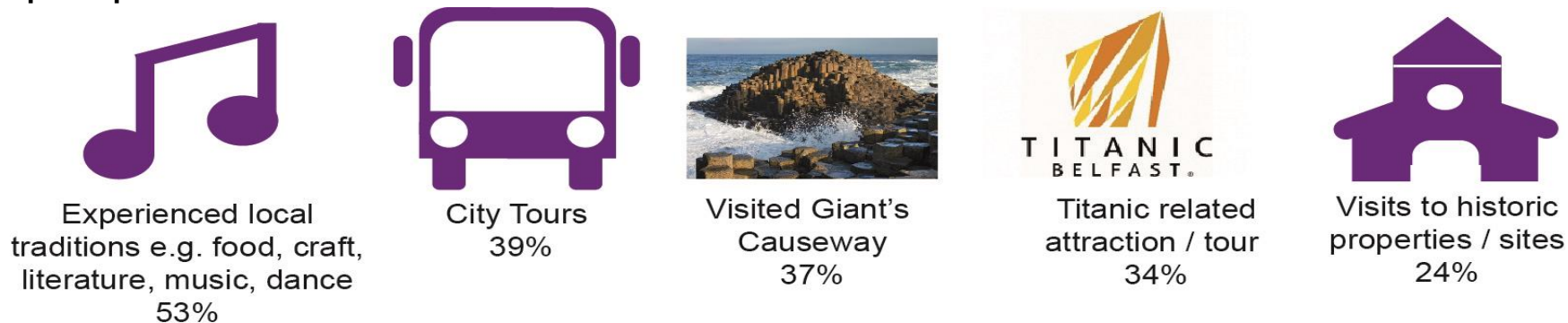


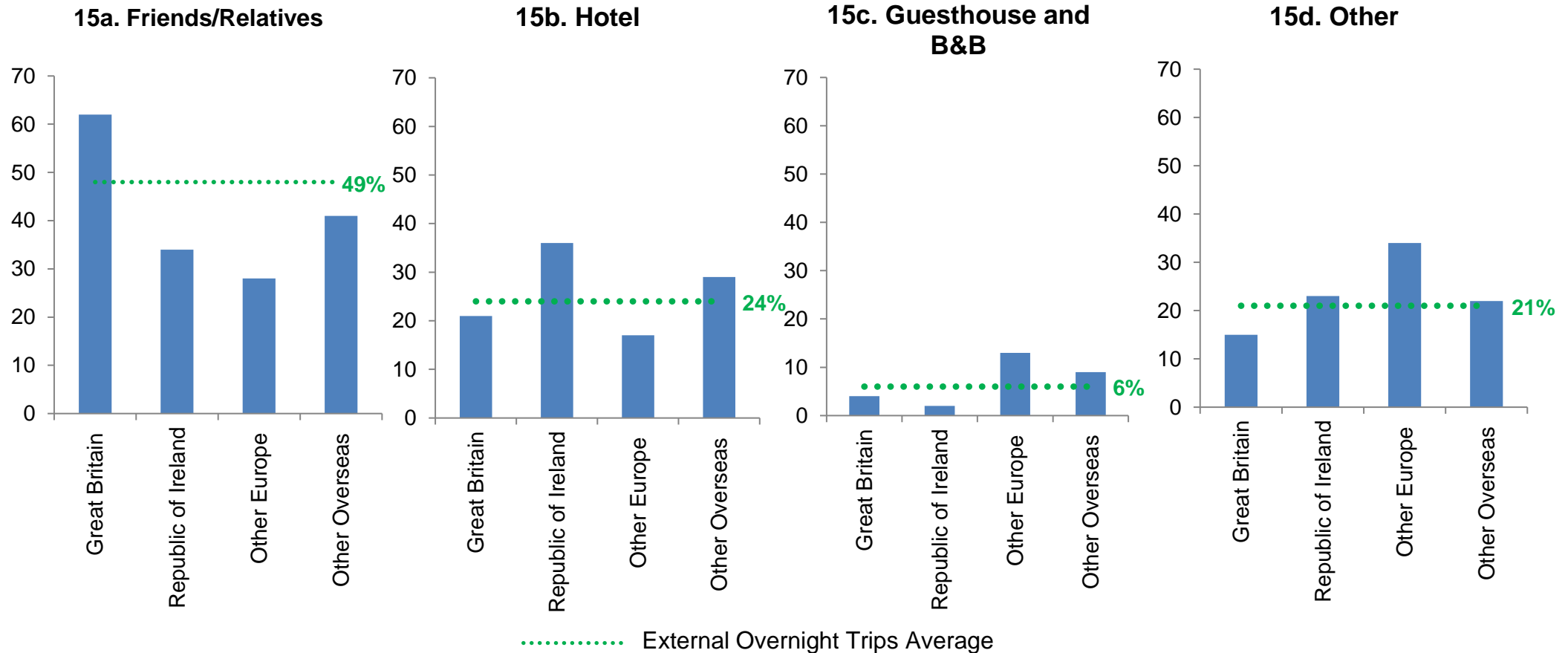
Figure 14b shows the top five leisure / sightseeing / cultural / historical activities that external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes participated in whilst in Northern Ireland during 2018. Approximately 53% experienced local traditions / culture (e.g. food, craft, literature, music, dance); over a third participated in a city tour (39%) and 37% visited the Giant's Causeway.

Figure 14b: What leisure / sightseeing / cultural / historical activities did external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes participate in when in NI 2018?



Accommodation type used for external overnight trips in Northern Ireland

Figure 15a-15d: Proportion of nights spent in accommodation type by external overnight visitors to Northern Ireland and main market 2018



Of all external overnight trips to NI during 2018, staying with friends and relatives was the most popular choice of accommodation type. In total, the majority of nights (49%) were spent staying with friends and relatives; ranging from 36% of Other Europe to 60% of Great Britain staying with friends and relatives (Figure 15a).

The second most popular accommodation type used was hotels, with 24% of total nights being spent in a hotel; ranging from 17% by visitors from Other Europe to 36% by visitors from the Republic of Ireland.

Passenger activity at Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland air and sea ports

The Civil Aviation Authority collects passenger information from NI Airports (Belfast International, Belfast City and City of Derry). Port authorities in Belfast and Larne collect data on sea passengers. Similar figures are also available for the air ports and sea ports in the Republic of Ireland.

Whilst passenger numbers in Northern Ireland air and sea ports had remained flat from 2011 to 2014, passenger numbers have been increasing during 2017 and 2018; and there has been a significant increase in the number of passengers at air ports and sea ports in the Republic of Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, the main factor for the increase in passenger activity in air passengers has been an increase in passengers at Belfast International Airport.

Further information regarding airport figures and information for both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland can be found in the [Northern Ireland Air Passenger Statistics](#) tables.

During 2017 the vast majority of Great Britain visitors (93%) arrived through Northern Ireland ports, whereas almost two thirds (62%) of visitors from Outside UK & Ireland came through Republic of Ireland ports.

Background notes

Sampling variability

The Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NIPS) is a sample survey and estimates obtained from it are subject to sampling variability; in 2017 the sample size of the NIPS was 45,200. Table 2 details the confidence intervals of the visitor and expenditure estimates by country of residence.

Table 2: Confidence intervals for external overnight visitors to Northern Ireland 2018 (Northern Ireland Passenger Survey).

	95 % Confidence Interval	
	Visitors	Expenditure
Total	+/-4%	+/- 5%

Source: NI Passenger Survey (NISRA)

Data revisions

Tourism estimates are produced to provide timely data to the tourism industry and Government policy makers. The estimates may be subject to revision due to improvements to the survey / analysis / methodology or inclusion of data returned after the publication date. The figures in this document are the most up-to-date available at the time of publication.

Single year estimates from the Survey of Overseas Travellers have been replaced with three year rolling averages following consultation with users. Further information can be found on the background notes of the Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics publication.

Data for the years 2012 to 2015 was revised on the 12th August 2016 due to a revised weighting mechanism for the Household Travel Survey, conducted by Central Statistics Office regarding overnight visitors to Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland. The HTS data for 2016 was revised in 2017 due to a weighting revision. This caused minimal change which was less than 1%

Full information on the revision of tourism statistics can be found at [Tourism Statistics Branch Revision Policy](#).

A quality report on Tourism Statistics can be found at this [link](#).

[Household Travel Survey 2018 data issues](#)

Data from the 2018 Household Travel Survey (HTS), provided by Central Statistics Office (CSO), relating to the number of visitors coming to Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland (ROI), [should be considered as interim data that may be subject to future revision](#).

Background

In 2018 the Household Travel Survey (HTS) was suspended due to quality issues in the collected data. Against a backdrop of falling response rates, it was observed that there was a non-response issue affecting the survey estimates in 2018. The percentage of HTS survey respondents who did not take overnight trips was much lower than in the equivalent quarters of 2017 and previous years. As a result, the survey weights assigned to those who took overnight trips were much higher than before, which would have led to unprecedented increases in the survey estimates of domestic trips, nights and expenditure.

Changes to methodology

In order to address the non-response bias in the 2018 HTS sample the CSO has adjusted the weights of respondents within each of the 112 cells of the sample design (region, sex and age class), for all four quarters of 2018. The effect of the adjustment procedure is to change the percentage breakdown between people who did and did not take overnight trips, and align it with a forecasted percentage of respondents with and without trips, based on data from the previous six years of the survey.

In this way, the percentage of people in the sample who have taken overnight trips follows a broadly similar, though not identical, pattern to previous years. This has the effect of addressing the non-response bias issue in the sample by reducing the weight assigned to those who took overnight trips. This further has the effect of reducing the estimates of trips, nights and expenditure arising from the HTS compared to the pre-adjustment estimates for 2018.

The estimates arising from this adjustment to the 2018 Household Travel Survey will be reviewed again in the context of the 2019 data. Therefore, the 2018 data should be considered interim and may be subject to future revision.

NISRA quality assessment

NISRA Tourism Statistics has been in liaison with CSO since the issue with the 2018 data became known. Having looked at the issues faced with the underlying data, we have taken the view that the adjustments CSO have made to correct the issue are reasonable and appropriate.

We have looked at past trends as well to assure ourselves that the patterns look correct. For example, the 23% increase in the estimate for trips between 2017 and 2018 compares with a recent 35% increase in trips between 2015 and 2016. The estimate for expenditure has increased by 20%, which compares with an increase of 29% between 2016 and 2017.

Whilst the data has no direct equivalent, we considered results from the 2018 hotel occupancy and found that arrivals from ROI visitors increased by 18% between 2017 and 2018, also indicating a similar increase, albeit for a subsection of these visitors.

We also considered the relative importance of the data to overall estimates. Visitors from ROI represent about only 12% of all trips in NI and therefore we have taken this context into account.

*****Update 24/06/2019 A report containing full details of the issues in the HTS, and the interim solution, is available on the CSO website and can be accessed [here](#)*****

Conclusion

Following quality checks NISRA feel the data provided by CSO is of suitable quality to report on. We ask users to be aware there is potential for future revision, but we don't feel this is likely to change the overall message of the publication or the key statistics. We advise users that are particularly interested in the number of visitors from ROI to use the figures with caution and look at the patterns over the last few years rather than focussing on short term changes.

If a future revision occur we will make users aware of their impact on the statistics in this publication.

Survey methodologies

For survey methodologies of the surveys used to compile this report click on the respective link below:

[Northern Ireland Passenger Survey](#) (NISRA)

[Survey of Overseas Travellers](#) (Fáilte Ireland)

[Household Travel Survey](#) (Central Statistics Office)

Further information

Tables containing data used in this publication can be found at: [External Overnight Trips to Northern Ireland](#). For more information relating to this publication or if an alternative format is required, please contact us at:

tourismstatistics@nisra.gov.uk

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