



External Overnight Trips To Northern Ireland 2019

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3.0m
trips



11.8m
nights



£731m
spent

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Theme: People and Places

The key points are:

- there were an estimated 3.0 million overnight trips to Northern Ireland by external visitors in 2019. 11.8 million nights were associated with these trips;
- external visitors spent an estimated £731 million;
- the survey estimates that the top five places of origin for external visitors were England, Republic of Ireland, Scotland, United States of America and Canada;
- 39% (1.2m) overnight trips by external visitors were for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes in 2019;
- users should note that there were no statistically significant changes in the key indicators (estimated overnight trips, nights and expenditure) between 2018 and 2019. However, there has been a statistically significant increase over the longer term since 2016.

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

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.



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 2018 and 2019. 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 both in terms of spend as reported during the year and in spend deflated using the Consumer Price Index. For more information please see the background notes.

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 2013-2019

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	% Change (2018-19)
Overall Trips (000s)	2,089	2,179	2,301	2,587	2,658	2,809	3,001	+7%
95% CI lower limit (000s)	2,006	2,100	2,219	2,483	2,566	2,706	2,890	
95% CI upper limit (000s)	2,172	2,257	2,384	2,691	2,750	2,913	3,111	
Overall Nights (000s)	9,817	10,033	10,680	11,361	11,646	11,776	11,815	+0%
Overall Expenditure (£M)	524	507	545	613	657	669	731	+9%
95% CI lower limit (£M)	448	472	502	558	609	633	689	
95% CI upper limit (£M)	599	543	588	668	704	705	773	

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 2019. The graphs also show margins of errors around the published estimates.

Figure 1: Estimated number of external overnight trips in Northern Ireland 2013-2019

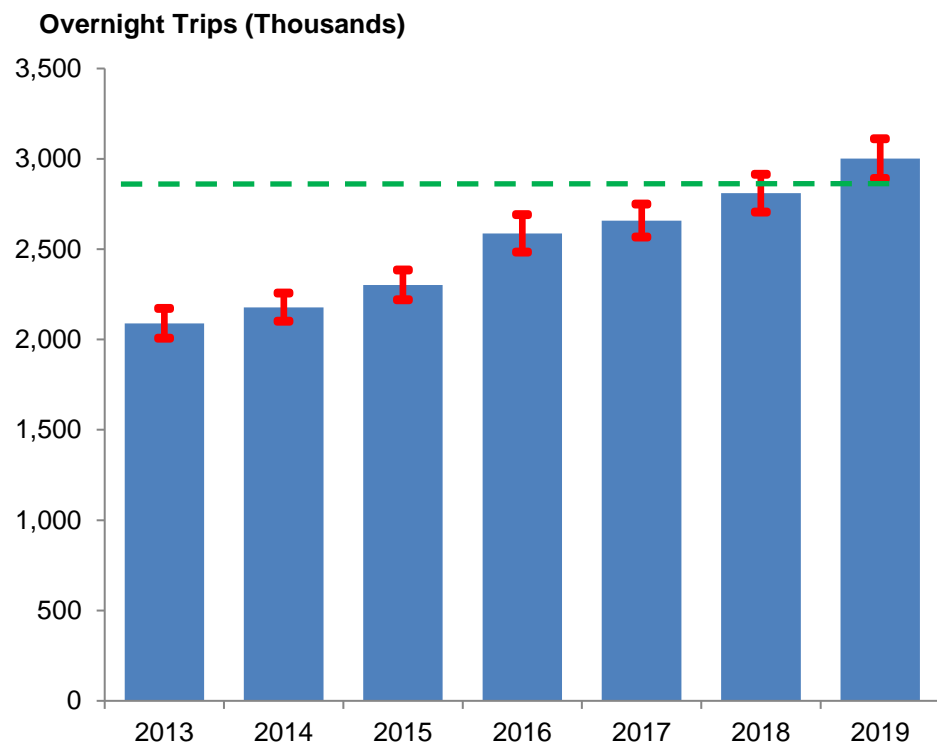
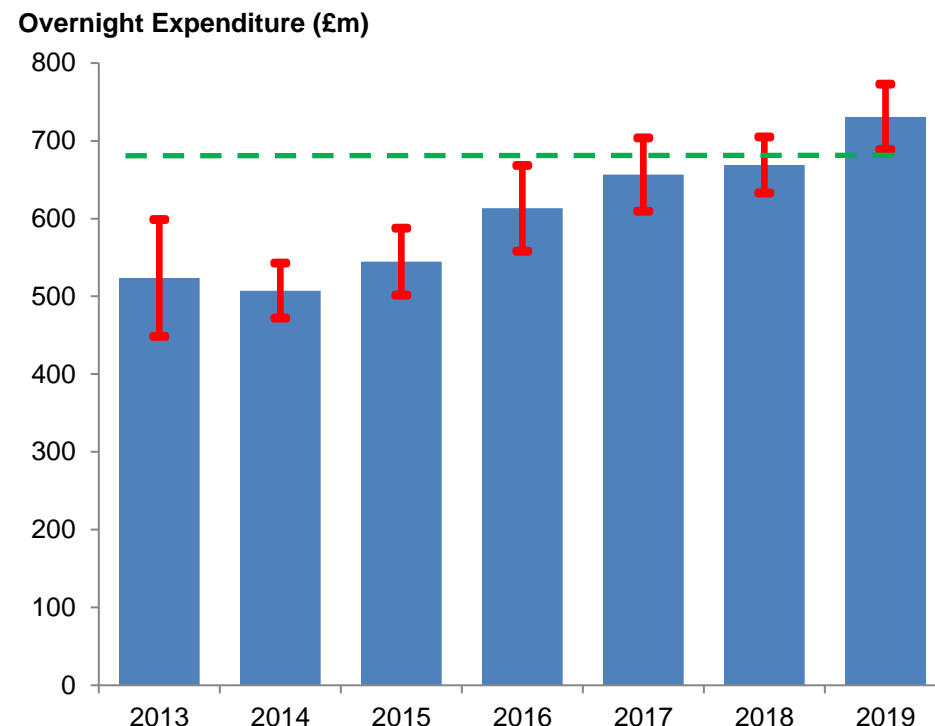


Figure 2: Estimated expenditure associated with external overnight trips in Northern Ireland 2013-2019



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 2018 and 2019; the sources point to a general upwards trend from 2013

What you cannot say....

There was a definite increase from 2,809,000 to 3,001,000 overnight trips and associated expenditure also increasing by 9% from £669m to £731m between 2018 and 2019

Introduction

This report provides statistics on external overnight trips (tourists from Great Britain, Republic of Ireland and elsewhere) to Northern Ireland during 2019. A full picture of all tourism activity can be found in the [Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics Publication](#).

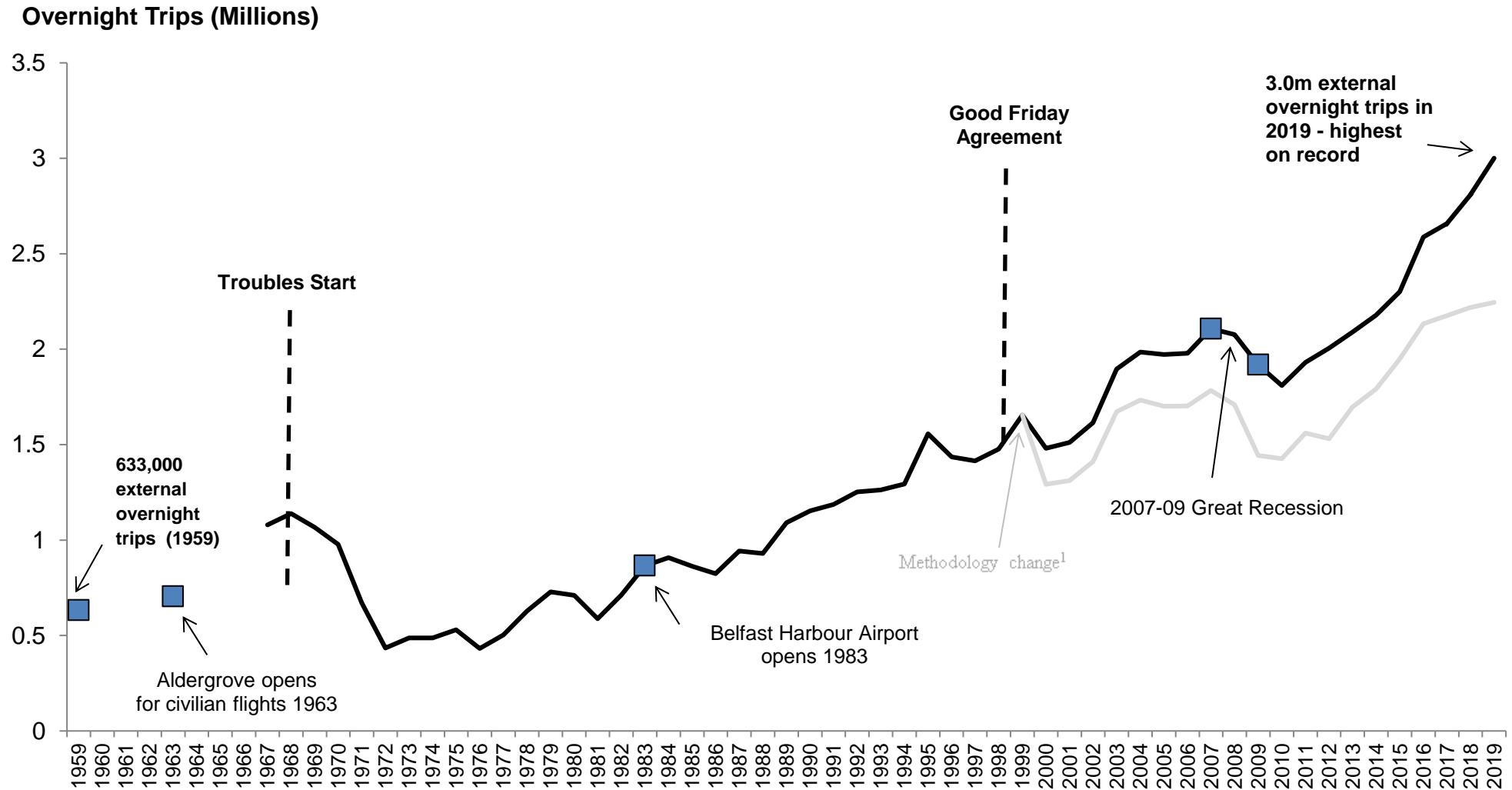
A number of sample surveys capture information from a subset of the population, in order to estimate the headline statistics of external overnight trips, associated nights and expenditure. The results from sample surveys are always estimates and not precise figures. This means that they are subject to 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 3.0 million external overnight trips to Northern Ireland in 2019. The estimated number of external overnight trips increased by 7% from 2.8 million in 2018. 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 2019 has had the highest recorded estimated number of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland.

Figure 3: Estimated annual external overnight trips to Northern Ireland (1959-2019)



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 – 2019

External Overnight Trips (Thousands)

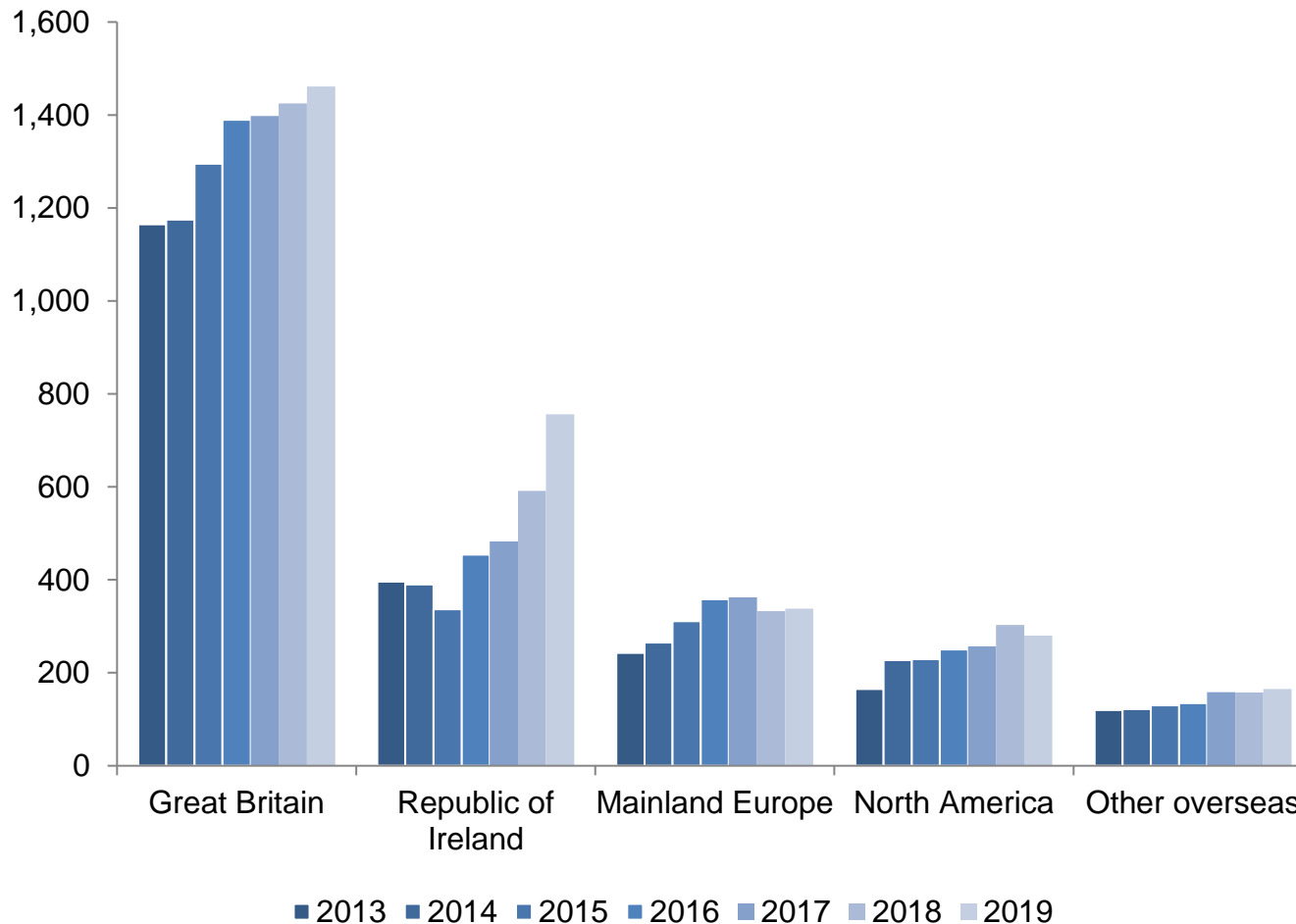
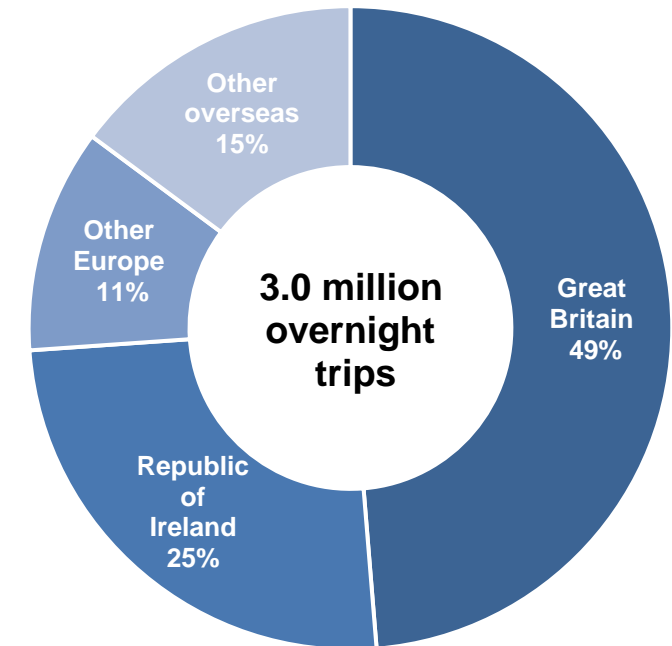


Figure 5: Breakdown by place of origin 2019

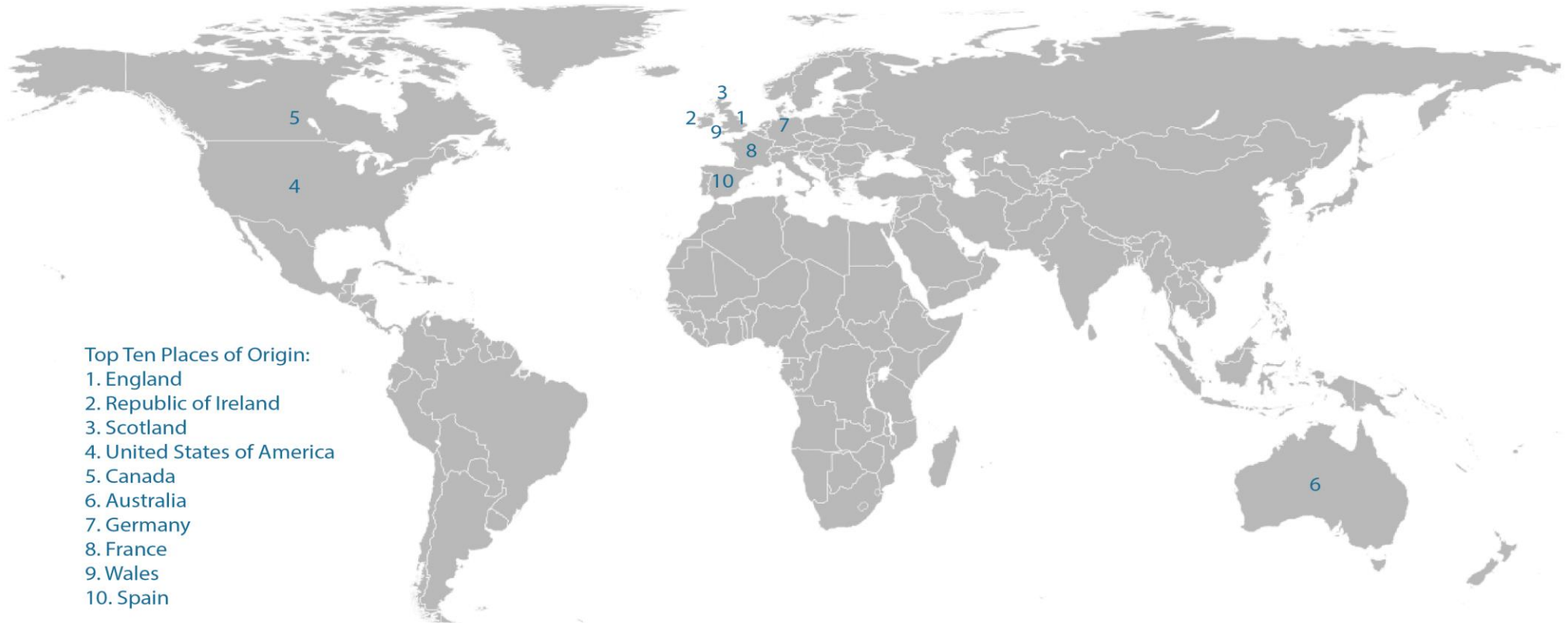


During 2019, of all estimated external overnight trips to NI, 49% were from GB. A further 25% of overnight trips were from residents of the Republic of Ireland; and 11% and 15% from Other Europe and Other Overseas respectively.

Top ten places of origin of external overnight visitors to Northern Ireland 2019

Figure 6 shows the place of origin of external visitors taking overnight trips to Northern Ireland during 2019. 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 2019



Expenditure of external overnight trips in Northern Ireland

Figure 7: Rolling 12 months expenditure of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland Q1 2013 – Q4 2019 (Non Zero Axis)

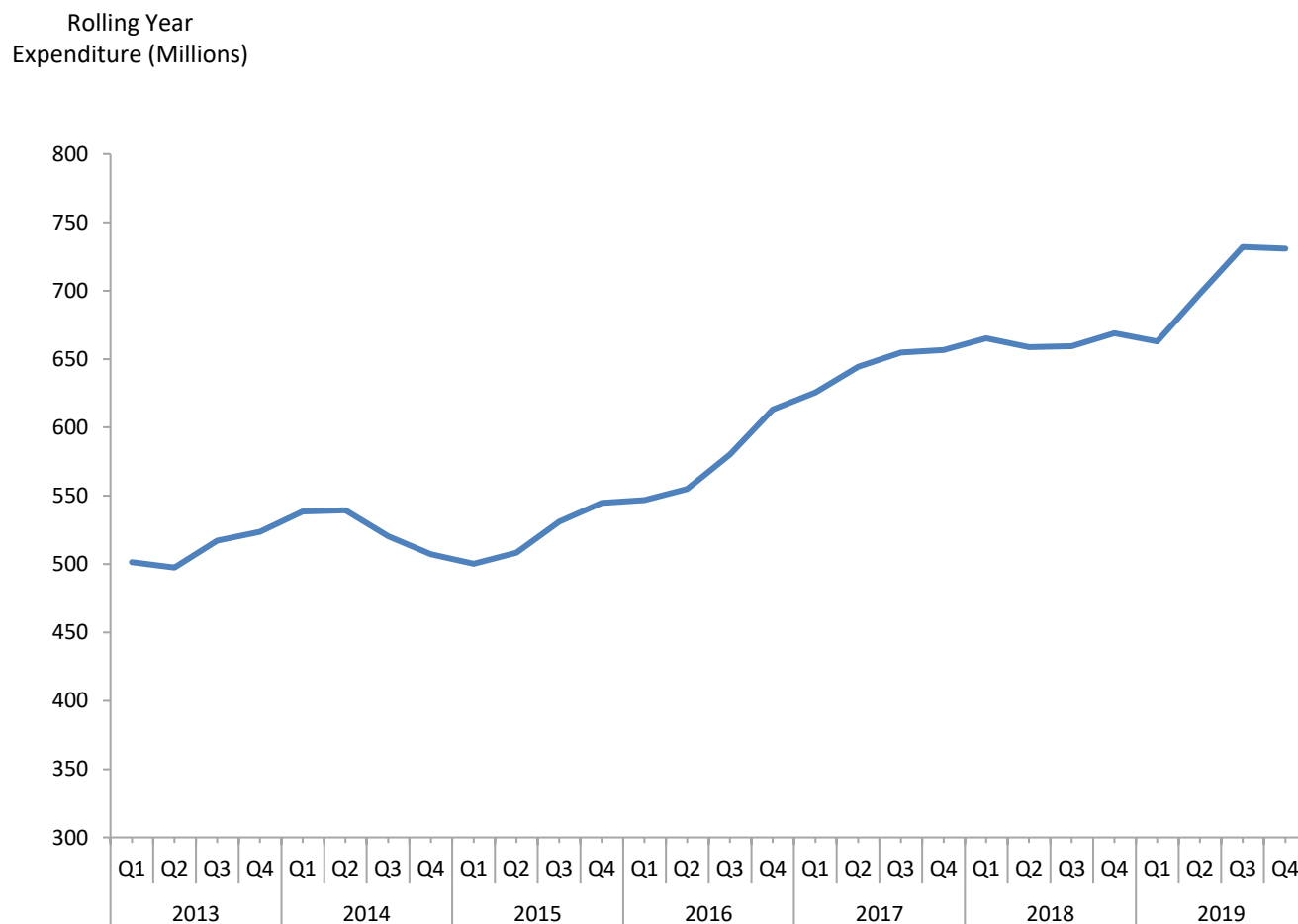


Figure 7 shows the rolling year (twelve months) estimated expenditure of external overnight trips from Q1 2013 to Q4 2019. In 2019 total estimated expenditure of external overnight trips was £731 million.

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 2019.

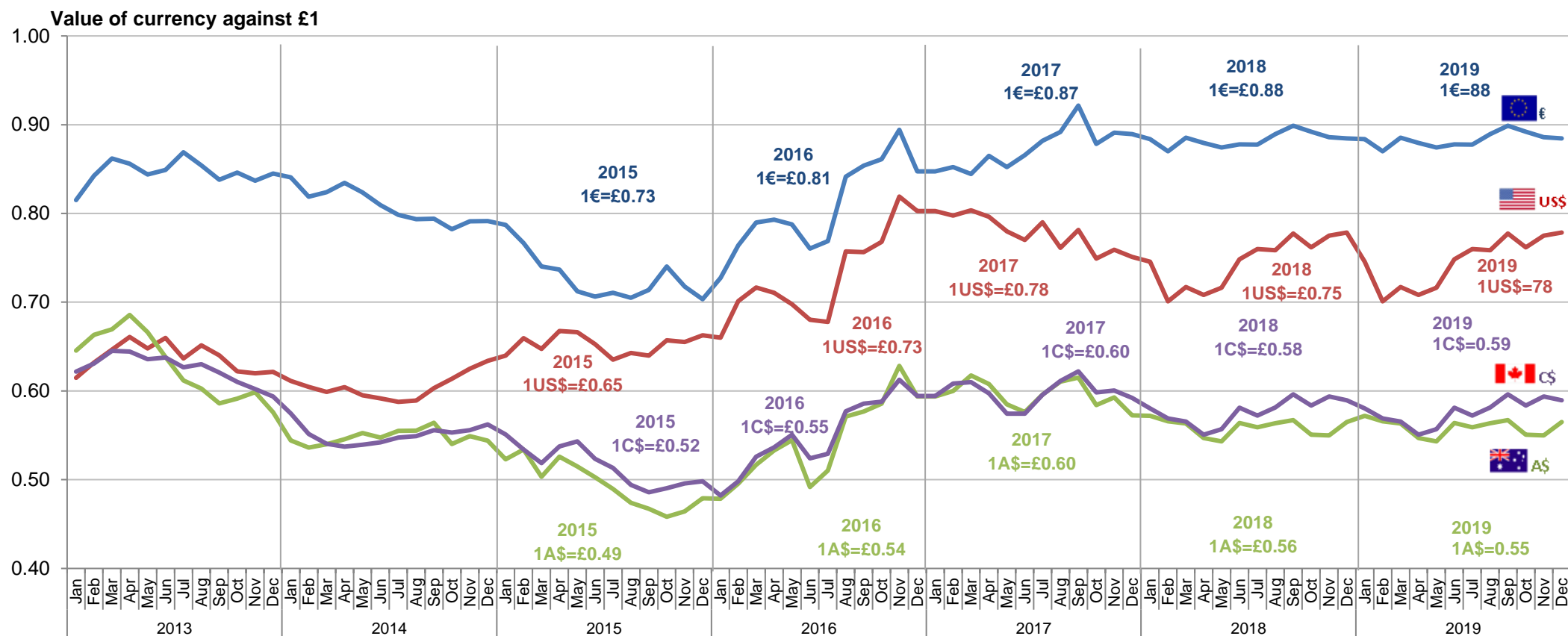
Users should note that whilst there has been growth in estimated expenditure over the years, estimates year on year often fall within the 95% confidence limits. However, the estimated expenditure of £731 million in 2019 is a statistically significant increase from the estimated expenditure of £545 million 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.

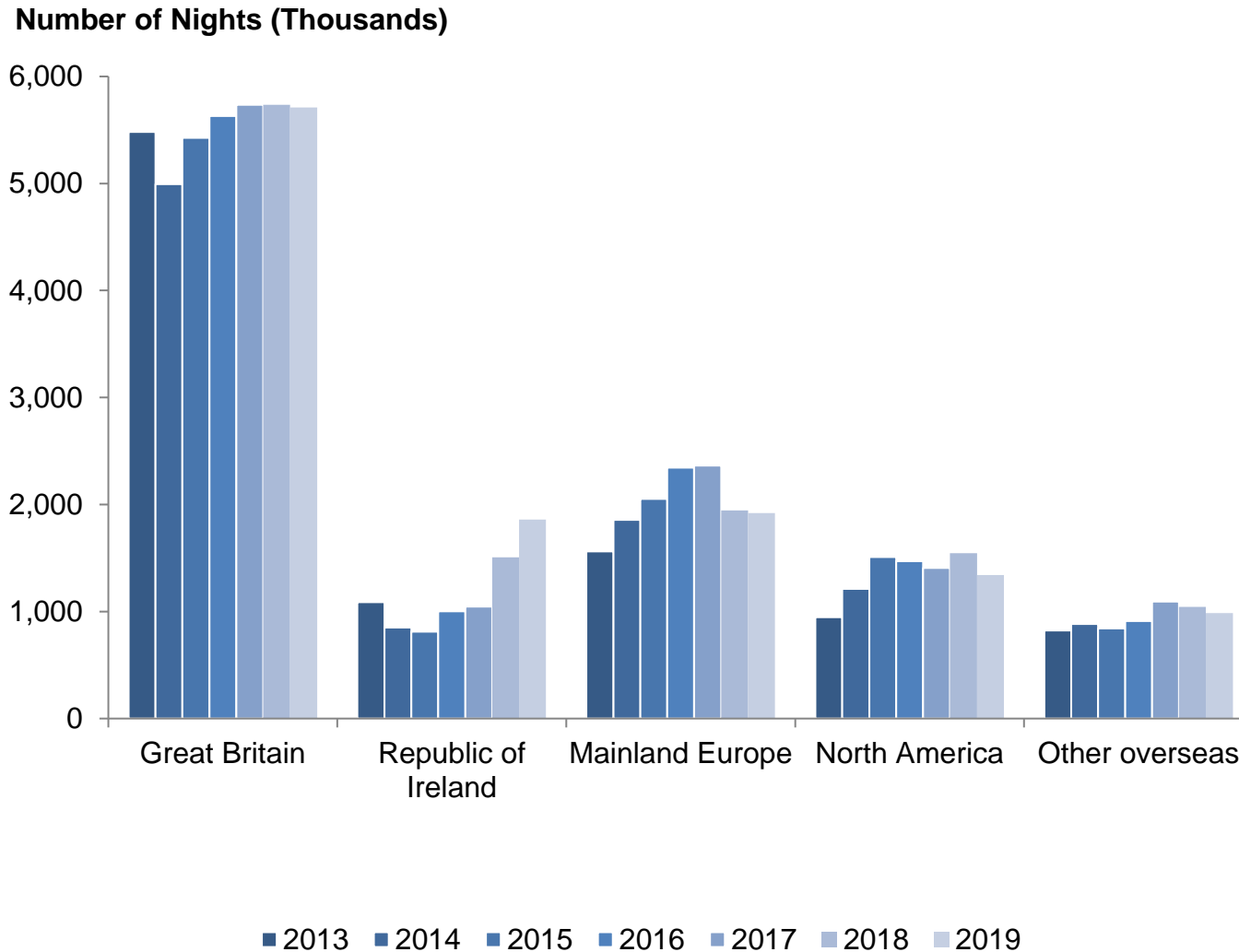
Figure 8: Monthly exchange rates – currency against £1 January 2013 to December 2019 (non-zero axis) (showing average annual exchange rates for 2015 to 2019)



Source: [Financial Times](#).

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 – 2019



Associated with the number of external overnight trips in 2019 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 2019 (3.9 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

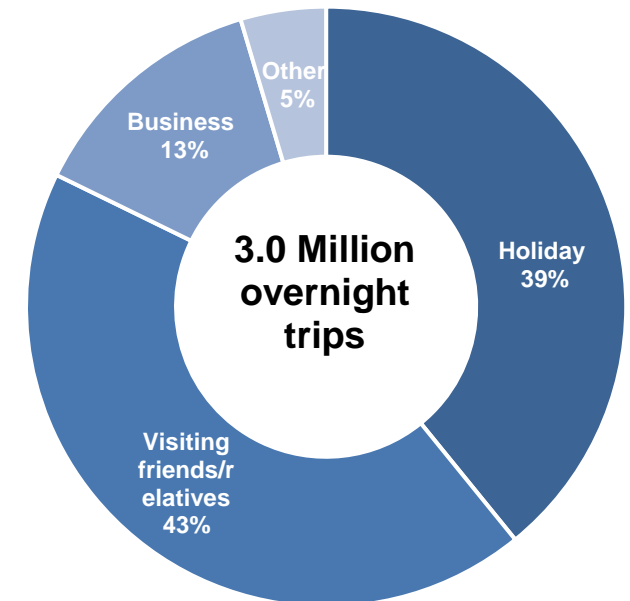
Of all estimated overnight trips to Northern Ireland in 2019, over two fifths (43%) were to visit friends and relatives. Another two fifths (39%) came to NI for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes. Some 13% came to NI for business purposes, and 5% for other reasons.

There were an estimated 1.3 million external overnight trips for **visiting friends and relatives** in 2019, making up 43% of all external overnight trips in NI during 2019. Perhaps linked to our proximity, the majority of overnight trips from England (51%) and Scotland (55%) were to visit friends and relatives (Figure 11a).

There were an estimated 1.2 million external overnight trips for **holiday / pleasure / leisure** purposes during 2019, making up 39% 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 68% of all external overnight trips from both Italy and Australia and 63% of those from the United States of America (Figure 11b).

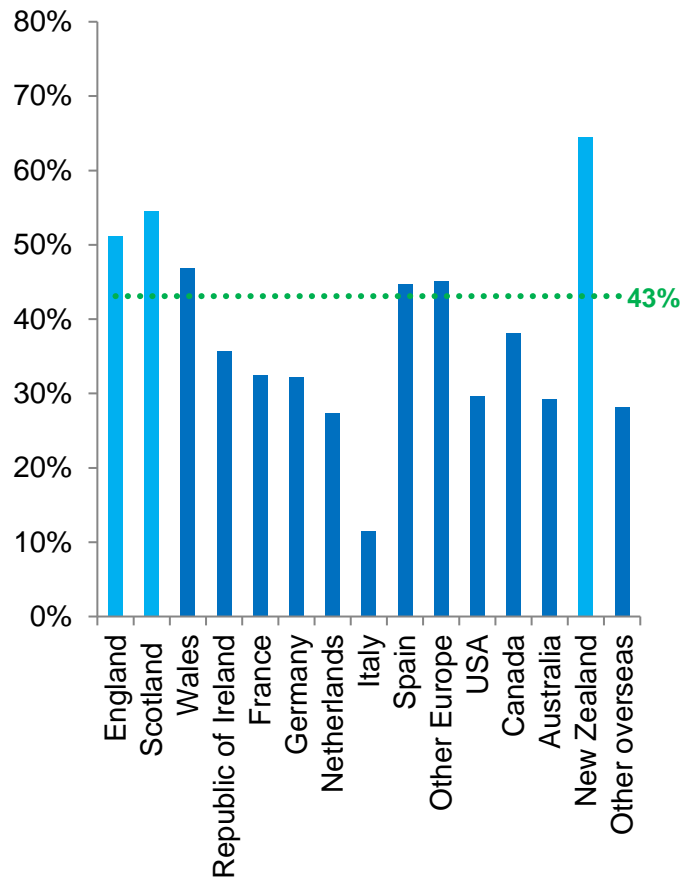
An estimated 0.53 (18%) million external overnight trips were for **business & other** purposes in 2019. External overnight trips for business & other purposes made up 27%, 23% and 22% of all external overnight trips from Wales, England and the republic of Ireland respectively (Figure 11c).

Figure 10: Reason for overnight trip 2019

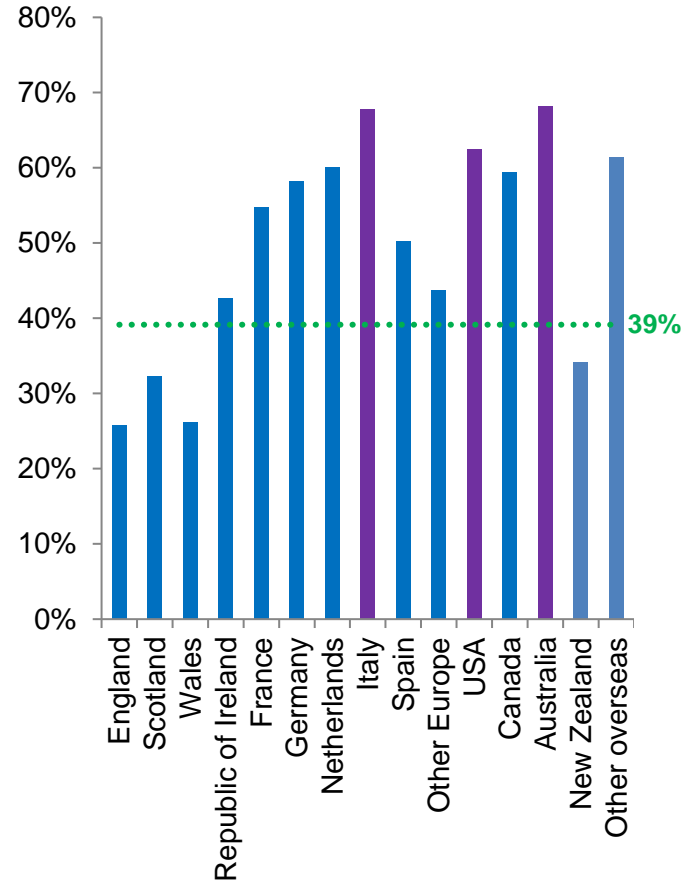


Figures 11a – 11c: Reason for external overnight trip in Northern Ireland by place of origin 2019

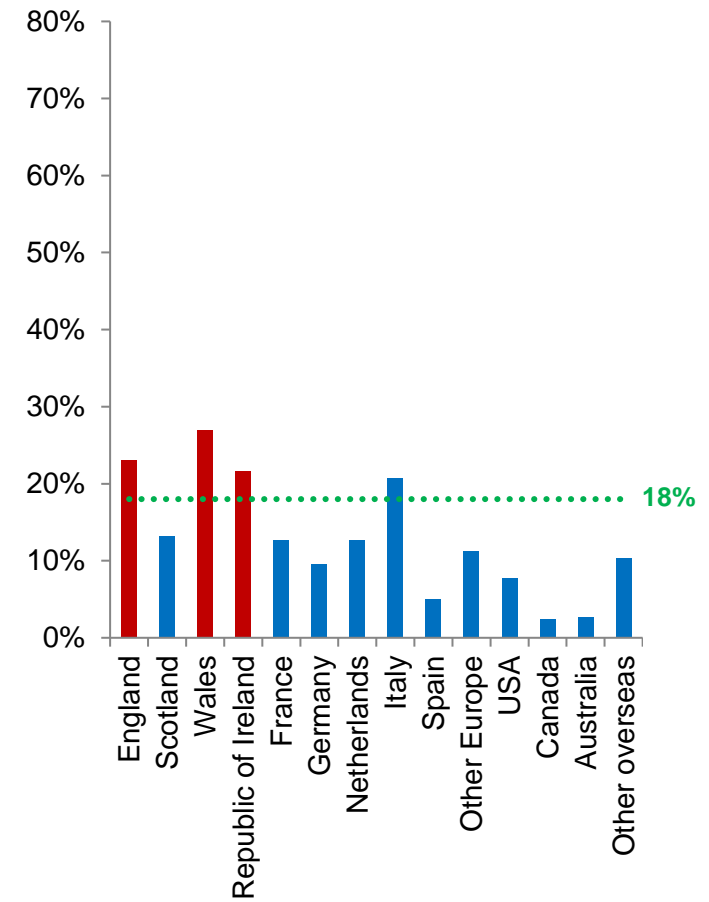
11a. Visiting Friends / Relatives



11b. Holiday / Pleasure / Leisure



11c. Business & Other



..... External Overnight Trips Average

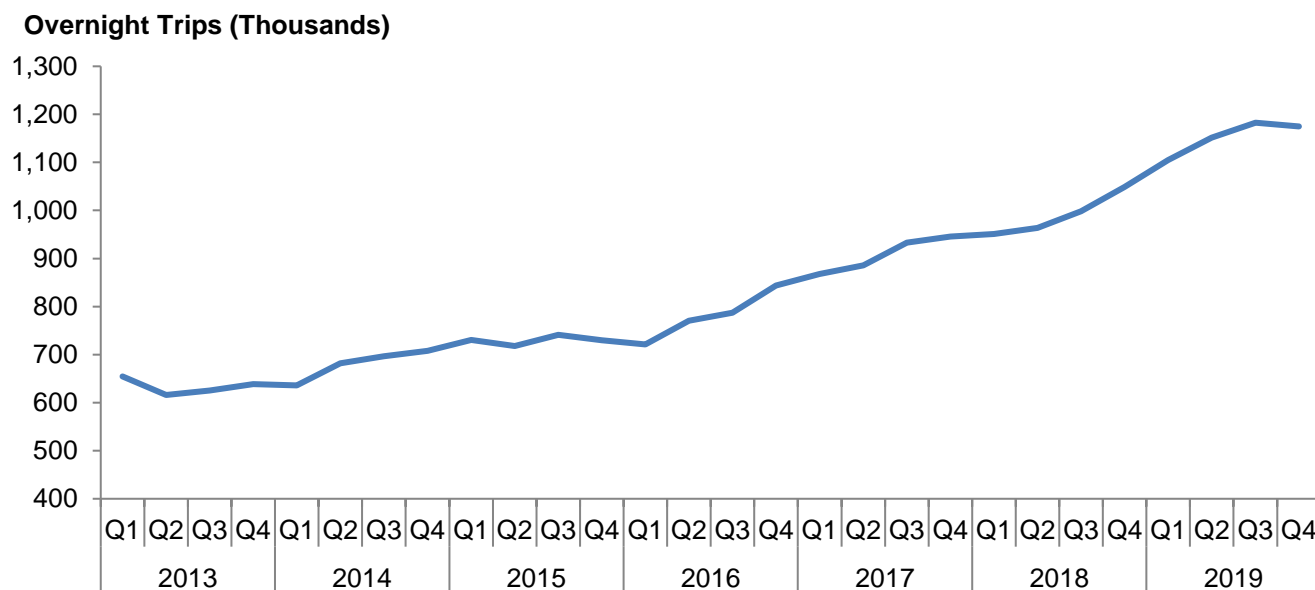
New Zealand,
Scotland,
England

Italy,
Australia,
USA

Wales,
England,
Republic of Ireland

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 2019 (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 1,175,000 external overnight trips during 2019 (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 2019.

Factors that may have influenced external overnight visitors coming to NI for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes include the Giant's Causeway, Titanic Belfast, the Causeway Coastal Route and Game of Thrones.

Figure 13: What influenced external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes to come to NI 2019?



Giant's Causeway 29%



Titanic Belfast 28%



Causeway Coastal Route 14%

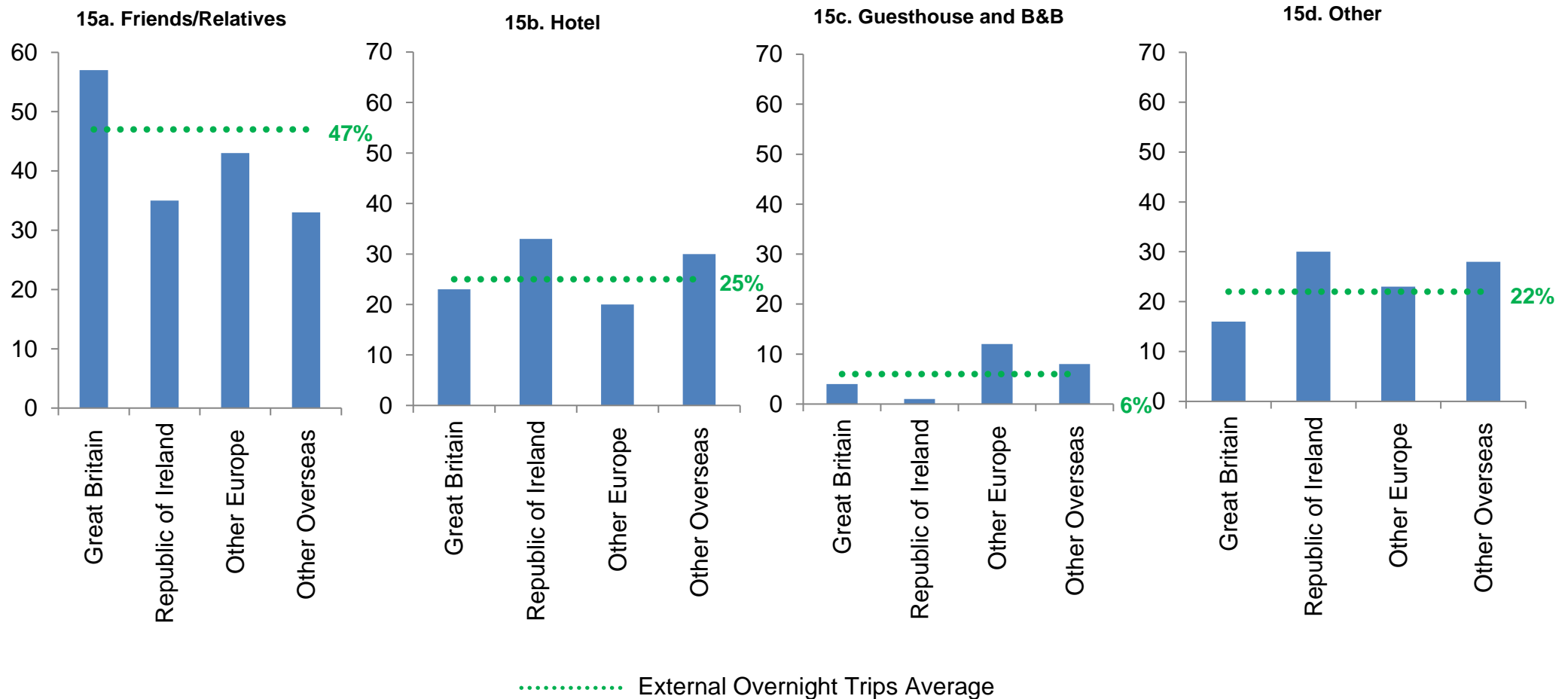


Game of Thrones 14%

Some information is captured on factors that influence people to come to Northern Ireland (Figure 13). The Giant's Causeway was the most influential factor for external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes during 2019 (29%), followed by Titanic Belfast (28%).

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 2019



Of all external overnight trips to NI during 2019, staying with friends and relatives was the most popular choice of accommodation type. In total, the majority of nights (47%) were spent staying with friends and relatives; ranging from 43% of Other Europe to 57% of Great Britain staying with friends and relatives (Figure 15a).

The second most popular accommodation type used was hotels, with 25% of total nights being spent in a hotel; ranging from 20% by visitors from Other Europe to 33% 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 more recent years; 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 2019 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 2018 the sample size of the NIPS was 43,500. 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%	+/- 6%

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%.

Data from the 2018 and 2019 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. They are based on a statistical adjustment of the data which began in 2018, and therefore may be subject to revision in the future. For more information on this adjustment, please refer to the Methodology Note on Review of Household Travel Survey 2018 at this [link](#). NISRA have assess that the quality of this data is comparable to the historic series.

Tourism Statistics in Northern Ireland are used to help monitor the [Draft Northern Ireland Programme for Government \(PFG\)](#). The NI Civil Service Outcomes Delivery Plan (ODP) sets out the actions put in place with the objective of improving wellbeing for all by tackling disadvantage and driving economic growth. The most [recent](#) update to this was published in December 2019.

Outcome 10 states that **“we have created a place where people want to live, and work, to visit and invest”**. Five indicators fall under this outcome and are used to assess whether this has been achieved. One of these uses tourism statistics - Indicator 30 **“Total Spend by external visitors”**. In order to truly assess if there has been a change in tourism spend, the UK Consumer Price Inflation including owner occupiers’ housing costs (CPIH) is used to take effect of inflation.

More detailed information can be found in the Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics 2019 [publication](#)

Readers of this report may also be interested in the Nation Brands Index which is another indicator under Outcome 10. The Executive Office in Northern Ireland use the Anholt Ipsos Nation Brands Index. The most recent results for 2019 were published at this [link](#). They showed that Northern Ireland’s international reputation remains stable, achieving a mid-level ranking of the 50 nations included. The reputation is strongest within the UK and European nations. “Natural beauty” was the attribute with the highest score in 2019 (and has been in all previous years).

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](#).

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:

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