Tourism Northern Ireland Consumer Sentiment Research

ROI Market

January 2023 Report (Wave 10)

SPARK
The Strategic Insight Agency

TOURISM NORTHERN IRELAND

Research background

Research background & objectives

This is the **10th wave** of our consumer sentiment research for the Republic of Ireland (ROI). We have continued to look at consumer attitudes towards travel in Northern Ireland (NI) and elsewhere, keeping an eye on how pertinent issues such as cost of living increases will impact on consumer spend and holiday/short break intentions.

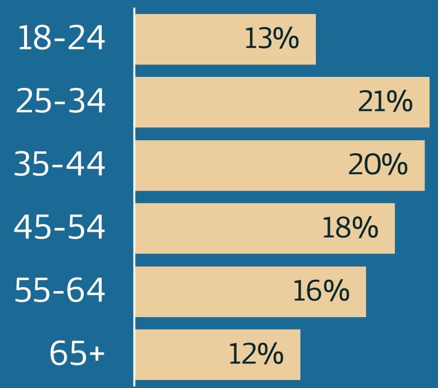
The research objectives:

- Determine the current consumer sentiment towards the cost of living
- Explore current attitudes towards travel
- Understand recent travel experiences in NI
- Assess current attitudes towards travel in NI, ROI and further afield

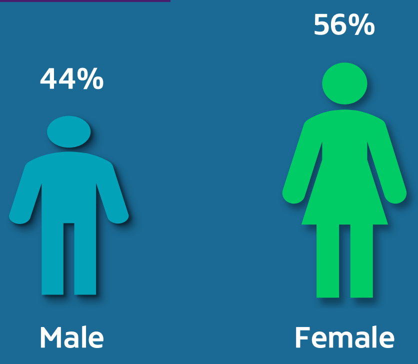
Sample - We spoke to a robust, nationally representative sample in the Republic of Ireland

Full sample n=750

Age

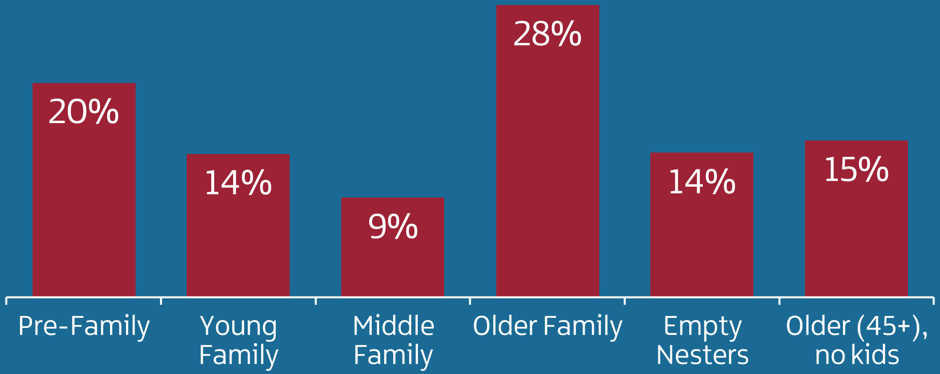


Gender

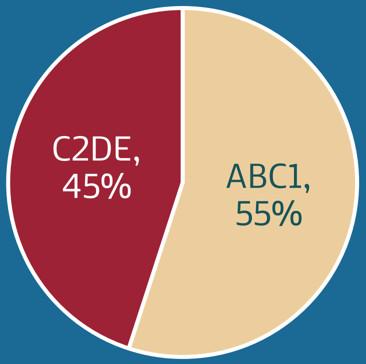


1% describe in another way

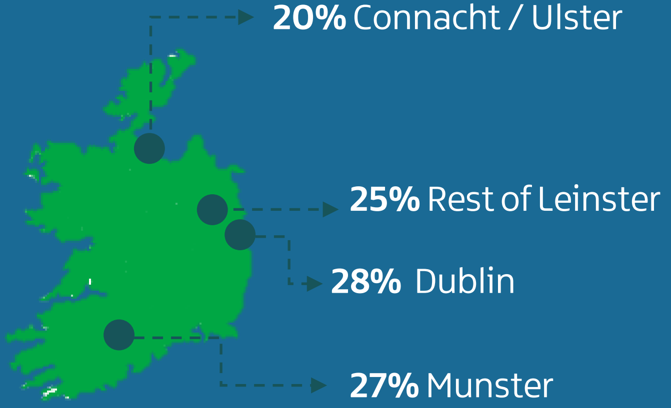
Lifestage



Socio



Region



Fieldwork was conducted between 9th and 23rd December 2022

Key takeaways

Cost of living is still a real worry – but there is optimism for 2023

- Cost of living remains a source of anxiety – but things are moving in the right direction compared to October
- Top emotions when looking ahead to 2023 were optimism (33%) and excitement (29%).
- And while most still expect to be negatively affected by cost of living increases in the coming months, the number saying they'll be "significantly" negatively impacted drops by 9 percentage points.

And most are unwilling to compromise on quality of experiences as a result

- As we saw in October, there is also a sense of resistance to the idea that having less disposable income means reducing activities and spend, and this has grown in the months since.
- 39% now say they're unlikely to make any changes to how much they spend on holidays or short breaks at home, up from 30% in October.
- And while 52% said they anticipate spending less on holidays / short breaks, only 26% want to reduce the quality of the experiences – this is above all the case with under-35s and the Active Maximisers segment. Emphasising quality as well as value is key at the moment.

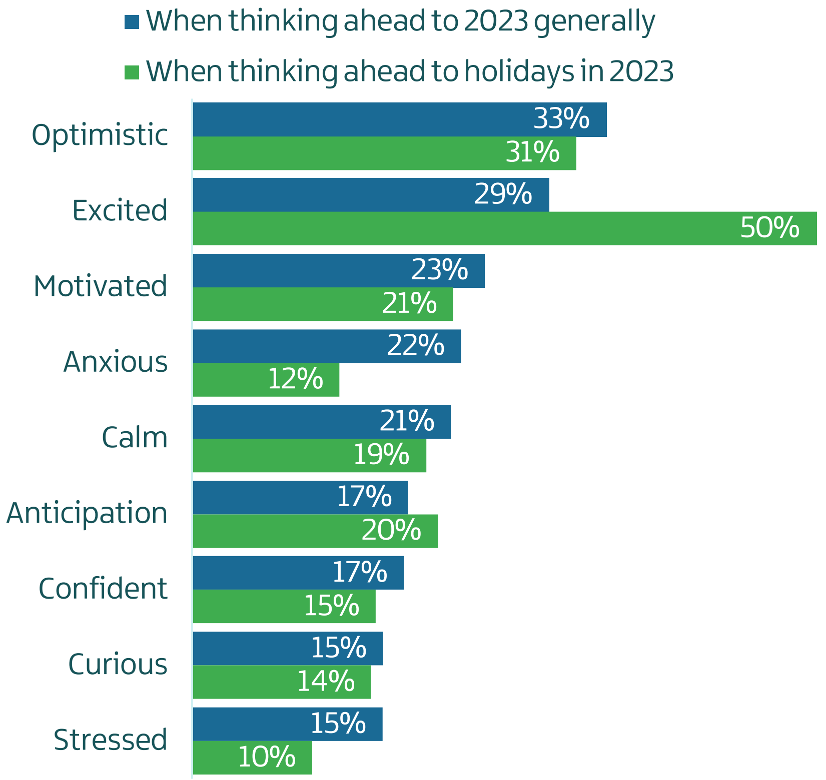
Visitor experiences of NI positive and trip intentions stable

- Net Promoter Score (NPS) among those who visited in 2022 was a solid 2 – highest among those who took short breaks (8). When asked why they would return in 2023, most focused on atmosphere, food and drink, and value.
- Trip intentions up to April are stable when compared to previous few waves (although there isn't a previous December wave to compare against). We are seeing a slight negative trend overall as intentions for trips abroad grow, but numbers are healthy considering this and the cost of living increases.

Cost of living

Most are looking forward to 2023 and any holidays they might be taking – sense of **optimism** and **excitement**, although there is an undercurrent of **anxiety** for some

Top emotions felt...



84% selected at least one positive emotion when looking ahead to 2023

More likely to select a positive emotion:

- Active Maximisers 93%
- Pre-family 92%
- 18-34s 90%

33% selected at least one negative emotion

More likely to select a negative emotion:

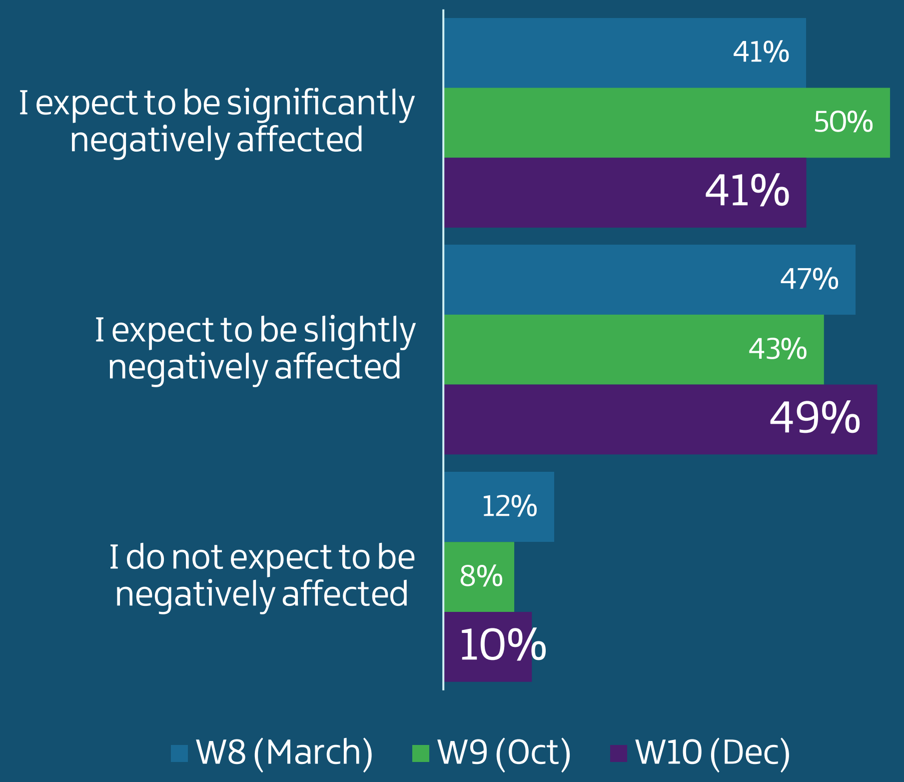
- Older, no kids 42%
- 55-64s 39%

Base n = 750

F12. Which of the following emotions do you feel...

We appear to be **past the peak** when it comes to cost of living concerns – vast majority still expect to see negative effects over coming months however

Extent to which they expect to be affected by cost of living in coming months



More likely to be **significantly affected**:

- 35-44 46%
- Older family 46%
- Female 45%

Less likely to be **significantly affected**:

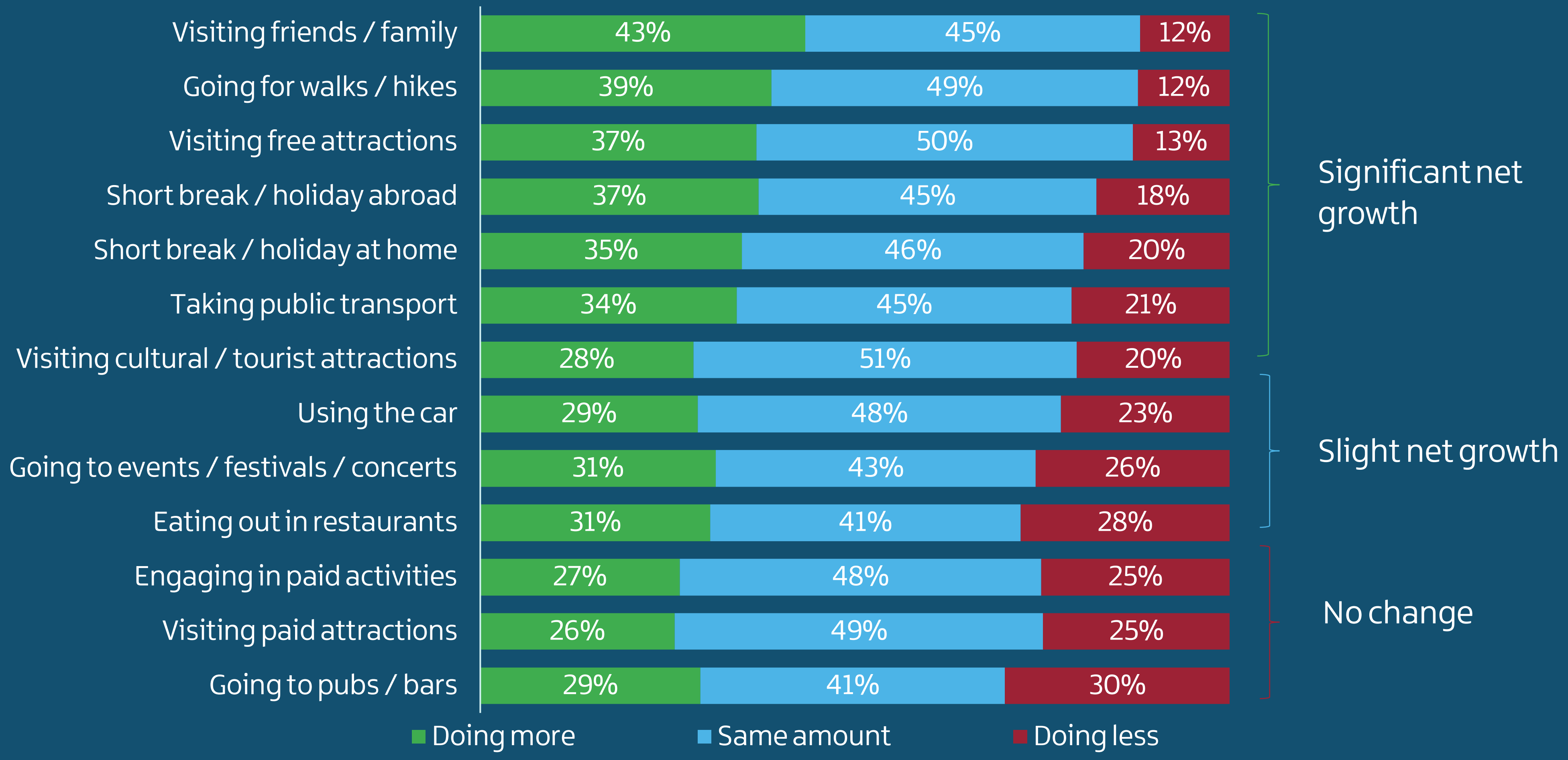
- Over-65s 32%
- Male 36%
- Open-Minded Explorers 36%

Base n = 750

F1. To what extent do you expect to be financially affected by cost of living increases in the coming months?

Generally, most expect to be doing more cost free activities than they were in 2022, but also positive intentions for short breaks both at home and abroad

What they expect to do more or less vs. this time last year

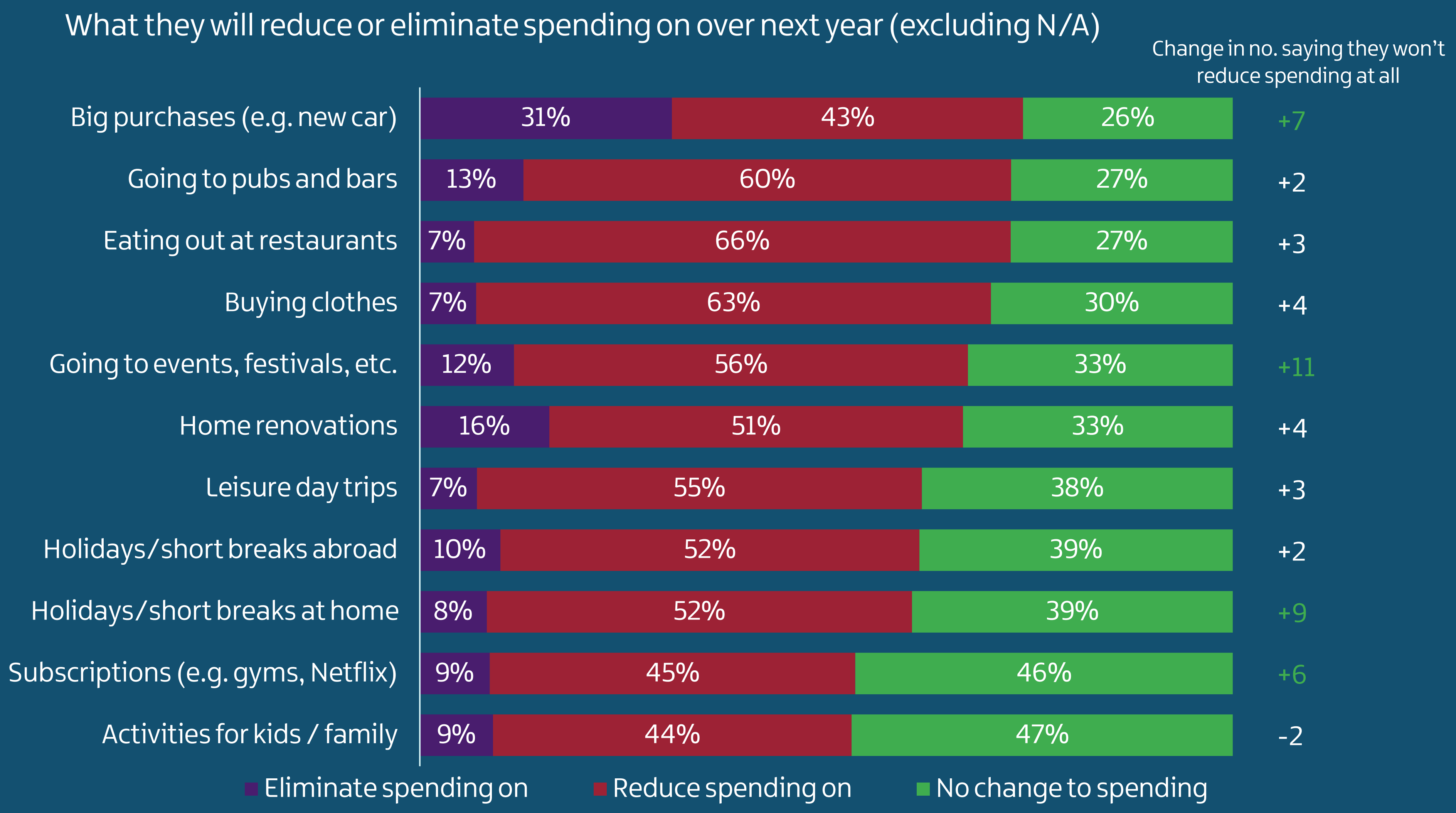


No big changes vs. October wave, although notable that there is a growth both in number expecting to use their car more and number expecting to use public transport more

Base n = 750

F6. Compared to this time last year (i.e. winter 2021), which of the following are you likely to be doing more or less of?

Encouraging to see the number saying they won't reduce spending on holidays at home going up by 9 percentage points

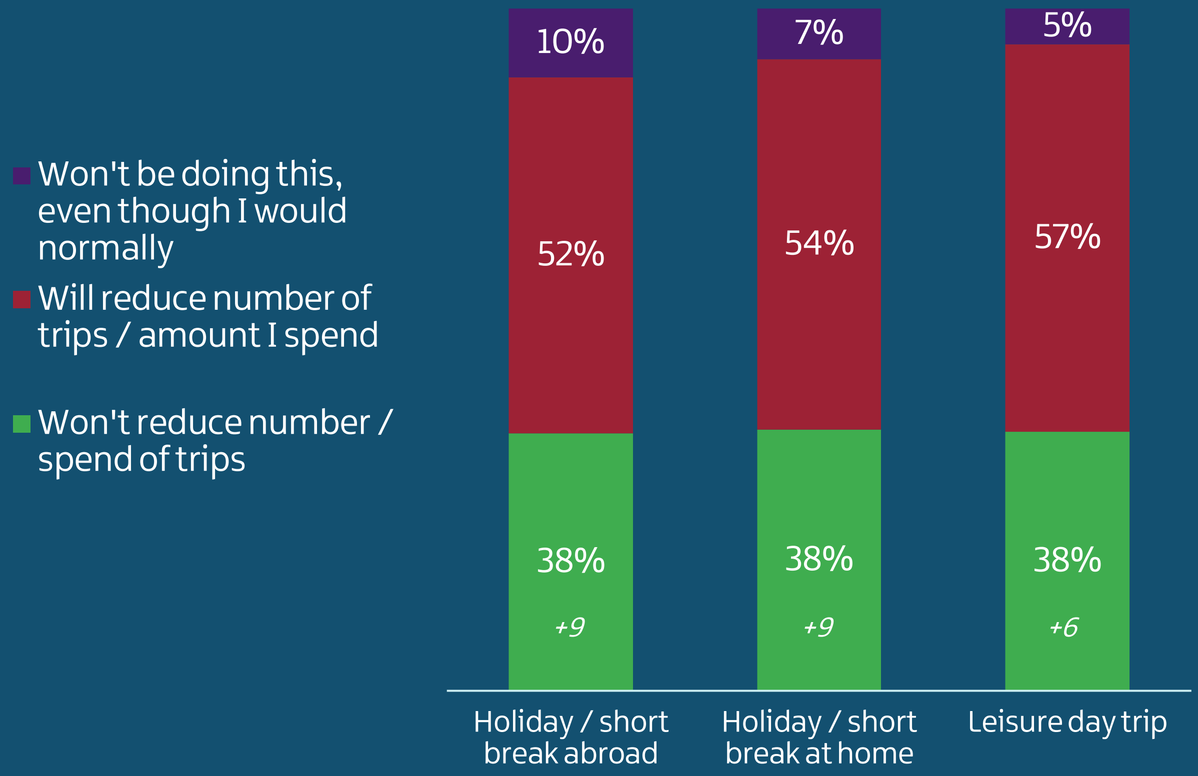


Base n = 750 (excl. N/A)

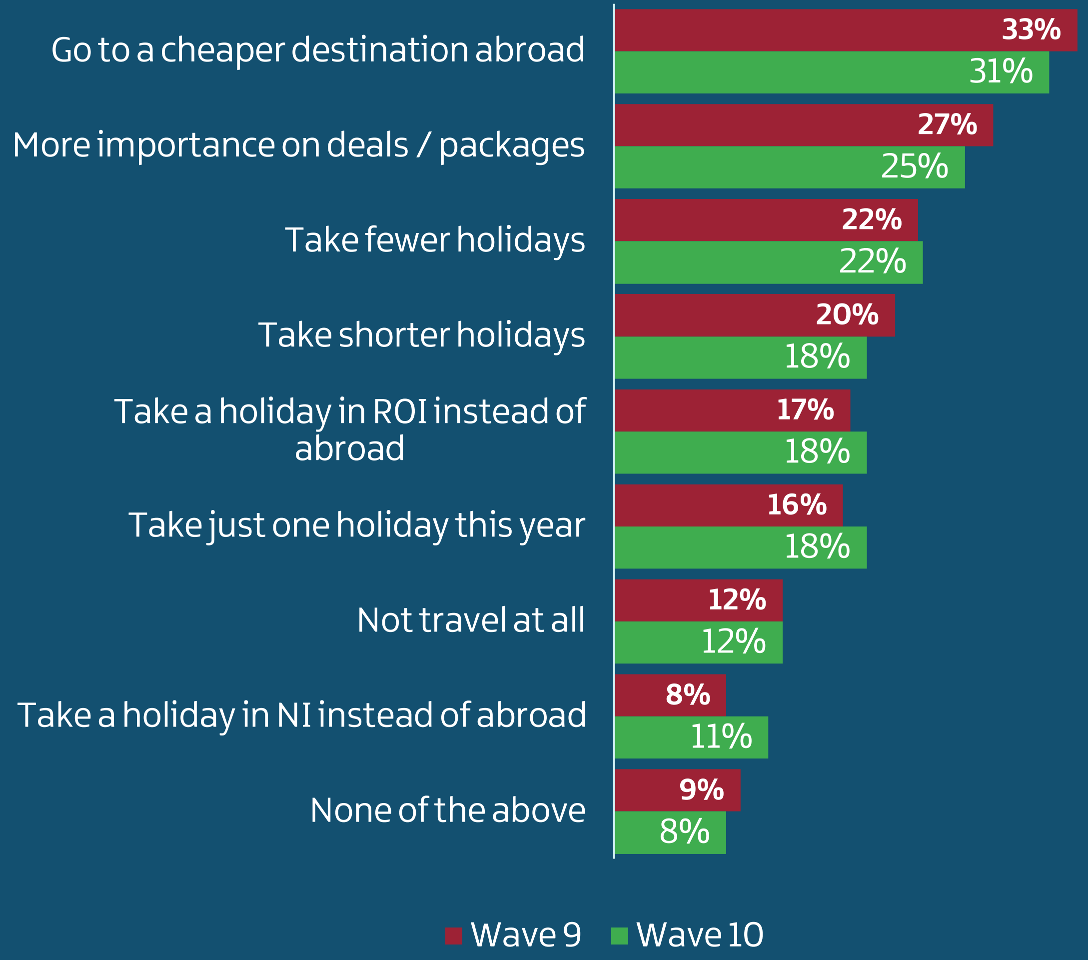
Please categorise the following activities, taking into account how you expect the cost of living increases to impact your spend on them in the next year...

And number saying they'll not take breaks on IoI as a result of cost of living is as low as 7% - although just over half still plan to make some reductions

How cost of living will affect break intentions



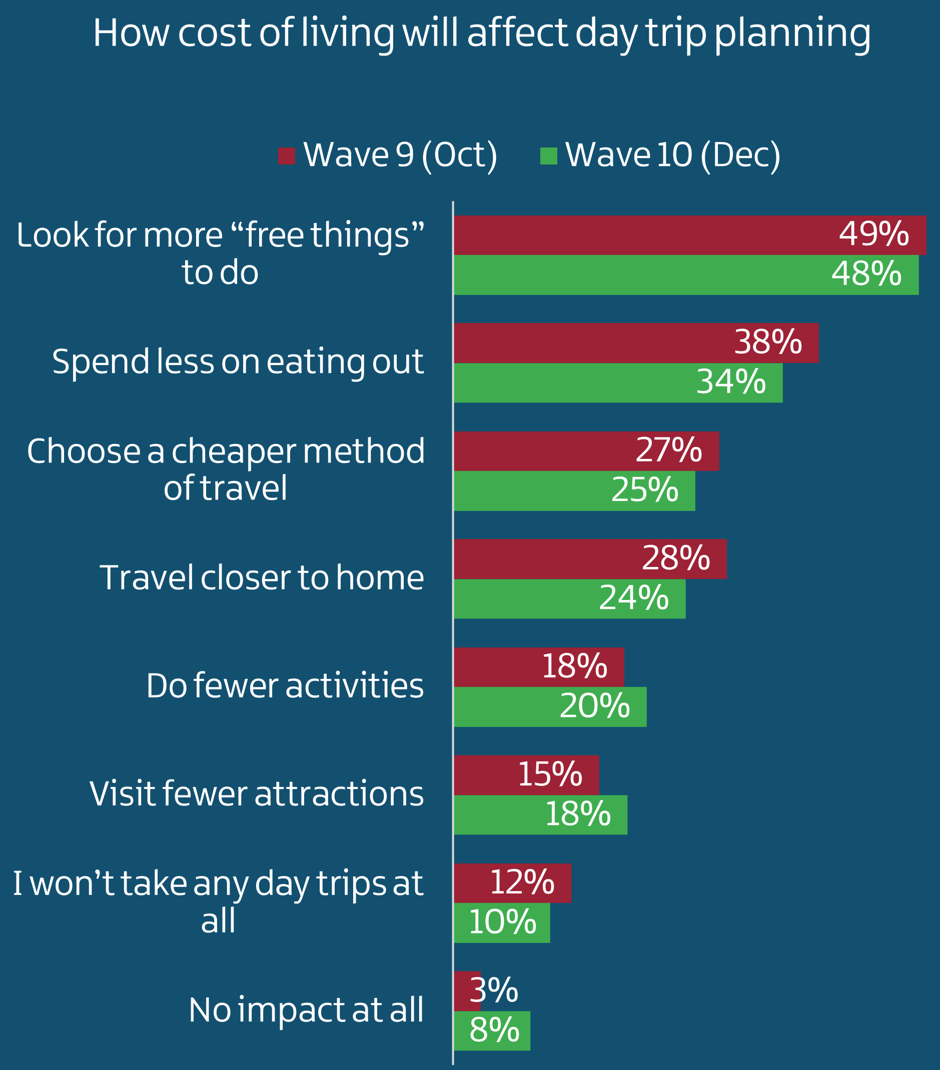
What those affected will do re holidays

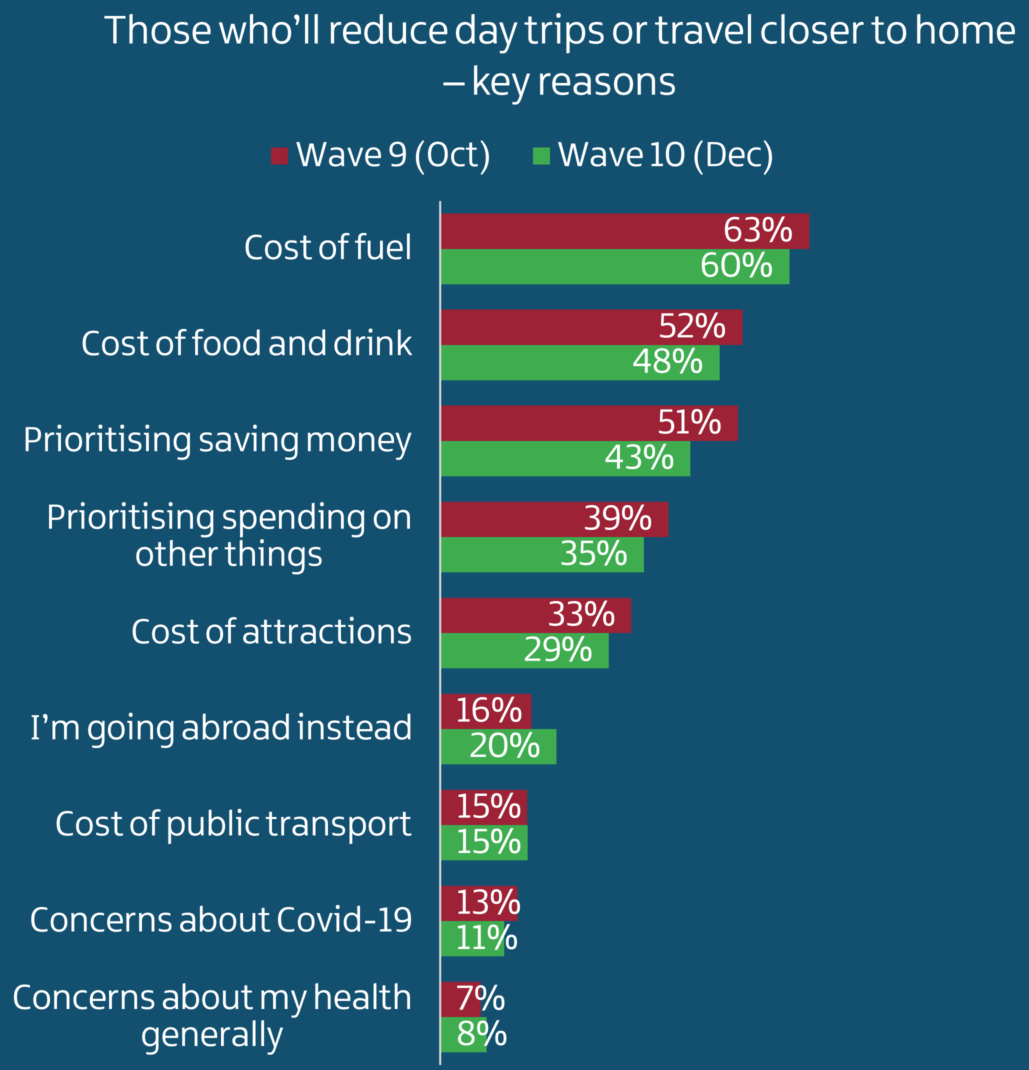


Base n = 750

F9. To what extent would you expect cost of living impacts to change your approach to the following types of holidays or trips? / F2. Compared to this time last year, which, if any, of the following are you more likely to do in relation to holidays and short breaks?

Around half are still planning to look for free activities on day trips



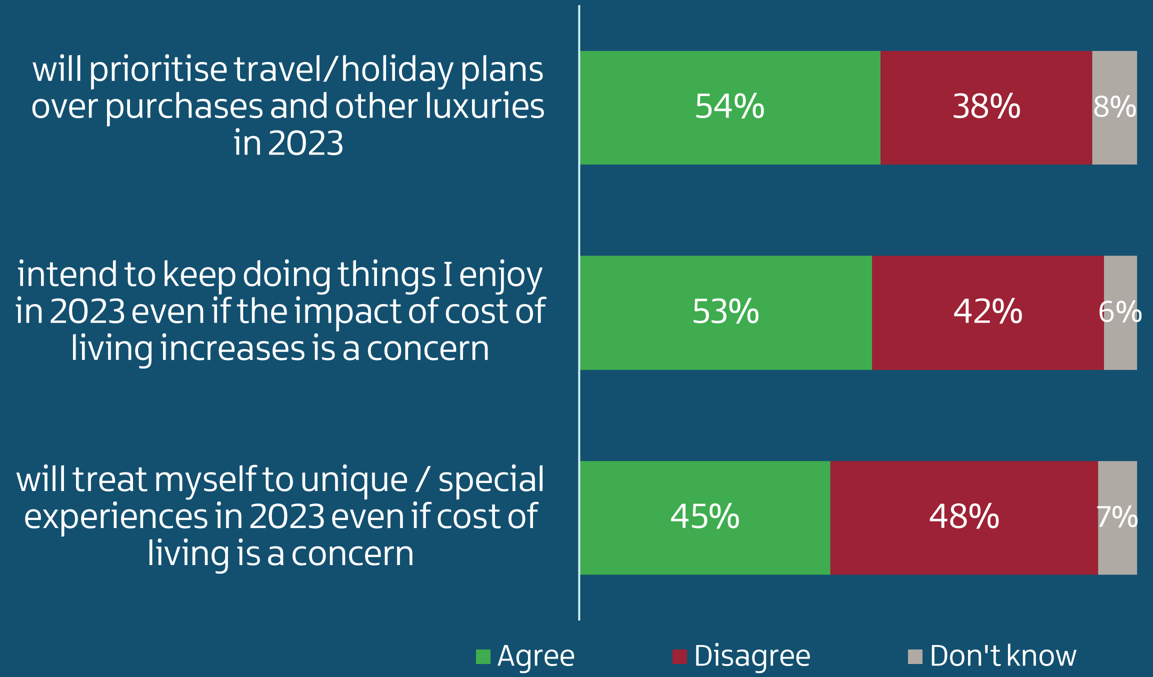


Base n = 750 / 339

F10. Which of the following would you consider doing as a result of recent increases in cost of living if planning a day trip in Northern Ireland in the next few months? / F11. You mentioned you will take fewer day trips or travel closer to home when it comes to day trips. What are the key motivations for this?

Consumers want to reduce spend on trips without compromising on experience – three quarters want to keep quality of experiences the same in 2023

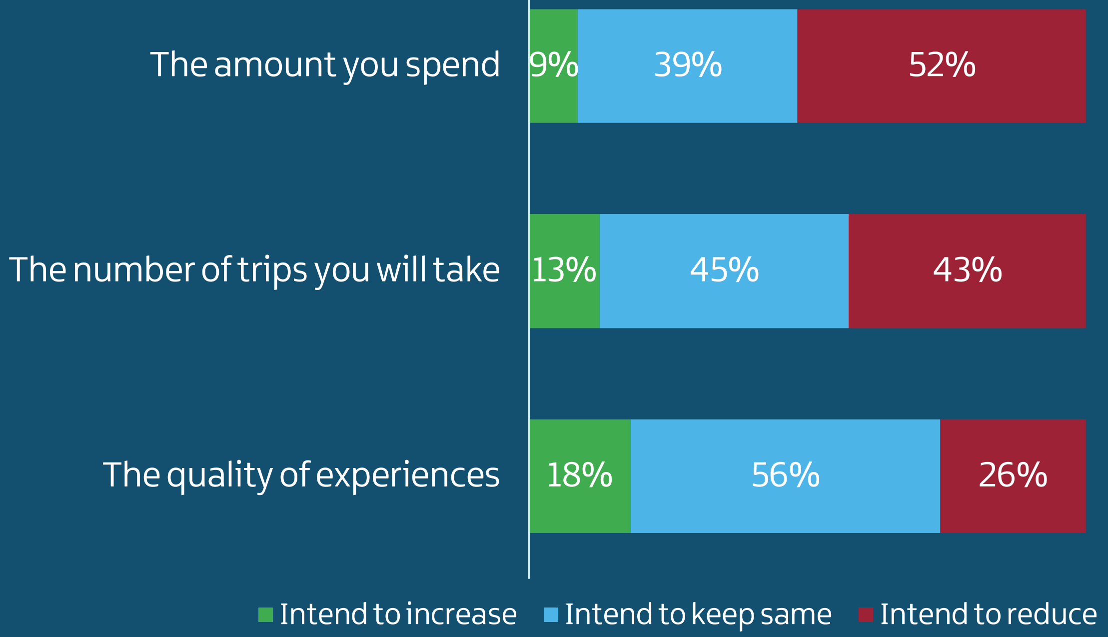
% who agree: "I…"



More likely to say they'll treat themselves to unique / special experiences:

- Active Maximisers 64%
- Pre-family 61%
- 18-34s 56%
- Male 50%

When it comes to holidays / short breaks, do they plan to increase / reduce…



More likely to say they'll increase quality of experiences in 2023:

- Pre-family 34%
- Active Maximisers 30%
- 18-34s 30%
- Indulgent Relaxers 27%

Base n = 750

F14. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about cost of living impacts in 2023? / F15. And thinking ahead to any trips you might take in 2023, to what extent do you intend to increase or reduce…?

Market comparison – Cost of living

Slightly more negative picture in NI – but both markets in a more positive place generally

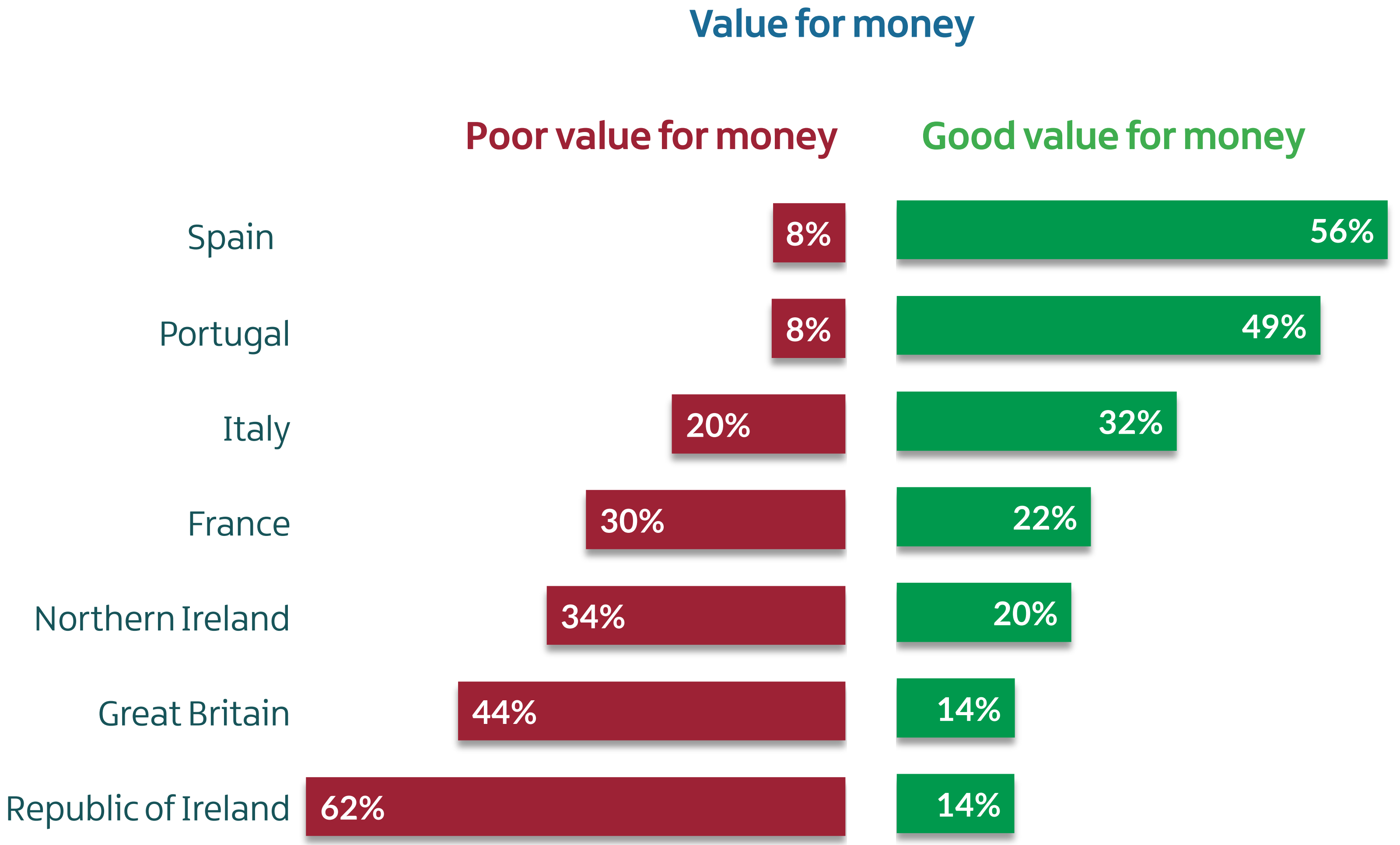
- Those in NI slightly more likely to give a negative emotion when prompted on feelings for 2023 (37% vs. 33% in ROI)
- **And roughly the same picture for both markets in terms of expecting to be negatively affected by cost of living in coming months (40% vs. 41% significantly impacted in ROI)**

Less of a desire for unique / special experiences for those in NI

- Slight increase in NI of number saying they won't reduce spending on holidays at home (up 4 percentage points to 35%) but not as big an increase as in ROI (where it grew 9 percentage points to 38%)
- Those in NI also appear less adventurous when it comes to experiences – 35% said they'd treat themselves to unique experiences in 2023, compared to 45% in ROI

Value for money

Slight increase in value for money perceptions for NI and ROI after significant drop in October – may be a sign of plateau in cost of living concerns



Net Score

	Dec	Oct	Mar
Spain	+48	+46	+48
Portugal	+40		
Italy	+12	+11	+17
France	-7	-1	+5
Northern Ireland	-14	-18	-6
Great Britain	-31	-31	-19
Republic of Ireland	-48	-53	-37

Base n = 750

C1. When thinking of the following places as tourism destinations, to what extent do they offer value for money?

Travel experiences

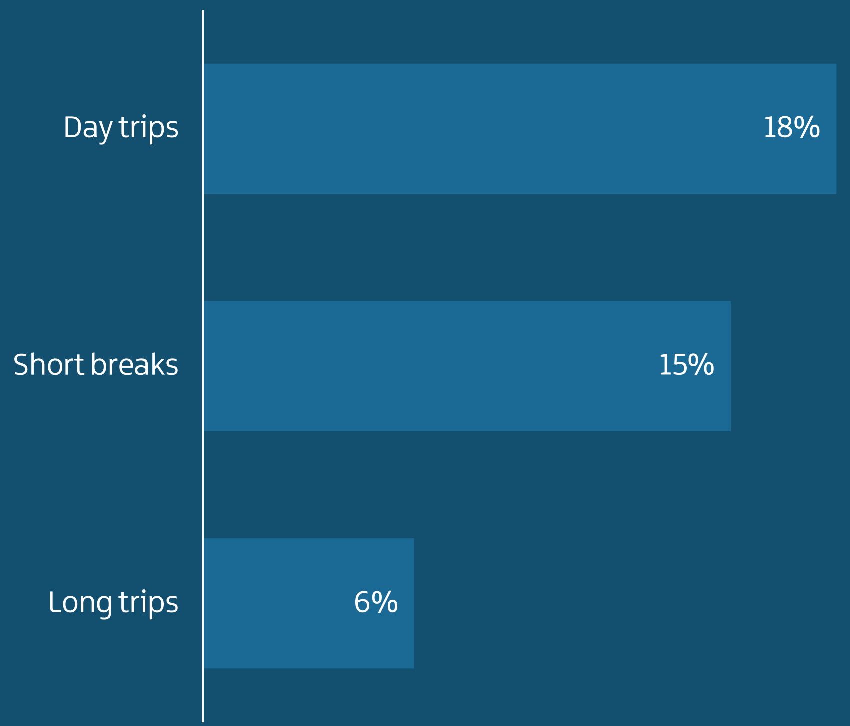
1 in 6 in ROI visited NI for a short or long break in 2022

17%

have taken a **short or long break** in NI in 2022

53% said they were first time visitors

% of total sample who took...



Other than NI...

52% took a break in ROI

39% went abroad

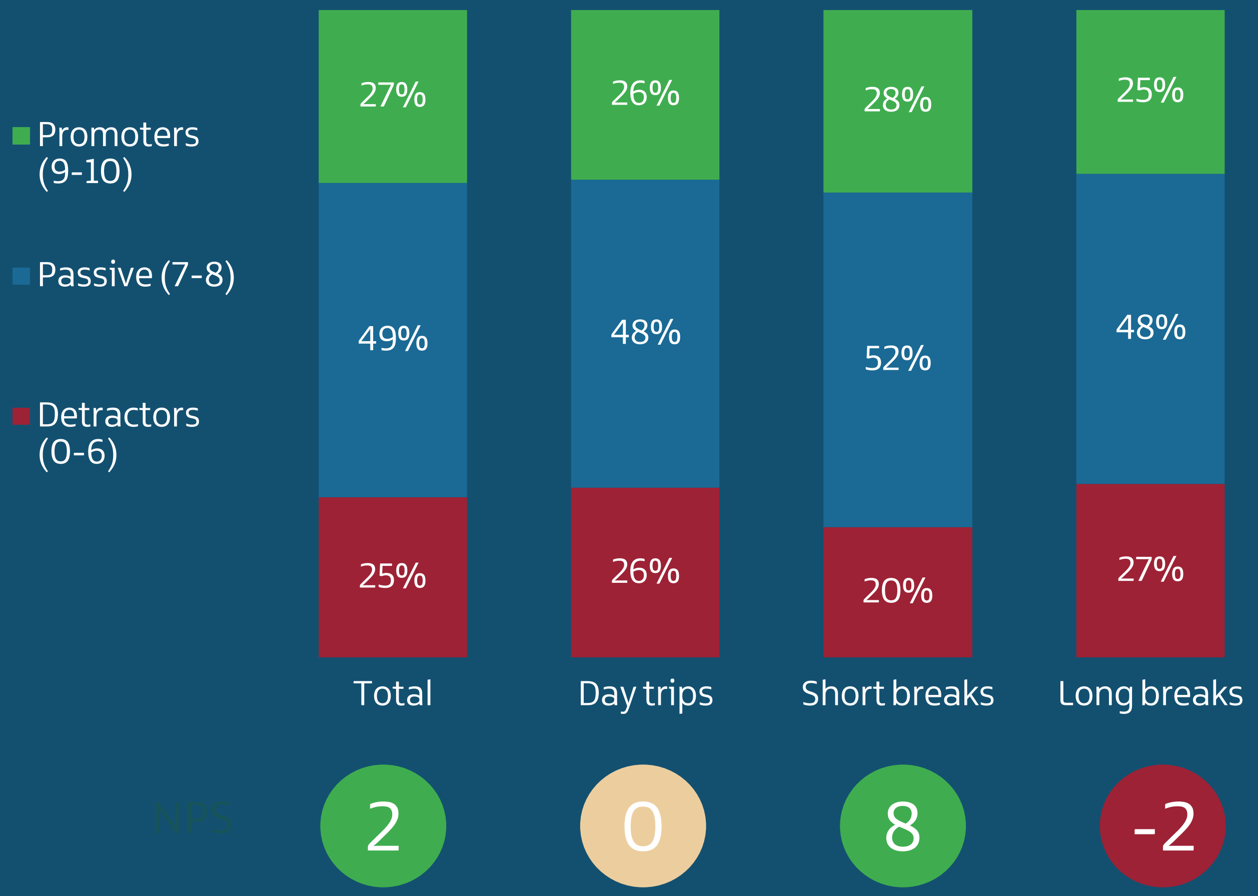
23% didn't travel at all

Base n = 750

D1. Have you taken a holiday or short break in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland or abroad for leisure purposes since the start of 2022?

Net Promote Score (NPS) is solid although takes a dip with the small number who took long breaks in NI; half say their trips exceeded expectations

NPS among those who visited in 2022



Exceeded expectations 51%

Met expectations 38%

Didn't meet expectations 10%

NPS is calculated as promoters minus detractors. Any score above 0 is a good score; +20 or higher is an excellent score

Base n = 148 (combined visitors 2022); 112 (short / day); 49 (long – caution low base)

D12. Thinking about Northern Ireland as a holiday or short break destination, to what extent would you be likely to recommend it to others? / D5. On the scale below, how did your trip(s) in Northern Ireland perform against your expectations?

Most would be likely to return

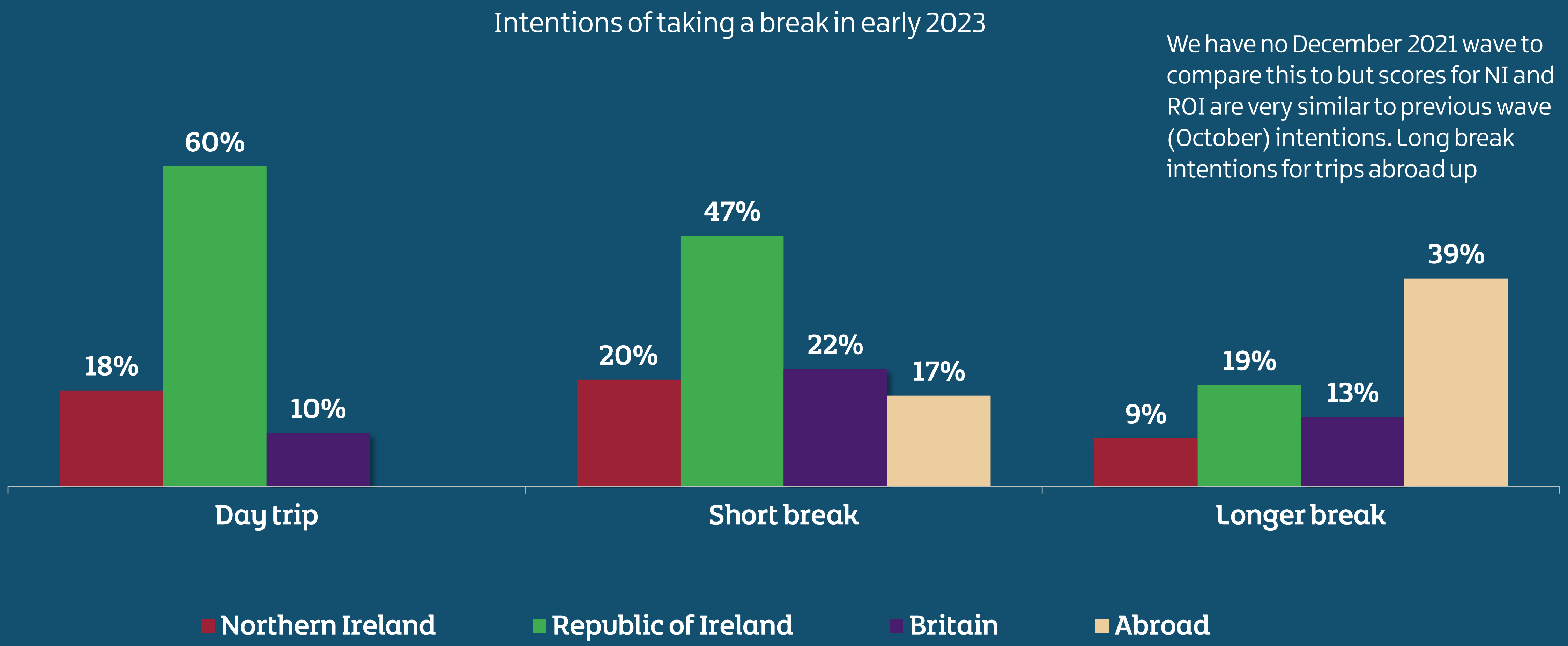
	Of those who travelled to NI	Of those who took a trip abroad
Would be likely to return in 2023	62%	75%
Would be unlikely to return	14%	11%

Base n = 201 took a short break / long trip in NI / 447 travelled abroad in 2022

D6. How likely would you be to take another break in Northern Ireland in the remainder of 2022? / D10. And in general, how likely would you be to travel abroad again in the remainder of 2022 and throughout 2023? and throughout 2023

Travel intent

Intentions stable against recent waves for short and long breaks – long breaks abroad up significantly though



We have no December 2021 wave to compare this to but scores for NI and ROI are very similar to previous wave (October) intentions. Long break intentions for trips abroad up

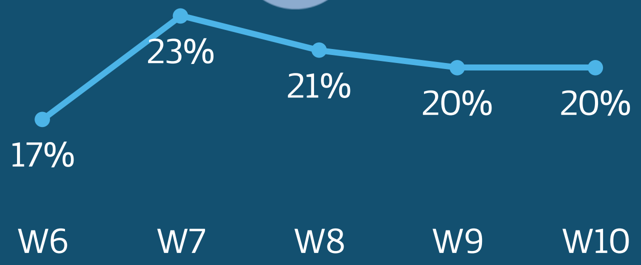
Base n = 750

E1. Would you consider taking a leisure day trip / short break of 1-3 nights / longer break of 4 or more nights in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland or Britain in December 2022 - April 2023?

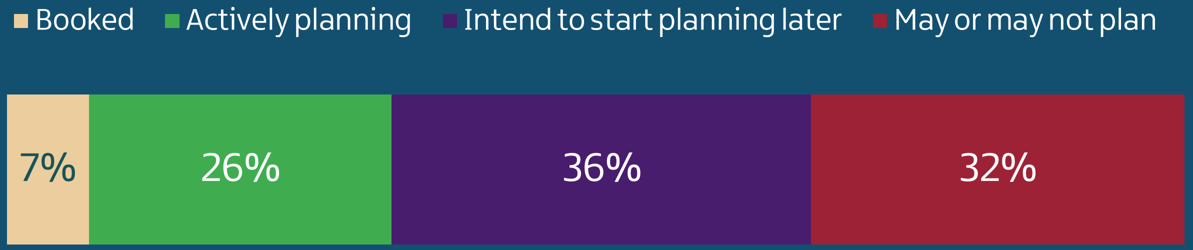
1 in 3 planning short breaks are currently actively planning or have booked – April the most likely month

20%

are considering a **short break** in NI in early 2023

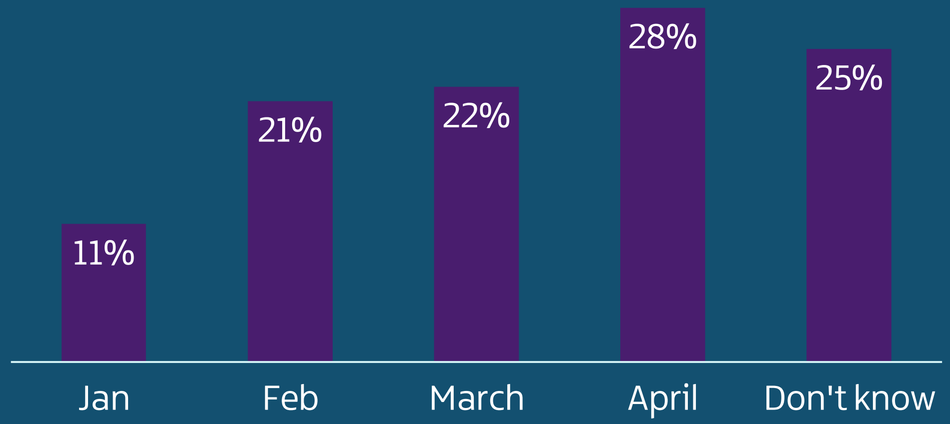


Amount of short break planned



33% are actively planning or have booked a trip to NI – **7%** of the total sample

Short break planned for



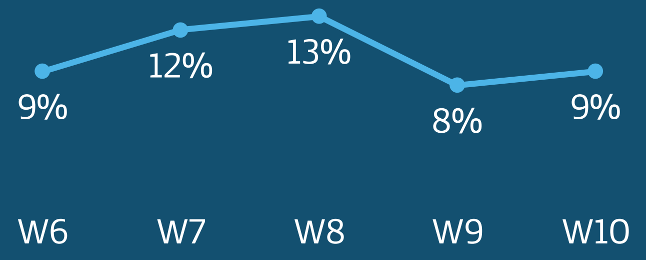
Base n = 750 / 151 planning short break

E1b. Would you consider taking a short break of at least 1-3 nights in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Britain or elsewhere abroad in December 2022 - April 2023? / E2. Which specific month, if any, did you have in mind for your break(s) in Northern Ireland/ E3. Have you booked or thought about planning this trip in Northern Ireland?

Increase in number actively planning long breaks – February / March key times for these

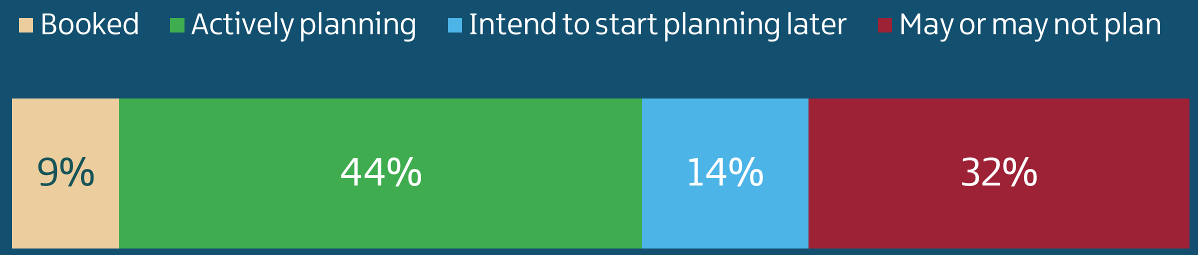
9%

are considering a **long break** in NI in early 2023



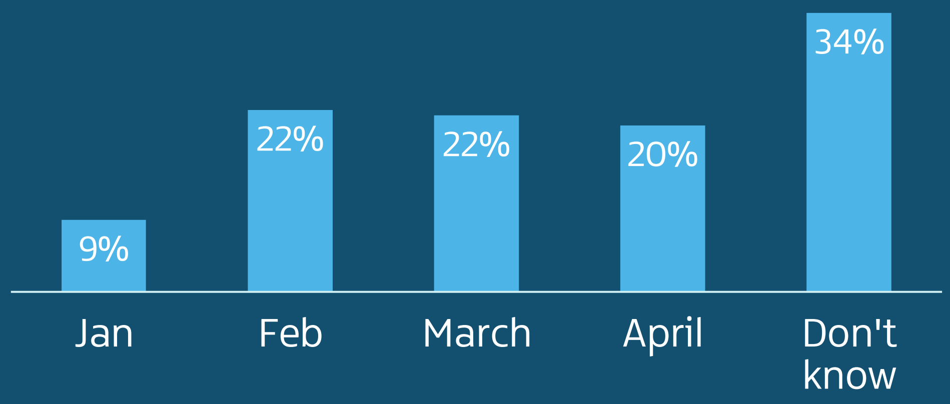
Base n = 750 / 72 planning long break

Amount of long break planned



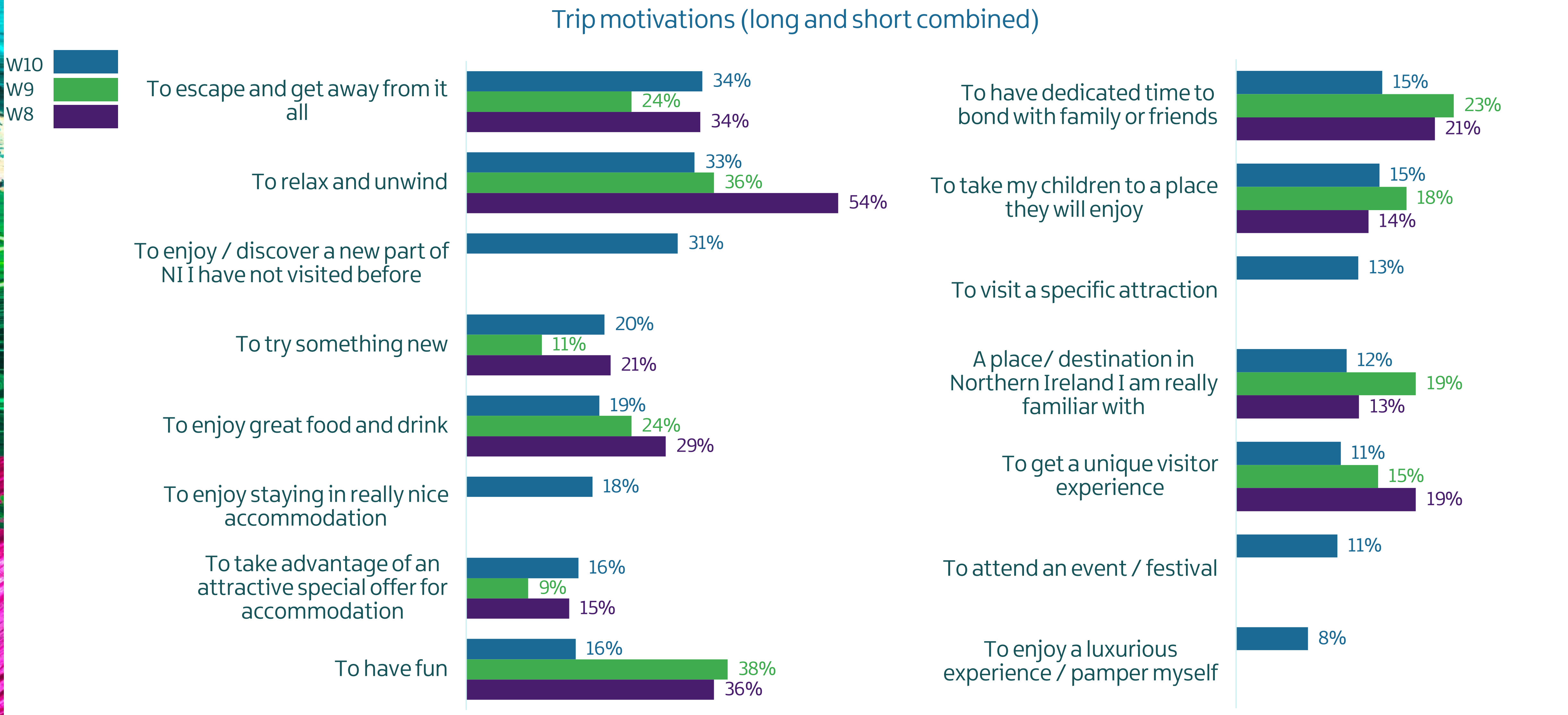
53% are actively planning or have booked a trip to NI – **4%** of the total sample. Up 14 percentage points

Long break planned for



E1b. Would you consider taking any of the following in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Britain or elsewhere abroad in December 2022 – April 2023? / E2. Which specific month, if any, did you have in mind for your break(s) in Northern Ireland/ E3. Have you booked or thought about planning this trip in Northern Ireland?

“Escapism” on the rise again for holiday motivations, possibly impacted by stress over cost of living crisis. Fun less of a decider than before

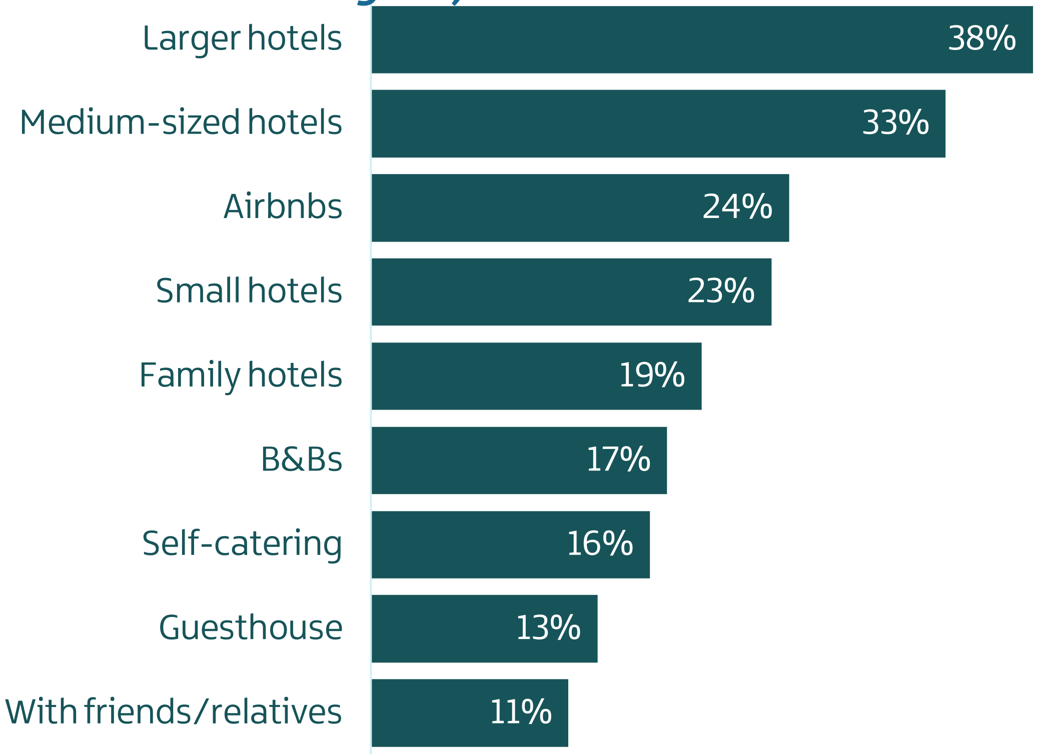


Base n = 120

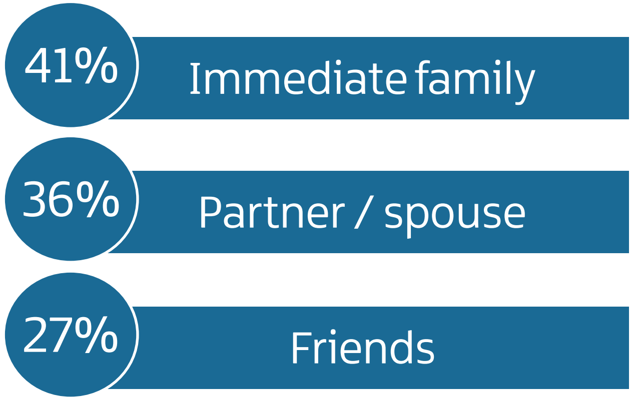
E4a. Thinking about your upcoming trip(s) in Northern Ireland, which of the following are the three most important motivations for taking the trip?

Larger hotels the preferred choice for accommodation – but notable trend towards Airbnbs and self-catering trips, as well as trips with friends this wave

Where staying (combined; *showing 10% or higher*)



Who travelling with (long & short combined)



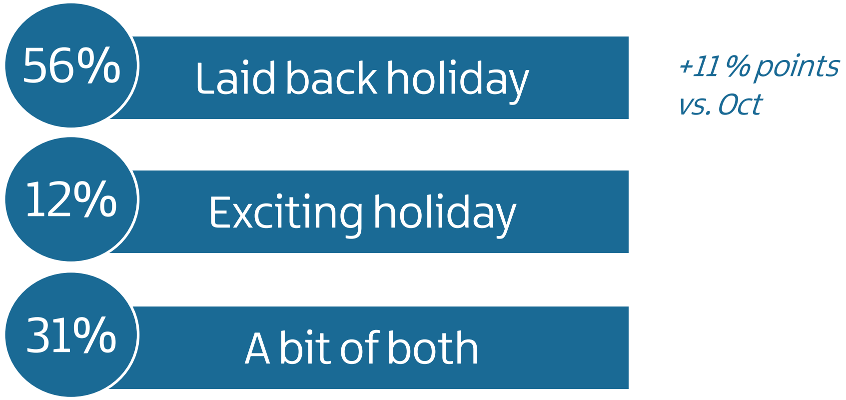
+7% points vs. Oct

Base n = 120

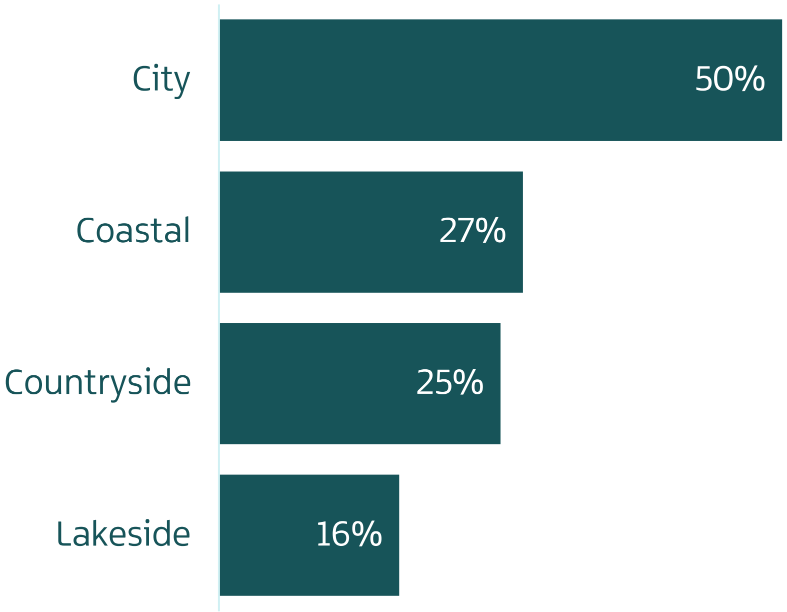
E5. Who do you intend on travelling/sharing your holiday(s) with? / E7. Thinking about your upcoming break(s) in Northern Ireland, what type of accommodation do you expect to stay in?

Over half of those considering trips have a preference for Coastal/Countryside/Lakeside, with trend back towards more relaxing holidays as strain around cost of living continues

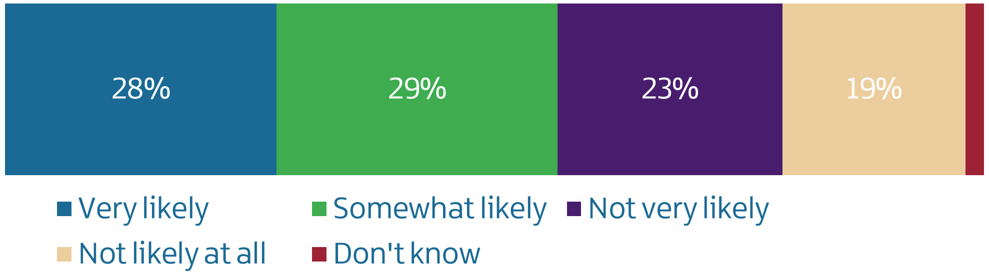
Type of trip preferred



Type of break preferred



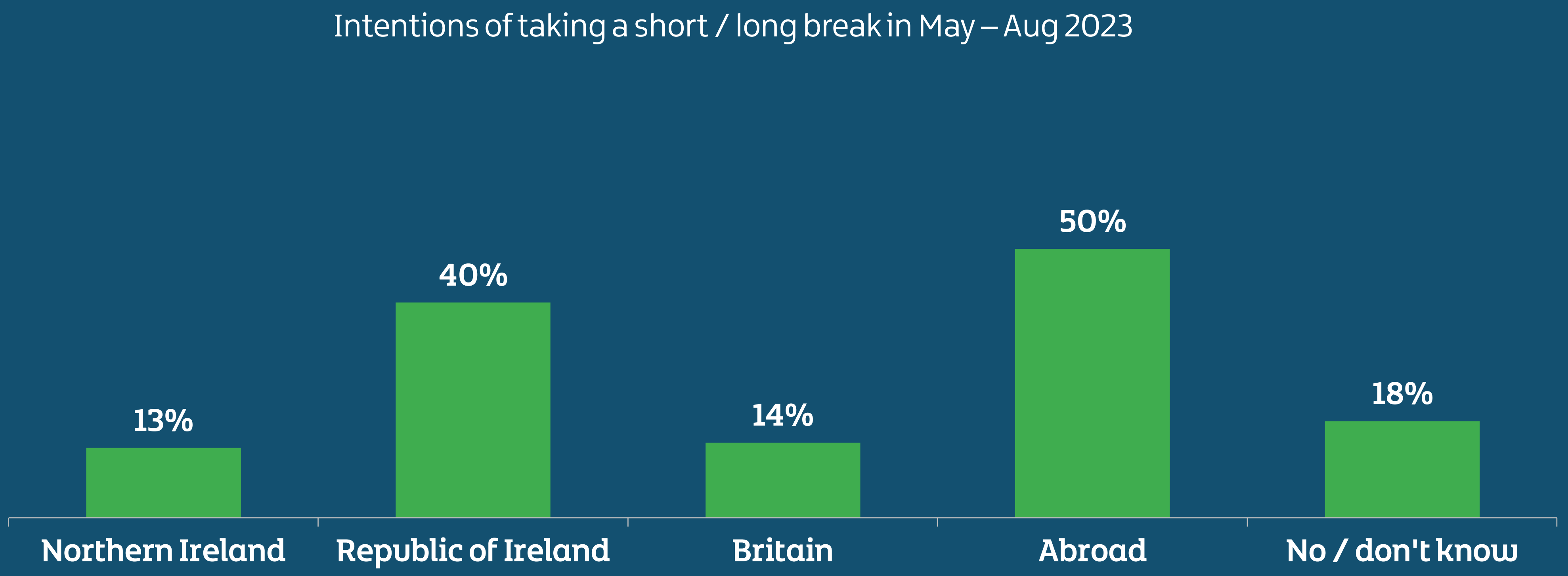
Likelihood to bring dog with them (if possible)



Base n = 120 / 73 have a dog

E6. Thinking about your upcoming trip(s) in Northern Ireland, what type of trip would you prefer? / E8b. How likely or unlikely would you be to bring your dog on your upcoming trip(s) in Northern Ireland, if the accommodation you were staying in allowed pets? / E36. Which of the following best describe your upcoming short break(s) or long trip(s) in NI?

Just over 1 in 8 considering short or long breaks in NI in summer 2023 at this point – half now considering trips abroad



Base n = 750

E24a. Would you consider taking a short break or longer holiday in any of the following between May and August 2023?

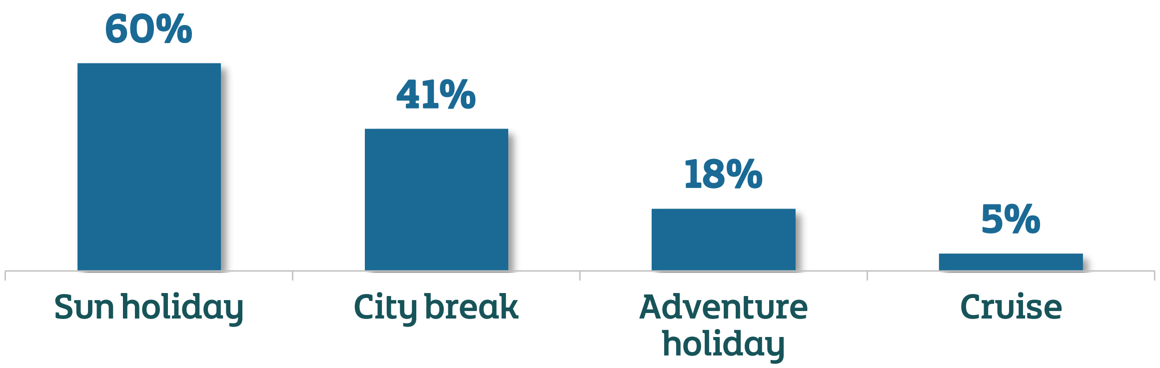
Number considering trips abroad in next 8 months has continued to grow – significant number who haven't yet travelled may be eyeing this summer as first proper sun holiday

62% of total sample are considering a break abroad in the next 8 months

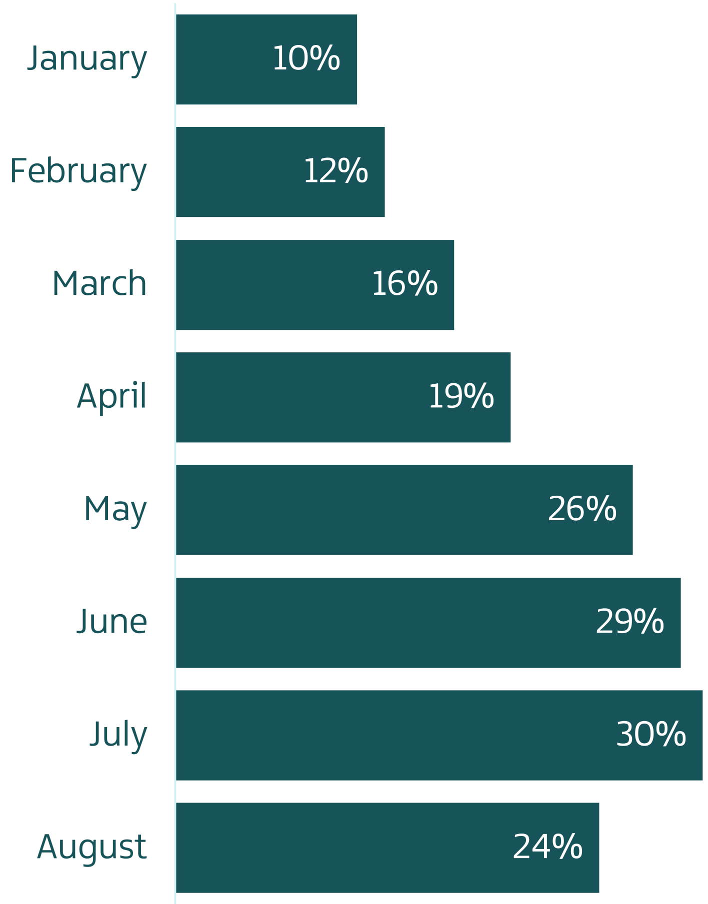
49% of this cohort are actively planning or have booked their trips

Trip intentions have grown by 11 percentage points (vs. last wave, *which didn't include summer*) to highest ever - although number actively planning trips continues to decrease, this time by 4 percentage points

What type of trip are you considering?



When trips abroad are planned for



Base n = 465 considering trip abroad

E29. In which of the following months are you considering travelling? / E14. Have you booked or thought about planning this trip abroad? / E15. What type(s) of holiday or short break abroad are you considering? / E15b.

Market comparison – Trip expectations

Trip planning stable in both markets

- No significant changes across both markets in number of NI short / long breaks planned
- **Slight downward trend against last few years as trip abroad intentions continue to grow**

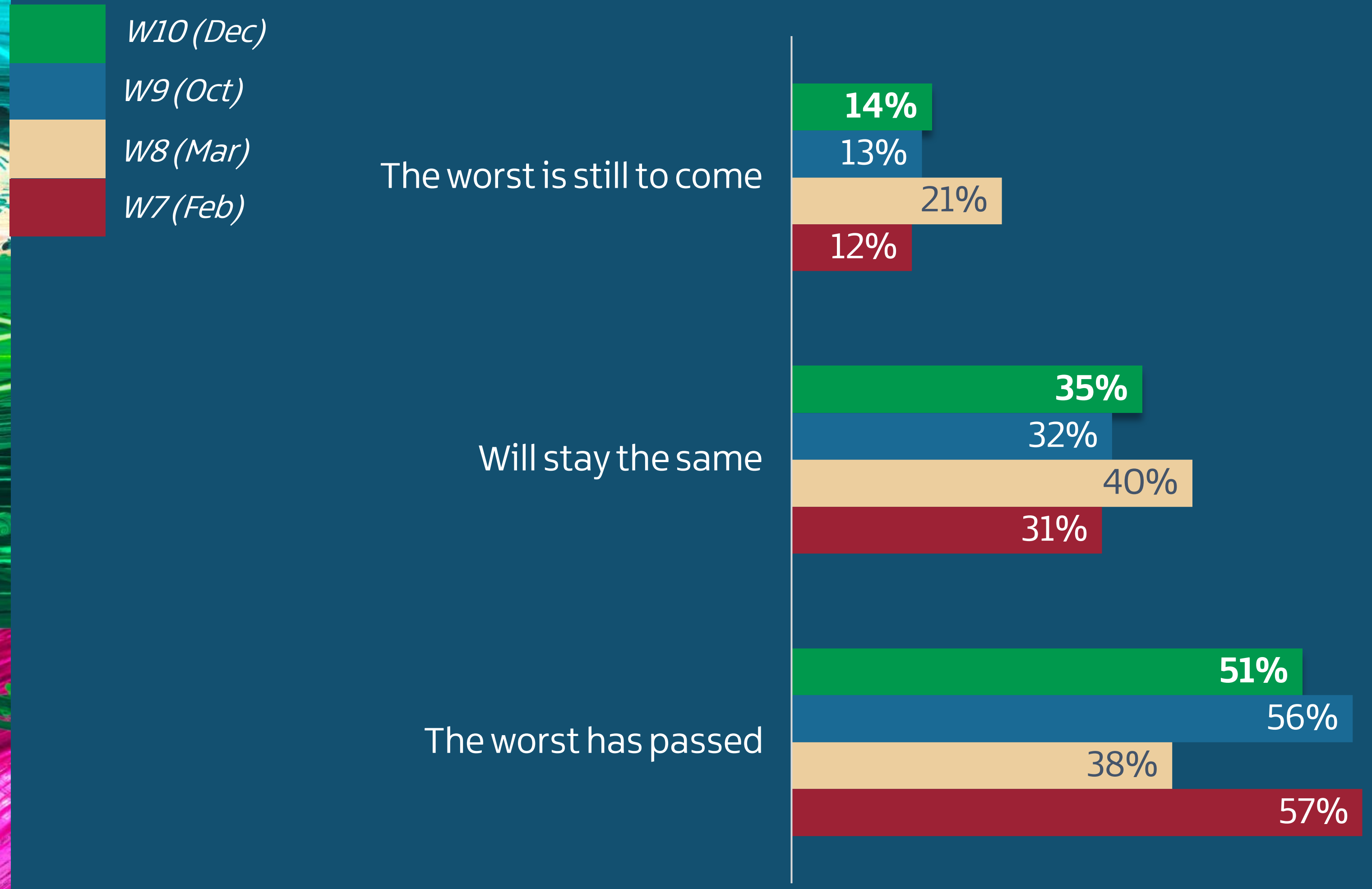
Chance to relax / unwind very important at the moment

- With Christmas coming up (at time of fieldwork) and costs increasing, <u>a chance to relax and unwind</u> is high up there as a reason for trips in NI for both markets

Covid-19 and tourism

Covid outlook for next month – little change since October shows situation is effectively stable at this point

How is the Covid situation going to change in the coming month?



More negative outlook among **mid-family** (21%) and **18-24s (20%)**

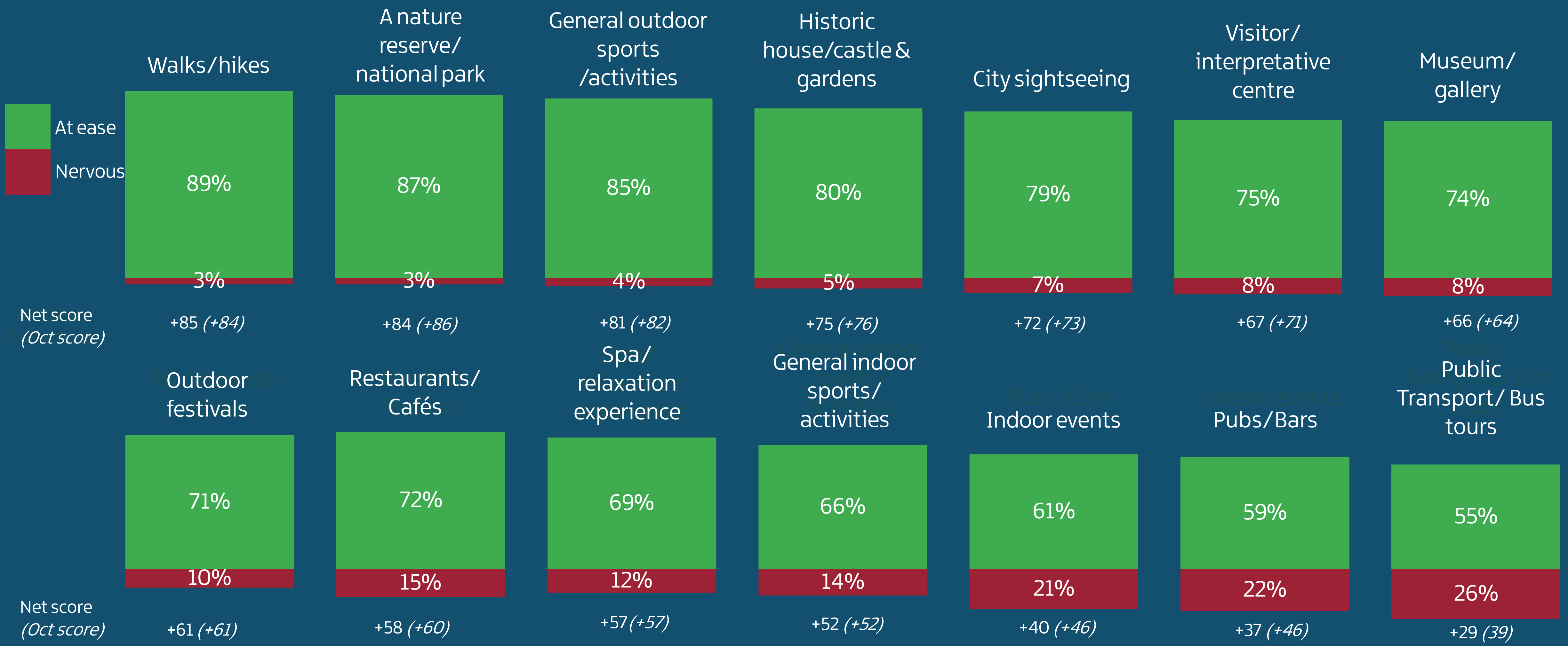
More positive outlook among pre-family (60%) and **25-34s** (57%)

Base n = 750

A1a. Regarding the situation of Coronavirus/Covid-19 in the Republic of Ireland and the way it is going to change in the coming month, which of the following best describes your opinion?

Comfort with activities generally unchanged, although some slight movement towards unease with pubs / indoor events suggests awareness of growing Covid cases

Ease in engaging with activities this winter / spring

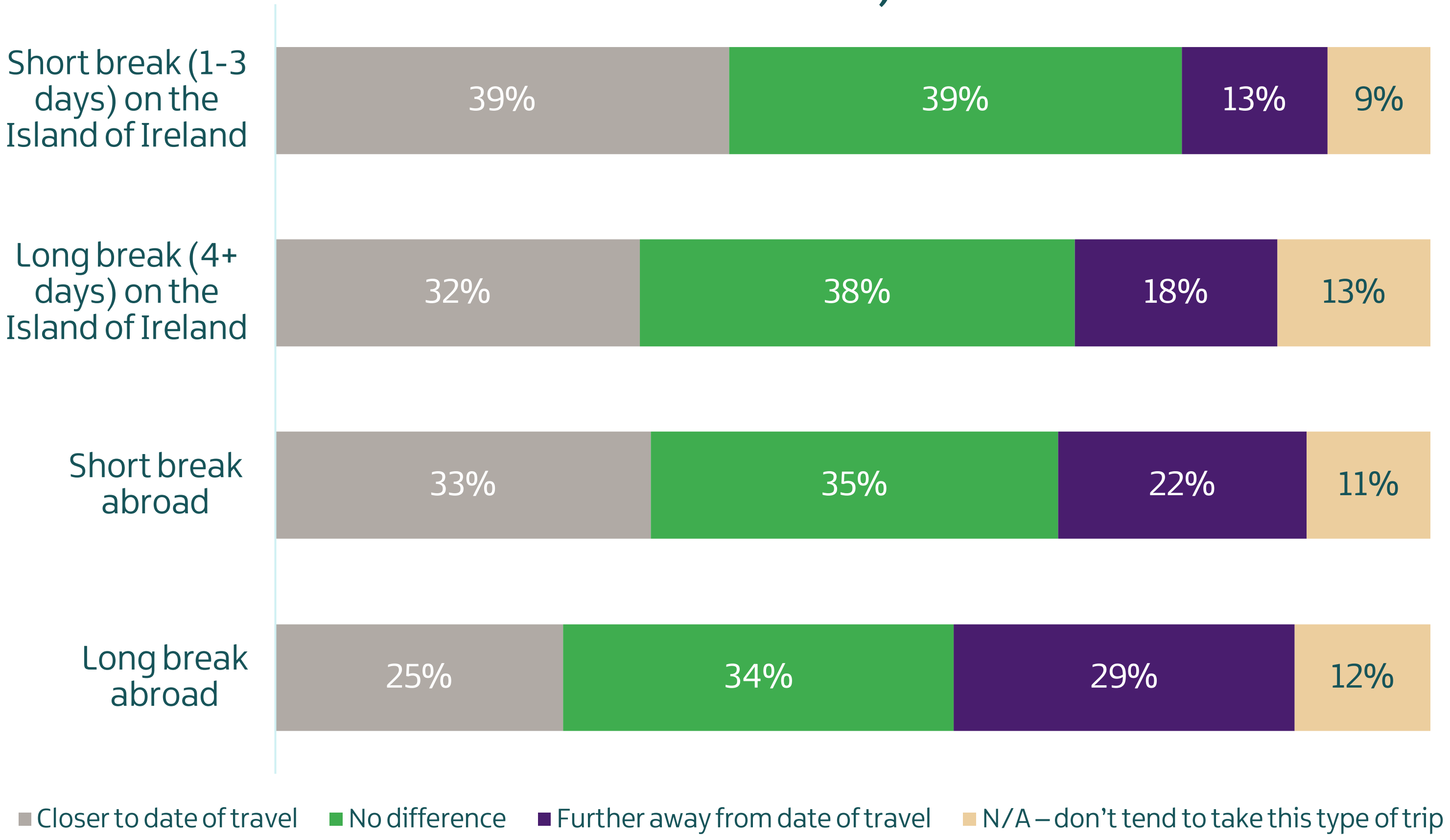


Base n = 750

B4. How do you currently feel about engaging in these activities over the remainder of December 2022 and into 2023?

For Island of Ireland breaks the tendency is still to book a little closer to the date than they would have before Covid – trend is reversed for long breaks abroad however

How long they'd book holidays before date of travel (winter / spring 2023)



Base n = 750

B6f. Thinking about the booking process for holidays or short breaks in winter 2022 / spring 2023, would you say you are booking holidays further in advance or closer to the date of travel than before Covid (i.e. pre-2020) for each of the following?

Recap

Recap and recommendations

Cost of living remains a source of anxiety – but things are moving in the right direction compared to October 2022. Top emotions when looking ahead to 2023 were optimism (33%) and excitement (29%).

And while most still expect to be negatively affected by cost of living increases in the coming months, the number saying they'll be "significantly" negatively impacted drops by 9 % points. 39% now say they're unlikely to make any changes to how much they spend on holidays or short breaks on the Island of Ireland, up from 30% in October.

And while 52% said they anticipate spending less on holidays / short breaks, only 26% want to reduce the quality of the experiences – this is above all the case with under-35s and the Active Maximisers segment.

NPS among those who visited in 2022 was a solid 2 – highest among those who took short breaks (8). When asked why they would return in 2023, most focused on atmosphere, food and drink, and value.

Trip intentions up to April are stable when compared to previous few waves. There is a slight negative trend for NI short breaks overall, as competition from ROI and GB remains strong and intentions for trips abroad grow, but numbers healthy considering this + cost of living impacts.