



**TOURISM
NORTHERN
IRELAND**

TOURISM 360°

2025 Travel Trends

Insights & Intelligence Service

This Issue

This Special Edition of Tourism 360° focuses on the trends in tourism and consumer preferences for 2025, with industry takeouts included throughout.

According to the latest World Tourism Barometer from UN Tourism, an estimated 1.4 billion tourists travelled internationally in 2024, indicating a virtual recovery (99%) to pre-pandemic levels. For the Northern Ireland industry, these are the trends that will make an impact in 2025.

03. Noctourism

Noctourism has become an increasingly popular phenomenon encompassing activities from late-opening museums to stargazing, presenting opportunities to help develop the night-time economy and encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more.

05. Tech-free trips

With the rise of burnout and 'brainrot' highlighting the importance of looking after our mental wellbeing, offering a break away from technology with wellness experiences is a great way to appeal to travellers keen to relax on their trip.

07. Sustainability and the 'say-do' gap

The sustainability 'say-do gap' recognises the importance of making sustainability hassle-free, and to highlight clearly the benefits for consumers and our planet to encourage environmentally conscious choices.

9. AI-powered planning

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming a powerful tool in the tourism industry, especially for trip planning and booking. NI operators can keep ahead of the trend and utilise emerging technology to maximise their online presence.

11. Slow travel

Slow travel is being embraced in 2025, taking trips at a more relaxed pace and reducing the number of tourist hotspots visited. Visitors are keen to soak up all a location has to offer, holding the potential to grow NI tourism in a sustainable way and support regional balance.

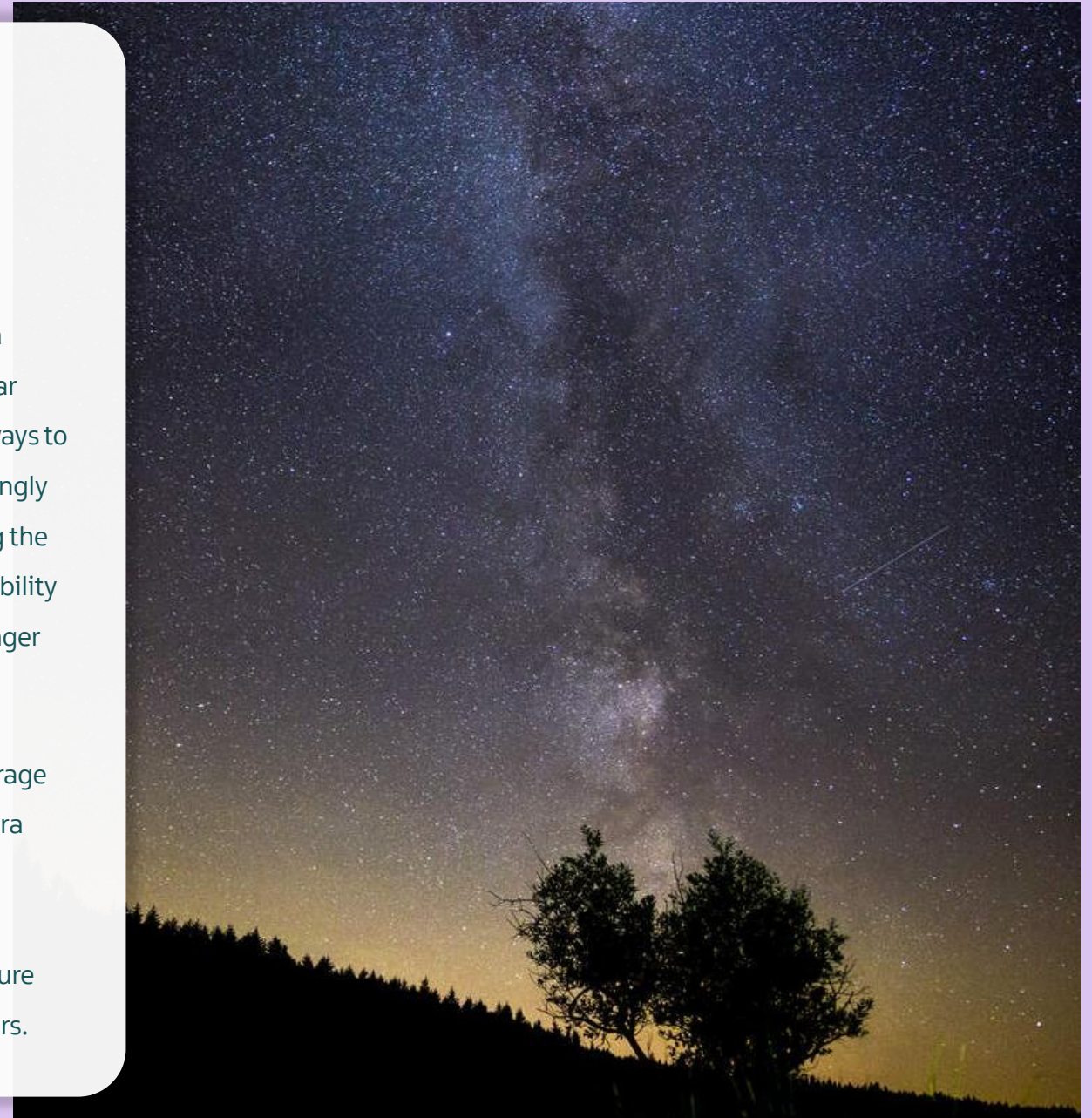
12. Culinary adventures

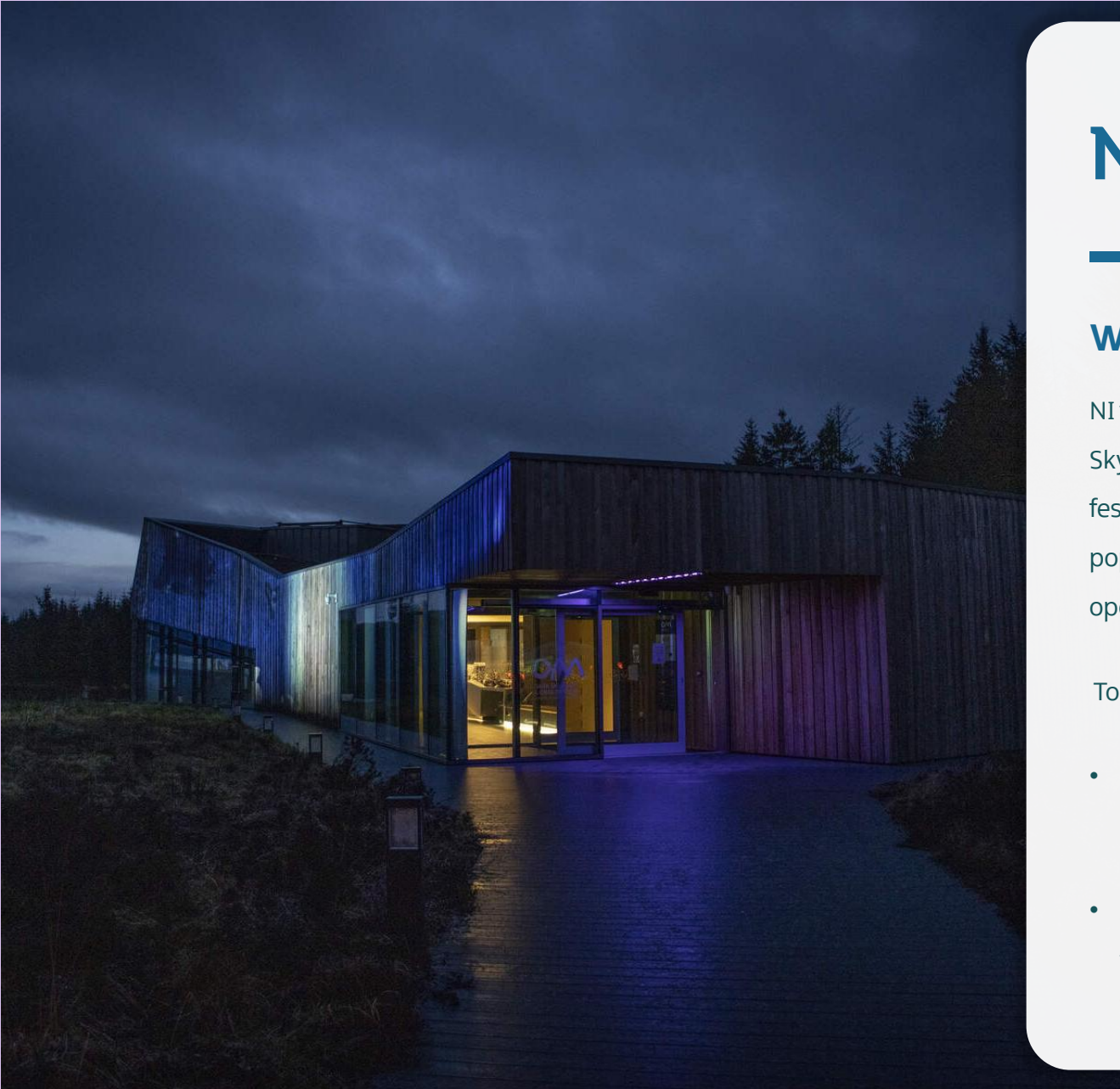
Rather than taking home a key ring or fridge magnet, local goods and traditional food & drink are becoming important souvenirs for visitors – NI has no shortage of produce for tourists to take home and share.

Noctourism

'Noctourism' has become the new buzzword for tourism experiences, encompassing a whole range of evening activities from late-opening museums to local festivals and star gazing. Extending opening hours for attractions and hosting local festivals are great ways to develop the night-time economy. Late-night cultural events in NI are becoming increasingly popular – Derry Halloween 2024 is estimated to have attracted 120,000 visitors during the course of the festival. Greater availability of evening activities allows visitors more flexibility within their trip and may help to convert day trips to overnight trips and encourage longer stays across NI's regions, a key priority in the [Tourism Vision & Action Plan](#).

Solar activity is going to be at its highest for decades in 2025, sending higher than average numbers of charged particles into the Earth's atmosphere and creating dramatic aurora viewing opportunities. According to a global survey by [Booking.com](#), nearly two thirds (62%) of travellers are considering visiting dark sky destinations with starbathing experiences, star guides, and once in a lifetime cosmic events top of the stellar adventure list. NI boasts some of the [darkest skies in the UK](#), making it a hidden gem for stargazers.





Noctourism

What it means for the NI industry:

NI is a prime location for night-time activities, home to an International Dark Sky Park at [OM Dark Sky Park](#), and [Derry Halloween](#), Europe's largest Halloween festival. The monthly [Late Night Art](#) event in Belfast City Centre has become popular as a free evening activity and may offer opportunities to extend opening hours, to benefit from increased evening footfall.

Tourism operators may wish to consider:

- Advertising nearby night-time experiences to highlight unique opportunities for visitors.
- Attraction operators may consider trialling events with late-opening hours to add an exciting aspect to an existing experience, as offered recently by [Titanic Belfast](#) and [Ulster Museum](#).

Tech-free trips

With 'Brainrot' named as the Oxford University Press [Word of the Year 2024](#), travellers are becoming increasingly attracted to ditching technology on their trips, to improve mental wellbeing and relationships. 46% of Gen Z are taking actions to limit their screen time according to a survey by [ExpressVPN](#), followed by Millennials at 33%. Tourism operators are seizing the opportunity to appeal to this market. Offering a unique offline trip experience, [unplugged](#) launched in the UK in 2020 with off-grid holiday cabins – the business recorded a 97% occupancy rate for summer 2024, and have expanded into Europe, highlighting the widespread popularity of a tech-free trip experience.

Tourism NI's sentiment research with NI and Republic of Ireland consumers highlights one of the top reasons for taking a trip is consistently 'to escape and get away from it all', supporting the tech-free trend. Tourism Ireland's global survey found that 'Disconnecting, unwinding and enjoying special moments together' was the second-most important aspect driving choice of destination. Providing the means for visitors to switch off from technology will improve this quality time and enhance visitors' experience in NI.

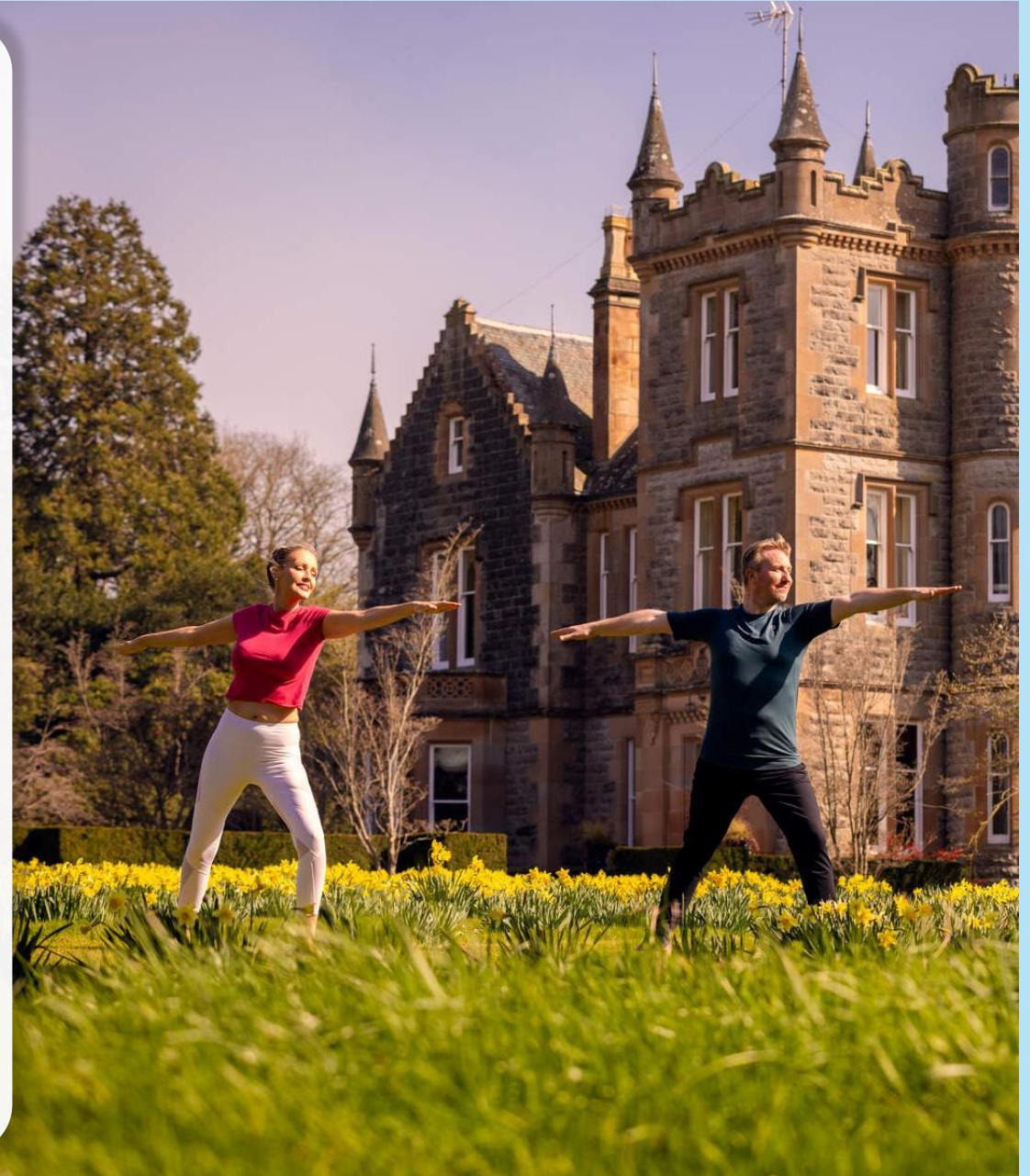




Image: Tourism Ireland

Tech-free trips

What it means for the NI industry:

Tourism NI's latest domestic consumer sentiment research found that 'opportunities to explore the outdoors' was rated most highly out of all aspects of an NI trip. NI has a wide range of wellness retreats and experiences to attract visitors who want to invest in their wellbeing and switch off.

- Check out this [Discover NI](#) article for inspiration and potential ways to upgrade or expand your offering.
- With an abundance of areas of outstanding natural beauty, NI operators have plenty of options to showcase their region as a great choice for a tech-free trip and try out activities in nature, from a gentle cycle to a more strenuous hike.

Sustainability and the 'say-do' gap

Sustainability is an essential consideration for the tourism industry, with many operators taking action to reduce their carbon footprint and offering more sustainable choices for an ever-increasing environmentally conscious market. However, as the cost-of-living crisis impacts consumer choices in all areas of spending, sustainable choices for trips are becoming more cost-sensitive. According to a recent [World Travel & Tourism Council](#) (WTTC) report, the proportion of people comfortable paying extra for sustainable travel options declines significantly, as cost increases from an additional $\leq 5\%$ to an additional $\geq 20\%$ extra.

The concept of sustainability, however, remains vitally important for businesses. In a survey by [Kearney](#) 75% of global travellers stated that impact on the environment plays a role in the selection of the destination or hotel for a trip.

The WTTC report also highlights that consumers are more likely to choose a sustainable travel option if it doesn't involve added time-consuming complexity. Creating a sustainable policy doesn't have to be complex, and guidance and support is available from Tourism NI and others.

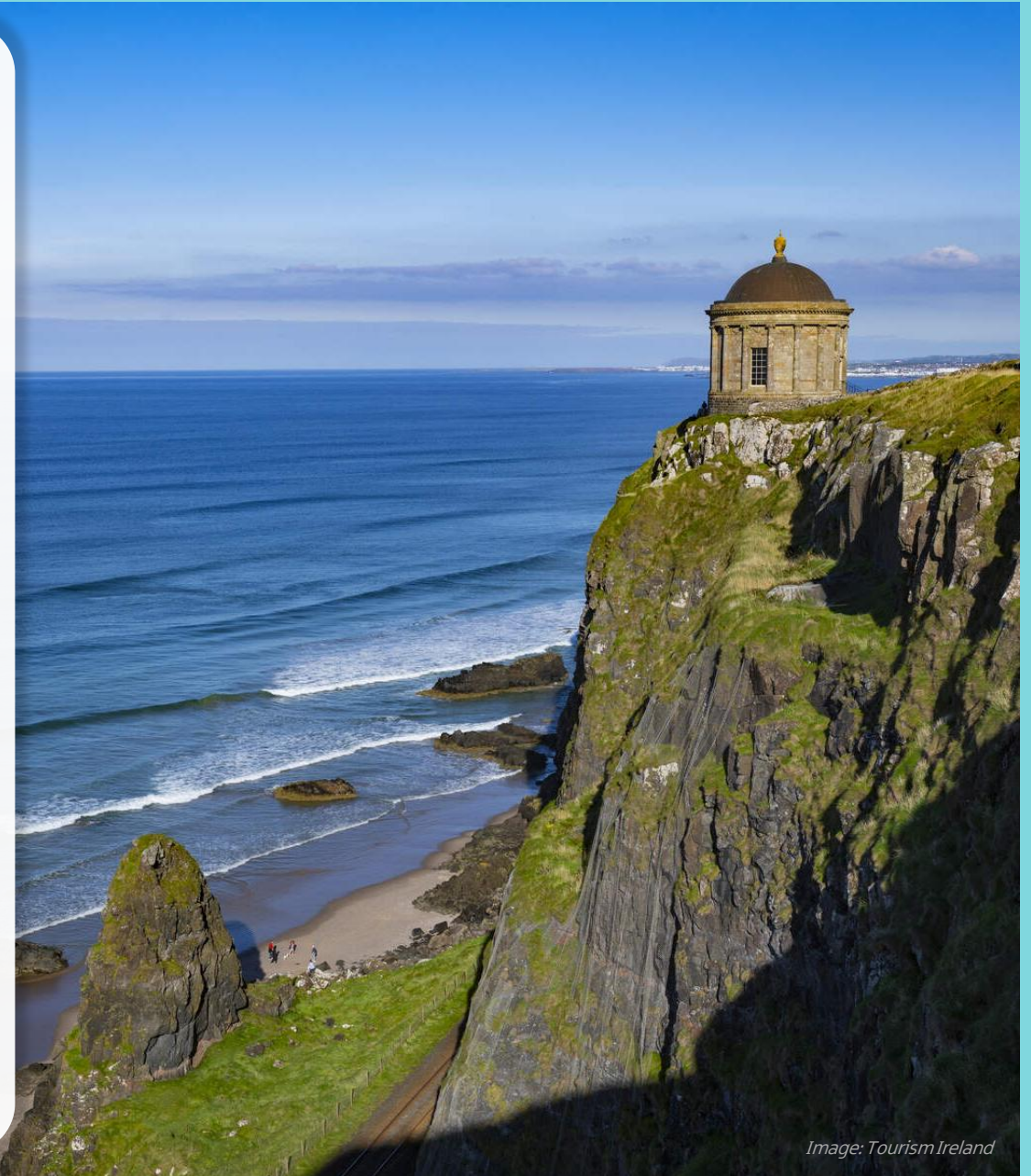


Image: Tourism Ireland



Sustainability and the ‘say-do’ gap

What it means for the NI industry:

It is important to make sustainability hassle-free and highlight clearly the benefits for consumers and our planet to encourage them to make sustainable choices. Consider:

- Tailoring marketing that speaks directly to the values of key segments, highlighting personal (as well as the wider) benefits of sustainable options.
- Incentivise eco-conscious travel decisions by offering rewards, discounts, or loyalty points.
- Highlight partnerships with other businesses to showcase where collaborative actions are being taken.
- There are a range of resources available on [Tourism NI's website](#) to help develop and adapt sustainability policies for your business.

AI-powered planning

AI is taking the tourism industry by storm, especially when it comes to the booking and planning process. According to a recent global survey by Tourism Ireland, just over 1 in 3 of all outbound holidaymakers plan to use AI to assist holiday planning for their next trip, driven by the US, Spain and Canada. Top reasons for using AI include saving time on research, easily comparing options, getting tailored suggestions and finding hidden gems.

PwC's [Travel Trends](#) survey reveals that younger travellers, particularly those aged 18-24, are leading the charge in leveraging AI for travel purposes – 54% of this category use AI to compare holiday prices. AI is also instrumental in finding hotel suggestions, with 36% of users employing it for this purpose. Other popular uses include researching itineraries, summarising reviews, and translating foreign language sites.

According to a report from [Mintel Ireland](#), smartphone compatibility is no longer a luxury but a necessity for holiday booking and planning. With around half of holidaymakers in NI and ROI using their smartphones for main holiday bookings, making investment in user-friendly interfaces and a seamless path-to-purchase are more important than ever.



Image: Tourism Ireland



AI-powered planning

What it means for the NI industry:

As AI tools and technology expand search capabilities, to improve the booking process and stand out from the crowd operators may consider the following:

- It is essential that operators' websites are visually appealing and that the key information is easily accessible, especially by smartphone. Incorporating new technologies like chat bots and online check-ins will attract bookings from tech-savvy travellers and will improve the overall booking experience.
- Tourism NI is holding a series of webinars on AI and its applications for tourism operators – check our [website](#) for details.

Slow travel

Skift research is calling 2025 'the year of long getaways', as their [Travel Outlook 2025 Report](#) finds tourists are staying longer and visiting fewer attractions in their wanderings, to get more out of each. Tourism NI's latest consumer sentiment research saw rising intentions to book a long break in Spring 2025. This trend may be influenced by environmental concerns and the over-tourism in popular destinations in Summer 2024.

The benefit of slow travel is that visitors tend to stay longer, taking trips at traditionally off-peak times, behaviours that help support the spread of tourism activity across NI's regions and throughout the year. Tourism NI's most recent consumer sentiment research found that 'scenic/interesting walks' and 'just exploring/soaking up the atmosphere' were top choices for NI and ROI residents taking trips in NI.

'Exploring new places, landscapes and cultural activities' was the top holiday need in a recent global survey by Tourism Ireland, which is marketing June 2025 'Slow Tourism Month' to inspire visitors to explore communities, scenery and attractions. This trend also appeals to visitors' budgets when pressure on household finances remains an issue, with visitors spending less on multiple experiences and spending more time in one place.

Sources: Skift Megatrends Report 2025, Tourism Ireland & Tourism NI's Consumer Sentiment Research.

What it means for the NI industry:

To showcase the potential for longer stays, operators may consider:

- Advertising lesser-known local attractions and including 'top tips' with off-peak times to visit, and locations to stop at along the way. Take inspiration from Tourism Ireland's [NI Slow Adventure](#) article.
- Slow travel can help all regions in NI to benefit from tourism – to encourage seasonal spread, operators may consider advertising offers for off-peak breaks and experiences.

Culinary adventures

Rather than taking home a key ring or fridge magnet, local goods and traditional foods are becoming important souvenirs for visitors. This trend has been amplified by social media, as [Expedia](#) reports that TikTok has enabled everything from a chocolate bar from Dubai and skincare products from Korea, to butter from France to go viral. Visitors to NI may take home a present from one of our many local distilleries, such as [McConnell's](#) in Belfast or [Bushmills](#) on the North Coast, craft chocolate from [NearyNogs](#) in Newry or [Broighter Gold](#) oil from Limavady.

Expedia's global survey data shows that 39% of travellers usually visit a grocery shop and 44% shop to buy local goods they can't get at home. Furthermore, the [Hilton Trends Report](#) finds that almost 1 in 5 global travellers will travel specifically to seek out new restaurants or culinary experiences. Local food-focused experiences are also on the rise in NI, such as the local cookery classes by [Krazi Baker](#) and [Waterman House](#). With all regions in NI offering a unique range of food & drink opportunities, there is no shortage of opportunities for tourism operators to benefit from this growing trend.



What it means for the NI industry:

NI is world-renowned for its food & drink offering, with plenty of experiences available:

- Local delicacies and farm shops are becoming popular as attractions to visit on a trip, so consider making visitors aware of the region's specialties and places to purchase them.
- Take a look at the toolkit on Tourism NI's website to [embrace a Giant Taste](#) and learn about how to improve your authentic food & drink offering and highlight your food and drink journey for visitors.