

TOURISM 360°

Performance Update – December 2024

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Summary

Northern Ireland (NI) hotel occupancy for January-October 2024 is on par with 2023 levels, with sales slightly above those achieved last year, and continued growth evident for rates. Cardholder spend data for the first nine months of the year indicates increased tourism-related spend in NI for all main market areas.

Industry research also suggests a positive performance for both the closer to home and further afield markets, with consumer research indicating a largely stable performance from the NI and Republic of Ireland (ROI) markets.

Looking ahead, air access is strong, while forward booking data suggests average occupancy over the next 90 days is slightly down for hotels and marginally up for self-catering establishments vs this time last year.

Industry outlook is generally favourable for the remainder of the year and optimism prevails for 2025, however significant levels of concern remain regarding the impact of reduced disposable incomes and high energy costs. Competition from abroad and ROI remains strong.

The Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA) recently published January–March 2024 tourism performance statistics. Findings indicate that overnight trips taken in NI during January–March 2024 experienced a small decline compared to Q1 2023, while nights spent in NI and associated spend each remained on par with 2023 levels. Holiday trips were up slightly on Q1 2023.

Key Findings:

- In the first quarter of 2024 (January–March), almost 920,000 overnight trips were taken in NI, accounting for over 2.9m nights and £223m expenditure.
- NISRA statistics indicate an increase in visitors from Great Britain (GB) and Other Overseas v the same period in 2023.
- The average length of stay of an overnight trip in NI in the first quarter of 2024 was 3.18 nights – an increase of 5% on Q1 2023.
- The average spend per trip in Q1 2024 was £242.34, representing a 4% increase on the same period last year. The average spend per night (£76.14) is on par with January–March 2023 (£76.56).
- Over half (51%) of all overnight trips taken in NI in the first quarter of 2024 were holiday trips, with a further 37% visiting friends/relatives and 10% taking business trips.
- Domestic trips (trips taken by NI residents in NI) accounted for two-fifths (41%) of overnight trips taken in NI, with one-fifth (21%) attributable to visitors from ROI and GB accounting for 30% of overnight trips.

January–March 2024 At a Glance



920k Trips

-4% vs Q1 2023



2.9m Nights

No Change vs Q1 2023



£223m Spend

No Change vs Q1 2023



[Click here to view the infographic.](#)

For the first time since May 2024, NI monthly room occupancy experienced growth compared to 2023 levels in October 2024. This was driven by positive performances in Belfast and Derry~Londonderry. Room sales also increased in October 2024. Comparing performance in October against last month (September 2024), all KPIs experienced declines however this is in line with historical trends seen at this time of year.

NI Hotel Performance January-October 2024

- STR report NI hotel room occupancy during January-October 2024 was 75.5%, 0.4 percentage points below the same period in 2023. Over 2.2m rooms have been sold in NI hotels so far in 2024, up 2% on the same period last year.
- NI's average daily rate (£116.16) and revenue per available room (£87.74) experienced increases of 7.5% and 7.0% respectively, compared with the first 10 months of 2023.
- Regional NI is leading performance so far in 2024 while Belfast is broadly on par with 2023 and Derry~Londonderry has seen a small decline.

Room Occupancy	Change vs 2023
75.5%	-0.4pps

**pps = percentage points*

ADR	Change vs 2023
£116.16	+7.5%

RevPAR	Change vs 2023
£87.74	+7.0%

NI Self-Catering Performance

January-November 2024

Occupancy	ADR	Reserved Nights
50%	£147.56	942,000
-1pp <small>vs Jan-Nov 2023</small>	+7% <small>vs Jan-Nov 2023</small>	+15% <small>vs Jan-Nov 2023</small>

- Lighthouse report NI self-catering room occupancy during January-November 2024 was 50%, down slightly compared to the same period in 2023.
- NI's average daily rate and nights reserved during the first 11 months of 2024 are both showing increases compared to last year.
- Performance in the month of November 2024 largely mirrors the year-to-date picture, with occupancy on par with November 2023 and a 12% increase in reserved nights.

Monitoring of visitor experience scores for January-October 2024 indicates that NI accommodation establishments and attractions continue to deliver an overall positive visitor experience, with scores comparable to those achieved in the same period in 2023.

Visitor Experience January-October 2024

Global Review Score (GRS)	
<u>Accommodation</u>	<u>Attractions</u>
89.2%	93.2%
+0.1pp vs 2023	+0.1pp vs 2023

- Global Review Score (GRS) is a key benchmarking metric for visitor experience. It is calculated by an algorithm that generates a percentage from 0-100, based on review data.
- NI accommodation establishments achieved a GRS score of 89.2% for January-October 2024, while NI attractions achieved a GRS score of 93.2%. Both remained on par with the same period in 2023.

Accommodation Experience by Category

A further deep dive into the NI visitor accommodation experience by key categories shows that service was the highest rated, followed by location and cleanliness. Value received the lowest rating, likely impacted by increases in NI accommodation rates and cost of living increases.

92.0%
Service



89.7%
Location



86.8%
Cleanliness



83.4%
Value



A comparison of January-September 2024 tourism related* cardholder spend in NI with the same period in 2023 shows an overall increase (+7%). While increased tourism related spend was evident for all main market areas, closer to home spend has slowed somewhat, with more significant growth evident for overseas (including GB) markets.

Cardholder Spend January-September 2024

- After substantial increases in tourism-related spend in NI from the ROI market in recent years, high levels of spend remain for January-September 2024 compared to the same period in 2023 (+7%). NI domestic spend increased by 4%.
- Tourism-related spend from the GB market increased by 28%.
- Considerable increases in spend in eating places & restaurants contributed to these increases for GB and ROI markets.
- Following on from recent encouraging trends, tourism-related spend for international

markets such as North America and Australia have shown substantial increases compared to January-September 2023. Other European and Asian markets have also shown positive levels of recovery.



*The tourism-related categories are:

- Bars/Taverns
- Eating Places & Restaurants
- Hotels/Motels/Resorts.

At A Glance

Key Tourism-Related Cardholder Spend in NI by Market: January-September 2024 v 2023

Northern Ireland	↑
Republic of Ireland	↑
Great Britain	↑
Other Overseas	↑
All Markets	+7%

Background:

The data in this report is based on transactions processed by a major card company.

Due to the market share of the card company, and because accommodation can be booked in advance through a third-party platform rather than through a local business or branch, the spend data should be seen as indicative of trends rather than providing actual spend figures.

Data is sometimes withheld to protect merchant and cardholder confidentiality.

Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) airport data indicate that air passenger flow for NI during January-August 2024 stood at 6.2m, up 15% on the same period in 2023. OAG airline schedule data (November 2024) indicates that scheduled seat capacity to NI during January-March 2025 stands at 1.2m, representing a 3% increase on the same period in 2024. January-October 2024 data for the number of passengers travelling on ferries to and from NI is down 2% vs 2023 levels.

Air Passenger Flow and Scheduled Seat Capacity

- CAA airport data indicate that air passenger flow for NI during January-August 2024 stood at 6.2m, up 15% on the same period in 2023. All NI airports experienced growth over this period, with George Best Belfast City Airport seeing the largest increase in air passenger flow.
- OAG airline schedule data (November 2024) indicates that scheduled seat capacity to NI during January-March 2025 stands at 1.2m, representing a 3% increase on the same period in 2024. Flights from GB make up four-fifths of scheduled seat capacity to NI

- during this period.
- In air access news, EasyJet has put on sale a new route to Reus in Spain from Belfast International. The first flight will depart on 5th April 2025 with twice weekly flights.

Airport	Jan-Aug 2024	Change vs 2023
Belfast Int'l	4.6m	+15%
Belfast City	1.6m	+17%
City of Derry	112k	+2%

Sea Access – Ferry Passengers

- January-October 2024 data for the number of passengers travelling on ferries to and from NI is down 2% vs 2023 levels. The decline in ferry passengers through the Northern Corridor (NI to and from GB) are lower than the declines experienced by the central and southern corridors in the ROI in the first 10 months of 2024.

Corridor	Ferry Passengers Jan-Oct 2024	Change vs 2023
Northern Corridor <i>(GB to NI)</i>	1.8m	-2%
Central Corridor <i>(Dublin & Dun Laoghaire)</i>	1.4m	-3%
Southern Corridor <i>(Rosslare)</i>	370,000	-13%

Tourism NI's consumer sentiment research indicates positive NI trip intentions for the remainder of the year and early 2025 for ROI consumers, with domestic intentions broadly stable. However, findings suggest that impacts on personal finances are continuing to affect most consumers in both markets. In relation to holiday behaviour, a considerable proportion of consumers say they would choose a cheaper destination abroad over a staycation. In the current climate, value for money and visitor experience will remain important drivers.

Key Findings

- Findings indicate a largely stable performance from the NI and ROI markets for overnight trips taken during the first nine months of the year, but growth in day trips.
- For those consumers in both markets who have taken a recent break in NI, the majority said their trip matched or exceeded expectations, with the range of places to eat & drink and the welcome & hospitality being particularly highly rated. Opportunities to enjoy the outdoors was also highly rated as a key aspect of the visitor experience.
- Positive NI trip intentions are evident for ROI consumers, with domestic intentions broadly stable. However, competition from abroad remains strong over the next 6 months.
- Key motivations for taking a break in NI continue to centre around relaxation and escapism. For NI consumers, enjoying great food and drink is a top motivator; while having fun tops the list for ROI consumers.
- Despite some slippage in value for money perceptions of accommodation and the cost of eating out, overall consumers in both markets continue to rate NI as a better value for money tourism destination than ROI and GB.



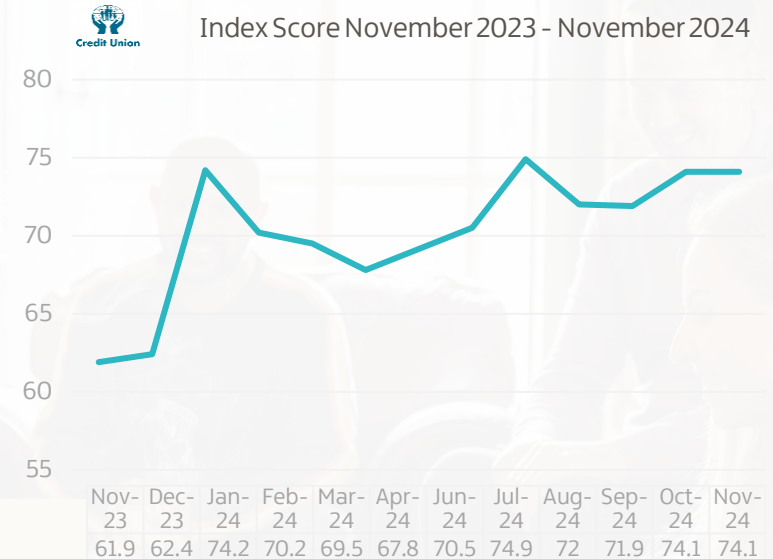
The United Kingdom (UK) Consumer Confidence Barometer is conducted by GfK and reports on consumer confidence against five measures including personal finance, general economic situations and major purchase index. The ROI Consumer Sentiment Index is conducted by the Irish League of Credit Unions and reports on consumer confidence against seven measures including conditions, expectations and economic outlook.

UK Consumer Confidence



- Consumer confidence has improved by three points in November to reach -18. There was evidence of nervousness in recent months as consumers contemplated the potentially worrying impact of the UK Budget at home, and even the implications of the US presidential election. But we have moved past those events now and the biggest change this month is an improvement in major purchase intentions in the run up to Black Friday and Christmas.

ROI Consumer Confidence



- Credit Union's ROI Consumer Confidence Index held steady at 74.1, unchanged from October 2024.
- Conflicting forces weighed on the mood of Irish consumers in November. The adverse impact of an uncertain and increasingly unstable geopolitical backdrop was countered by the imperative of increased seasonal spending and stable if subdued readings on household finances.

Tourism NI commissioned an industry survey in October with NI's tourism industry to monitor 2024 year-to-date business performance, outlook for the remainder of the year and into 2025. The survey points to a generally positive January–September 2024 business performance. Overall, the outlook for 2025 is optimistic, despite ongoing concerns around key issues including consumers' disposable income levels and high energy costs.

Key Findings

- The majority of businesses indicated turnover during January–September 2024 was similar to or exceeded 2023 levels.
- Room yields have also been higher (43%) or similar (40%) to 2023 for the majority of accommodation providers.
- Generally positive visitor volumes were reported for January–September 2024 across the closer to home and international markets, although around one fifth of businesses reported below par performance levels across these markets.
- Over 8 in 10 businesses have seen international visitor volumes either exceed or match January–September 2023 visitor levels.
- Expectations regarding visitor volumes for 2025 are largely positive, with the majority businesses anticipating similar or higher visitor volumes than 2024. Just over one in ten expect visitor volumes to be below last year's.



[Click here to view the full report.](#)

Outlook for 2025



Significant levels of concern, prevail regarding the ongoing impact of reduced consumer disposable income, alongside energy prices. Other concerns highlighted relate to the impact of increased competition, including more people going abroad.



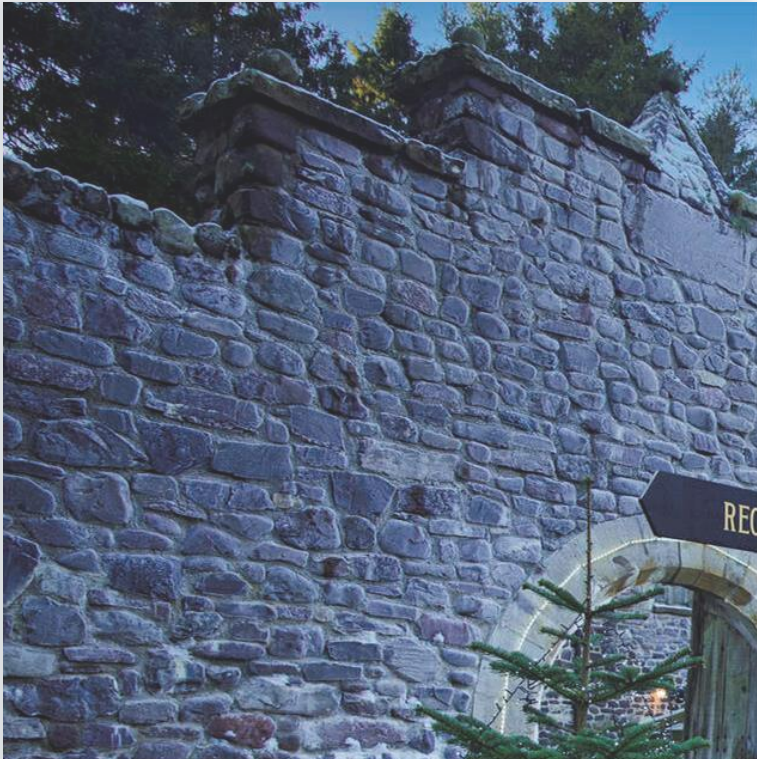
Ongoing challenges continue in relation to staff recruitment and retention, particularly for entry level positions.



Despite the concerns around the challenges ahead, the majority remain confident about maintaining overall business profitability.



The continued success of repeat visitors, the return of overseas visitors and improved local visitor experiences, are among the main reasons for the overall positive outlook for the year ahead.



This report was produced in December 2024 by Tourism NI's Insights & Intelligence Service.

