

External Overnight Trips To Northern Ireland (2015)

Published 26 May 2016

(revised 12 August 2016)



**2.3m
trips**



**10.7m
nights**



**£545m
spent**

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Frequency: Annual

Coverage: Northern Ireland

Theme: People and Places

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The key points are:

- there were 2.3 million overnight trips to Northern Ireland by external visitors in 2015. This is a 6% increase from 2014. These trips accounted for 10.7 million nights (up 6%) and £545 million expenditure (up 7%)
- the top five places of origin for external visitors were England, Republic of Ireland, Scotland, United States of America and Germany;
- there were 0.7 million overnight trips by external visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes in 2015, up 3% from 2014; and
- with 2.3 million overnight trips by external visitors, 2015 has the greatest number of external overnight trips on record.

Introduction

This report provides statistics on external overnight trips (tourists from Great Britain, Republic of Ireland and elsewhere) to Northern Ireland during 2015. A full picture of all tourism activity can be found in the Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics Publication.

Overall Volume/ latest trend

Figure 1a: Rolling 12 months number of external overnight trips, Q1 2011 – Q4 2015 (non-zero axis)

Rolling Year Overnight Trips (Thousands)

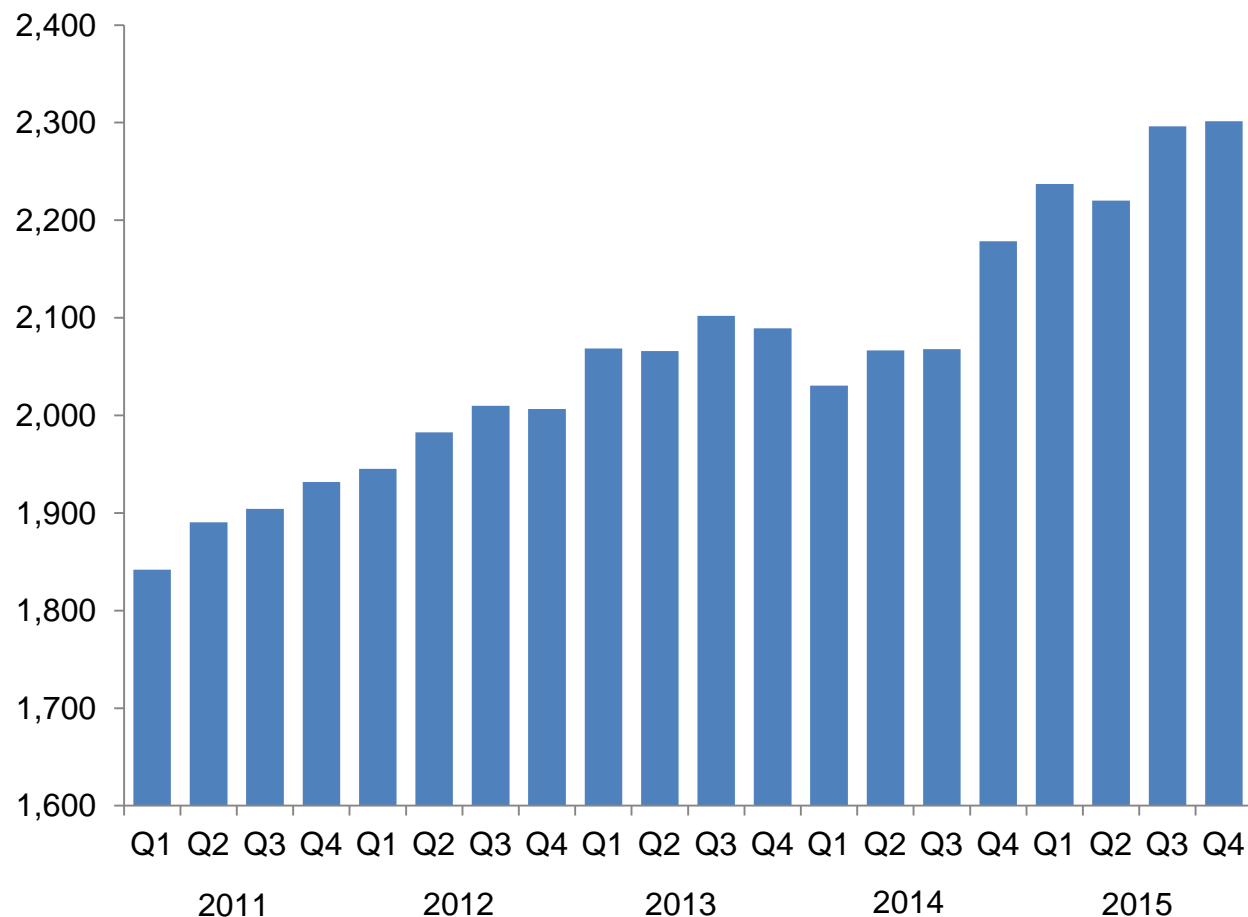


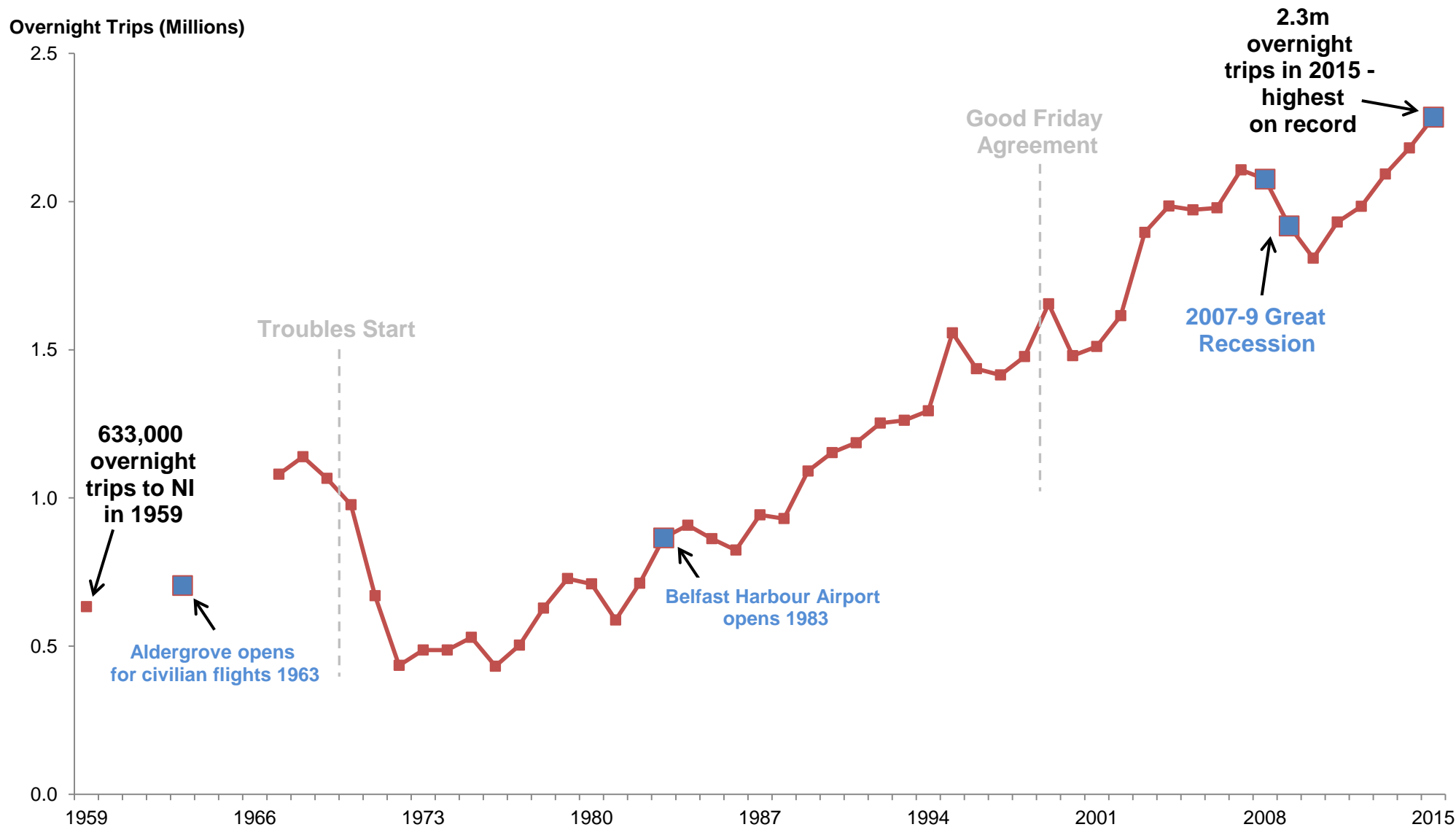
Figure 1a shows the rolling year (twelve month) external overnight trips from Quarter 1 2011 to Quarter 4 2015.

There has been a steady increase in the number of external overnight trips up to 2.3 million in 2015.

These figures should be seen in the context of the longer time series shown in Figure 1b (overleaf).

External overnight trips in Northern Ireland have shown a general upward trend over recent years. Periods such as The Troubles and The 2008-2009 Great Recession can be seen to have a negative impact. It should be noted 2015 had the greatest number of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland on record.

Figure 1b: Annual external overnight trips to Northern Ireland (1959-2015)



Sources: 1959-2010 Northern Ireland Tourist Board; 2010 onwards Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

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 make up approximately 13% of the total). This is the longest timescale available as data for NI tourism begins in 1959.

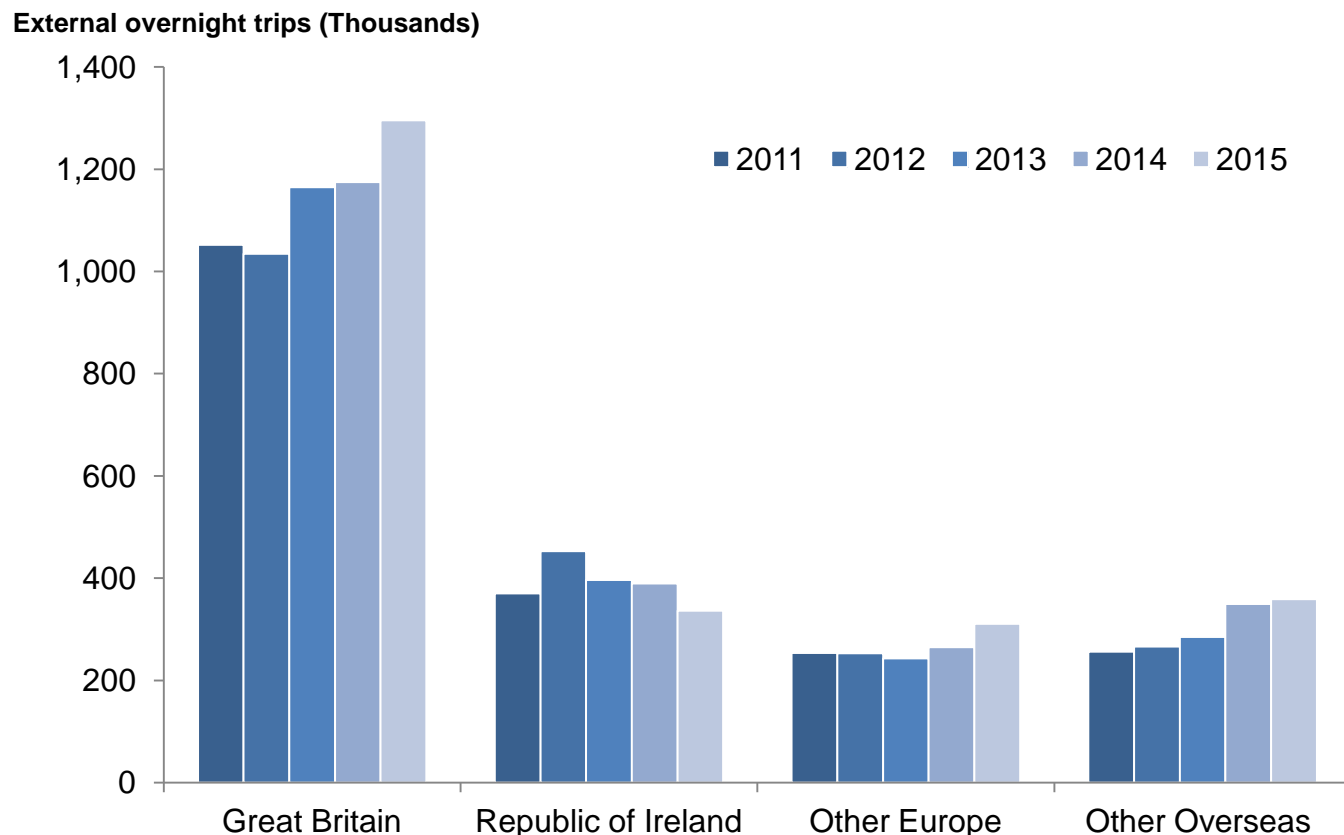
Full information on External Overnight Trips to Northern Ireland can be found at the following link:
[External Visitors to Northern Ireland](#)

External overnight trips to Northern Ireland by main market

For this publication information regarding external overnight trips to Northern Ireland (NI) will be broken out into main markets which are Great Britain (GB), the Republic of Ireland (RoI), Other Europe and Other Overseas.

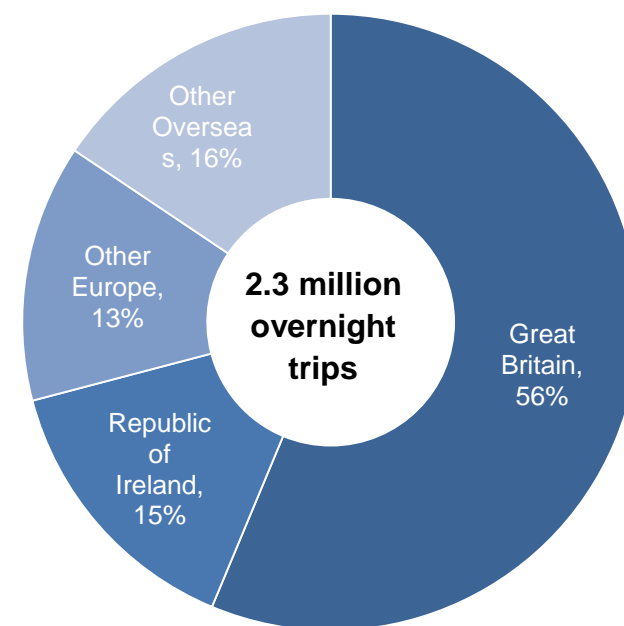
During 2015, there were 2.3 million external overnight trips in NI, an increase of 6% from 2.2 million in 2014 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: External overnight trips to Northern Ireland by main market 2011 – 2015



There was a particular growth in the GB and Other Europe markets, increasing by 10% and 17% respectively. There was also an increase in the Other Overseas market (3%). However, the Republic of Ireland market showed a decrease of 14% in the number of overnight trips in NI.

Figure 3: Breakdown by place of origin (2015)

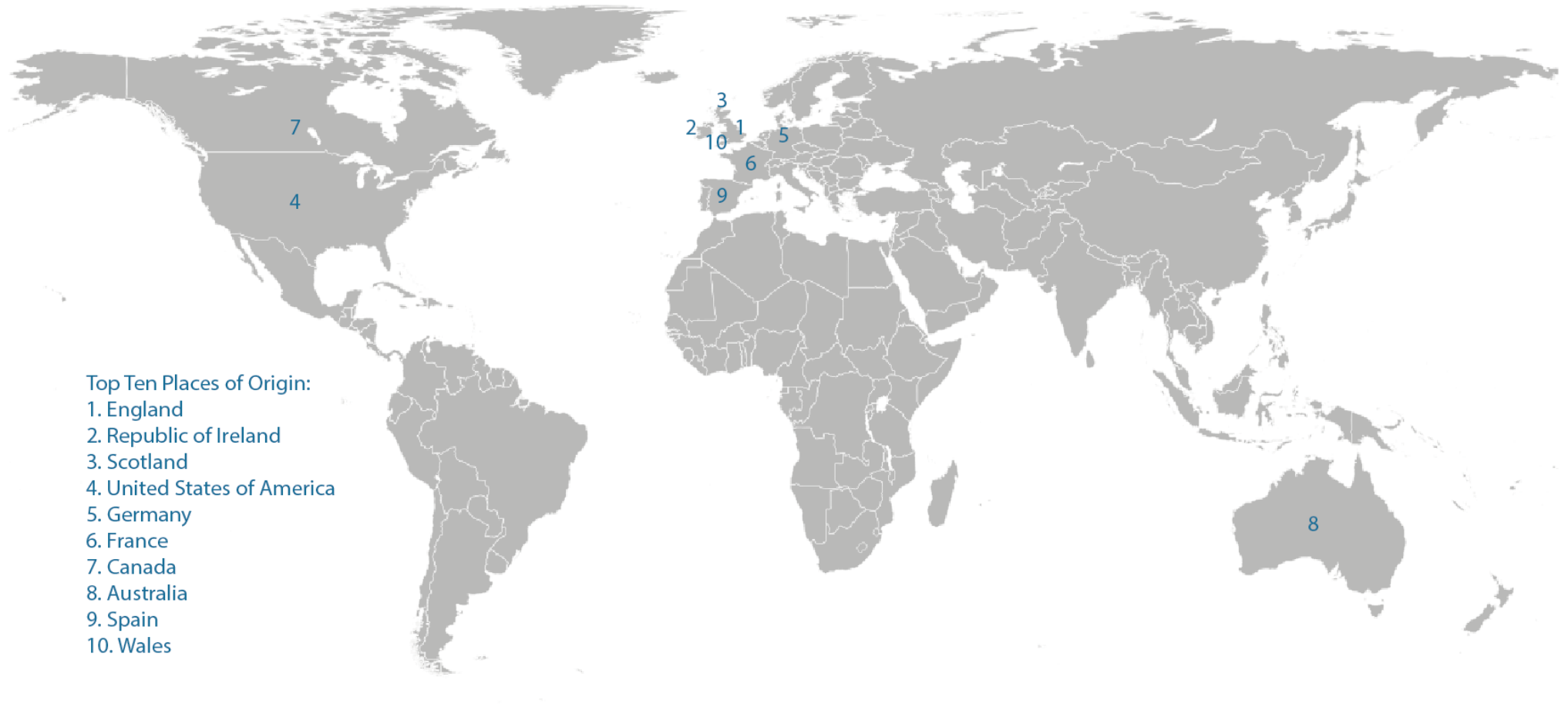


During 2015, of all external overnight trips to NI, 56% were from GB. A further 15% of overnight trips were from residents of the Republic of Ireland and Other Europe; and 16% from Other Overseas (Figure 3).

Top ten places of origin of external overnight visitors to Northern Ireland 2015

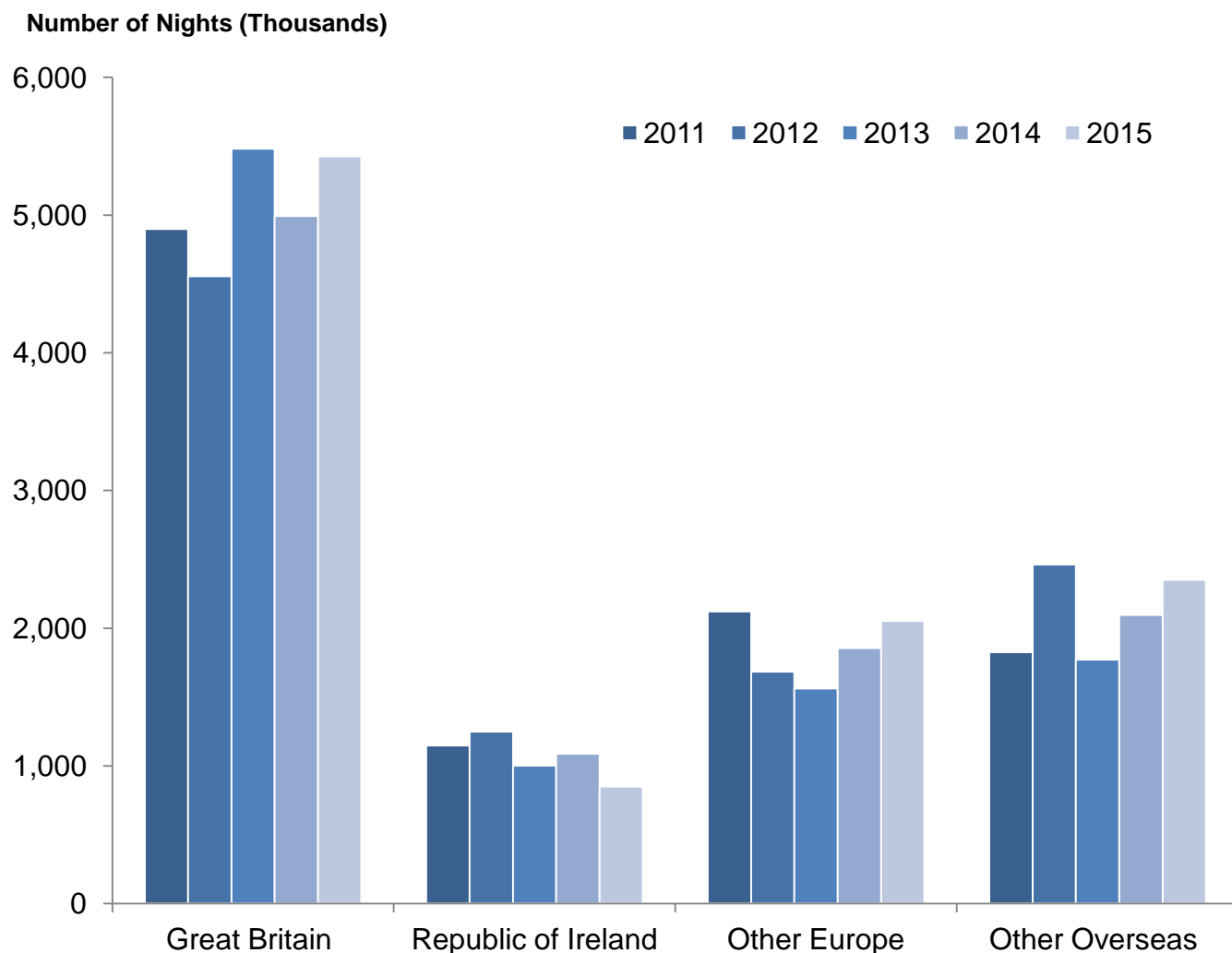
Figure 4 shows the origin of the ten most popular places of external visitors taking overnight trips to Northern Ireland during 2015, with the most popular being England, followed by the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. Although these are neighbouring Northern Ireland, places as far as USA, Canada and Australia are also in the Top Ten.

Figure 4: Top ten places of origin of overnight visitors to Northern Ireland 2015



Number of nights spent by external visitors in Northern Ireland

Figure 5: Number of nights spent by external visitors in Northern Ireland by main market 2011 – 2015



Associated with the number of external overnight trips is the amount of nights spent in Northern Ireland through these trips, which was just over 10.6 million nights in 2015 an increase of 6% from 2014 (Figure 5).

On a market level there was growth on the number of nights spent in NI by those from Other Overseas (12%), Other Europe (11%) and GB (9%). This mirrors the external overnight trips statistics presented above.

In contrast there was a decrease in the number of nights spent in NI by those coming from RoI, by 22%.

The average number of nights spent in NI has fallen from 2011 (5.2) to 2015 (4.6) suggesting that although there are more external overnight trips being taken in NI, visitors are staying for shorter periods of time.

Expenditure of external overnight trips in Northern Ireland

Figure 6: Rolling 12 months expenditure of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland Q1 2011 – Q4 2015 (non-zero axis)

Rolling Year Expenditure £ (Millions)

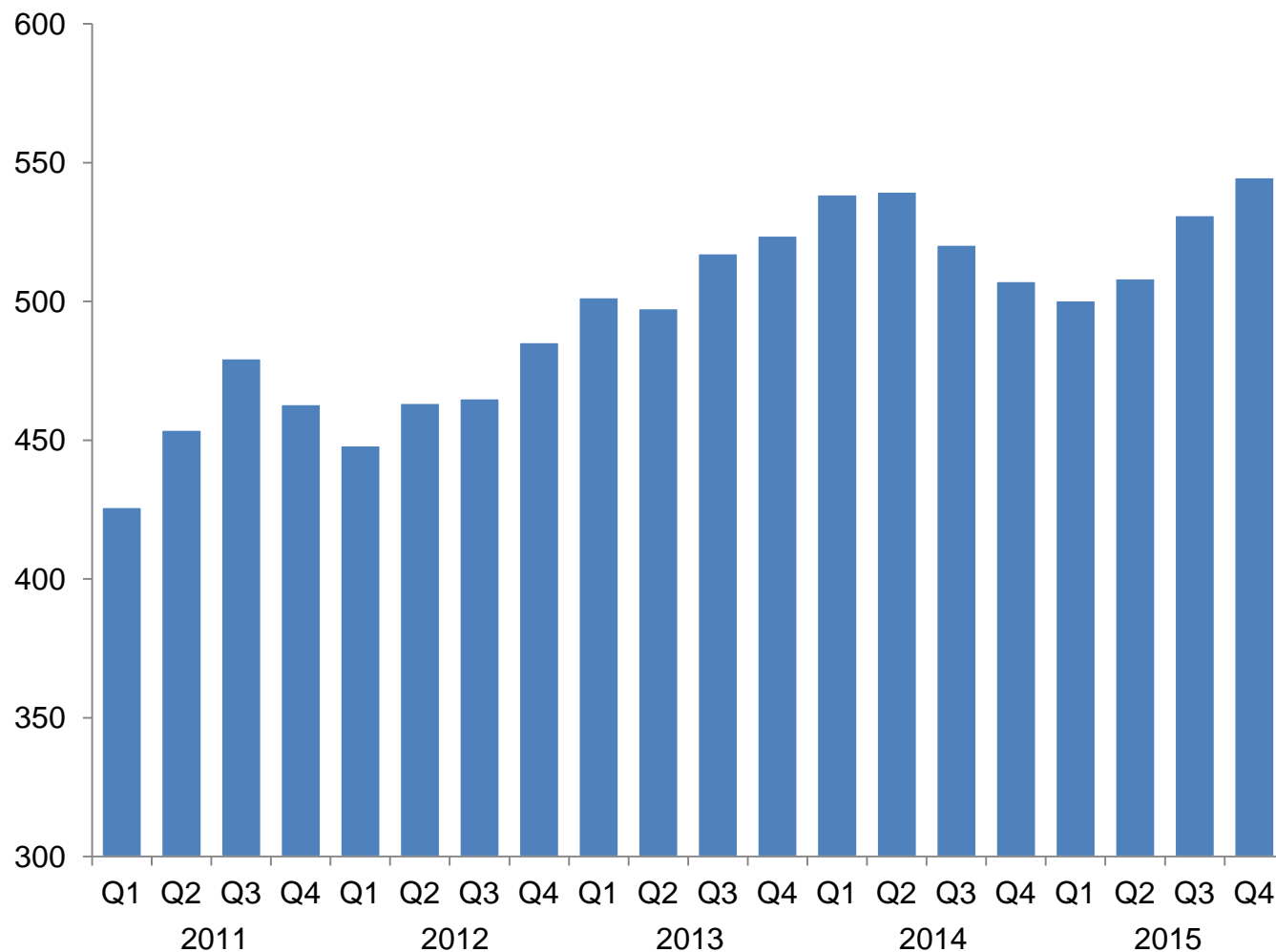


Figure 6 shows the rolling year (twelve month) expenditure of external overnight trips from Q1 2011 to Q4 2015. In 2015 total expenditure of external overnight trips was £545 million, a growth of 7% from £507 million in 2014.

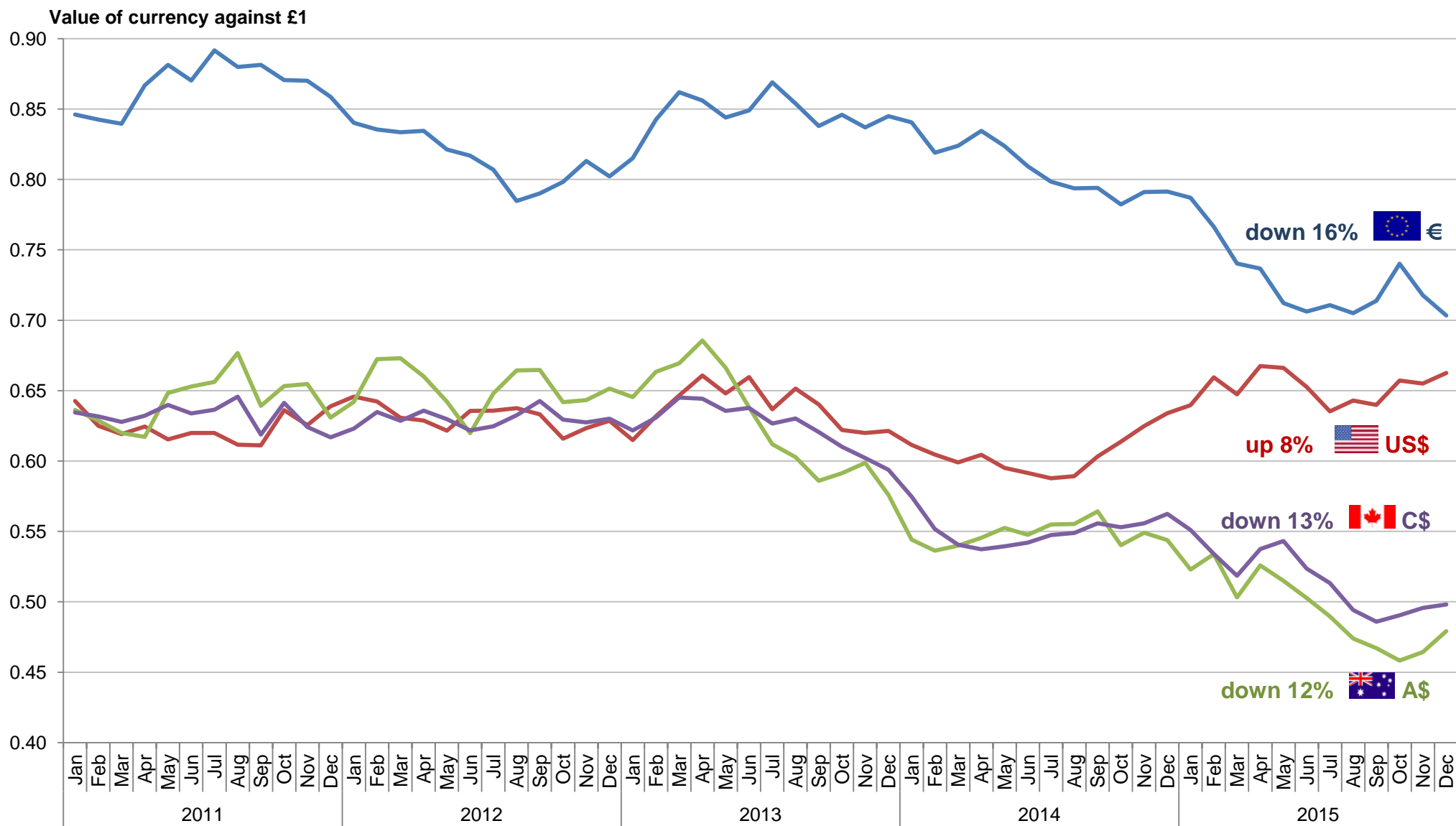
Reflecting the increase in number of overnight trips and nights, expenditure increased by 29% in overnight trips from Other Europe to £92 million, and 7% from GB to £274 million in 2014.

There was no change in expenditure from Other Overseas, remaining at £117 million.

The RoI was the only market to experience a decrease in expenditure in 2015 (down 1% to £61 million).

Figure 7 (overleaf) shows monthly exchange rate changes from January 2011 to December 2015. It shows that the euro (€), Canadian (C\$) and Australian (A\$) dollars have experienced a prolonged fall against the pound (£); down 16%, 13% and 12% respectively from January 2014 to December 2015. The only currency to remain strong against the pound over this two year period has been the US dollar (US\$).

Figure 7: Monthly exchange rates – currency against £1 January 2011 to December 2015 (non-zero axis) (showing percentage change between the rate at January 2014 and December 2015)



Source: [Financial Times](#).

Reason for visit of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland

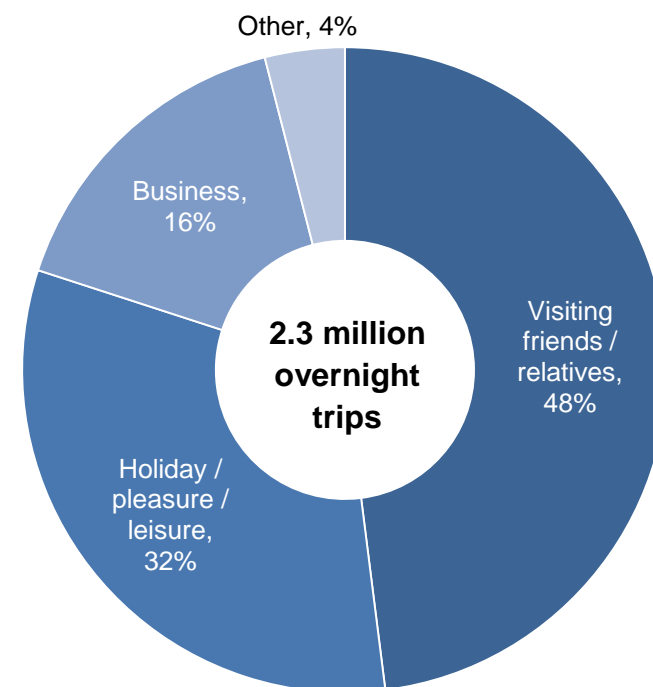
Of all overnight trips to Northern Ireland in 2015, almost half (48%) were to visit friends and relatives; almost a third (32%) deciding to come to NI for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes. Some 16% came to NI for business purposes, and 4% for other reasons. These proportions have remained relatively unchanged between 2014 and 2015 (Figure 8).

External overnight trips for **visiting friends and relatives** were up 3% in 2015 to 1.11 million, from 1.07 million in 2014. Of all external overnight trips in NI during 2015, 48% were for this reason. Perhaps linked to close proximity, the majority of overnight trips from England (61%), Scotland and Wales (both 64%) were to visit friends and relatives (Figure 9a).

External overnight trips for **holiday / pleasure / leisure** purposes increased 3% to 0.73 million between 2014 and 2015, with 32% of all external overnight trips for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes. The majority of places of origin were above this level, with 71% of all overnight trips from New Zealand, 62% of all overnight trips from Australia and 60% of all overnight trips from Germany to NI for this purpose (Figure 9b).

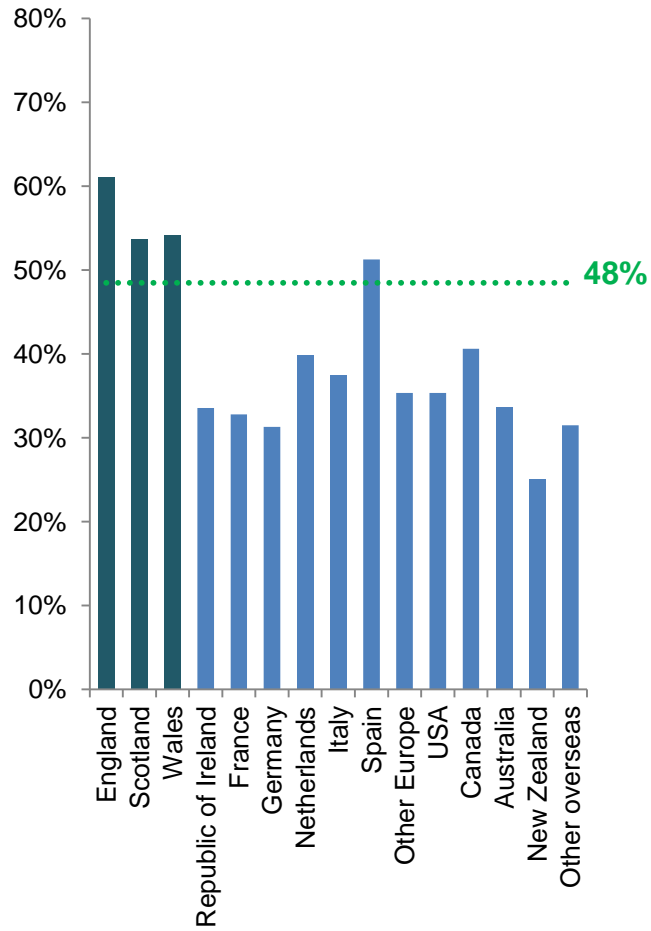
External overnight trips for **business** purposes rose by 18% from 0.30 million in 2014 to 0.36 million in 2015. Of all overnight trips from Wales and England, both had 26% and 20% respectively coming to Northern Ireland for business purposes (Figure 9c).

Figure 8: Reason for overnight trip 2015



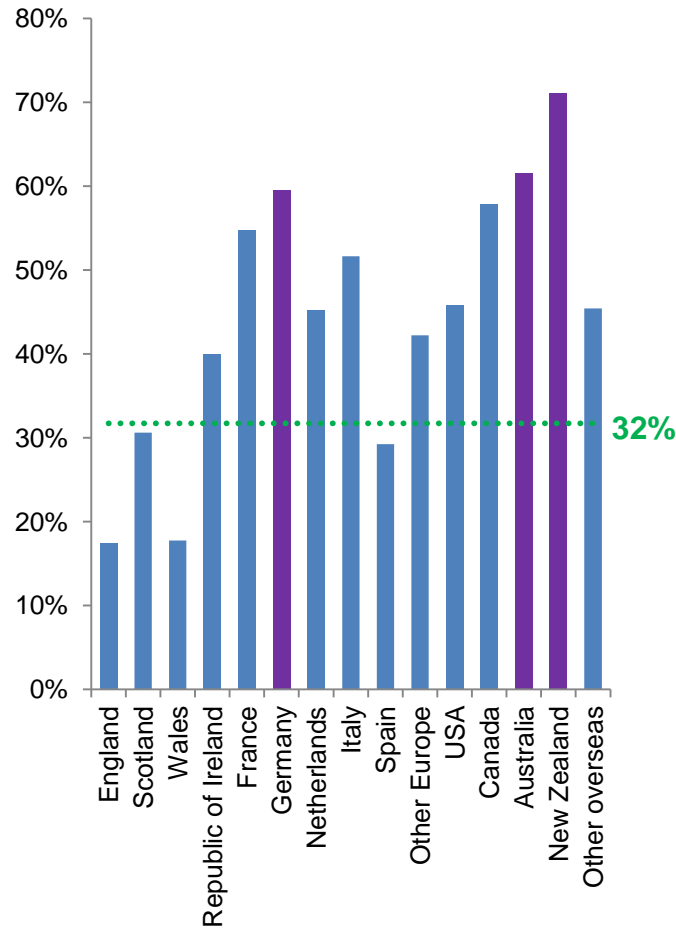
Figures 9a – 9c: Reason for External Overnight Trip in Northern Ireland by Place of Origin 2015

9a. Visiting Friends / Relatives



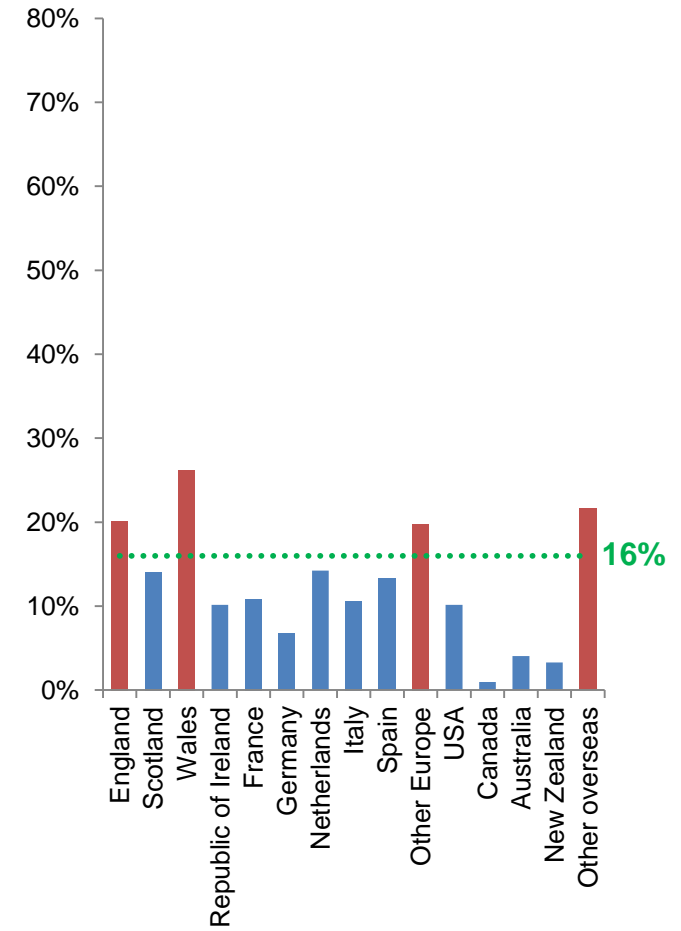
England,
Wales,
Scotland

9b. Holiday / Pleasure / Leisure



New Zealand,
Australia,
Germany

9c. Business

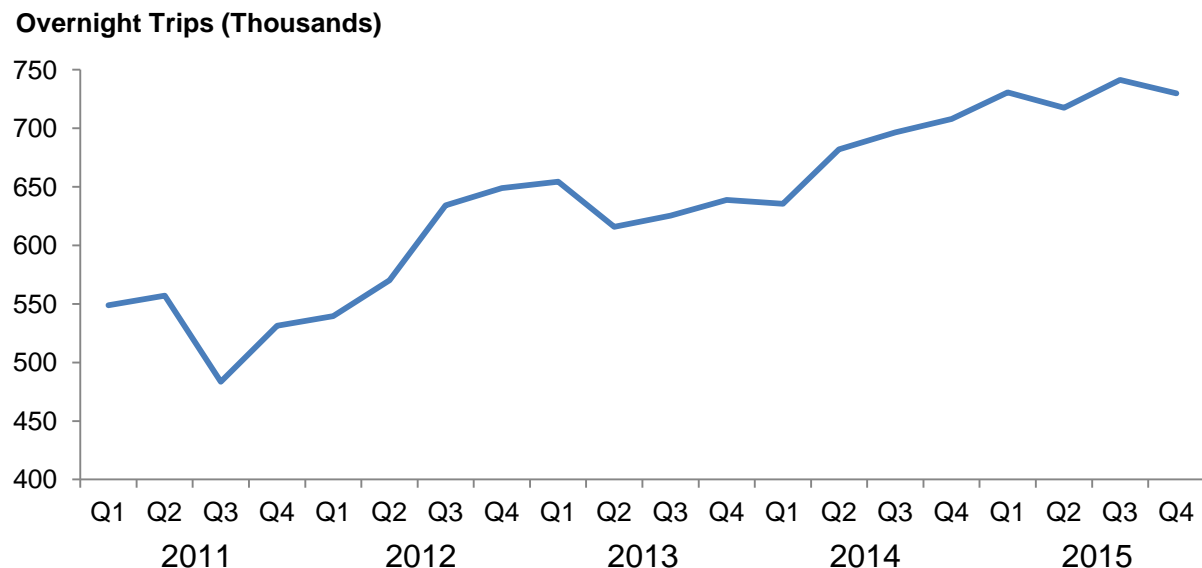


Wales,
Other Overseas,
England and Other Europe

..... External Overnight Trips Average

External Overnight Trips to Northern Ireland for Holiday / Pleasure / Leisure Purposes

Figure 10: Rolling 12 months number of external trips for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes, Q1 2011- Q4 2015 (non-zero axis)



The number of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes has increased year on year from 532,000 external overnight trips in 2011 to 730,000 external overnight trips during 2015 – an increase of 37% over this period (Figure 10). The number of nights and value of expenditure associated with these external overnight trips have also shown a strong increase (+26% and +49% respectively) from 2011 to 2015.

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 2015), Titanic Belfast (number two visitor attraction in NI 2015) and Game of Thrones.

Figure 11: What influenced external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes to come to NI 2015?



Giant’s Causeway 26%



Titanic Belfast 24%



Game of Thrones 5%

Some information is captured on factors that influence people to come to Northern Ireland (Figure 11). Reflecting the Visitor Attraction Survey, the Giant’s Causeway was the most influential factor for external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes during 2014 (26%), followed by Titanic Belfast (24%).

Full information on External Overnight Trips to Northern Ireland can be found at the following link:
[External Visitors to Northern Ireland](#)

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'.

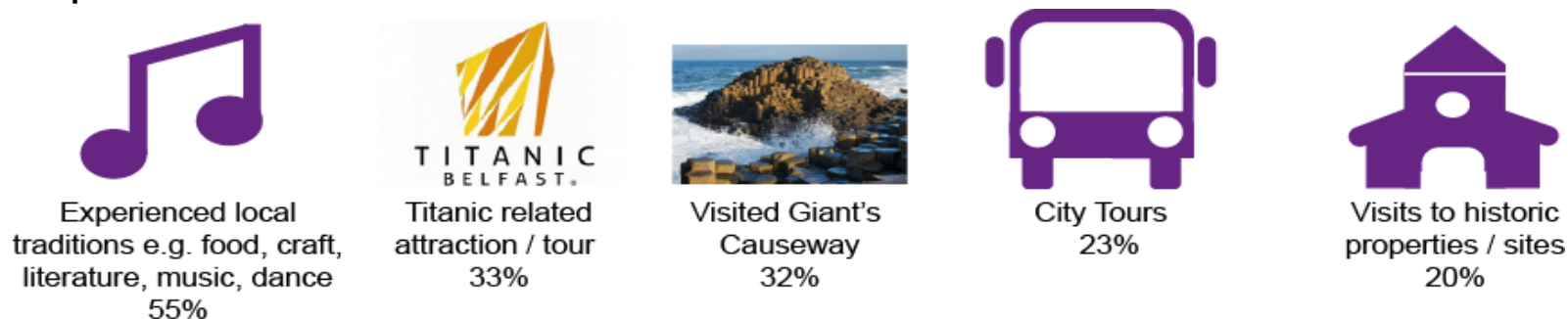
Figure 12a shows the top five sporting activities that external overnight visitors to Northern Ireland for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes participated in whilst in Northern Ireland during 2015. Just over 8% attended or participated in an organised sporting event (e.g. motor sport / rugby / football / Gaelic games), with the next most popular sporting activity being hiking / cross country walking (8%).

Figure 12a: What sporting activities did external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes participate in when in NI 2015



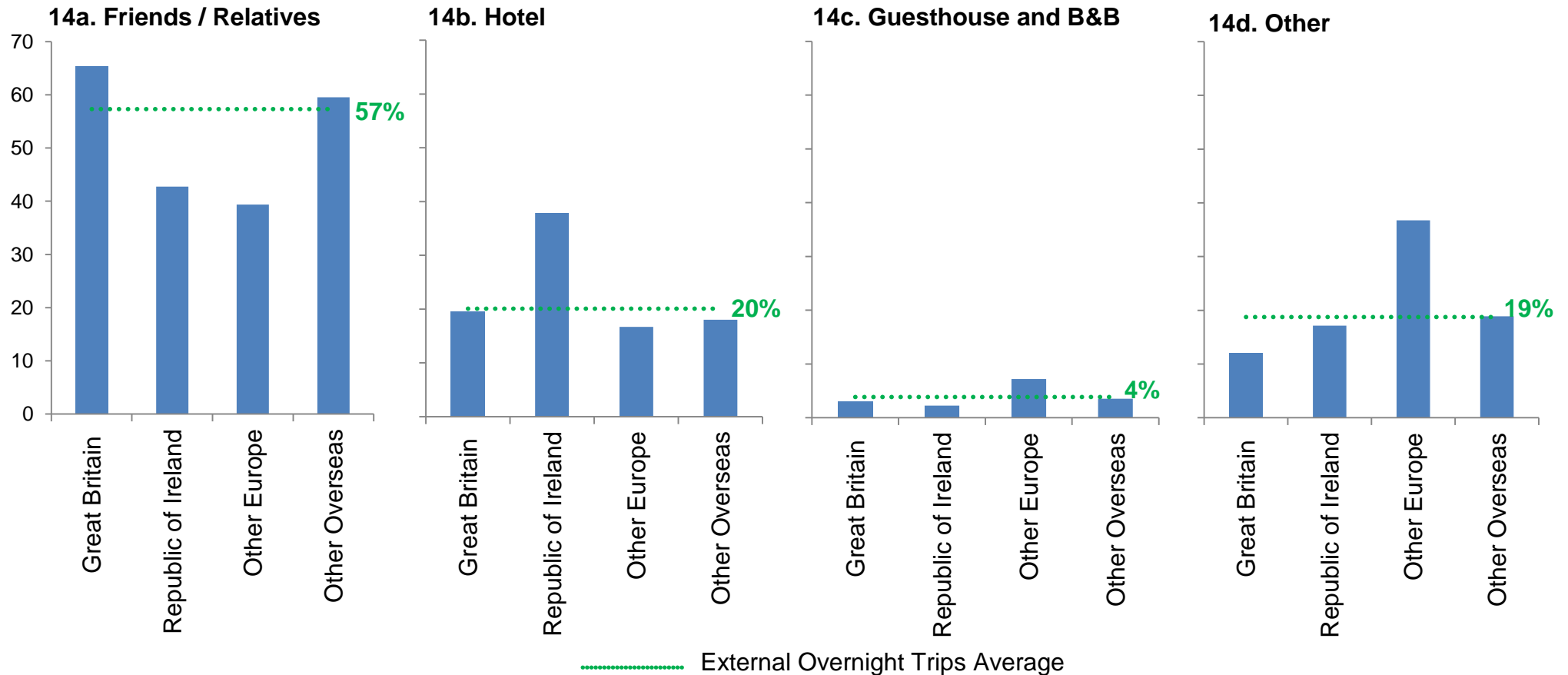
Figure 12b shows the top five leisure / sightseeing / cultural / historical activities that external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes participated in whilst in Northern Ireland during 2015. Over half (55%) experienced local traditions / culture (e.g. food, craft, literature, music, dance); and almost a third participated in a Titanic related attraction tour (33%) or visited the Giant's Causeway (32%).

Figure 12b: What leisure / sightseeing / cultural / historical activities did external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes participate in when in NI 2015



Accommodation Type used for External Overnight Trips in Northern Ireland

Figure 14a-14d: Proportion of nights spent in accommodation type by external overnight visitors to Northern Ireland and main market 2015



Of all external overnight trips to NI during 2015, staying with friends and relatives was the most popular choice of accommodation type. In total, the majority of nights (57%) were spent staying with friends and relatives; ranging from 39% of Other Europe to 65% of Great Britain staying with friends and relatives (Figure 14a).

The second most popular accommodation type used was hotels, with 20% of total nights being spent in a hotel; ranging from 17% by visitors from Other Europe to 38% by visitors from the Republic of Ireland (Figure 14b)

Full information on External Overnight Trips to Northern Ireland can be found at the following link:

[External Visitors to Northern 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, there was a slight increase during 2015; and there has been a significant increase in the number of passengers at air ports and sea ports in the Republic of Ireland.

During 2015, of all overnight visitors that came to Northern Ireland that were not resident to the island of Ireland (non resident to NI and/or RoI) 29% used a port in the Republic of Ireland.

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 2015 the sample size of the NIPS was 56,800. Table 1 details the confidence intervals of the visitor and expenditure estimates by country of residence.

Table 1 Confidence intervals for external overnight visitors to Northern Ireland 2015 (Northern Ireland Passenger Survey).

	95 % Confidence Interval	
	Visitors	Expenditure
Total	+/-5%	+/- 8%

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.

This report 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. More information can be found at this [link](#).

The impact of this revision on the estimates for overall trips, nights and spend to NI was less than 1%. When looking at external overnight trips to NI, the biggest differences were in estimates of expenditure in 2013 and 2014 (1.3%). As per the [Tourism Statistics Branch Revisions Policy](#), TSB have published more information on the minor impact to tourism statistics at this link ([impact of HTS methodological change August 2016](#)). The change in methodology has been discussed at all-island Tourism Statistics groups and NISRA have followed up with key users following this to discuss implications, however the impact is small.

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 Visitors to Northern Ireland](#). For more information relating to this publication or if an alternative format is required, please contact us at:

tourismstatistics@finance-ni.gov.uk

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