



# **Unlocking the growth potential for tourism to Northern Ireland from the ROI market**

Market Recovery Taskforce Review and Strategy

# Introduction

**The Republic of Ireland (ROI) market represents a significant tourism opportunity for Northern Ireland. In 2016<sup>1</sup>, Northern Ireland attracted more overnight visitors from ROI (456,000) than from mainland Europe (358,000) or North America (250,000). Furthermore, the economic outlook now and into the future for the ROI market is very positive and ROI residents have been holidaying more at home, with ROI domestic holiday trips increasing by one fifth between 2012-2016<sup>2</sup>.**

However, in the recent past (2012-2015), due to a number of factors, holidaymaker trips to Northern Ireland from ROI declined by 29 percent<sup>3</sup>. In response to this decline, the Minister of the Department for Enterprise, Tourism and Investment tasked Tourism Northern Ireland (TNI) with the development of an action plan to address this trend. TNI established an independent Taskforce composed of industry leaders and influencers who operated in both the NI and ROI markets. The role and purpose of the Taskforce was to facilitate the development of a strategy designed to drive the recovery of, and growth from, the ROI market. Set against this background the Taskforce engaged in a complete review of the market. The core focus of this review was to determine the key reasons for the decline and identify the strategic imperatives required to stabilise performance and drive sustainable growth in the future.

An extensive programme of work was undertaken which encompassed:

- a detailed review of available market intelligence;
- industry consultation;
- collaboration with TNI and the Taskforce on strategy development;
- large-scale qualitative and quantitative consumer research and
- the development of a new customer segmentation strategy.

This document sets out the future growth strategy developed under the direction of the Taskforce. It provides an overview of performance (past and present), identifies the key reasons for the decline in holidaymakers from ROI to NI, outlines the rationale for pursuing future growth and sets out the key strategic actions that need to be acted upon in order to stimulate future growth.

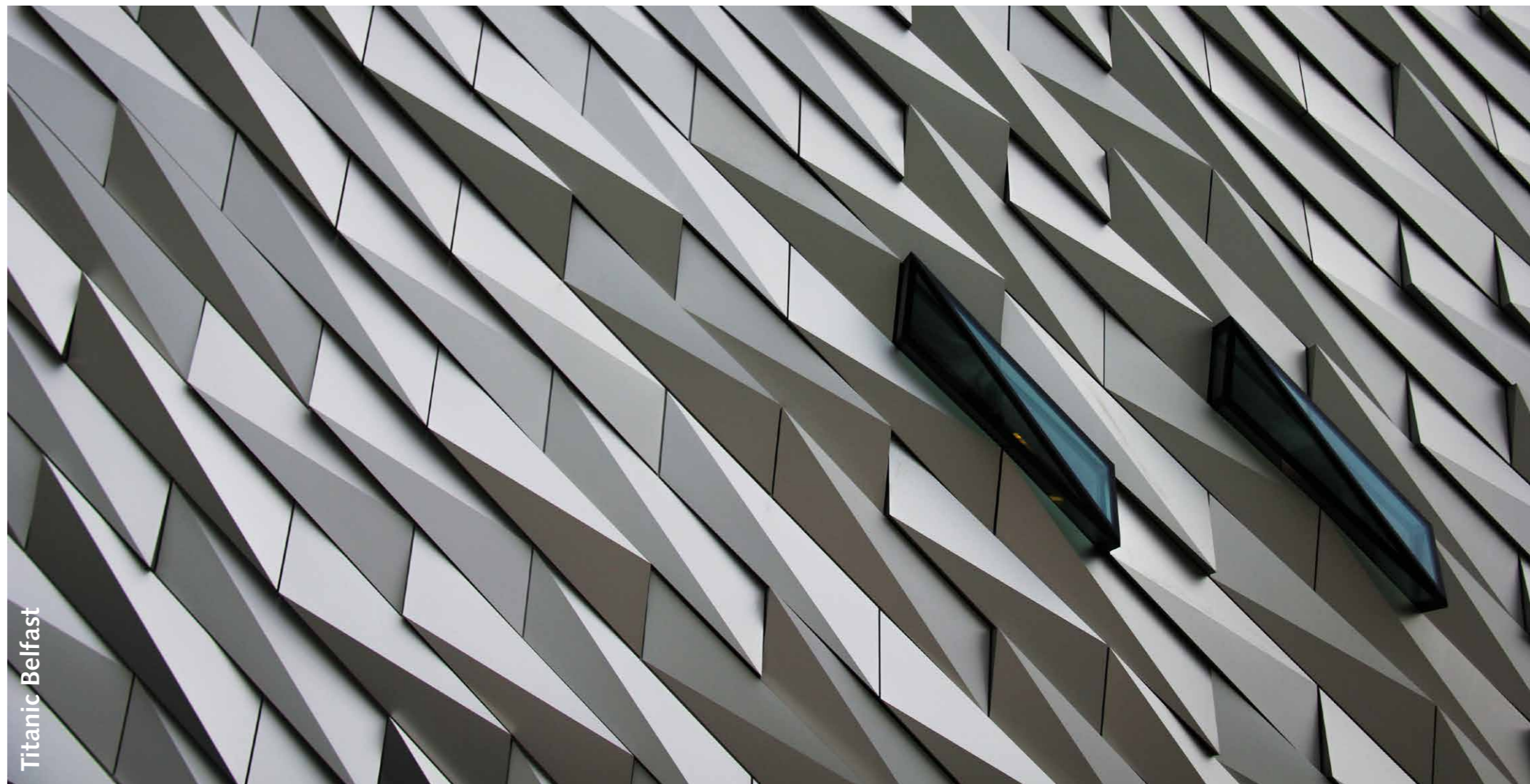


# Recent Performance

During the course of the review the ROI market demonstrated a significant upturn in performance. Full year figures for 2016<sup>4</sup> demonstrate a return to growth in terms of holidaymaker trips (+19 percent Vs 2015), whilst value grew at a lower rate (+6 percent Vs 2015). This was fuelled by an accelerated performance in the second half of the year. It is noteworthy that 2016 also saw the delivery of TNI's most effective communications campaign to date, giving ROI consumers motivating reasons to take a short break in NI. Additionally, it can safely be assumed that the bounce in performance was linked to increased competitiveness (due to a weakened Sterling).

However, it is worth considering that ROI residents took 5m overnight holiday trips on the Island of Ireland in 2016, spending £942m, **NI's share was just 3 percent of holiday trips and 4 percent of holiday spend**. From an ROI perspective further growth in domestic holiday taking is anticipated, with short breaks taking the lion's share. Looking towards the future, and as the NI tourism proposition develops and matures, the ROI market undeniably represents an opportunity for accelerated and sustainable growth.

The recent positive performance has continued into the first half of 2017, with NI welcoming one third more ROI holiday visitors compared with Jan-June 2016. In total, ROI trips to NI grew by almost one quarter and spend increased significantly during the first six months of 2017.



Titanic Belfast

## Peak Performance

With respect to the ROI market, 2012 represented the peak of NI's performance, with over 188,000 ROI residents taking an overnight holiday trip to NI. 2012 was a notable year for tourism in Northern Ireland in that, through the NI 2012 initiative, there was an industry-wide concerted effort to drive tourism growth.

Critically five major capital investment projects, with over £300m of investment came on stream and TNI had the highest level of marketing investment in its history.

This effort, investment and commitment created a sense of common purpose that enabled step change growth.

# Reasons for Decline

In planning for the future, it was first imperative to build a robust understanding of the key factors that led to the decline in holiday trips from ROI. In order to build this understanding an extensive review of existing market intelligence as well as detailed consultation with NI and ROI tourism stakeholders was undertaken. Arising from this a range of factors influencing performance were identified.

## Macro-economic factors

- Currency fluctuations: The purchasing power of the euro consistently weakened over the period 2012-15 versus STG making NI an expensive destination versus ROI. Recent currency movements have resulted in the strengthening of the Euro versus STG and this in turn has delivered an improved performance;

- VAT: The ROI tourism and hospitality industry enjoys a special 9 percent VAT rate. NI's VAT rate is 20 percent, which places it at a competitive disadvantage.

**Note:** The potential impact of Brexit on tourism is unclear. While the immediate weakening of STG makes NI a more cost competitive destination, Brexit may bring both perceived and real issues to the forefront e.g. border controls, levies and duties etc. which currently don't apply and may increase costs etc. The impact of Brexit on NI's appeal, accessibility and cost competitiveness needs to be closely monitored and managed in the future.

## Competitive factors

- NI is consistently outperformed by ROI on most of the key motivating short break activities (e.g. shopping, nightlife, enjoying the natural environment, engaging with locals etc.). Importantly, ROI consumers rate ROI as offering better places to eat and stay – two key drivers of decision-making in choice of a short break destination. In essence, NI faces a more mature and strong key competitor in ROI. This presents a significant challenge – namely how to make NI more relevant to ROI consumers in order to drive preference for a short break over their domestic offering;

- The active promotion of NI as a destination by its industry to ROI consumers is limited. ROI industry are far more focused and engaged in heavyweight promotion of their propositions to domestic consumers. There is a challenge to create more awareness of NI generally, placing NI into the consumer's mindset as a compelling alternative to an ROI break. Quantitative and qualitative research that was undertaken as part of the review indicates that while ROI consumers are open to taking a short break in NI they do not find NI a compelling enough destination to engage in immediate planning and NI suffers from a being a 'someday but not now' destination.

## Consumer factors

- NI is currently not a sufficiently compelling or motivating destination for ROI consumers. While only a minority of ROI consumers reject NI (9 percent) the actual level of intent to visit NI (in the next three years is low relative to ROI (58 percent Vs 83 percent respectively)<sup>5</sup>;

- Knowledge about NI is low amongst ROI consumers, with 54 percent<sup>6</sup> stating they know NI 'not well at all' or 'not that well'. ROI consumers are challenged not only by a lack of awareness of what they can see and do during a break in NI but also by a limited awareness of places to stay, eat and basic geography;

- The customer segmentation model previously used to target ROI prioritised segments similar to the priority segment focus for ROI domestically. Given the comparative profile, attractiveness and relevance of ROI to ROI consumers, NI was less likely to win business from the ROI by focusing on the same segments with an offer that is perceived to be less motivating than that provided by the ROI.

## Brand factors

- While relatively positively regarded by ROI consumers, NI is not sufficiently compelling in its own right nor relative to the ROI domestic offering to drive choice. There is a perceived lack of 'must see and do' attractions and a sense that the short break holiday experience in generally is underdeveloped;

- Historically NI has suffered from a 'poor value for money' perception and has been considered an expensive destination (although current exchange rate conditions counteract this and NI's perceived value for money offering is now a competitive advantage);

- Concerns about personal safety, although minimal, remain present and linger in the ROI consumer's mind, acting as a deterrent to consideration and planning. This is particularly the case for older age cohorts, although this is less likely to be a challenge in the future;

- There has been a very significant decline in TNI campaign budget in recent years (77 percent decline 2011/12 Vs 2015/16) leading to a significant decrease in NI brand visibility and consideration. This was further compounded by a limited direct spend by NI industry in the ROI market.

While many of the factors that have constrained performance will be challenging to overcome, they are not insurmountable. Having defined these key challenges NI can now take them head on, deploying strategies designed to strengthen competitiveness, build consumer relevance and increase overall destination appeal.



Castlewellan maze Co. Down

# A Strategy for Growth

## Why go for growth now?

As 2016 demonstrated, Northern Ireland has the capacity to deliver significant holidaymaker numbers and revenue from the ROI market. The recent performance begs the question – can momentum be sustained and capitalised upon?

In considering this question there are a number of key factors that indicate that there is latent potential and now is the time for a renewed focus on the ROI market. These factors are detailed as follows:

- Recent performance (2016) demonstrates ROI already delivers a very significant number of visitors to NI, delivering 456,000 total overnight visitors. This volume of visitors is greater than that delivered by all of mainland Europe or North America;
- The ROI market is stronger for regional dispersion than other markets with approximately 75 percent<sup>7</sup> of ROI visitors staying outside Belfast;
- ROI visitors are also more likely to visit NI outside peak season delivering seasonal dispersion;
- Both qualitative and quantitative research (conducted as part of the review and strategy development) would indicate there is potential in the ROI market, with two in three ROI consumers demonstrating an interest in taking a short break in NI at some point in the future;
- The economic outlook now and into the future for the ROI market is positive;
- GB visitor numbers may weaken post Brexit and greater market diversification is required. Note: figures<sup>8</sup> for the first half of 2017 show that although GB trips to NI remain unchanged versus the previous years, spend declined by 8 percent;
- The cost to reach, connect and influence the ROI consumer is significantly less than that involved in targeting consumers in overseas markets;
- The generation of consumers for which 'the troubles' are 'historical' increases every year, thus there is a dissipation in any negative legacy associations;
- With an estimated 2,000 new hotel rooms being introduced in NI in the next 24 months, a significant stock of accommodation that is likely to be relevant to ROI consumers will be available to be marketed and sold;
- There is momentum and a target of £1BN<sup>9</sup> to be delivered from out of state tourism by 2025, ROI can and needs to make a very significant contribution to this target.



The strategy outlined in this document focuses on creating the necessary conditions to strengthen performance in the near future whilst also enabling growth and development in the longer term. It is a strategy that has been designed to be owned by the entire industry rather than any one entity. The 2012 experience demonstrates that with a common purpose, commitment and shared effort, NI has the potential to unlock real growth from the ROI market.

## Scale of ambition

**£140m by 2025**

The Draft Programme for Government targets **£1 billion** in export revenue across all non-domestic markets including ROI by 2025. Against this background, a stretch target of **£140** million in revenue from the ROI market has been set. This target will necessitate a compound annual growth rate of **8 percent** (from a 2016 baseline) up to 2025, delivering a **5 percent** growth in trips over the same period. However, indicators suggest that significant in-roads have been made in 2017 with ROI overnight trips increasing by **23 percent** in the first half of 2017 and holiday trips by **33 percent**, compared to Jan-June 2016, with a significant increase in visitor spend, thereby potentially reducing the annual growth levels required in subsequent years.

## Consumer focus

With respect to winning in the ROI market, it will be important efforts are focused on addressing the needs of a well-defined group of potential visitors. Therefore, a new consumer segmentation model for the ROI market has been developed as part of the review and new strategy. The new segmentation model identifies eight potential segments, three of which have been defined as priority segments. These three segments represent the best opportunity to drive tourism growth from ROI into NI.



## The ROI consumer - Size and description of ROI holidaymaker segments identified

### Indulgent Relaxers (13 percent)

- Short breaks are viewed as an important part of their lives;
- Likely to relax, indulge themselves on their short breaks;
- Seeking comfort, ease and value for money;
- Prefer large, quality, comfortable hotels and enjoy natural scenic surroundings;
- Seek calm certainty rather than activity, interaction and unpredictability.

### Open to Ideas (18 percent)

- Conduct a lot of research online, consider reviews and influenced by media;
- Open-minded and interested in the outdoors, sport, music and history;
- Seeking organised 'active' but not adventurous activities; motivated by nature/outdoors;
- Like to plan and have an itinerary;
- Value for money important and influenced by deals;
- Like 'easy to get to' destinations and scenic natural surroundings.

### Active Maximisers (10 percent)

- Like to squeeze in as much as possible on a short break;
- Enjoy energetic activities (but not extreme sports) and have a strong sense of adventure;
- Passion for outdoors and the natural environment;
- Looking for unique and mind broadening experiences;
- Digital a very significant influence;
- Focused on getting a good deal;
- Actively research online;
- Need to be connected (Wi-Fi etc.).

### Families Seeking a Buzz (18 percent)

- Looking to spend quality time with kids, enjoying activities that suit all the family;
- Want high quality accommodation;
- Also motivated by city buzz and atmosphere – shopping, pubs, nightlife;
- Wi-Fi and mobile coverage important;
- Strong usage of digital – planning and booking.

### Connection Seekers (4 percent)

- Motivated by experiencing local culture and interacting with locals and other holidaymakers;
- Highly interested in place – natural environment, historic sites;
- Seeking unique experiences;
- Quality accommodation and food important;
- Digital of little or no influence;

### Budget Explorers (13 percent)

- Highly focused on value for money and getting the best deal;
- Price matters, actively watch currency fluctuations;
- Very interested in all aspects of place – natural environment, welcoming locals and local culture;
- Value unique experiences – art, architecture, historic sites;
- Looking for quality, dedicated time with their children and a good welcome from locals.

### Open-minded Explorers (17 percent)

- Wish to engage with local people and local culture;
- Seeking unique experiences and interested in learning;
- Want high quality hotels and food;
- Appreciate and enjoy the natural environment and scenic beauty;
- Enjoy planning breaks, doing a lot of research and rely on traditional media and tourism websites more than other segments.

### Uber Enthusiasts (7 percent)

- Highly engaged;
- Value for money very important;
- Seeking easy to organise breaks, places that are easy to get to, great food, quality accommodation;
- Natural environment, history and culture all deemed important;
- Very open to influence – online and traditional media;

# Priority Segments

While the priority segments have been defined by the key motivations that differentiate them from each other it is critically important to understand that all segments have fundamental needs that NI must meet in order to be considered as a short break destination of choice. These 'tablestakes' relate to the desire to stay in comfortable accommodation (with good facilities), have easy access to quality food and drink, underpinned by excellent service, authentic hospitality and good value for money.

## Identifying the priority segments

In order to determine the ROI segments of greatest potential, they were evaluated based upon three key criteria:

**Scale:** The actual size of the segment;

**Value:** The estimated level of spend on short breaks by each segment;

**Propensity:** The stated likelihood of visiting NI in the future.

Using these criteria, the evaluation model illustrated below was applied.

|                     | Overall segment value                                 | Feasibility  |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Assessment Criteria | What is the financial potential of the segments?      | Likelihood to visit<br>Positivity towards Northern Ireland                       |
| Data Analysis       | Segment size & annual HH spend;<br>Segment potential. | Purchase funnels;<br>Driver Vs NI rating differential + competitive differential |

The potential value of each segment was co-related with the current feasibility of NI to attract each segment. This enabled the identification of segments of value that could be more easily influenced to visit NI. Having applied these evaluation criteria three priority segments emerged:

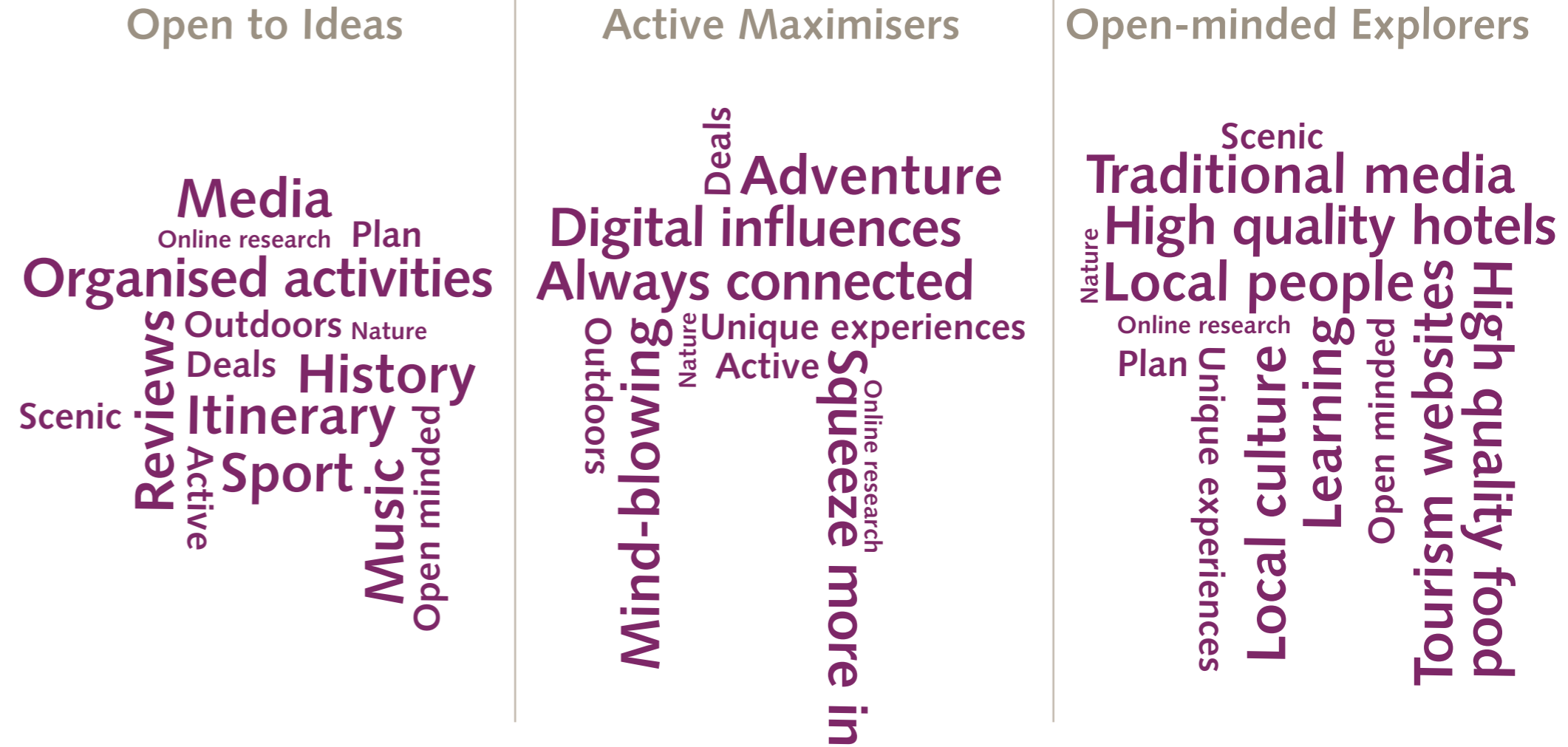
1. Open to Ideas
2. Open-minded Explorers
3. Active Maximisers

Of these priority segments, two ('Open to Ideas' and 'Open-minded Explorers') are characterised by a willingness and disposition towards trying new things, going new places and being open to new experiences. Both are segments of scale and have a greater likelihood to consider NI than other segments.

What distinguishes these segments is the types of experiences they are seeking – with the 'Open to Ideas' segment having a greater focus on activity, the outdoors and nature and the 'Open-minded Explorers' having a greater interest in people, place and culture. It could be hypothesised that the 'explorers' are a more mature version of the 'open to ideas' segment.

The third segment, Active Maximisers, is smaller in size but is currently more likely to visit NI than the majority of other segments. This is a younger segment, more focused on getting the most out of their short breaks and seeking unique and mind-broadening experiences (that NI could deliver on). As such, this segment represents not only holidaymakers of today but holidaymakers of the future.

The following shows key things that are important to the three identified segments. Each word is of equal importance but the size indicates how unique this aspect is within the three sectors.



# A Formula for Success

In developing the strategy for growth, three strategy platforms have been established. These will act as key areas of focus, guiding decision making and informing the actions that will be taken to drive growth from the ROI market. The three platforms are:

## Industry engagement and development

Developing an active and collaborative industry that is focused, committed and ambitious for growth from the ROI market.

## Brand proposition delivery

Establishing a compelling destination brand, with appropriate sustained investment levels that continually builds knowledge, relevance, appeal and differentiation with target ROI consumers.

## Product and experience development

Developing a range of products (accommodation, food and drink) and connected experiences (visitor attractions) that at minimum rivals what is available in the ROI market while also delivering relevant differentiation for NI as a short break destination.



# Industry Engagement and Development

**Overarching objective:** to foster an active and collaborative industry that is focused, committed and ambitious for growth from the ROI market.

The strategy for growth from the ROI market must be owned by the entire industry. With this in mind it is vital that industry support the strategy and get behind it, driving focused implementation.

## Key initiatives

**Win commitment and agreement to focus and succeed in ROI market.**

Whilst much of the industry in NI may be interested in the ROI market the degree to which it is a core focus varies. Given that the NI domestic market and international visitor markets are performing well this is perhaps unsurprising. For real momentum and impact, the commitment and efforts of NI industry to support the strategy and drive its implementation is essential.

While TNI will be key to coordinating the growth strategy, setting out the scale and value of the opportunity presented by ROI, educating industry regarding priority segments etc., the industry itself must aggressively pursue growth from the market. This will require a sustained focus on the ROI market in which resources (time, money and people) are used effectively to win share.

**Build industry understanding and appreciation of competitive context.**

With ROI enjoying 97 percent of island of Ireland trips made by ROI consumers it will be important for NI industry to develop an understanding of the products and experiences it must win against (rivaling the ROI domestic offering). TNI will facilitate this through familiarisation trips to ROI, masterclasses and seminars. It is proposed that development plans are then devised in partnership with NI industry based on learning and insight generated from these initiatives.

**Enable and support active promotion by industry aimed at ROI market.**

As previously mentioned, the degree to which NI industry currently actively targets the ROI market and consumer is limited. While TNI might create the 'conditions for sale' via its marketing efforts, it is the products and offers from the tourism industry that 'close the sale'. A specific programme (providing guidance, support and incentives) will be developed, aimed at encouraging NI industry to promote to the ROI consumer and intermediaries effectively through key channels.

## Key short-term actions:

- Conduct case making roadshow for the NI industry to support the development of understanding of the ROI market, its potential and how growth can be delivered;
- Convene small industry group with a desire and commitment to develop ROI customer base, examine the strategy and explore how implementation from an industry perspective can commence;
- Complete 'learning journeys' in the ROI market with select number of industry and socialise findings;
- Develop and pilot targeted growth strategies of focus (e.g. migrate Belfast day trips to overnight trips) with committed industry partners.



# Brand Proposition Delivery

## Overarching objective:

to build a compelling tourism destination, with appropriate sustained investment levels that continually builds knowledge, relevance, appeal and differentiation with target ROI consumers.



Dark Hedges, Co. Antrim

Based on a review of existing data and primary consumer research it can be concluded that the products, attractions and experiences NI offers have the potential to drive relevance and differentiation (for the key target segments in particular).

While the NI enjoys good awareness levels, knowledge about what Northern Ireland offers as a tourism destination requires significant strengthening. While ROI consumers have a sense of what a short break in NI might be like, their depth of knowledge and understanding of what is available and where it can be found is weak. This extends not only to knowledge of things to see and do but also the fundamentals of where to stay, where to eat, how to get around and basic geography. The consequences of this are twofold.

# 1

ROI consumers do not feel confident or capable of organising a short break in NI.

# 2

In the absence of knowledge the consumer fills the gap with legacy perceptions linked to safety, security and not being welcome.

The above two factors have a significant impact on NI consideration and propensity to organise a short break there.

In strengthening NI as a tourism destination, it is imperative that drivers of consideration (attractions and experiences) and knowledge of the fundamentals of the holiday experience (accommodation, food, ease of travel, geography) are addressed.



Belfast

# Key Brand Tasks

## Build basic knowledge of NI as a short break destination.

While the priority segments have been defined by the key motivations and drivers that set them apart, as stated earlier, NI must also address the tablestakes that meet the fundamental needs of short trip holidaymakers. These fundamentals relate to creating awareness of a variety and range of quality accommodation, food and drink; authentic welcome; warm hospitality and professional service. All of this must be underpinned by value for money, ease of planning/booking and accessibility (ease of getting to and around NI). This must then be supplemented by a compelling presentation of the differentiated experiences NI can deliver.

## Design and deliver the NI proposition of scale.

ROI as a holiday destination has enjoyed significant success both internationally and domestically by creating a number of 'propositions of scale'. These effectively are 'big ideas' that offer holidaymakers a sense of place and experiences that are 'must see and do'. Going beyond the traditional iconic sites such as the Cliffs of Moher or the Ring of Kerry, these 'propositions of scale' are manifest in the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East and Dublin. TNI is currently in the process of developing NI's 'proposition of scale' with its launch being estimated for industry in 2018 and consumers in 2019.

As part of the development process the key experiences that will substantiate the 'proposition of scale' will be defined for each priority ROI segment and then given focus in terms of future communications and activation strategies and plans.

In addition to this ROI consumers are motivated by the idea of exploring different parts of the island of Ireland. Consideration needs to be given as to how to position NI as part of the island rather than 'Northern Ireland' itself.

## Calibrate communications to drive impact with priority segments (based on their motivations).

All communications will be designed and executed with specific target segments in mind. Communications will focus on the key motivations of the respective segments and showcase NI's ability to meet and exceed their expectations. Additionally, a dedicated communications programme based on building basic key information that will educate consumers with respect to planning a short break in NI will be put in place.

## Channel and media utilisation.

In order for NI to connect, engage and influence the priority segments it must first determine the channels (both paid for and earned) through which it can best reach and communicate with them. Due to the ever changing and increasingly fragmented media landscape the challenge of reaching the consumer is greater than ever.

It is intended that TNI and NI industry build capacity in this area to the point that it is viewed as a competitive advantage. In order to do so a dynamic and iterative channel and media utilisation capability will be required, enabling brand NI to connect with the consumer at the right time, in the right way and in the right environment. It is envisaged that Online Travel Agents (OTAs), user generated content, earned media and social media utilisation will be key in this area.

## Increased marketing investment.

The positioning and promotion of NI as a compelling and motivating short break destination to the ROI consumer will require more investment than has been available in the recent past. It must be acknowledged that the destination is not at the same point in its development than its key competitor, the ROI domestic market offering. With this in mind it is critical that appropriate investment in the tourism experience is allocated and TNI and the broader industry must 'case make' for additional funding. While NI has potential much of it is latent and investment will be required for it to be unlocked. Additionally, general knowledge of NI in the ROI requires strengthening which again will require sustained funding so that knowledge can be built over time.

## Strengthen 'value for money' perceptions.

While recent currency shifts have improved NI's value for money perception historically NI has been viewed as an expensive short break destination for ROI consumers.

In the short term, the current positive exchange rate should be leveraged as a key reason to consider NI and to drive trial. NI should also continue to deliver tactical value for money offers; however, these should now be designed and implemented with key target segments in mind. Lastly segment-led value for money propositions (value experiences and bundling) should be developed and promoted through industry.

## Key short-term actions:

- Application of segment and growth strategy to 'business as usual' brand activity;
- Scope budget required to support brand and marketing dimensions;
- Pilot specific communications and sales initiatives with committed industry partners, measure impact and use to case build with broader industry.

# Product and Experience Development

**Overarching objective:** to establish a range of products (attractions, accommodation, food & drink) and connected experiences that at minimum rivals what is available in the domestic ROI market while also delivering relevant differentiation for NI as a short break destination.

NI has a broad range of appealing, unique and differentiated products and experiences, with more currently under development. The challenge is now to improve standout and integrate these products and experiences in a way that will delight the ROI consumer.



Mount Stewart, Co. Down

## Key initiatives:

### Mine appeal of established experiences.

The review affirmed the appeal and attraction of NI's current standout products and experiences, namely Belfast as a city break, Titanic, the Giant's Causeway and the Causeway Coastal Route. While many ROI consumers have visited and experienced these attractions there are many more who have not (the number of ROI consumers who have 'made any trip ever' to NI is only 47 percent).

Based on qualitative research conducted with priority segments it is apparent that these leading attractions have appeal and are of interest, but they tend to be places that people intend to visit sometime in the future rather intend to visit now or soon. The challenge is to make these established iconic experiences accessible and irresistible to key target segments. Consideration is to be given to creating highly targeted creative communications and bundling experiences. In addition to this there is a significant opportunity to deliver multi-dimensional propositions, e.g. the Giant's Causeway experience encompassing the Causeway Coastal Route, Bushmills (town and distillery) and the Game of Thrones®.

### Leverage niche or special interest experiences to deliver cut through and differentiation.

While the primary focus is on experiences of scale that will command the ROI priority segments' attention, it is important to remember that two priority segments ('Open to Ideas' and 'Openminded Explorers') are characterised by a willingness and disposition towards being open-minded, researching and discovering new places and experiences.

Considering this tendency, it will be important that NI continues to develop and promote a range of niche and special interest experiences (including festivals and events) to the ROI consumer. While in some instances this strategy may not always generate significant visitor numbers or revenue it will support the sense that NI is unique, innovative and offers a depth and breadth of experiences that cannot be found elsewhere.

Alongside these niche experiences there will be other opportunities (e.g. The Open in 2019) for NI to attract specific segments from the ROI market. These opportunities need to be identified, prioritised and acted upon. Additionally, the NI festival and events strategy should be reviewed considering the ROI market and the priority segments.

### Enhance and build credentials in the tablestake areas - accommodation (and facilities) and food & drink

As previously outlined a key area of the strategy for growth from the ROI market will be the development of consumer knowledge of the range and quality of accommodation and food/drink offerings in NI. While there has been a range of positive developments in these areas it is imperative that this progress be expanded outside the major cities and accelerated.

### Resolve strategic approach to Belfast as an accommodation hub supporting regional tourism.

The review uncovered a concern about the regional distribution of quality accommodation. It was concluded that in the medium term the likelihood of major accommodation and other capex projects being developed on a regional basis is limited. A significant amount of new hotel capacity is to be created in Belfast in the near term, estimated at approximately 1,300 new rooms in the next 12 months. While this development will help Belfast thrive as a tourism destination consideration should be given as to how this new capacity can support the development of tourism on a regional basis (through a 'hub and spoke' strategy). The strategic approach to linking Belfast's accommodation capacity and the regional development agenda must be resolved in the context of the ROI market.

## Key short-term actions:

- Devise holistic experience bundles in line with priority segment needs and motivations, build communications and pilot in the ROI market.
- Align festivals and events strategy with key segments (couple with accommodation, food & drink experiences).
- Develop and pilot specific regional and seasonal propositions (in doing so flexing value proposition) to enhance and broaden NI relevance as a short break destination.
- Game plan (now) how to fill new hotel capacity (Belfast, Derry~Londonderry and Fermanagh) with ROI holidaymakers (in partnership with industry) while also supporting regional dispersion.

# Measuring Progress

The truism of 'what gets measured gets managed' is particularly true for tourism. The key performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of the strategy are detailed as follows.



## Key performance metrics:

- Visitor numbers, number of trips and revenue (CSO / NISRA). This headline metric will continue to be a key determinant of performance. However, it is acknowledged that the accuracy and timeliness of the data currently being delivered has limitations and TNI will be required to engage with the CSO and NISRA to agree the best means of addressing these limitations;
- Funnel metrics (Brand Tracker). NI's rating in terms of interest, intent and active planning;
- Brand health (new metric). The overall health of the brand, defined by awareness, knowledge, esteem, relevance and differentiation needs to be assessed on a cyclical basis to guide future development and strategy;
- Planning knowledge (new metric). The perceived ability of the ROI target segments to imagine and plan a trip to NI with confidence needs to be measured on a cyclical basis. It is vital that in the future the ROI consumer feels capable of designing and organising a short break to NI (ideally to the same degree they feel they can in their own domestic market);
- Industry promotional activity in the ROI market (new metric). The degree and incidence of NI industry actively promoting in the ROI market will be tracked to record level and impact of activity.

It is also important to note that given the potential risks and challenges presented by Brexit, the global economy, security and other factors, the strategy must remain flexible and agile so that it can be nuanced as conditions evolve.

# It's Up To Us...

Everyone within our tourism sector will play a vital role in building NI's appeal and driving growth from the ROI market. It is through our individual and collective efforts that we will build and sustain the NI destination tourism proposition – driving growth and a sustained performance in the ROI market that creates both economic and social value.



## Acknowledgements

### Market Recovery Taskforce

Ruth Andrews  
Katy Best  
Anne Doyle  
Niall Gibbons  
Conal Harvey  
John Healy  
Shirley McCay  
Eamonn McKeon (Chair)  
Orla McKibbin  
Stephen McNally  
Len O'Hagan

### Observers

Terence Brannigan  
John McGrillen

### Other organisations

Genesis (Dublin)  
W5 Research  
Genesis Advertising, Belfast  
Jago Communications

**Market Recovery Taskforce**  
December 2017