



External Overnight Trips To Northern Ireland 2016

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**2.6m
trips**



**11.4m
nights**



**£614m
spent**

The key points are:

- there were an estimated 2.6 million overnight trips to Northern Ireland by external visitors in 2016. This is a statistically significant increase of 12% in the estimated number of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland during 2015 (2.3 million external overnight trips);
- associated with these overnight trips were and estimated 11.4 million nights and £614 million expenditure;
- the survey estimates suggest that the top five places of origin for external visitors were England, Republic of Ireland, Scotland, United States of America and Germany;
- there were 0.8 million overnight trips by external visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes in 2016.

[Click here for definitions of tourism statistics common terms used in this report](#)

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National Statistics Status

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Office for Statistics Regulation. The Office for Statistics Regulation considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is NISRA's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Office for Statistics Regulation. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.



External Overnight Trips Trend

Table 1 shows the trend in the three headline statistics (estimated overnight trips, nights and expenditure since 2011) with regards to external overnight trips in Northern Ireland. Any significant changes have been marked with an asterisk (*) in the percentage change column; a statistically significant change occurs when the lower limit of one year's estimate is higher than the upper limit of the previous year's estimate. Users should note that there were no statistically significant changes in the key variables (estimated overnight trips, nights and expenditure) between 2015 and 2016. However, there have been some significant changes over time and these are displayed in more detail for each market in the next section. As overnight tourism statistics are survey based estimates they are subject to associated confidence intervals (see [background](#) note 9).

Table 1: Estimated number of external overnight trips, nights and expenditure in Northern Ireland 2011-2016

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	% Change (2015-16)
Overall Trips (000s)	1,932	2,006	2,089	2,179	2,301	2,589	12%*
<i>95% CI lower limit (000s)</i>	<i>1,850</i>	<i>1,920</i>	<i>2,006</i>	<i>2,100</i>	<i>2,219</i>	<i>2,484</i>	
<i>95% CI upper limit (000s)</i>	<i>2,013</i>	<i>2,093</i>	<i>2,172</i>	<i>2,257</i>	<i>2,384</i>	<i>2,693</i>	
Overall Nights (000s)	9,992	9,952	9,817	10,033	10,680	11,366	+6%
Overall Expenditure (£M)	463	485	524	507	545	614	+13%
<i>95% CI lower limit (£M)</i>	<i>435</i>	<i>457</i>	<i>448</i>	<i>472</i>	<i>502</i>	<i>556</i>	
<i>95% CI upper limit (£M)</i>	<i>491</i>	<i>514</i>	<i>599</i>	<i>543</i>	<i>588</i>	<i>671</i>	

Figures derived from Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NIPS) conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), the Survey of Overseas Travellers (SOT) conducted on behalf of Fáilte Ireland, the Household Travel Survey (HTS) conducted by Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey (CHS) conducted by NISRA.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the estimated number of external overnight trips and associated expenditure in Northern Ireland from 2011 to 2016. The graphs also show margins of errors around the published estimates.

Figure 1: Estimated number of external overnight trips in Northern Ireland 2011-2016

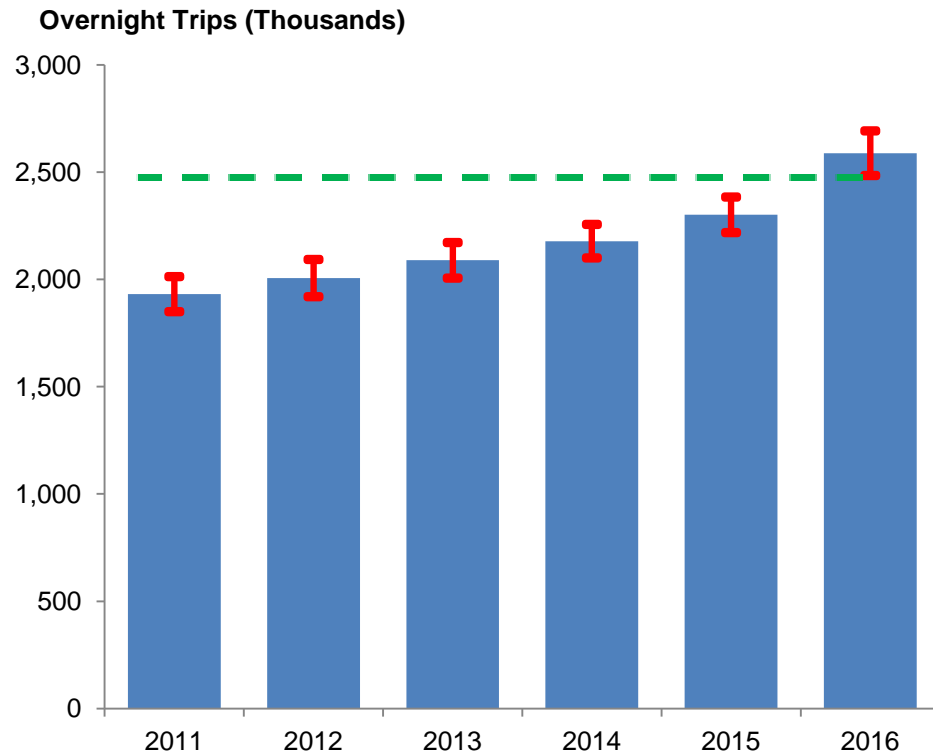
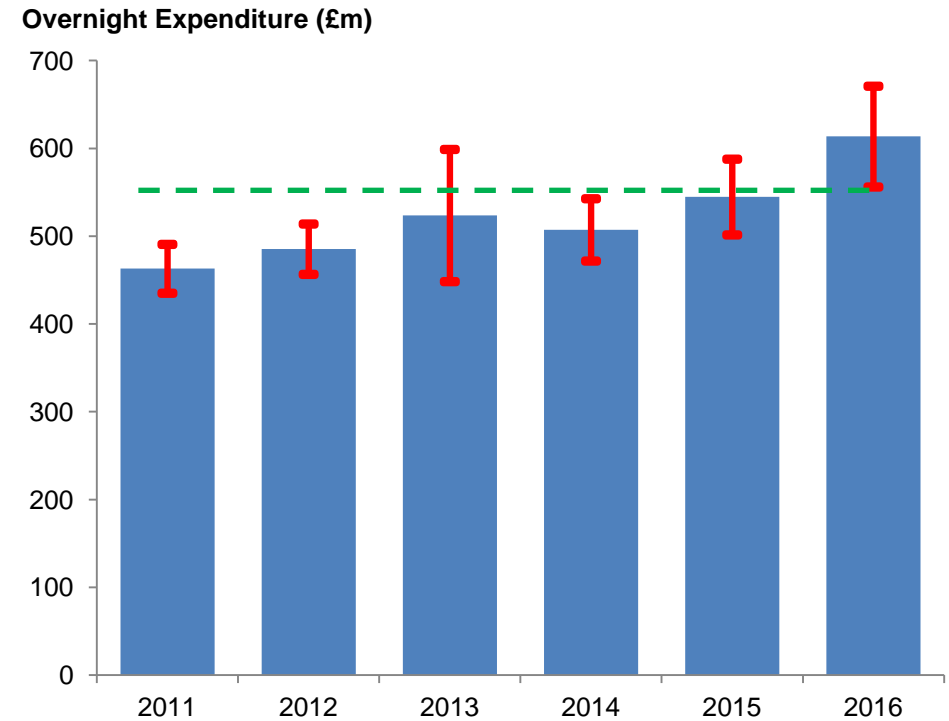


Figure 2: Estimated expenditure associated with external overnight trips in Northern Ireland 2011-2016



What you can say....

There has been a statistically significant increase in the number of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland from 2.3 million in 2015 to 2.6 million in 2016. However, expenditure associated with external overnight trips has not had a statistically significant increase over the same period (2015-2016) but the estimated expenditure of £614m in 2016 is significantly more than the estimated expenditure of £485m in 2012

What you cannot say....

There was a definite increase from 2,301,000 to 2,589,000 overnight trips and associated expenditure also increasing by 13% from £545m to £614m between 2015 and 2016

Introduction

This report provides statistics on external overnight trips (tourists from Great Britain, Republic of Ireland and elsewhere) to Northern Ireland during 2016. A full picture of all tourism activity can be found in the [Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics Publication](#).

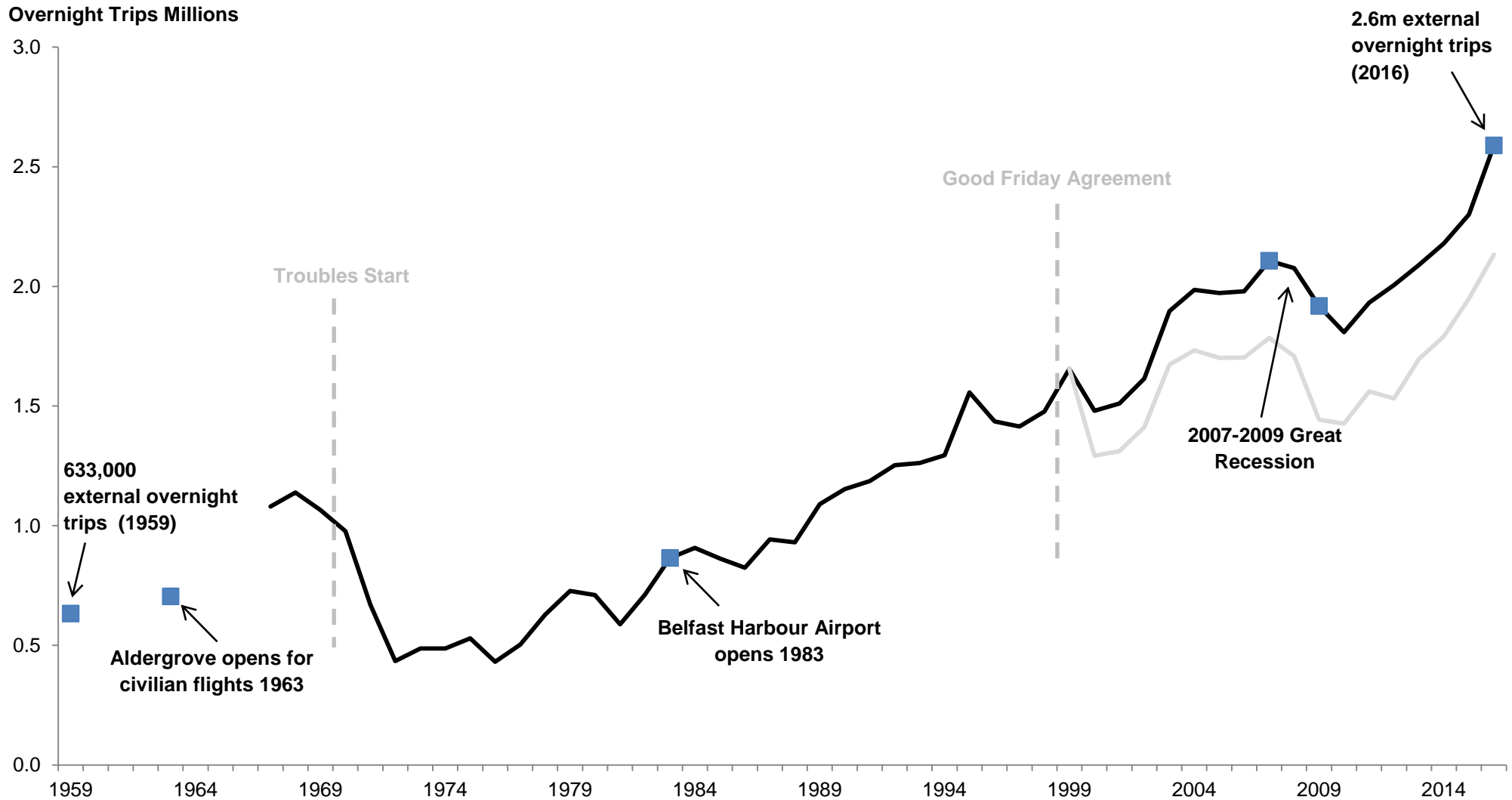
A number of sample surveys capture information from a subset of the population, in order to estimate the headline statistics of external overnight trips, associated nights and expenditure as well as other informative statistics of the whole population. The results from sample surveys are always estimates and not precise figures. This means that they are subject to margins of error which can have an impact on how the estimates should be interpreted, especially regarding comparisons over the short term.

This report aims to present external overnight trips to Northern Ireland statistics in a clear manner and that will inform users of when changes over time in estimates may be due to sampling and would not be seen as statistically significant; and indeed when there have been statistically significant changes in the estimates.

Table 1 shows an estimated 2.6 million external overnight trips to Northern Ireland in 2016. The estimated number of external overnight trips increased by 12% from 2.3 million in 2015 to 2.6 million in 2016; this is a statistically significant increase in the estimated number of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland. The longer term trend suggests that there has been a steady increase in the number of external overnight trips from 2011. These estimates should be seen in the context of the longer time series shown in Figure 3 (overleaf).

Periods such as The Troubles and The 2008-2009 Great Recession are seen to have had a negative impact. It should be noted 2016 has had the greatest estimated number of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland.

Figure 3: Estimated annual external overnight trips to Northern Ireland (1959-2016)



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 made up approximately 13% of the total external overnight trips in 2000 and 18% in 2016). The faint grey line shows the trend had the figures for residents of the Republic of Ireland not been included; users can see that when the overnight trips from the Republic of Ireland are removed the volume of estimated external overnight trips to NI drops; however, the general upward trend remains the same. This is the longest timescale available as data for NI tourism begins in 1959.

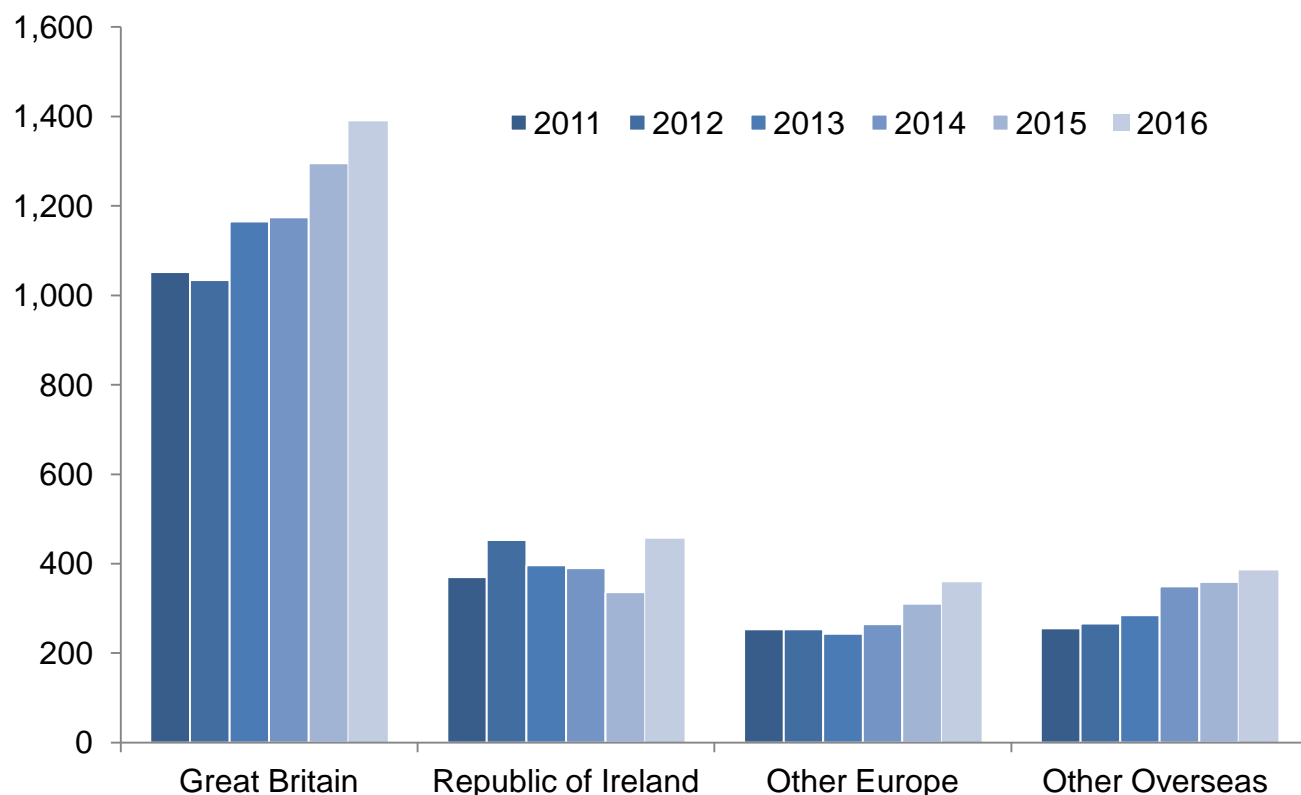
External overnight trips to Northern Ireland by place of origin

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

During 2016, there were an estimated 2.6 million external overnight trips to NI, an increase of 12% from 2.3 million in 2015 (Figure 4).

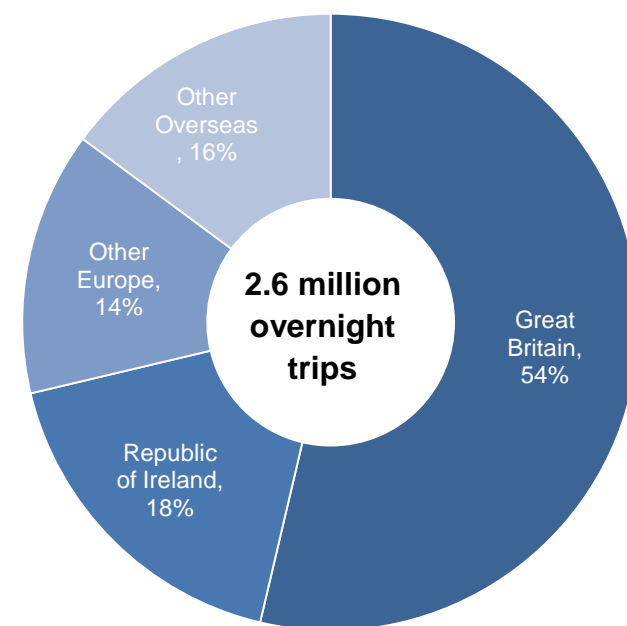
Figure 4: External overnight trips to Northern Ireland by main market 2011 – 2016

External overnight trips (Thousands)



The longer trend over time would suggest an increase in overnight trips by visitors from Great Britain, Other Europe and Other Overseas markets.

Figure 5: Breakdown by place of origin 2016

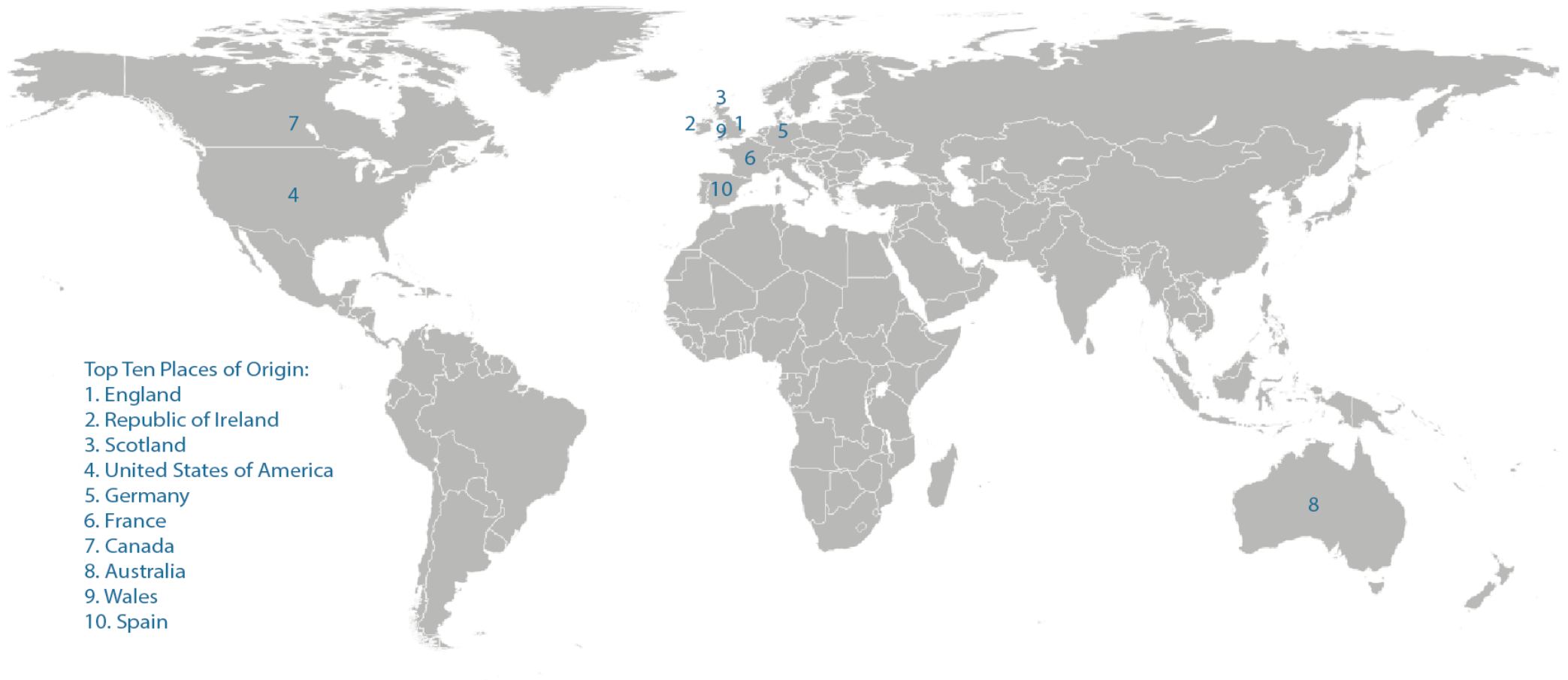


During 2016, of all estimated external overnight trips to NI, 54% were from GB. A further 18% of overnight trips were from residents of the Republic of Ireland; and 14% and 16% from Other Europe and Other Overseas respectively.

Top ten places of origin of external overnight visitors to Northern Ireland 2016

Figure 6 shows the origin of the ten most popular places of external visitors taking overnight trips to Northern Ireland during 2016, 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 6: Top ten places of origin of overnight visitors to Northern Ireland 2016



Expenditure of external overnight trips in Northern Ireland

Figure 7: Rolling 12 months expenditure of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland Q1 2011 – Q4 2016

Rolling Year Expenditure £ (Millions)

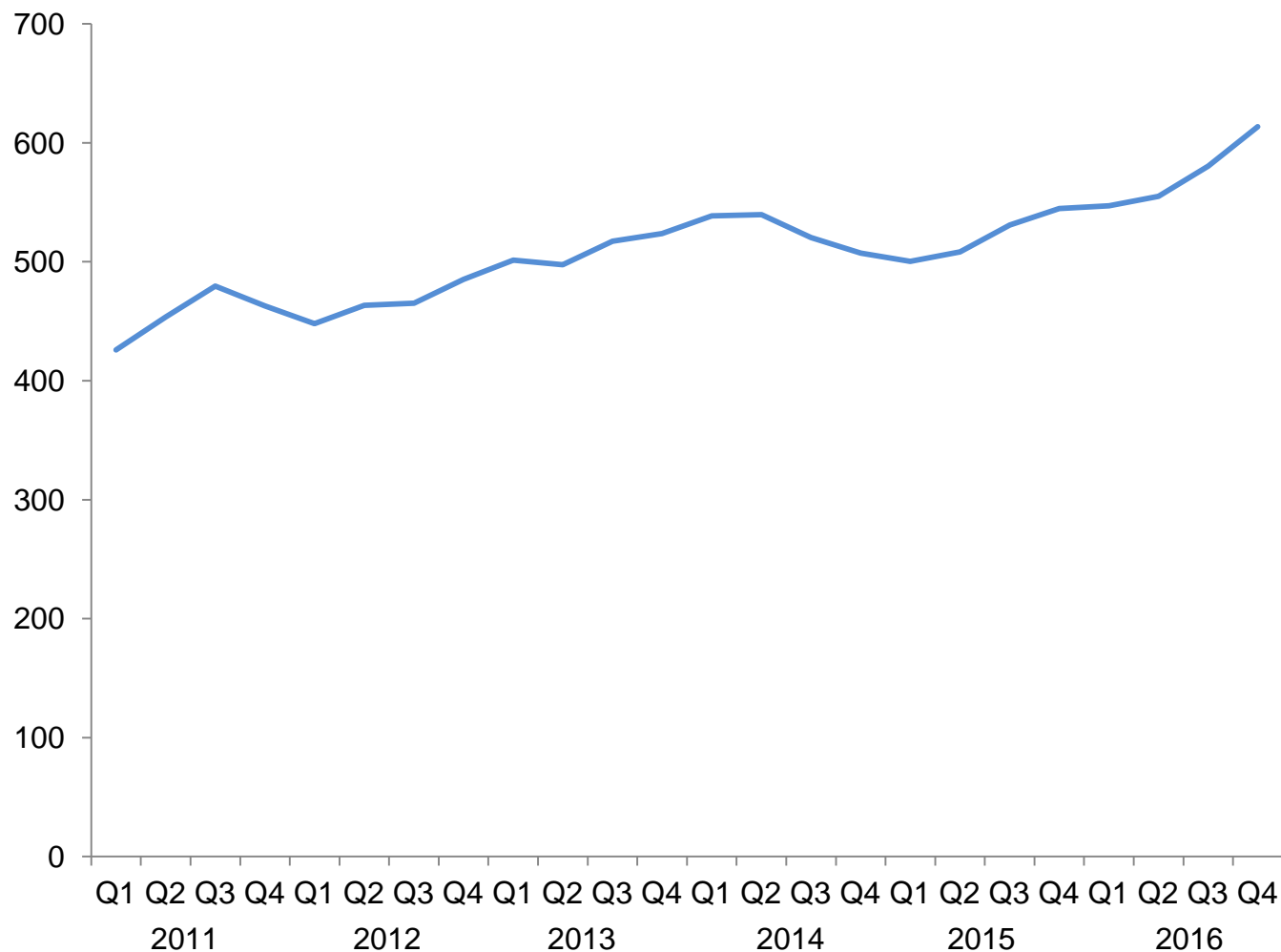


Figure 7 shows the rolling year (twelve month) estimated expenditure of external overnight trips from Q1 2011 to Q4 2016. In 2016 total estimated expenditure of external overnight trips was £614 million.

Looking at the long term trend from 2011 onwards, the estimated expenditure reflects the trend in estimated number of overnight trips and nights, with all three estimates displaying an upward trend in external tourism activity between 2011 and 2016.

Users should note that whilst there has been slight growth in estimated expenditure over the years, estimates year on year fall within the 95% confidence limits. However, the estimated expenditure of £614 million in 2016 is a statistically significant increase to the estimated expenditure of £485 million in 2012.

Exchange rates of sterling against other currencies, mainly the Euro and US, Canadian and Australian Dollars, can influence external expenditure. An idea of how exchange rates may impact the value of expenditure is explained on the following pages.

Exchange rates of Sterling against other currencies

It is important for users to note the changes in value of sterling against other currencies around the world, and the impact that this may have on making a location more or less desirable for visitors. For example, a strong sterling against the euro may influence those in Great Britain to travel to the Euro zone area; similarly it can have the opposite influence on those from euro countries and make sterling areas less appealing. In contrast, a weak sterling against the euro may have the opposite impact encouraging those in sterling areas to take trips within the sterling area, whilst also making it more appealing for those from euro countries to visit sterling areas.

Figure 9 (overleaf) shows monthly exchange rate changes from January 2011 to December 2016. It shows that between January 2014 and December 2015 the euro (€), Canadian (C\$) and Australian (A\$) dollars experienced a prolonged fall against the pound (£); with the annual average exchange rate down 10%, 6% and 10% respectively from 2014 to 2015. The only currency to remain strong against the pound over this period has been the US dollar (US\$) which was up 8%.

However, from January 2016, the strength of the pound (£) can be seen to weaken against these currencies with the euro (€), Canadian (C\$) and Australian (A\$) dollars returning to similar levels of exchange as 2014. The US dollar (US\$) further grew in strength against the pound (£), increasing 12% from an average exchange rate of £0.65 in 2015 to £0.73 in 2016.

To put this into context, users can see from Figure 8 the example of expenditure from the United States of America, which was an estimated £55 million for 2014. Using the average exchange rate for 2014, this value would equate to US\$91 million. If the expenditure of overnight visitors to Northern Ireland from the United States of America was to remain at US\$91 million for 2015 and 2016, this would have been worth £59 million in 2015 and £66 million in 2016. That would be an increase of £11 million (21%) in estimated expenditure of overnight trips from United States of America between 2014 and 2016, simply due to exchange rates.

Figure 8: Comparison of US Dollar exchange rates from 2014 to 2016

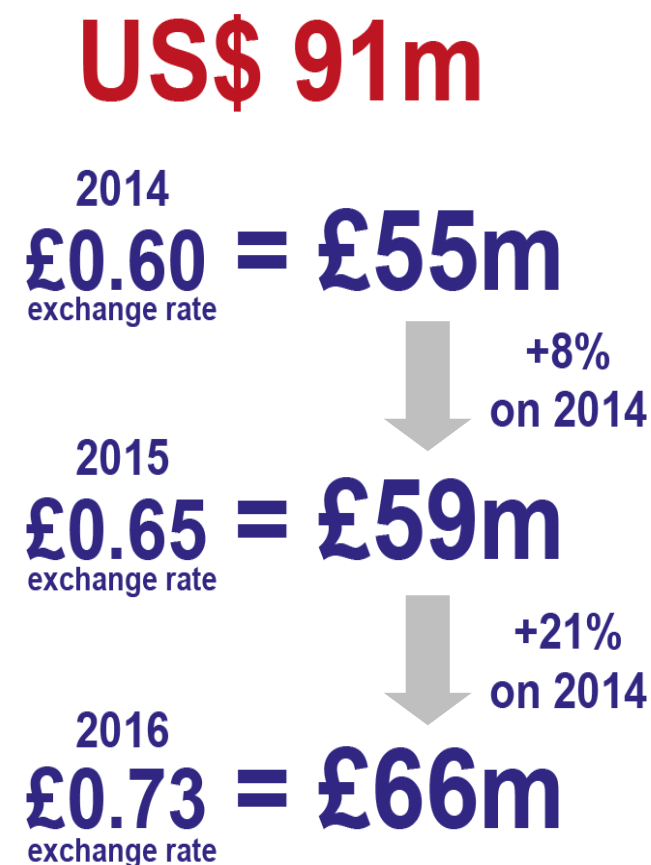
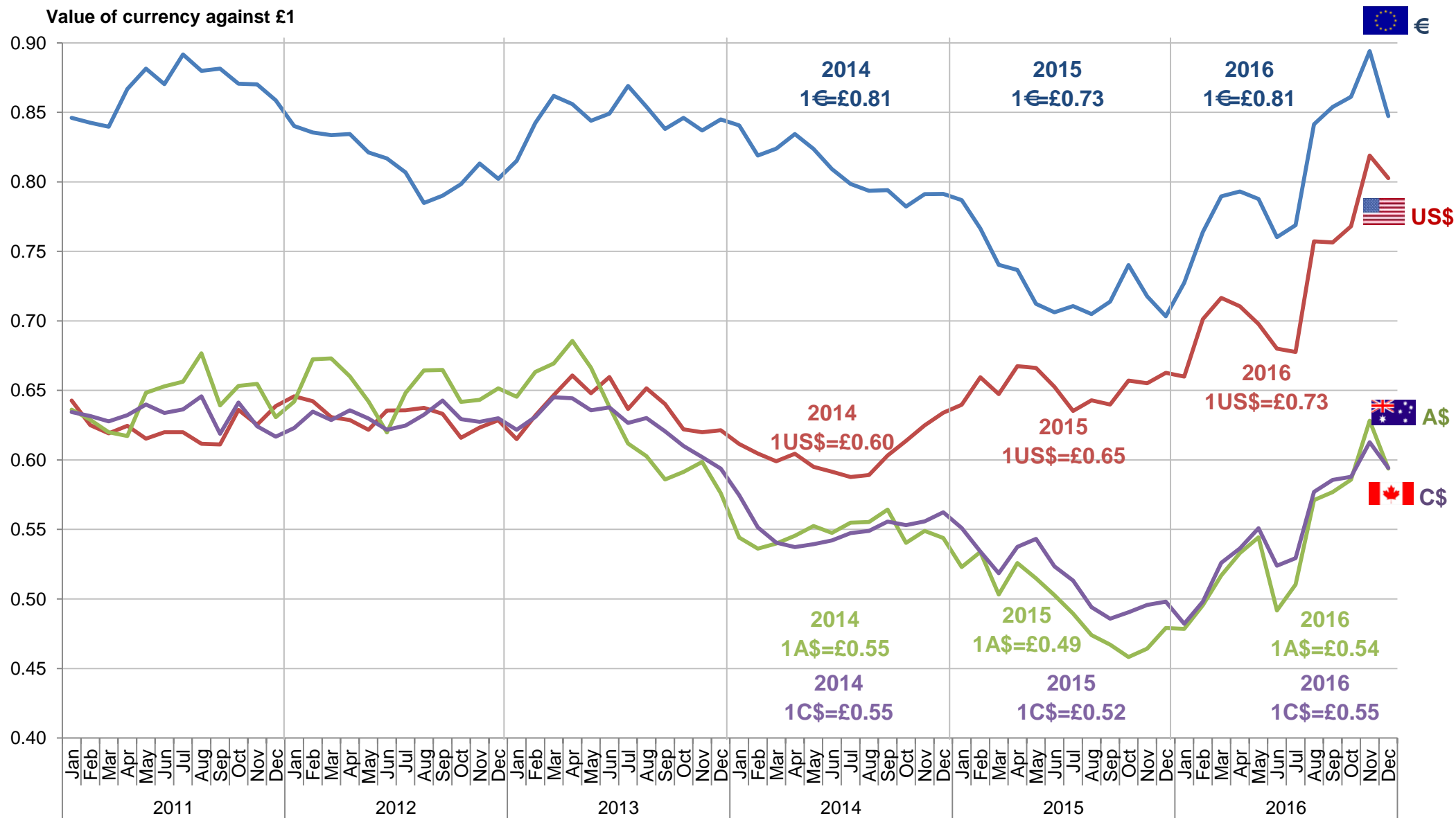


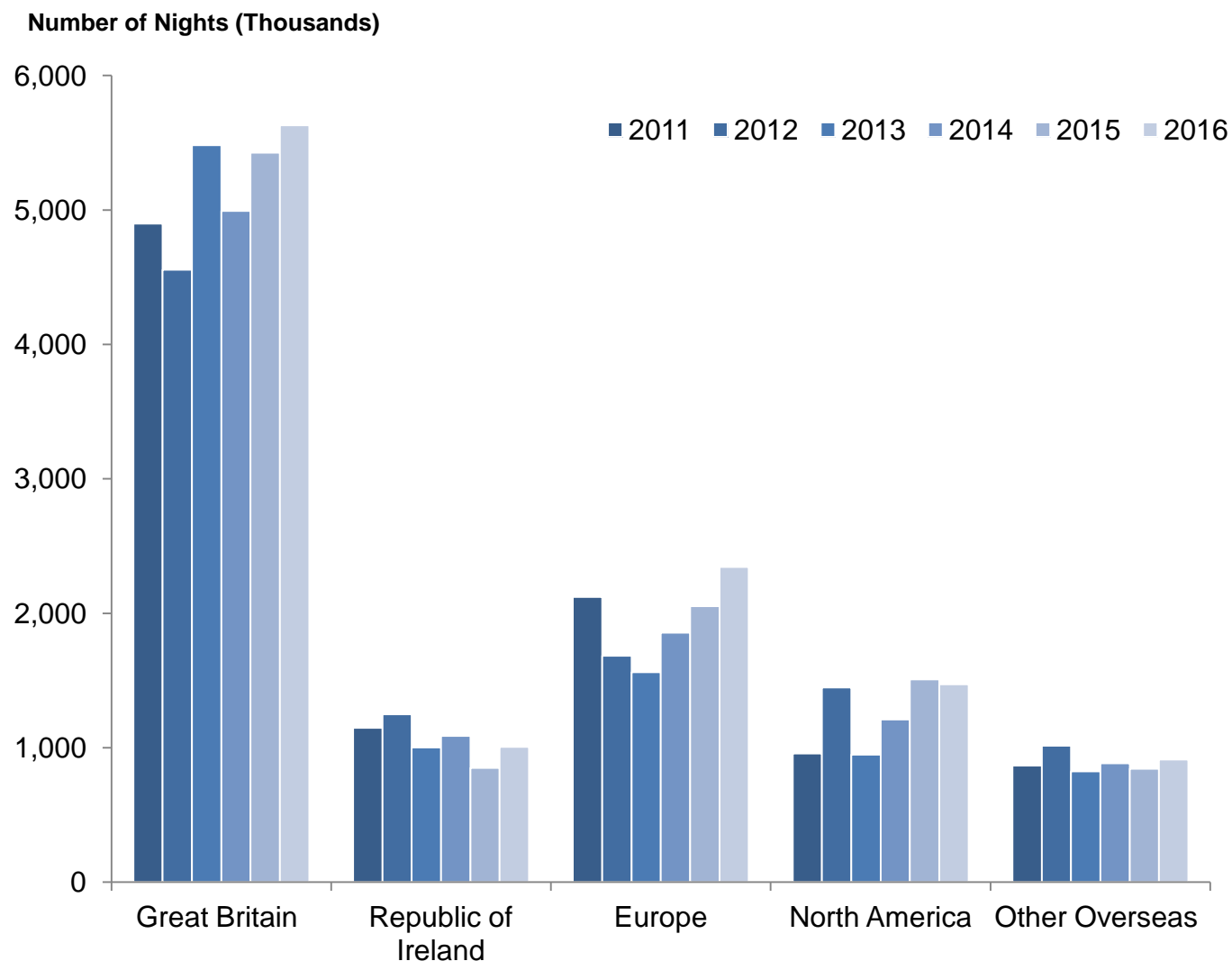
Figure 9: Monthly exchange rates – currency against £1 January 2011 to December 2016 (non-zero axis) (showing average annual exchange rates for 2014 to 2016)



Source: [Financial Times](http://www.ft.com).

Estimated number of nights spent by external visitors in Northern Ireland

Figure 10: Number of nights spent by external visitors in Northern Ireland by main market 2011 – 2016



Associated with the number of external overnight trips in 2016 were an estimated 11.4 million nights spent in Northern Ireland through these overnight trips (Figure 10).

Reflecting the other figures such as the number of overnight trips to Northern Ireland, main markets such as Great Britain and Europe have seen an increase in the trend in the number of nights spent in Northern Ireland between 2011 and 2016.

Other main markets such as the Republic of Ireland and Other Overseas appear to have a more flat trend over this period.

The average number of nights spent in NI has fallen from 2011 (5.2 nights) to 2015 (4.4 nights) suggesting that although there are more external overnight trips being taken in NI, visitors are staying for shorter periods of time.

Estimated reason for visit of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland

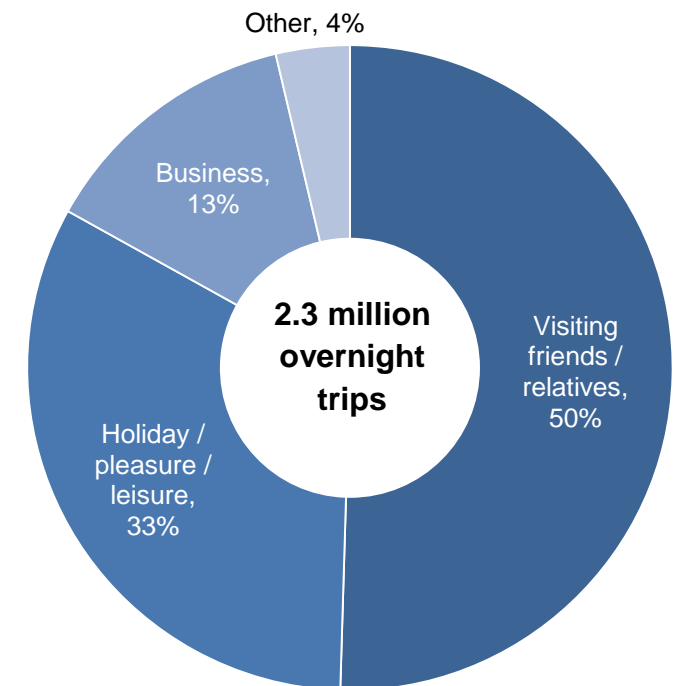
Of all estimated overnight trips to Northern Ireland in 2016, half (50%) were to visit friends and relatives. A third (33%) came to NI for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes. Some 13% came to NI for business purposes, and 4% for other reasons. These proportions have remained relatively unchanged between 2011 and 2016 (Figure 11).

There were an estimated 1.3 million external overnight trips for **visiting friends and relatives** in 2016, making up 50% of all external overnight trips in NI during 2016. Perhaps linked to our proximity, the majority of overnight trips from England (59%) and Scotland (58%) were to visit friends and relatives (Figure 12a).

There were an estimated 0.84 million external overnight trips for **holiday / pleasure / leisure** purposes during 2016, making up 33% of all external overnight trips. The majority of places of origin were above this level. External overnight trips for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes made up 61%, 58% and 55% of all external overnight trips from Italy, Germany and the Netherlands respectively (Figure 12b).

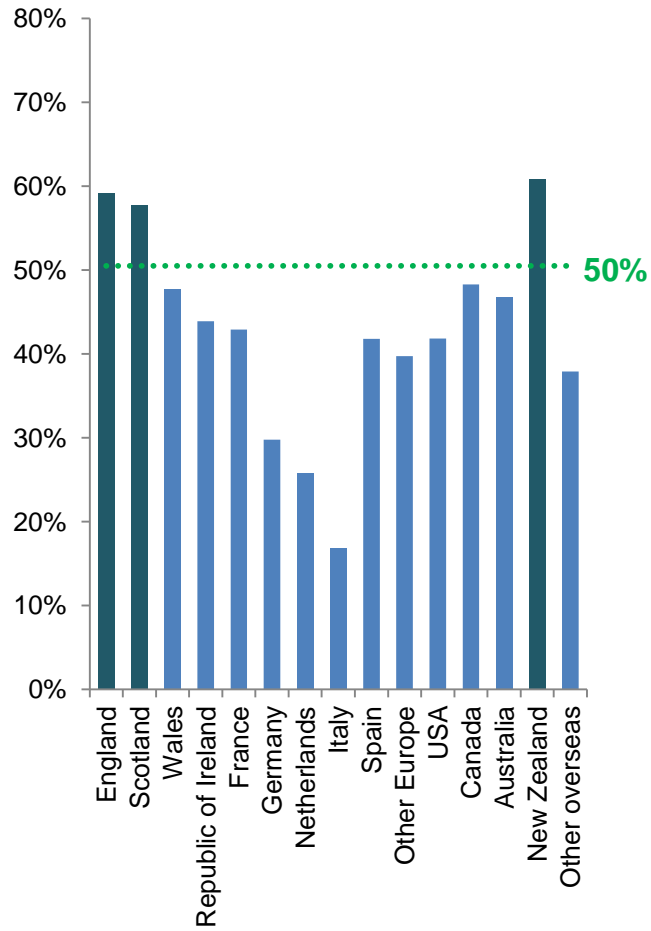
An estimated 0.44 million external overnight trips were for **business & other** purposes in 2016. External overnight trips for business & other purposes made up 23%, 22% and 21% of all external overnight trips from the Republic of Ireland, Italy and Wales respectively (Figure 12c).

Figure 11: Reason for overnight trip 2016

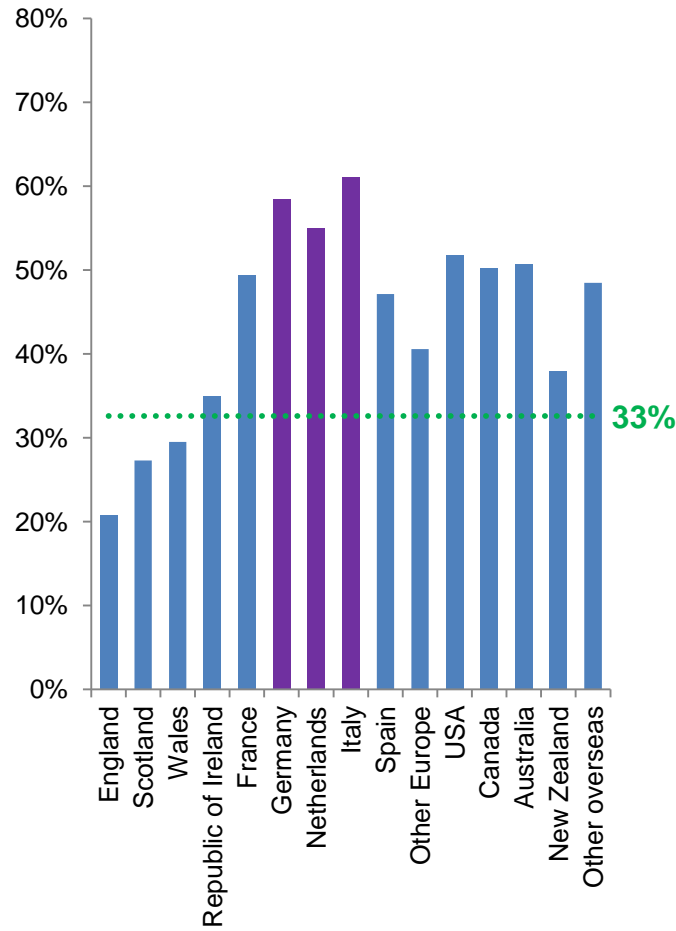


Figures 12a – 12c: Reason for External Overnight Trip in Northern Ireland by Place of Origin 2016

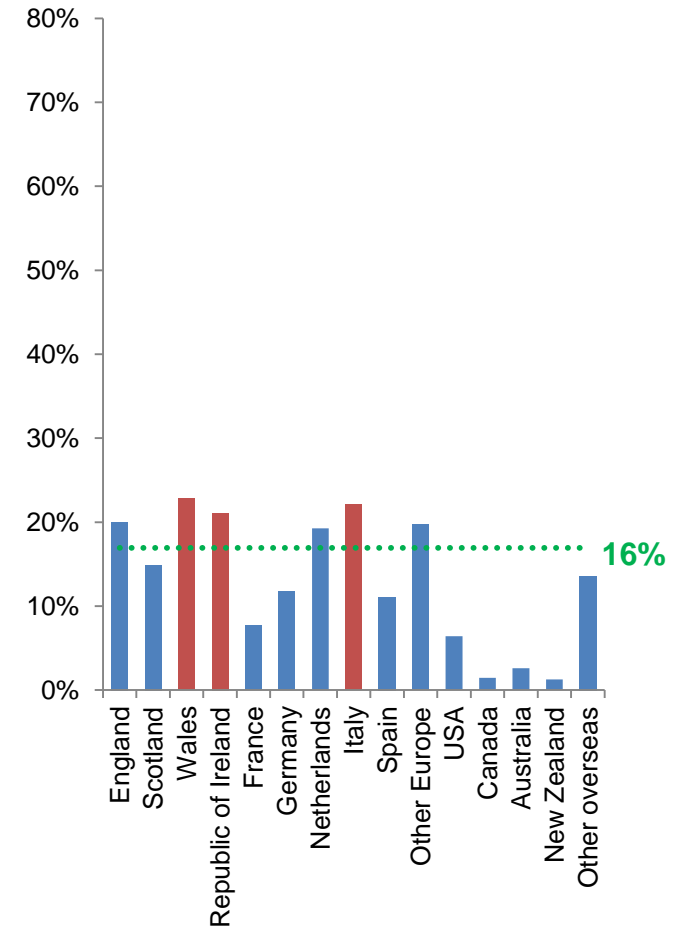
12a. Visiting Friends / Relatives



12b. Holiday / Pleasure / Leisure



12c. Business



..... External Overnight Trips Average

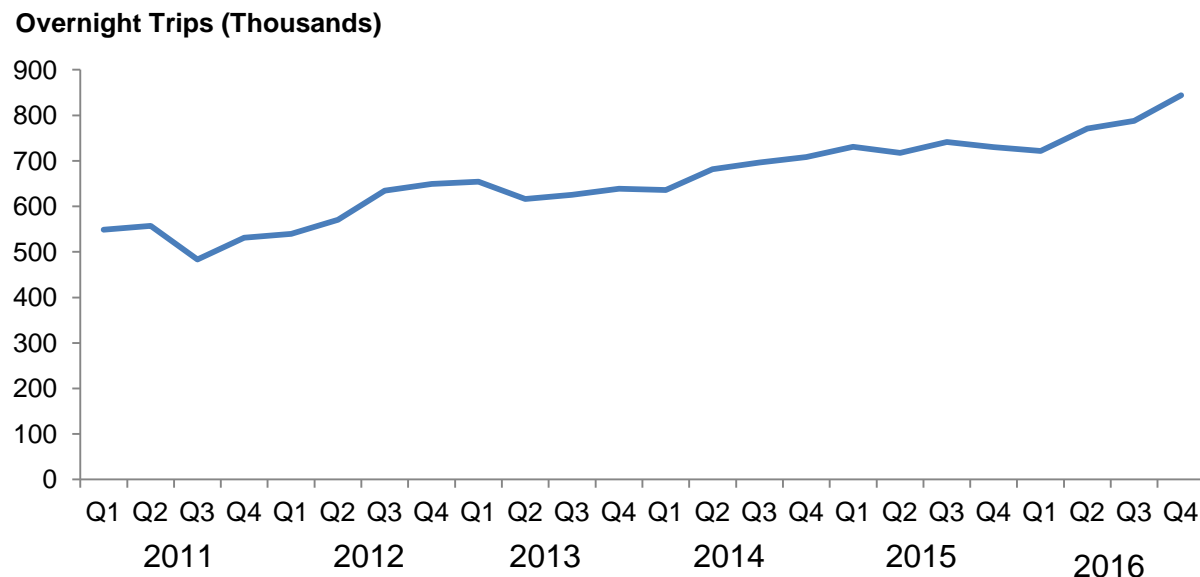
New Zealand,
England,
Scotland

Italy,
Germany,
Netherlands

Wales,
Italy,
Republic of Ireland

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

Figure 13: Rolling 12 months number of external trips for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes, Q1 2011- Q4 2016



The estimated number of external overnight trips to Northern Ireland for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes has increased year on year from 531,000 external overnight trips in 2011 to 844,000 external overnight trips during 2016 (Figure 13). Following this trend, the estimated number of nights and value of expenditure associated with these external overnight trips have also shown an increase from 2011 to 2016.

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 2016), Titanic Belfast (number two visitor attraction in NI 2016), the Causeway Coastal Route and Game of Thrones.

Figure 14: What influenced external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes to come to NI 2016?



Giant's Causeway 33%



Titanic Belfast 28%



Causeway Coastal Route 17%



Game of Thrones 13%

Some information is captured on factors that influence people to come to Northern Ireland (Figure 14). Reflecting the Visitor Attraction Survey, the Giant's Causeway was the most influential factor for external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes during 2016 (33%), followed by Titanic Belfast (28%).

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 15a 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 2016. Just over 14% went hiking / cross country walking, followed by 6% attending or participating in an organised sporting event (e.g. motor sport / rugby / football / Gaelic games).

Figure 15a: What sporting activities did external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes participate in when in NI 2016

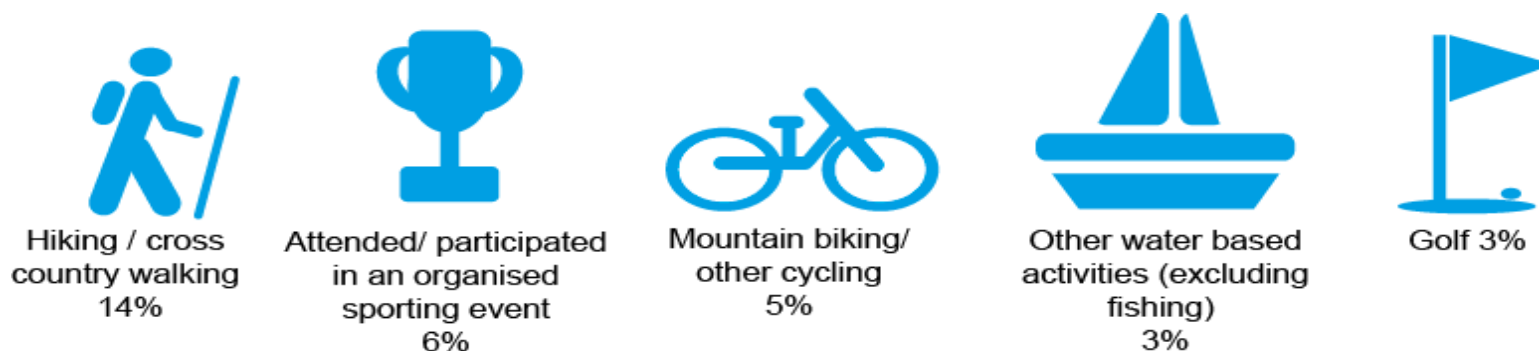
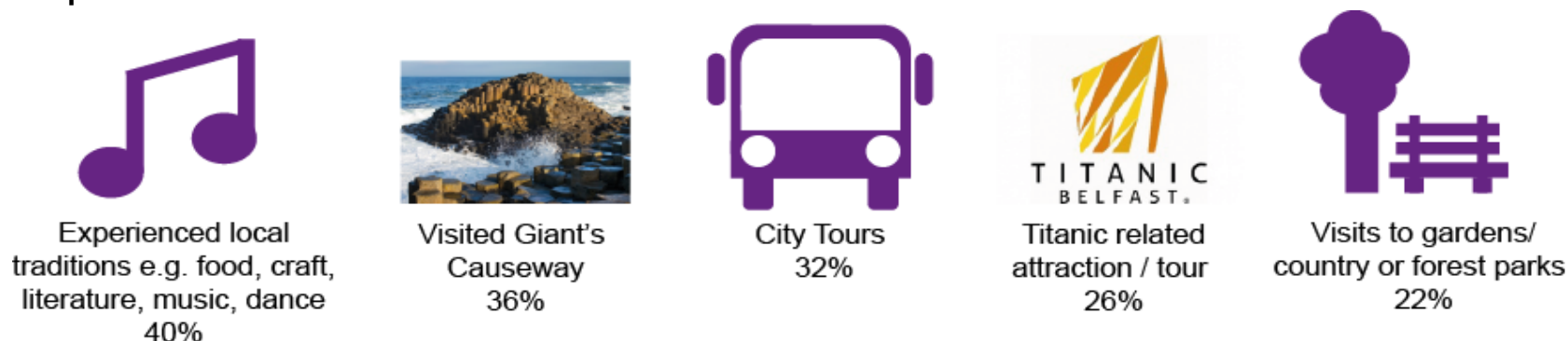


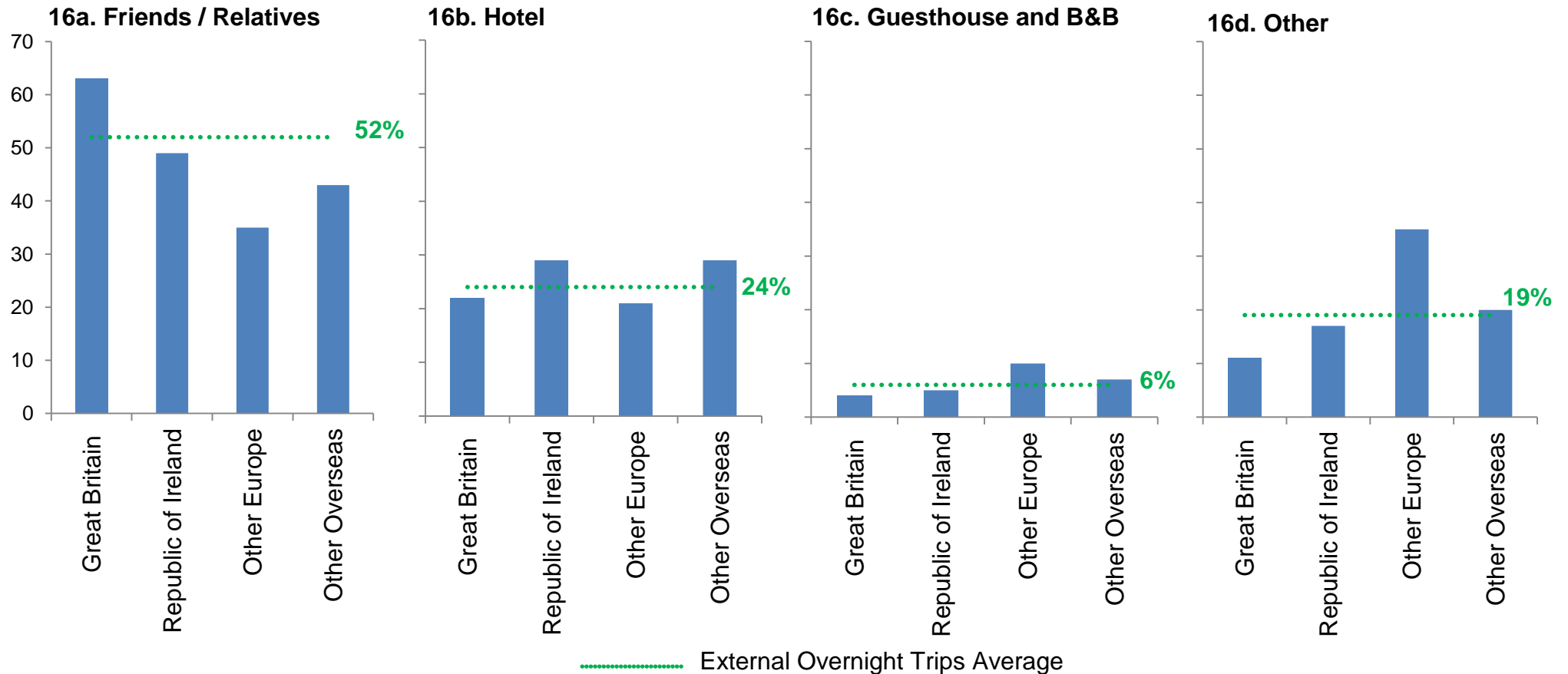
Figure 15b shows the top five leisure / sightseeing / cultural / historical activities that external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes participated in whilst in Northern Ireland during 2016. Approximately 40% experienced local traditions / culture (e.g. food, craft, literature, music, dance); over a third visited the Giant's Causeway (36%) and 32% went on a City Tour.

Figure 15b: What leisure / sightseeing / cultural / historical activities did external overnight visitors for holiday / pleasure / leisure purposes participate in when in NI 2016



Accommodation Type used for External Overnight Trips in Northern Ireland

Figure 16a-16d: Proportion of nights spent in accommodation type by external overnight visitors to Northern Ireland and main market 2016



Of all external overnight trips to NI during 2016, staying with friends and relatives was the most popular choice of accommodation type. In total, the majority of nights (52%) were spent staying with friends and relatives; ranging from 35% of Other Europe to 63% of Great Britain staying with friends and relatives (Figure 16a).

The second most popular accommodation type used was hotels, with 24% of total nights being spent in a hotel; ranging from 21% by visitors from Other Europe to 29% by visitors from the Republic of Ireland and Other Overseas (Figure 16b)

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, passenger numbers have been increasing during 2015 and 2016; and there has been a significant increase in the number of passengers at air ports and sea ports in the Republic of Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, the main factor for the increase in passenger activity in air passengers has been an increase in passengers at Belfast International Airport; coinciding with the introduction of Ryanair and various new routes available to passengers. Further information regarding air port figures and information for both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland can be found in the [Northern Ireland Air Passenger Statistics](#) tables.

During 2016, 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) 33% 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 2016 the sample size of the NIPS was 49,100. Table 2 details the confidence intervals of the visitor and expenditure estimates by country of residence.

Table 2: Confidence intervals for external overnight visitors to Northern Ireland 2016 (Northern Ireland Passenger Survey).

	95 % Confidence Interval	
	Visitors	Expenditure
Total	+/-4%	+/- 9%

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.

Data for the years 2012 to 2015 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](#)). Even though the impact is small, 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.

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

tourismstatistics@nisra.gov.uk

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