

Northern Ireland Tourism Statistics April 2018 – March 2019

Published 19th September 2019



**5.1m
trips**



**16.3m
nights**



**£963m
spent**

The key points are:

- There were an estimated **5.1 million overnight trips** (domestic & external) in Northern Ireland (NI) in the year to March 2019.
- **Expenditure** associated with all overnight trips was an estimated **£963 million**.
- There were **16.3 million nights** spent in Northern Ireland on these trips.
- There were an estimated **2.9 million overnight trips made by external visitors** (from outside NI) in the year to March 2019. This compares to an estimated 2.6 million in the year to March 2018.
- Over the same period, in total **2.2 million room nights** were sold in Northern Ireland in the year to March 2019.

Lead Statistician:

Stephen Dunne
Tourism Statistics Branch
NISRA
Colby House
Stranmillis Court
BELFAST
BT9 5RR

Telephone: 028 9025 5163

Email: tourismstatistics@nisra.gov.uk

Web: www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/tourism

Sign up to our [mailing list](#)

Frequency: Quarterly

Coverage: Northern Ireland

Theme: People, Places and Culture

Contents:

[Introduction](#) 4

[Overnight trips in NI](#) 5

[Hotels rooms sold](#) 10

[Passengers at local ports](#) 11

[Background notes](#) 12

National Statistics status

National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

These statistics were designated as National Statistics in May 2017 following a full assessment against the Code of Practice. Since the assessment by the UK Statistics Authority, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have also made improvements such as the following:

- Improved quality of the data by boosting the sample size of the tourism module in the Continuous Household Survey (CHS) from April 2017. This improved the precision around headline estimates.
- The CHS and the Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NIPS) have been made more accessible by improving the wording of questions and updating survey software to improve the presentation. This reduces the burden on respondents to improve response rates.
- Increasing awareness of statistics by allowing users to sign up to a [mailing list](#) that means they can be informed of any new statistical releases.



Household Travel Survey 2018 data quality issue

Data from the 2018 Household Travel Survey (HTS), provided by Central Statistics Office (CSO) and relating to the number of visitors coming to Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland, should be considered as **interim data that may be subject to future revision**. In 2018 the HTS was suspended due to quality issues in the collected data. Against a backdrop of falling response rates, it was observed that there was a non-response issue affecting the survey estimates in 2018. In order to address the non-response bias in the 2018 HTS sample the CSO has adjusted the weights of respondents within the sample design, for all four quarters of 2018. From Q1 (January to March) 2019, CSO has made changes to its questionnaire that addressed the issues of non-response bias. However, the issues still remain with 2018 data, which means the rolling year estimates are still affected.

Following quality checks on the methodology change and the data itself, **NISRA feel the data provided by CSO is of suitable quality to report on. We ask users to be aware there is potential for future revision, but we don't feel this is likely to change the overall message of the publication or the key statistics. We advise users that are particularly interested in the number of visitors from ROI to use the figures with caution and look at the patterns over the last few years rather than focussing on short term changes.**

A report containing full details of the issues with the HTS, and the interim solution, is available on the CSO website and can be accessed [here](#)**

If a future revision occurs we will make users aware of any impact on the statistics in this publication.

More details can be found in point 14 of background notes section of this publication.

Introduction

This quarterly report provides an up-to-date indication of Northern Ireland tourism trends. The report informs the Assembly and Executive, tourism bodies, the tourism industry and the public on data relating to tourism in Northern Ireland. A primary aim is to provide information on progress towards the Programme for Government tourism targets.

It should be noted that 2019 data are provisional and subject to revision until publication of the 2019 annual tourism statistics report in spring 2020.

Further information on the use of tourism statistics can be accessed at [link](#).

Measuring tourism is challenging with no single statistic providing a definitive measure. Therefore this report includes a variety of data to paint a more complete picture. The report includes 3 sections:

1. [Overnight trips in Northern Ireland \(Trips, spend\)](#)
2. [Hotel accommodation occupancy](#)
3. [Passenger activity at Northern Ireland air and sea ports](#)

The report also includes background notes which provide information on the methodology and background to these statistics.

Overnight tourism statistics are survey based estimates and, as such, they are subject to associated confidence intervals. (See [background note 8](#)).

Section 1: Overnight trips in Northern Ireland

Background

Two key measures of tourism activity are the number of overnight trips and the associated expenditure. To estimate these measures two sets of rolling annual sample surveys of passengers and households are undertaken.

- (i) Firstly, **sample surveys of passengers** at air and sea ports in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are undertaken to identify overnight trips to Northern Ireland by people living outside the island of Ireland.
- (ii) Secondly **household sample surveys** in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are undertaken to identify Northern Ireland based overnight trips of Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland residents.

Overnights: Headline overnight trip statistics are measured using standard UN definitions, the UN use the concept of “overnighting”. This is broadly defined as staying away from your usual place of residence for one night or more. This does not need to be for holiday, it can also relate to visiting relatives, business etc. As well as overnighting of visitors to Northern Ireland, the statistics also include overnights of local residents within NI. Note overnighting excludes day trips, which will be a significant part of the local tourism market.

Key estimates

It is estimated that there were 5.1 million overnight trips taken in Northern Ireland (NI) between April 2018 and March 2019. These overnight trips accounted for 16.3 million nights stayed in NI and the Expenditure associated with these trips was £963 million.

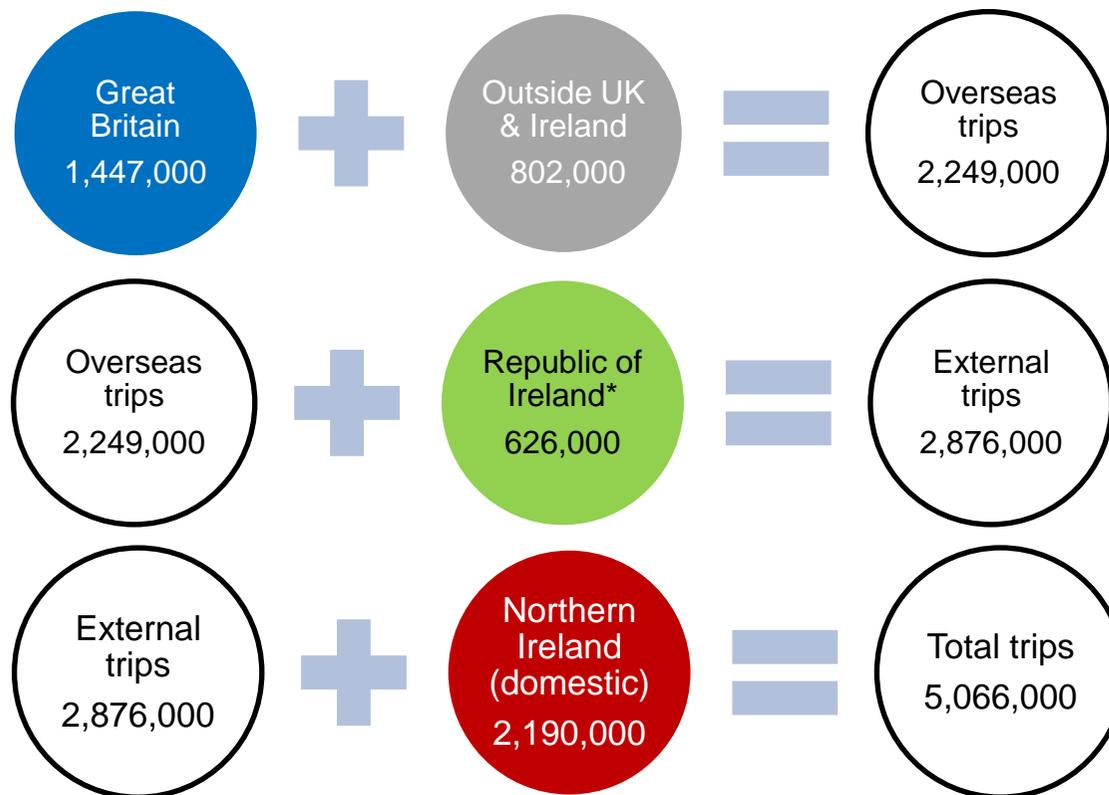
Table 1: Estimated number of overnight trips, nights and expenditure in Northern Ireland (all visitors) for the 12 months to March 2018 and March 2019

	April 2017 - March 2018	April 2018 - March 2019
Overall Trips	4,844,351	5,065,915
Overall Nights	16,599,317	16,323,877
Overall Expenditure (£)	943,804,420	963,382,851

Place of origin

An important part of the assessment of tourism is the place of origin of visitors to Northern Ireland. Figure 1 provides further detail on the place of origin for visitors coming to NI between April 2018 and March 2019.

Figure 1: Estimated overnight trips by place of origin (April 2018-March 2019)

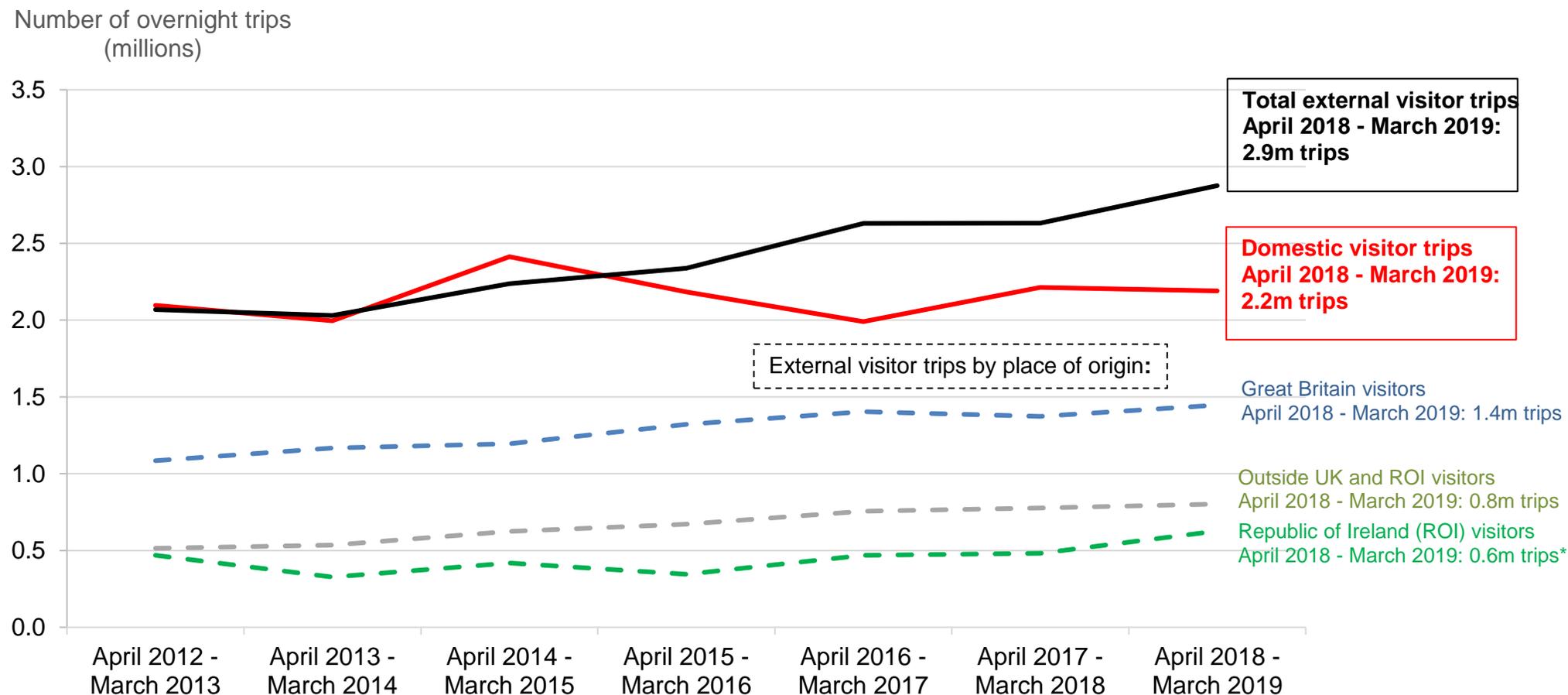


(Figures rounded to the nearest thousand)

*See background note 14 in relation to the quality of ROI visitor estimates

Figure 2 shows the trend in the estimated number of overnight trips over a rolling twelve month period by place of origin. The total estimated number of overnight trips (domestic and external) in the year to March 2019 was 5.1 million. This is made up of 2.2 million domestic overnight trips (NI residents overnighing within NI) and 2.9 million external overnight trips (visitors from outside NI). The breakdown of the place of origin for external visitors shows that visitors from Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) are the largest group that overnighed in NI, with 1.4 million trips in the year to March 2019.

Figure 2: Rolling year estimated number of overnight trips (non-zero y axis)



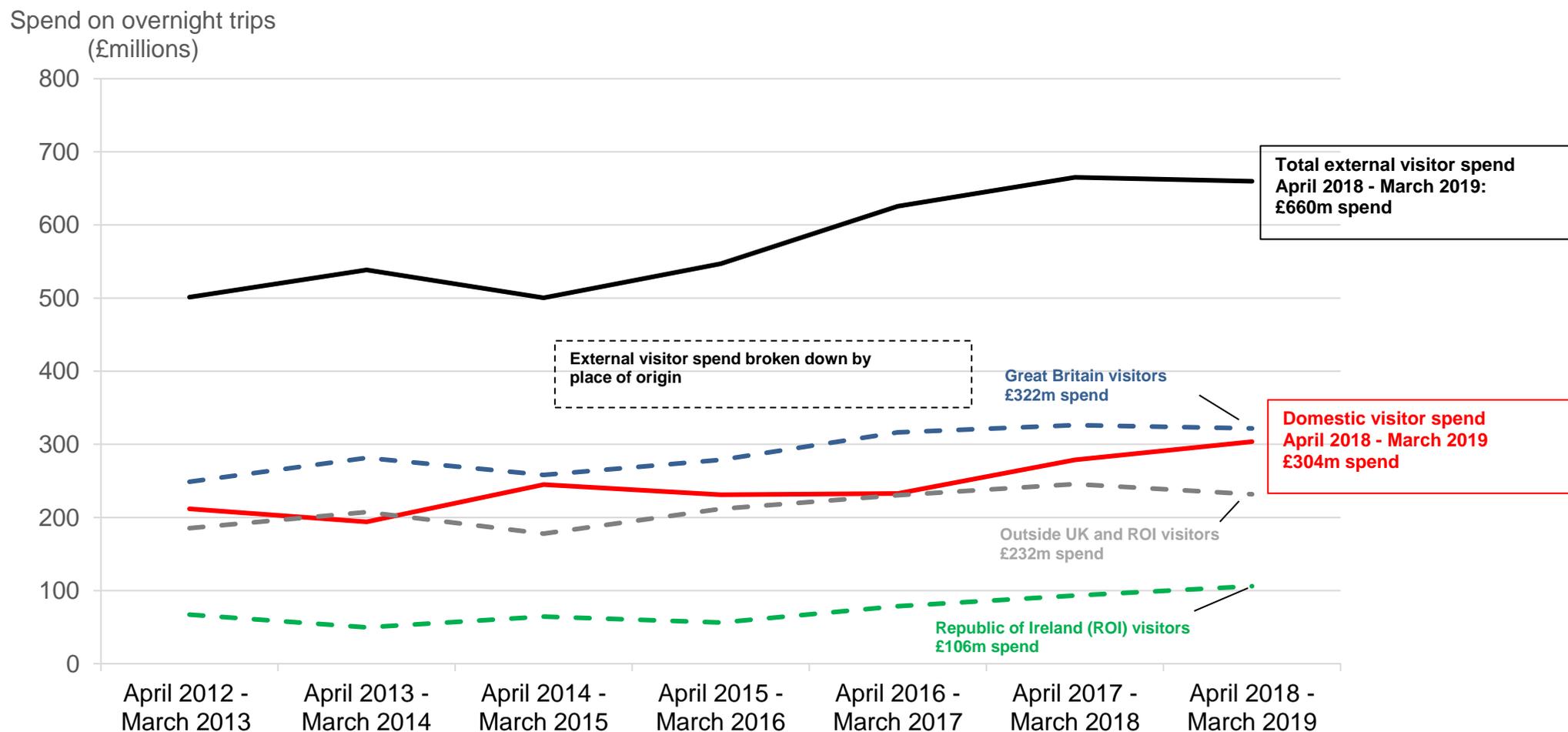
Note: Annual changes are generally not statistically significant. Therefore comparisons should be made over the longer term.

**See background note 14 in relation to the quality of ROI visitor estimates*

Expenditure by place of origin

Expenditure on overnight trips on overnight trips has generally been increasing since 2013 for both external and domestic visitors. External visitors make up over two thirds (68%) of the total spending on overnight trips, illustrating the importance of these visitors to the local economy.

Figure 3: Rolling year estimated spend on overnight trips (non-zero y axis)



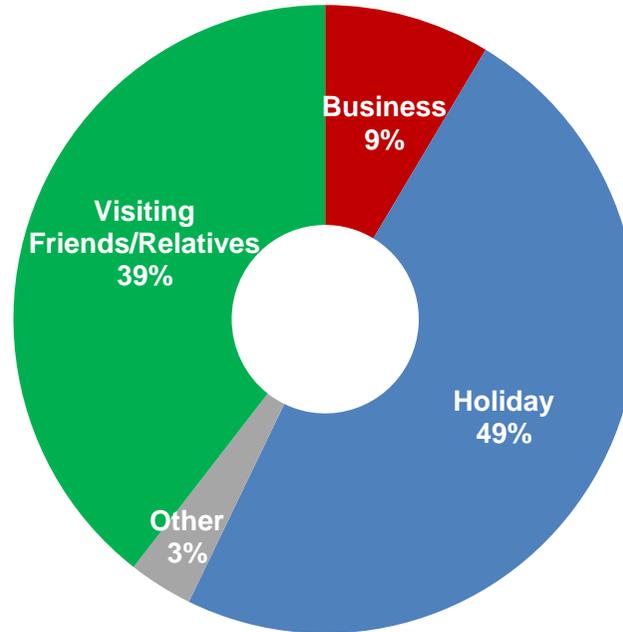
Note: Annual changes are generally not statistically significant. Therefore comparisons should be made over the longer term.

*See background note 14 in relation to the quality of ROI visitor estimates

Reason for overnight trip

All survey respondents are also asked the reason for their overnight stay. The result for all overnight trips is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Reason for overnight trip in Northern Ireland (April 2018 – March 2019)

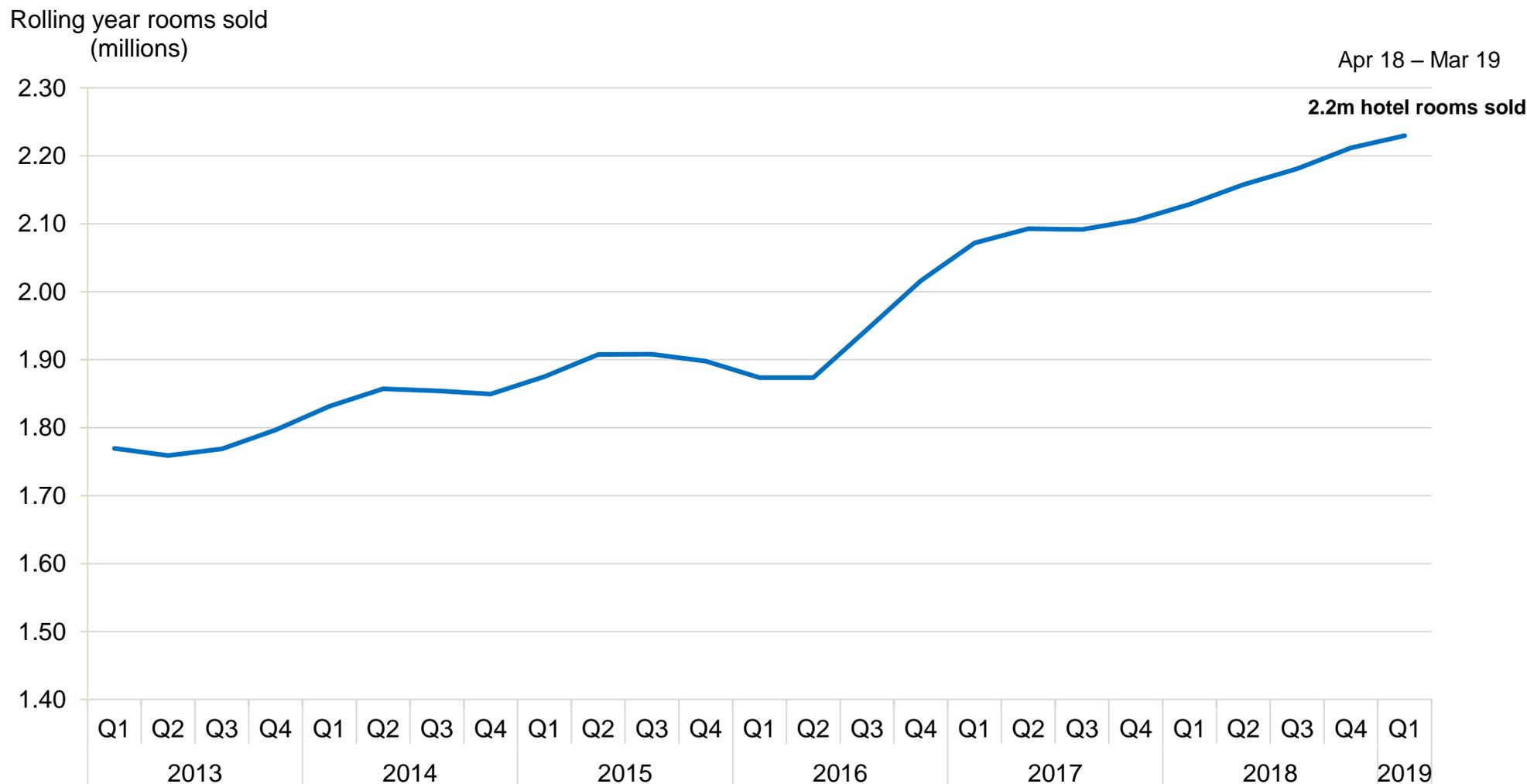


The most common reason for people to overnight in Northern Ireland is holidaying, this makes up an estimated 49% of all overnight trips. A further 39% of overnight trips were due to people visiting friends and relatives in Northern Ireland.

Section 2: Hotel rooms sold

Alongside passenger and household surveys, NISRA conduct a monthly occupancy survey of local hotels. Quarterly statistics on the number of rooms sold are shown in Figure 5. The detailed figures show that over the latest 12 month period (April 2018 – March 2019) the number of rooms sold was 2.2 million. This compares to 2.1 million rooms sold April 2017 - March 2018.

Figure 5: Rolling year Northern Ireland Hotel rooms sold (millions) (non-zero y axis)

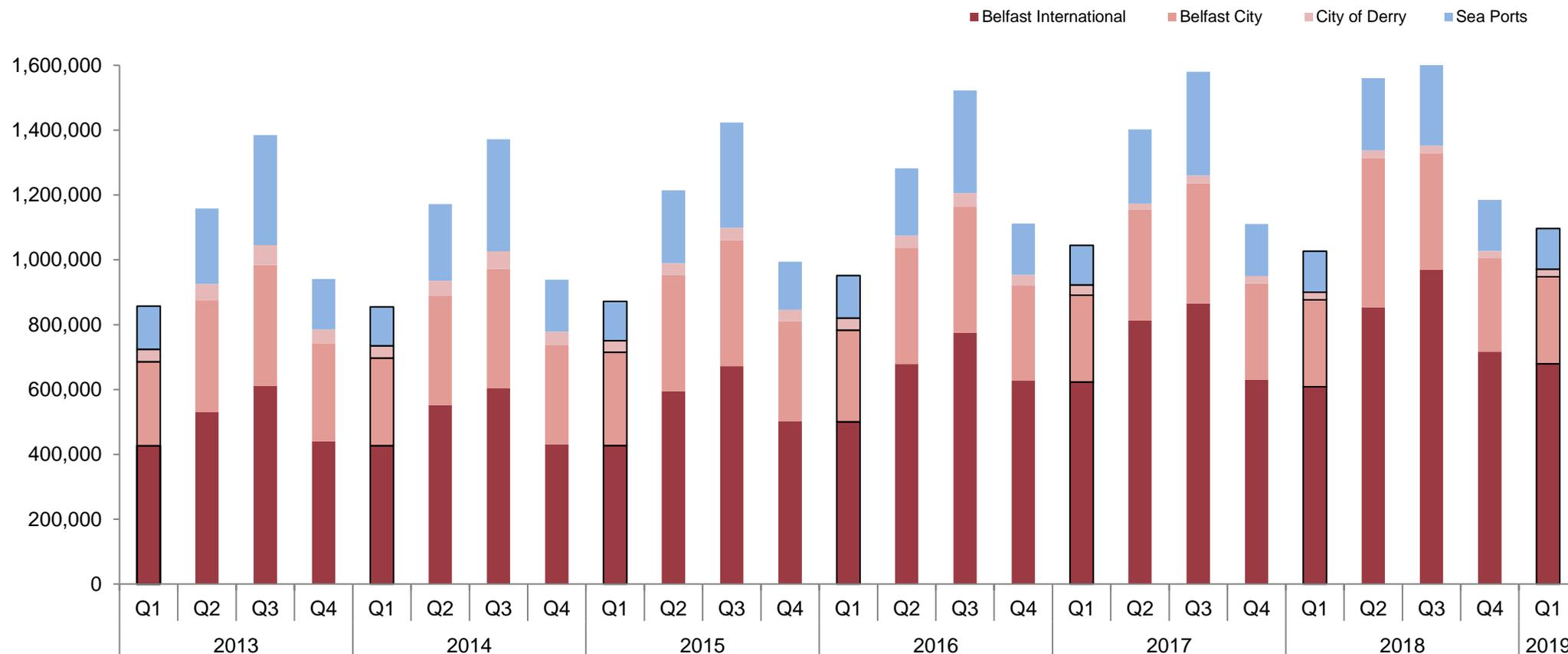


More detailed hotel occupancy statistics are available on our [website](#). Official Statistics for occupancy in guesthouses, bed & breakfasts and guest accommodation and also self catering occupancy can also be found on our [website](#).

Section 3: Passenger activity at Northern 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. The latest combined quarterly data on outgoing passengers are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Quarterly outgoing passengers Northern Ireland ports



The latest quarterly statistics show an increase of 8% in outgoing passengers in the twelve months to March 2019 (5.5 million) compared to the twelve months to March 2018 (5.1 million).

Background notes

1. This report presents a summary of tourism information in the year ending March 2019. More detailed quarterly data is available in the additional tables on our website at this [link](#). It should be noted that 2019 data are provisional until publication of the 2019 annual tourism statistics report in spring 2020.
2. Tourism data is derived from a variety of sources, more information on these sources can also be found at this [link](#). Tourism estimates are designed to provide timely data on tourism activity in Northern Ireland. The estimates may be subject to revision due to improvements to the survey/analysis methodology or the 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. Northern Ireland Tourism statistics have undergone a series of organisational changes and revisions to methodology. Information on the sources, the data quality of each source and any revisions or changes in methodology can be accessed at this [link](#).
3. The production of tourism statistics is conducted in line with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Compliance with the Code gives you confidence that the statistics produced by government departments and public bodies have been prepared by professionally-independent statisticians, free from political pressure; that they are produced using sound methods and are based on reliable data sources; and that they provide insight, support decision-making and inform debate.
4. Tourism statistics have recently undergone an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority. In May 2017 the Office for Statistics Regulation completed their review and confirmed the designation of new National Statistics on:
 - Northern Ireland Annual Tourism Statistics*
 - Northern Ireland Quarterly Tourism Statistics*
 - External Overnight Trips to Northern Ireland*
 - Northern Ireland Domestic Tourism*
 - Northern Ireland Hotel Occupancy*
 - Northern Ireland Local Government District Tourism Statistics*National statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value.
5. Due to the nature of household surveys in Northern Ireland, users should be aware that statistics on overnight trips in Northern Ireland exclude residents aged under 16.
6. Tourism statistics systems are designed to collect information for Northern Ireland as a whole. However, respondents do indicate where they stay during these overnight trips allowing for some analysis at Local Area level. The most recent 2018 results published at this level can be found at this [link](#). The 2019 Local Government results will be published in summer 2020.
7. While the statistics are produced in as timely a way as possible, it is realised that early indicators would be useful. Early tourism indicators are published at this [link](#) and are updated monthly.

8. The estimates in this bulletin are derived from sample surveys and are therefore subject to sampling errors. Sampling errors are determined both by the sample design and by the sample size. Generally speaking, the larger the sample supporting a particular estimate, the smaller the associated sampling error. Confidence intervals around the estimates of all overnight trips in Northern Ireland stands at +/- 4% for the year (associated expenditure at +/- 5%). Note: based on the survey design confidence intervals for domestic tourism trips stands at +/-7% and external trips at +/-4%. Information on confidence intervals in Northern Ireland tourism statistics can be accessed at this [link](#).
9. The vast majority of cruise ships visit Northern Ireland on a single day basis, docking in the morning and then leaving in the evening. Thus under UN definitions cruise ship visits are considered day-trips and excluded from the overnight trips figures outlined in section 1. To address this statistics from [Visit Belfast](#), [Cruise North West](#) and Newry & Mourne Council relating to Warrenpoint port are included. Cruise ships can also drop anchor and tender passengers ashore at other parts of Northern Ireland (Bangor & Portrush).
10. Tourism estimates are designed to provide timely data on tourism activity for Northern Ireland as a whole. The estimates may be subject to revision due to improvements to the survey/analysis methodology or the 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.
11. Follow NISRA on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).
12. We welcome feedback from users on the content, format and relevance of this release.
Feedback can be sent by [email](#).
13. If you would like to be kept up to date on NISRA tourism statistics please join our [mailing list](#).

When you are join the list, we will notify you by email of:

- new NI tourism statistical publications that have been released
- any delays or changes being made to tourism statistical publications
- user engagement exercises

You can be removed from the list at any time.

14. [Household Travel Survey 2018 data issues](#)

Data from the 2018 Household Travel Survey (HTS), provided by Central Statistics Office (CSO), relating to the number of visitors coming to Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland (ROI), **should be considered as interim data that may be subject to future revision**. From Q1 (January to March) 2019, CSO has made changes to its questionnaire that addressed the issues of non-response bias. However, the issues still remain with 2018 data, which means the rolling year estimates are still affected.

Background

In 2018 the Household Travel Survey (HTS) was suspended due to quality issues in the collected data. Against a backdrop of falling response rates, it was observed that there was a non-response issue affecting the survey estimates in 2018. The percentage of HTS survey respondents who did not take overnight trips was much lower than in the equivalent quarters of 2017 and previous years. As a result, the survey weights assigned to those who took overnight trips were much higher than before, which would have led to unprecedented increases in the survey estimates of domestic trips, nights and expenditure.

Changes to methodology

In order to address the non-response bias in the 2018 HTS sample the CSO has adjusted the weights of respondents within each of the 112 cells of the sample design (region, sex and age class), for all four quarters of 2018. The effect of the adjustment procedure is to change the percentage breakdown between people who did and did not take overnight trips, and align it with a forecasted percentage of respondents with and without trips, based on data from the previous six years of the survey.

In this way, the percentage of people in the sample who have taken overnight trips follows a broadly similar, though not identical, pattern to previous years. This has the effect of addressing the non-response bias issue in the sample by reducing the weight assigned to those who took overnight trips. This further has the effect of reducing the estimates of trips, nights and expenditure arising from the HTS compared to the pre-adjustment estimates for 2018.

The estimates arising from this adjustment to the 2018 Household Travel Survey will be reviewed again in the context of the 2019 data. Therefore, the 2018 data should be considered interim and may be subject to future revision.

NISRA quality assessment

NISRA Tourism Statistics has been in liaison with CSO since the issue with the 2018 data became known. Having looked at the issues faced with the underlying data, we have taken the view that the adjustments CSO have made to correct the issue are reasonable and appropriate.

We have looked at past trends as well to assure ourselves that the patterns look correct. For example, the 23% increase in the estimate for trips between 2017 and 2018 compares with a recent 35% increase in trips between 2015 and 2016. The estimate for expenditure has increased by 20%, which compares with an increase of 29% between 2016 and 2017.

Whilst the data has no direct equivalent, we considered results from the 2018 hotel occupancy and found that arrivals from ROI visitors increased by 18% between 2017 and 2018, also indicating a similar increase, albeit for a subsection of visitors.

We also considered the relative importance of the data to overall estimates. Visitors from ROI represent about only 12% of all trips in NI and therefore we have taken this context into account.

A report containing full details of the issues in the HTS, and the interim solution, is available on the CSO website and can be accessed [here](#)**

Conclusion

Following quality checks NISRA feel the data provided by CSO is of suitable quality to report on. We ask users to be aware there is potential for future revision, but we don't feel this is likely to change the overall message of the publication or the key statistics. We advise users that are particularly interested in the number of visitors from ROI to use the figures with caution and look at the patterns over the last few years rather than focussing on short term changes.

If a future revision occur we will make users aware of their impact on the statistics in this publication.

Responsible Statistician:

Mr Stephen Dunne

NISRA Tourism Statistics

Colby House

BELFAST

BT4 2JP

Telephone: 028 9025 5163

E-mail: tourismstatistics@nisra.gov.uk

Media Enquiries:

Press Office, DfE,

Netherleigh, Massey Avenue

BELFAST

BT4 2JP

Telephone: 028 9052 9604

Email: pressoffice@economy-ni.gov.uk