

## Development of Northern Ireland Tourism Statistics

### Background

Northern Ireland Tourism Statistics have undergone a series of organisational changes and revisions to methodology in recent years. This document is intended to provide an overview and explain any resultant breaks in the statistical series.

A review of Northern Ireland tourism statistics was conducted in 2005, shortly after a similar review of UK tourism statistics by Damian Allnut (2004). The NI review can be accessed through the following link -

[http://www.detini.gov.uk/ttc\\_review\\_of\\_tourism\\_statistics\\_final\\_report\\_october\\_2005.pdf?rev=0](http://www.detini.gov.uk/ttc_review_of_tourism_statistics_final_report_october_2005.pdf?rev=0)

The report made numerous recommendations on the methodology of the surveys carried out on tourism statistics, which helped inform a number of changes detailed in this report.

The UK Official Statistics Order also came into force (1<sup>st</sup> April 2009) which brought statistics produced by the then British Tourist Authority within the scope of the terms of the UK Statistics and Registration Services Act (2007). This had the effect of designating GB tourism statistics as “official” statistics, which required them to meet the standards required by the Official Statistics Code of Practice. To ensure that NI tourism statistics also met “official” statistics standards, a new Tourism Statistics branch was established and staffed by NISRA statisticians based in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI).

NISRA took over responsibility for the collection, production and publication of the main NI tourism statistical series from the NI Tourist Board in 2010. Tourism statistics produced by NISRA are required to conform to the principles and protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

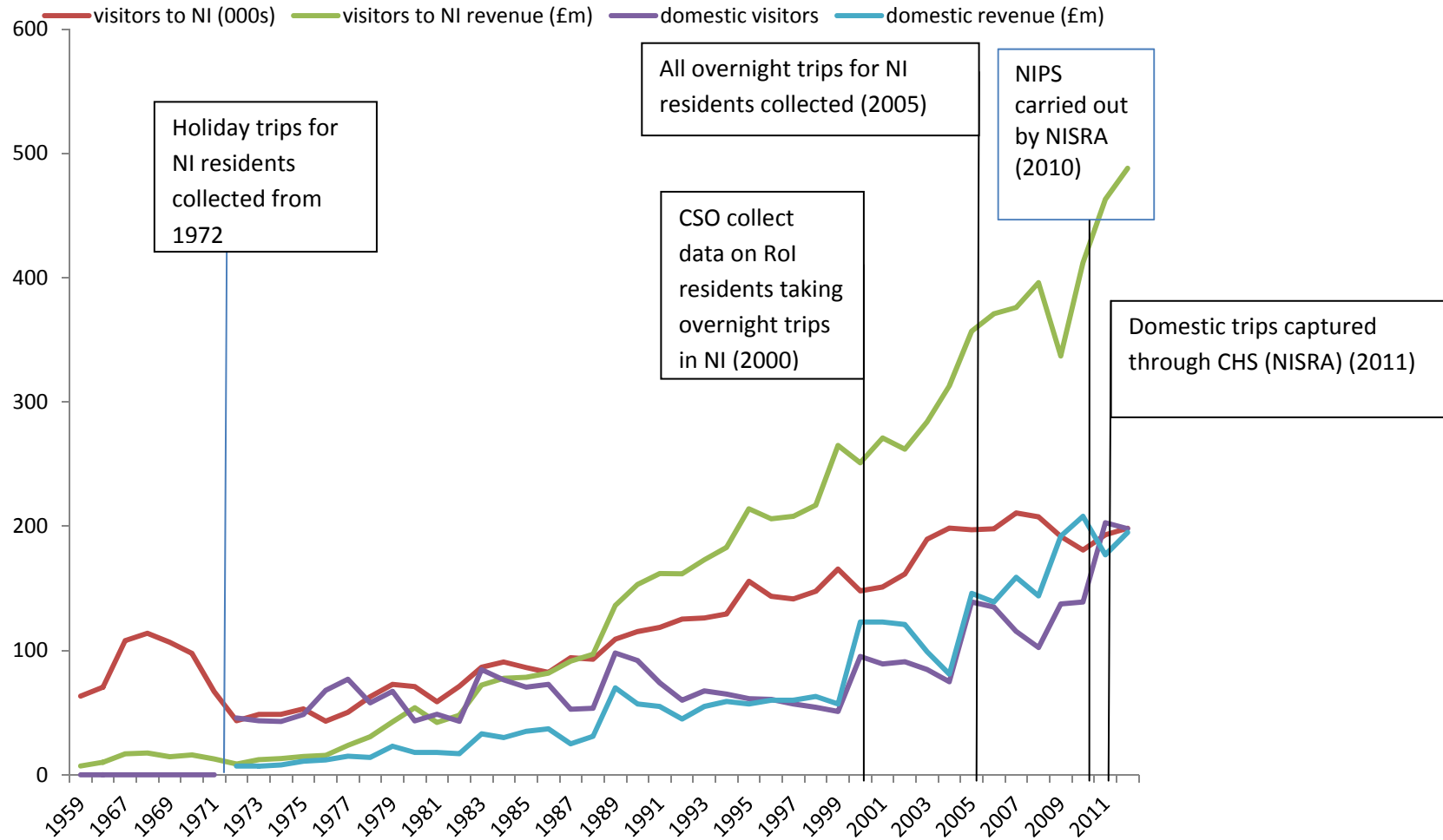
### Trips and Expenditure in Northern Ireland from 1959-2013

Figure 1 shows visitor trips and expenditure in Northern Ireland from 1959-2013. The original series (1959) collected information on GB and overseas visitors to NI exiting at ports and airports. NI residents were first surveyed in 1972, though this was only to measure the number of holiday visits taken. The coverage of this survey was further extended in 2005 to capture all overnight trips taken by NI residents.

In 2000, the Central Statistics Office in ROI began to produce statistics on the number of overnight trips taken by ROI residents in NI, based on a postal survey of residents

(<http://www.cso.ie/en/surveysandmethodology/tourismandtravel/householdtravelsurvey/>).

## Overnight Trips to Northern Ireland, 1959-2012



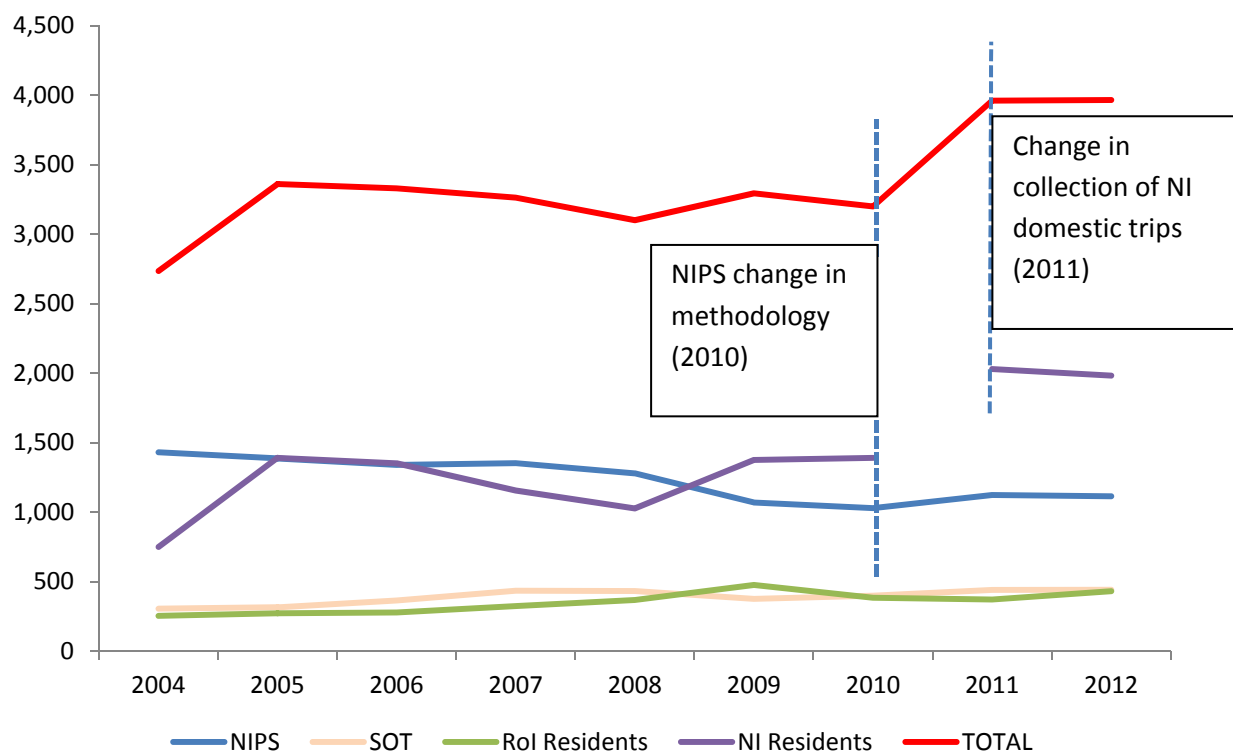
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Joanne Henderson, Tourism Statistics Branch. [joanne.henderson@dfpni.gov.uk](mailto:joanne.henderson@dfpni.gov.uk) 02890 529 585

Figure 2 shows the more recent breaks in the overall series and in the component surveys. A number of methodological changes were introduced in the NIPS in 2010 and in the measure of domestic trips with effect from January 2011. These breaks are both to do with the move to NISRA official statistics.

### Overnight trips in Northern Ireland by source, 2004-2012



### Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NIPS) (2010)

From January 2010, NISRA assumed responsibility for the NIPS. The opportunity was taken to review the sampling methodology given the concerns raised in the NI Review of Tourism Statistics. The old NIPS used a 'quota' based sampling frame, which had a number of limitations, namely interviewer discretion, potential to miss key groups and no count of who or how many people had been missed. The new methodology employed; multi-stage sampling design whereby ports were sampled on a given day and within a given period of the day (known as a 'shift'). Shifts are selected to ensure a balanced representation of mornings and afternoons on weekdays and at weekends over a three month period. Within a shift, certain passengers passing a hypothetical interview line are systematically chosen for interview at fixed intervals from a random start.

Two systematic sample intervals applied at each shift to all passengers crossing the interview line. A short and long questionnaire are administered to every 5<sup>th</sup> and (from January 2013) every 20<sup>th</sup> passenger identified as being an overnight visitor to NI and/or the Republic of Ireland (RoI).

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At the same time, NISRA also made changes to the definitions used in NIPS to follow those set out in the 2008 International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics (IRTS2008).

The main changes in definitions are set out below

- Usual environment – excluding all routine overnight trips taken on weekly or frequent basis
- Reason for visit – due to specific needs of NITB ‘short breaks’ are included which is a variation to those listed in IRTS2008
- Incentive trip – these are included under Business trips rather than ‘holiday/leisure and recreation’ as recommended in IRTS2008 as NITB promote incentive trips under ‘business tourism’
- Mode of transport – mode on which the greatest distance travelled within NI/Rol

The old NIPS used monthly data from the individual air and sea ports to weight the survey. The new NIPS uses official CAA monthly air passenger figures and the sea passengers continue to be provided by the individual sea ports. The other main change was a move from paper based questionnaire to NISRA’s Computer Assisted Personal Interviews using tablet technology.

NISRA received technical assistance from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in assessing the impact of the above changes, which concluded that the time series for visitor numbers, nights and expenditure should be formed using the estimates from the old survey up to Q4 2009 and the estimates from the new survey from Q1 2010 onwards. However, all published tables and charts showing the top level time series should indicate the time of which the change in survey methodology occurred. The report also recommended that time series for country of residence and purpose of visit were not sufficiently reliable to allow comparisons between the old and new series.

More information on the change in the NIPS methodology and the benefits and implications can be accessed at <http://www.detini.gov.uk/index/what-we-do/deti-stats-index/tourism-statistics/stats-overseas-visitors/stats-nips-methodology.htm>

### **NI Domestic Overnight Trips within NI (2011)**

The NI Tourism Statistics Review (2005) recommended that the value and volume of domestic travel within NI would benefit from being part of a household survey with a well-controlled and managed random probability sample. NISRA’s Continuous Household Survey provides such a vehicle, being based on a simple random sample of the household population (<http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/survey.asp2.htm>). A ‘tourism’ module was added to the survey from April 2010 (the CHS is conducted on a financial year) with the view to start producing official statistics on NI residents making tourism related trips within NI from January 2011. This also meant that the CHS was carried out simultaneously with the UKTS for 3 quarters to allow comparisons to be made.

The benefits of using the CHS to gather information are larger sample size; face-to-face contact and NI specific source. The CHS is a larger sample frame than the UKTS was for NI specific information. The interviews are carried out face-to-face in the CHS which allow more interaction between the

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interviewer and respondent. The results from the CHS are weighted on a monthly basis to the NI population by age group and sex, this means the weights sum across the sample file to the NI population on a monthly basis. While the results are still subject to sampling variability, NISRA is able to provide a confidence interval around the estimate to help inform users of the variability. The benefits of the NI specific datafile also mean that there are no UK biases on the weighting of data.

When the overnight questions were added to the CHS, NISRA also added questions on day trips taken by NI residents. This was not previously available from the old survey and sits well in the tourism module of the CHS. Information is also available on why NI residents did not take an overnight trip which can be used to quality assure the data.

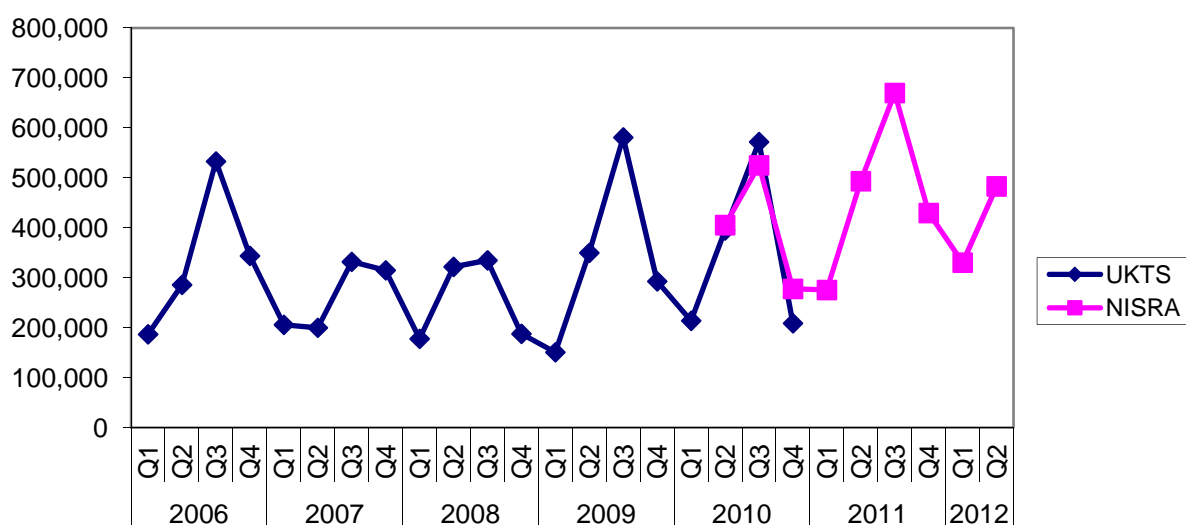
Data from the 9 month period during which the surveys ran in parallel were used to assess changes in the estimates and the possibility of combining the 2 time-series. Examination of the results from the parallel run of both surveys indicated that there were some inconsistencies in the spend data.

Results from the 9 month period during which the surveys ran in parallel are presented in the below table

#### Results from parallel run of the UKTS and CHS Q2 2010-Q4 2010

		Q2 2010	Q3 2010	Q4 2010	Q2-Q4 2010
<b>Trips</b>	UKTS (old)	395,000	572,000	209,000	1,176,000
	CHS (new)	405,548	525,178	278,001	1,208,727
	Difference	+10,548	-46,822	+69,001	32,727
	<i>% difference</i>	+3	-8	+33	+3
<b>Nights</b>	UKTS (old)	659,000	1,386,000	372,000	2,417,000
	CHS (new)	720,841	1,634,027	548,274	2,903,142
	Difference	+61,841	+248,027	+176,274	486,142
	<i>% difference</i>	+9	+18	+47	+20
<b>Spend</b>	UKTS (old)	49	70	49	168
	CHS (new)	40	43	26	109
	Difference	-9	-27	-23	-59
	<i>% difference</i>	-18	-37	-47	-35

## NI Domestic Overnight trips taken within NI 2006-2012



NISRA does not recommend combining the time series between the two surveys based on the above differences. Further investigations on whether this represents a statistically significant break are ongoing.

2010 Domestic tourism estimates using the UKTS data were published in April 2011. It is recommended that UKTS data should be used until December 2010 and CHS data should be used from January 2011.

### Other Changes in reporting the NI Tourism Statistics series

In May 2013, NISRA held a user consultation exercise regarding methodology on Tourism Statistics, this led to some slight changes in the reporting of the results. Since July 2013, NISRA has combined the estimates of visitors from the NIPs, CHS with the VIAS (those exiting RoI ports who spent a night in NI) and the HTS (RoI visitors to NI) and publish these on a quarterly basis. These publications also include overall cruise ship data as supplied by Visit Belfast and Derry Visitor Convention Bureau. NISRA also publishes the rolling year data alongside the year to date.

In the quarterly publications, NISRA has included a combined confidence interval for the overall estimate. As confidence intervals are not provided for the estimates from the SOTS or for the HTS, NISRA has estimated these assuming the SOTS follow the same trend as the NIPS and the HTS as the CHS.

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