Reporting Document

March 2020

Northern Ireland Domestic Tourism Strategy

Whiterocks Beach, County Antrim

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Introduction

The domestic market is a critical part of Northern Ireland's tourism economy. In 2018 the domestic tourism accounted for 44 percent of all overnight trips taken in Northern Ireland and 31 percent of spend.[1] In real terms this equates to approximately 2.2 million overnight trips and an estimated expenditure of £300 million by Northern Ireland residents.

As a result, the domestic market generates an important contribution to total tourism revenue. Furthermore, the domestic market has a significant positive impact to the regional and seasonal distribution of tourism.

Whilst attracting international visitors from an expanding portfolio of markets and growing the Republic of Ireland market will be a key focus for future growth, the importance of developing and sustaining the domestic market alongside these activities cannot be underestimated.

In recent years the Northern Ireland tourism sector has invested in the development of clear and actionable strategies designed to drive growth from international markets and the Republic of Ireland. Underpinning these strategies is a rich and textured understanding of the consumer landscape, and the specific segments that Northern Ireland is seeking to target and win.

Set against this backdrop, it was important and logical to also determine a clear strategy designed to develop and grow the opportunities present in the domestic market.

In early 2019 a dedicated Steering Group was established to oversee a review of the domestic market and the development of a strategy for growth into the future. In order to complete this work an extensive programme of work was undertaken. This encompassed the following:

- a detailed review and analysis of existing market intelligence
- consultation with key stakeholders from industry, local councils and Tourism Northern Ireland
- a large scale quantitative and qualitative research study within the domestic market
- the development of a new segmentation strategy and collaboration with the Domestic Market Steering Group, Tourism Northern Ireland and the Tourism Northern Ireland Board on the development of future strategy

This reporting document details the key outputs of the review, alongside the future strategy for the domestic market in Northern Ireland. Specifically, it outlines a situational analysis of the current state of the domestic market, sets out the scale of ambition for the future, details the new segmentation solution, and outlines the strategy and key actions required to support the future development and growth opportunities.

[1] Tourism Performance Jan to Dec 2018 – Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)

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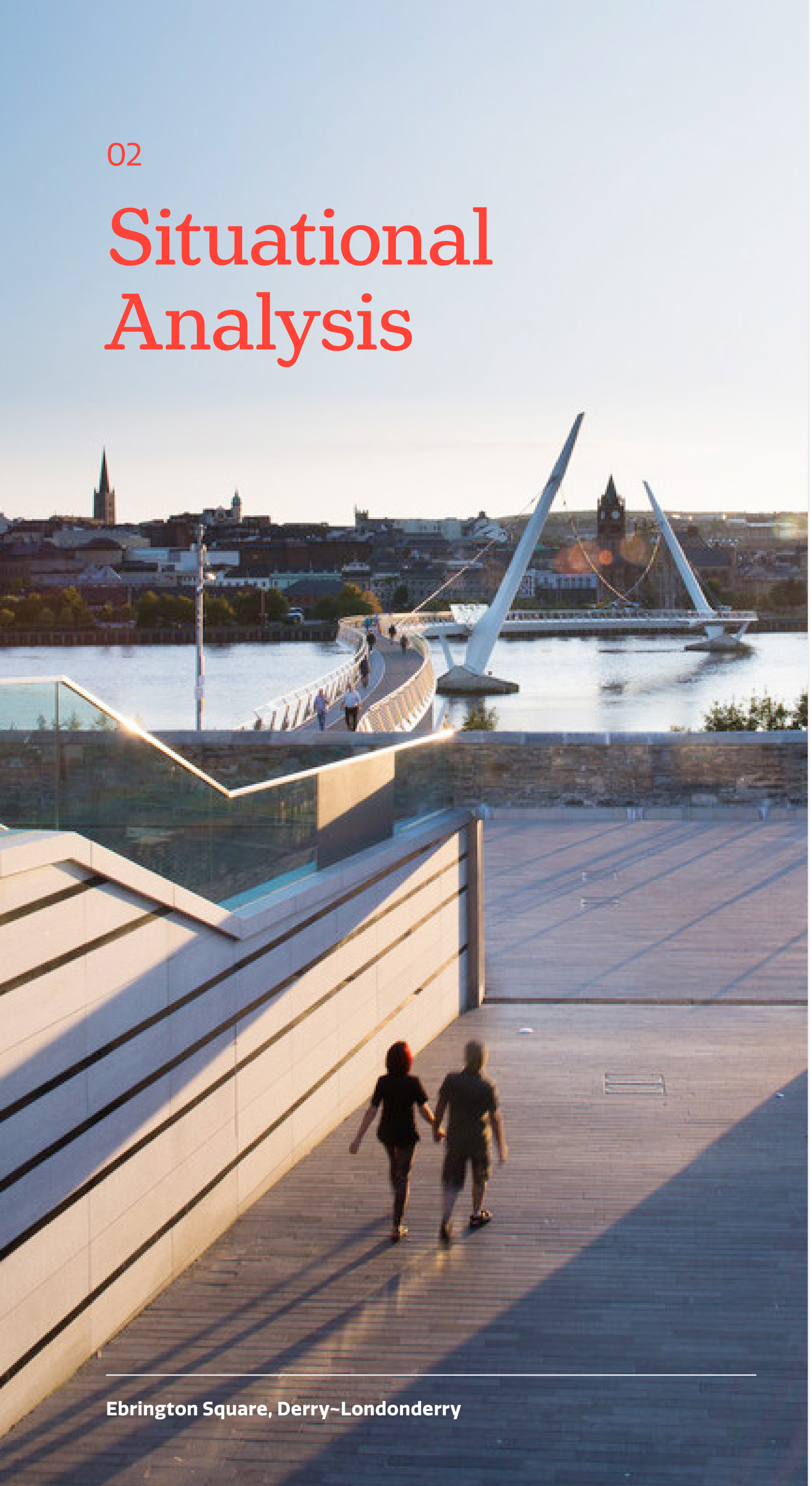
Situational Analysis



Ebrington Square, Derry~Londonderry

The importance and future potential of the domestic market

As is the case with many tourism destinations, the domestic market within Northern Ireland makes a vital contribution to the overall tourism sector, and to its wider progress and development.

NISRA reports that domestic tourism market accounts for 44 percent of all trips made in Northern Ireland and 31 percent of all revenue generated, making it the single largest contributor to the Northern Ireland tourism economy (estimated expenditure of £300M in 2018).

Its importance is only further reinforced when one considers its current and potential regional and seasonal impact. For example, in some Local Authority areas the domestic market can account for up to 65 percent of visitors. Additional domestic travel tends to better distributed throughout the calendar year relative to overseas markets, supporting a more sustainable sector year-round.

Additionally, it could be argued, that despite largely positive trends there may be a major opportunity to drive accelerated growth from the domestic market.

Nearly two thirds of the overnight trips made by Northern Ireland residents in 2018 (64% or 3.8 million) were taken outside Northern Ireland. The majority of these trips were made to either Great Britain (24 percent) or the Republic of Ireland (35 percent). Given these destinations are proximate to Northern Ireland and in many instances offer similar experiences it is fair to hypothesise that there is an opportunity to retain a significant number of these visitors in Northern Ireland and thus increase visitor volume and value.

Given these facts, and the obvious importance of the contribution of the domestic market, one can be certain that it will be a key component of success for Northern Ireland's tourism sector in the future.

Performance

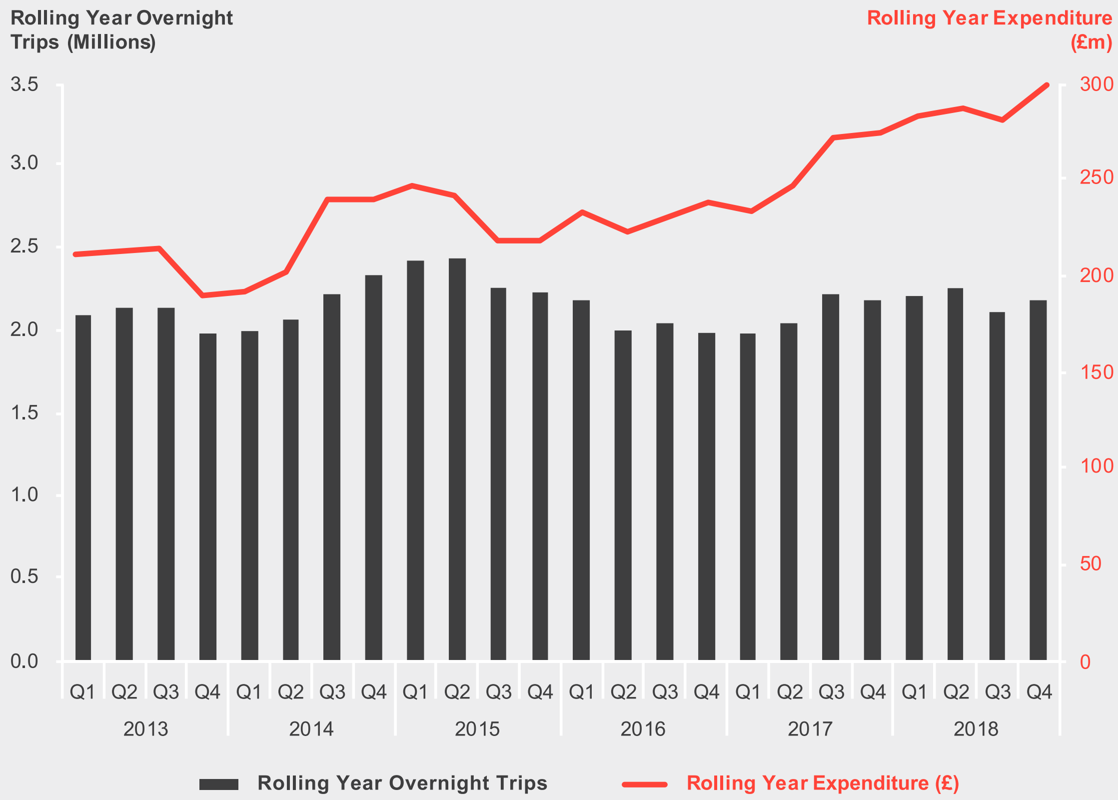
Data indicates that the number of domestic overnight trips has fluctuated since 2011. Overall over the period 2011 to 2018 the number of domestic overnight trips grew by 7 percent.

In more recent years, 2017 and 2018[2] the number of trips being taken by Northern Ireland resident has stabilised at nearly 2.2 million trip per annum. This represents 44 percent of the total number of trips taken in Northern Ireland.

In terms of revenue in both the long and short term the estimated expenditure has trended upwards. Over the period 2011 to 2018 the domestic market delivered 68 percent growth. Notably 2018 saw a 11 percent increase in spend by the domestic market versus 2017.

[2] Source: Tourism Performance Jan to Dec 2018 – NISRA

Rolling 12 months NI domestic overnight trips and associated expenditure within NI, Q1 2013–Q4 2018



However, notwithstanding the increase in expenditure, the relative spend of the domestic market versus out-of-state visitors is significantly less, with an average spend per trip of £137 vs £238, a difference of 43 percent. This statistic is largely as a consequence of the length of stay of domestic trips (2.1 nights) when compared with the average 'out of state trips' (4.2 nights). In real terms the average domestic spend per night is £66, ahead of the average out of state spend per night of £57. This further reinforces the value and importance of the domestic market.

Key macro-economic factors

In assessing the current and future potential of the domestic market it is important to identify the key macro-economic factors. These key factors are identified as follows:

Population profile: The population of Northern Ireland is forecast to grow by 85,800 over the period 2018-2028.[3] Perhaps more important is the change in age profile of the market, with a growth of over 25 percent in people over 65 over this period. This is an important factor when one considers the type of experiences to be developed.

Economic landscape: The Northern Ireland economy has demonstrated steady growth in recent years. Since Q2 2013 there has only been one quarter in which the Northern Ireland economy did not grow.[4] Additionally, June 2019 saw employment at a record high. However, real wage growth is expected to be modest due to inflation and people in Northern Ireland have the lowest disposable income of any region in the UK. While household income is set to increase, value for money will continue to be a factor when considering a domestic break.

Consumer confidence: One of the consequences of Brexit is a marginal decline in consumer confidence in Q3 2019.[5] However, it is still above the Q3 2018 confidence levels.

Underlying sentiment would seem to be somewhat fragile with one in four consumers feeling their finances had deteriorated in the past year and the same number stating they think their financial position will worsen over the next 12 months.

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[3] NISRA Population Projections Oct 2019
[4] Northern Ireland Composite Economic Index Oct 2019 (NISRA)
[5] Danske Bank NI Consumer Confidence Report Q3 2019

Castlederg Castle, County Tyrone

On one level this is a cause for concern as Northern Ireland residents may not choose to take short breaks. However, it may also be argued that consumer sentiment may encourage people to take more domestic trips rather than out of state breaks. With this in mind it will be important that consumer sentiment and how it impacts, positively or negatively, on travel is closely monitored.

Competitive Context

The key competitive set for the domestic market is the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. As previously detailed, 64 percent of all trips taken outside of Northern Ireland in 2018 were made to either Great Britain (24 percent) or the Republic of Ireland (35 percent).

More specifically, in the last two years 46 percent of Northern Ireland residents have visited the Republic of Ireland and 29 percent have visited England. Scotland and Wales have lower levels of visitation at 15 and 2 percent respectively. This is further affirmed when one considers that in terms of future planning, 32 percent of Northern Ireland residents are actively planning to visit to the Republic of Ireland and 21 percent to England. Meanwhile 25 percent of people are actively planning a break in Northern Ireland.[6]

In pursuing growth within the domestic market, it will be imperative that the domestic tourism proposition can compete and win against these key competitors.

Consumer Context

Overall, Northern Ireland is held in high esteem as a short break destination within the domestic market. Based on a dedicated study conducted as a part of this review, it was determined that Northern Ireland was viewed as positive as the Republic of Ireland and had a stronger profile than Great Britain. In particular Northern Ireland was viewed as offering better value for money than Great Britain, and significantly more so than the Republic of Ireland.

In terms of interest, intent and planning, key metrics for Northern Ireland are improving, with all aspects strengthening over the last five years.[7] Most notably 'active planning', which provides the strongest indication that a booking will be made, and trip will occur, has strengthened. However, it is important to note that in spite of these positive metrics Northern Ireland is outperformed by the Republic of Ireland on all key measures.

The primary needs of the domestic consumer is rooted in 'taking time out and enjoying a break from routine life', and in doing so, having quality time with the people they are travelling with (spouse, family, friends etc).

In terms of activities, the outdoors (coastal touring/beaches, houses/castles/garden, enjoying the natural environment), food and shopping dominate key activities that Northern Irish residents engage in when taking overnight trips in Northern Ireland. Across the board, the importance of good food and drink is firmly at the fore of consideration and interest.

[6] Consumer Intelligence NI – Kantar Millward Brown May 2018
[7] Consumer Intelligence NI – Kantar Millward Brown May 2018

Dark Hedges, County Antrim

Encouragingly, there are no major barriers impeding the domestic market from taking a break in Northern Ireland. However, approximately one in five consumers indicate they are just not 'motivated' to travel. Part of the lack of motivation relates to the belief that taking a break in Northern Ireland 'isn't really getting away' – although this is a view held by the minority of residents. Breaking embedded inertia represents a significant opportunity to drive growth within the domestic market.

Communications Context

The current overall consumer perception of Northern Ireland as a holiday / short break destination is near the highest levels on record – indicating a strong positive consumer disposition towards the Northern Ireland 'brand'.

This is further supported by largely positive scores in terms of satisfaction levels of domestic consumers who have taken and holiday / short break overnight stay in Northern Ireland.[8]

Recent share of voice (media spend has weakened and it would appear the competitive landscape is intensifying. However, communication efficacy would appear to be strong. Set against this background developing and delivering highly focused and relevant communication to the domestic audience will be vital in order to drive growth within the market.

Threats

However, in spite of the growth in revenue and the recent stabilisation in the number of overnight trips, the domestic market cannot be taken for granted.

The competitive environment is intensifying. Most notably, Fáilte Ireland, the tourism development authority in the Republic of Ireland, have increased their advertising expenditure in Northern Ireland, and have announced significant capital expenditure plans for product and experience development.

Furthermore, the Northern Ireland tourism economy will be impacted by myriad effects arising from Brexit – some known (e.g. currency) and some unknown (e.g. Government investment in NI; potential recession and impact on tourism SMEs; taxation policy, etc.).

While specific outcomes cannot yet be known there is a possibility that Brexit may lead to a weaker inbound market from ROI and a greater reliance on the domestic market.

Key conclusion

While the future would appear to hold both challenges and opportunities, there can be certainty that the domestic market will be a key component for the success of the tourism sector in Northern Ireland. With this in mind a focused and dedicated strategy to enable the growth of the domestic market is of vital importance to the overarching Northern Ireland tourism economy.

[8] Visitor Attitudes Survey 2018 (day trippers and overnight stays)

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Domestic Market Growth Strategy

Domestic market growth targets to 2030 (vs 2019)

24%

growth in trips

31%

growth in spend

As outlined earlier in this document the importance of the domestic market in terms of revenue, employment, regionality, seasonality and indeed the progress and development of Northern Ireland is clear.

In addition to this, in recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of hotel rooms (with hotel bedroom stock reaching record levels). Set against this background it will be important to continue to develop and maintain a strong domestic base to ensure high occupancy levels throughout Northern Ireland's accommodation set.

While there will be a key focus on out of state markets for growth it will be vital that the domestic market is developed and potential is realised. It is with this outlook and intent that a strategy for growth for has been developed.

Scale of ambition

The Northern Ireland tourism industry has ambitions to achieve nearly £1.3 billion in revenue by 2025 and £2 billion by 2030. This represents an increase of 36% and 112% respectively versus the forecasted 2019 revenue figure.

While much of the growth in revenue will be derived from out of state markets, with North America, Mainland Europe and 'other overseas' markets being key drivers of this growth, the contribution of the domestic market will remain significant.

Given the domestic market is likely to fluctuate less, and given that it is less susceptible to broader macro-economic forces, this strategy envisages a steady growth rate of two percent per annum in trips and 2.5 percent growth in revenue.

This level of growth would deliver 12.6 percent growth in trips and a 16 percent growth in revenue by 2025, delivering an estimated £284 million in revenue from the domestic market (22 percent of all tourism spend).

Looking to 2030, this growth trajectory would result in an overall increase of 24 percent in trips versus 2019 and a 31 percent growth in spend (totaling £321 million annual spend by 2030).

The growth target that has been set is considered to be ambitious but achievable. It is also recognised that a strong and vibrant domestic market will be a critical foundation from which Northern Ireland can develop and grow in international tourism markets, whilst also ensuring that the social and economic benefits of tourism are enjoyed across the whole region, all year round.

Consumer focus

As part of this review, a detailed quantitative study of the market, and the Northern Ireland consumer was completed. This study examined the following key dimensions:

- Northern Ireland consumers' attitudes and motivations towards short breaks generally
- Their perceptions of Northern Ireland and its key competitors (Republic of Ireland and Great Britain) as short break destinations
- Key past and likely future behaviours with respect to short breaks and
- Means and triggers through which Northern Ireland could influence future consumer decisions and actions

Arising from this study a new consumer segmentation model was developed. This model defines the overall consumer market, identifying six distinct segments, three of which have been determined as priority segments. These three segments represent the best opportunity to drive growth within the domestic market. An overview of all segments is summarised as follows.

30%

of domestic holidaymakers are Aspiring Families

Size and description of domestic holidaymaker segments

Comfort Seekers (13%)

- Seeking safe, secure, easy to get to and easy to organise short breaks
- Need to feel welcome
- Like familiar places where they can relax
- Love nature, culture and enjoy engaging locals
- Care for the environment and are interested in sustainability
- Active online but limited / little use of social media

Demographics: **Older, more female, C2DEF, older kids 16+**

Estimated annual spend: **£822**

Pragmatists (13%)

- Inclined to be seeking value (price focused) but also want quality (balanced decision makers)
- Like to relax and need to feel welcome
- Have a focus on enjoying good food
- Active researchers – gather information from a variety of sources
- Active on social media

Demographics: **Female bias, older (av. age 45), older children, even social class split**

Estimated annual spend: **£964**

Aspiring Families (30%)

- Strong family focus
- Activities very important (all types, variety of interests)
- Need activities to suit children, as well as the whole family
- Planners – do a lot of research
- Pay attention to price, seeking value
- Consider themselves bargain hunters but not afraid to pay for quality (if worth it)

Demographics: **Most likely 35–44, even social class split, have younger children (under 16)**

Estimated annual spend: **£1,360**

Short Break Enthusiasts (14%)

- Love short breaks – important part of their lives
- Active planners – research in detail
- Actively write reviewers online
- Seeking to engage with people and culture
- Will indulge themselves
- Big food emphasis
- Quality and location key

Demographics: **Even gender split, older (av. age 54), even social class split**

Estimated annual spend: **£1,020**

Natural Quality Seekers (15%)

- Quality of accommodation important
- Nature lovers, enjoy the outdoors
- Preference for gentle activities
- Sustainability important
- Enjoy planning and like to have clear itineraries
- Short breaks important part of their lives

Demographics: **Older (av. age 55) more likely to be male, ABC1, older kids**

Estimated annual spend: **£1,238**

Social Instagrammers (15%)

- Buzz and atmosphere seekers
- Seeking nightlife, great pubs etc.
- More likely to use AirBnB
- Short breaks important part of life
- Want to broaden the mind
- Connectivity very important (Wifi, 4G)
- Getting a good deal and engaging in activities deemed more important than finding great accommodation

Demographics: **Youngest segment with 29% aged 18–24yrs and 26% aged 25–34yrs. Least likely to have children. More likely to be female, slight C2DE bias.**

Estimated annual spend: **£1,006**

Note: Estimated spend was determined by each segments estimated household expenditure on short breaks within Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland or Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales) in a calendar year.

Although demographics have been included in this summary it is important to note that the segmentation strategy was developed with a focus on the key needs, motivations and behaviours of consumers within the domestic market. By looking at the market through this lens it is possible to target priority segments in the most compelling manner, tapping into their key motivations, meeting their most important needs and acting on their most likely behaviours.

Identifying the priority segments

In order to identify the domestic segments that have the greatest potential an evaluation was conducted using three key criteria:

1. Scale – the size of the segment

2. Value – the estimated level of spend on short breaks by each segment

3. Propensity – general positivity towards Northern Ireland as a short break destination and the stated likelihood of taking a break in Northern Ireland in the future

Using these key criteria, an evaluation model, illustrated below, was applied.

	1. Overall Segment Value	2. Feasibility
Assessment	What is the financial potential of the segments?	Positivity towards NI visit likelihood
	- Segment size and annual spend - Segment potential	- Purchase funnels - Driver vs NI rating differential + competitive differential

Based on a correlation between the potential value of each respective segment, and the current feasibility/likelihood of the Northern Ireland market being able to attract each of these segments, a prioritisation was created. This in effect created a ranking of the segments from which three priority segments emerged, detailed as follows:

1. Natural Quality Seekers

2. Aspiring Families

3. Social Instagrammers

These three segments combined represent 60 percent of the market and rank the highest in terms of estimated spend. Critically all three segments have a positive perception of Northern Ireland as a short break destination and are open to taking future domestic trips.

As one would expect from a segmentation strategy each priority segment is identifiable (in the real world) and distinguishable.
In summary the priority segments comprise of a large 'family' segment (a mainstay of any domestic market), a younger segment more focused on urban experiences and social activities and a more mature segment that has a particular love for nature, the outdoors and demands high quality accommodation.

Encouragingly, the qualitative research conducted as part of this study suggests that Northern Ireland has many of the key components required to meet the needs and motivations of these segments (although the Republic of Ireland is a significant competitor in each area for the Aspiring Families segment given their product and experience offering, e.g. Centre Parcs). It is the positioning, communication, and bundling of the propositions that the strategy will need to address if the sector is to successfully grow amongst these segments.

Alignment with international and Republic of Ireland priority segments

Looking towards the future the tourism sector in Northern Ireland will be seeking to compete and win in a number of markets and with a range of segments. It is therefore important to understand both the differences and similarities that exist amongst segments in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and international markets.

From an alignment perspective, although there are important nuances there are key themes that unite the range of segments. These are summarised as follows:

Nature & Outdoors	Great Escapers (intl.) Active Maximisers (RoI) Natural Quality Seekers (NI)
Culture & Heritage	Culturally Curious (intl.) Open Minded Explorers (RoI) Open to Ideas (RoI)
Socialising & Nightlife	Social Energisers (intl.) Social Instagrammers (NI)

It is important to note that the above summary does not indicate that each of the segments are strictly siloed by interest, e.g. Active Maximisers will enjoy urban nightlife while Culturally Curious will be motivated by the natural environment etc. What is important to note, is that by Northern Ireland building out its product and experience offering in line with these key themes the destination can simultaneously appeal to key segment but on a domestic, island of Ireland and international front.

The only marginal outlier is the Aspiring Families segment within the domestic market. In this instance they represent the only dedicated 'family' segment being targeted. However, as previously mentioned families represent a core element of all domestic markets and it will be important for Northern Ireland to have a clear focus on this segment in order to grow and sustain the domestic market.

A strategy for growth

In order to deliver the desired growth for the domestic market, the strategy must focus on four key pillars, illustrated as follows:

As a consequence, the tourism sector must:

1. Deliver effective communications through a range of channels that resonate with and influence the domestic audience to holiday/take a short break in Northern Ireland
2. Continue to build out and improve new and existing tourism experiences, attractions and events
3. Build resident engagement, pride and advocacy for Northern Ireland as a tourism destination.
4. Collaborate effectively and build connections at all levels (agency, industry, council etc.) to ensure the progress and development of domestic tourism offering in a coherent and focused way

Effective Communications

Overarching objective: *Deliver effective communications that resonate with and influence the domestic audience to holiday/take a short break in Northern Ireland.*

The review of the domestic market determined that although resident in Northern Ireland, people often had significant gaps in their knowledge in terms of the overall tourism offering, the range of accommodation options, festivals, events and 'things to do' more generally.

This gap in their knowledge often lead to inertia with respect to taking breaks in Northern Ireland. This inertia must be overcome through compelling and well targeted communications, delivered through a range of channels, both in paid and earned media.

Key Initiatives

1. Focused communications centred on priority segment passion points

In simple terms it will be important that future communications content is centred on the known interest and passion points of priority segments. At a high level this will result in dialling up communications for accommodation, food & drink, outdoor/natural environment, whole family activities, soft adventure, urban culture and nightlife.

These communications will be a focal point for all marketing activities (agency and industry) and be designed with the direct objective of breaking inertia and driving consideration and booking of breaks.

The new Northern Ireland experience brand, Embrace a Giant Spirit, will be central to future communications. Although the brand was designed primarily with international markets in mind, it should be nuanced and leveraged so that it can have maximum resonance and traction for the domestic market.

2. Review of domestic communications architecture

Within the domestic market, consumers are less inclined to rely on traditional channels (TV, radio) for information relating to short breaks and holidays within Northern Ireland; they are far more likely to act on personal recommendations, and place more weight in trusted online reviews, and user generated content from key social media platforms.

Furthermore, from a content perspective, while the presentation of established tourism icons and destinations are likely to have impact in overseas markets, how they are presented to the domestic market, who may already be familiar with them (and may have already experienced them) needs consideration.

Set against this background it will be important that the overarching communications architecture, how and what is communicated, is reviewed to ensure that relevant and relatable content is presented to the domestic audience at the right time and in the right place.

The review should also extend to the presentation of content, particularly digital, from local councils. Based on the review completed, it would appear that residents will often reference local council websites when researching locations and therefore the presentation of content on these platforms must be optimised and refreshed on an ongoing basis. In particular information relating to 'things to do', 'food and drink', accommodation and ease of access should be highlighted.

Adentureland, County Fermanagh

In addition to this, efforts need to be made to ensure greater co-ordination of communications on a domestic basis. This is of particular importance for festivals and events. Given the small landmass of Northern Ireland it is likely that events and festivals will overlap in terms of their timings. However, efforts should be made to minimise this overlap and ensure that there is something of interest happening throughout the year that can be promoted to the domestic audience.

Lastly, from a communications perspective the convenience of taking a break in Northern Ireland should be promoted and intertwined within communications. In consultation with priority segments this is emerging as a competitive advantage versus other destinations that could be leveraged.

3. Developing peoples' knowledge of the regional offer

As referenced earlier, Northern Ireland residents have gaps in their knowledge with respect to the depth and breadth of Northern Ireland's tourism offering. By default, residents tend to be less motivated by well known attractions in their own market, and have a desire to find and experience hidden tourism gems, whether it be a new pop-up restaurant or café, a remote or largely unknown beach, scenic and off-the-beaten track walks and drives, or 'quaint village' surprises.

Many of these 'hidden gems' are located regionally. As part of an effective future communications strategy, there must be a deliberate effort to dial up lesser-known, emerging attractions and events throughout the regions of Northern Ireland. This will support greater regional distribution of domestic tourism while also enabling the presentation of new experiences that have the capacity to motivate Northern Ireland residents.

Compelling Experiences, Attractions and Events

Overarching objective: *build out and improve new and existing tourism experiences, attractions and events*

Core to the success of the tourism sector will be the quality, depth and breadth of compelling experiences and events. The development of Northern Ireland's tourism offering will not only position it for success in international markets, but also act as a base to drive domestic tourism spend.

Key Initiatives

1. Consideration of the domestic market in product development strategy

It will be important that the domestic segmentation strategy is considered from a product development perspective. In simple terms, this means that product development and innovation strategies should be influenced by key segments' interests and motivations, and indeed take account of the aging profile of the domestic market.

In addition to the above, a review of the current offering for the family segment should be considered and benchmarked against key competitors, particularly the Republic of Ireland. This review indicated that the tourism proposition for families in Northern Ireland may be a particular area that requires further development, and this should be evaluated separately in more depth.

2. Development and promotion of 36-hour propositions

One of the key opportunities presented by the domestic market is to convert 'day trips' to overnight stays. This is a means to generate significant incremental revenue.

In order facilitate this a range of '36-hour' propositions (day, night, next day) should be developed and promoted. These propositions should be underpinned by a keen price/value for money offering and developed in collaboration with accommodation providers, event owners and leading food and drink establishments.

3. 'Day tripper' value strategy

Although hard to measure, undoubtedly 'day trippers' are a significant part of domestic tourism. While efforts will be made to convert day trips to overnight stays efforts should also be made to generate as much value from day trips as possible.

Set against this background a dedicated strategy designed to maxmise value from day trippers, i.e. maxmise spend while on trip (attractions, food, retail etc.) should be put in place.

4. Continue to develop and promote Northern Ireland's food and drink offering

The review identified Northern Ireland's food and drink offering as a particular area that has been transformed in recent years. Residents now recognise that the food and drink offering in Northern Ireland is thriving, diverse and a key aspect of what the region offers.

However, given its importance across the segments, and the stiff competition from the Republic of Ireland, this needs to be developed further. In particular this should focus on evolving the domestic perception beyond quality restaurants for evening meals and generating greater awareness of day time casual dining and highlighting the broader range of high-quality food innovators – gastropubs, cafes, premium deli, international cuisine etc.

Initiatives such as the all island 'Taste the Island' programme, designed to promote the island of Ireland's extensive catalogue of food and drink experiences to domestic and international visitors should be leveraged to support the desired positioning and perception of Northern Ireland's food and drink offering.

Separate to this, from a product development point of view, the development of a breakfast brunch culture/scene should be explored. This a dimension of the food offering in Northern Ireland that is currently deemed to be weak and an increasing important motivator for overnight stays.

Lastly a strategy to support and enhance the development of markets and street food offerings (both on temporary e.g. The Big Grill Festival [Dublin] and permanent basis, e.g.], St. George's Market [Belfast] should be considered.

5. Development of the night-time economy

For all markets, the domestic market included, the continued development of the night time economy in urban centres and beyond will be important.

For the majority of residents 'day trips' are a viable alternative to overnight stays it is therefore important that there is enough to encourage Northern Ireland residents to stay overnight. Product development to ensure Northern Ireland's night time proposition is compelling will be important and requires attention.

Additionally, it will be important that 'what to do at night' is effectively communicated and linked to / positioned as an extension of day time led propositions.

6. Infrastructure, facilities development and policy

Critical to the overall development of Northern Ireland's tourism offering will be the continued development of key infrastructure and facilities. With this in mind, key tourism stakeholders should collaborate with local councils to ensure that focused investment enhances the 'fabric' of local communities (public spaces, amenities, infrastructure, broadband, etc.).

This local investment should be designed so that it triggers private investment by creating local momentum and the right conditions for private sector investment (particularly beyond major urban centres).

Lastly, key stakeholders will be required to lobby for tourism friendly planning policy and licensing laws, e.g. pub opening hours, street trading, weekend retail trading times etc. From a product and experience development point of view, having appropriate polices in place will be vital to ensure the evolution and strengthening of Northern Ireland's tourism offering.

Citizen and Community Engagement

***Overarching objective:** build resident engagement, pride in and advocacy for Northern Ireland as a tourism destination.*

The degree to which residents are proud of and promote Northern Ireland as a short break destination will be a key factor in the achievement of a successful and sustainable domestic market. Residents feeling positive about Northern Ireland will increase the propensity to holiday 'at home' while also supporting 'word of mouth' which is key to influencing others. In addition to this, efforts should be made to encourage local people to actively participate in the tourism system through volunteering.

Key Initiatives

1. Establish and develop a domestic tourism advocacy strategy/programme. Such a programme would be designed to engage local people and give them the means to promote and make a contribution to tourism in their own regions. Such a strategy could include developing community engagement models, 'local heroes' profiling, insights and skills to drive word of mouth and earned media, local tourism awards etc.

2. Develop a dedicated regional communications programme designed to actively engender civic pride and local confidence in each respective region's tourism offering and potential. Such a programme would be supported by a tool kit through which local communities could take action and promote their region/town on a domestic basis.

3. Building on the WorldHost Programme, create a systemic approach to recruitment, training and supporting local volunteers to contribute to tourism experience. This is an approach that has been successfully deployed by Fáilte Ireland through their Volunteer Tourism Ambassador Programme.

Industry Collaboration, Activity and Development

***Overarching objective:** collaborate effectively and build connections at all levels (agency, industry, council etc.) to ensure the progress and development of the domestic tourism offering in a coherent and focused way.*

The domestic market strategy must be owned by the entire industry. With this is mind it is vital that industry understands and supports the strategy, and fully embraces it by driving focused implementation.

Key Initiatives

1. First and foremost, an understanding and appreciation of the importance of the domestic market must be embedded across the entire tourism industry. This should initially be achieved through the communication of the growth strategy, setting out the scale and value of the opportunity presented by the domestic market, educating the industry regarding priority segments etc. This should then be further supported by dedicated regional workshops to examine the strategy, and to game-plan the actions that will be required and taken at a regional level.

2. Building on existing structures and networks, those industry players that have the ambition to drive the domestic market should be facilitated to build out connected local tourism propositions and experiences – packaging regions/locations in a coherent and distinctive manner that will appeal to priority domestic segments.

3. The review uncovered that the domestic market is primarily influenced by digital channels in terms of research and booking. Set against this backdrop, the industry should be supported to better utilise digital media, social, OTAs etc. and leverage the reach of key digital influencers. This could include:

- domestic focused co-op initiatives with key OTAs (e.g. Booking.com) and sales platforms (e.g. Groupon) to trigger spontaneous breaks and promote value for money position / credentials and
- retargeting, repeat and reselling activities by industry (e.g. post business trip, wedding etc.)

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Measuring Performance

Murlough Bay Beach, County Down

The key performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of the strategy are detailed below.

I. Number of trips and revenue (NISRA). These headline metrics will continue to be a key determinant of performance.

II. Funnel metrics (Brand Tracker). Northern Ireland's rating in terms of interest, intent and active planning relative to the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain

III. Return on marketing investment – key to the success of the strategy will be effective communications. A means to measure the volume and effectiveness of communications aimed at the domestic market should be established as a key metric

IV. General and regional knowledge (Brand Tracker) – It is apparent from the research that many residents have significant knowledge gaps of the tourism offering, especially on a regional basis. A dedicated measure within the Brand Tracker should be established to measure the development of this knowledge over time

V. Community engagement and volunteering – resident and community participation in the delivery of Northern Ireland's tourism offering will be key to its sustainability and authenticity. The level of involvement should be tracked by measuring the number of tourism community initiatives and number of active volunteers

Conclusion

Titanic Belfast, Belfast City

The domestic market is a critical part of Northern Ireland's tourism economy. Its continued development will be key to Northern Ireland achieving its overall tourism ambitions. Coming from a solid base there is more that can be done to support the domestic market and encourage residents to stay and enjoy outstanding tourism experiences in Northern Ireland. The review and strategy for growth that it has produced provides clear direction on the key actions that now need to be taken.

Everyone within the tourism sector will play a vital role in building Northern Ireland's offering and driving growth from the domestic market. It is through their individual and collective efforts that a compelling tourism offering can be built – driving growth from the domestic market and creating value, social and economic, for the people, communities and businesses throughout Northern Ireland.

Market Recovery Taskforce

March 2020