

Special Edition | March 2024



TOURISM 360°

2024 Travel Trends



This Issue

This Special Edition of Tourism 360° focuses on the trends in tourism and consumer preferences for 2024, with industry takeouts included throughout.

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2024

Travel Trends



Off the beaten track

Travel is still a priority for the majority in 2024, despite cost-of-living pressures. To manage budgets, consumers are increasingly looking to lesser spotted locations for trips, or location 'dupes'. Northern Ireland is in a prime position to embrace this trend and attract new visitors looking for something different as well as offering great value.



Positive experiences

The turbulence of global events in the last few years has taken a toll on mindsets, with many looking to holidays and short trips for a vital source of positivity and fun. Operators that cater to this through attention to detail, e.g. with hospitality offerings, will attract greater demand.



Business and leisure

Business travel is on the rise again, with a revival in added leisure time. Many are extending traditional business trips to include personal days to explore the local area, and/or bringing family and friends to make the most of their trip. Tourism operators can benefit from this trend by reaching out to business travellers and advertising information on things to do and see.



Human connections

The integration of technology for the booking process and trip experience has developed at high pace, but human perspectives and good communication remain key to making trips personal and intimate. Businesses should focus on improving this aspect of their service by investing in learning and development.



Sustainable lifestyles

Sustainability has grown to become a lifestyle rather than just a buzzword – key to improving the long-term quality of service and experience, benefitting both visitors and operators in the tourism industry. Businesses can avail of Tourism NI's Sustainability Toolkit to create a holistic approach for their operation.

Positive experiences

In the last few years, it feels as though the world has been in perpetual crisis, and this negativity has had an impact on our mental health. The cost-of-living crisis has also taken a toll on consumers, with over 60% reporting they are concerned or very worried about their financial outlook according to Mintel UK. As a result, small positive experiences are holding greater significance in many of our lives to brighten mindsets and perspectives.

Holiday breaks and day trips are a vital source of positivity for people, providing respite from the worries and uncertainty of everyday life. Tourism NI's latest consumer sentiment research in NI and ROI found that the main motivations for trips in NI remain to relax and unwind and to have fun, creating opportunities for operators who cater to these needs. 'Enjoying great food and drink' featured as a popular motivation, particularly for ROI consumers, highlighting this as key to the overall trip experience. Attention to detail can have a real impact on the quality of a stay or experience. 42% of consumers surveyed by Mintel prioritise indulging in everyday pleasures, and adding small touches to an experience that create joy for consumers will often stay with them, contributing to better loyalty and reputation.





Positive experiences

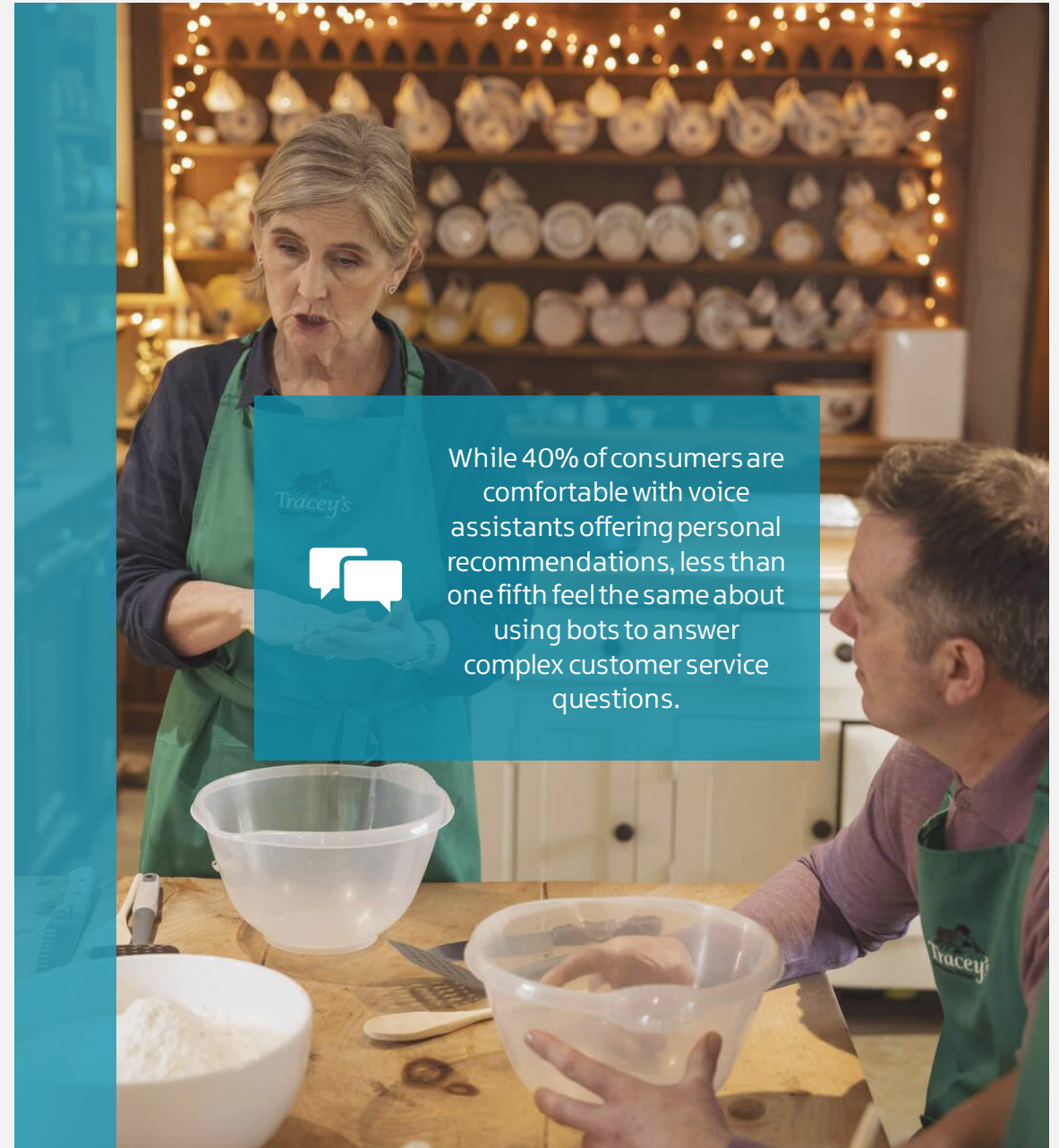
What it means for the NI industry:

Ensure your advertising and messaging promote opportunities to relax and have fun, to encourage consumers to book. Visitors increasingly view enjoying great food and drink as central to their trip experience. In light of this, Tourism NI have compiled a number of [online guides](#), highlighting ways in which the industry can benefit from both our produce and wonderful producers. Small hospitality offerings and features that bring joy and light-heartedness for guests will attract demand and enhance the experience, so it may be helpful to review the aspects of your offering and identify if there are any areas that could be improved with creativity, such as by providing [welcome offerings](#) or adding storytelling elements to the experience.

Human connections

The integration of technology for the booking process and trip experience has developed at high pace, with the rise of generative AI providing travel itineraries, hospitality apps and AR/VR technology for attractions. Consumers have adapted and many are embracing these innovations, but these changes have highlighted the importance of human perspectives and communication.

While new technology has improved efficiency and accessibility, consumers are realising the value of human connections and customer service to make their trip personal and intimate. Euromonitor's research finds that while more than 40% of consumers are comfortable with voice assistants offering personal recommendations, less than one fifth felt the same about using bots to answer complex customer service questions. NI has an outstanding reputation for its Giant Welcome, with 'Welcome and hospitality' rated highly among all aspects of a trip by consumers who had recently visited according to Tourism NI's consumer sentiment research. The tourism industry here is passionate about the quality of service, able to exceed expectations and provide the personal experience many are looking for.



While 40% of consumers are comfortable with voice assistants offering personal recommendations, less than one fifth feel the same about using bots to answer complex customer service questions.



Human connections

What it means for the NI industry:

The tourism industry in Northern Ireland prides itself on the 'Giant Welcome' and excellent customer service it provides. If you have invested in new technology for your business, it is important that the personal aspect of your service works in collaboration with this. For learning and support, see [MyTourismNI](#), our recently launched innovative E-Learning platform for the tourism industry. Ensuring that team members are well-supported is fundamental to any successful businesses, and this is particularly vital for the NI tourism sector to maintain its fantastic customer experience. Consider signing up to the [Wellbeing and Development Promise](#) which is being rolled out by Hospitality Ulster in partnership with Tourism NI and the Hospitality and Tourism Skills network.

Off the beaten track

Despite cost-of-living pressures, consumers are still planning to travel in 2024. 84% of consumers are prioritising travel in their 2024 budgets according to a global survey from eDreams, highlighting the strong travel demand despite the economic context. Interest has risen for destinations which are budget-friendly or traditionally lesser-known. The hotter weather witnessed in Europe in Summer 2023 has led some consumers to opt for milder destinations or travelling off-peak. This presents an opportunity for NI operators to showcase their appeal and attract a new market.

Social media platforms like TikTok have popularised the idea of “dupes,” or more affordable alternatives to popular products, and the concept is taking off in the world of travel. 1 in 3 polled by Expedia have booked a dupe for a future trip, and Tourism NI’s consumer sentiment research shows NI is consistently rated highly for value for money. Belfast has been listed on National Geographic’s 2024 Cool List as one of the most exciting destinations for the year ahead, and as Belfast 2024 brings the city’s biggest ever creative and cultural celebration, it will showcase the value of our offer as a location.



84% of global consumers are prioritising travel in their budgets for 2024.



1 in 3 polled by Expedia have booked a dupe for a future trip.



Off the beaten track

What it means for the NI industry:

Highlighting areas that may be traditionally less popular can attract consumers looking for something different or at a lower cost, as well as having the effect of spreading the benefits of tourism to local economies and helping drive regional balance. Help visitors that are looking for low-cost activities and lesser known places to explore by creating a list of things to do in your area, including both paid and free activities. Provide information to highlight the ease of travelling to different regions or attractions within NI. The use of social media advertising, such as working with local influencers or local councils can also increase your visibility to younger audiences.

Business and leisure

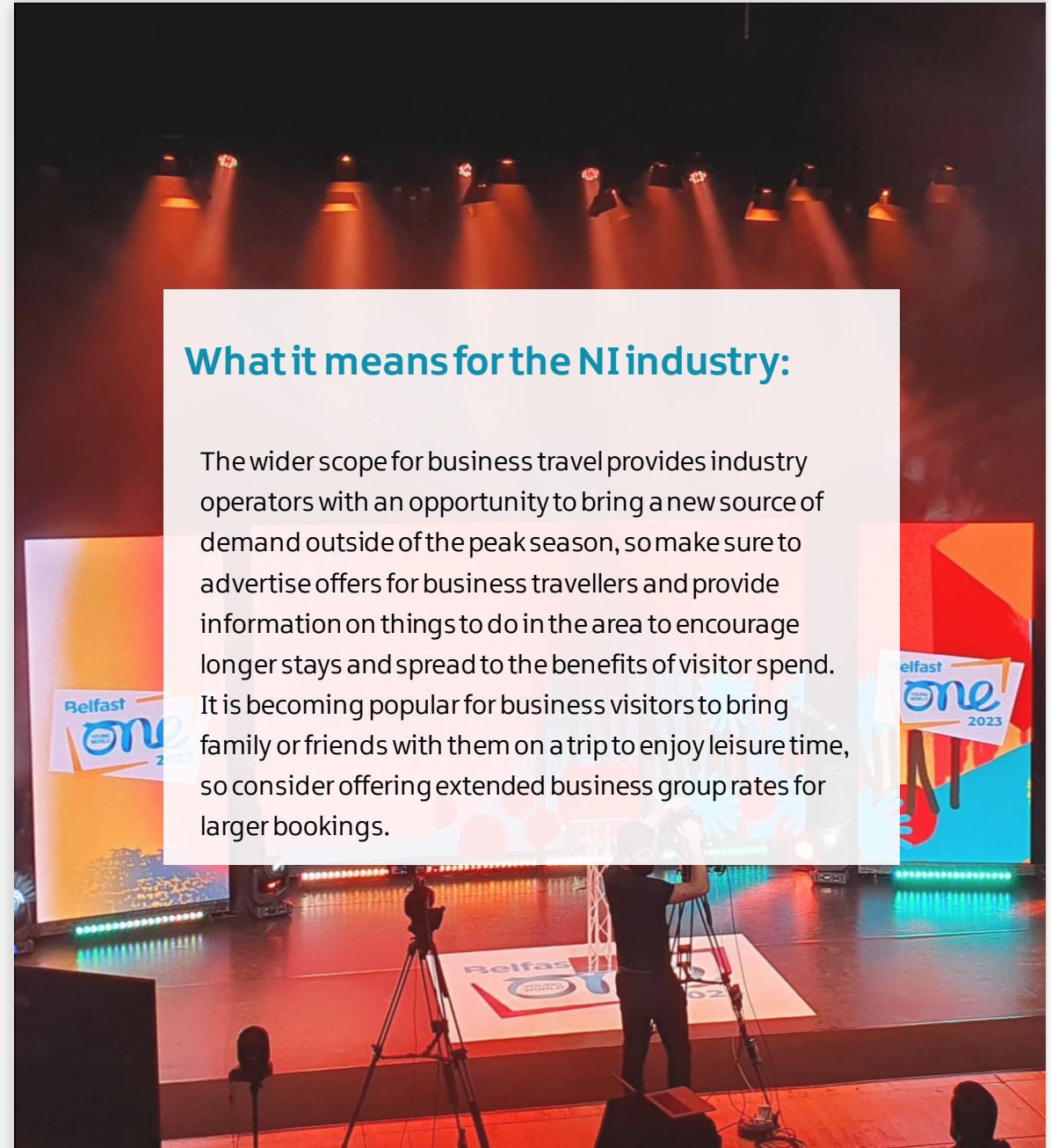
While initially slow to recover following the pandemic, business travel is on the rise again with global business travel spending expected to reach £1.1 trillion in 2024. 2023 was a record year for business in Belfast, with 92 events taking place in the city bringing an economic impact of over £42.5 million. Traditional business travel has been redefined, blending work with leisure. Hilton reported a 15% global increase in the length of stay for business visitors compared to 2019.

Hilton also reports that over a third of Gen Z/Millennial travellers will extend a business trip in 2024 to enjoy leisure time, creating a new market for tourism operators as business visitors adopt behaviours similar to holidaymakers. Flexible working has supported this trend, allowing many to work abroad. As events like One Young World 2023 demonstrated NI's appeal as a business destination, Belfast is now set to welcome 145 conferences in the coming years with 62,000 delegates, suggesting this market will continue to grow.

Sources: GBTA Business Travel Index, Hilton 2024 Trends, Cvent & Visit Belfast

What it means for the NI industry:

The wider scope for business travel provides industry operators with an opportunity to bring a new source of demand outside of the peak season, so make sure to advertise offers for business travellers and provide information on things to do in the area to encourage longer stays and spread to the benefits of visitor spend. It is becoming popular for business visitors to bring family or friends with them on a trip to enjoy leisure time, so consider offering extended business group rates for larger bookings.



Sustainable lifestyles

The importance of sustainability has been building for many years now, and for many it is a lifestyle rather than a buzzword. However, studies from Euromonitor suggest consumers are tired of companies putting the onus on their actions to help the environment. Instead, they want to see how operators are actively making changes to help the environment and create a fairer society, while improving the quality of their service.

Sustainability is key to improving the long-term quality of service and experience, benefitting both visitors and operators. Over half of travellers are seeking accommodation that blends comfort with innovative sustainability features according to Booking.com. Inclusivity and social values are also a priority in travel: 27% of global consumers under 24 highlight the importance of social inclusivity in brand and destination choices, so consider how these aspects may factor into a holistic sustainability plan for your business.

Sources: Euromonitor Trends 2024, Booking.com & eDreams



What it means for the NI industry:

Visitors appreciate transparency, so consider highlighting the steps your business has taken for sustainability. Investing in long-term energy efficient measures can be a cost-cutting strategy for your business in the long term. Environmental certifications can also encourage demand and foster good reputation. Take a look at Tourism NI's [Sustainability Toolkit](#) for helpful information. Building a sustainable and inclusive culture in your business can promote staff retention and satisfaction, as well as improving the quality of service. Tourism NI's [Make It Here toolkit](#) is free to access, aiming to help businesses attract the best talent possible.

Source: Tourism Ireland 2023

Tourism 360° is produced by Tourism NI's Insights & Intelligence Service

We welcome all feedback – [contact us here](#)

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