

Special Edition | March 2023



# TOURISM 360°

2023 Travel Trends



TOURISM  
NORTHERN  
IRELAND

# 2023

## Travel Trends

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### Value for Money

Despite the current economic uncertainty, there is still a strong desire for travel. Travellers will prioritise a trip that delivers strong value for money, however, will still expect high quality experiences.



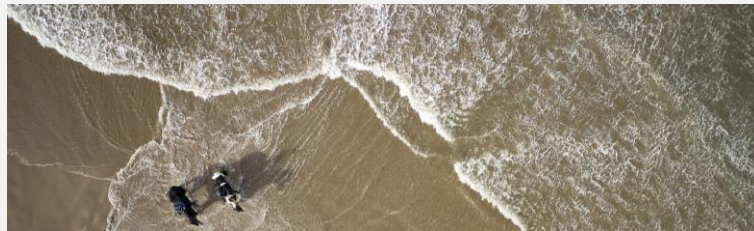
### Relaxation and Escapism

Motivations for travel vary among different market segments, but relaxation and getting away from it all are key reasons behind travel in 2023. Linked to this, the trend of wellness travel continues.



### Authentic Experiences

In 2023, there is rising interest in unique and authentic experiences. Local excursions are likely to become increasingly popular as tourists search for authenticity in destinations that have a culture different to their own. Immersive culinary journeys will allow travellers to sample local produce.



### Sustainable Tourism

There is more to the topic of sustainability than just the environmental focus. The social aspect of sustainability is equally important and, given the rising costs facing tourists and businesses, the economic aspect of sustainability is now more crucial than ever.



### Seamless Travel

Aligning with relaxation being the top motivation for travelling, consumers want a seamless, hassle-free experience when taking a trip. They are interested in how the latest digital innovations can enhance their experience but still expect high quality, human-led hospitality.



# Value for Money

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High inflation and energy bills, increasing interest rates and an uncertain economic situation continue to present challenges for a tourism industry which is still recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, Booking.com research reports that almost three quarters of people said travelling in 2023 is still worth it despite the economic uncertainty. Tourism NI's latest consumer sentiment research indicates there are strong intentions from NI and ROI consumers to take a trip in the summer of 2023.

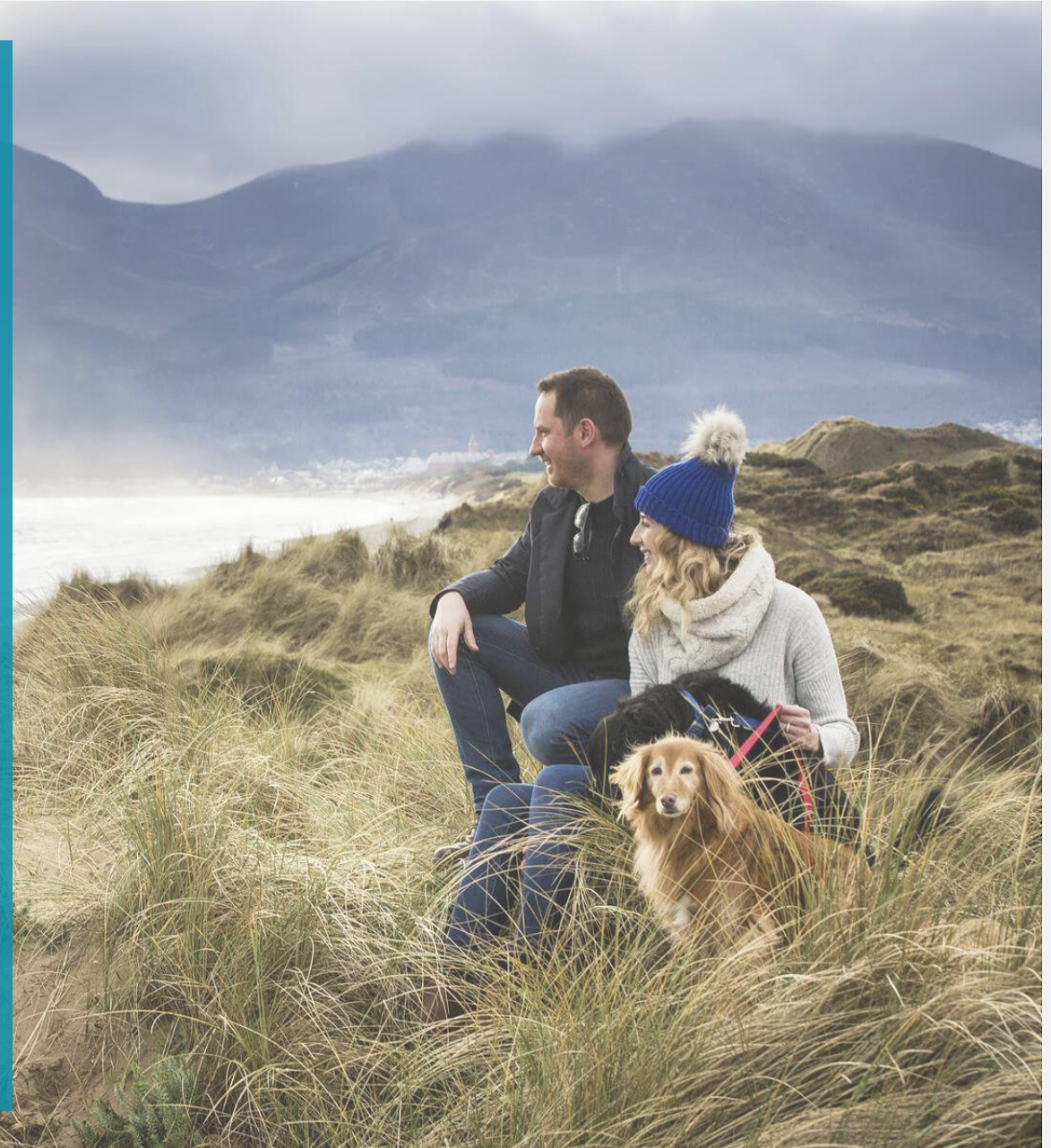
While demand for travel remains positive this year, many travellers will prioritise a trip that delivers strong value for money. Booking.com's research indicates that three-fifths will prioritise value for money with discounts and loyalty programmes. This is potentially good news for NI which is regarded by NI and ROI consumers as better value for money than competitor markets such as Great Britain and ROI (*Tourism NI's latest consumer sentiment research*). With a strong focus on value, and with increased competition from competitor markets, it is essential that NI continues to deliver good value, as well as high value experiences to visitors.



# Value for Money

## What it means for the NI industry:

Given the cost-of-living challenges, consumers will take more time to thoroughly plan their trips to ensure they are getting the most value for money. Ensure that you have clear, detailed and up-to-date information about your product offering on your website and in your marketing materials and be sure to highlight the free and paid things to see and do nearby. With travellers spending more time planning their trip, advocacy is of increased importance. Ensure your testimonials and customer feedback function to your website are up-to-date to allow customers to highlight the quality of your offering. Review your T&Cs and cancellation policy - a flexible booking policy could encourage people to book earlier.





# Relaxation and Escapism

Motivations for travel vary among market segments but the general trend coming out of TNI's latest wave of consumer sentiment research is that for both the NI and ROI markets, the primary motivations for travel are to relax, unwind and get away from it all. Linked to this, wellness travel appears again as a key trend for 2023, with Booking.com reporting that 42% of travellers want to go on a break that focuses on their mental and physical health. We covered this in-depth in a previous [Tourism 360°](#).

Relaxing with pets is another travel trend that emerged following the pandemic. Hilton found that the 'pet friendly' booking filter is the third most engaged booking search filter on their website as travellers look for every opportunity to bring their pets along on their travel journeys. You can learn more about pet friendly holidays in NI at [discovernorthernireland.com](https://discovernorthernireland.com).

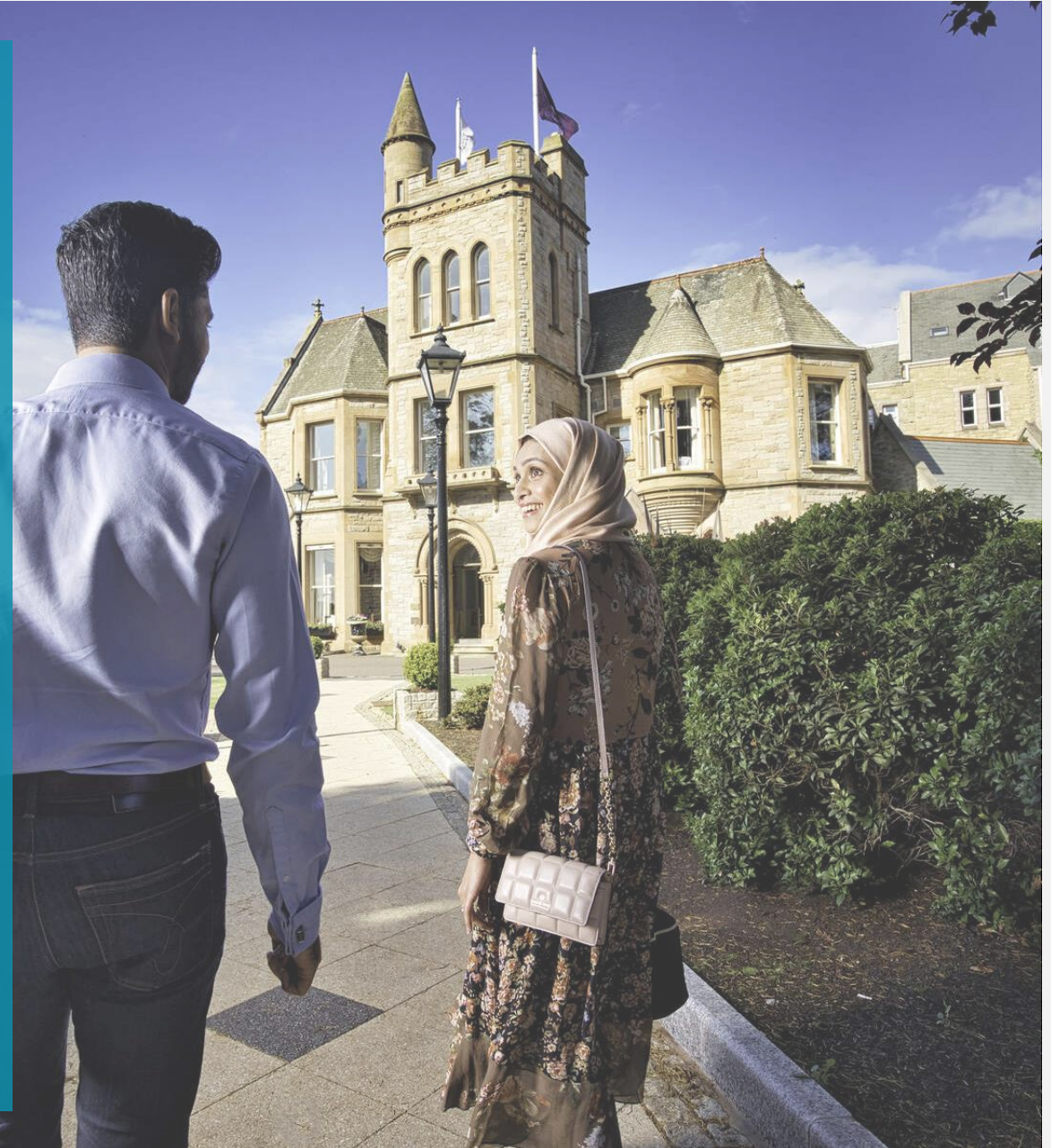
Travelling solo to get away from it all is on the rise. GWI report that over one-third of Gen Z say they plan to travel by themselves in 2023, with 'safety of solo travellers' being an important factor for many when booking a trip. This suggests that solo travel could be a lucrative market for the tourism industry to focus on this year. EasyJet announced that it would be extending its solo traveller discount due to popular demand.



# Relaxation and Escapism

## What it means for the NI industry:

Review the key motivators to travel highlighted on the previous page and shape your products/experiences to reflect these. Relaxation is the primary motivation for taking a trip so focus messaging on how your offering can help visitors unwind. Consider if pets could be accommodated into your offering and ensure that your messaging makes clear whether pets are welcome. Tourism NI's latest consumer sentiment research uncovered that of those ROI dog owners planning to take an NI trip, almost 6 in 10 said they would bring their dog with them if they could. This figure is even higher for NI residents, and this potentially presents new opportunities for the industry to take advantage of.



# Authentic Experiences

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Travel is a vehicle for discovering different cultures and perspectives. In 2023, there is rising interest in unique and authentic experiences, with a survey by Hilton finding that almost half of respondents are looking to be immersed in local cultures and products while travelling this year. Local excursions are likely to become increasingly popular, as tourists search for authenticity in destinations that have a culture polar to their own, and immersive culinary journeys allow travellers to sample local produce.

Destinations can offer experiences unique to them through screen tourism. Many travellers are turning to their favourite TV shows and movies for their next big trip inspiration in what Expedia have coined the 'Set-Effect'. Two-thirds of global travellers have considered booking trips to destinations after seeing them in TV shows and movies. With NI's established and internationally recognised screen tourism sector, and the success of Game of Thrones, Derry Girls, Line of Duty and Kenneth Branagh's Belfast, we are well equipped to capitalise on this trend in 2023.





# Authentic Experiences

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## What it means for the NI industry:

Although there is caution about spending on experiences, Tourism NI's latest consumer sentiment research found that over half of NI and ROI consumers say they "intend to keep doing things I enjoy in 2023 even if the impact of cost-of-living increases is a concern." Focus messaging on how your product offering is authentic to NI and consider collaborating with other local businesses to create experiences that fully immerse visitors in the local culture. Consider how you can take advantage of NI's thriving screen tourism sector and be ready to point visitors to well-known tv and film locations.





# Sustainable Tourism

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One travel trend that is impossible to ignore is sustainability. We included this in last year's trends report and its importance remains in 2023. NI's natural resources, rugged landscapes and welcoming hosts are key reasons people visit. Our air, our water, our natural environment and our cultural heritage - all the elements that make for a better quality of life - flourish here. Our job is to share them with our visitors in a way that protects those resources for the future, while delivering the best experiences for everyone.

It is often common to centre the focus on environmental sustainability, and while this is important, there is more to sustainable tourism. The UN World Tourism Organization says sustainable tourism is "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities." The social aspect to sustainability is equally important - managing visitors, supporting your community and helping your guests to do their bit while they explore NI, and the economic aspect of sustainability is now more important than ever given the rising costs facing tourists and businesses.



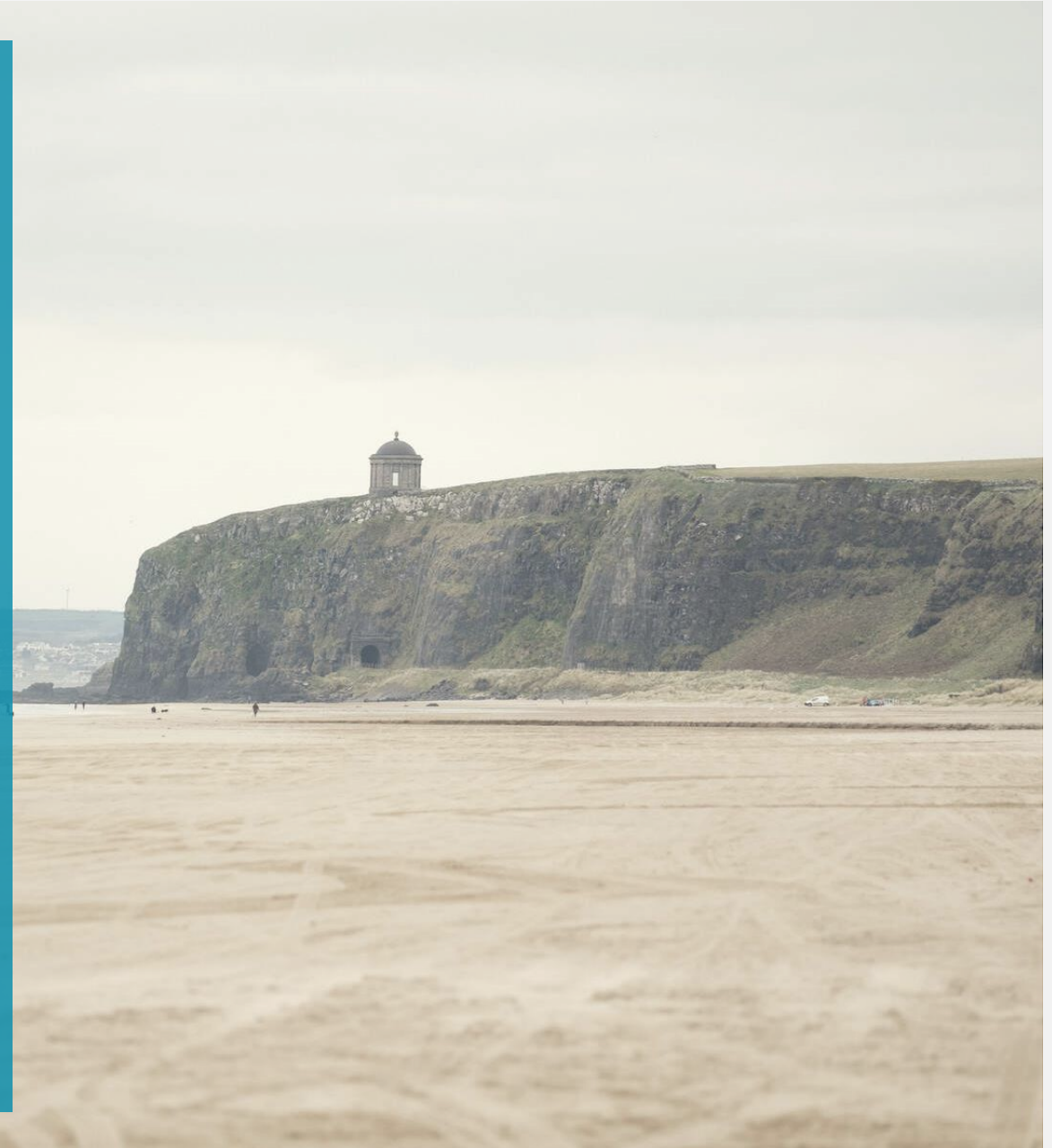


# Sustainable Tourism

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## What it means for the NI industry:

With the importance of sustainability growing across all industries and businesses, it is vital to dedicate time to furthering your understanding of the topic. Consider signing up for one of Tourism NI's many [sustainability-focused webinars](#) and view Tourism NI's Sustainability Toolkit [here](#). Conducting a sustainability audit is a good starting point to help identify how your site or amenity is impacting your surroundings. Then you can start to make the changes that protect the environment and attract more green tourists, which could save you money too. More ideas and inspiration can be found on [TourismNI.com](https://www.tourismni.com).





# Seamless Travel

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Over the past few years, travelling during a pandemic uncovered new tension points – with restrictions and staffing issues negatively impacting the travellers’ experience. Travellers are keen seek out innovative and intelligent solutions to these tension points, with a Hilton survey uncovering that 56% of respondents are most concerned about having an easier travel experience in 2023. Leveraging digital technologies can increase efficiencies and solutions that simplify the travel experience and driving booking activity. For example, Booking.com report that 43% will use virtual reality to inspire their travel choices, with 46% more likely to travel somewhere they haven’t visited before if they could experience it virtually first.

It’s also crucial not to forget that it is people who can provide the hospitality and personalisation that will make a holiday memorable. Travellers expect the same level of hospitality and service that they received pre-pandemic, especially given the higher costs involved in the current economic climate. Hilton’s survey found that 86% of travellers will be looking for personalisation during their 2023 travel experiences. Combining human and digital innovations will deliver the most seamless experience for visitors.



# Seamless Travel

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## What it means for the NI industry:

Travellers want a seamless, hassle-free experience when travelling so review your current processes and assess how efficient they are. 3 out of 4 UK travellers now use a mobile device to plan or book their next trip so ensure that your online materials are up-to-date and user friendly. Consider exploring how new digital solutions could potentially create a smoother experience for your visitors. Hospitality and service remain integral to creating a positive experience for travellers so ensure all staff are trained and ready to deliver the warm welcome and friendly hospitality that NI is known for.





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