



The Voice for Tourism in Northern Ireland

Impact Report 2023/24

Introduction

With members across all sectors of the tourism economy, the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance (NITA) plays a crucial role in representing our members. Our mission is to ensure the industry's voice is heard, and our role is to influence and shape policy based in industry insights and expertise to create the environment for tourism to thrive.

Strategic Focus for 2023/2024

NITA remains committed to advocating for the tourism industry in Northern Ireland. Through strategic focus and dedicated efforts, we have strived to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the industry and the overall growth of tourism across the region. Together with our members and stakeholders, we have continued to champion the cause of Tourism. The key areas of focus were:

- **Member Engagement, Retention, and Recruitment**
 - NITA welcomed 4 new members: -
 - Belfast International Airport
 - British Holiday and Home Park Association
 - Irish Association for Adventure Tourism
 - Maritime Belfast Trust
- **Lobbying Activities on priority policy areas: -**
 - Skills
 - In partnership with HATS
 - Connectivity and Access
 - Air Access, ETA, transport infrastructure
 - Sustainability
 - Competitiveness
 - Business Support, funding for promotional activity, tax reform
 - Research
 - Development of evidence base on value of tourism to the NI economy
- **Engagement with UK Government, Irish Government and newly formed NI Executive and Assembly.**
- **Voice of Tourism in Northern Ireland** through membership of:
 - Home Office Future Borders and Immigration System (FBIS) advisory group
 - Tourism Ireland Central Marketing Group and GB Marketing Group
 - UK Tourism Industry Council
 - Partnership with Scottish, Welsh and English Tourism Alliance's
 - Engagement with ITIC (Irish Tourism Industry Council)
 - NI Skills Council Labour Supply Task & Finish Group
 - Belfast City Region Deal Tourism & Regeneration Advisory Group

- **Membership Communication**
 - Weekly Updates providing relevant information and sign posting.
 - Weekly NI Assembly Update providing a summary of all tourism related business taking place in the NI Assembly plenary and committees.

Overview of Activities and Impact in Policy Areas

This section provides a detailed overview of our activities and impact across each policy area. While the Stormont institutions were inactive, NITA continued to engage with politicians, advocating for tourism as a positive force that serves as both a key economic driver and a provider of social benefits. As a result, one of the highlights this year was gaining recognition from Conor Murphy, the Minister for the Economy, of the significant contribution tourism makes to the economy. This financial year saw the Minister increase funding for Tourism Ireland and give a full-year budget to Tourism NI, ensuring that promotional activities are not dependent on monitoring rounds.

Some of the key actions we have taken during the year include:

- Developing a robust evidence base showing the full value of tourism to the NI Economy
- Engaging with members and the Department contributing to the development of the Department's Tourism Strategy. *(NOTE: NITA have been invited to join the Tourism Partnership Board which will have its inaugural meeting in September 2024)*
- Advocating for solutions to mitigate the impact of the electronic travel authorisation on tourists entering Northern Ireland via the Republic of Ireland.

Policy Priorities and Achievements

Below is our Progress Report for 2023/2024 against each of our five priority policy areas as laid out in our 'Tourism a Force for Good' policy document which is available [HERE](#)

1. Sustainability

Priorities	Achievements
• Achieving global recognition for Northern Ireland as a sustainable destination. • Supporting a funded tourism strategy to maximize the regenerative nature of tourism	• Held the successful NITA conference 'Tourism: A Force for Good' in September 2023, focusing on investing in people, planet, and prosperity. Collaborated with National Trust to have a focus on sustainability – keynote and industry panel. • Match funded donations made by attendees to the conference and donated £500 to local food banks through the 'Change the Menu for Good' campaign. • Worked with Tourism Ireland, Tourism NI and Failte Ireland on the development of the All-Island Sustainability Mark. • Submitted a comprehensive response to the Department of Economy Draft Tourism Strategy for NI which included importance of a sustainable approach in policy. Response available HERE • Organized an information session for members with the 10X PLACE team to discuss the importance of tourism to

	creating sustainable destinations. The CEO attended a TNI Sustainable Tourism Learning trip to Slovenia.
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2. Competitiveness

Priorities	Achievements
- Business support - to address competitive disadvantage by lobbying for government investment and development of business support initiative - Promotion - to lobby for continued and increased investment in promoting NI as a destination to key markets. - Taxes - to demonstrate the effects of the removal of APD on domestic flights and a reduced VAT rate for tourism services. - Legislation - to assist in updating the NI Tourism Order.	- Collaboration with TNI to develop a programme to support innovation in tourism businesses and to recognise innovative tourism businesses. - Facilitated a learning visit to Derry for Department of the Economy's Deputy Secretary for the Economy. Included site visits to several businesses and a roundtable with members highlighting innovation and sustainability. - Participation in the Department's research into the language of innovation to make innovation more accessible to smaller businesses. - Successfully campaigned for additional marketing funds, securing £6 million for Tourism Ireland and £3.6 million for Tourism NI. - Continued to lobby at UK Government level on abolishment of APD on short haul flights. - Contributed to the NI Assembly SDLP debate on the reduction of VAT in tourism and hospitality - Maintained a strong media presence and participated in various high-profile industry events.

3. Access and Connectivity

Priorities	Achievements
- Lobbying for exemptions on Electronic Travel Authorisations (ETAs). - Promoting additional air routes to NI. - Advocating for enhanced rail/bus connectivity between RoI and NI.	- NITA engaged extensively with the Home Office, Irish Government, local politicians regarding the rollout of the ETA and its impact on travel to NI. Key activities included. A full briefing is available HERE - April 2024 – NITA presented at the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly Plenary in Wicklow. Opening statement available HERE. As a result, the Assembly agreed to write to the Home Office in support of our call for an exemption for cross-border travel. - March 2024 – NITA submitted written evidence to the House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee Call for evidence on Electronic Border Management which is available HERE. As a result, the committee raised the issue of the impact on tourism in NI and supported our call for an

	exemption for non-visa nationals crossing the land border into NI. They included a section on Tourism in NI in their report LFtoTP- an Outcome of EBMS Inquiry-200524 (parliament.uk), and it was included in their key eight points laid out in their covering letter to Tom Pursglove, Minister for Immigration at the time. ○ March 2024 – Following the restoration of the NI Executive, NITA met with Economy Minister, Conor Murphy, to brief him on ETA. The Minister has since written to the Minister of State in support of an exemption. ○ October 2023 – Following our presentation to the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly - a cross-party group of politicians from the UK and Ireland – their report from the Sovereign Affairs committee, published in October 2023, fully supported our call for an exemption. Committee Chair Senator Emer Currie said, <i>“The Common Travel Area underpins our all-island health and tourism strategies, and life on our island as we know it. The Electronic Travel Authorisation Scheme in its current form will undermine it, weigh down and damage tourism to Northern Ireland and the North-West of Ireland.”</i> ○ 18th July 2023 – Westminster Hall Debate with sitting NI MPs. Opportunity to engage with Minister of State Robert Jenrick. ○ 17th July - House of Lords Follow up Questions to Regret Motion Debate ○ 23rd May 2023 - House of Lords Regret Motion Debate proposed by Baroness Margaret Ritchie. • Participated in the York Aviation review of air connectivity to NI. The report was published in June 2024 and is available HERE. We are currently reviewing the report and will be raising with the Minister for the Economy at our meeting in August 2024. • Successfully lobbied for the inclusion of Access and Connectivity in the Tourism Strategy – outlined in our response HERE. This included air connectivity, Cruise and transport infrastructure across the Island of Ireland.
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4. Skills

Priorities	Achievements
• Designating tourism as a priority sector • Improving workplace attractiveness	• Launched the Joint NITA/HATS People and Skills Policy paper which is available HERE • Supported TNI/HATS recruitment campaigns, sign-up to employer charters and contributed to 'Make it Here'

• Attracting high calibre entrants • Broadening the appeal of the sector • Improving the professionalism of the workforce • Encouraging flexible immigration policies.	campaign. • Engaged with the Department for the Economy's Deputy Secretary for Skills and the NI Skills Council Chair to make the case for the inclusion and prioritisation of Tourism skills. This secured representation on key subgroups (Labour Supply and Equality & Diversity) and a presentation to the NI Skills Council in June 2024 on tourism and hospitality. • Participated in the Home Office Future Borders and Immigration System (FBIS) All Advisory Group. NITA kept members updated on all changes to immigration policy and was able to position the specific needs of NI regarding immigration policy. This is being taken forward by the Labour Supply Task & Finish Group of the NI Skills Council of which NITA is a member.
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5. Research and Data

Priorities	Achievements
• Developing an annual Tourism Barometer. • Working with the Government to produce a GVA figure for the tourism economy. • A Force for Good - to provide case studies to show the positive impact of the NI tourism economy	• Collaborated with Grant Thornton to develop a Tourism Barometer and GVA figure, presented in the report 'Valuing the Tourism Industry in NI' at our annual conference in September 2023. This showed the broader impact of Tourism on the economy and has been used to support lobbying activity – report available HERE. • Engaged with NISRA regarding Tourism Reporting and the development of the Tourism Satellite Account for 2019. • Facilitated a learning visit to Derry for Department of the Economy's Deputy Secretary for the Economy. Included site visits to several businesses and a roundtable with members highlighting innovation and sustainability.