



Impact Report 2024/25

The Voice for Tourism in Northern Ireland

Executive Summary

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

In 2024/25, the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance (NITA) continued to deliver strong advocacy and leadership as the trusted Voice for Tourism. Working alongside members, government, and partners, NITA ensured the tourism industry's priorities were represented at the highest levels of decision-making. Through ministerial engagement, lobbying on critical issues such as the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA), and shaping skills and workforce policy, NITA strengthened the competitiveness and sustainability of the sector.

Key achievements include the launch of Northern Ireland's first Tourism & Hospitality Week, direct influence on UK and Irish parliamentary committees regarding ETA, and new partnerships to embed sustainability and skills into tourism's future. Membership also grew, with the addition of the Inbound Tourism Operators Association of Ireland, and board leadership expanded to reflect wider industry representation.

Despite political transition, skills shortages, and global uncertainty, NITA has demonstrated resilience and impact. The tourism sector is increasingly recognised as a driver of Northern Ireland's economy, sustainability, and peacebuilding—a position strengthened through NITA's collaborative efforts and evidence-based advocacy.

Strategic Focus for 2024/25

NITA's activities during 2024/25 were guided by five strategic policy priorities:

- **Sustainability** – embedding regenerative and responsible tourism.
- **Competitiveness** – supporting business growth, investment, and promotion.
- **Access and Connectivity** – ensuring Northern Ireland remains accessible to visitors.
- **Skills** – tackling labour shortages and improving workforce attractiveness.
- **Research and Data** – strengthening the evidence base on the value of tourism.

Key Highlights 2024/25

Ministerial Engagement

- Facilitated engagement with outgoing Economy Minister Conor Murphy and newly appointed Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald.
- Contributed to discussions on the Tourism Vision and 10-Year Action Plan through membership of the Tourism Partnership Board.

Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)

- Compiled industry evidence of cancellations and impacts.
- Addressed the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly plenary in Wicklow.
- Submission to House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee. NITA specifically mentioned in their findings along with support for the exemption.
- Coordinated joint industry-government meetings on ETA with the Home Office, Departments in NI and RoI, Tourism Ireland, ITIC, and industry stakeholders.

- Engaged with new UK Minister Seema Malhotra, presenting a cross-industry letter with 21 signatories. This led to her visit to Northern Ireland to meet industry representatives.
- Worked with the Home Office on improved communications and industry briefings, including workshops and webinars for industry across the island.

Skills and Workforce

- Continued partnership with the Hospitality and Skills Network (HATS) on the People and Skills agenda.
- Represented tourism on the NI Skills Council Labour Supply Task & Finish Group.
- Facilitated industry input into the Good Jobs legislation, hosting a webinar and workshop with members to develop a collective response.

Annual Conference – Tourism and Peace

- Held on 27th September 2024 at ICC Belfast, attracting over 200 delegates.
- Explored themes of tourism's role in peace and reconciliation, dynamic pricing, local government's role in regional tourism, and cross-border collaboration with Tourism Ireland and Tourism NI.
- Launched the first **Northern Ireland Tourism & Hospitality Week**, in partnership with Tourism NI.

Membership Growth

- Welcomed **Inbound Tourism Operators Association of Ireland (ITOA)** as a new member.
- Membership directory refreshed and published on NITA's website.

Leadership and Governance

- Welcomed new directors: **Caroline McComb (McComb's Coach Travel)**, **Colette McCafferty (Tour Guides NI)**, and **Brendan Kenny (Irish Association for Adventure Tourism)**.

Policy Priorities and Achievements

Priority Area	Priorities	Achievements
Sustainability	- Positioning NI as a sustainable destination. - Ensuring tourism policy supports regenerative growth.	- Highlighted the link between sustainability and peacebuilding during the Annual Conference. - Advocated for sustainability principles in government and industry forums. - Supported Tourism NI programmes.
Competitiveness	- Supporting tourism businesses to overcome competitive challenges. - Securing investment in promotion and marketing - Advocating for fair taxation and supportive legislation.	- Strengthened industry-government dialogue through monthly meetings with Department for the Economy, Tourism Ireland, and Tourism NI. - Represented members on the UK Tourism Industry Council and other UK Tourism Alliances to highlight competitive pressures facing NI.
Access & Connectivity	- Lobbying for ETA exemption for tourists entering NI via RoI. - Enhancing connectivity across air, sea, and land.	- Led coordinated lobbying campaigns across NI, RoI, and UK forums. - Secured parliamentary attention and support from the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly and House of Lords Committee. - Engaged with the Home Office to improve visitor communications and implementation. - Secured Ministerial engagement, leading to collaborative work between Home Office, NISRA, and Tourism NI to model ETA's economic impact.
Skills	- Attracting and retaining talent. - Securing flexible migration policy. - Enhancing sector professionalism and workplace attractiveness.	- Joint NITA/HATS policy work shaped skills debate. - Secured tourism's inclusion in national labour market discussions via NI Skills Council Task & Finish Group. - Facilitated industry input into the Good Jobs Bill. - Represented tourism on the Home Office Future Borders Advisory Group and provided member updates on migration/visa policy.

Research & Data	• Strengthening the evidence base for tourism. • Showcasing tourism’s wider economic and social contribution.	• Compiled and presented industry data on ETA impacts. Advocated for robust tourism reporting and represented members on NISRA Tourism Reporting Group. • Contributed to Tourism NI industry surveys to strengthen evidence outputs.
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Representation and Partnerships

NITA represented members at the highest levels across government and industry, including:

- Monthly engagement with Department for the Economy, CEO Tourism NI, and CEO Tourism Ireland
- Tourism Partnership Board
- Belfast Region City Deal Tourism & Regeneration Advisory Board
- NI Skills Council Labour Supply Group
- Derry City & Strabane District Council Tourism Strategy Group
- UK Tourism Industry Council
- Home Office All Advisory Committee
- Ongoing collaboration with Tourism Alliances in UK and Ireland

Conclusion

2024/25 has been a year of progress and resilience for the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance. Against the backdrop of political change, new challenges such as the ETA, and ongoing skills shortages, not to mention the global uncertainty, NITA has continued to deliver strong representation, evidence-based advocacy, and industry leadership.

By working collaboratively with members, government, and partners across the UK and Ireland, NITA has strengthened the voice of tourism and ensured that the sector remains recognised as a key driver of Northern Ireland's economy and society.