

The ABC of Tourism Economics

Policies that could Add, Build and Create
a stronger tourism economy

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Tourism is growing. But trips are outrunning nights.

5.1m

overnight trips

+9%

15.0m

nights

+1%

£1.2bn

visitor spend

+9%

More arrivals helped. The growth question begins after check-in.

2025 performance versus 2024

The £2bn ambition depends on value per trip

£1.2bn

2025 visitor spend

+£0.8bn

minimum growth required

£2bn+

2035 ambition

Access brings people in

**Capacity lets the sector serve
them**

**Demand gives them a
reason to stay**

Visitor numbers alone will not bridge the gap.

NOW!

THAT'S WHAT I CALL

TOURISM

VOLUME 2026

All the classic policy asks on one album

THE TOURISM POLICY GREATEST HITS

Some classics. Some remasters. A few tracks we should retire.

- | | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|----|--------------------------------|
| 01 | Cut the VAT | 06 | The Last Bus Left at Ten |
| 02 | Drop the APD | 07 | Water, Water, Nowhere to Build |
| 03 | Fund That Route | 08 | One More Night |
| 04 | Market Me More | 09 | The Shoulder Season Blues |
| 05 | Where Have All the Workers Gone? | 10 | Events Aren't Just for Summer |

THE ECONOMIC TEST

What changes? Who benefits? Is it additional? What happens when support ends?

A

ADD VALUE

Make access easier, improve competitiveness
and turn arrivals into greater local value.



One more night changes the economics

2.9

average nights per trip

down 0.2 nights

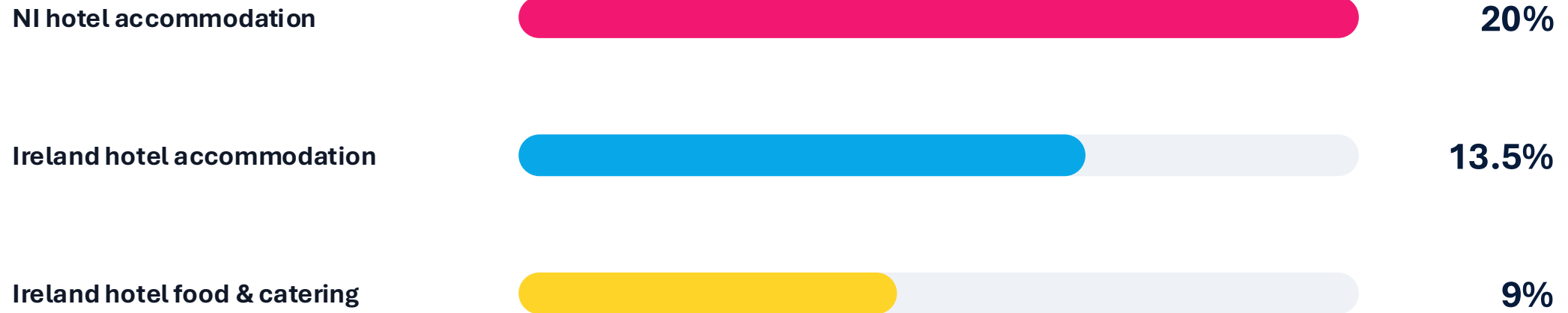
+5.1m

potential extra nights

if every current trip gained one night

Not every trip will gain a full night. Even a fraction would make a material difference.

VAT matters. But a cut needs a delivery story.



A credible ask explains where the benefit goes:

PRICE

MARGIN

PAY

INVESTMENT

PRODUCTIVITY

A route fund should buy a route to viability

5

tests for public support

The subsidy should absorb early risk, not become the business model.

- 01 **A strategic market we cannot reach well today**
- 02 **Predominantly inbound, additional demand**
- 03 **A credible path to viability after subsidy**
- 04 **Joint airline and destination marketing**
- 05 **Clear safeguards against displacement**

Direct long-haul departures from NI already carry zero APD.

B

BUILD CAPACITY

Growth stalls when the workforce, rooms, infrastructure or transport cannot keep pace.

OOO GLOBAL



The skills shortage begins before the hotel door.

53%

of tourism employers report
recruitment difficulty

HOUSING

Can people afford to live near the job?

TRANSPORT

Can they get home after the last shift?

WORK

Do pay, progression and scheduling make the
career credible?

Training matters. So do the conditions that determine whether people stay.

You can't market your way around a capacity constraint.

MARKETING



DEMAND

meets

THE CAPACITY WALL

PLANNING

WATER

ENERGY

TRANSPORT

ROOMS

**The £2bn ambition depends on investable projects and functioning places,
not promotion alone.**

C

CREATE DEMAND

Give people a reason to come now, stay longer
and return outside the peak season.

The calendar is an economic development tool.

EVENT



creates urgency

PLACE



turns attendance into experience

PROGRAMME



extends the day and the season

CONNECTION



spreads spend beyond the venue

The Fleadh showed what happens when programming, place and people come together.

Events are catalysts. The size of the crowd is not the economic impact.

GROSS HEADLINE

attendance × spend

The number everyone remembers

**DEADWEIGHT
DISPLACEMENT
LEAKAGE
CROWDING OUT**

= additional value retained locally

The right question is not ‘How busy was it?’ but ‘What changed because it happened?’

‘One More Night’ should be the next single

ONE MORE NIGHT

- 01 Bookable two- and three-day itineraries
- 02 A Sunday-night economy worth staying for
- 03 Business trips that convert into leisure stays
- 04 Events and experiences beyond July and August
- 05 Better links between Belfast and the regions

Longer stays add spend without requiring another arrival.

THE ABC TEST

A

ADD VALUE

Does it increase spend, length of stay, productivity or retained local benefit?

B

BUILD CAPACITY

Does it remove a real constraint on people, places, rooms or infrastructure?

C

CREATE DEMAND

Does it give someone a compelling reason to come, stay or return?

**If a policy does none of the three, it may be activity.
But it isn't an economic strategy.**