



Wales Tourism Business Barometer

January 2026 wave



Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

Wales Tourism Business Barometer: January 2026 wave

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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1. Headline findings

Mixed 2025 performance by sector

Overall, 40% of tourism businesses had more customers in 2025 compared to 2024, 32% had the same level and 28% had fewer.

However, performance varied significantly by sector. Among non-accommodation businesses (attractions, activity operators, restaurants, pubs and cafés), 50% had more customers, 26% had the same level and only 24% had fewer. The picture is far more mixed among accommodation businesses however, with 34% of businesses having more customers, 35% having the same but 31% having fewer.

Businesses in South Wales (43% were up) performed better than North Wales (34% were up).

Much better weather than previous summer helped many businesses

Summer 2025 (June to August) was the warmest summer on record in the UK according to the [Met Office](#), with above average levels of sunshine and below average rainfall. About one in three (34%) businesses with increased customers in 2025 attribute their upturn unprompted to the weather, which was unfavourable in 2024.

But the economic climate continues to hamper demand

About a third (34%) of businesses with decreased customers attribute their downturn unprompted to 'people lacking in disposable income', and 19% attribute the decline to 'global economic uncertainty'.

Use of OTAs and direct booking facility

Most (80%) accommodation businesses use OTAs. Among those who do, most (81%) say they can also take live, instant direct bookings on their own website.

Among those using OTAs but not having a direct booking facility, some (19%) are interested in support to set one up, but most are content to continue doing business as they are.

Two thirds (67%) of businesses which use OTAs sometimes try and encourage guests to book directly. By far the most common method of doing this is to offer a discounted price (74% of respondents).

Confidence to operate profitably

About a third (32%) of businesses feel 'very confident' to operate profitably this year and a further 33% say they feel 'fairly confident'. There are hopes for another summer of good weather.

2. Background and method

What is the Wales Tourism Business Barometer?

The Wales Tourism Business Barometer is designed to give quick feedback on how the tourism industry in Wales is performing at key times during the year. This wave looks at performance in 2025. The ad-hoc topics this time are use of OTAs and live online booking facilities.

How was the survey conducted?

We have conducted 902 interviews by telephone. The results of questions asked to everyone are accurate to $\pm 3.3\%$. The balance of the sample by region and sector broadly reflects the industry in Wales. The contact database used is a combination of Visit Wales' list of graded businesses and databases of non-graded businesses that we have sourced from an independent supplier.

Table 1: Research sample by sector and region

Sector / Region	North	Mid	South West	South East	Total
Serviced accommodation	95	47	59	23	224
Self-catering	72	36	70	32	210
Caravan / campsites	17	35	32	20	104
Hostels	8	4	12	4	28
Attractions	71	25	35	36	167
Activity operators	23	13	25	17	78
Restaurants / pubs / cafés	31	10	20	30	91
Total	317	170	253	162	902

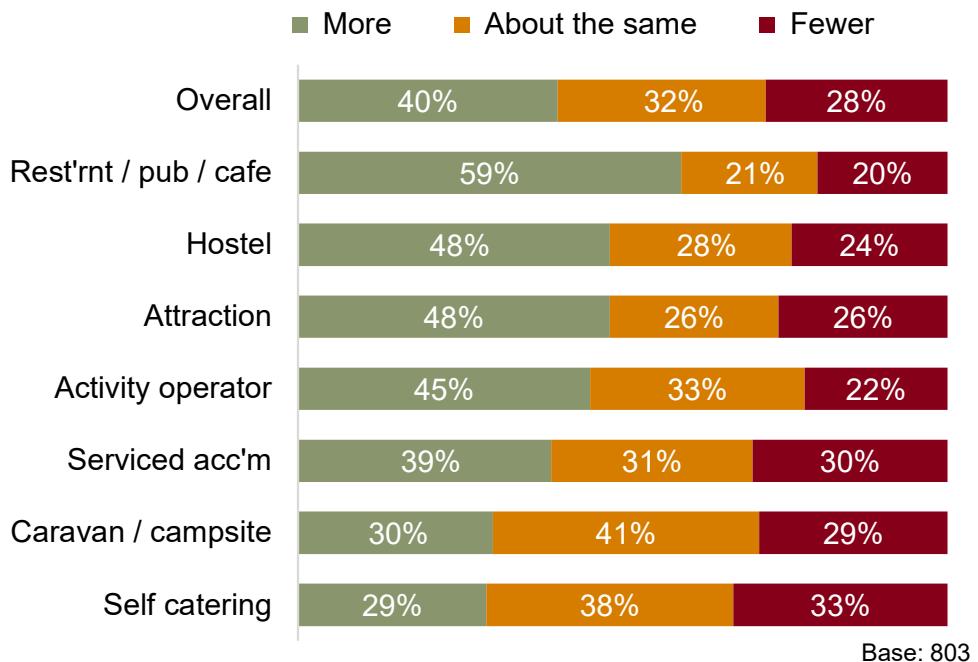
68% of businesses in the sample are graded by Visit Wales. The graded and non-graded samples are spread across the different regions and sectors except restaurants / pubs / cafés, where grading is not applicable.

All telephone interviews have been conducted with business owners or managers between 7th and 20th January 2026.

3. Performance in 2025

Performance by sector

Figure 1: Q1 "How many customers did you have in 2025 compared to 2024?" by sector



'Don't know' and 'not applicable' answers have been excluded

Mixed performance by sector

Non-accommodation operators, especially the restaurant / pubs / cafés sector, generally performed well in 2025. Accommodation operators however vary greatly in their feedback, with some experiencing a buoyant peak summer season and year overall but others enduring a very challenging year.

"We had an excellent year"

Activity operator, South West

"The weather helped last year with last minute bookings"

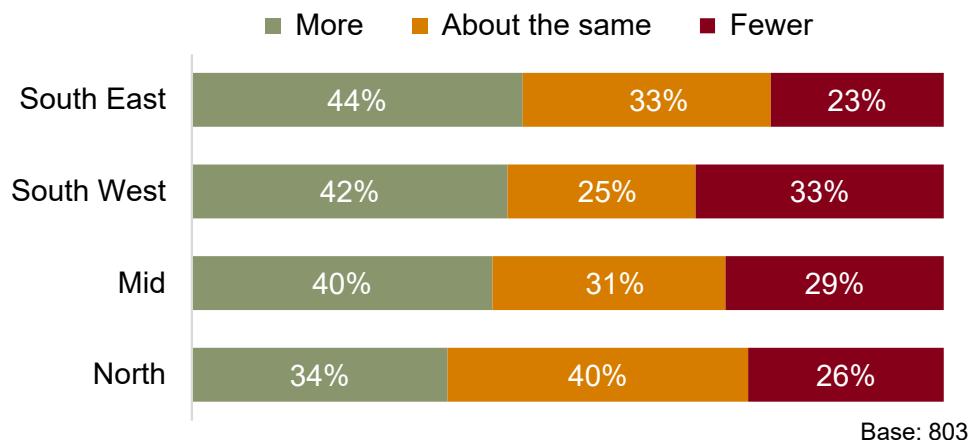
Serviced, Mid

"People don't have money. They're not travelling as before."

Caravan park, Mid

Performance by region

Figure 2: Q1 "How many customers did you have in 2025 compared to 2024?" by region



'Don't know' and 'not applicable' answers have been excluded

Some differences by region

The proportion of businesses reporting to be up in 2025 outweighs the proportion reporting to be down in every region. South East Wales performed somewhat better than the other regions.

"We had a lot more visitors from the USA last year"
Activity operator, South East

"Last year was atrocious but we are getting more enquiries for this year so feeling more positive"
Activity operator, South West

We discuss the reasons for being busier or quieter next.

Reasons for being busier

Figure 3: Q2 "Are there any particular reasons why you had more customers in 2025?" (unprompted)



Q2 has been asked to businesses having more customers in 2025 (Q1). Respondents could give more than one answer.

Fine summer weather helped many businesses

Summer 2025 (June to August) was the warmest summer on record in the UK according to the [Met Office](#), with above average levels of sunshine and below average rainfall. About one in three (34%) businesses with increased customers in 2025 attribute their upturn unprompted to the weather, which was unfavourable in summer 2024.

"Last year was the best summer we've had, whereas summer 2024 was the very worst season in North Wales. Let's hope the weather is good again."
Pub, North

Many (46%) activity operators and 43% of caravan / campsites which had a busier 2025 attribute the upturn to the weather.

"Last summer was good because of the weather so we didn't have to cancel anything, but 2024 was atrocious as we had to cancel loads because of adverse weather."
Activity operator, South West

Reaping the rewards of own marketing

Investing in marketing the business can bring good returns. About a third (34%) of attractions and activity operators who had more customers in 2025 attribute the increase to their own marketing.

“We’ve been advertising on new platforms, trying to entice international visitors, and had our website redone.”

Attraction, South East

“My wife is investing a lot on advertising our business with nice pictures and it looks like it’s working”

Caravan park, Mid

Events in Cardiff

One of the reasons why South East Wales performed better than the other regions in 2025 is the volume of visitors that events in Cardiff attracted. Some businesses in the region say they expect this to continue in 2026.

“Looking forward to another great summer of Cardiff being firmly on the map, with the castle and the stadium hosting great events”

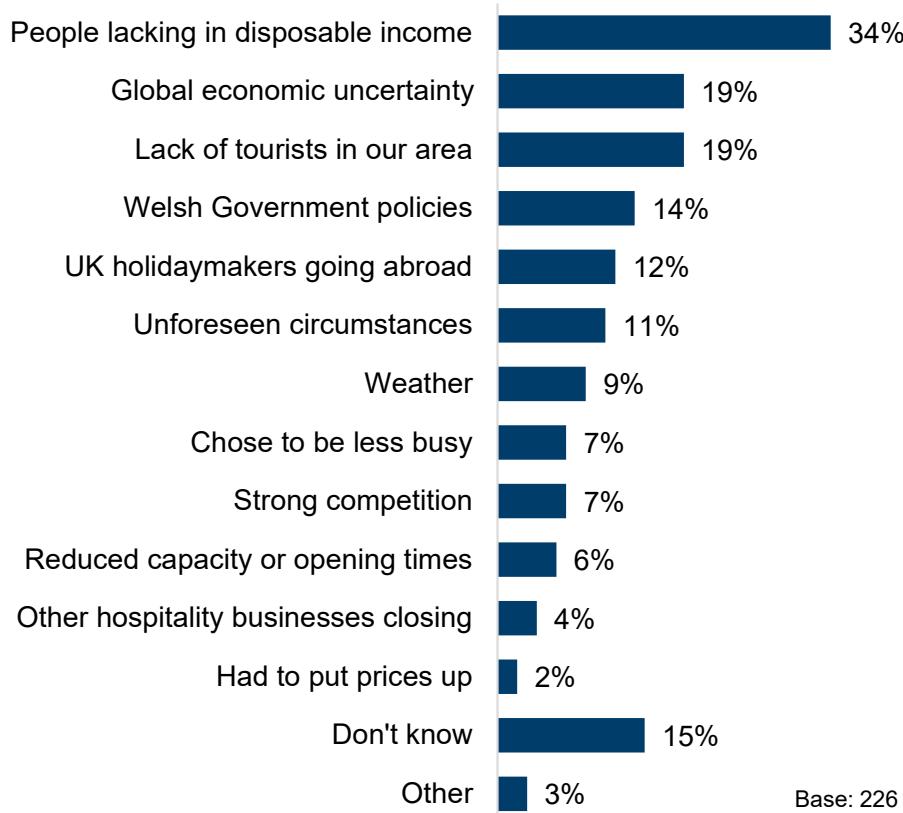
Pub, South East

“Feeling positive as lots of events happening this year”

Restaurant, South East

Reasons for being quieter

Figure 4: Q3 "Are there any particular reasons why you had fewer customers in 2025?" (unprompted)



Q3 has been asked to businesses having fewer customers in 2025 (Q1). Respondents could give more than one answer.

Challenging economic times

Lack of disposable income remains the most frequently cited reason for being quieter, as has been the case in recent barometer waves. The situation within the UK is not helped by wider global economic and geopolitical uncertainty.

Operators are continuing to notice shorter overnight stays and day trips instead of overnight stays. This might help explain why non-accommodation operators performed well in 2025, whereas the accommodation sector did not enjoy the same level of success. Another reason for the difference could be that not all customers of non-accommodation businesses are tourists, whereas accommodation businesses are solely reliant on tourists.

"It's getting quieter and quieter. Guests are only booking for one or two nights, and stays are coinciding with pay-day."
Caravan park, North

"We noticed that there were far more day-trippers than those taking longer stays"
Attraction, North

Weather not necessarily 'good' for all businesses

Whilst some businesses reaped the rewards of a warm and sunny summer, the weather at times was 'too good' for businesses inland or indoors. Around a quarter (23%) of attractions and activity operators with decreased visitor levels attribute their decline to the weather.

"Last year the weather was good so people were heading to the coast instead"

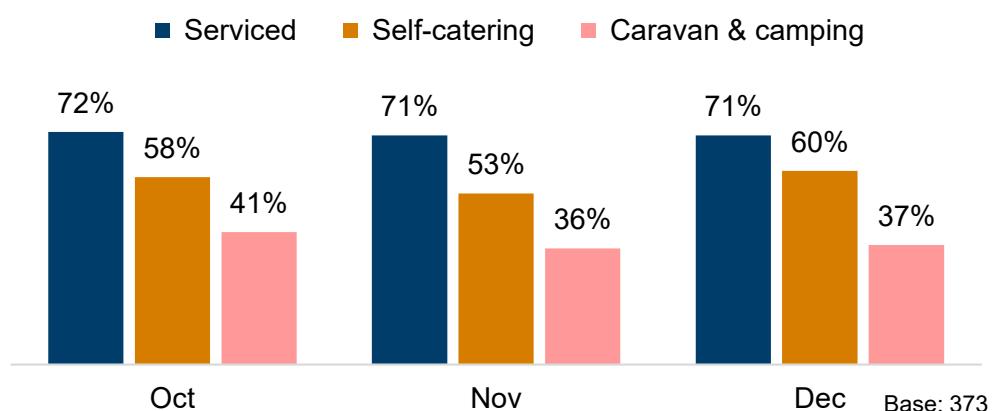
Caravan park, South West

"Fewer visitors last year because people were on the beach due to the sunny weather"

Attraction, North

October to December occupancy levels

Figure 5: Q5 "How much of your available capacity was booked for ... ?"
(accommodation operators)

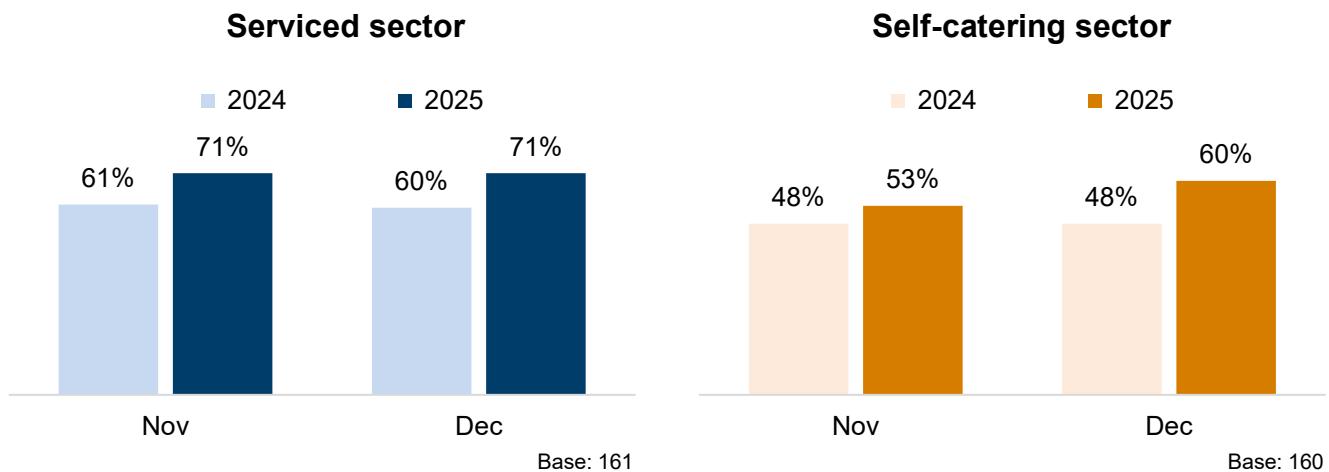


Q5 has been asked to accommodation operators. 'Don't know' and 'closed all month' answers have been excluded. Occupancy levels shown have been weighted by size of business.

Occupancy rates up on 2024 for those remaining open

Net occupancy rates in the serviced and self-catering sectors for November and December 2025 were up on 2024. The charts below show these year-on-year differences in sector occupancy:

Figure 6: Net occupancy year-on-year comparison



The sample size of open caravan / campsites is too small for reliable year-on-year comparison. October occupancy in 2024 was not measured in earlier barometer waves.

Under pressure to reach 182 days

Many self-catering operators feel under a lot of pressure to meet the 182 day occupancy target in order to qualify for non-domestic rates. In some cases this means they are sacrificing price in favour of occupancy.

“We hit our 182 days last year but we had to decrease the prices dramatically”
Self-catering, North

“Our biggest worry is being under pressure to be booked for 182 days ... lots of bookings seem to be short notice, which is nerve-wracking.”
Self-catering, Mid

Differences by region

Table 2: Net occupancy by sector and region

Sector / Region	October to December occupancy				
	North	Mid	South West	South East	All Wales
Serviced	69%	60%	61%	82%	71%
Self-catering	69%	51%	33%	75%	57%

The sample size of open caravan / campsites is too small for reliable regional comparisons

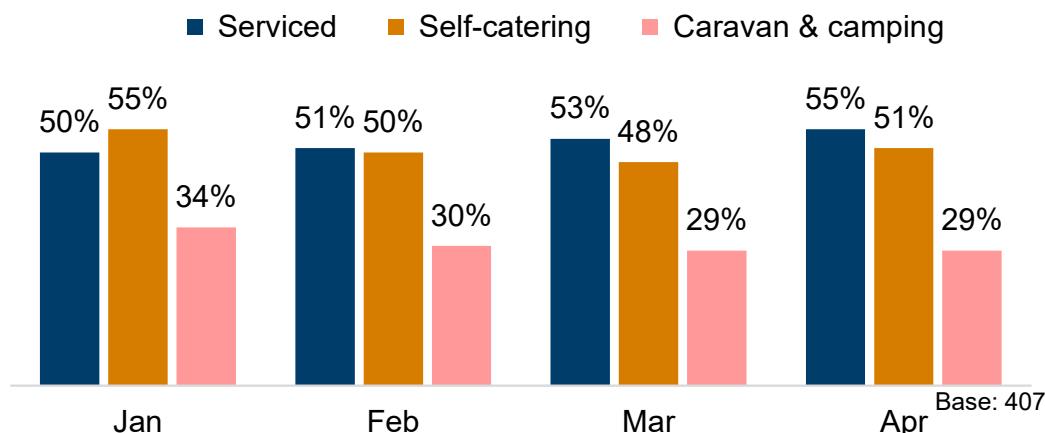
South East Wales performed very well on occupancy levels during the October to December quarter, especially in the serviced sector.

The self-catering sector in South West Wales saw occupancy levels well behind the other regions of Wales.

4. Advance bookings and confidence

Advance bookings

Figure 7: Q6 "How much of your available capacity is booked for ... ?"



Q6 has been asked to accommodation operators. 'Don't know' and 'closed all month' answers have been excluded. Occupancy levels shown have been weighted by size of business.

Outlook for the spring

The last minute trend makes the spring hard to predict as consumers watch the weather forecasts and their disposable income.

"Filling up nicely"

Serviced, North

"We aren't unduly worried about this year as we get a lot of last minute bookings with people watching the weather"

Caravan park, South West

Differences by region

Table 3: Booked occupancy by sector and region

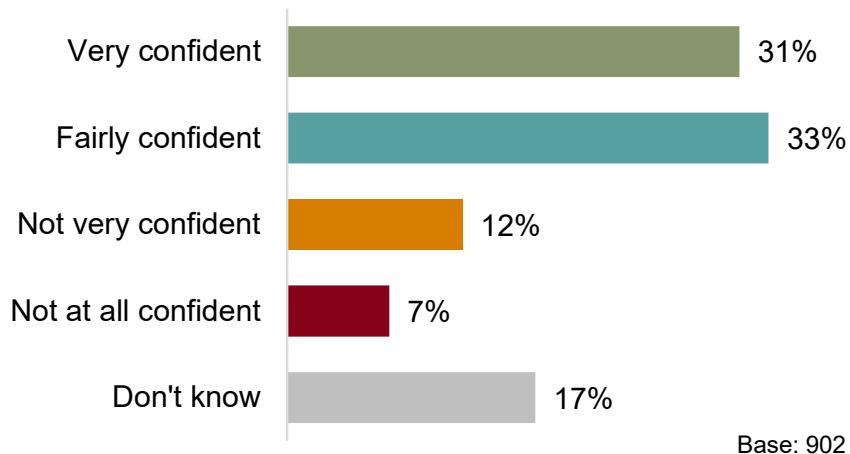
Sector / Region	February to April occupancy				
	North	Mid	South West	South East	All Wales
Serviced	54%	36%	53%	59%	53%
Self-catering	56%	39%	34%	68%	50%

The sample size of open caravan / campsites is too small for reliable regional comparisons

There are differences by region in current occupancy levels but the last minute booking trend means that this picture could all change nearer the time.

Confidence to operate profitably

Figure 8: Q7 "How confident do you feel about running the business profitably this year?"



Mixed levels of confidence

The majority (64%) of operators feel confident about running their business profitably this year. Some are pinning their hopes on another summer of good weather.

"Feeling very positive now that Visit Wales have helped us with social media marketing"
Serviced, North

"We're expecting a good year due to the filming of TV programmes nearby. We're hoping for exposure through that and for another year of good weather."
Attraction, North

Activity operators stand out, with 53% saying they are 'very confident' and a further 31% saying they are 'fairly confident'.

"We are working with American walking tour companies and at the tail end of 2025, we had far more enquiries for the upcoming year than we have ever had so our booking window is looking up."
Activity operator, South West

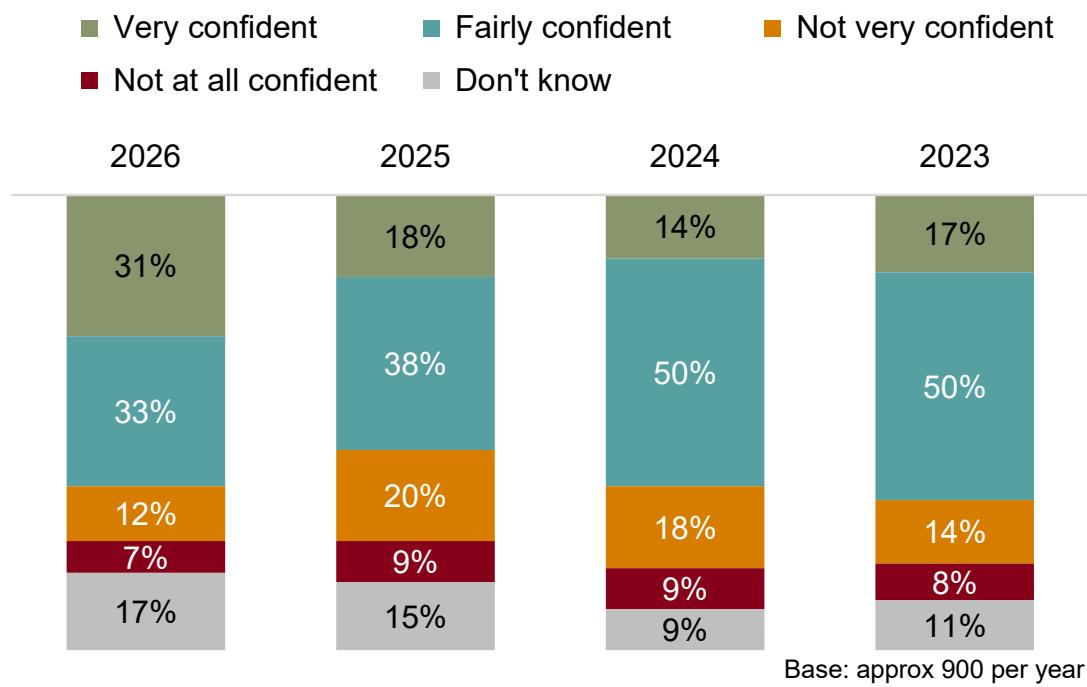
Among businesses not feeling confident, concerns are mainly around high operating costs and not being able to increase prices as much as they ideally need to because of consumer affordability and remaining competitive.

"We are not confident in our profitability this year because of high overheads, the ongoing cost of living crisis, changing business rates and taxes, minimum wage and national insurance rises"
Café, North

"It's going to be a difficult year due to costs increasing"
Attraction, South West

Confidence trend

Figure 9: "How confident do you feel about running the business profitably this year?" (trend by year)



The same question has been asked in January or February in each year shown

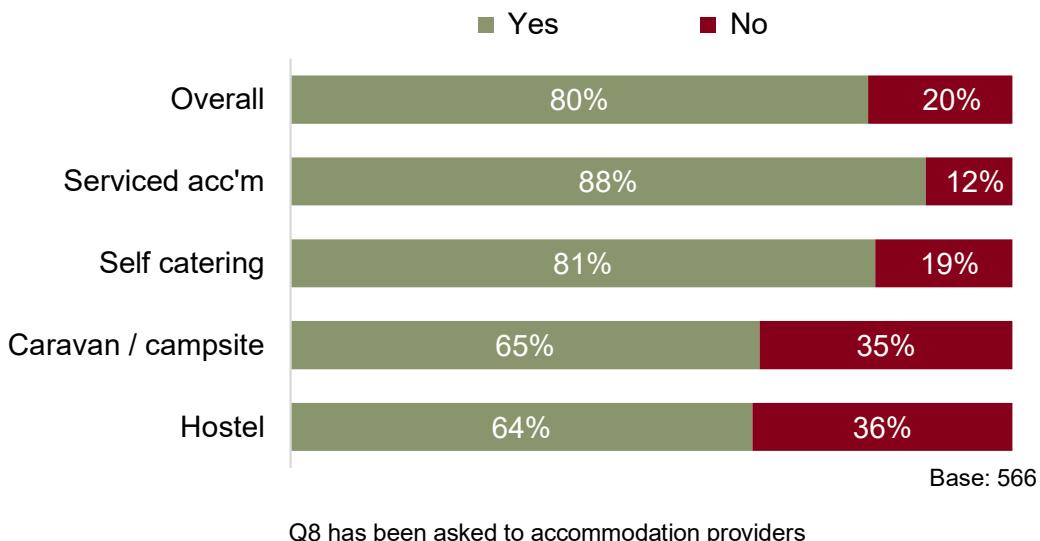
Increase in the proportion of 'very confident' operators

Confidence to operate profitably was quite subdued at this time of year when looking ahead in 2023, 2024 and 2025 because of soaring operating costs. In 2026, the proportion of operators feeling 'very confident' is approximately double what it has been in recent years, although uncertainty among some operators remains.

5. Use of OTAs and live online booking systems

Use of OTAs

Figure 10: Q8 "Do you use any OTAs such as Booking.com, Airbnb, Pitchup or an agency?"



Most use OTAs

The use of OTAs is very widespread in the serviced and self-catering sectors. Around two thirds of operators in the caravan / campsite and hostel sectors also use them.

Some businesses appreciate the volume of bookings that come in through OTAs, sometimes with little effort on their part. Others would rather not use them but feel they have little choice.

"We teamed up with Travel Chapter and got lots of bookings last year"
Self-catering, South East

"We've had to use more agencies just to get more bookings. It's going to be another hard year with the cost of living. It's becoming a luxury to go away."
Caravan park, North

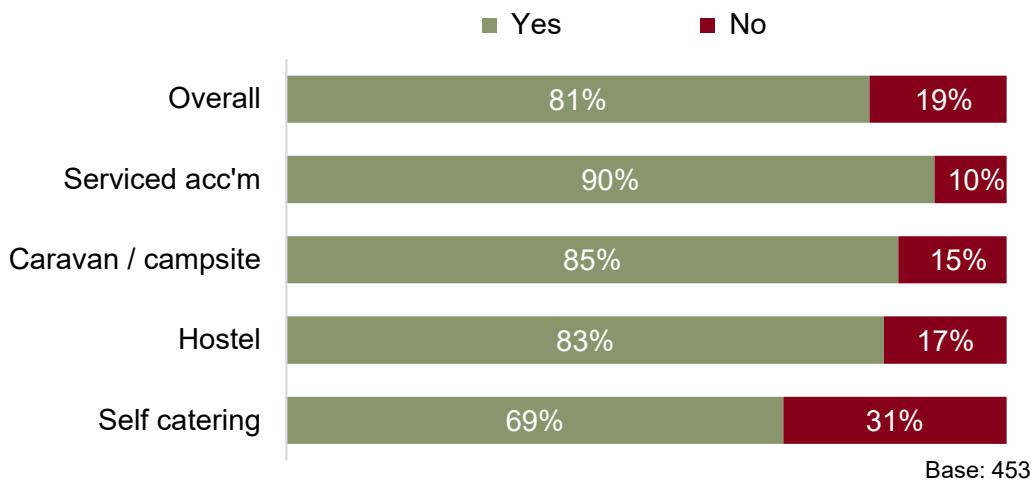
Reasons for avoiding OTAs

Avoiding paying commission to a third party is an obvious reason not to use OTAs but it is not the only reason. Some small businesses are keen to know who is coming into their property before accepting a booking. Using an OTA relinquishes that control.

"Human interaction is really important. We found that using Airbnb means little control over the type of customer."
Hostel, South West

Use of live online booking systems

Figure 11: Q9 “Can you take live, instant direct bookings on your website which are not facilitated through an OTA such as booking.com or Airbnb?”



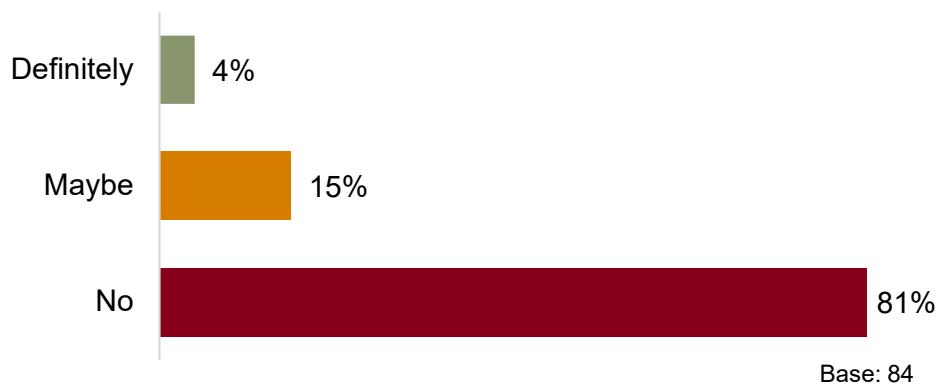
Q9 has been asked to those using OTAs ('yes' to Q8)

Most can take instant direct bookings

For operators which deal with OTAs, customers also usually have the option of booking instantly and directly online if they want to and know that they can.

Interest in live online booking systems

Figure 12: Q10 “Would you like support in setting up a booking system to take live, instant direct bookings on your website?” (unprompted)



Q10 has been asked to those who use OTAs but do not offer instant direct bookings through their website ('yes' to Q8 but 'no' to Q9)

Minority are interested in support

Among those using OTAs but not having a direct online booking facility, some (19%) are interested in support to set one up, but most are content to continue doing business as they are. We discuss the reasons for not being interested in more detail under Q12.

Support needed in setting up a booking system

Figure 13: Q11 “How would you need support in setting up the booking system?” (prompt if necessary)



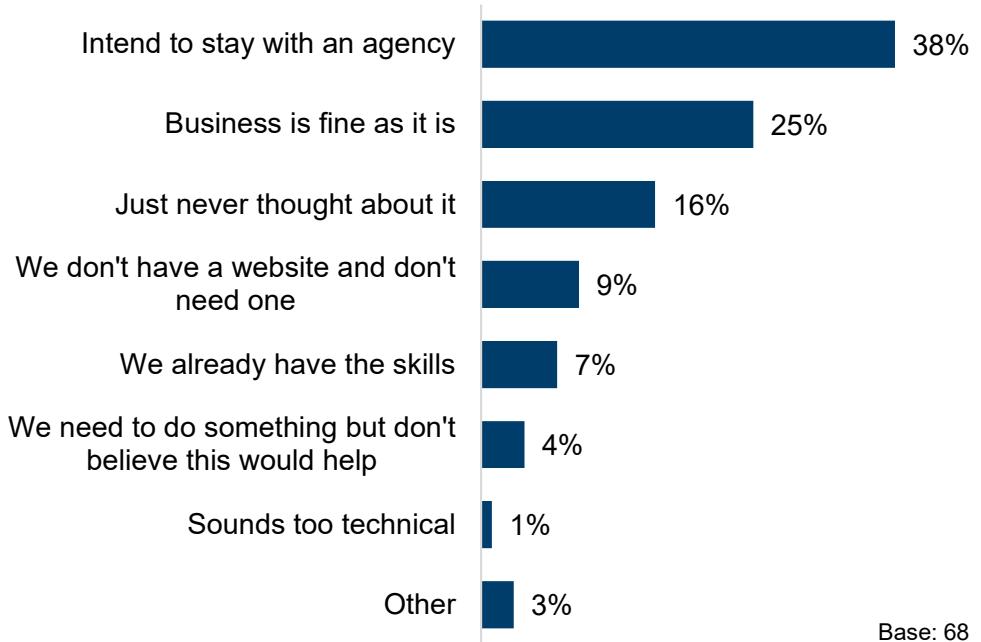
Q11 has been asked to those interested in a live online booking system ('definitely' or 'maybe' to Q10). Respondents could give more than one answer. Results are shown as numbers of respondents rather than percents due to the low base (16).

Indication of support needed

The sample size for this question is very low (16) and so the above findings are indicative only. The general feedback is that businesses interested in the support would be starting from a long way back, as some don't know what support they would need, don't yet have their own website or would need support for the whole set-up.

Reasons for not being interested

Figure 14: Q12 “Are there any particular reasons why you don't need support in setting up a booking system to take live, instant direct bookings on your website?” (prompt if necessary)



Q12 has been asked to those not interested in a live online booking system ('no' to Q10). Respondents could give more than one answer.

Happy as we are

Among those who deal with OTAs but don't offer live direct bookings through their own website, many are content to continue as they are. This typically means a combination of instant online bookings coming through an OTA and some customers (usually repeats) phoning to book directly.

Whilst using OTAs has its disadvantages as operators lose margin, some say they appreciate how easy the OTAs make doing business. They would rather not have the hassle of managing an online booking facility themselves, storing payment card details securely and handling cancellations.

“We are happy using Airbnb as a booking system as it is reliable and takes a lot of stress off us”
Self-catering, South West

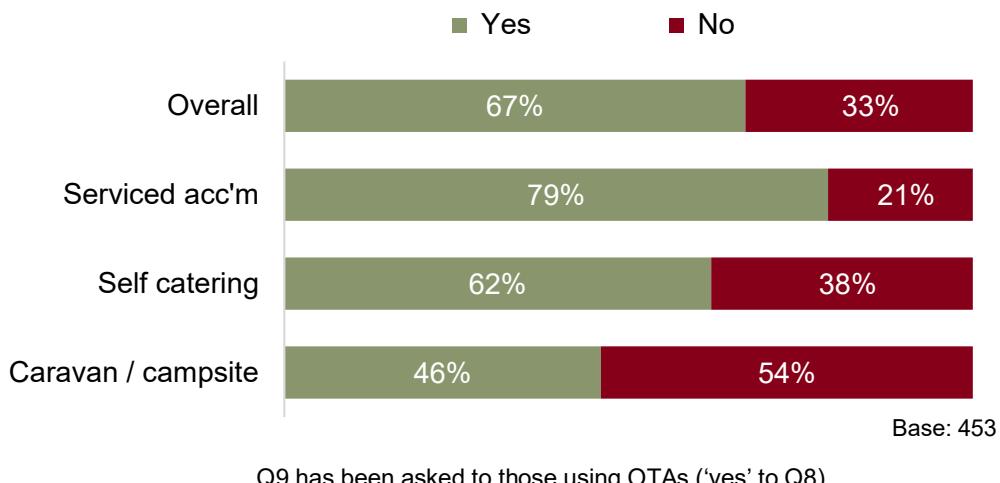
“I used to have a website but the majority of my bookings are and were done via OTAs so it wasn't economical to carry on running my website.”
Self-catering, South West

“We are busy enough with our current use of Pitchup. We don't need a website to take direct bookings as we have enough customers.”
Hostel, South West

“We have joined Sykes and they are brilliant. We find that people who book with us directly ask 101 questions and they are the ones who then cancel. We don't get any cancellations with Sykes.”
 Caravan park, South East

Encouraging direct bookings

Figure 15: Q13 “Do you ever try and encourage your guests to book directly with you instead of through an OTA?”



Variations by sector

Most (79%) serviced accommodation operators who use OTAs say they also try and encourage guests to book directly. This practice is also prevalent among self-catering and caravan / campsite operators, but to a lesser extent than in the serviced sector. Some businesses find it hard to get around an OTA to take direct bookings.

“Airbnb tries to block direct bookings”
 Hostel, South East

“We are with Sykes but encourage people to book directly with us on our website to save us and them money.”
 Caravan park, South East

Targeting repeat bookers

Operators can usually do little about the practice of new guests booking instantly through an OTA instead of directly, but when they are at the property in person and have given their contact details, there is an opportunity to target direct repeat bookings either in person or by following up post-visit.

“We encourage customers to book directly if they want to come again”
 Caravan park, South East

Preference for OTAs taking away the hassle

In spite of losing margin through paying commission, some businesses prefer just to let the OTAs deal with the bookings and any related hassle such as handling cancellations, online payments and some also say insurance.

“We are insured with Airbnb if something breaks so we prefer that to direct bookings”

Self-catering, South West

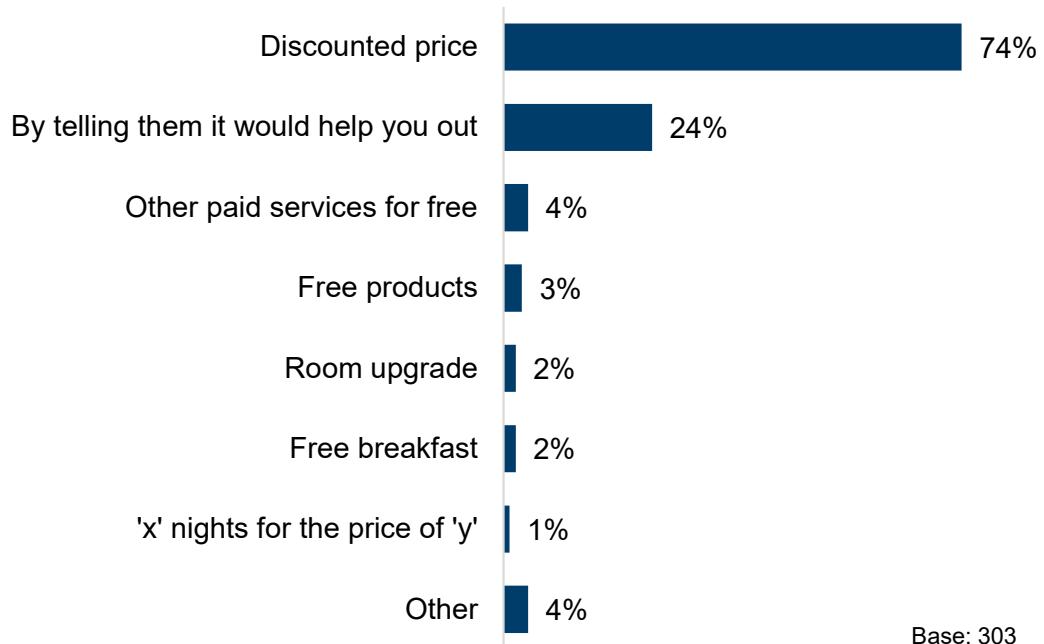
“We had a lot of no-shows from direct bookings over the phone. It would also turn out that the credit card / debit card number was void.”

Serviced, North

“I don't prefer direct bookings as it's easier for Booking.com to manage it for me.”

Serviced, North

Figure 16: Q14 “How do you encourage them to book directly?” (unprompted)



Q14 has been asked to those who encourage guests to book directly ('yes' to Q13). Respondents could give more than one answer.

‘It's cheaper if you book directly next time’

Offering a lower price than the OTA price is the main tool that businesses use to encourage direct bookings. Some businesses run promotions to that effect.

“We run special promotions out of season to encourage our guests to book with us directly”

Serviced, Mid

'It would really help us out'

Some operators appeal to the emotional side of their customers by stating it would help them out to receive a direct booking next time instead of a booking through an OTA.

"I do try and encourage my customers to book with us directly by telling them it would help us out"
Serviced, North

Further enticements

Apart from offering a lower price, businesses may also try and entice direct bookings by offering free or discounted products and services.

"We offer 20% off food for direct bookings"
Serviced, Mid

"This winter we are offering Welsh cakes and tea for people booking direct"
Serviced, North