



ENGLAND ATTRACTIONS MONITOR

Quarter 1 Report
January to March 2008

JN: 173396

Date: June 2008



Content

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Methodology	2
3.	Summary of Findings	3
4.	2008 Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) Visit Trends 2007-2008	5
5.	2007 Quarter 1 (January to March) Business Performance Trends 2007 - 2008 ..	10
6.	Business Confidence for Quarter 2 (April to June)	11
7.	Q1 2008 – Hot Topics – Rising Fuel Prices	17

1. Introduction

In December 2007, TNS Travel & Tourism, an independent market research company, were commissioned to manage the England Attractions Monitor in 2008, an online survey designed to help provide the attractions industry in England with rapid feedback on current trends in visits to attractions.

VisitBritain originally commissioned BDRC, a London based market research company, to launch and manage the Monitor in January 2006. Following a successful first year, the survey was enhanced for 2007 to cover not only recent visit trends but also questions relating to business confidence for the forthcoming quarter.

The intention during 2008 is to keep the survey questions consistent with 2007; one enhancement has been the introduction of a different 'hot topic' question, agreed with VisitBritain beforehand that will be added to the survey each quarter. During Quarter 1, the 'hot topic' question asked attractions what impact, if any, they thought rising fuel prices had on visitor numbers to their attraction during 2007. The results from this question can be found in Chapter 7.

2. Methodology

As in last year's survey, the objective was to create a committed panel of c.500 attractions comprising:

- c.200 individual attractions recruited by e-mail and telephone (c.20-25 per England region);
- c.300 National Trust and English Heritage properties (with key data for each property provided centrally).

Regional Tourism Organisations were contacted and given the opportunity to enhance the survey for their region by boosting the sample size to enable them to analyse their own results in greater detail. To date, the North West region has taken up this opportunity. The Regional Tourism Organisations were also given the opportunity to add bespoke questions.

A great deal of effort went into recruiting attractions by e-mail and telephone, with data collection subsequently taking place online. Attractions that had participated in the 2007 Monitor as well as the annual 2006 Visits to Visitor Attractions survey were contacted initially and this was supplemented by targeted telephone calls to attractions. Regional Tourism Organisations were also contacted by telephone asking them for assistance in identifying attractions that would be willing to take part. A cross-section of attractions were recruited according to type, size and free/paid admission.

During the first 2008 quarterly period – January to March 2008 – 516 attractions provided data. Of these, 329 were either National Trust or English Heritage properties – National Trust provide visitor numbers only and English Heritage a partial data set. The intention is to recruit at least 200 attractions for the second quarter. For consistency, comparisons will always be made among constant samples where appropriate.

3. Summary of Findings

This is a summary of the findings for the Quarter 1 (January to March 2008) period below.

From a weather perspective, Quarter 1 was generally mild with January being the fourth warmest since records began. Rainfall for January was also higher than the norm. February was much drier with rainfall below average and it was the sunniest February since 1929. March temperatures were close to average although rainfall was higher than normal with it being the wettest March since 1981. Sunshine for March was generally above average though for most areas. The important Easter holiday period fell in March in 2008 and April in 2007.

With regards to differences in visitor admissions between Q1 2007 and 2008, overall, admissions across the 516 participating attractions increased by 19%. March was a good month, with visits up 27% year-on-year. It is likely that Easter falling during March in 2008 contributed to this increase with some seasonal attractions opening to the public earlier than in 2007.

As with last year's report, to add a level of consistency between 2007 and 2008 surveys, attractions were asked to provide an overall assessment of whether their visitor numbers had increased, remained the same or decreased compared with the equivalent quarter of the previous year. The findings for the first quarter (Jan to Mar) in 2008 were very positive, with three in five attractions (60%) reporting that their visitor numbers for Q1 2008 were higher compared with Q1 2007. Nevertheless, one in five attractions (21%) recorded a decline in visits.

This positive outlook was generally mirrored with the overall business performance of the attractions, with 53% feeling that business performance was better than in Q1 2007. However, 17% thought that business performance was worse than in Q1 2007.

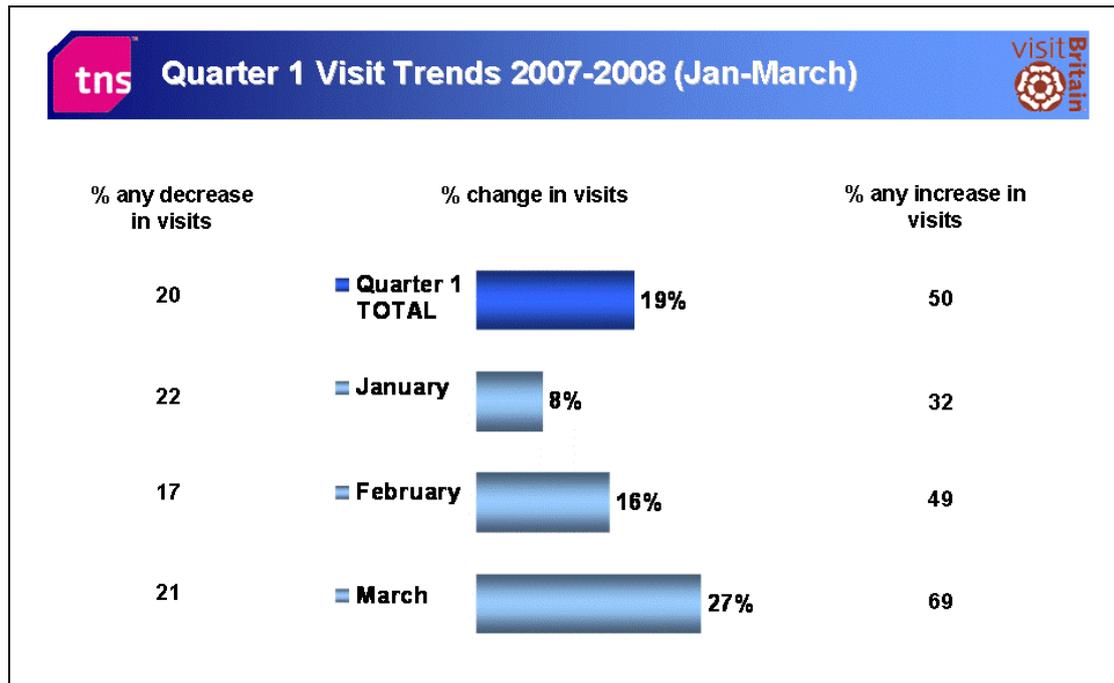
Looking forward to Quarter 2, business confidence is cautiously optimistic overall. Some 44% of attractions expect visitor admissions to be higher in Quarter 2 (April to June) in 2008 than they were in the equivalent quarter for 2007. Similarly, 37% feel more optimistic about their business prospects for the quarter than they did last year. Nevertheless, a quarter of attractions (25%) claimed they were less positive than in

2007. This may indicate that some of the attractions are feeling more cautious in their outlook given the current economic climate.

Perceptions of the effect of rising fuel costs on visitor numbers were mixed: while two in five attractions (41%) thought that rising fuel costs in 2007 had an effect on visitor numbers to their attraction a slightly smaller proportion thought that it had no impact (38%). A small minority of attractions (4%) thought that it had a major impact.

4. 2008 Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) Visit Trends 2007-2008

The chart below illustrates the percentage increase in visitor admissions between Q1 2007 and 2008 amongst the 514 attractions taking part in the survey. It also identifies the proportion of attractions recording an overall increase and decrease in admissions.



Q1 (January, February and March) has seen a positive start in 2008 for the attractions industry, with visitor admissions among the 514 attractions taking part in the survey increasing by 19% compared to the equivalent time period in 2007.

As in 2007, visitor admissions grew in each of the three months of Q1, with greater percentage increases as the quarter progressed. An 8% rise was recorded in January, followed by a 16% increase in February and 27% in March.

Half of the attractions in the survey (50%) recorded visitor admissions that were higher than in Q1 2007, compared with only 20% recording lower figures. Visitor admissions improved as the quarter progressed with 69% of attractions recording an increase in visitors in March compared with 32% in January.

It is likely that February was helped by the generally good weather increasing visits at gardens and open attractions. For March, the Easter holiday period fell during March in 2008 compared to April in 2007, which will have contributed to the large percentage of attractions recording an increase.

The following charts illustrate how visitor admission trends for Quarter 1 vary by region, attraction category, size of attraction, geographic location, and whether the attraction was paid or free entry.

tns Quarter 1 Visit Trends 2007-2008 (Jan-Mar) –by region				visit Britain
REGION	Jan change (%)	Feb change (%)	Mar change (%)	Total Quarter 1 % Change
North East (46)	1	9	49	23
North West (52)	47	44	71	56
Yorkshire (43)	-11	-15	-1	-8
East Midlands (46)	4	23	54	29
West Midlands (41)	5	55	40	36
East (57)	18	53	34	38
London (27)	6	-2	12	5
South East (100)	18	25	23	22
South West (102)	3	33	51	36
Total England (514)	8	16	27	19

tns Quarter 1 Visit Trends 2007-2008 (Jan-Mar) –by attraction 

ATTRACTION CATEGORY	Jan change (%)	Feb change (%)	Mar change (%)	Total Q1 Change
Historic Houses/Castles (271)	11	40	71	49
Other historic properties (28)	4	19	36	24
Museums/Art Galleries (69)	17	8	25	17
Gardens (40)	8	86	11	31
Visitor/heritage centres (12)	47	11	41	32
Wildlife attractions/zoos (22)	-2	28	19	18
Others (72)	5	4	11	7
Total England (514)	8	16	27	19

tns Quarter 1 Visit Trends 2007-2008 (Jan-Mar) – by other segments 

	Jan change (%)	Feb change (%)	Mar change (%)	Total Quarter 1 % Change
Visits per annum				
20,000 or less (179)	5	-7	95	38
20,001-50,000 (123)	2	23	53	32
50,001-100,000 (91)	6	33	71	45
100,001-200,000 (69)	15	47	46	40
Over 200,000 (41)	8	8	10	9
Admission				
Paid (448)	6	28	45	30
Free (66)	11	4	3	6
Location				
Coastal (28)	-2	23	36	23
Rural (357)	18	38	44	36
Urban (129)	2	0	12	5
Total England (514)	8	16	27	19

In Q1 2008, the North West (+56%), East (+38%), West Midlands (+36%), South West (+36%), East Midlands (+29%), North East (+23%) and South East (+22%) regions each recorded percentage increases in visitor admissions which were above the England average of +19%. January recorded some particularly high increases in the North West (+47%). Further high increases were recorded across the regions in February in the West Midlands (+55%) and the East (+53%). The highest increase in visitor admissions across the quarter was recorded by the North West region (+71%) in March.

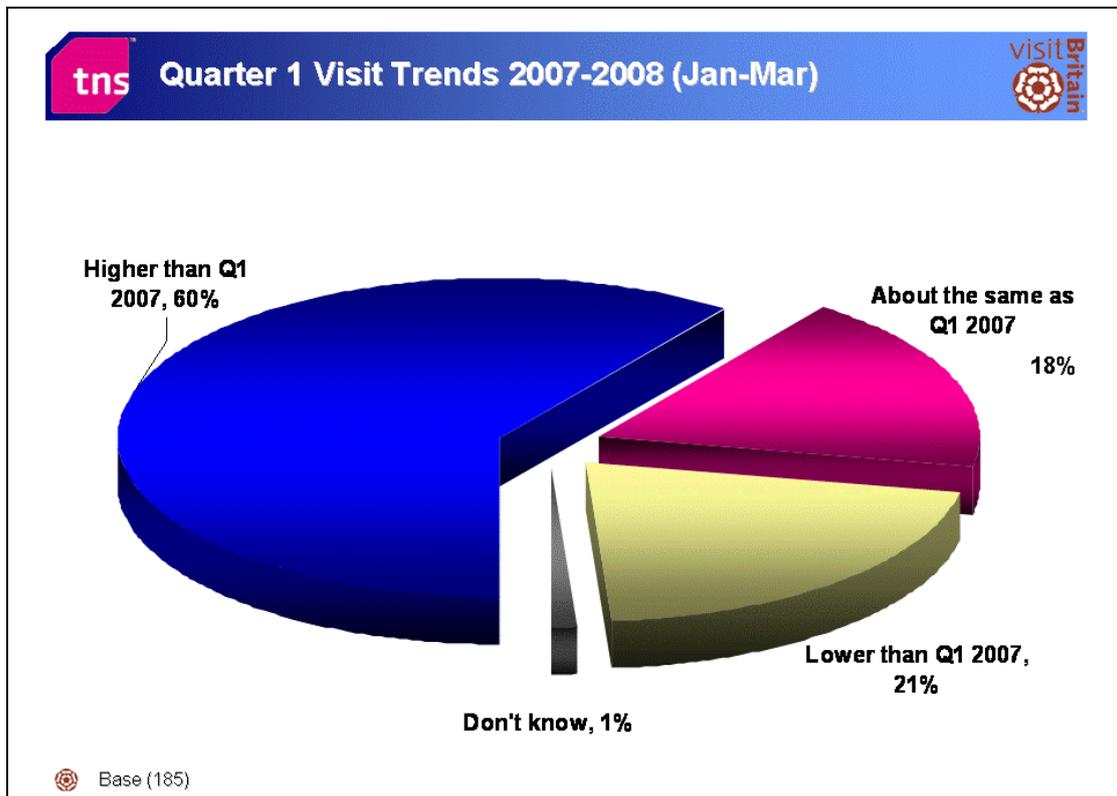
Yorkshire (-8%) was the only region to record a decrease in visitor admissions for Q1. This was driven by a large attraction in the region recording significantly lower visitor numbers for Q1 2008 compared to Q1 2007. Removing this attraction from the data set resulted in the Yorkshire regional score changing from an -8% decrease in visitor admissions to +23% increase.

Increases in admissions in Q1 by attraction category were varied, ranging from +49% for historic houses and castles (driven by a 71% increase in March) to +17% for museums and art galleries.

Attractions with between 50,000 and 100,000 visitors per annum recorded a higher increase during the quarter (+45%) than those with over 200,000 visitors (+9%).

Paid attractions (+30%) recorded a greater increase in visitor admissions than free attractions (+6%). Similarly, rural attractions (+36%) recorded greater increases than either coastal (+23%) or urban (+5%) attractions.

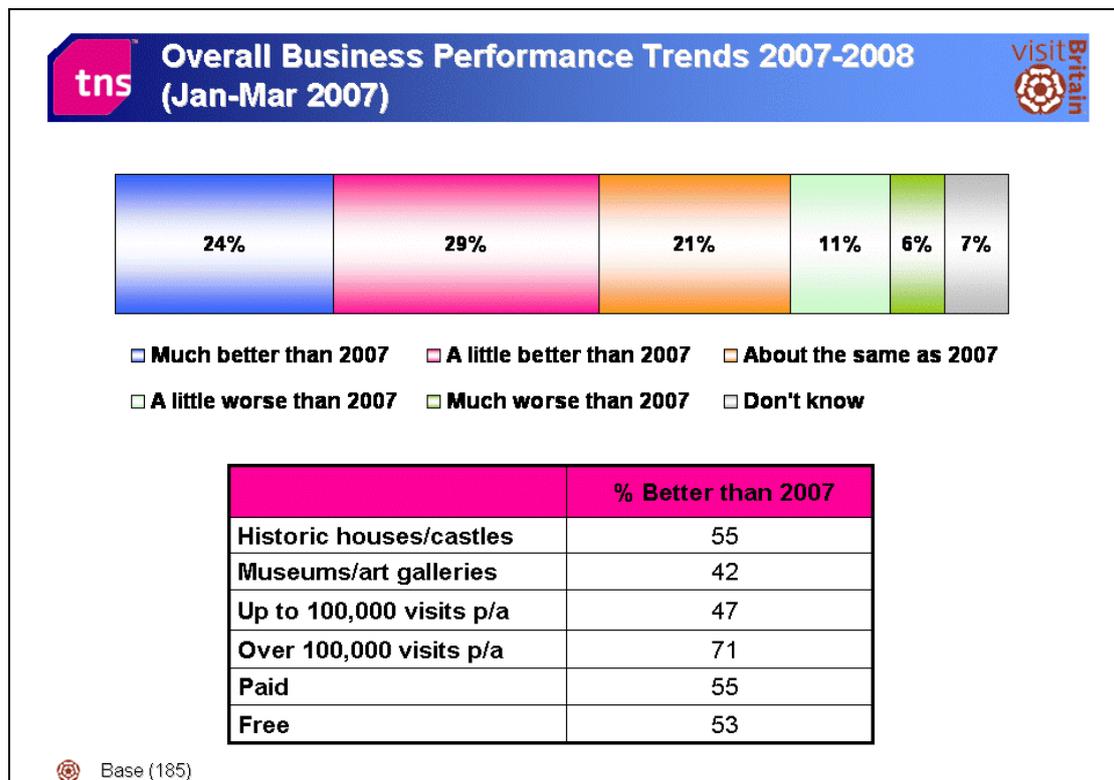
To add a level of consistency between the 2007 and 2008 surveys, attractions were asked to provide an overall assessment of whether their visitor admissions had increased, remained the same or decreased compared with the equivalent quarter of the previous year. The chart overleaf compares the findings of Q1 2008 versus Q1 2007.



Three in five (60%) of the attractions taking part in the survey in Q1 2007 felt that visitor admissions increased compared with Q1 2007. This compares with 47% who felt that admissions had increased between Q1 2006 and Q1 2007. It is likely that Easter falling during Q2 in 2007 and Q1 in 2008 contributed to the large proportion of attractions recording higher scores.

5. 2007 Quarter 1 (January to March) Business Performance Trends 2007 - 2008

Attractions were also asked to state how they thought their business had performed overall in Q1 2008 compared with during Q1 2007. The chart below illustrates the proportions of the 185 attractions (excluding English Heritage and National Trust properties) taking part in the survey in Quarter 1 2008 who felt that their business had performed better, worse or the same.

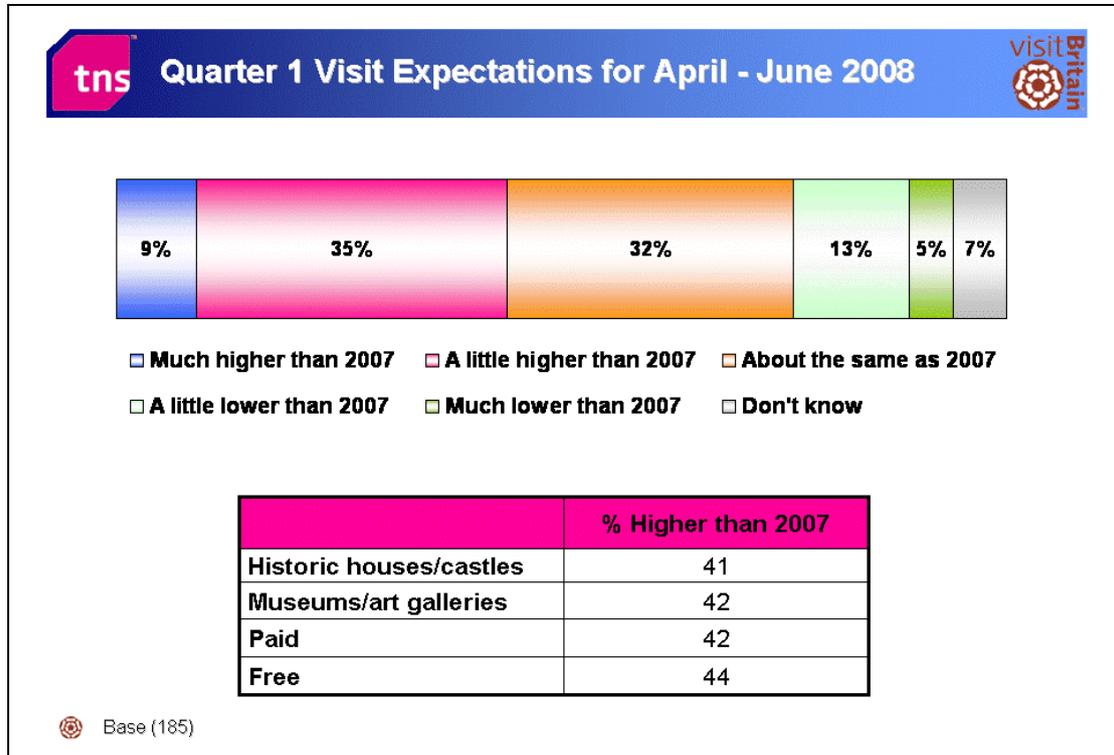


Half (53%) of attractions taking part in the survey felt that their business performance was either much better (24%) or a little better (29%) than in Q1 2007. This is similar to the 60% of attractions who felt that their admissions were higher in Q1 2008 than in Q1 2007.

Opinion of business performance was more positive among larger attractions, with 71% of attractions with over 100,000 visitors per annum feeling that business performance was better in Q1 2008 compared with 47% with less than 100,000 visitors per annum.

6. Business Confidence for Quarter 2 (April to June)

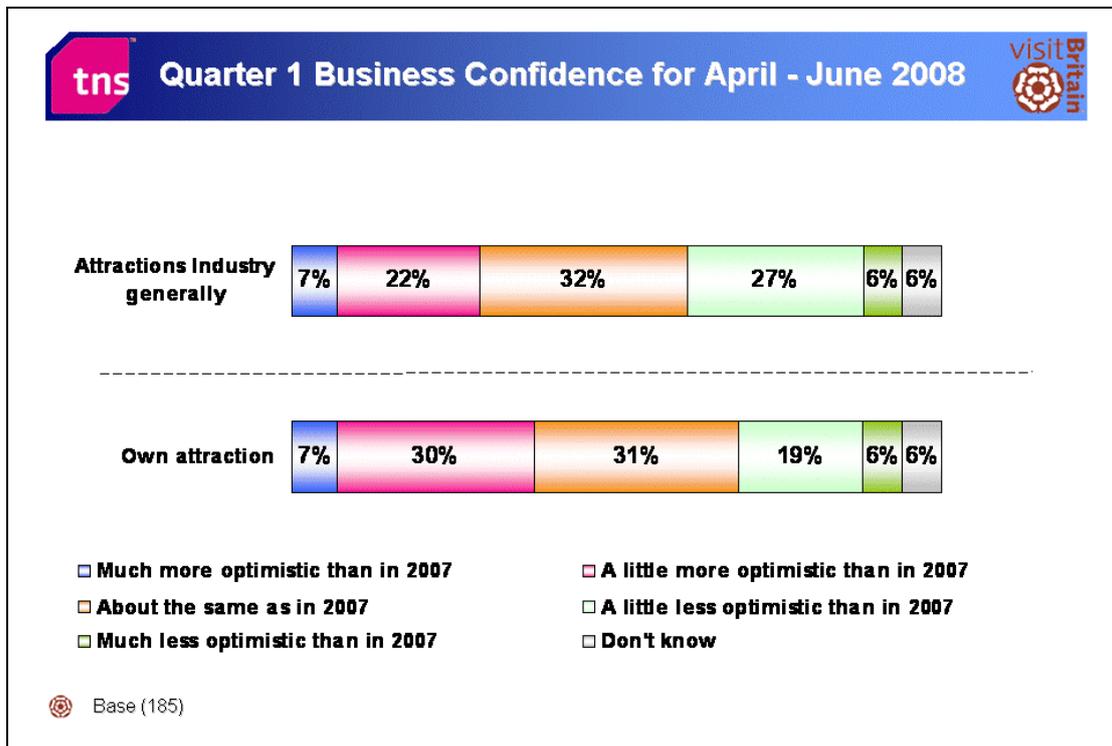
The chart below illustrates attractions' expectations for visitor admissions in Quarter 2 2008 compared with actual visitor admissions in Quarter 2 in the previous year.



Attractions were cautiously optimistic looking ahead to Q2 2008 with 44% of attractions expecting their visitor admissions to increase between Q2 2007 and Q2 2008. However, the largest proportion felt that increases would be modest, with 9% predicting visitor admissions to be much higher than in 2007 and 35% expecting them to be a little higher in 2007.

Similar levels of optimism were recorded across paid and free attractions and historic houses/castles and museums/art galleries with between 41 – 44% anticipating visitor numbers to increase.

The chart overleaf presents business confidence among attractions in Q2 2007 across the 185 non-English Heritage/National Trust attractions taking part in the survey in 2008.



Business confidence would appear to be high, with 37% of attractions feeling more positive about their own attraction’s business prospects in the Q2 (Apr – Jun) period than they were about the same period in 2007. Mirroring visit expectations, attractions were more likely to feel a little more optimistic (30%) than much more optimistic (7%).

However, a quarter of attractions (25%) felt less positive about their own business prospects, 19% feeling a little less optimistic and 6% feeling much less optimistic.

These, and the visit expectation findings, would suggest that although attractions remain relatively positive, there may be some indication that some are feeling more cautious in their outlook given the current economic climate.

The charts overleaf illustrate how business confidence for Quarter 2 varies by region, attraction category, size of attraction, geographic location and whether the attraction is free or paid entry.

 Quarter 1 Business Confidence for April-June 2008 (Own attraction) – by region			
REGION	% More optimistic than 2007	% Less optimistic than 2007	
North East (17)	47	24	
North West (30)	43	23	
Yorkshire (22)	36	45	
East Midlands (24)	17	17	
West Midlands (12)	42	17	
East (22)	36	27	
London (10)	50	10	
South East (26)	38	27	
South West (22)	36	27	
Total England (185)	37	25	

 Quarter 1 Business Confidence for April to June (Own attraction) - by attraction category			
ATTRACTION CATEGORY	% More optimistic than 2007	% Less optimistic than 2007	
Historic Houses/Castles (29)	38	24	
Museums/Art Galleries (59)	36	24	
Visitor/heritage centres (12)	33	42	
Wildlife attractions/zoos (15)	33	33	
Others (70)	40	23	
Total England (185)	37	25	

Quarter 1 Business Confidence for April-June 2008		
tns Own attraction – by other segments	visit Britain	
	% More optimistic than in 2007	% Less optimistic than in 2007
Visits per annum		
20,000 or less (53)	42	15
20,001-50,000 (46)	37	26
50,001-100,000 (34)	45	29
100,001-200,000 (22)	32	23
Over 200,000 (30)	37	40
Admission		
Paid (126)	41	29
Free (59)	29	19
Location		
Coastal (28)	44	28
Rural (357)	34	31
Urban (129)	40	19
Total England (185)	37	25

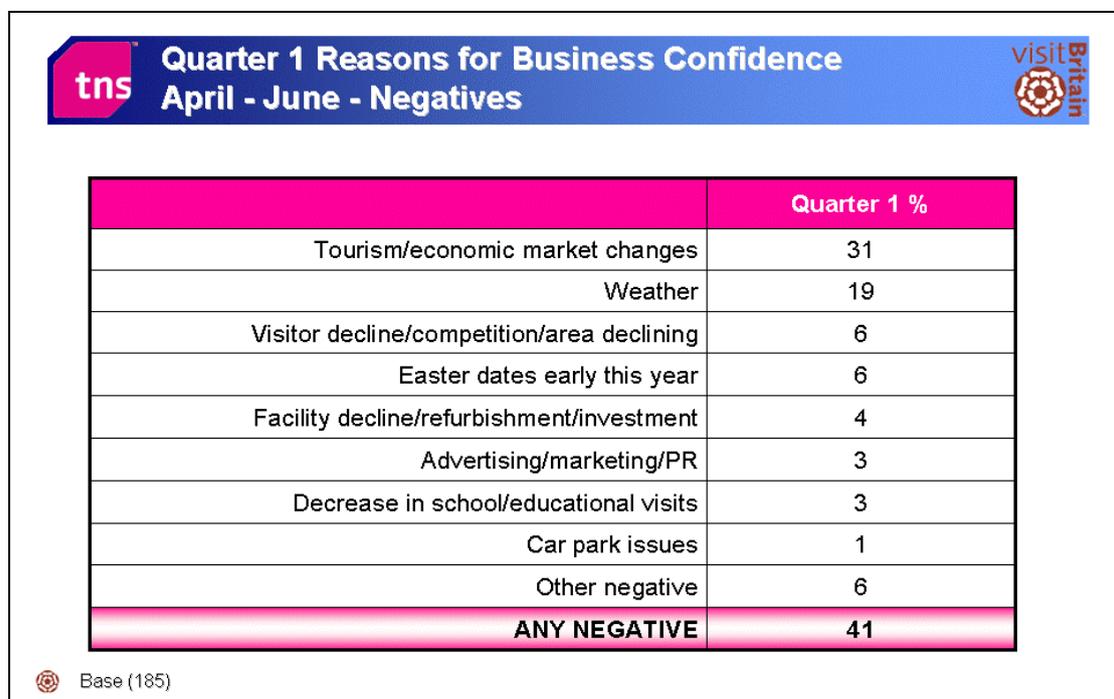
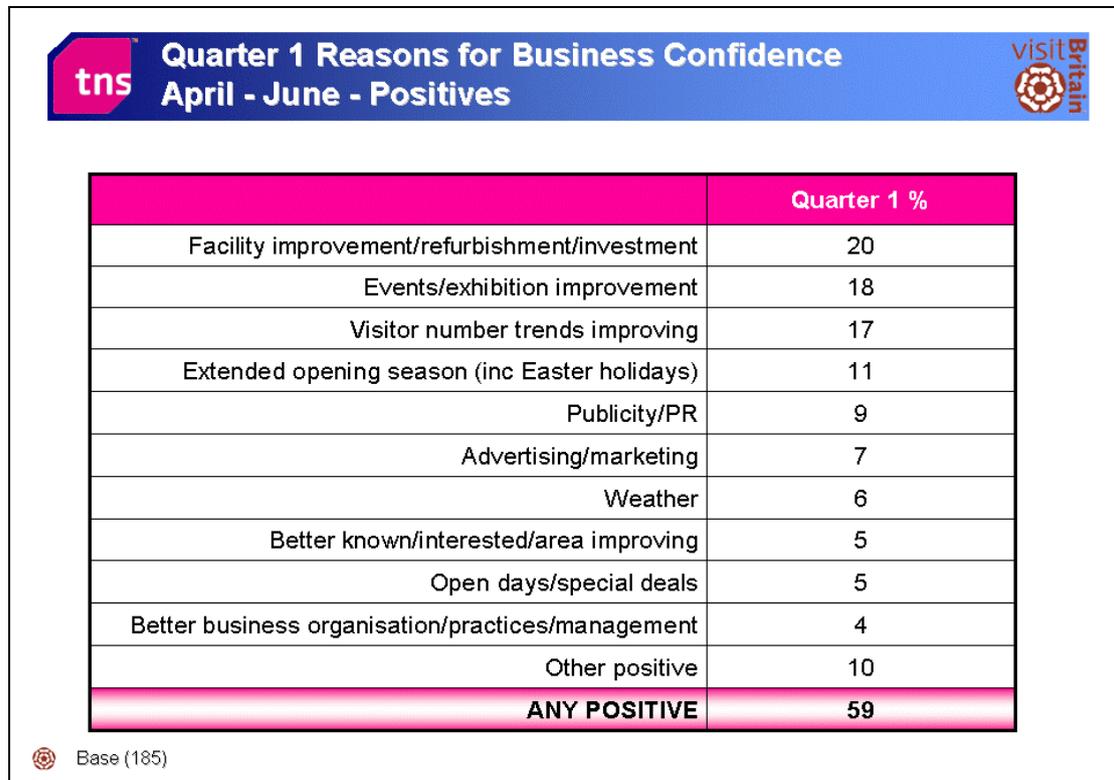
Business confidence was higher among attractions within the London (50% more optimistic than in 2007) and North East (47%) regions. Business confidence was lower within the East Midlands (17%) region.

Business confidence was highest among attractions with between 50,000 and 100,000 visitors per annum (45%) and those attractions with paid admission (41%).

Rural attractions (34%) were less likely than urban (40%) and coastal (44%) attractions to feel more optimistic than in 2007.

Business confidence was largely similar across attraction types.

Attractions were asked to state the reasons for their level of optimism for Q2 2008. The charts below illustrate the positive and negative reasons for business confidence.



Three in five (59%) of all attractions mentioned a positive element influencing their optimism for Q2 2008. The key reasons given focused on facility improvements at the attraction (20%) and events and exhibition improvements (18%). Some 17% of

attractions mentioned visitor number trends improving (17%) and a further one in ten (11%) stated the extended opening season (including Easter holidays).

Conversely, two in five (41%) mentioned a negative aspect influencing their optimism. The key reasons given were changes in the tourism and economic market (31%) and the weather (19%) – perhaps a result of the poor weather experienced during the Easter holiday period and summer months of 2007 and attractions feeling that it may have an impact again in 2008.

We received a number of positive and negative comments providing positive and negative outlooks for Q2 2008 – we have presented a selection of these below:

Positive mentions:

- *“We have had a better approach to marketing and feel we have raised the profile of the attraction nationally as well as locally”*
- *“This year we have extended our opening period to include post Easter and April. We also have more group bookings this year for this period and are opening free of charge for a Local’s Day in May”*
- *“Liverpool’s status as European Capital of Culture during 2008”*
- *“Strong product and great momentum from the first quarter”*

Negative mentions:

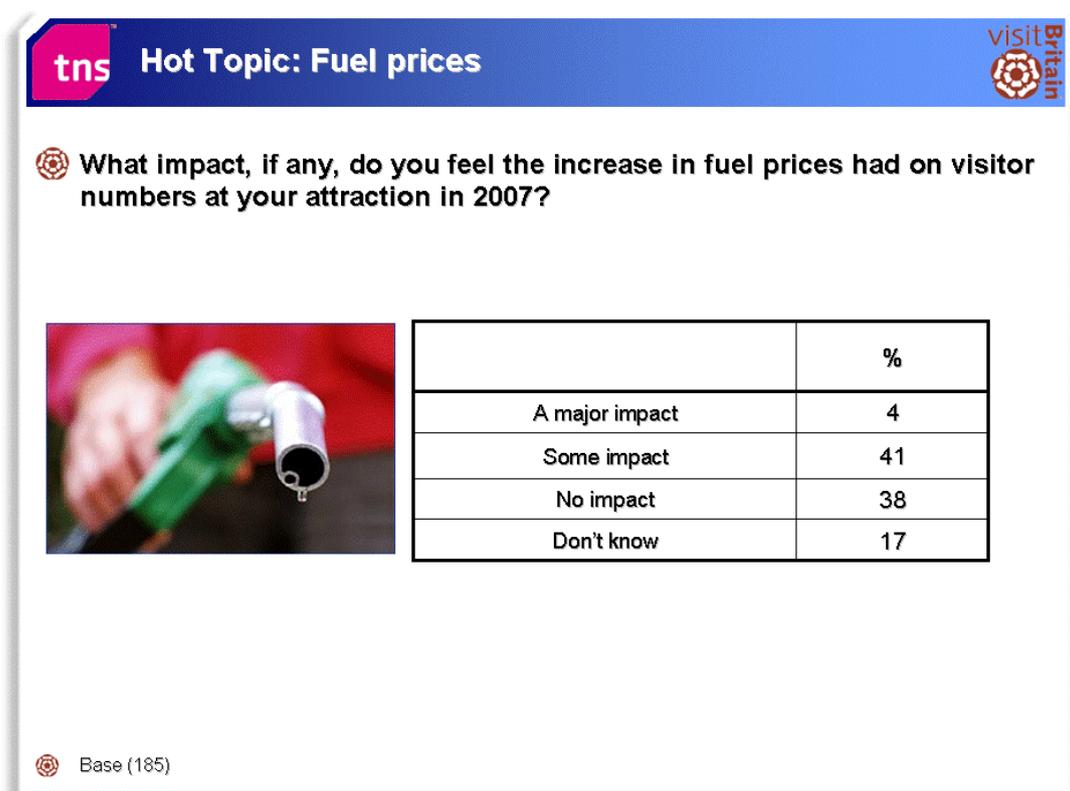
- *“Fewer American visitors and those who come spend less. Economy is definitely slowing resulting in reduced leisure spend”*
- *“Concerns over credit; cost of higher mortgages and fuel”*
- *“We are having building works carried out, to build an extension and although we are staying open for as long as possible, we will inevitably lose visitors”*
- *“Easter last year was in April and the weather was warm, dry and sunny, visitor numbers were record breaking. Easter this year was in March and the weather was cold, wet and windy, with sleet at times and visitor numbers were very poor”*

We have selected just a few of the comments received above. A recurring theme for the negative mentions were concerns with the current economic outlook, with higher mortgage costs and rising fuel prices – something that many of the free attractions thought may work in their favour as the public become more careful in their spending. Rising fuel prices are clearly a very topical issue and this is covered in the following chapter which presents the results for the Q1 2008 hot topic question.

7. Q1 2008 – Hot Topic – Rising Fuel Prices

The intention during 2008 is to keep the survey questions consistent with 2007; one enhancement has been the introduction of a different 'hot topic' question, agreed with VisitBritain beforehand that will be added to the survey each quarter. During Quarter 1, the 'hot topic' question asked attractions what impact, if any, they thought rising fuel prices had on visitor numbers to their attraction during 2007.

The chart below presents the findings for this question.



13

Two in five attractions (45%) thought that rising fuel costs in 2007 had an effect on visitor numbers to their attraction with a further 38% feeling it had no impact. A small minority of attractions (4%) thought that it had a major impact.

To add some context to this question, rising fuel prices were mentioned by a number of attractions when asked to comment on their business prospects for Q2 2008 (as described in the previous chapter). This would suggest that although only a handful of attractions thought that this had a major impact in 2007 (4%), looking forward, it is

possible that rising fuel prices may have a larger impact on the overall business prospects for attractions.