

# THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE RURAL AND COASTAL SELF-CATERING SECTOR IN ENGLAND



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**A report for the English Association of Self Catering  
Operators by the Economic Development Resource Centre,  
University of Greenwich**

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**UNIVERSITY  
of  
GREENWICH**



# The Economic Impact of the rural and coastal self-catering sector in England

A REPORT FOR THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION OF SELF CATERING OPERATORS BY THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the research

This report was commissioned by the English Association of Self Catering Operators (EASCO). EASCO is the trade association that represents the self-catering holiday industry throughout England. EASCO has a diverse membership comprising:

- Owners of self-catering holiday accommodation of all types who operate their businesses independently but want the support of a wider organisation. The properties concerned can be individual or multiple units, town houses, apartments, country cottages, castles, or seaside houses.
- Associations of various sorts but generally representing owners of self-catering properties in a particular geographic area, such as Cumbria, or a location such as a particular resort or of a particular type.
- Agencies that let self-catering accommodation on behalf of the property owners, including agencies that offer management services as well as booking services.
- Consortia of letting agencies who operate and cooperate in a specific geographic area such as the Cornish Association of Holiday Home Agencies (CAHHA) or more widely such as Cottage Line.

The primary aim of this report was to produce a rigorous estimate of the economic impact of the self-catering accommodation sector in the rural and coastal areas of England. A secondary aim was to generate fresh intelligence about the nature of the sector including its characteristics and its patterns of use.

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*“The average self-catering property is a cottage with two bedrooms, that can sleep around 4-6 people. It will typically be available to rent for 52 weeks of the year and will be occupied for around 25 weeks. Every three self-catering properties create one new job and around £150,000 for the economy.”*

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## 1.2 Definition of Self Catering Accommodation

For the purposes of this research, a definition of self-catering accommodation was developed. Many agencies, including UK and European institutions, include caravanning, camping and holiday parks in their definitions of self-catering, often as part of the 'non-serviced' accommodation sector, leading to definitional problems which this report aims to address. This report draws on the Treasury's (2014) guidance on Furnished Holiday Lettings – which sets specific technical criteria – but also definitions of 'self-catering', 'rented house', 'other short term rented accommodation' and 'holiday dwelling' from the International Passenger Survey<sup>1</sup>, Visit England Accommodation Stock Audit<sup>2</sup> and the Great Britain Tourism Survey<sup>3</sup>, in order to produce the following definition of the properties under study in this research:

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*“A self-catering holiday accommodation (SCHA) unit is a property that is available to rent by visitors on a short-term basis, for the purposes of a holiday or a short break. A SCHA unit will be self-contained accommodation containing its own cooking facilities, but may form part of a larger property, or be grouped with other units on a shared site.”*

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Unlike in many countries, there is no requirement for tourist accommodation to be licensed in the United Kingdom, meaning that it is difficult to provide reliable data on the size of the self-catering sector. Because of this, this report has drawn on a range of sources to propose an approximate value for the size and distribution of the sector. In 2015, research carried out by Visit England, Premier Cottages, Love Cottages and Cottages.com found that there were almost 25,000 nationally assessed properties in the Visit England Quality schemes (either NQAS or NAS). This represents a sizeable proportion of the self-catering sector. It is worth noting that self-catering businesses are usually subject to some form of inspection, e.g. EASCO members, but second homes and properties offered for rental through agencies such as Air B&B might not be.

According to Visit England's Accommodation Survey in 2014, there were a total of 68,024 accommodation establishments in England, of which 29,286 were 'holiday dwellings' according to the Eurostat (2015)<sup>4</sup> definition, which includes youth hostel accommodation and excludes properties let for one month or more. This is 43% of total accommodation establishments, but this figure is significantly higher than the amount of self-catering holiday units as defined by this study.

A study by the LSE in 2014<sup>5</sup> used the same Visit England data set and compared this to the availability of self-catering lets on internet agency listings including HomeAway, Air B&B, Flip Key and House Trip. Using these figures, the study estimates that there are approximately 60,000 holiday units

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<sup>1</sup> International Passenger Survey (2015)

<sup>2</sup> Visit England Accommodation Stock Survey (2014)

<sup>3</sup> Visit England Great Britain Tourism Survey (2015)

<sup>4</sup> Eurostat (2015)

<sup>5</sup> Scanlon et al (2014) *The Economic Impacts of Holiday Rentals in the UK: Final Report*, London: LSE

in England. This figure, although an approximation, has been used for the purposes of impact and market profiling calculations in this report.

### 1.3 Self-Catering and the Economy

Since 2010, Tourism and the Visitor Economy have been the fastest growing sectors in terms of employment in the United Kingdom. In 2013, the Deloitte report 'Tourism: Jobs and Growth' found that: Tourism accounts for 9.6% of total UK jobs, 3.1m; Tourism contributes 9% of UK GDP, £126.9bn; Tourism is predicted to grow at around 3.8%pa to 2025, outperforming the UK economy as a whole by 0.8%. Tourism Alliance published figures in 2016 that showed a fall in this contribution to 7.1% of UK GDP, which can be partly explained by a recovery in the overall size of the non-tourism economy, but confirming the scale of the contribution to UK employment (9.5%), highlighting that tourism is the UK's third largest employer.

The economic contribution of many parts of the tourism and visitor economy are well researched with, for example, the British Hospitality Association estimating that around 4% of UK GDP comes from Hospitality businesses<sup>6</sup> and Meetings Professional International stating that the meeting industry alone generates £58.4bn in GDP<sup>7</sup>. However, there has only been one previous study that has attempted to estimate the economic contribution of self-catering accommodation (Scanlon et al 2014). This previous research used secondary data sets to compile economic data about the self-catering accommodation sector, as well as primary data gathered through a survey of self-catering property owners. In contrast, this new report for EASCO uses a national primary data set that covers customer bookings of self-catering accommodation over a twelve-month period and combines this with a similar, but different survey of property owners. The Scanlon et al (2014) study also estimates the economic impact of the sector and has been used as a point of comparison with the findings of the research.

This study makes a timely contribution to debates around the economic impacts of the sharing economy, as another, largely unregulated aspect of the tourism and visitor economy in the UK. The sharing economy involves the unlocking of previously unused or under-used resources to meet consumer demand, normally in heavily disintermediated markets such as through Air B&B, Uber or Deliveroo. The Woskow Review<sup>8</sup> demonstrated that the sharing economy is of growing significance to the UK economy and that it could be worth up to £9bn per year by 2025. Air B&B themselves estimate that their users in the UK generate £502m per year in economic impact and support more than 11,000 jobs<sup>9</sup>. Within these debates, the contribution of the more traditional self-catering sector has been overlooked, despite it often making use of a likewise under-utilized asset base of second homes and investment properties, and that it is frequently characterized by direct market transactions and personal interactions, notwithstanding the presence of a number of intermediaries in the market.

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<sup>6</sup> British Hospitality Association (2015)

<sup>7</sup> Meetings Professionals International (2015)

<sup>8</sup> Woskow (2014)

<sup>9</sup> Air B&B (2015)



## 2 METHODOLOGY

The Methodology section covers how the research was designed and conducted. A combination of primary and secondary research was undertaken to achieve the objectives of the study. Three research methods were used to collect the data required for the study.

### 2.1 A desk study of relevant literature sources

A review of the literature on the self-catering industry was conducted using the University of Greenwich's access to industry data sets and specialist market studies. This secondary data provided a background to the industry as well as market intelligence and existing economic impact studies. We verified our primary data against well-respected sources such as Visit Britain's Great Britain Tourism Survey and Accommodation Stock Audit. The self-catering industry is not widely researched; however, we acknowledge recent reports such as Scanlon et al's (2014) Economic Impacts into Holiday Rentals in the UK and Mintel (2014, 2015a) reports into the UK's Holiday Rental Property market. The reference list at the end of this report contains the secondary sources used in our study.

### 2.2 A survey of self-catering operators

A questionnaire survey was conducted to collect data from self-catering operators in England covering: characteristics of their units of accommodation; bookings, advertising and social media usage; and employment. The questionnaire was designed using SurveyMonkey, an online survey software package. A pilot study was conducted in April 2015 with 18 respondents who were asked to complete the questionnaire and give their feedback. The questionnaire was finalised taking into account the feedback received and the main survey was launched in May 2015 and ran until July 2015. The questionnaire was distributed to target respondents through two main channels: EASCO members who are agents emailed the questionnaire to their network of self-catering operators and self-catering operators were targeted on social media, in particular, Facebook and Twitter, and asked to take part in the survey. The second method was used to broaden the respondent base to include self-catering operators who are not EASCO members. A total of 563 completed questionnaires were received.

### 2.3 Database of customer bookings

A database of customer bookings for self-catering properties in England in 2014 was created using data provided from the SuperControl booking system which is used by over 18,700 owners of cottages and other self-catering accommodation (SuperControl, 2016) and bookings data from agents who are members of EASCO. 204,160 records were collected in total; however, following the removal of duplicate records and those which did not meet the required criteria (e.g. value of booking and/or number of guests = 0), the number of cases included in the analysis was 191,337. The fields of data used in the analysis were: customer characteristics (gender, number of guests including adults/children and guest postcode); property characteristics (bedrooms, capacity and property postcode) and booking characteristics (date of booking, start date of stay, number of nights and booking value).

The next section contains the presentation and analysis of the research results.

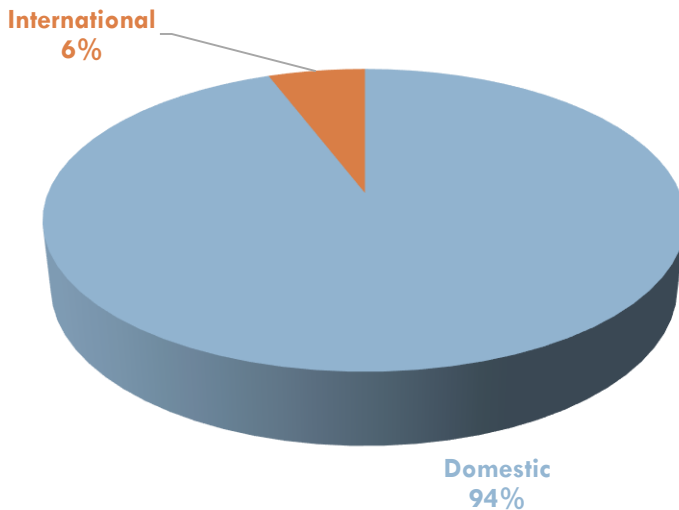


### 3 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 Profile of Guests

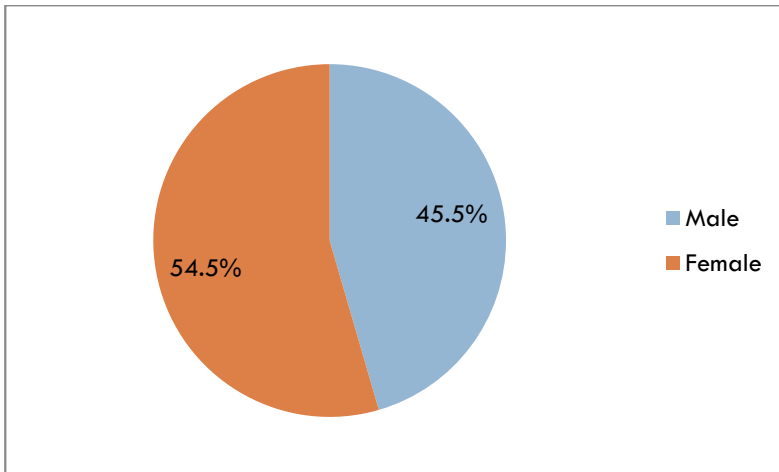
The profile of guests was obtained from the customer bookings database (see 2.3) which contained 191,337 individual records of bookings from guests who stayed in self-catering properties in 2014. Figure 1 shows that domestic bookings made up 94% of the total number of bookings with international bookings at 6%. The data gathered for this research supports the research literature in this area which suggests that women take a significant role in holiday purchase decisions.<sup>10</sup> Figure 2 shows the split between females (54.5%) and males (45.5%) making the bookings. The average number of guests per booking was 4 persons (3.3 adults and 0.7 children). The Mintel (2015a) report into Holiday Rental Property – UK confirms that families with young children are a key target market for self-catering holiday properties due to their need for convenience.

**Figure 1 Number of Bookings: Domestic vs International**



<sup>10</sup> Barlés-Arizón et al (2013)

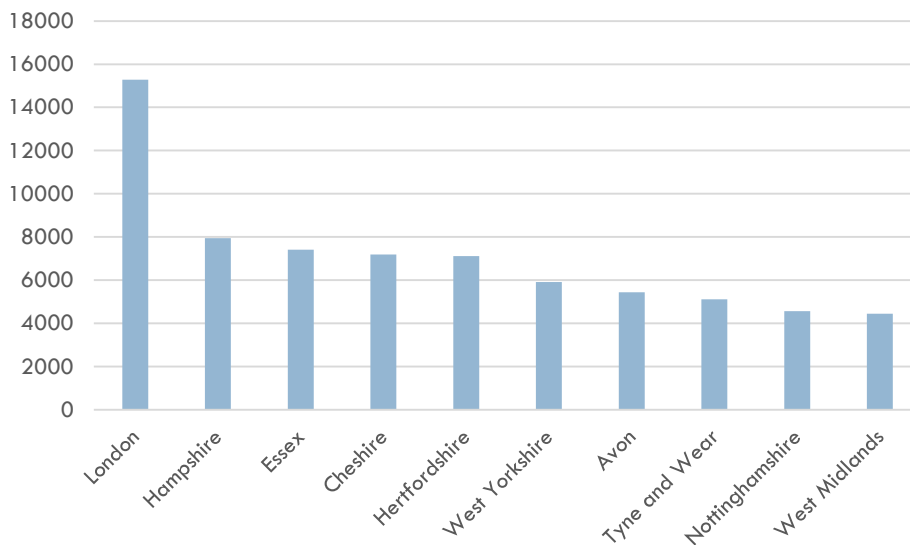
**Figure 2 Number of Bookings: Males vs Females**



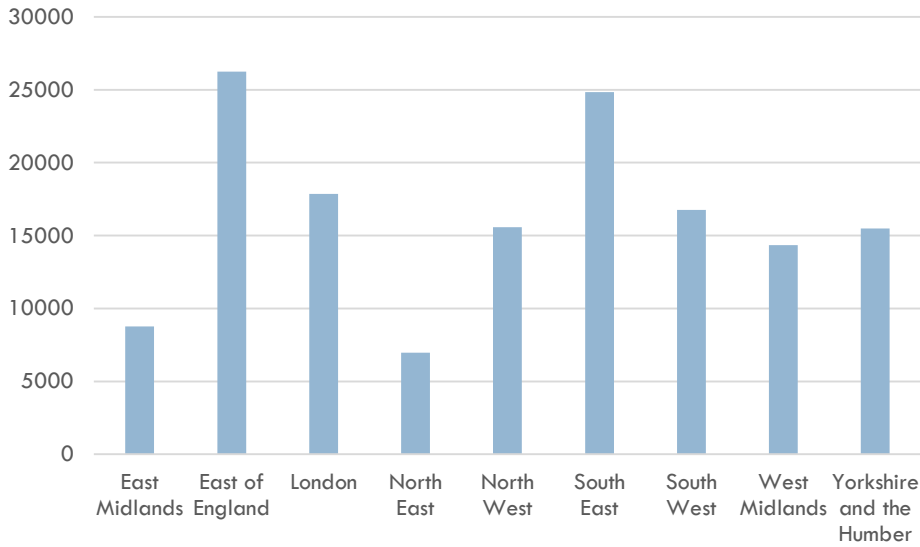
**Where do the guests come from?**

An analysis of the guest postcodes by county and region showed that there is a predominance of guests booking self-catering accommodation who live in London and the South and South East of the country. Figure 3 illustrates that guests from London (15,278) make around twice as many bookings as those from the next two counties, which are Hampshire (7,938) and Essex (7,416). Figure 4 shows that by region, guests from the East of England make the most bookings (26,233) followed by the South East (24,829) and London (17,856).

**Figure 3 Top Ten Guest Counties**



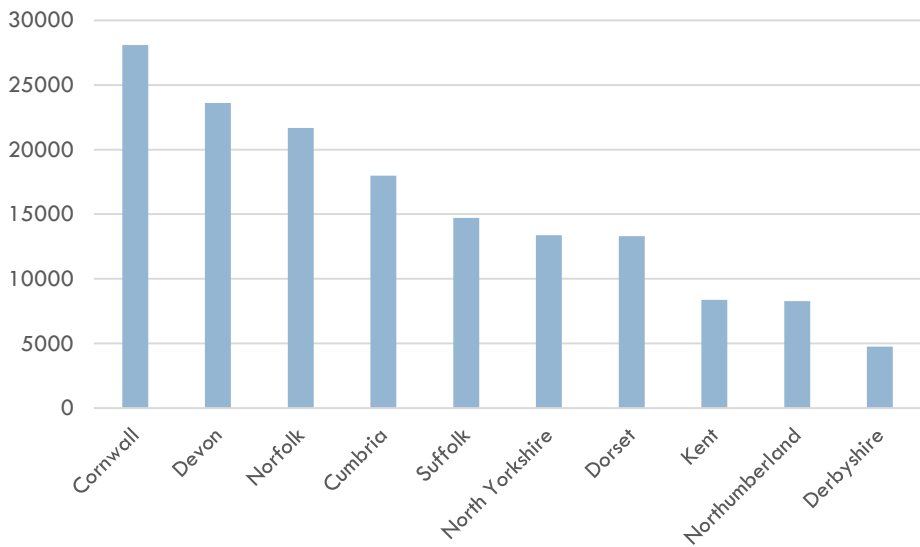
**Figure 4 Guest Regions**



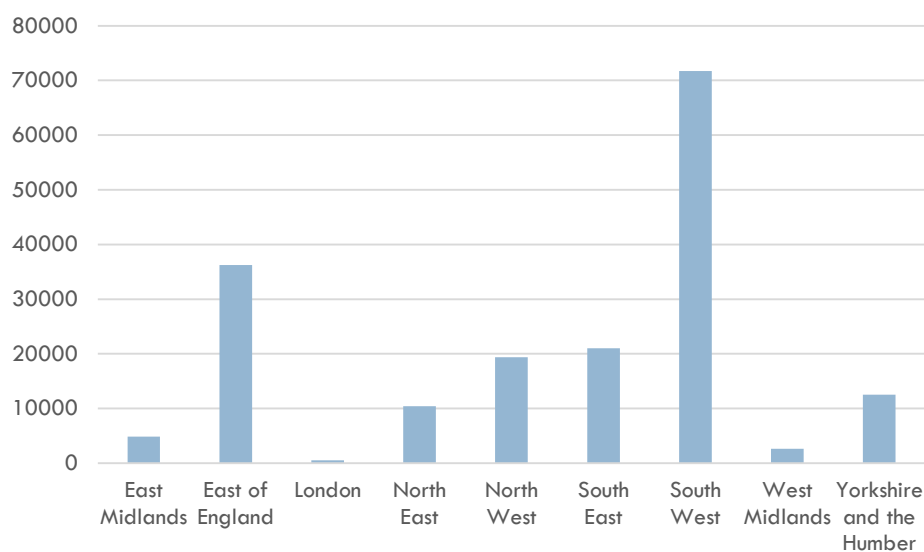
**Where do guests stay?**

An analysis of property postcodes by region (Figure 6) shows that the most popular region for guests booking self-catering accommodation is the South West of England (71,733 bookings). Figure 5 shows that the largest number of bookings was made for properties in Cornwall (28,086) followed by Devon (23,606). The East of England is the second most popular region, with the most bookings being recorded in Norfolk (21,675) and Suffolk (14,705). The North West and North East, in particular the counties of Cumbria (17,985 bookings) and North Yorkshire (13,387) are also popular destinations. This is supported by research from the Mintel (2015a) report which shows that 44% of people who took a holiday in self-catering accommodation between 2011-2014 stayed at the seaside and 35% in the countryside or a village.

**Figure 5 Top Ten Counties for Bookings**





**Figure 6 Bookings by Region**

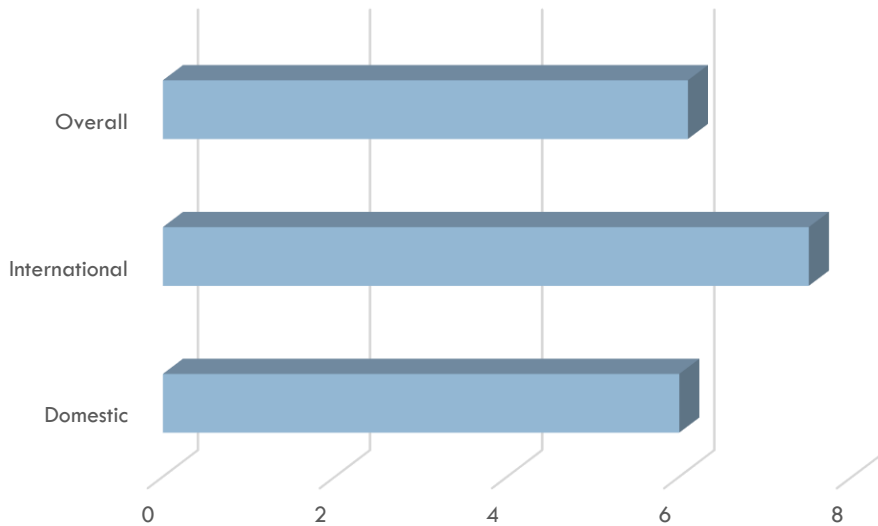
### How long do guests stay and how much do they pay?

The average length of stay was 6.1 nights which may be broken down into 6 nights for domestic visitors and 7.5 nights for international visitors (Figure 7). These figures are in line with recent studies by Mintel (2015a) and Scanlon et al (2014) which found that the majority of holiday properties are rented for 4-7 nights. In addition, the Scanlon et al (2014) report found that international visitors tend to stay for longer in self-catering properties. Our figure for international visitors is similar to Visit Britain's of 7.6 nights<sup>11</sup>.

The average price paid per person per night was £35.09. Per unit of accommodation this works out at £102.24. Mintel (2015a) shows the average spend per night at self-catering accommodation to be £74; however this is based on the Great Britain Tourism Survey which also includes holiday centres and villages which may explain why the price is lower. The Mintel report shows a growth of 21.8% in expenditure on domestic trips by guests staying in self-catering accommodation between 2010-2014. The figures demonstrate that UK consumers are spending an increasing amount on self-catering holidays. There has been a recent decline in more cost-effective holiday types, such as hostels, camping or using a friend's home from 2013-14 (Mintel, 2015a). In addition, the Mintel report (2015b) on The Premium vs Budget Traveller indicates that holidaymakers are willing to spend more on self-catering accommodation for a higher-quality experience. This reflects the general trend of growth in the luxury end of the self-catering market while still being considered a value-for-money option (Scanlon et al 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Visit Britain (2015)

**Figure 7 Length of Stay: Domestic vs International**



**When do guests book and take their holiday?**

Figure 8 shows that January is the most popular month for booking a self-catering holiday with 28,677 bookings (17.8%) made during that month. The number falls sharply in February with a rise in March followed by a downward curve for the rest of the year. This reflects the seasonal trend expected with UK (as well as many other European) consumers planning their holidays at the start of the year<sup>12</sup>.

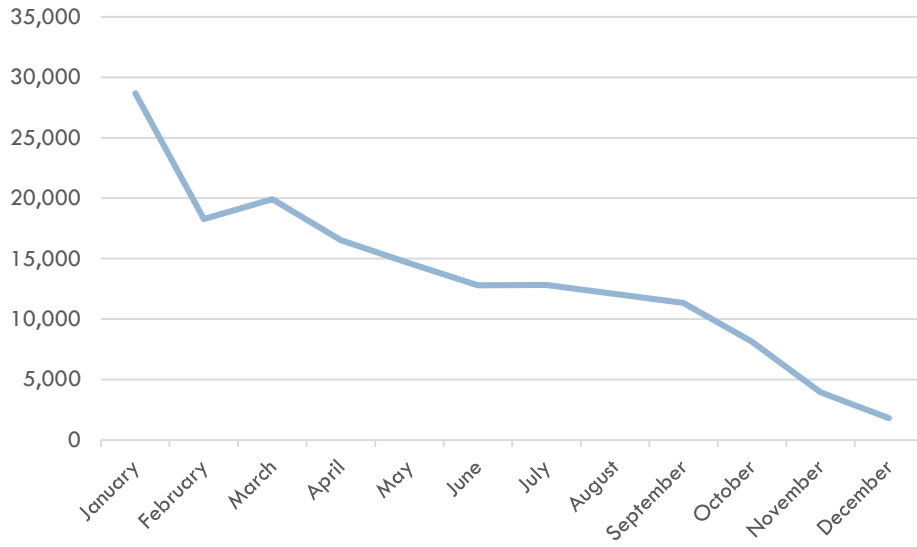
Figure 9 shows a spike in holidays starting in August with 30,552 (16%) as the most popular month, followed by July with 23,035 (12%) and May with 21,953 (11.5%). Again, this follows the seasonal trend expected with July and August as the most popular months for a holiday followed by traditional school holiday periods such as May and October half-term breaks and Easter.

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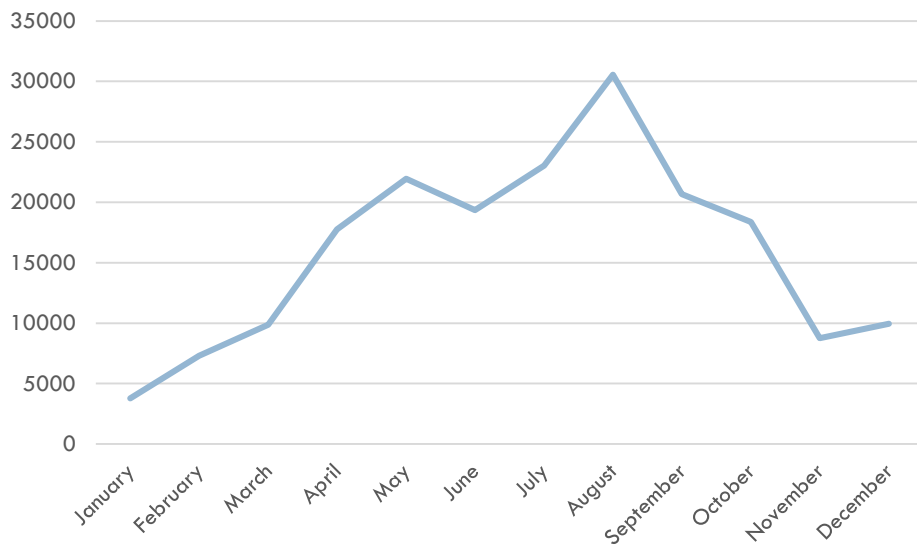
<sup>12</sup> [http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-17767-5\\_2](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-17767-5_2)



**Figure 8 Date of booking (by month)**



**Figure 9 Date of holiday taken (by month)**



### 3.2 Self-Catering Properties

The data being presented comes from our survey of self-catering operators (see 2.2). The respondents – the owners of self-catering properties - were asked to report on individual units of accommodation and not the whole property for the calendar year 2014.

As can be seen in Figure 10, the main type of self-catering accommodation reported in this study was cottages/small houses (73%). This was followed by apartments/flats (13%) and Other (6%). The most popular response for Other was barn conversions. Based on 869 units of accommodation included in the study (Figure 11), the majority of units had 2 bedrooms (37%) followed by 3 bedrooms (25%) and 1 bedroom (22%). Figure 12 shows the number of bed spaces per unit. The majority of units had four bed spaces (32%) followed by 2 (16%) and 6 (15%) bed spaces. 20% of respondents reported between 7-20 bed spaces.

#### Availability and Occupancy

Results show (Figure 13) that 80% of the units included in this study were available for letting between 300-365 days in 2014. However Figure 14 shows that most units (24%) were let between 155-199 days, followed by 105-154 days (21%) and 200-249 (21%). Scanlon et al's (2014) report used number of months for this calculation therefore we are not able to make a direct comparison. However their key finding that 70% of self-catering accommodation in the UK is rented for six months or more shows a similarity to the figures in our study (Figure 14) which show that 66.8% of the units of accommodation were rented between 155-365 days in 2014.

Figure 10 Types of Property

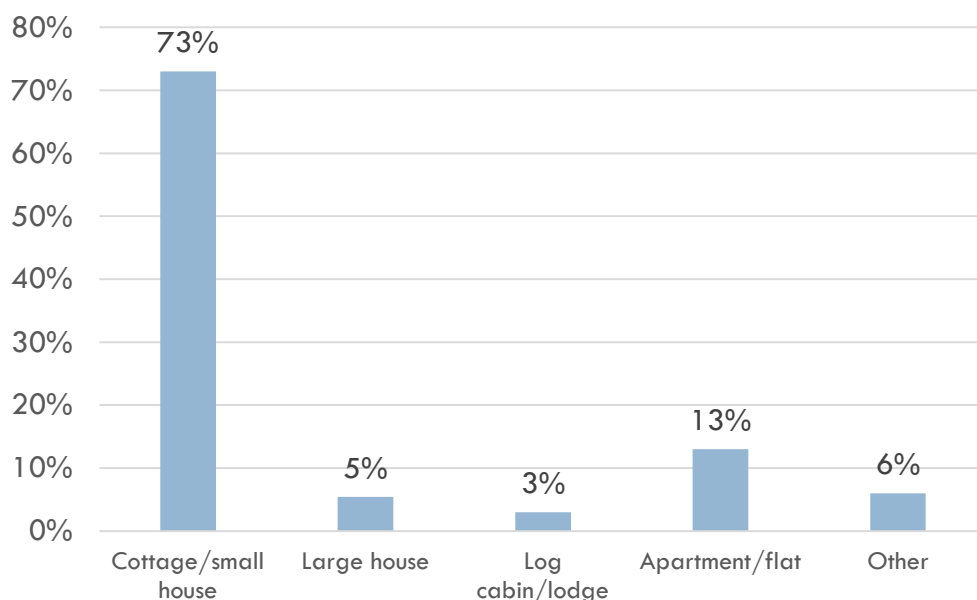


Figure 11 Number of bedrooms<sup>13</sup>

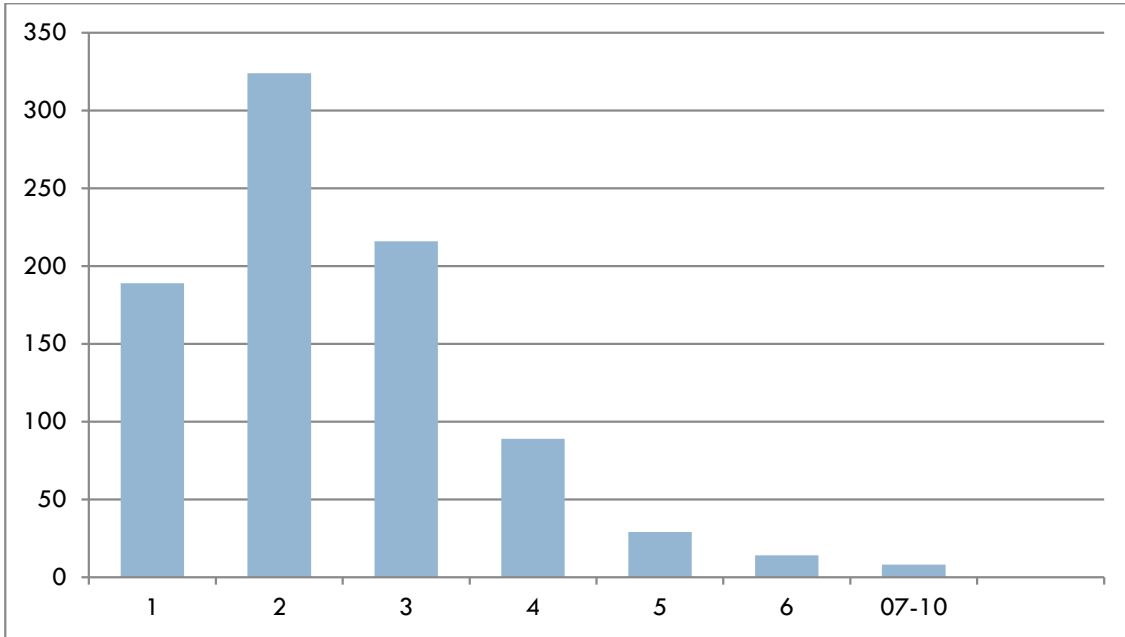
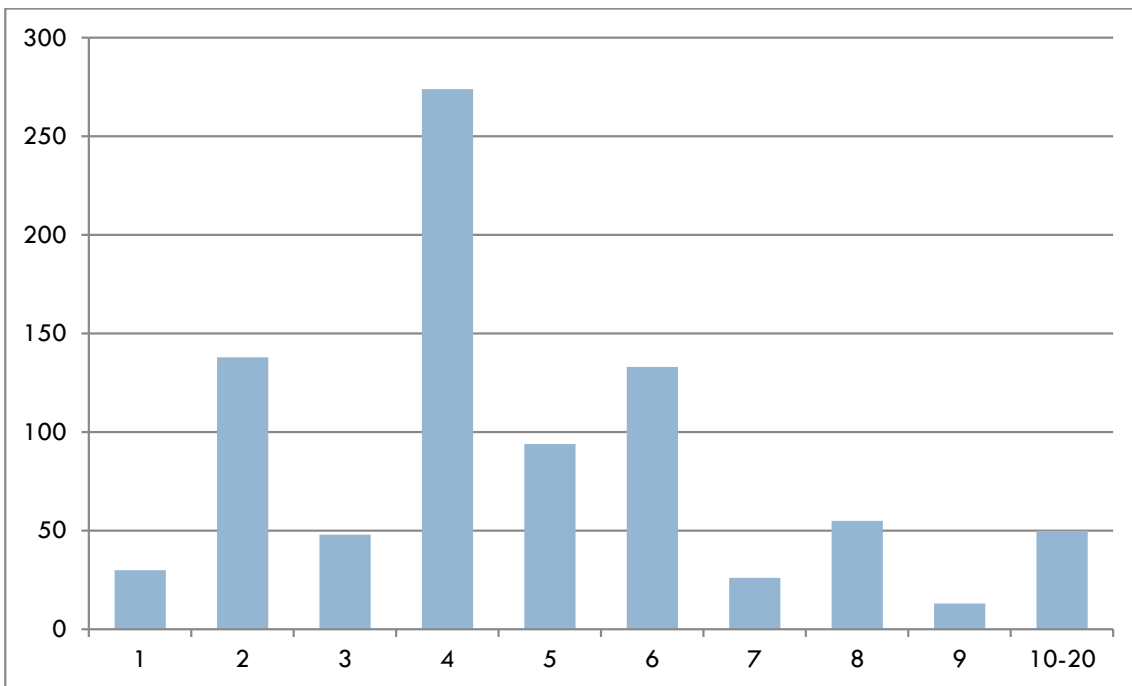


Figure 12 Number of bed spaces



<sup>13</sup> Five respondents reported that they had a much larger number of bedrooms but these were removed so as not to skew the results.

Figure 13 Number of Days the unit was available for letting in 2014

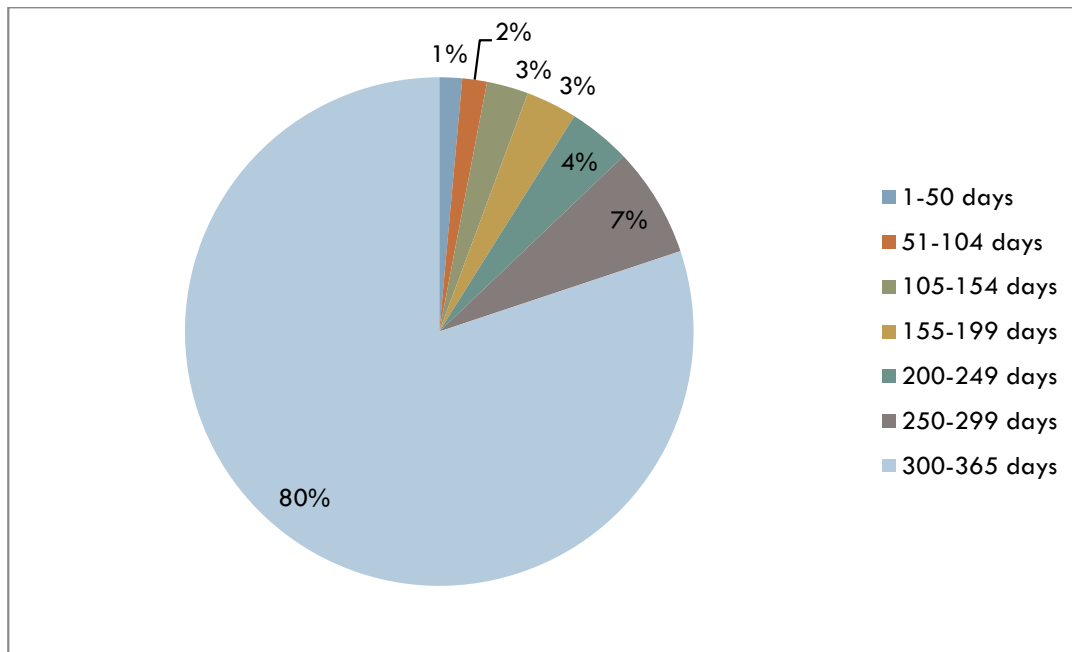
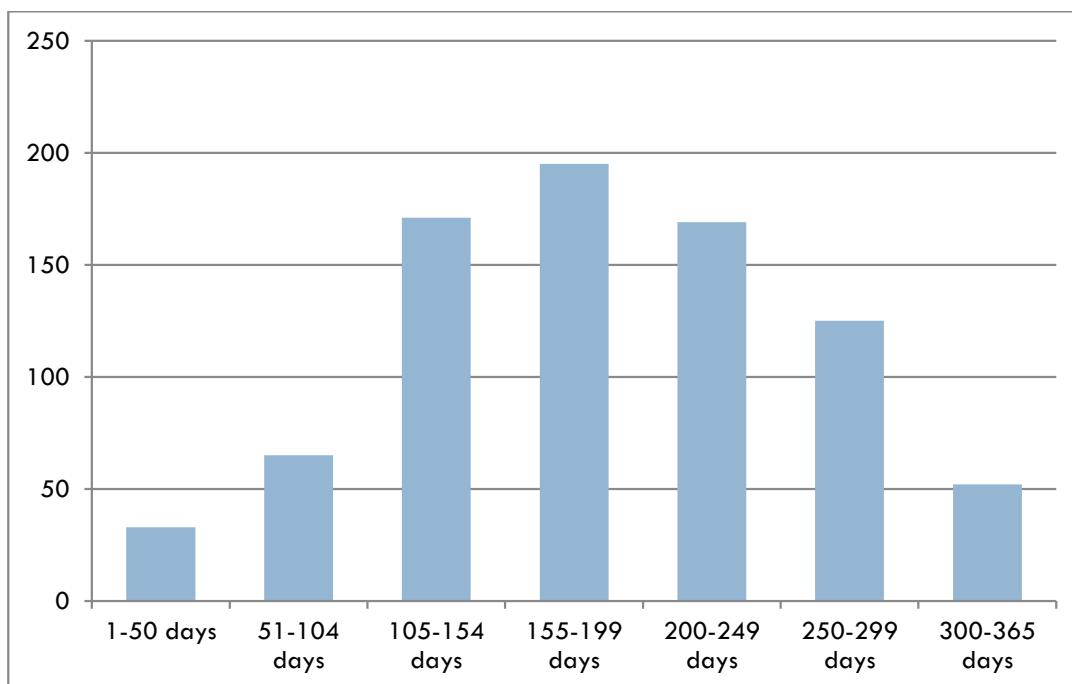


Figure 14 Number of Days the unit was let in 2014



## Guest Services

As can be seen in Table 1, the services which most self-catering operators provide to their guests are linen and towels (98%), laundry facilities in each unit (90%) and a welcome hamper (80%). Services not provided by 90% or more of property owners include catering as well as more premium services such as tennis courts, hot tub/whirlpool, outdoor and indoor pool, sauna and gym. A separate question was asked about whether guests are charged for these services. Most of the services provided did not incur an additional charge; however 44% of respondents who allow dogs in their property charge their guests for this service.

**Table 1 Services Provided to Guests**

Services	Yes (%)	No (%)
Linen and towels	98	2
Laundry facilities in each unit	90	10
Welcome hamper	80	20
Cots	66	34
High chairs	65	35
Dogs allowed	48	52
Logs	42	57
Games room	10	90
Communal laundry facilities	9	91
Catering	8	92
Tennis	6	94
Hot tub/whirlpool	5	95
Outdoor pool	5	95
Indoor pool	5	95
Sauna	3	97
Gym	2	98

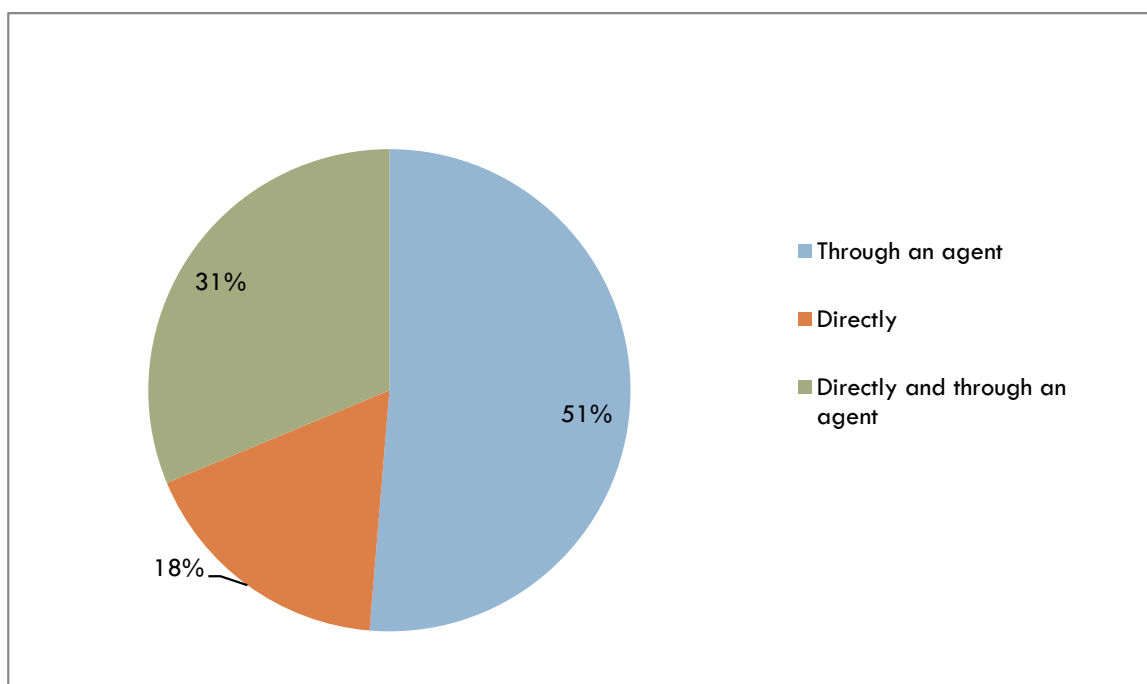
### 3.3 Bookings, Advertising and Social Media

As may be seen in Figure 15, the majority of self-catering operators reported that their guests can make a booking only through an agent (51%). This is in line with Mintel's (2015a) report which states that 50% of all bookings for holiday lets are through an agency in the UK. 31% of respondents in our survey stated that bookings can be made both directly and through an agent while 18% said that bookings can only be made directly. According to Mintel (2015a) nearly one in four bookings are made directly with the property owner. This is larger than the 18% in our survey; however the report acknowledges that the share of properties booked directly with the owner has declined since they conducted their survey in 2013. The Mintel (2015a) report suggests that this may be due to an increase in agents or Air B&B as intermediaries.

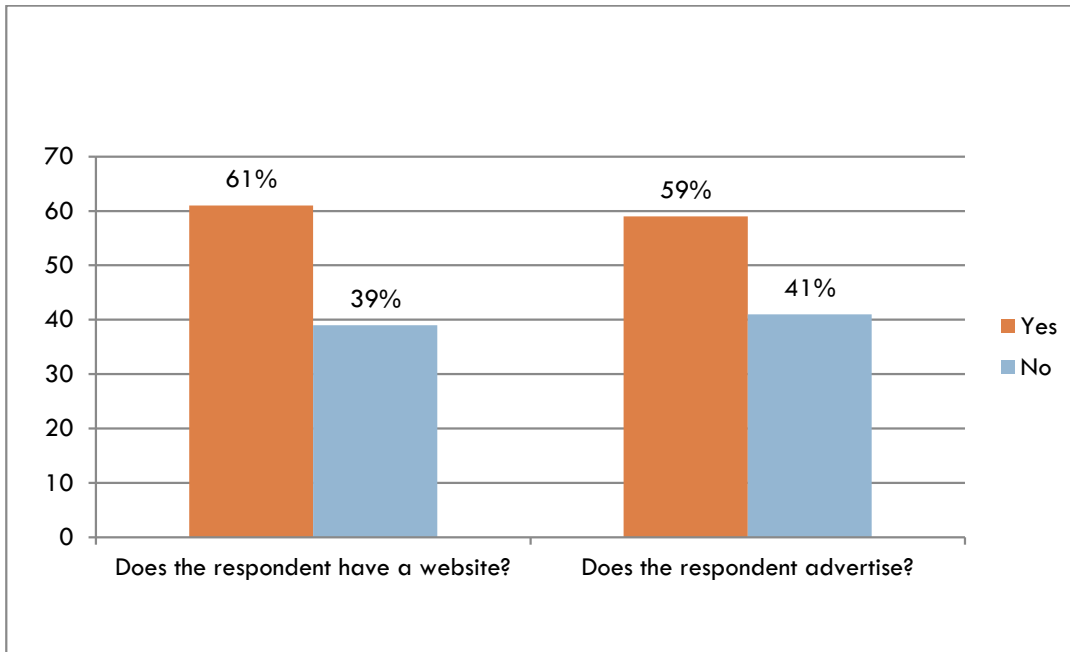
Where bookings can be made directly (Figure 16), 39% of self-catering operators indicated that they do not have a website and 41% do not advertise. These figures are higher than expected, possibly due to bias in the sample since the majority of respondents were recruited through EASCO members who are agents (see Section 4.5 Limitations of the Study). Therefore it is likely that the agents advertise the property on behalf of the self-catering operators.

Figure 17 shows that self-catering operators who advertise use a wide variety of sites. The largest number of respondents selected Other (84%) and identified sites where they advertise which were not included on the main list of options such as Devon Farms and Country Cottages Online. Of the main options, Holiday Lettings was used by 46% of respondents, Farm Stay by 39% and Premier Cottages and Owners Direct by 32%. As may be seen in Figure 18, most self-catering operators (92%) reported that they do not advertise in newspapers and magazines. Again, this is likely to be due to the bias in the respondent sample (as mentioned previously) who mainly use the services of agents which include advertising the property.

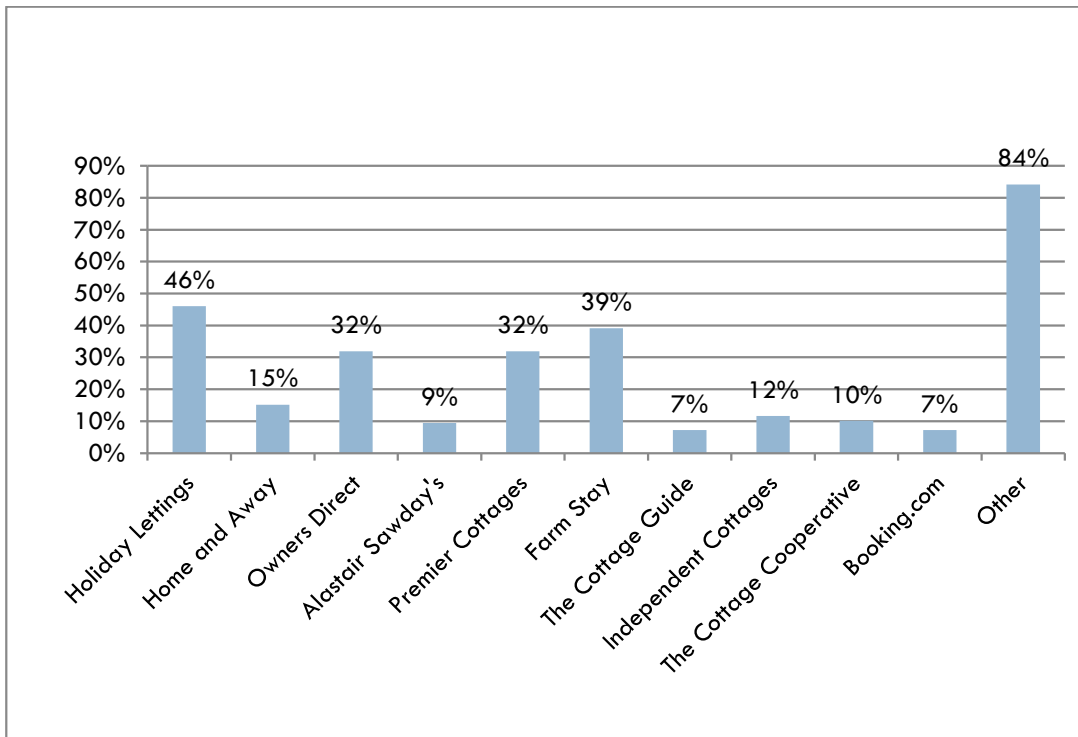
**Figure 15 How Guests can make a booking**



**Figure 16 Direct Bookings**

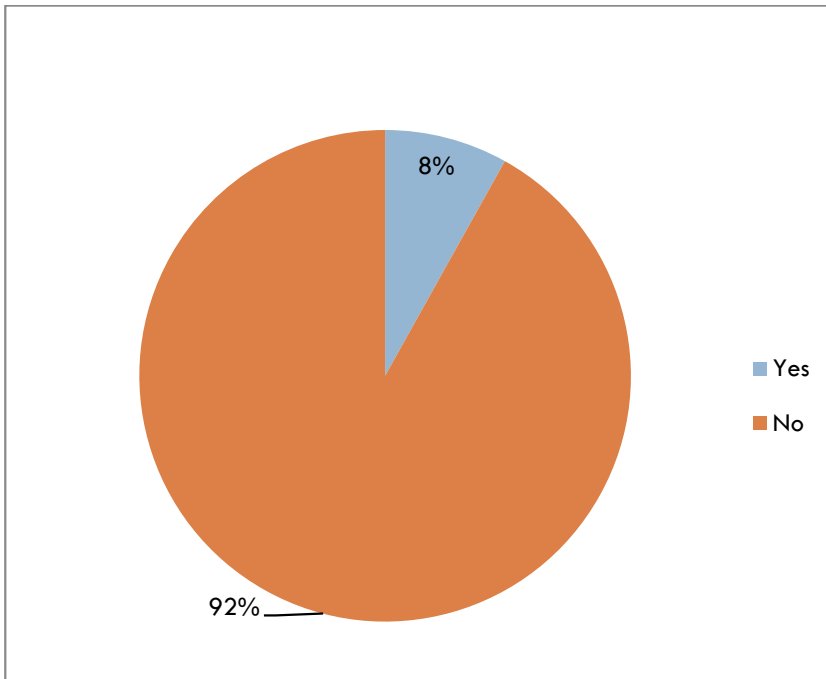


**Figure 17 Online sites where self-catering operators advertise<sup>14</sup>**



<sup>14</sup> Respondents who advertise online could indicate as many options as they wished therefore the responses do not add up to 100%.

**Figure 18 Do self-catering operators advertise in newspapers and/or magazines?**

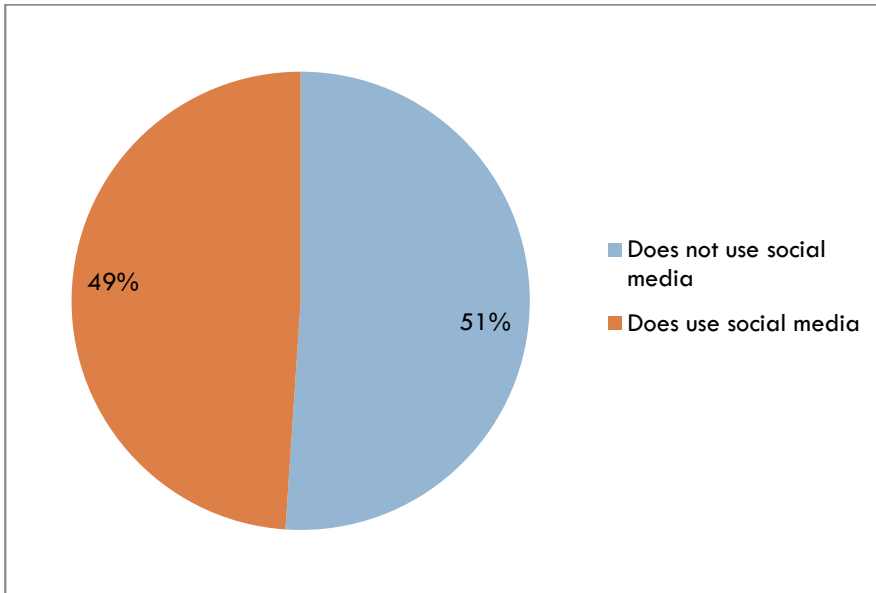


### **Social media use by self-catering operators**

Figure 19 shows that just over half of the respondents (51%) reported that they do not use social media. The remaining 49% use a range of social media as shown in Figure 20. 92% of respondents who said they use social media used Facebook, followed by Twitter (48%) and Google+ (34%). Since the self-catering operators who completed our survey were mainly obtained through EASCO members who are agents, this may indicate a lower use of social media than in the general population of self-catering property owners since the properties are mainly marketed by agents. However this cannot be verified as the studies we used to support our research findings such as Mintel (2015a) and Scanlon et al (2014) have not reported on the use of social media platforms by self-catering property owners.

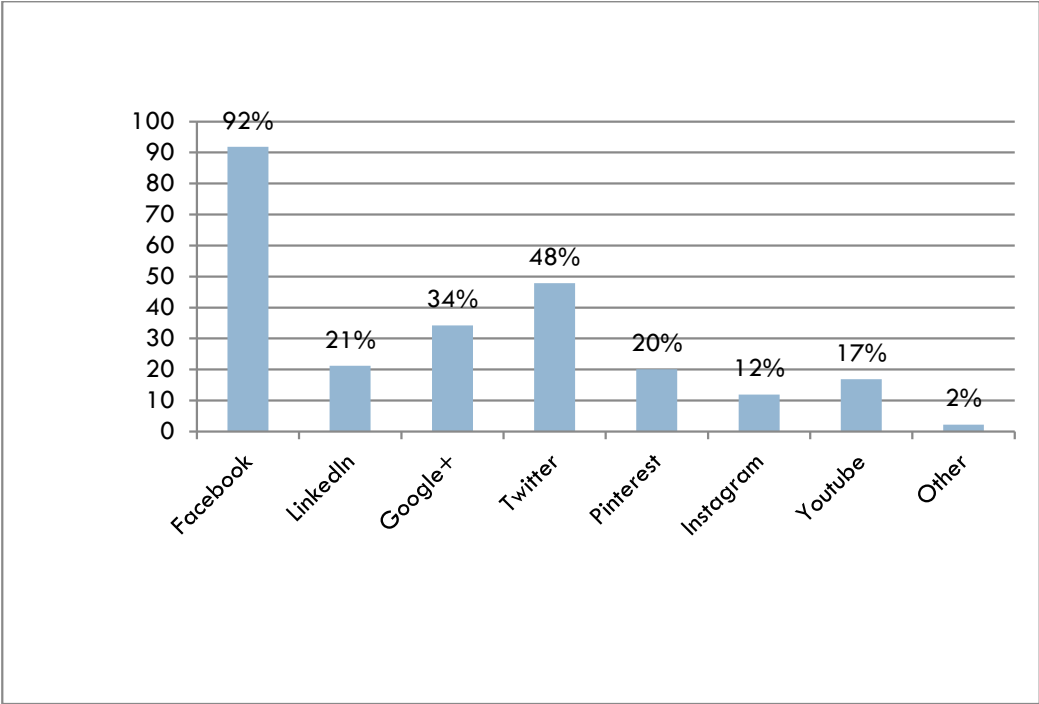


**Figure 19 Does the self-catering operator use social media?**



**Figure 20 Which social media do self-catering operators use (based on 49% of respondents who use social media)?<sup>15</sup>**

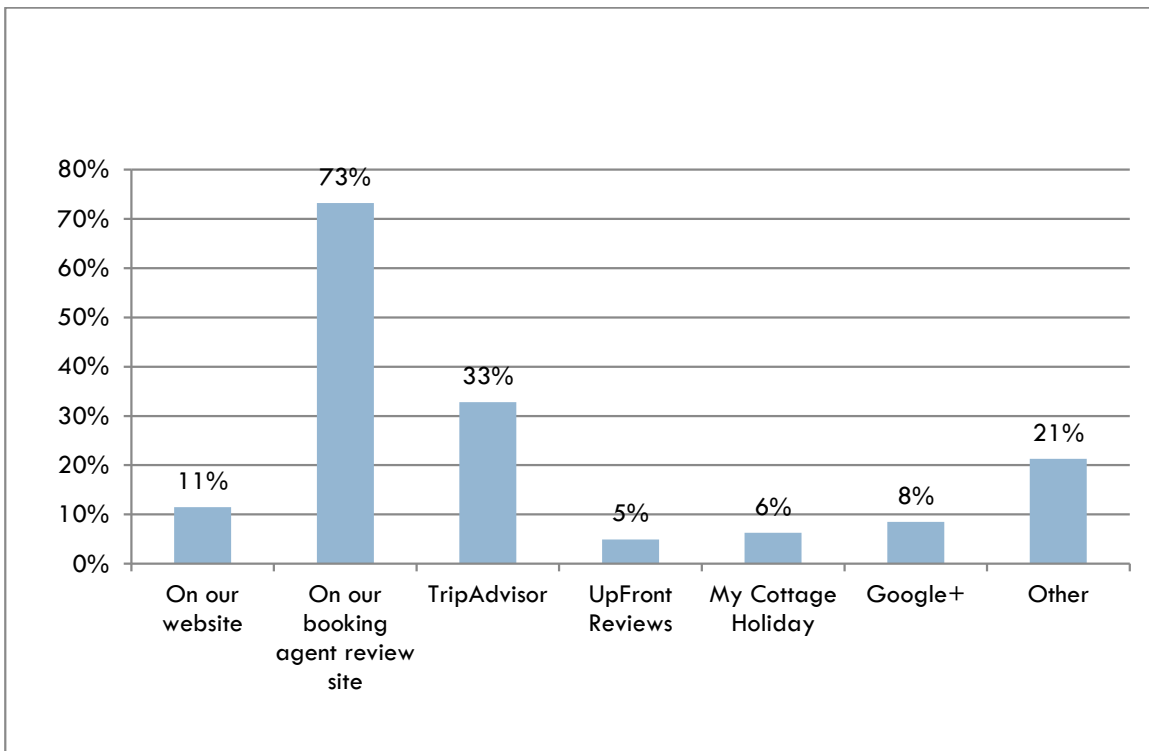
<sup>15</sup> Respondents who use social media could indicate as many options as they wished therefore the responses do not add up to 100%..



**Customer Online Reviews**

Respondents reported a number of different sites where guests could leave online reviews. Figure 21 shows that the majority of self-catering property owners (73%) reported that their guests could leave reviews on their booking agent’s review site. One third of respondents (33%) indicated that guest reviews for their property could be published on TripAdvisor. Other was mentioned by 21% of respondents and within that group, about half reported that guests could not leave online reviews but could write a review in the visitor book or via a questionnaire provided by the agent. These figures reflect the operators’ perspectives of where guests can leave online reviews but may not take into account all the possibilities available to the guest. Our data supports the increase in popularity of online reviews (Schuckert et al, 2015) which means that in a growing number of cases, guests’ feedback is no longer private but may be read by and influence potential customers.

**Figure 21 Where can guests leave online reviews?<sup>16</sup>**



<sup>16</sup> Respondents could select as many options as they wished therefore the responses do not add up to 100%.

## 3.4 Economic Impacts

### 3.4.1 Spending and Employment multipliers

To calculate the economic impact of the self-catering accommodation sector, multipliers were used. Multiplier calculations are used to account for the economic impacts of both direct and indirect spending on tourism goods and services and the additional impact on the economy that is created by this spending in other areas (principally through increased spending by tourism industry employees) and through the tourism supply chain. Multipliers can be characterized as type 1 (the relationship between direct and indirect impacts) and type 2 (also taking into account the additional 'spill-over' effects of spending on wider consumer activity). This study has used the type 2 multiplier created by Deloitte (2013) to measure the economic contribution of tourism to the UK economy, which has been shown to be relatively consistent across the nations of the UK and thus appropriate to use in the context of this report. This calculation is also used by Visit Britain and other agencies. This Type 2 multiplier for tourism activity is 1.8, meaning that for every £1 increment in GVA due to tourism spending in England, an additional £1.80 of economic activity is created elsewhere in the economy.

In addition to this calculation of additional GVA, the Deloitte (2013) report also calculated the additional spending on tourism required to create one new job in the sector. This calculation is based on econometric modelling which looks at the elasticity of employment with regard to tourism. The calculation showed that this elasticity is 0.89, meaning that a 1% rise in tourism spending is associated with a 0.89% rise in FTE employment in the sector. In cash terms, this means that additional spending of £54,000 in the tourism economy will create one new job in the sector.

### 3.4.2 Contribution to GVA

We used the Scanlon et al (2014) assumption that there are approximately 60,000 self-catering accommodation holiday properties in England. Our data shows that these are let, on average, for 177 days per year, at an average unit price of £102.24 per night. This produces a gross spending figure on self-catering accommodation of £1,085,788,800.

After applying the type 2 multiplier described above, this spending on accommodation accounts for an additional £3,040,208,640 to English GVA each year. Of this, 6% of the increase is due to international visitors, with 94% coming from domestic visitors.

### 3.4.3 Employment contribution

Gross spending on self-catering holiday accommodation is £1,085,788,800. This figure has been used as described in 4.3.1, above, to calculate the impact of this spending on job creation, using the figure of £54,000 in GVA to account for one new FTE job in tourism. According to this calculation, the spending on self-catering holiday accommodation supports 20,107 FTE jobs in the sector.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1 Economic Impacts

It is clear from this research that the self-catering sector makes a significant contribution to England's GVA in rural and coastal areas. £3.04bn per year can be attributed to spending on the accommodation involved in self-catering holidays alone. Further research should be conducted to estimate the total value of all expenditures by self-catering holidaymakers.

This finding is significant for all stakeholders in the self-catering sector. During a period of reduced public expenditure on tourism and an increasing policy emphasis on economic impacts, the self-catering sector is an under-acknowledged contributor to national and local economic development. This contribution should be leveraged to make strong representation for the interests of self-catering property owners and the sector as a whole in debates about planning, taxation and growth.

### 4.2 Employment in the sector

We have calculated that spending on self-catering accommodation supports 20,107 Full-Time-Equivalent jobs in the sector. This equates to each self-catering property accounting for 0.33 FTE jobs in the sector, or 1 FTE job being supported by every three self-catering properties. This is a strong narrative about the positive impacts of self-catering properties, which can be used when arguing for investment in and support for the sector.

### 4.4 Regional Impacts

Our data on the English regions that generate self-catering holidaymakers and the regions in which they stay, clearly shows that a transfer of wealth is taking place between the wealthier regions of the country and those whose economies are weaker.

The current political context for economic development is characterized by a strong concern for how to spread the benefits of economic growth to under-performing regions of England. Increasing regional devolution, city mayors and the support for the 'Northern Powerhouse' are examples of this. In this context, the fact that the majority of self-catering properties are in regions targeted for economic development by policymakers is significant. The self-catering sector has an important contribution to make in terms of both GVA and job creation in many of the most disadvantaged areas of the country, especially those suffering from disadvantages associated with peripherality and rurality.

### 4.4 Understanding the self-catering sector

This report has presented a number of new findings about the nature of the sector which can be used by EASCO and other tourism stakeholders, including Destination Management Organizations and Local Authorities, to gain a deeper understanding of the sector and be better able to meet its needs. Some of these key findings include:

- 94% of bookings are domestic:
  - Self-catering accommodation is a major component of the staycation phenomenon.
  - There is a clear opportunity to market self-catering properties to international visitors.
- Average length of stay is 6 nights for domestic visitors and 7.5 nights for international visitors:
  - Domestic visitors stay for more than twice as long in self-catering accommodation, as they do on average in all forms of accommodation.
- There is strong seasonality in the self-catering market:

- The average booking for a self-catering property is for 4 people, normally including one child. This suggests that properties are very reliant on family-type bookings, which are clustered in specific periods of the year. This presents opportunities for new entrants to the market, and the re-marketing of existing properties, to attract other kinds of bookings (e.g. retirees and childless couples), which may help to reduce seasonality in the sector.
- The sector is very dependent on agencies for its marketing:
  - Although this finding may be influenced by the nature of EASCO's membership, it does suggest that the sector is particularly vulnerable to disruptive market entrants such as Air B&B and RyanAir Rooms, who are able to present platforms which allow for direct communication between supply and demand in the market. Coupled with the fact that 39% of respondents do not have a website and 51% do not use social media, this suggests that EASCO members (including both agencies and individuals) are particularly vulnerable to innovations in this area.

#### 4.5 Limitations of this study

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of our research which may have an impact on the results:

- The self-catering operators who completed our survey were mainly obtained through EASCO members who are agents; therefore the responses to the questions relating to advertising and the use of social media reflect that the properties are mainly marketed by agents and not the property owners themselves.
- The customer database was developed using bookings data for 2014; therefore the data being analysed provides a snapshot of the industry within this time period. It is not possible to identify trends year-on-year as this is not a longitudinal study.
- In calculating economic impacts, this study only looked at the direct spending by tourists on self-catering accommodation, and not at additional spending carried out by tourists during their stay. By examining a national database of customer bookings, it means that this research is based on rigorous data on actual spending, but we did not carry out primary research into tourist spending, which was outside the scope of this study.

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