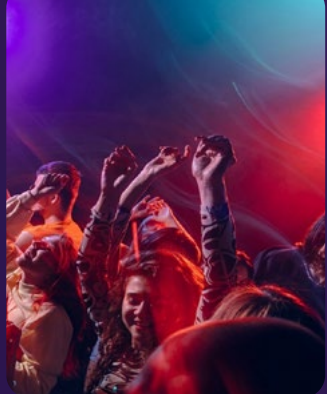




THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY INDEX

2026



Experience
Economy.

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FOREWORD

An evolution in consumer culture

An evolution is happening in consumer culture, both around the world and here in the UK. Great experiences have always been central to our happiness and wellbeing, from music concerts to museums and festivals. But today, as technology changes how we live and work, a growing desire for memorable human interaction and digital downtime is making one part of the economy increasingly vital – experiences.

The impact of the UK's experience economy ripples far beyond traditionally experience-led sectors such as attractions, art and culture or sport. It also extends into areas such as financial services, logistics and infrastructure. Its emphasis on engagement, loyalty and meaningful face-to-face interactions offers lessons for organisations across the whole economy, including those with no direct link to experiences, as they seek to make memorable connections with customers in an AI-driven world.



Frederik Vinten
Chief Commercial Officer
Grant Thornton UK

For private capital, growing consumer demand for experiences is also creating investment opportunities across the businesses, venues and infrastructure that support the sector.

Yet, unlike other established sectors, no single, consistent set of data captures the experience economy. The evidence is fragmented across industries, measured in different ways and rarely brought together.

This **Experience Economy Index** research series sets out to start building a clearer picture of the experience economy, its scale and its growing value to the UK. In this report, we take a deeper look at immersive attractions, a rapidly growing sub-sector that captures the growing desire of consumers to disconnect and create lasting, tangible memories.

FOREWORD

A sector worth celebrating

The experience economy is one of the UK's economic and cultural strengths, yet its scale and contribution have too often been fragmented across sector boundaries. **The Experience Economy Index** provides a real opportunity to change that.

This report shows that UK consumers spent £206 billion in experience-related categories in 2025, with experiences accounting for 11.7% of all consumer spending. This is forecast to reach 13% by 2031, around £23 billion more in today's prices. Behind those numbers are world-class creators, operators, venues and destinations producing experiences that bring people together, strengthen places and showcase British expertise internationally.

Encouragingly, the government is increasingly recognising this potential, including the importance of collaboration, regional supply chains and ensuring that major investments create benefits extending far beyond a single attraction.



Ian Clappison
Chief Executive Officer
Experience UK

This growing acknowledgement of the links between the visitor economy and creative industries represents a meaningful step forward and creates an opportunity to spread jobs, investment and visitor spending throughout the country.

This Index gives us the evidence needed to tell a clearer, more confident story about the sector's value. More importantly, it creates a platform for industry and government to work together, unlock investment, support innovation and ensure the benefits of the experience economy reach communities across the entire UK.



Our methodology

The **Grant Thornton Experience Economy Index** brings together consumer research, economic modelling and academic evidence to measure the growth and significance of the UK's experience economy*.

The research has three core elements:

- Findings and analysis from two consumer research studies conducted in June** and August*** 2026 investigating attitudes and spending habits relating to experiences, with a particular focus on immersive experiences which represent an important and fast-growing part of that landscape.
- A literature review by Dr Ozlem Tetik and Dr Hang-Yee Chan, professors at King's College London, examining the current and future state of the UK experience economy, covering consumer preferences and spending, industry growth and emerging trends. It answers one central question: *what is the strongest evidence that the experience economy is growing, broadening and becoming more important across culture, entertainment, tourism, retail and place?*
- Economic impact modelling**** conducted by Grant Thornton's Economic Consulting team, exploring the UK's top immersive experiences*****. The model tracks how spending on these top immersive experiences flows through the economy to estimate total expenditure, contribution to Gross Value Added (GVA) and jobs supported. Figures are available at UK-wide, regional and city level.

* The Experience Economy is defined as businesses that compete on staged, memorable experiences rather than goods or services alone.

** Based on a survey of 2,000 UK adults weighted to be nationally representative, carried out by Opinium 19-23 June 2026.

*** Based on a survey of 4,000 UK adults weighted to be nationally representative, carried out by Opinium 7-14 August 2026.

**** To estimate the wider economic contribution of immersive experiences across the UK, Grant Thornton combined survey data on visitor spending and attendance with economic data showing how different industries interact across the UK economy. The model captures the direct impact of spending by people attending immersive experiences, including tickets, travel, food, accommodation and other purchases; indirect impacts generated as businesses purchase goods and services through their supply chains; and induced impacts created when employees supported by this activity spend their wages in the wider economy. Place-specific multipliers are used to reflect differences in economic structure, productivity, local supply chains, business linkages and spending patterns across the UK. Impacts are reported in terms of total economic output, Gross Value Added (GVA) and full-time equivalent jobs supported.

***** An experience is defined as an activity in which the consumer gains an exceptional experience through engaging actively – intellectually, physically, socially or emotionally – with the product or service provided. For economic impact modelling, the focus is on paid, public-facing experiences where value is created through audience immersion, interaction, co-creation, movement through a designed environment, or participation in a shared social moment. Traditional entertainment (e.g. conventional concerts, theatre, cinema) is excluded unless it has a significant active, immersive component.



THE EXPERIENCE INDEX

Highlights

Experience
Economy.

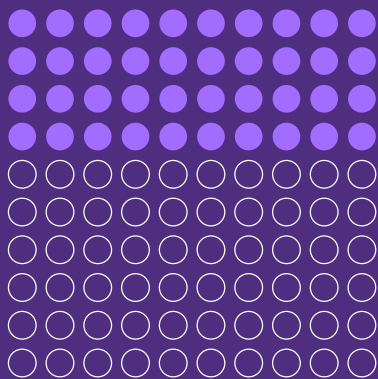
Making memories over material things

Our research shows experiences are becoming more important to UK consumers relative to possessions

PRIORITISING

40%

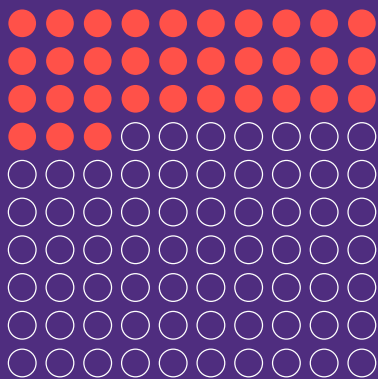
say they are increasingly prioritising experiences over material things



SACRIFICING

33%

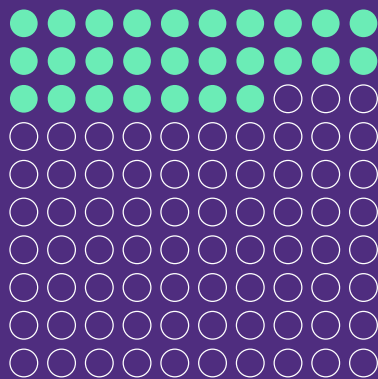
say they would make sacrifices elsewhere to fund experiences



SPENDING

27%

say they are spending more on experiences than a year ago

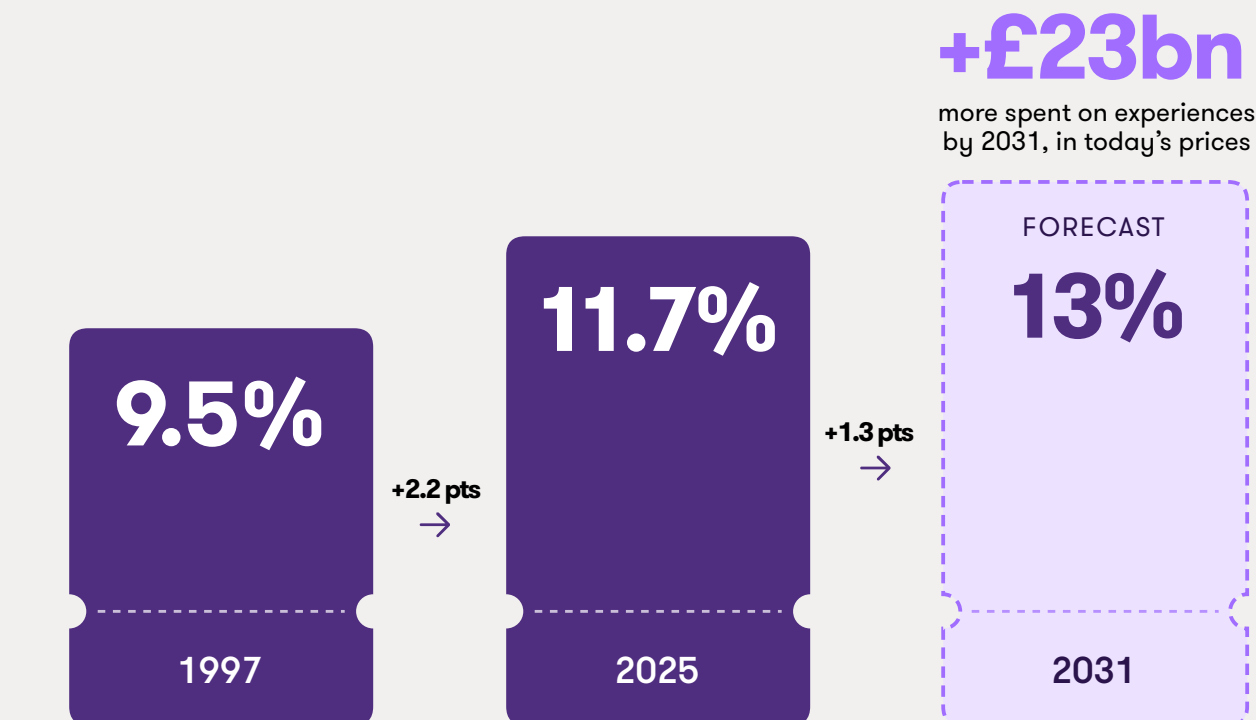


[Source: Opinium research for Grant Thornton, 2,000 UK adults, June 2026]

The value of the UK Experience Economy

£206 billion – approximate consumer spending in the UK's experience-related categories in 2025.

Experiences accounted for 11.7% of all consumer spending in 2025, up from 9.5% in 1997. This is forecast to reach 13% by 2031, around £23 billion more in today's prices¹.



The rise of immersive experiences

We estimate that **17.3 million** UK adults attended an immersive experience in the last 12 months².

Live, immersive experiences such as ABBA Voyage, The Crystal Maze LIVE Experience, Monopoly Lifesized and Frameless are increasingly attracting consumer spending.



£3.9bn

economic contribution (GVA) to the UK economy by immersive attractions



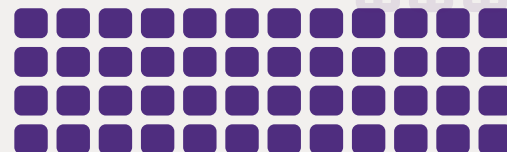
+78p

of GVA is generated elsewhere in the UK economy through supply chain purchases and employee spending

Immersive events supported nearly

48,000

full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs across the UK in 2025



Each block is roughly 1,000 jobs

£7.4bn

expenditure generated by UK immersive attractions in 2025³



Each circle is £1bn

THE EXPERIENCE INDEX

Why experiences matter



Consumer demand is shifting towards experiences, not things

People are seeking escapism, face-to-face interaction and shared cultural moments, driving growth in the experience economy.

While consumers remain price conscious, they are increasingly prioritising experiences that deliver memories, connection, escapism and personal enrichment over material purchases. The trend spans the entire experience economy, from entertainment and live events to attractions, culture, sport and tourism.

Our research, which surveyed 2,000 UK adults, found:

40%

say they are increasingly **prioritising experiences** over material things, **rising to 54%** among 18 to 34 year olds.

33%

say they would make **sacrifices elsewhere** to fund experiences

Demand is growing, but consumers are increasingly selective:

60%

say they are less likely to buy tickets for an event that uses **dynamic pricing**.

67%

say they are more likely to attend experiences that are **local, easy to access** and **less crowded**.



Dr Tom Middleton

Economic Consulting Partner
Grant Thornton UK

“The growth in demand for experiences, and their relative importance, is one of the clearest trends in our research. Whether that spending is new or pulled from competing activities, the economic opportunity for the local areas where experiences are located, and for the businesses in them, is real. However, value remains critical. The findings indicate that consumers are very sensitive to both pricing and convenience. This means that transparent pricing strategies and the delivery of a seamless and simple experience for buyers will help to deliver both new and repeat customers.”

Unless stated otherwise, all data in this section is from Opinium research for Grant Thornton, 2,000 UK adults, June 2026.

Experiences deliver emotional and social value, not just entertainment

Why consumers choose experiences:

Connection

36%

quality time with loved ones



Escapism

25%

escape routine

21%

escape daily life



Memories

38%

creating memories

20%

family days out



Anticipation

32%

something to look forward to



Self-reward

28%

treat themselves

17%

feeling inspired



Discovery

18%

something unique



Dr Hang-Yee Chan

Senior Lecturer,
King's Business School

“The experience versus material preference gap is likely to widen further as younger, more experience-oriented generations gain spending power. Separately, rising AI adoption may increase, rather than reduce, demand for face-to-face, human-mediated experiences, as live and shared moments gain relative value precisely because they cannot be automated.”

Digital fatigue is reinforcing demand for real-world experiences

The shift towards experiences is fuelled by a desire for more authentic, offline moments.



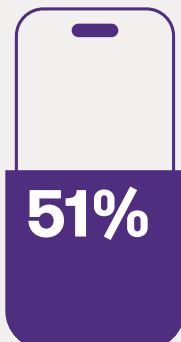
Dr Tom Middleton
Economic Consulting Partner
Grant Thornton UK

“As consumers spend increasing amounts of their lives using screens, we’re seeing a growing appetite for experiences that offer genuine opportunities to disconnect and be fully present. The desire to switch off and live in the moment reflects a broader shift in how people are defining value, with meaningful moments, shared experiences and human connection becoming increasingly important.”



40%

agree digital overload makes them prioritise experiences where they can be fully present



51%

believe more events should restrict phones and devices that distract people from being “in the moment”



THE EXPERIENCE INDEX

Literature review



Dr Hang-Yee Chan

Dr Hang-Yee Chan is a Senior Lecturer in Marketing at King's Business School, specialising in consumer neuroscience and behaviour. His internationally recognised research uses brain imaging and social data analytics to uncover how consumers think, decide and share information.



Dr Ozlem Tetik

Dr Tetik is a Lecturer in Marketing at King's Business School, specialising in consumer behaviour and decision-making. Her research on sustainability, health, and consumer well-being has earned several prestigious awards, including major honours from the Association for Consumer Research and the Society for Consumer Psychology.



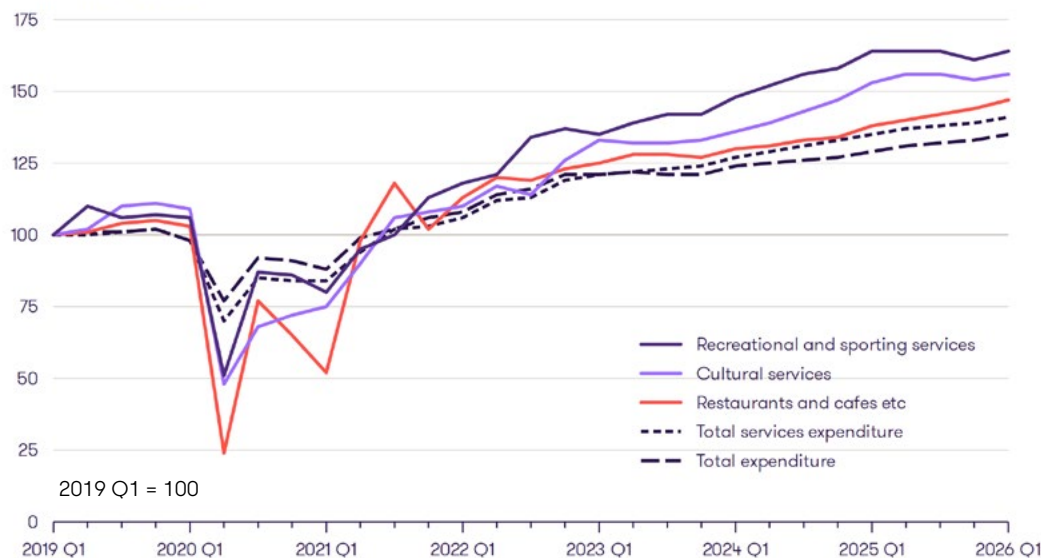
Experience spending is growing faster than overall consumer spending

Consumer spending on experience-related activities has recovered strongly since the pandemic and is becoming a larger share of household expenditure.

Key findings:

- UK consumers spent at least £206 billion on experience-related categories in 2025⁴
- Experience-related spending grew from 9.5% of all consumer spending in 1997 to 11.7% in 2025, and could reach 13% by 2031, around £23 billion more⁵
- Revolut spending data shows entertainment spending growing faster than shopping, a gap that could reach roughly 9 percentage points (40% to 49%) within five years⁶

Fig 1. Relative changes since 2019 in consumer spending on experience




Dr Hang-Yee Chan

Senior Lecturer,
King's Business School

“The shift in consumer choice towards experiences is important because it affects both how people spend their money and how organisations create value. Behaviourally, experiences help people build memories, relationships and a sense of identity. Economically, that translates into growing demand for sectors such as culture, hospitality, attractions and live entertainment.”


Dr Tom Middleton

Economic Consulting Partner
Grant Thornton UK

“The growing share of spending on experiences reflects a structural shift in consumer priorities. For businesses, this means a larger pool of consumer spending is flowing towards services that can deliver memorable and meaningful experiences. Those that invest in customer experience, personalisation and community-building are likely to capture a greater share of household spending as this trend continues.”


Dr Ozlem Tetik

Lecturer,
King's Business School

“Based on the current evidence from both consumer appetite and industry response, the UK's experience economy is growing. Consumer appetite for experience is well established both psychologically and behaviourally, while industry confidence and investment have moved in step, from a £1.5 billion cultural infrastructure package to a £50 billion theme park resort. This alignment between demand and investment suggests the shift towards experience is likely to last.”

Businesses are investing heavily in experience-led growth

Companies across hospitality, leisure, retail, attractions and culture are responding to growing demand.

This suggests businesses increasingly see experiences as a key source of competitive advantage and future growth.

Research from Barclays of UK hospitality and leisure leaders found⁷:

- **65%** are increasing investment in experience-led offerings
- **60%** believe demand for memorable experiences is growing faster than demand for physical products
- **51%** plan to expand over the next three years



Irena Scullion

Consumer Tax Partner,
Grant Thornton UK

“This isn’t a UK trend happening in isolation, it’s part of a global shift in how consumers spend, and the UK is well placed to capture its share. Every ticket sold to an overseas visitor, every global leisure brand choosing to open here, adds to a revenue base with real knock-on impact, for jobs, for local economies and for the infrastructure that supports them.”



CASE STUDY

Universal United Kingdom Resort⁸

- Nearly £50 billion of economic benefit projected by 2055
- Around 28,000 jobs - 20,000 in construction, 8,000 once open
- 8.5 million visitors expected in the first year
- More than 1 million additional overseas visitors a year
- £1.3 billion of government investment, including a £400 million Regional Growth Fund grant and £438 million from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport



CASE STUDY

Christmas at Kew

Christmas at Kew, an after-dark light trail at the Royal Botanic Gardens has run every year since 2013 and continues to expand, with new world-premiere installations each season.

It generates the kind of visitor volume that materially supports Kew's research into biodiversity loss. It does this while reinforcing rather than contradicting the brand: every technical choice, from generator fuel to path lighting design, is presented as an extension of Kew's conservation work.

Ticket sales and retail spend fund Kew's science directly. The scale of the event, drawing large nightly visitor numbers over seven weeks, makes it one of Kew's most significant commercial activities.



Philip Stephenson

Turnaround and Recovery
Partner, Grant Thornton UK

"In the hospitality space, experiences are increasingly viewed as a source of long-term competitive advantage because they can create stronger customer loyalty and help businesses stand out in crowded markets. But differentiation isn't static. As consumer expectations evolve, operators need to keep investing in their offer, whether that's through new concepts, technology or venue enhancements. The challenge for management teams is ensuring that investment translates into repeat visits, sustainable growth and attractive returns."



Emily Cheevers

Partner and Head of Retail,
Grant Thornton UK

"Retailers are recognising that convenience and price alone no longer secure loyalty. The brands winning today are creating destinations rather than stores, giving shoppers a reason to visit, interact and return. From McDonald's turning a menu favourite into a pop-up experience, to LEGO's hands-on build zones, and IKEA, John Lewis and Selfridges investing in live events and experiential spaces, the focus is on memorable moments that deepen emotional connection. That's what drives dwell time, repeat visits, and ultimately stronger sales."



THE EXPERIENCE INDEX

In focus: immersive attractions

Experience
Economy.

FOREWORD

Immersive attractions

Our economic impact modelling focuses on immersive experiences. By this we mean paid experiences where people actively take part, rather than simply watch.

That includes interacting with what's happening, exploring a specially designed space, helping shape the experience, or sharing a memorable moment with others.

We have focussed on experiences that are already attracting significant audiences or spending, while also including newer formats that are growing quickly or changing the market.

Traditional concerts, theatre and cinema aren't included unless they have a strong immersive or interactive element.

We've chosen to focus on immersion because it is a fast-growing and increasingly important part of the wider experience economy.

Immersive experiences are now mainstream

- **36%** of UK adults have attended an immersive experience in the last five years, around **19.5 million** people across the UK
- **89%** of those attendees went in the last 12 months, representing around **17.3 million people**



The economic contribution reaches far beyond the ticket

The findings demonstrate that the economic contribution of immersive attractions extends well beyond spending on admission tickets. Visitors frequently purchase accommodation, food and drink, transport, retail goods and complementary leisure activities as part of their wider experience. As a result, immersive attractions generated an estimated **£7.4 billion** in expenditure across the UK economy in 2025.

This spending translated into a **total contribution to the UK economy (GVA) of £3.9 billion**, illustrating how visitor expenditure circulates through supply chains and local economies. In other words, immersive attractions not only create value through their own operations but also

stimulate economic activity across a broad range of sectors that benefit from visitor spending.

For every £1 of GVA generated directly by immersive attractions, a further 78p of GVA is generated elsewhere in the UK economy through supply chain purchases and employee spending.

In total, immersive events supported nearly **48,000 FTE jobs across the UK** in 2025.



CASE STUDY

ABBA Voyage

ABBA Voyage sees ABBA, one of the most successful pop groups of all time, perform digitally in their very own, purpose-built, ABBA Arena at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London.

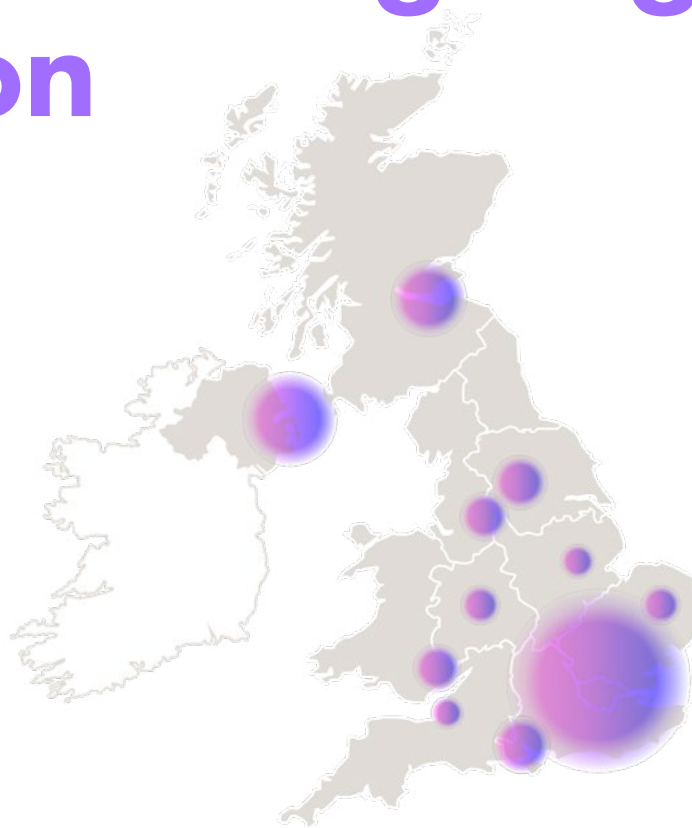
- £2.06 billion in UK turnover, May 2022 to May 2025
- £1.14 billion of that in GVA
- 9,739 workers supported each year across the UK⁹
- In April 2026 surpassed 4 million visitors since opening in May 2022.

Where the value is going: GVA by region

The value generated by the UK's immersive experience economy is not spread evenly. Our modelling puts total GVA at £3.9 billion across the UK in 2025, and London alone accounts for £2.2 billion of it, 58% of the total.

Northern Ireland is the clear standout outside London, at £510 million, ahead of Scotland (£233 million), Yorkshire and The Humber (£215.7 million) and the South West (£200.5 million).

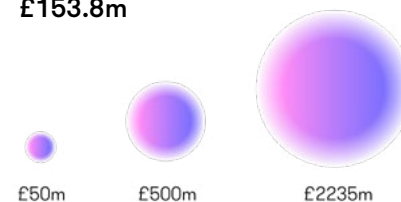
Relative to the size of its own economy, Northern Ireland's return is the most striking in the UK: it accounts for 13% of national immersive GVA from just over 2% of UK GVA overall, driven by Titanic Belfast and the Game of Thrones Studio Tour.



Bubble area is proportional to GVA (minimum size floor applied below £50m)

GVA by region

London	£2,234.7m	North East	£58.7m
Northern Ireland	£510.0m	East of England	£30.9m
Scotland	£233.1m	West Midlands	£26.8m
Yorkshire and The Humber	£215.7m	East Midlands	£21.2m
South West	£200.5m	Wales	£12.6m
South East	£171.6m		
North West	£153.8m		



Immersive experiences outperform traditional events on spend

Average spend per immersive experience substantially exceeds spending on more traditional activities¹⁰:

Experience type	Median spend
Immersive experience	£210
Festival	£125
Music concert/gig	£88
Live sport	£63
Theatre, musical, dance performance	£63
Visitor attraction (theme park, heritage, zoo)	£45
Cinema	£15



Matt Foulger

Tax Partner
Grant Thornton UK

“People aren’t necessarily treating immersive experiences as a single transaction, but as an opportunity to spend time together and make memories. That can translate into spending on everything from eating out and travel to accommodation and shopping, alongside additional investment on costumes or props, which helps explain why the overall value of an immersive experience can be substantially higher than a more traditional night out.”



Immersive experience spend

Where the money goes:

Category	Median spend
Accommodation	£25
Admission	£45
Travel	£25
Food & drink after venue	£25
Food & drink purchased at venue	£25
Clothing/costumes	£5
Merchandise or souvenirs	£15
Food & drink before venue	£15
Other attractions, shopping or activities undertaken because of trip	£25
Any other spending directly connected	£5

Immersive experiences drive travel and tourism



Average travel time is **1 hour 41 minutes** each way



55% of attendees stayed overnight



53% made the trip specifically to attend the experience

Local economies benefit significantly from secondary spending



37% ate or drank at local businesses



32% went shopping locally



24% recommended the destination to others



Gen Z, adults aged 18 to 29, are the most engaged audience



66% of Gen Z have attended an immersive experience in the last five years, against 36% of all UK adults



30% of Gen Z say they are spending more on experiences than a year ago, compared with 16% of all UK adults



25% of Gen Z expect to increase spending further over the next 12 months

The rise of the escapism economy

One of the fastest-growing parts of the experience economy is location-based entertainment, an immersive form of entertainment including concepts such as escape rooms, interactive gaming, social darts and competitive socialising.

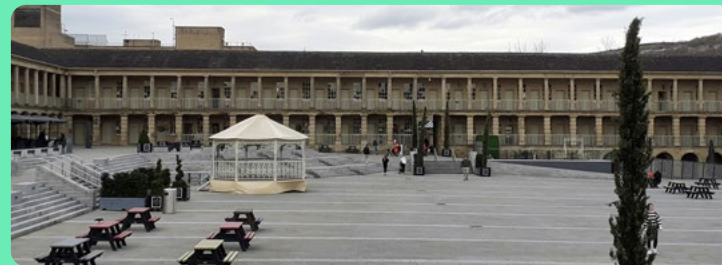
- The UK is estimated to be Europe's largest location-based entertainment
- Revenue is forecast to grow from £162 million in 2024 to £558 million by 2032, around 17% a year¹¹
- The number of UK venues has grown by around 40% since 2018, to around 600¹²



CASE STUDY

The Piece Hall, Halifax

Calderdale Council's £19 million restoration of Halifax's historic Piece Hall and transfer of its operations to an independent trust generated a cumulative economic impact of £680 million between 2015 and 2025. The strategy transformed the 18th-century woollen cloth hall into a self-sustaining cultural and entertainment hub delivering more than five times return on investment. The impact report estimates that around 7.2 million visitors from outside of Calderdale have been attracted into the borough because of The Piece Hall, delivering a major boost for local businesses¹³.





CASE STUDY

Little Lion Entertainment

Little Lion Entertainment is one of the UK's leading attractions companies, creating large-scale entertainment experiences that bring people together in the real world. Across its current attractions, The Crystal Maze LIVE (London and Manchester) and Arcade Arenas (London), around 350,000 guests are welcomed each year.

Tom Lionetti-Maguire, Founder and CEO

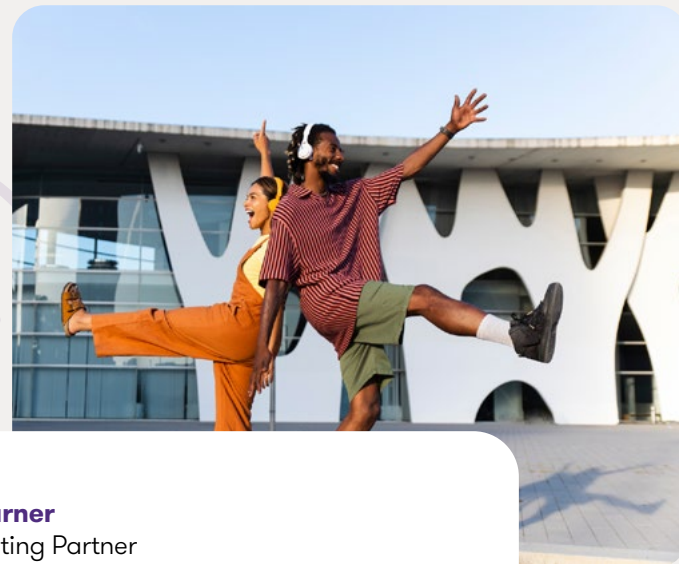
"People still love gaming, entertainment and great content, but increasingly they want a reason to get out of the house and experience those things together. The best immersive experiences combine the quality and replayability of a video game with the energy of a live event. You're not watching somebody else have the adventure - you're actually inside it, competing with your friends and creating a memory together. I think that desire for shared, real-world experiences is only getting stronger. Consumers have an extraordinary amount of entertainment available to them at home, so when they choose to go out, the experience has to offer something they simply can't replicate on a sofa or through a screen."



Rob Turner

Consulting Partner
Grant Thornton UK

"The sectors benefiting most from immersive visitor expenditure include food and beverage, retail, creative and entertainment activities, sports and recreation, and accommodation, showing how the benefits ripple through the wider visitor economy. For local economies, the prize can be significant: attracting visitors, increasing footfall and supporting businesses and jobs well beyond the attraction itself. But competition for these investments is fierce. Places need to create the right conditions to attract them, which can require upfront public investment alongside private capital. Get that partnership right and cultural, heritage or entertainment attractions can be a powerful tool for delivering growth in every postcode."





THE EXPERIENCE INDEX

What we can learn from the experience economy

Experience
Economy.

Five lessons from the experience economy

According to ONS data, spend on experiences has grown from 9.5% of consumer expenditure in 1997 to 11.7% in 2025 and is forecast to reach 13% by 2031¹⁴.

Growth at that scale creates opportunity, both for experience operators and those positioned to benefit indirectly from the spend around them, but it doesn't guarantee which organisations will capture it.

Here are five key lessons grounded in this research on what it takes to succeed.



1.

Protect the human moment

Digital overload is pushing people back towards the room, not the screen:

- **40%** agree digital overload is pushing them towards real-world experiences where they can be present and engaged
- **51%** think more events should restrict phones and devices that pull people out of the moment¹⁵

For operators, it's a clear signal to rethink the technology that sits between customers and the experience. Phone-free zones or simply resisting the urge to digitise every touchpoint could become a genuine point of difference.

And digital fatigue extends beyond live events. The findings are a reminder that a more tech-enabled process doesn't always equal a better experience for your customers or clients, and the 'easy wins' aren't always the right ones.

The lesson:

Use technology to strip out routine, repetitive work, but protect the human interaction that makes your brand memorable and keeps customers coming back.



Mark O'Sullivan

Head of Technology and Digital
Grant Thornton UK

“Digital fatigue is real and it's something every business should be considering. Swapping customer service for chat bots or self-serve kiosks might seem like an easy efficiency to show your Board, but you could be saving pennies while losing pounds. Use technology to remove friction and make processes smoother, not to replace the human relationships that bring the real value.”

2.

Don't leave reliefs on the table

Businesses in experience related sectors are facing rising costs, from the increase in employer national insurance contributions to high business rates. They have two ways to protect margin: cut costs or pass them on through higher prices. The latter isn't a lever every business can pull. Almost one quarter of consumers are cutting back on experiences, and of those, 41% point to rising costs as the reason.¹⁶

In a market this tight, making sure you're claiming every relief available is key, yet we see many businesses miss out. For example:

- Research and development (R&D) reliefs go unclaimed; a lack of understanding of the rules, paired with the pace of change and a disconnect between teams doing the creative work and the finance teams, can mean qualifying activities are not spotted in time, data isn't captured and claims are missed.
- Spend on infrastructure, sets and physical kit isn't captured or analysed in real time, so by the time a capital allowances claim is possible, the evidence has gone or is too time consuming to recreate.

The lesson:

Capture information as you spend, get the right advice, and plan ahead. Don't leave money on the table.



Yvonne Chappell

Corporate Tax Partner
Grant Thornton UK

"It takes a lot of investment and innovation to keep experiences fresh and ahead of the curve. The good news is that the UK has good incentives for capital spend and for research and development - so make sure you've factored that in, and you're not missing out on the reliefs that help keep the lights on."

3.

Capture the halo effect

The spend around a major experience doesn't stop at admission, and it doesn't only benefit the operator:

- **37%** of attendees ate or drank at local businesses
- **32%** went shopping locally
- **21%** booked and paid for accommodation nearby¹⁷

The spend is there, but it isn't guaranteed. It will go to the businesses that make themselves part of the experience, not just the ones closest to the door, through event-day offers, extended opening hours or a tie-in with organisers.

The lesson:

Map where customers spend around the experiences they attend and put yourself in that path with something recognisably yours.



Phillip Woolley

Head of Public Sector Consulting
Grant Thornton UK

“‘Experiencing an event’ goes well beyond the event itself. Take the UEFA European Football Championship, which the UK and Ireland are set to host in 2028. This event won’t just be about attending the games, it will be going to the pub, the fan zones, the watch parties. That means there’s a real opportunity for even smaller businesses to capitalise on the halo effect.”



4.

Forecasting at the speed of demand

Discretionary spend is inherently volatile, and it doesn't move evenly. Split our consumer research by age, location or other attributes, and it's clear that few segments are acting the same way. Some are increasing spend on experiences, others are cutting back, and what, when and where they spend is diverging significantly.

If your forecasts are built largely on historic trend lines, or don't capture this level of detail, they won't allow you to spot shifts and adapt quickly enough. By the time you notice a change, you've either missed the upside of a surge or already absorbed the downside of a drop. It's easy to be unprepared for these shifts if:

- your forecasts are built on historic trends rather than known commercial drivers
- scenario planning is manual and slow, meaning the moment to act has passed by the time a model is updated

The lesson:

Agree early which levers you'd pull if a customer segment cuts back, so the decision is ready before you need it.



Johnny Leiper
Partner, CFO Solutions
Grant Thornton UK

“When your customer base is fragmenting into segments that behave nothing alike, a single top-down forecast just averages away the information and insight you actually need. The finance teams winning in this space are using AI EPM tools to build very granular, driver-based models that adapt in near real time, turning a shift in demand into an opportunity – for example, to ramp up production or make pricing decisions – rather than a surprise.”

5.

Build in the option to walk away

Every new experience concept looks attractive at the pitch stage. What separates the winners from the write-offs is what happens if it doesn't work: whether the business can stop quickly and cleanly, or whether it's locked in by the leases, headcount and fit-out it signed up to at launch.

Treat every new concept as an option, not a commitment. That means favouring variable cost over fixed wherever possible: short-term venue agreements instead of long leases, flexible staffing instead of permanent headcount, modular fit-out instead of bespoke build. It also means agreeing the exit criteria before launch, not after the results come in, so the decision to stop isn't clouded by sunk cost or reputational pride once real money is already committed.

The lesson:

Design new concepts with a built-in off-ramp that includes flexible cost, clear success criteria and a pre-agreed exit point so testing an idea never turns into betting the business on it.



Philip Stephenson

Turmaround and Recovery Partner
Grant Thornton UK

"The businesses that survive a downturn aren't the ones that never make a bad bet, they're the ones that structure it so a bad bet doesn't cost them the business. If you can't control your cost base closely enough to know exactly what walking away costs you on day one, you shouldn't be launching it."



CONCLUSION

Encore for the Experience Economy Index



Frederik Vinten
Chief Commercial Officer
Grant Thornton UK

We hope that you have enjoyed reading our report into the Experience Economy. For me a key take away is the clear shift in what people value. They are choosing to put their time and money into experiences that help them switch off and connect with others, and that leave memories that last a lifetime.

In a world that is getting increasingly connected through digital tools there is already evidence that suggests humans are starting to feel the weight of isolation and loneliness from an 'always on' lifestyle. The need to connect with other people directly is inherently human, and it's something that all businesses should take into account.

Experience has fundamentally moved from a niche part of the economy to material driver of consumer spending and economic prosperity, and our evidence suggest that this is structural behaviour change rather than a passing trend.

For experience operators, the opportunity is significant, but the lessons apply well beyond the sector. As technology and AI take on more of the routine work in serving customers, the organisations that stand out will use them to remove friction and protect the moments that feel personal and memorable.

Growth follows from understanding what people value and giving them reasons to come back. This is true for every organisation, whatever sector it operates in.

Sources

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