



SCOTTISH
TOURISM
ALLIANCE

Your voice in tourism matters

SCOTTISH TOURISM ALLIANCE AND TOURISM – FACT SHEET

WHO IS THE SCOTTISH TOURISM ALLIANCE?

[The Scottish Tourism Alliance \(STA\)](#) is the overarching trade body for the tourism and hospitality industry in Scotland. It comprises of over 250 trade associations, businesses, destination groups and other organisations with an interest in tourism. Its membership is spread across all regions and destinations in Scotland.

The organisation is governed by a [Board](#) with wide-ranging representation from Scotland's tourism industry and supply sectors, who together with STA's [Council](#) and [Destination Forum](#) shape the organisation's policy agenda for the Scottish Government, UK Government and other key stakeholders.

The STA led and co-ordinated the development and launch of Scotland's national tourism strategy, [Scotland Outlook 2030](#), in collaboration with the Scottish Government and its agencies. The trade body remains driven by this strategy, growing the value and positively enhancing the benefits of tourism in Scotland by delivering the very best for visitors, businesses, people, communities and environment.

The STA's Chief Executive, Marc Crothall MBE, co-chairs the [Tourism and Hospitality Industry Leadership Group](#), alongside the Minister for Small Business, Trade and Innovation, Richard Lochhead. The group's core purpose is to provide the recommended strategic direction that will help to drive recovery and sustainable growth across both tourism and hospitality in the long term. It builds on the partnership approach of the [Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group \(STERG\)](#), which led the industry's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in partnership with the Scottish Government.

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KEY TOURISM STATISTICS

- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector contributed £4.5 billion in gross value added to Scotland's economy, employing 229,000 people, accounting for around 9% of employment in Scotland or the equivalent of one in every 11 jobs. Today it employs c185,000. In 2019, day and overnight visitors spent almost £11.6 billion in Scotland.¹
- The tourism sector is an important part of the Scottish economy, supporting business activity and employment opportunities across the whole of Scotland. In 2017, 96% of tourism enterprises were small businesses (0-49 employees), accounting for 51% of employment in the sector.²
- In 2019, UK residents made 14.1 million overnight stays in Scotland, accounting for 80% of all stays in that year.³
- International visitors made almost 3.5 million visits to Scotland in 2019, staying for approximately 27.4 million nights and spending around £2.5 billion – 43% of the total overnight spend in Scotland.⁴
- In 2021, the number of international visitors to Scotland dropped by 86% to 479,000 visits and expenditure by 82% to £459 million compared to 2019 levels.
- Before the pandemic, visitors spent around £995 million on eating and drinking when on holiday in Scotland, with UK tourists accounting for £656 million and overseas tourists accounting for £339 million.⁵
- According to the Scotch Whisky Association, 2.2 million people visited distilleries in Scotland in 2019, with two-thirds coming from overseas. The trade body reports that spending at visitor centres was worth around £84.7 million.⁶

¹ <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/what-was-said-in-parliament/meeting-of-parliament-22-03-2022?meeting=13658&iob=123961>

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/tourism-scotland-economic-contribution-sector/pages/4/>

³ www.visitscotland.org/binaries/content/assets/dot-org/pdf/research-insights/key-facts-on-tourism-in-scotland-2019

⁴ <https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/about-our-visitors/international/annual-performance-report#2021>

⁵ www.visitscotland.org/binaries/content/assets/dot-org/pdf/research-insights/opening-up-scotlands-larder-to-our-visitors

⁶ <https://www.scotch-whisky.org.uk/newsroom/support-local-call-as-record-for-2019-scotch-whisky-tourism-revealed/>

- Pre-COVID-19, the economic impact of golf tourism to Scotland was worth over £300 million. In 2017, overseas golfing visitor spend was on average £338 per night during a trip to Scotland – more than four times the daily spend of an average domestic visitor.⁷

TOURISM POLICY PRIORITIES:

Following the appointment of the new First Minister and Cabinet, the STA welcomes the opportunity to continue working with the Scottish Government to shape and deliver world-leading policies that will support future growth and prosperity in Scotland, recognising the substantial contribution of tourism to the economy.

We welcome the recognition from the new Minister for Small Business, Trade and Innovation that the Scottish Government is committed to listening and working with the tourism and hospitality sector to ensure that businesses grow, thrive and have a key role in the development of the wellbeing economy.

Having the very best policy is one of the 6 key conditions for enabling success, as outlined in our national tourism strategy, [Scotland Outlook 2030](#).

Alongside tourism and hospitality aiding economic recovery and future growth as part of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation, the STA has a collective role to play with industry partners in community wealth building, sustainability and supporting the Fair Work agenda.

As an immediate priority, the Scottish Government must work with the industry to determine and agree a set of recommended solutions to resolve existing issues concerning policies that are damaging the sector or have the potential to damage it. We must work together to ensure that these are developed into better policy that works for all and that can be regarded as setting an example at a global level.

We also ask that the Scottish Government ensures that as one of its greatest economic and reputational assets, the tourism industry is placed at the centre of its policy making and investment decisions to support our shared vision of Scotland becoming the world leader in 21st century tourism.

– Local Visitor Levy Manifesto

In February 2023, the STA published a [Local Visitor Levy Manifesto](#) to help inform national and local government about the key considerations the

⁷ <https://scottishtourismalliance.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Scottish-Golf-Tourism-and-Visitor-Strategy-2022-2030.pdf>

tourism industry believes must be taken into account should the Scottish Government decide to proceed with local visitor levy legislation.

The industry, represented by the STA, firmly believes that should this legislation be progressed, it must be centred on ensuring Scotland remains as competitive a visitor destination as it can be.

The STA has made **10 recommendations** in the manifesto that seeks to ensure that this policy is deployed at a local level to deliver the best possible outcome for tourism, with no unintended consequences for the sector.

The STA is committed to working closely with the Scottish Government to ensure that the tourism industry has a key role in shaping the development of a levy and in guaranteeing that any net revenue raised is a force for good.

– **Consultation on Restricting Alcohol Advertising and Promotion**

As the acknowledged overarching trade body and voice for tourism and hospitality in Scotland, the STA welcomes that the First Minister has announced that there will be a significant rethink on plans for restrictions on alcohol advertising, and that the Scottish Government will work with both industry and health stakeholders to shape a new set of proposals.

The consultation proposals as they currently stood would have had a lasting detrimental impact on the positioning of Scotland as a globally attractive visitor destination. They would have affected not only the country's prestigious distilleries and breweries, but also had a serious knock-on impact on local communities.

Scotland's drinks producers are of vital importance to Scotland's tourism landscape, driving visitors to the country, including remote parts of Scotland. For many local communities, they are central to the local economy and job creation, and support sports and events that might not happen otherwise.

You can view the [STA's full response to the previous consultation](#) and an [open letter](#) we sent on behalf of the tourism and hospitality sector. We urge the Scottish Government to ensure that tourism and hospitality representatives are involved in informing the revised set of proposals before reaching the public consultation stage.

– **Short-Term Let Licensing Scheme**

The STA strongly supports the calls made by the [Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers \(ASSC\)](#) that the Scottish Government should reconsider the burdensome Short-Term Let Licensing Scheme.

The STL scheme is the one of greatest issues facing the Scottish tourism sector, with 83% of respondents to our recent [Business Barometer and Energy Survey](#) citing it as challenge for their business.

In this extended period of registration, it is vitally important there is a recognition that a reset is needed concerning how local authorities are applying the policy, so we have consistency, proportionality, and fairness. And importantly, to prevent further loss of many excellent and experienced operators and businesses from our product portfolio.

[Moffat Centre for Travel and Tourism Business Development at Glasgow Caledonian University recently reported](#) that over three-quarters (77.5%) of accommodation operators feel the scheme is a significant or medium threat to their business.

Participants in the study also highlighted that the licensing legislation has no clear purpose, with confusion as to whether it aims to ensure health and safety standards or address housing challenges.

In addition, the Scottish Government must ensure that [new consultation proposals on tax changes to second and empty homes](#) do not have any unintended consequences for the self-catering sector.

– **Deposit Return Scheme**

As one of the [recent signatories calling for the Scottish Government to delay the implementation of the Deposit Return Scheme \(DRS\)](#), we welcome the First Minister's announcement that the scheme to be delayed until 1st March 2024, giving businesses more time to prepare.

Despite considerable efforts by producers and their trade associations to make the scheme work, the DRS is currently not fit for purpose and the pause in implementing the scheme must be used to work with business and Circularity Scotland to address concerns and prevent considerable damage to the country's drinks industry. Businesses must be able to sign up for a scheme in which they can have confidence will deliver and without taking on unacceptable liability.

The DRS was mentioned by over half of respondents to STA's recent [Business Barometer and Energy Survey](#) as a challenge to their business.

The DRS, STL Licensing Scheme and other regulatory reforms place an additional burden on tourism and hospitality businesses in the current financial crisis and while they are still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

– **Business rates**

It is a matter of urgency that the Scottish Government gives sector-specific relief on business rates for the tourism and hospitality sector, and restores the level playing field with England on the higher property business rate. This is having a disproportionate impact on the costs facing tourism, hospitality, and retail businesses, and creating an anomaly with competitors over the border.

We were pleased that the First Minister has said that as part of a “New Deal for Scottish business”, non-domestic rates will be considered as part of this work.

STA's recent Business Barometer and Energy Survey found that nearly half of respondents are facing an increase in their business rateable values, with 5% of businesses experiencing an increase of over 75%, and 9% facing a 50% hike. A significant number of respondents called for action on business rates, with rates relief to be aligned with England.

The Scottish Government's decision to freeze business rates was very welcome, but reform of the current business rates system is needed to ensure that there is the best possible environment for businesses operating in Scotland. A full review of the current methodology is needed to deliver a better solution for determining future more proportionate and fairer rateable values.

– **Transport Infrastructure**

An accelerated solution is needed to address the issues currently facing the country's transport infrastructure, which is having a significantly damaging impact on local communities, businesses and tourists.

With a third of CalMac ferries more than 30 years old and around half of its larger ships in operation beyond their expected service life, breakdowns and disruption to services are now a regular occurrence, while replacement ferries continue to be delayed. Once again, tourism and hospitality businesses and visitors to Scotland's islands face a summer season of cancellations and uncertainty due to the ongoing ferry crisis.

We are supportive of the development of the international inbound travel grid, which is of great significance to the highly valuable international visitor economy and stimulating new markets for inbound tourism. International connectivity has a key role to play in achieving our ambition to be the world leader in 21st century tourism.

Very careful consideration is needed to balance the need to develop the country's transport infrastructure to support tourism and business, alongside Scotland's green agenda.

Additionally, the timing of the implementation of Low Emission Zones (LEZs) in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee is causing serious concern for tourism, hospitality and retail businesses.

There is risk that this will lead to a significant decline in city centre footfall due to the current transport system and a drop in taxi availability, while it is unlikely that electric vehicle production, including for logistics companies, will be able to meet current delivery timescales in time for implementation of LEZs.

– **Asks of UK Government**

The STA continues to make several asks of the UK Government to create the right conditions for tourism and hospitality business stability and growth. This includes:

- Calls for a VAT reduction on supplies relating to hospitality, accommodation, or admission to certain attractions, as was afforded during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is also the potential to have lower levels of VAT for businesses based in island areas.
- The reinstatement of plans for duty free shopping.
- All tourism and hospitality businesses made eligible for the same level of support as received by energy and trade intensive industries, along with UK Government intervention to safeguard business from unfair treatment by energy suppliers and the financial sector.
- Temporary seasonal visas be granted to help address the critical shortage of tourism and hospitality labour during peak tourism season and additional roles in the sector to be added to the Shortage Occupation List. Longer-term fixes to address the labour workforce shortages experienced within the sector, particularly among rural and island areas.
- The prioritisation of Levelling Up Funding in Scotland.

KEY TOURISM STRATEGIES:

– **Scotland Outlook 2030**

Launched on 4th March 2020, the national tourism strategy, [Scotland Outlook 2030](#), is guided by the vision that Scotland will be the world leader in 21st century tourism.

Alongside inspiring stakeholders across the country, it aims to enrich the lives of those who live and visit Scotland by protecting and preserving our places, with Scotland's tourism industry acting as pioneers for delivering responsible tourism.

The strategy was developed through a shared vision and strong partnership between the STA, Scottish Government, VisitScotland, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland.

Over 2,500 tourism leaders and stakeholders from Scotland's tourism industry contributed to its development through dedicated events, workshops and an online survey.

At the strategy's heart is community wealth building – encouraging local communities to take ownership of tourism in their area, welcoming visitors and bringing to life the stories of their local community, working together to protect and enhance our environment, and creating new businesses and job opportunities.

As a significant force for good, the benefits of tourism must be experienced directly by our communities, with engaging and listening to our urban and rural communities an essential part of the development of our destinations and tourism offering.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry has worked closely to engage and support communities to help them shape and deliver their tourism products as we look towards economic recovery.

Scotland Outlook 2030 also includes a clear commitment to ensuring tourism businesses are Fair Work and responsible employers, creating quality jobs with the right pay and conditions, which will help to encourage more people to keep working in and join the tourism and hospitality workforce.

Alongside STA's role in Scotland's Fair Work Convention Inquiry into the Hospitality Industry, we are collectively committed to working with our industry members to support the Fair Work agenda.

There is a growing recognition among tourism and hospitality businesses that giving employees access to more opportunities, improving employee benefits, and increasing wages are integral to attracting new staff and retaining and protecting the welfare of their current workforce.

The Vision – We will be the world leader in 21st century tourism.

The Mission – Together we will grow the value and positively enhance the benefits of tourism across Scotland by delivering the very best for our visitors, our businesses, our people, our communities and our environment.

Key Priorities – Our passionate people; Our thriving places; Our diverse businesses; Our memorable experiences.

Our Commitments – For each of our key priorities we have an agreed set of commitments. These commitments will ensure that we deliver on our vision to be the world leader in 21st century tourism.

– **Food Tourism Scotland Strategy**

Scotland's first [Food Tourism Action Plan](#) aims to make the country a global food tourism destination and deliver an additional £1 billion to the Scottish economy by 2030.

Developed by [Scotland Food & Drink](#) together with the STA, the action plan identifies 17 actions to realise these ambitions and unlock potential.

These actions are centred around a series of pillars:

- **Pillar 1:** Sustainable local food supply chain
- **Pillar 2:** Quality products and experiences for all
- **Pillar 3:** Rich storytelling
- **Pillar 4:** Skilled and vibrant workforce
- **Pillar 5:** Innovative collaboration

This strategy is in the process of being refreshed post-pandemic, as growing the Scottish #Foodtourism proposition still presents massive opportunities for many local and rural business, as well as further strengthening Scotland's appeal.

– **Scottish Golf Tourism and Visitor Strategy 2022-2030**

Led by the Scottish Golf Tourism Development Group (SGTDG), [The Scottish Golf Tourism and Visitor Strategy 2022-2030](#) has been developed to help shape and support the future of the golf industry from 2022 to 2030.

Led by the Scottish Golf Tourism Development Group (SGTDG), the strategy was developed through a shared vision with contributions from public and private sector, industry, public bodies and partner organisations.

It sets out a number of objectives and identifies actions that help support the sustainability and growth of the golf tourism industry in the coming decade, including recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The strategy highlights five key areas that are central to the strategy's success: Developing our Destinations; People; Reaching Out to Communities; Maximising the Value of Golf Events; Protecting the Environment

– **Scotland's Marine Tourism Strategy**

[Giant Strides 2020-2025](#) is Scotland's second marine tourism strategy, building on the success of the previous 'Awakening the Giant' strategy.

The five-year plan aims to boost Scotland's reputation as a world-class sustainable marine tourism destination by meeting changing consumer, workforce, community and environmental needs, and growing the industry's economic contribution to over £500 million by 2025.

The Vision: That Scotland will be a world leader in 21st century sustainable marine tourism.

The Mission: Marine tourism is sustainable and meets changing consumer, workforce, community and environmental needs and expectations, whilst growing the industry's overall economic contribution to over £500 million by 2025.

Four core themes: Our waters; Our experiences; Our businesses; Our people and communities

Marine Tourism includes water-based activity of all types – including sailing, kayaking, surfing, windsurfing, paddleboarding, and open water swimming.

Our coasts and waters are one of the many strengths of Scotland's visitor proposition, which in turn drives huge local economic and health benefits too. The STA has recently submitted its [response to the Scottish Government's Consultation on Scottish Highly Protected Marine Areas \(HPMAs\)](#), which cautions that the measures to protect and improve the marine environment must take into consideration any unintended and damaging consequences for Scotland's visitor economy.

The establishment and management of HPMAs should involve careful planning, meaningful stakeholder engagement, and consideration of local socio-economic and cultural contexts to minimise potential negative impacts on island and coastal communities, including wider parts of the tourism sector such as accommodation and hospitality providers.