Survey: Self-Catering Holiday Booking Trends in Scotland 2023

11th August 2023

The ASSC conducted a survey, closing date 7th August 2023. The survey aimed to gather information on booking trends for self-catering holiday accommodation in Scotland compared to 2019. The survey also looked at business pressures such as cancellations, business investment and short-term let licensing.

The data shown in the below survey results will be used to inform ongoing discussions with the Scottish Government and other stakeholders.

Headlines:

1270 responses where gathered.

- 70% of properties were described as rural or on an island.
- 41% noticed a noticeable increase in international bookings.
- 42% noted a that the booking lead time has decreased since 2019.
- 35% rated 2023 occupancy over all as moderate, with 16% rating it low or very low and 48% rating it as high or very high.
- Compared to the same time last year, 32% said the occupancy level had stayed the same, but 39% noted that it had decreased.
- Compared to 2019, 21% said the occupancy level had stayed the same, but 38% noted that it had decreased.
- Looking ahead to Autumn (September-November 2023), based on current enquiries and/or bookings, 25% expect the number of autumn bookings compared to the same period last year to be about the same, with 53% expecting it to be slower or significantly lower.
- Factors deemed to be influencing the change in autumn bookings include the economic situation in the UK (57%), more people heading overseas for holidays (31%), booking trends are changing, bookings are more last minute (33%) and other (27%), see below.[1]

- [1] Some operators closing down at the end of September as they will not want to deal or bother with the licensing requirements Short Term Let Licensing.
- Almost certainly will be put out of business by City of Edinburgh Council.
- Bad press around Calmac ferries definitely affecting Scottish visitors in particular. Closure of Uig - Tarbert run in autumn/winter 2022 had a massive impact. Similar trend for the coming autumn/winter
- A greater percentage of people aged 50+ seem to be taking more short breaks during the year within driving distance. More people appear to be returning to same destination/ accommodation.
- We have had European cancellations due to the bookings they had in the south of Scotland, cancelling their bookings since the self-catering establishments are no longer going to continue (due to regulations). They then cancelled with us - since they were going to do a road trip from south of Scotland up to Orkney and Shetland. We have had numerous cancellations from Germany and France.
- Licensing scheme in Scotland which I'm not applying for.
- Arran Ferry fiasco
- Uncertainty of STL

- Compared to 2022, 51% have experienced no change in the number of cancellations, with 27% noting an increase in cancellations.
- Factors impacting on cancellations include changes in customer behaviour and priorities (18%), financial difficulties impacting travel plans (19%).
- 31% are seeing weaker demand in September 2023, 43% in October, 51% in November and 39% in December.

Where is your business based?

Local Authority	Number of Respondents
Aberdeen City	8 / 0.63%
Aberdeenshire	40 / 3.15%
Angus	21/ 1.66%
Argyll & Bute	111/ 8.75%
Clackmannanshire	4/ 0.32%
Dumfries & Galloway	48/ 3.79%
Dundee City	6 /0.47%
East Ayrshire	6/ 0.47%
East Dunbartonshire	5/ 0.39%
East Lothian	24/ 1.89%
East Renfrewshire	2 /0.16%
Edinburgh City	184/ 14.51%
Eilean Siar	46 / 3.63%
Falkirk	3 / 0.24%
Fife	43 /3.39%
Glasgow City	28 / 2.21%
Highland	379 / 29.89%
Inverclyde	1/ 0.08%
Midlothian	4 / 0.32%
Moray	32/ 2.52%
North Ayrshire	39/ 3.08%
North Lanarkshire	5 / 0.39%
Orkney	22/ 1.74%

- rental prices increased as expenses are rising, now to make thinks worse even a LICENCING FEE plus associated checks to pay
- New licence will make me to close for good so no plans/bookings after September.

Perth & Kinross	80/ 6.31%
Renfrewshire	5/0.39%
Scottish Borders	51/ 4.02%
Shetland	6 / 0.47%
South Ayrshire	8 / 0.63%
South Lanarkshire	12 /0.95%
Stirling	32 / 2.52%
West Dunbartonshire	4 / 0.32%
West Lothian	6 /0.47%

Do you operate any of the following?

Self-Catering	1143 / 90.74%
B&B/ Guest House/ Small Hotel	70 / 5.55%
Farm / Agritourism Accommodation Business	22 / 1.74%
Glamping / Shepherds Hut, wigwam etc.	38 / 3.01%
Caravan, not part of a licence caravan site	3 / 0.24%
Home Share (in your primary residence)	56 / 4.44%
Property Management Agency	20 / 1.59%
Serviced Apartment	2 / 0.16%

- **Other:** bunkhouse, exclusive venue, wedding and events accommodation, chalet park, bothy, Mix of SC & B&B

How would you describe the location of your property?

Urban	373 / 29%
Rural	693 / 55%
Island	190 / 15%
Pan Scotland	9 / 1 %

How many people do you accommodate?

1-2	185 / 15%
3-4	392 / 31%
5-9	408 / 32%
10-12	102 / 8%
12+	180 / 14%

Have you observed an increase in international bookings this year compared to last year?

Yes, there has been a noticeable increase in international bookings	469 / 41%
No, international bookings have remained relatively stable	340 / 29%

No, there has been a decrease in international bookings	211 / 18%
Unsure	49 / 4%

- **Other:** Ferries mentioned as barrier to booking

Booking Lead Time

What is the average lead time between booking and arrival this year?

Less than 1 week	16 / 1%
1 to 2 weeks	51 / 4%
2 to 4 weeks	151 / 13%
1-2 months	271 / 23%
2-4 months	314 / 27%
4-6 months	183 / 16%
More than 6 months	130 /11%
Unsure	40 / 3%

Compared to last year, has the booking lead time:

Decreased significantly	231 / 20%
Decreased slightly	267 / 23%
Remained the same Increased slightly	325 / 28%
Increased significantly	60 / 5%
Unsure	83 / 7%
N/A	25/ 2%

Compared to 2019, has the booking lead time:

Decreased significantly	298 / 26%
Decreased slightly	193 / 17%
Remained the same Increased slightly	214 / 18%
Increased significantly	71 / 6%
Unsure	125 / 11%
N/A	124/ 11%

2023 Occupancy

How would you rate the current level of occupancy overall this year so far

Very low	57 / 5%
Low	129 / 11%
Moderate	411 / 35%
High	370 / 32%
Very High	190 / 16%
N/A	4 / 0.34%

Compared to the same time last year, has the occupancy level:

Decreased significantly	164/ 14%
Decreased slightly	305 / 27%
Remained the same	368 / 32%
Increased slightly	227 / 20%
Increased significantly	73 / 6%
N/A	25 / 2%

Compared to the same time during 2019, has the occupancy level so far this year:

Decreased significantly	212/ 18%
Decreased slightly	231 / 20%
Remained the same	245 / 21%
Increased slightly	199 / 17%
Increased significantly	108 / 9%
N/A	166 / 14%

Occupancy Levels (Summer June - August)

How would you rate the current level of occupancy this summer:

Very low	41 / 6%
Low	105 /9%
Moderate	314 / 27%
High	371 / 32%
Very High	328 / 29%

Compared to the same time last year, has the occupancy level:

Decreased significantly	137/ 12%
Decreased slightly	270 / 23%
Remained the same	478 / 41%
Increased slightly	200 / 17%
Increased significantly	60 /5%
N/A	24 / 2%

b. Compared to the same time during 2019, has the occupancy level:

Decreased significantly	173/ 15%
Decreased slightly	215/ 18%
Remained the same	347 / 30%
Increased slightly	186 / 16%
Increased significantly	85 / 7%
N/A	163 / 14%

Looking ahead to Autumn (September-November 2023)

Based on current enquiries and/or bookings, how do you expect the number of autumn bookings to compare to the same period last year?

Significantly higher	21 /2%
Slightly higher	116 / 10%
About the same	287 /25%
Slightly lower	260 / 22%
Significantly lower	357 /30%

Unsure	65 / 6%
N/A	65 / 6%

Based on current enquiries and/or bookings, how do you expect the number of autumn bookings to compare to the same period in 2019?

Significantly higher	45 / 4%
Slightly higher	120 / 10%
About the same	209 / 18%
Slightly lower	201 / 17%
Significantly lower	349 / 30%
Unsure	68 / 6%
N/A	179 / 15%

What factors do you believe are influencing the expected change in autumn bookings compared to previous years? (Select all that apply)

Economic situation in the UK	**663/ 57%**
More people heading overseas for holidays	**361/ 31%**
Booking trends are changing, bookings are more last minute	**384 / 33%**
Unsure	**151/13%**
N/A	**82 /7%**

Other reasons:

- *Some operators closing down at the end of September as they will not want to deal or bother with the licensing requirements*
- *Short Term Let Licensing. Almost certainly will be put out of business by City of Edinburgh Council*
- *Licensing mentioned a number of times as 'other' reason*
- *Bad press around Calmac ferries definitely affecting Scottish visitors in particular*
- *Closure of Uig - Tarbert run in autumn/winter 2022 had a massive impact. Similar trend for the coming autumn/winter*
- *A greater percentage of people aged 50+ seem to be taking more short breaks during the year within driving distance. More people appear to be returning to same destination/ accommodation*
- *We have had European cancellations due to the bookings they had in the south of Scotland, cancelling their bookings since the self-catering establishments are no longer going to continue (due to regulations). They then cancelled with us - since they were going to do a road trip from south of Scotland up to Orkney and Shetland. We have had numerous cancellations from Germany and France*
- *Arran Ferry*
- *Ferry concerns mentioned a few times*
- *Orkney is expensive to get to as RET has still not been put in place by the Scottish Government, we've also had ferry problems*
- *People are more favourable towards booking ferries now, as media exposure has dropped*
- *Fight costs Airport and operation difficulties/ flights being cancelled*
- *Construction market is booming, 1 company in Dundee has 100 people to accommodate. They have taken 8 of my properties, which is 8 less available to Tourists and other businesses to book. Dundee council is planning over 1000 homes in the next 2 years according to their planning applications, so where will all the trades stay to complete these works? They don't like hotels as they need to cook to save money*
- *Ferries. The constant negative media coverage despite not relating to our island or route has had a hugely detrimental effect on guest booking confidence to our location. This is the single biggest factor damaging our business*
- *Booked stays are significantly shorter this year. Mostly 3- and 4-night bookings with only the odd 7-night booking as previously. An expensive alteration in trends as there are at least 2 changeovers a week instead of only 1. Meanwhile income has not significantly increased. Expenses have Considerably Increased. Not least in taking into account the financial BURDEN of the STL licence costs.*

- *Ferries fiasco is killing the Hebrides and not just self-catering but we are suffering the most. People have a choice 1. Go abroad with a reasonable expectation of being able to return on time for work 2. Go to the Hebrides and other remote islands and risk getting stuck with limited travel facilities. Number 1 is also becoming cheaper whereas this SNP/Green government are making everything more expensive to pay for independence we voted against in 2014. NB. I voted for independence in 2014 and have now renounced my SNP membership*
- *Are people frightened to book due to changes in regulations and licensing?*
- *We are having severe trouble with our ferries and people are cancelling their holiday*
- *STL legislation has created uncertainty with consumers, and the 'homes not holiday lets' attitudes of locals (encouraged by the government) are putting guests off in some places*
- *The new certification from the Scottish Government. I'm also seeing constant comments about concerns from tourists, on tourist pages, about accommodations closing due to the new regulations and should they leave it until the last minute to book their trips in case their accommodation doesn't receive its certification, or in case their accommodation decides to leave the sector due to the new certification*
- *Cost of operating has increased by 35-40% and this has been passed on in the cost per week. Self-catering is now less like a "home from home" because of the licencing regulations - it's made the property feel more like a hotel, definitely a "commercial building". This makes the higher price of operating and therefore higher cost of the holiday much less attractive*
- *Awareness of stl legislation and unsureness about state of holidaying in Scotland. Awareness of Scotland not wanting tourists*
- *I believe that bookings are down due to licensing coming into play as owners and guests are unsure of the future .eg no confirmation that licences are going to be granted , (waiting game with people's livelihood) cost of living crisis , mortgage rate increases ,lack of disposable income .weather poor summer etc.*
- *People are becoming more aware of the STL and either not booking in case it's cancelled or hedging their bets. I am usually fully booked for Christmas and new year by now and so far only a couple of enquiries*
- *Many owners like myself not currently making accommodation available beyond September at which date they need to have applied for the STL licence. Despite having all in place, booking trends and levels and lack of results from a national agency knowing current overburdening of self-catered property suppliers in admin costs, also lure of cheap flights abroad this year waiting to assess point of continuing beyond September. Owners also constantly urged to green uo their properties on drastically reduced incomes if any these past years. All costs go up for trades,materials,cleaners if you can get one but owners constantly told to reduce prices to counteract foreign prices being seen as more appealing. In current situation where foreign countries are seeing Hugh temperatures and wildfires, there govt needs to be intensively promoting Scottish options at airports and on TV, especially mornings when families may watch breakfast TV. Scottish tourism has much to offer and owners need supported by being seen as offering something desirable. A further factor is loss of cleaners during peak season and no guarantee of any in place thereby making future bookings an unknown factor*

Cancellations

Compared to last year, have you experienced change in the number of cancellations?

Yes, significantly higher	**62/ 5%**
Yes, slightly higher	**245 / 21%**
No, about the same	**582 / 51%**
No, slightly lower	**82 / 7%**
No significantly lower	**64 / 6%**
Unsure	**9 / 1%**
N/A	**103 / 9%**

Compared to 2019, have you experienced a higher number of cancellations?

Yes, significantly higher	**91 / 8%**
Yes, slightly higher	**184 / 16%**
No, about the same	**520 / 45%**
No, slightly lower	**54 / 5%**

No significantly lower	**50 / 4%**
Unsure	**36 / 3%**
N/A	**214 / 19%**

If cancellations have increased, what factors do you believe are contributing to this change? (Select all that apply) –

Changes in customer behaviour and priorities	197 / 18%
Financial difficulties impacting travel plans	208/19%
I am not seeing any significant changes in cancellations	222/ 20%
Unsure	91/ 8%
N/A	460 / 41%

- **Other**: ferry reliability/ issues are a consistent 'other', lack of respect when it comes to cancellations, people keeping their options open, Covid, booking more properties and then cancelling.

Times of weak demand

In your experience, which periods have seen/ are showing weaker demand this year? (Select all that apply)

January	471/ 41%
February	487 / 43%
March	436 / 38%
April	278 / 24%
May	217 / 19%
June	201 /18%
July	175 / 14%
August	180 / 16%
September	349 / 31%
October	487 / 43%
November	577 / 51%
December	442 / 39%
N/A	160 / 14%

Business Pressures

What are the main pressures affecting you and your business?

Short-term let licensing and planning	916/ 85%
Uncertainty	455 / 42%
Cancellations	72 / 7%
Lack of bookings	294 / 27%
Economic situation in the UK	514 / 48%
Cost of doing business	583 / 54%
Competition from other accommodation types	119 / 11%
Staffing challenges	129/ 12%
Infrastructure limitations	55 / 5%

Other regulatory changes	91 / 8%
No opinion	19 / 2%

- **Other:** Ferries, business rates, customer expectation, interest rates/ mortage, damage by guests, lack of government support

Facilities and Additional Services:

Which of the following facilities and services do you offer? (Select all that apply)

Pet friendly	542 / 51%
Accessibility features for guests with disabilities	238 / 22%
Family-friendly facilities	592 / 55%
Hot tub	95 / 9%
E-charging	108/ 10%
Secure bike storage	366 / 34%
None of the above	192/ 18%

- **Other:** off-road parking, wildlife, remote working, fishing, farm animals, ability to pre-order local produce, sauna, couples only, free wifi, satellite tv, parking for boat/ trailer, cold storage for fish, games room, outdoor bath, indoor pool, tennis courts, drying rooms, pizza oven, water-sports, fire-pit, BBQ, boat hire, 18+
- Noted that answers need to be more tailored to urban properties

<u>Investment for Future Growth</u>

Are you actively investing in your business?

Yes, significantly increasing investment	157 / 15%
Yes, slightly increasing investment	253 / 24%
No change in investment	327 / 30%
Yes, slightly reducing investment	68 / 6%
Yes, significantly reducing investment	81 / 8%
I am not investing in my business	132 / 12%
I am selling my business	41 / 4%

<u>Direct Bookings</u>

Do you offer the option for visitors to book directly on your own website?

Yes	548 / 51%
No	281 / 26%
I do not have a website	240 / 22%

If yes, what percentage of your total bookings are made directly on your own website?

Less than 25%	209/ 20%
25% to 50%	126 / 12%
50% to 75%	69 / 7%
More than 75%	153 / 15%

Compared to last year, has there been an increase or decrease in the number of direct bookings made on your own website?

Significant increase	25 / 2%
Slight increase	104 / 10%
No change	246 / 23%
Slight decrease	127 / 12%
Significant decrease	44 / 4%
N/A	522 / 49%

Short-Term Let Licensing

Have you applied for a short-term let licence yet?

- 662 / 61% have not applied

Are you intending to withdraw from the sector prior to the 1st October 2023

- Yes 78/ 7%
- I am considering withdrawing 243 / 23%

Are you a member of the ASSC?

- 615/ 57% yes
- 462/42% no