The Importance of the Visitor Economy

A strong visitor economy helps to position Scotland on the world stage whilst the economic impact of the visitor spend spreads out from the traditional component parts of the tourism industry into other sectors such as arts and crafts, food and drink, cultural activities, sports events and activities, retail, and finally into the Scottish Government’s core priority industries which are central to the economic growth strategy.

The total annual direct and indirect contribution of the visitor economy is £11.6 billion and it supports more than 292,000 jobs.

VisitScotland’s Role in Developing the Visitor Economy.

VisitScotland supports the continued growth of the visitor economy through our principal activities.

These involve: the marketing of Scotland to all parts of the world (including Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom) to attract visitors; providing information and inspiration to visitors and potential visitors so that they derive the best experience from a visit to Scotland; providing quality assurance to visitors and quality advice to industry; working with partners to assist the tourism industry in not only meeting but exceeding visitors’ expectations; and the development of a portfolio of events that deliver impact and an international profile for Scotland by establishing Scotland as the perfect stage for events.

VisitScotland is a marketing specialist and a key economic development agency, driving growth in the visitor economy alongside Scottish Development International, Highland and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise.

The organisation is the lead body for the visitor economy, a position underscored last year, when VisitScotland was a key player in maximising the benefits from the Commonwealth Games, and the lead public agency in the highly successful delivery of The 2014 Ryder Cup and the development, design and delivery of Homecoming Scotland 2014.

In fulfilling this role in economic development the organisation pushes beyond its previous boundaries and takes a proactive role in areas such as air connectivity, skills, national and local planning, including the National Tourism Development Framework for Scotland, and is the holder of the vision for the Scottish Visitor Economy.

VisitScotland’s International Marketing Activity

VisitScotland markets Scotland to the world through international campaigns, directed by a strategy designed to maximise the economic impact on Scotland's economy. Our campaigns showcase the country around the world, principally through our Meet the Scots consumer-facing campaign, showcasing ambassadors drawn from across the tourism industry and a range of activities.
Through campaigns VisitScotland targets a number of overseas markets. The core international markets are North America, Germany and France, presenting strong opportunities to maintain and grow Scotland’s share of their outbound holiday taking.

In addition to multi-touch campaigns, VisitScotland works with the international travel trade to provide knowledge and opportunities to promote Scotland. For example there are some 10,000 SCOTS agents enrolled in the programme run by VisitScotland, assisting these tourism operators to provide knowledge and expertise to potential visitors in their country of origin.

VisitScotland Expo, held in Scotland in April each year, provides important opportunities for engagement with international trade representatives. In 2015 Expo was attended by 322 international buyers. Now 36 years on, expo is the UK’s longest-established travel trade fair, showcasing the best of Scottish tourism to the world.

Emerging markets, which although currently provide a smaller share of Scotland’s visitors, show considerable potential for growth. These include China and India. VisitScotland activity comprises work with partners in the travel trade, supported by PR and tactical opportunities.

Recent examples of activity include:

India, where VisitScotland delivered a trade mission at the end of January 2015, with an itinerary that included a VIP dinner for the presidents of the main trade associations in India, VisitBritain, and the British Council.

There was also a series of trade meetings at the South Asia Travel and Tourism Exchange which is being held in India this year. A Scotland networking event provided a platform for SATTE stand partners and Indian based trade. Activity also included a Bollywood Scotland launch event – a Bollywood themed event to launch the Bollywood Scotland map in Mumbai. The map highlights locations in Scotland that have been used in Bollywood films.

This activity built on a trade mission at the end of 2013 when VisitScotland delivered 150 trade engagements to promote travel to Scotland.

China, where at the end of 2014, VisitScotland representatives met with London based destination marketing companies that work with the Chinese travel trade to update them on Scotland’s offer in 2015.

VisitScotland works with VisitBritain to ensure that imagery and messaging about Scotland feature prominently within the UK National Tourism Organisation’s campaigns, like GREAT.

By targeting our campaigns at the best prospects we are able to encourage visitors from across the globe to enjoy a visit to Scotland. Evidence of Scotland’s place as a leading destination was highlighted recently with the publication of visitor statistics for 2014.
The results show that visits to Scotland from North American tourists rose 28 per cent to 500,000, with expenditure increasing by 48 per cent.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that overall, overseas tourists increased by 11 per cent in 2014 and spent £1.84 billion, 10 per cent more than in 2013.

Spending by tourists from overseas was also up, rising from £1.6 billion in the year to the end of September 2013 to £1.8 billion in the year to the end of September 2014.

VisitScotland’s international activity is aligned with the Scottish Government’s current International Strategy and the individual country plans which include tourism activity. VisitScotland is activity involved in the Scottish Government’s current review of the strategy and has contributed learning and views from the industry in Scotland and those of our international partners.

**Increased Connectivity**

Direct transport links are key to growing Scotland’s tourism industry.

Recent successes in securing new routes to Scotland - including routes from Chicago, JFK, Toronto, Halifax, Doha and Abu Dhabi - demonstrates the confidence Scotland is generating among our transport partners, while also ensuring that there will be the capacity to meet heightened demand from international visitors to Scotland.

VisitScotland is using these opportunities to enhance marketing campaigns with strong messages of affordability and accessibility. The ongoing improvement of the Scottish air route network is not only important for growing inbound leisure tourism, but also supports business tourism and provides vital connectivity for exporters across all sectors.

VisitScotland pursues opportunities both on point-to-point routes and, critically, with those carriers who can deliver onward connectivity via major international hubs and airline alliances.

Working together as Team Scotland (VisitScotland, Transport Scotland, Scottish Government, SE, SDI and HIE) with airports and other partners we are further developing international air connectivity which will assist in the prioritisation and the support of those new and extended services delivering the greatest economic benefits for Scotland.

**International Recognition**

VisitScotland is regarded as a world leader in what it does – an expert agency from which others wish to learn.

Over the past 10 years VisitScotland has been working with partners across Europe and further afield, sharing knowledge and expertise primarily, although not exclusively, in relation to our quality assurance schemes.

VisitScotland has taken a strategic approach to engaging with other national tourism organisations. This focuses on building our reputation on the global stage by sharing
best practice – a two-way process that ensures, VisitScotland continually enhances its activities and impact.

From this engagement, it is clear that VisitScotland’s experience and expertise in developing a sustainable tourism economy is valued across the globe. As a national tourism organisation, we hold considerable international credibility and reputation as an organisation of excellence.

It is also a positive message for our own tourism industry that Scotland is held in such high regard by so many other countries, ranging from Norway and Sweden to Queensland, Australia. This position was underscored recently with the signing of an MOU with the tourism authority in Nova Scotia at the end of May 2015. The agreement with Nova Scotia focuses on information sharing, quality and major events.

Also, in Scotland’s Year of Food and Drink, Basque Tour has invited a delegation to travel from VisitScotland to discuss the importance of food and drink to tourism.

At a European level, working with a number of individual member states has enhanced Scotland’s reputation within the European Union and is helping to increase Scotland’s sphere of influence across the tourism debate.

VisitScotland recently joint hosted a summit in Brussels with Visit Flanders, presenting our world leading work in Quality Assurance, major events and information provision.

Through the work of EventScotland, a specialist team within VisitScotland Events, this expertise in securing and delivering major events is also recognised, with a MOU in place with New Zealand and less formal information exchanges with Victorian Major Events in Australia and Sport Event Denmark.

This pre-eminent position was further highlighted during the Commonwealth Games with government representatives from Alberta, Canada and the Gold Coast, Australia seeking meetings with senior VisitScotland personnel.

EventScotland has already secured a strong event legacy for Scotland following the Commonwealth Games and The 2014 Ryder Cup, with five World and European level sporting events and a string of cultural events, including The Turner Prize.

Importantly this story of international recognition and success will be continued with the forthcoming refresh of Scotland The Perfect Stage, A Strategy for the Events Industry in Scotland.

**Business Tourism / Conference Bid Fund**

In support of Scotland’s growth sectors and business tourism industry (meetings, conferences, conventions and associated support services) VisitScotland and the Scottish Government established the Conference Bid Fund to provide qualified match-funding to support conferences and conventions which align to Scotland’s priority industries and sectors.
These are major, international, reputation boosting conferences for up to 5,000 delegates at a time, which support Scotland’s positioning and credentials on the global stage in areas including Pharmaceuticals, Finance, Tourism, Energy and Food and Drink, in addition to generating economic benefit to urban and rural parts of Scotland.

The fund has been instrumental in confirming £107.5 million of delegate expenditure into the country between 2013 and 2020.

VisitScotland.com / Digital Connectivity

VisitScotland provides a ‘best in class’ website to both Scottish tourism businesses and consumers across the globe through VisitScotland.com. This includes providing consumers with a single digital gateway enabling them to discover the very best Scotland has to offer.

VisitScotland.com offers industry a free platform from which to reach a global audience of some 20 million users and underscores the importance of Scotland’s digital connectivity to international markets.

Conclusion - Increased Internationalisation

Scotland’s position as leading international visitor destination has been enhanced through the major events of 2014. It has also been enhanced as a place in which to visit, study or do business.

VisitScotland will continue to work with Team Scotland partners to showcase Scotland on the global stage and as a place to visit and invest in. This will be achieved through the continuation of captivating marketing campaigns delivered through a range of media which is increasingly delivered digitally.

Continued engagement with the Global Scots network can yield further results and opportunities to promote Scotland. In addition we will work with Scotland’s universities and their alumni, who as a new diaspora, can be developed to be ambassadors for Scotland.

Airline partnerships will continue to be an essential part of how VisitScotland markets to key audiences, demonstrating the ease of flying direct to Scotland. Again, with partners in Team Scotland we will work to retain and develop direct routes.

We will also continue to develop Scotland’s reputation as a world leading events destination, and through the work of our events directorate, new major sporting and cultural events will continue to be added to the country’s rich portfolio.

Following the successes of 2014 for tourism and Scotland's increased international profile, VisitScotland is working to maximise the opportunities by taking Scotland to the world this year and in the years ahead.

27 May 2015