

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park

VISITSCOTLAND ANNUAL SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

2019-2020

Contents

Introduction

Climate Change Reporting

Sustainability Policy Objectives

Promote the integration of sustainability in the tourism sector

Minimise resource use and waste production

Reduce the impact of tourism transport

Protect and enhance Scotland's natural and cultural heritage

Enhance quality of life for Scottish communities

Make holidays in Scotland available for all

Improve the quality of tourism jobs

Support adaptation to climate change in the tourism sector

Introduction

Tourism is not only a key driver for sustainable economic growth, but also has a special relationship with the Scottish environment and society, due to its unique dependency on quality environments, cultural distinctiveness, social interaction, security and wellbeing. Therefore, we at VisitScotland believe the success of Scotland's tourism industry rests not only on its economic competitiveness but also on protecting and enhancing the Scottish environment, society and culture, which are vital to the brand, the industry and sustaining Scotland's economic growth.

In line with the Scottish Government's plans, VisitScotland aspires to make Scotland Europe's most sustainable destination and aims to be recognised as a leader in sustainable tourism development. VisitScotland will contribute to a more sustainable future for Scotland through taking direct action on issues under our control and influence the opinion and action of third parties such as strategic partners, businesses and visitors, to help drive sustainability within the tourism sector in Scotland.

VisitScotland's [Sustainable Tourism Policy](#) provides a clear rationale and plan for delivering our aspirations for sustainable tourism.

This annual sustainability report outlines the key activities VisitScotland has undertaken in 2019/20 in support of our sustainability policy, as well as the Scottish Government's sustainability ambitions for Scotland and relevant legislation.



VisitScotland will contribute to a more sustainable future for Scotland

Climate Change Reporting

CLIMATE CHANGE REPORTING

VisitScotland has **Reduced CO2 emissions** since 2008/9 **by 74%**



Scottish Government Target **was 56% by 2020** from 2008/09

MINIMISE RESOURCE WASTE AND PRODUCTION

58 % recycling rate in 2019/20

6 % reduction in CO2 emissions from 2018/19 - 2019/20

17 % decrease in waste to landfill



Scottish Government **recycling Target is 70% by 2025**

NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

2 beehives sponsored through **Plan Bee**



IMPROVE QUALITY OF JOBS FOR ALL

5 graduates

3 modern apprentices

taken on in 2019/20



SUPPORT ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

87% of VisitScotland properties have achieved **Green Tourism Certification**

35% gold

65% silver

Green Tourism

Over 2500 Quality Assured businesses



were assessed on their sustainability actions in 2018

REDUCE IMPACT OF TOURISM TRANSPORT

38% reduction in VisitScotland transport related **Carbon emissions** since 2008/9



MAKE HOLIDAYS IN SCOTLAND AVAILABLE TO ALL

192 Scottish businesses have created an **Accessibility Guide**



Over 6,225 people have experienced a **Break**

ENHANCED QUALITY OF LIFE IN SCOTTISH COMMUNITIES

Over 300 local Scottish suppliers involved in **Shop Local**



1000 businesses signed up to **Taste Our Best**

£6 million distributed to **31 projects** through the **Rural Infrastructure Fund**

ADAPTATION

Business Continuity Plans consider current Weather and Climate Impact to provide a continued tourism service

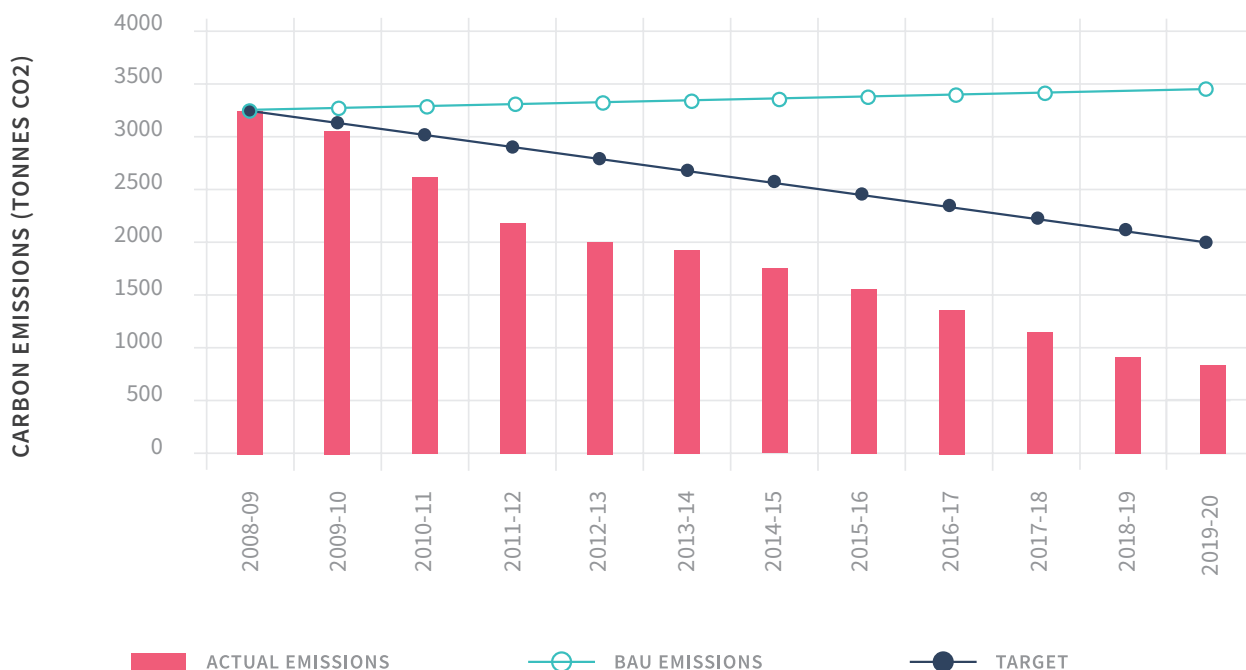


Climate Change Reporting

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires all public bodies to exercise their functions in a way that best contributes to the Act's carbon emission reduction targets, delivery of climate change adaptation program and overall sustainable practices. As part of the Act, the Scottish Government has set climate change targets: to reduce Scotland's CO2 emissions to net-zero by 2045, with an interim reduction of 56% by 2020, against a 2008/9 baseline.

As of the 31 March 2020, VisitScotland has achieved a 74% reduction in CO2 emissions, which already exceeds the current 2020 target. VisitScotland annually reports on its compliance with its climate change duties through the [Scottish Sustainable Networking reporting](#) tool.

Comparison of actual emissions with BAU increases and reduction targets predicted



Sustainability Policy Objectives

PROMOTE THE INTEGRATION OF SUSTAINABILITY IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

'We will integrate sustainability principles into all our activities and influence improvements in the tourism sector across Scotland.'

- The majority of the VisitScotland's local offices and iCentres have achieved Green Tourism certification, as part of which consideration is given to overall sustainability activities, including resource efficiency, transport, natural and cultural heritage, and community engagement. This directly supports the implementation of our sustainability objectives across the estate. As of 31st March 2020, 87% of the properties were certified under Green Tourism, of which 35% hold a Gold award and 65% a Silver award. This shows no change from the previous year as no assessments have been completed by Green Tourism who are creating a new online tool which has been delayed. This will be progressed during 2020/21.
- VisitScotland has incorporated sustainability actions into its Quality Assurance program since 2015 to encourage and support Quality Assured tourism businesses to undertake sustainability actions, covering a wide range of activity also reflected in our policy objectives, such as resource efficiency, transport, natural and cultural heritage, and community engagement. We encourage continuous improvement and maximizing business benefits through increasing minimum requirements every year. In 2019/20 just over 4000 businesses received sustainability advice through their Quality grading. The minimum sustainability requirements for 2020 have been increased to support continuous improvement.
- We continued with our sustainability comms plan in 2019/20 to deliver more consistent staff communication on the sustainability policy and activities undertaken and how staff can support the activity. This will be developed further for 2020/21.
- In October 2019 we held an all staff conference attended by 430 staff. Much of the day's themes were focused on our People Strategy and on the wider goals. It was an event that explained the vision and priorities (encouraging sustainable economic growth) and our renewed focus on sustainability and wellbeing.

MINIMISE RESOURCE USE AND WASTE PRODUCTION

'We will take action to encourage reduced resource use and waste production, both from our internal operations and those of tourism businesses operating in Scotland.'

- Our resource use and waste related CO2 emissions are continuing to reduce annually. In 2019/20 we saw a 6% reduction from the previous year. This is due to behavioural changes and improvements we have made through a programme of increasing efficiency, driving down resource use (e.g. energy use in buildings, business travel, and water use), waste reduction, as well as changes within the VisitScotland estate.
- We support the Scottish Government Targets of 70% recycling for all waste and a maximum 5% sent to Landfill by 2025 (baseline year 2012/13). In 2019/20 our recycling rate was 58%, and there was a 17% decrease in waste to landfill. VisitScotland's Head Office alone equated to a saving of 2.8 tonnes pa of landfill waste which was achieved by no single use plastic cups, improved recycling stations and introduction of a food waste collection. These figures were supplied by 'changeworks' who are VisitScotland waste uplift contractors.
- With the further development of Oracle we were able to offer more savings through online payslips, performance diaries, petty cash remittances and travel expenses, saving not only paper printing but postage costs.
- We provided all staff at our staff conference with a reusable shopping bag, reusable cool-bag and shampoo bar to reduce the need for purchasing plastic bags, reduce the single used plastic lunch cartons and single use shampoo bottles
- VisitScotland continues to implement the Carrier Bag Charge (Scotland) Regulations across our iCentre network, which contribute to reducing litter and resource use. In the year to 31 March 2020, the VIC network provided customers with 12,820 chargeable bags. This is a 30% reduction in carrier bag sales from the previous year. We also promote the sale of reusable bags, made from recycled plastic which have increased by 30%, indicating the consumer move away from single use bags.

Sustainability Policy Objectives

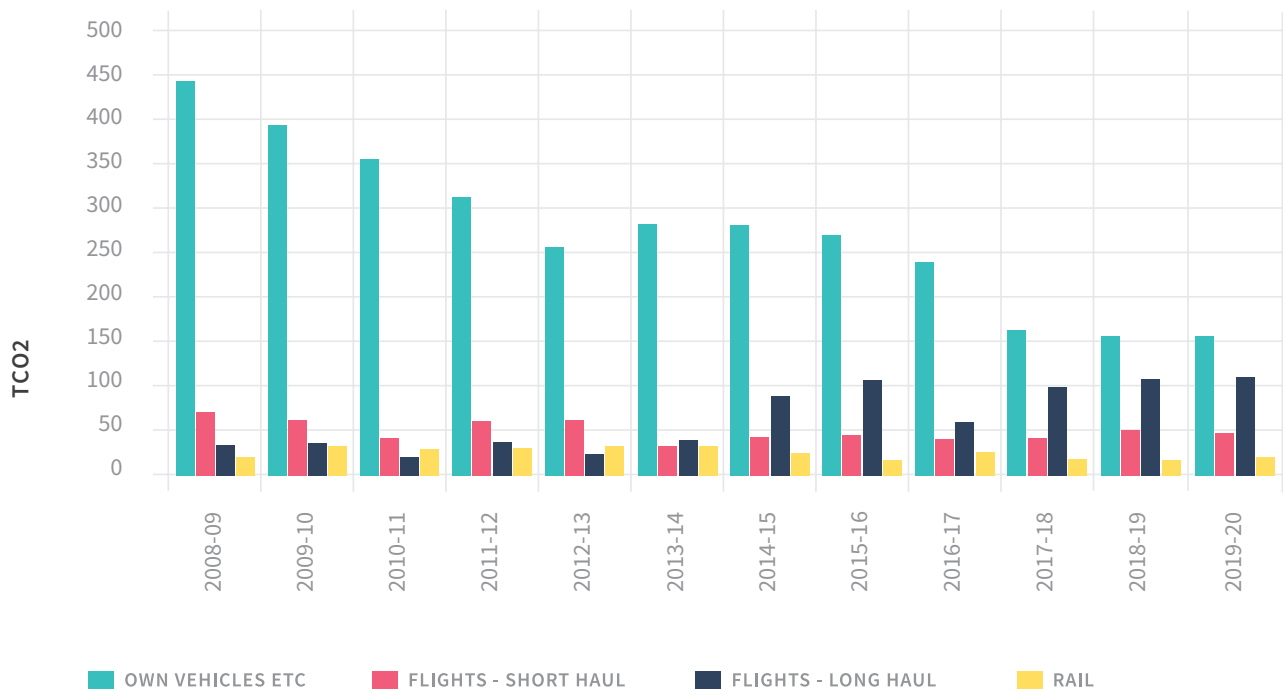
REDUCE THE IMPACT OF TOURISM TRANSPORT

‘Our efforts will focus on promoting a shift towards more environmentally friendly forms of transport (train, coach/ bus, ferry, cycle, foot) both to and within tourism destinations in Scotland.’

- We have made a 38% reduction in our travel related CO2 emissions from the baseline year. Both long and short haul air travel decreased this year and we have continued to show improvement in other areas.
- We encourage and promote the use of low carbon transport and, through our discussions on the VisitScotland Public Transport Working Group and Sustrans, we identify areas for sustainable growth.

- We have 24 vehicles in our leased car fleet of which 4 vehicles are under 100g/km CO2 emissions and 4 vehicles are under 110g/km. The remainder are under 130g/km but will be changed on lease renewal.
- In March 2020 (although curtailed by the pandemic), VisitScotland staff participated in the Sustrans Journey Challenge. With 77 members of staff logging 2,067 journeys we managed to score 1st place in our workplace size category for the second year running. During the challenge we saved over 4.5 tCO2; 628 car journeys were replaced saving nearly £7.5k.

VisitScotland Carbon Emmissions from Transport (2008-2020)



Sustainability Policy Objectives

PROTECT AND ENHANCE SCOTLAND'S NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

'We will promote Scotland's natural and cultural heritage to visitors and support the activities of organisations responsible for its protection and enhancement.'

- Through a wide range of channels, we are providing potential visitors and visitors in Scotland with a range of information on Scottish Wildlife and its natural landscapes, as well as promoting the Outdoor Access code.
- In 2017 VisitScotland started working with Plan Bee to adopt Beehives, using the money collected for the 5p carrier bag charge, which we committed to donate to an environmental good cause. We will be collaborating with Plan Bee to highlight the plight of Bees with our staff as well as externally with communities and visitors. In 2018 VisitScotland, Plan Bee, and House for an Art Lover worked with local schools in Glasgow to design and paint the beehives in the spirit of Charles Rennie Mackintosh in celebration of its 150 year anniversary. The sponsored beehives have been installed at the House of an Art Lover in Glasgow. This will directly support the Scottish Government's Pollinator Strategy. This commitment has continued in 2019/20 and the bees continue to thrive and produce honey.
- There are volunteering opportunities available for VisitScotland staff who can take up to 1 day per year to do so, staff have undertaken activities such as litter picking, beach clean and clearing invasive species.
- VisitScotland has a responsibility under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 to further conservation of biodiversity in Scotland and publicly report on its related activities. VisitScotland published its [Biodiversity Duty report for \(2015-17\)](#). The next biodiversity duty report (2018-2020) will be published in 2020.



Sustainability Policy Objectives

ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR SCOTTISH COMMUNITIES

'We will support Scottish communities through promoting year-round tourism activity including local accommodation, events, attractions and products to visitors. We will also advocate local engagement and empowerment in tourism planning and management and the wider community development process.'

- In 2019, VisitScotland established a cross-departmental group, Responsible Tourism Working Group, to accelerate our work in this area, and ensure leadership and commitment to our responsible tourism ambitions. The group identifies opportunities and sustainable projects, encouraging all VisitScotland's activity to be viewed through the lens of responsible destination development.
- VisitScotland works with industry and partners like Scotland Food and Drink to increase the sourcing of quality Scottish Food and drink to enhance the visitor experience, as well as support local businesses and communities. VisitScotland's Taste Our Best accreditation, which showcases businesses that provide and promote a quality Scottish Food and Drink experience, was achieved by over 1000 businesses by the end of 2019/20.
- Shop local initiative in iCentres now sources products from over 300 local Scottish suppliers.
- 2020 is designated as Scotland's Year of Coast and Waters and has a strong connection to sustainability. The year aims to sustain and build upon the momentum of Scotland's preceding Themed Years to spotlight and celebrate Scotland's unrivalled Coast and Waters, inspiring future visits, as well as encouraging responsible engagement. The Year of Coasts and Waters 2020 is a Scottish Government initiative being led by VisitScotland, and supported by a variety of partners including Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Historic Environment Scotland, Marine Scotland, National Trust for Scotland, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Sail Scotland, Scottish Canals, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Water and Scottish Tourism Alliance. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Year of Coast and Waters will extend into 2021.
- To ensure that tourism supports and benefits communities across Scotland, our marketing activity promotes strong geographical and seasonal spread, encouraging visitors to stay longer, visit all year round and explore more of what Scotland has to offer.
- The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF), administered by VisitScotland, supports communities to deliver sustainable, well planned, inspiring, and collaborative infrastructure projects that focus on improving the visitor experience and enable more visitors to enjoy Scotland's rural communities as well as reducing negative impacts on the community. The total fund value of £6m was split over two funding rounds and awarded to 31 successful applicants. The projects range from improved parking capacity and footpaths to the creation of facilities for motorhomes and toilet facilities. The projects alleviate key pressure points and enhance the overall visitor experience.
- Managing the success of tourism in hotspots across Scotland, and identifying capacity and capability is key to the success of responsible development. Working closely with the tourism industry, intermediaries, and destinations, we support and steer the growth of quality, responsible products and experiences.
- Collaboration and partnership is key to our activity. We work with a wide range of industry partners, such as Green Tourism, Keep Scotland Beautiful and Zero Waste Scotland, who are all planning and implementing activity to address climate change and make Scotland a sustainable destination.
- We continue to work closely with our international partners, including global and international agencies such as the UNWTO, Visit Flanders and Tourism New Zealand, to share best practice on sustainable development.
- In February 2020, Scotland was identified by Travalyst (the global sustainability travel initiative led by The Duke of Sussex in partnership with [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com), Visa, Trip advisor and Skyscanner) to be a destination at the forefront of responsible tourism development and selected Edinburgh to host the inaugural Travalyst Summit. In partnership with VisitScotland, the summit invited over 150 tourism industry representatives to share best practice, as well as discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by the sector.

Sustainability Policy Objectives

MAKE HOLIDAYS IN SCOTLAND AVAILABLE FOR ALL

'We will help to improve the accessibility of tourism opportunities in Scotland, especially for disabled and economically disadvantaged persons.'

- This year's priorities have focused on showcasing the needs of three specific market segments, disabled people, seniors and families with young children. Individual businesses and industry groups through a programme of presentations and networking meeting, have been encouraged and supported to complete Access Guides. This resulted in additional 192 access guides produced this year, with a further 336 additional users have completed our Accessible Tourism training programme.
- Working with Euan's Guide we produced three travel trade itineraries, these have been used by colleagues to inform development of familiarisation trips and other activities related to inclusive tourism. Discussions are ongoing with Cairngorm National Park Authority, St Andrews Tourism Group, Accessible Callander and Accessible Glasgow who are all looking to develop their area into becoming accessible tourism destinations. These projects are likely to take several years to develop, with each area at different stages of accessible development.
- Working with the VisitScotland Growth Fund team we helped the first accessible tourism Growth Fund project obtaining funding, a group of businesses from the Forth Valley region, include Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park came together to develop a series of accessible itineraries and videos.
- In partnership with VisitEngland and Alzheimer's UK we produced a dementia guide for business, it this was launched in October 2019. The guide has already been used by groups to inform their inclusive tourism development plans, such as a community group called Soirbheas in Drumadrochit, the group wanted to develop their area to become a Dementia Friendly destination.
- In the year leading up to the Solheim Cup in September 2019, we worked on accessibility plan to support the Solheim Cup to create a fully accessible tournament, we engaged with Euan's Guide for ongoing comment and advice and the feedback the event attendees has been extremely positive with many commenting that Solheim Cup was the most accessible golf event ever.
- This year for the first time in its history, the Scottish Thistle Awards introduced a new category to acknowledge and celebrate businesses who are exemplars in providing inclusive tourism experiences. This year's award was presented to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society for their commitment to; ensuring all festival goes can fully enjoy the programme of events, and their ongoing championing of inclusive practices within the festivals and events arena both locally and internationally.
- Our social tourism programme, ScotSpirit began in 2016 in partnership with the Family Holiday Association, a national charity that delivers breaks for low income families. To date over 90 businesses and organisations from across the tourism industry have enabled 1,627 families to experience the magic of a short break or day out in Scotland. That's 6,225 people, including 3,495 children – an incredible achievement only possible with the collective support of so many partners.

Sustainability Policy Objectives

IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF TOURISM JOBS

'We will support initiatives to improve the quality of jobs both across the tourism sector and within VisitScotland.'

Following on from the success of the summer placements within the Career Ready programme - highlighting the development opportunities within the organisation to school leavers - discussions are ongoing as to the continuation of this into next year with suitable mentors within the organisation being sought.

- Following on from the success of the summer placements within the Career Ready programme - highlighting the development opportunities within the organisation to school leavers - in 2019-20 we offered six Career Ready Internships to school-age students (this is a full-time work placement in an iCentre for 1 month). In addition, we took on five graduates and three Modern Apprentices.
- Raising the attractiveness of the tourism and hospitality sector to new entrants through work with schools and universities
- VisitScotland supports the key priority 'To ensure staff at all levels understand and are able to respond to visitor expectations' through programs such as Exceeding Visitor Expectations and the Accessible Tourism on-line training.

SUPPORT ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

'We will take action not only to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, but also to adapt to the unavoidable consequences of climate change and support tourism businesses and destinations to do the same.'

- Reviewed Adaptation needs across the estate as part of the buildings review with a focus on Energy performance certificates and recommendations to reduce rating.

