



Insight Department:
Soul seeking in a destination
The importance of storytelling in tourism

Topic Paper | February 2022

YEAR OF
STORIES
2022

Visit
Scotland | Alba™

Welcome

A great story is true.
Not necessarily because it's factual, but because it's consistent and authentic
Seth Godin, Business Author and Entrepreneur.

Throughout 2022 we will be celebrating the Scotland's Year of Stories. Every culture has its stories to tell, and Scotland has a particularly rich heritage of stories and storytelling. From icons of literature to local tales, the year will encourage residents and visitors to experience a diversity of voices, take part in events and explore the places, people and cultures connected to all forms of our stories, past and present.

Ever since Homecoming in 2009, Themed Years have celebrated the features that make Scotland unique. The objectives of every Themed Year are Promotion, Celebration, Participation, Collaboration and Industry Engagement, and alongside the marketing and industry engagement activities, there is a programme of supported events.

The Year of Stories will spotlight, celebrate and promote the wealth of stories inspired by, written, or created in Scotland. From icons of literature to local tales, the year aims to encourage locals and visitors to experience a diversity of voices, take part in events and explore the places, people and cultures connected to all forms of our stories, past and present.

Five themes will be woven through the Year of Stories:

1. **ICONIC STORIES AND STORYTELLERS** Showcasing Scotland's wealth of treasured and iconic stories and storytellers from classics to contemporary.
2. **NEW STORIES** Shining a light on emerging, fresh and forward-looking talent and highlight the innovators that break boundaries across all forms of storytelling.
3. **SCOTLAND'S PEOPLE AND PLACES** Our people and places have inspired the widest range of stories and storytellers across the world. Scotland's diverse culture, languages, landscapes and ways of life, urban and rural, provide a source for all types and forms of stories, encouraging visitors and audiences to find out more.
4. **LOCAL TALES AND LEGENDS** Every community has its distinct tales to tell, these are the stories we tell ourselves and share with others to make sense of time and place.
5. **INSPIRED BY NATURE** Our encounters with nature are an unfailing source of stories. These stories define our place in the natural world and help create a more sustainable future for Scotland, and a greener planet.

Stories, Storytelling and Tourism

Why do stories matter? Stories have been used for millennia to help us explain our experiences. From feelings to memories and make us question or challenge the stories we hear, read, or listen, therefore make emotional and cognitive connections that shape our perspective of the world.

Stories have been intertwined through the fabric of Scotland and at the heart of the tourism experience from the earliest of days. The landscape, heritage, culture and people have contributed to and inspired writers to chronicle real events or weave myths and create legends. It has been proposed by [Alastair Durie in his History of Tourism in Scotland](#) that the publication of Sir Walter Scott's "The Lady of the Lake" inspired visitors to come to Scotland, and therefore create what could best be described as the start of modern tourism.

From the distinguished literary traditions of Sir Walter Scott, stories continue to be at the heart of the tourist experience. Unsurprisingly the use of stories by destinations and tourism businesses is increasing. From the verbal tradition to the written word and prose through film and television and now the digital arena with user generated content and influencers stories continue to inspire travel. Stories (as defined by [Moscardo, 2018](#)) are:

“a very specific type of narrative that are designed explicitly to entertain, engage emotions and change their audience... a story must include descriptions not just of a set of events but also descriptions of characters, how they respond to these events and the consequences of these reactions.”

Stories, therefore, engage the audience on many levels but need to be based on key factors such as destination, people, history, landscape – all elements of Scotland's Brand.

With the democratisation of the internet, brands and destinations need to attract people's attention and reach their hearts. They must be able to tell a great story and develop emotional connections, in order to stand out in a sea of content and advertising. Scotland's Year of Stories draws on the wealth of literary traditions and storytelling to recognise the characters, landscapes and legends which visitors may already be aware of combined with the infinite potential of generating stories around Scotland's future in terms of sustainability, nature and the voices of the next generations.

A recent [survey](#) of Scottish resident holidaymakers found six in 10 agreed with the statement “In the future, I am likely to take fewer trips and spend more time at a single destination”. There is clear consumer demand for meaningful engagement with specific destinations as part of a holiday or short break, offering opportunities for immersive and authentic storytelling across Scotland.

Source: Scotland residents' views, G15 - Thinking more generally about travel and holidays to all destinations following the Covid-19 pandemic, to what extent agree/disagree with the following? Base = 805

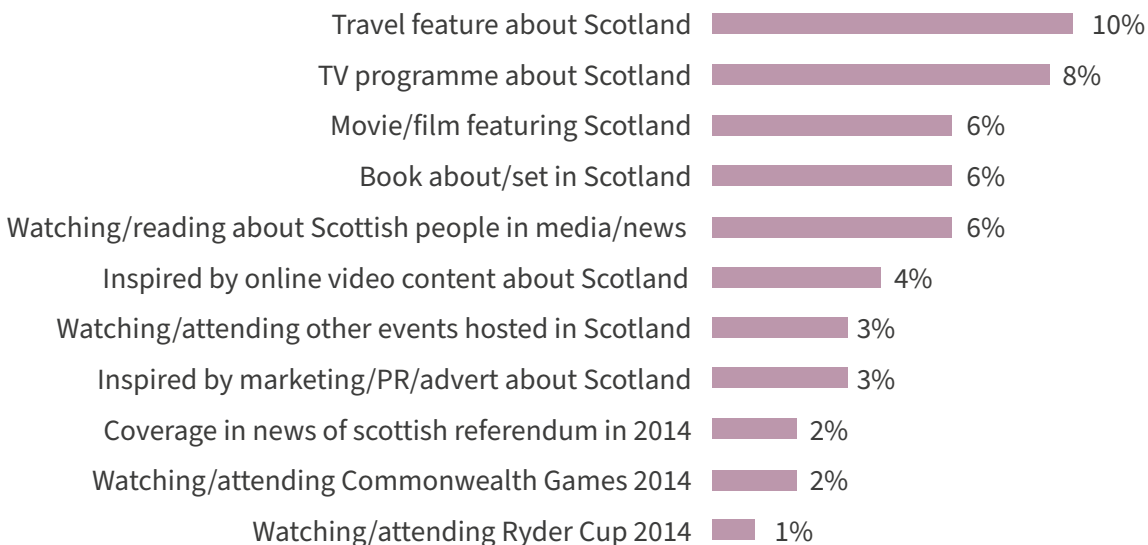
Visitor Insights around Storytelling



VisitScotland regularly undertake Scotland-wide *visitor surveys* to explore different areas of the visitor experience. The insights from the visitor survey feed into the development of business and marketing strategies for VisitScotland which aims to deliver responsible and sustainable tourism development within Scotland.

Looking at why visitors choose Scotland as a destination, half of survey respondents sited *landscape* (45% UK & Scottish Residents / 71% European, 53% Long Haul), and *history & culture* (33% respondents) as the core motivational drivers. *Ancestry and Scotland's* reputation for friendly people all over indexed for international visitors' motivators. And while *word of mouth* is an important factor for recommendation of choosing Scotland, between 6% and 8% of visitors were influenced by literature, film or television programmes about or featuring Scotland.

1 in 10 visitors were influenced by a travel feature about Scotland, whilst TV, film and books are also important prompts to consideration, especially for international visitors

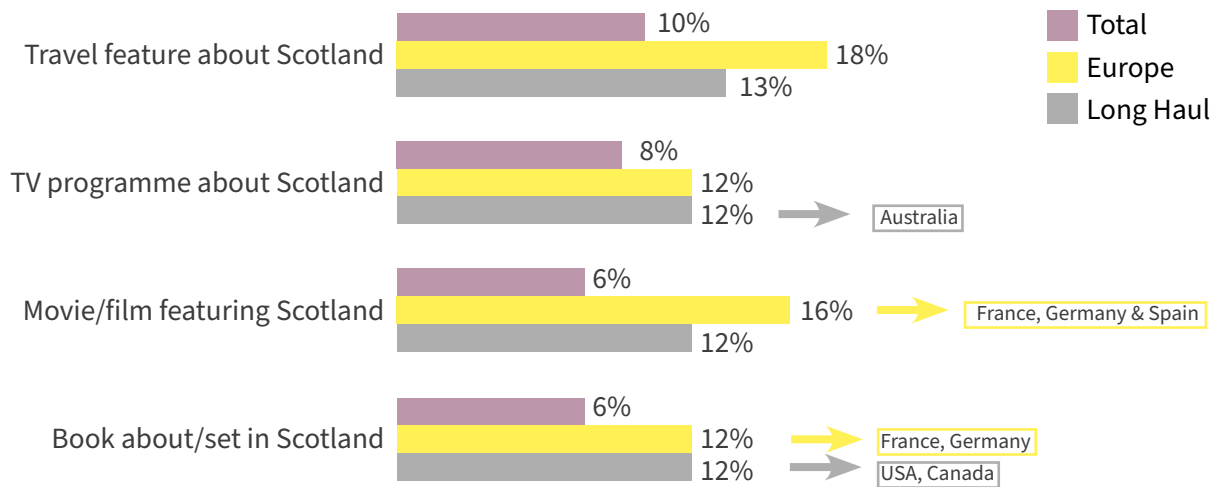


Q12 Did any of these prompt you to consider Scotland for this holiday / short break? Base: S1 All (11743)

The planning and booking process among travellers is complex and multifaceted. It is clear however that stories, literal and inferred are inspirational in choosing Scotland as a destination. From legends and history to film and literature our visitors use these as catalysts for defining itineraries and destinations along with activities and attractions to visit (including set-jetting to film locations).

Visitor Insights around Storytelling

Travel features, movies, TV programmes and books were particularly influential for European and Long Haul visitors



Q12 Did any of these prompt you to consider Scotland for this holiday / short break? Base: S1 All (11743)

It is our international visitors who appear more influenced by film and literature based or set in Scotland. But it transcends markets with culture, landscape and people being the universal motivator which captures visitors’ imaginations. Recently the “*Outlander effect*” based around the novels and subsequent television series from Diana Gabaldon that has had a noticeable effect on increasing screen tourism. Large followings of Outlander are seen in North America, Europe and Australia with active social media groups and strong motivations to visit both filming locations in Scotland alongside historic locations that are prominent in the storylines.

Scotland has however benefited from *strong associations* with screen and literary tourism with James Bond, Harry Potter, Braveheart and Highlander all showcasing the stunning landscapes and heritage the country has to offer.

- TV and film play a role in inspiring visitors to come to Scotland and acts as a prompt to visit, particularly for European and long-haul markets.
- Films such as Braveheart and the increasingly popular TV show, Outlander, are the standout ones mentioned by visitors. Outlander is especially popular with visitors from the USA, who are twice as likely than others to mention the show. Other popular films mentioned by visitors include Highlander, Harry Potter, Skyfall, Trainspotting and Brave. Popular TV shows include Coast, Shetland and Springwatch.
- Some visitors will take part in specific TV/film related activities when on holiday in Scotland, such as visiting a TV or film set. 6% of all visitors surveyed visited a TV/film set but this proportion rises to 18% for American visitors. In Europe, French (17%) and German (16%) visitors are most likely to visit sets.

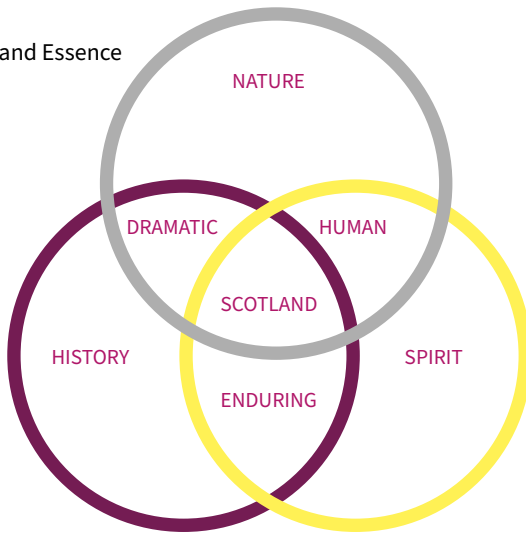
Scotland’s Brand Essence

We know that stories engage an audience and elicit an emotion. It is the promise of an emotional experience that is critical for today’s tourist; it’s a powerful differentiator when selecting one destination over another. That sense of connection and enrichment is often what people will remember most about visiting a country... and it’s certainly one of the things they’ll tell their friends about when they get home.

VisitScotland research provides evidence that experience tends to exceed expectation in Scotland. The core of Scotland’s brand has long since been identified as a combination of Nature (Dramatic), History (Enduring) and Spirit (Human). There are clear rational and emotional benefits for visitors who choose to spend time here. Whether that is hard facts about the product on offer or things that people feel about a destination without necessarily asking themselves why and it is the latter which gives a break in Scotland some of its most distinctive qualities.

When we talk about being in Scotland we talk about a ‘powerfully enriching personal experience’ – Scotland is an emotional destination.

Scotland’s Brand Essence



The Scotland brand promises an emotional experience and words that people have used to describe the way they have felt are welcome, special, enriched, rejuvenated, inspired and ‘in awe’. Interactions with Scotland’s citizens and communities contribute to the emotional magnitude of the experience. It is taking essence of the Scotland brand and intertwining our stories from across the five themes that will resonate so well with our visitors.

The individual **spirit** of one country cannot be easily reproduced by any other and VisitScotland’s research highlighted a perception of mysticism and passion in the spirit of Scotland which sets it apart from other destinations. Visitors and potential visitors imagine that a holiday in Scotland will be an intense experience with the potential to move them at a profound level with a sense of **awe**. The expectation of experiencing real space on a Scottish holiday comes from the openness of the landscape as well as **escaping** everyday life and de-stressing. This is also seen as one of the key benefits of taking a holiday in Scotland. And Scotland’s stories will deliver on the expectation of making a **connection** to Scotland which runs through all the emotional benefits that VisitScotland’s research uncovered.

Tourism Trends with Storytelling

So what makes a great story? Clearly it needs to be emotionally meaningful to the visitor so it draws the travellers interest, motivating them to engage to visit and hopefully advocate. Increasingly in a more competitive world there has to be something that makes a destination magical, transformational and special.

Making Storytelling Work for You...

We have seen that Scotland's brand has all the elements to create stories that make for a magical, meaningful and emotional trip.

It is the voices of our people who can give you the hidden gems and iconic locations that make a journey unique. It is intertwining landscape and legend which tells of our cultural history and sustainable future.

What drivers have been found to deliver an impact to your destinations or business stories?

Use visitor feedback and engagement to establish how your customers feel about your product or destination. Interpret these thoughts into strong narrative for social media channels and content.

Establish your goals for storytelling – do you want to drive visitation, advocacy, promotion, engagement – perhaps the objective is for the long-term goal rather than the short-term benefit?

Scotland has a long history and stories, and folklore can become forgotten. Go beyond the obvious and engage with locals and communities to find the lost traditions, history and personalities that connect place and past.

- Understand your customers. The Outlander effect resonates with international and domestic visitors for example. However, while both will want to visit the filming locations, the interpretation of stories may be different with domestic audiences perhaps having greater knowledge of local history compared to international visitors whose knowledge may be exclusively taken from the fictional plotlines.
- Think about what channels you want to use – storytelling works well with a mix of media – Instagram and Facebook allow video, audio, images and text to immerse the viewer in a range of stimulus to engage and interact.
- Stories can act as a framework if they communicate the core values and attributes of a destination in an understandable way. Stories can incorporate elements to promote activities, events or opportunities. So stories can be used as a metaphor to enhance a providers offering.
- Opportunities for collaboration shouldn't be underestimated and with the range of themes available commonality should be easily made across different provider types.

Finally, your stories can be on social impact telling your good news to your clients and followers or stories can be narrative where you can communicate your values, perhaps through humour and personality.



CONTACT US

Insight Department

VisitScotland
Ocean Point One
94 Ocean Drive
Edinburgh EH6 6JH

0131 472 2222

research@visitscotland.com

First published September 2021,
updated February 2022

visitscotland.com visitscotland.org

Disclaimer: The work presented in this paper combines previously published research from VisitScotland with primary and secondary research and interviews conducted by VisitScotland's Trends Team specifically for this study. Case studies provided in this paper are illustrative examples of the suggested solutions described, alternative providers and solutions may be available. VisitScotland has published this report in good faith to update stakeholders on its activity. VisitScotland has taken all reasonable steps to confirm the information contained in the publication is correct. However, VisitScotland does not warrant or assume any legal liability for the accuracy of any information disclosed and accepts no responsibility for any error or omission

All images are credited to VisitScotland unless stated, all rights reserved

YEAR OF
STORIES
— 2022 —

 VisitScotland | Alba™