



**VisitScotland:
Destination Net Zero
Climate Action Plan**

Introduction

Tourism is a force for good. It creates jobs, sustains communities, enriches lives and contributes significantly to the economy. However, with increasing concern around the impacts of climate change and changing consumer behaviours, it has become clear that the industry's future success is dependent on responsible development.

VisitScotland is committed to supporting the development of responsible tourism practices across the sector, with one of the key strategic focus areas being the transition to a net zero economy.

Tackling climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing the tourism and events sector. Tourism contributes to climate change, but also stands to suffer its consequences. Our natural and cultural assets, the things that make Scotland so special, are at risk from the impacts of climate change. It is now more important than ever to ensure that tourism is part of the solution in tackling the climate emergency.

VisitScotland want to be at the forefront of the net zero journey and aim to lead by example through our own internal suitability practices. Externally, through our marketing activity we aim to inspire, educate and inform our visitors on how to make responsible choices at planning stage and in destination. Through our tourism business support programme, we will continue to work with tourism businesses and events to help them meet their net zero targets and create products and experiences that are sustainable. We continue to work closely with destinations and communities to understand the impacts of tourism and ensure that the benefits of the industry are wide reaching and positive for all involved.

We want to inspire future generations to say that Scottish tourism led the way and made a difference.

In this document, VisitScotland is setting out its own climate action plan aligned with the national tourism strategy, Scotland Outlook 2030, the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) the Scottish Government's net zero targets and The Glasgow Declaration.



Context

Supporting the global commitment to tackle climate change, the Scottish Government has set ambitious, but necessary, targets to reach [net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045](#).

Aligned with these ambitions, the national tourism strategy [Scotland Outlook 2030](#) and the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation ([NSET](#)) have identified climate action as a priority.

VisitScotland is committed to taking bold action and championing change. VisitScotland was the first national tourism organisation to join Tourism Declares and declare a Climate Emergency. It was also on the drafting committee and a founding signatory of the [Glasgow Declaration for Climate Action in Tourism](#).

A collaborative approach is essential to enable the development and delivery of VisitScotland's Climate Action Plan. VisitScotland is committed to working with climate change specialists, taking guidance and support to deliver meaningful action. Through working with our strategic national partners, as well as the enterprise agencies, destinations and tourism businesses, we will collectively accelerate Scottish tourism's journey to net zero.

VisitScotland's Destination Net Zero Climate Action Plan

VisitScotland is setting out our climate action plan aligned with the Glasgow Declaration five pathways in support of the Scottish Government targets of 75% reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2045, in line with our commitment as a Glasgow Declaration and Tourism Declares signatory.

Purpose of the climate action plan is to support and accelerate climate action within the Scottish tourism and events sector, ensuring we make progress towards net zero at the pace and scale required.

Timeframe: The plan covers an initial period of three years (2023-2026).

This climate action plan is focused on VisitScotland's key areas of influence. To deliver the climate action plan we will work with businesses, destinations and visitors to influence and drive change.

VisitScotland also has set our own internal targets and actions to make sure we are consistent across the organisation and working towards the same goals and values. Further information on our internal activity can be found [in VisitScotland's sustainability report on VisitScotland.org](#).

Climate action taken by VisitScotland, and tourism businesses will need to address key areas to support Scotland's transition to a low carbon economy aligned with the Scottish Government climate action plan.

- Measure, monitor and report on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions
- Energy efficiency and renewables
- Resource use and Waste Reduction (Circularity)
- Low carbon consumption
- Low carbon transport and active travel
- Climate change adaptation
- Protect and restore natural environments

VisitScotland's priority action areas, objectives and supporting actions are outlined below.

Key action areas

To accelerate Scottish tourism's journey to net zero, VisitScotland will develop and implement the following priority action areas:

1. Collective Ownership

Objective: *In order to create an enabling environment, and encourage collective ownership, to deliver the climate action plan we will take the following actions as part of our strategic planning and management.*

Actions:

- Ensure our corporate planning process is aligned with and supports the delivery of the Destination Net Zero Climate Action Plan.
- Develop and implement a responsible low carbon tourism education programme for VisitScotland employees, including accredited carbon literacy training. All employees will be encouraged to sign up to the training to build their carbon literacy.
- Inspire action and innovation by amplifying Scotland's low carbon tourism and events story and sharing and celebrating best practice across the sector.
- Produce clear and consistent communication to our audiences encouraging them to make low carbon choices and adopt responsible behaviour.
- Develop and implement a route map to embed net zero conditionality (i.e. minimum requirements) for funding, marketing opportunities, and other key services. Conditionality needs to be consistent, relevant, transparent and supported.

Key action areas (Cont.)

2. Insights and Measurement

Objective: *Build and share data and insights, to inform practical action with purpose, to develop new measures of success and measure and monitor progress.*

Actions:

- Review opportunities to add relevant and valuable responsible tourism data to Scotland's Tourism Observatory, making analysis and insight easily available and usable by all. This data will support and inform responsible low carbon tourism actions.
- Develop an understanding of the carbon footprint associated with Scottish tourism activity to inform and guide future activity and measure progress towards net zero.
- Collaborate with partners to adopt, measure, and report on agreed and standardised metrics addressing not only decarbonisation, but also biodiversity, adaptation and community wellbeing at destination and business level.
- Develop industry insights into importance of climate action and the barriers that have been overcome to take climate action. Use research to develop a programme of business support to collaborate with the industry and encourage adoption of responsible practices across the sector.
- Gain better insights into consumers and market segments, to effectively influence behaviour and identify climate optimal markets, developing a better understanding of the social and economic impact of visitors against the ecological impact of their visit.

Key action areas (Cont.)

3. Net zero advice and tools for tourism and events

Objective: *Build capacity and capability in businesses and destinations to take climate action and develop their climate action plans.*

Actions:

- Provide advice and support for tourism and events businesses, sectors and destinations to set up climate action plans, including capacity building for carbon measurement.
- Support development of industry wide carbon literacy, raising awareness of the challenges and opportunities climate change is posing to tourism.
- Collaborate with partners (national and international) to connect businesses and destinations with available advice, tools, and funding sources; focus on leveraging existing sources of support for benefit of the sector.

4. Support net zero tourism products, itineraries and supply chain

Objective: *Support businesses and events and their supply chain to develop responsible low carbon products and itineraries.*

Actions:

- Support the innovation and development of near net zero tourism itineraries, considering all aspects involved, accommodation, transport, activities, food and drink (work with tour operators, incl. on-line platforms and supply chain).
- Work with transport operators, destinations and businesses to support low carbon transport options in Scotland.

Key action areas (Cont.)

5. Visitor engagement and communication

Objective: *Inspire, inform, and influence visitors to make low carbon choices in their trip planning and when visiting.*

Actions:

- Maximise the economic and social benefits of tourism by promoting greater geographical and seasonal spread of visits, encouraging visitors to stay longer and “travel slow” all year round.
- Develop and implement innovative ways to engage, inform and inspire visitors to make responsible low carbon choices at planning stage and in destination.
- Influence visitor choices on how to get to Scotland and how to travel around focusing on prioritising low carbon transport options and reducing car miles where appropriate.
- Review and scope out the opportunity to create a national carbon calculator for visitors, including key supply chain impacts, to guide visitors on low carbon options and opportunities to reduce their trip’s carbon impact.
- Showcase and prioritise best practice from committed responsible, low carbon businesses and destinations to visitors.

Key action areas (Cont.)

6. Collaboration

Objective: *Collaborate with strategic partners both nationally and internationally; to share ideas; best practice and find, influence and promote solutions together, positioning Scotland as a leader in taking action to achieve net zero targets.*

Actions:

- Prioritise collaboration with partners that align with our responsible tourism values, driving Scotland towards Scottish Government's net zero targets.
- Collaborate with key Strategic National partners to accelerate tourism's journey to net zero.
- Increase partnership working between tourism and transport sectors, to influence and support development of appropriate low carbon infrastructure and services, which will benefit our visitors and make low carbon transport options attractive and accessible to them.
- Increase collaboration with other sectors to drive and support impact of climate action, for example:
 - Engage with [Adaptation Scotland](#) and regional organisations leading on climate change adaptation, to increase awareness of predicted impacts on the destination and opportunities to support adaptation strategies; building resilience in businesses and the destination by mitigating the risks and recognising potential opportunities of unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Implementation and Governance

VisitScotland has a dedicated Responsible Tourism team. However, collective leadership, by our senior management, will ensure responsible tourism is at the heart of all our activity. VisitScotland's Responsible Tourism Steering Group will have a strategic overview of operations across the organisation, working in partnership with all directorates to implement the climate action plan. The group will continue to monitor progress and ensure the relevance and effectiveness of the climate action plan.

The internal sustainability group will continue to focus on our internal responsible tourism activity, ensuring we are not only compliant with any government requirements, but leading by example and achieving our internal targets for sustainability.

VisitScotland will report annually on the actions undertaken and the progress made.

Glossary

Active travel: Journeys made by physically active means, such as walking and cycling as opposed to transport options that emit high volumes of GHGs.

Adaptation: Adjusting to the impacts of climate change to reduce the negative consequences and exploit any opportunities.

Biodiversity: The variety of living species on Earth.

Carbon footprint: The amount of carbon emitted by an individual or organisation in a given period of time, or the amount of carbon emitted during the manufacture of a product.

Carbon literacy: An awareness of climate change, the impact of everyday activities, and the ability and motivation to reduce emissions, on an individual, community and organisational basis.

Circularity: Retaining the lifespan of products to eliminate waste and maximise the reuse of resources. Also known as the circular economy.

Climate change: A large-scale, long-term shift in weather patterns and average temperatures.

Community wellbeing: The quality of people's lives linked to both the places in which they live and the communities of interest they belong to.

Cultural assets: Assets and traditions that have been passed down from one generation to another, including both tangible and intangible assets.

Decarbonisation: Reducing or removing carbon from the atmosphere.

Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG): Emissions into the earth's atmosphere of any gases that trap heat and contribute to global warming and climate change, such as carbon dioxide.

Mitigation: Reducing GHG emissions in the atmosphere to slow or stop global climate change.

Natural assets: Naturally occurring physical, biological, and geological features, including natural habitats, wildlife, and landscapes.

Net zero: The balancing of GHG emissions against GHG removal and/or offsetting with the net result being zero emissions.

Resilience: The capacity of a community, business, or natural environment to prevent, withstand, respond to, and recover from the consequences of climate change.

Responsible tourism: A sustainable and inclusive approach to tourism that considers not only the needs of the visitor and the industry, but also the host communities and the environment – creating better places for people to live and visit.

Visitors: International/domestic tourists or day-trip travellers who are visiting a tourism business/event in Scotland.