

Industry supportive statements

Marc Crothall, Chief Executive of the Scottish Tourism Alliance said:

“Digital information and the widespread use of mobile devices have transformed the way visitors source information and make bookings, both pre and on arrival. The world is changing and the tourism industry in Scotland has to respond to ensure we continue to provide the high quality and authentic experiences that our visitors expect at all points of their journeys.

“The national tourism strategy, Tourism Scotland 2020 identifies both high quality digital services and quality experiences as central to driving tourism forward into the next decade and we must ensure that we are investing in our information provision to highlight fantastic experiences, inspire more visitors than ever before to come to Scotland and make it easier for them to find information they need.

“VisitScotland’s new broader approach to information provision will mean changes, however it will also make more options available to visitors, ensuring information is delivered in the right place, at the right time in the right way to meet demand. The new approach should see more people getting more information than ever before, which in turn should see them stay longer, spend more and grow the visitor economy.

“Although there will be fewer VisitScotland Information Centres, we know that in fact there will be many more places for visitors to access information across the country, whether this is online through their greatly enhanced digital platforms and partnerships, the ever-expanding network of tourism ambassadors and businesses who provide local advice or through the improved flagship VisitScotland regional travel hubs. We also believe that VisitScotland will manage these changes in a sensitive way, ensuring that alternatives are in place to help manage any local concerns.

“We recognise that we need to change how visitor information is provided – the customers are asking for it – and support VisitScotland in the changes they are making. Get it right, and we will significantly increase the perceived value to the visitor and offer them a greater incentive to visit, return and recommend us to others, helping make Scotland a destination of first choice. What’s more, doing the legwork on behalf of our visitors and making it easier for them to use a wider range of tourism products and services once here will also help boost takings and profits.”

Calum Ross, Argyll and the Isles Tourism Cooperative said:

“The way visitors access information has changed significantly over the last ten years. With so much available online, we are firmly in an era where, for many visitors, if it isn’t online it doesn’t exist. This heralds the need for a much more nimble approach to information provision ensuring it is where people expect it and need it – and in the format they want it. We need to look beyond bricks and mortar to deliver this content to ensure they get the most out any trip they are making.

“We are increasing our information channels across Argyll and the Isles with innovative new partnerships involving businesses, attractions and accommodation providers. In addition, we are investing in our own digital channels and working with our members to do likewise to ensure that we are responding to customer needs and are providing compelling content that will inspire as

well as inform. With three in four customers now accessing information through a smartphone it is no longer a case of thinking about change - we need to embrace this digital revolution.

“But on top of this we are also witnessing exponential growth in the value placed on personal recommendations, with online reviews really influencing decision making. We further recognise that when in a destination it is the human interaction that invariably seals the deal. Visitors want to glean information on the hidden gems over the breakfast table or in the local pub. With this in mind Argyll and the Isles already have 106 VisitScotland Information Partners across the region geared up to welcome and inform visitors coming to our destination. And we plan to grow this number.

“This still leaves a place for VICs at hub locations where key decisions are made, literature is needed and a face to face interaction will be welcomed.

“With investment promised in hub VICs and innovative partnerships, we are fully supportive of this change of focus which will in turn enable a greater investment in digital channels and put the region on a new technological information map.

“Argyll and the Isles is a stunning region with an abundance of amazing experiences on offer and we know that this pioneering strategy will enable us to reach more people with more information about how to enjoy Scotland’s Adventure Coast.”

Willie MacLeod, Executive director, BHA Scotland said:

“The British Hospitality Association welcomes this major strategic change by VisitScotland in the way it will deliver information to our visitors. This change of direction recognises the importance of the hospitality industry in giving inspiring information and recommendations. The fact that a significant proportion of visitors want to get their information at the breakfast table, from a well-informed hotel front desk or in the local pub shows that we must ensure our staff are fully aware about things to see and do in Scotland – and in particular the hidden gems.

“Digital technology has been the game changer over the last few years, not least in the way visitors select and book their accommodation, and visitors are increasingly looking to their smartphone for inspiration. But in spite of the digital revolution, people are what makes the experience right for visitors and this new mix of locals, cutting edge VICs, and taking the information to where the visitors are will add to the digital inspiration, ensuring that people stay longer, spend more and grow the Scottish economy.”

Gordon Morrison, Chief Executive of ASVA said:

“The Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions has been working with VisitScotland for many years to ensure that operators are telling the story of Scotland as part of the visitor experience.

“More than 250 visitor attractions have already signed up to be VisitScotland Information Partners – and this growing band of ambassadors is selling both their immediate area and the wider Scotland message at every opportunity. These attractions have a major role to play in growing the local economy and benefit from longer opening hours and, in many cases, growing footfall.”

“Information comes from a wide range of people and places and research shows that a growing number of visitors are looking for local information, the hidden gems and insider knowledge at their visitor attraction welcome desk. We think the mix of visitor attraction partners, upgraded information centres, and promoting Scotland where the visitors are, is a great way of adding the people element to the growing digital landscape which is transforming the way visitors find out about a country and its must-see attractions.”

David Smythe – Chairman -The Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers (ASSC)

“At the Association of Scotland’s Self-Caterers, our members understand the significant role they play in giving local information, showcasing hidden gems and being the welcoming face for information for visitors from across the globe. Many of our members are VisitScotland Information Partners (VIPs) and take great pride in engaging with visitors and being part of a recognised scheme. What is clear is that with around half of visitors looking for information from locals and more than a third wanting to chat to their accommodation provider, we have a significant role to play in spreading the tourism spend beyond our doors.

On top of that, the digital revolution has created many opportunities to engage with guests before they arrive with insider information and tips. What is emerging is a real trend where communities want to provide information and visitors want to engage with them, either face to face or over digital channels – it’s being recognised as part of the warm welcome that Scotland is renowned for and self-caterers are leading the way.

Councillor Mark Rowley, Scottish Borders Council’s Executive Member for Business and Economic Development, said:

“The way in which visitors to the Scottish Borders access information has changed dramatically in the past decade, and will continue to do so, with digital channels increasingly being used.

“This has impacted on footfall to traditional visitor information centres and VisitScotland’s new strategy has been designed to make the most of partnerships with local businesses and key attractions where there is high visitor footfall.

“This will ensure that important visitor information is still available locally, and can be provided face-to-face, and will also help generate additional footfall for the partners, which for local businesses in particular could prove extremely beneficial.

“I am keen to see that the new approach by VisitScotland will bring more partners on board across the Scottish Borders so that more information than before is available to more visitors at an increasing number of outlets. I welcome the investment and particularly look forward to seeing VisitScotland create more partnerships with Live Borders, Historic Environment Scotland and more of the many fine attractions and tourism operators that we have in the Borders.

“With an increased number of partnerships I'm confident that the new approach will ensure that visitors to the Scottish Borders will continue to be able to access high quality visitor information on the Borders' many fabulous attractions, scenery and businesses.”

Will Haegeland, Chairman, Scottish Borders Tourism Partnership said:

“Scottish Borders Tourism Partnership (SBTP) recognises fully that visitors of today source visitor information through their own mobile digital devices. Up-keep of tourism information offices are costly. With declining numbers seeking their assistance face-to-face, new ways of providing the support seems sensible.

“SBTP welcome the development of iKnow providers and other Visit Scotland partnerships that are provided by “real” locals, who as part of other service provisions share their local knowledge, acting as local ambassadors. This social networking route is increasingly valued by visitors.”

Gordon Watson, Chief Executive of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park, said:

“While disappointed at this announcement we recognise that the way people look for visitor information and book accommodation has radically changed meaning a significant downturn in use of some visitor information centres in recent years.

“We welcome VisitScotland’s commitment to work with us, other partners and the local business communities to explore how best to ensure that visitors to the National Park continue to have access to all the information they need via a range of channels, both before and during their visit.”