

Scotland Starts Here:

A Responsible Tourism Strategy for the South of Scotland

2024-2034





Our Vision

We will make the South of Scotland a thriving, responsible, year-round destination; leveraging our unique geography, culture, history and landscape to create Scotland's fastest growing visitor economy, attracting international visitors, creating quality employment and powering community prosperity.

Our Ambition for Growth:

- Increase our visitor economy by £1 billion, to £1.76bn by 2034.

- Support a further 6,000+ jobs, to 20,000 FTE by 2034

1. Inspire visitors to come to the South of Scotland ▶

- Develop the **Destination Position and Profile**, so target markets know about us and why they should visit ▶
- Develop a **year-round destination** by bringing in new visitors through the shoulder months and winter ▶
- Inspire and engage the **travel trade**, and help businesses be travel trade ready ▶
- Better **leverage our designations**, accolades and awards to bring in new visitors ▶
- Have game-changing ambition to **attract international visitors** by building an iconic, totemic, national flagship visitor attraction in the South of Scotland ▶

2. Develop the visitor experience, with a focus on quality ▶

- Improve the **quality** of our attractions, accommodation, food and drink ▶
- Create **Growth and Development Hubs** in areas such as: cycling, literary tourism, dark skies, agritourism, food and drink, equestrian, film/TV, and golf/country sports ▶
- Improve the availability and accuracy of **visitor information** ▶
- Maximise our **events** programme to attract visitors ▶
- Expand the **accommodation** offer to better fit visitor needs ▶
- Identify the **infrastructure** gaps and solutions for our businesses and visitors ▶
- Attract significant **inward investment** to develop our bed-stock, visitor attractions and food and drink offerings ▶

3. Support business to succeed ▶

- Enable effective **collaboration and mutual support** between businesses and support agencies ▶
- Ensure businesses and local communities are well **represented** in policy-making and regulation ▶
- Develop quality **year-round employment** for a skilled local workforce ▶
- Develop and share **data insights** which will genuinely inform decision-making and contribute to success ▶

4. Act responsibly for long-term collective benefit ▶

- Protect and enhance our **Natural Capital** ▶
- Support businesses and the destination on the journey to **Net Zero** ▶
- Support **community-leadership** and community benefit ▶
- Develop an **accessible and inclusive** offer that attracts visitors of all ages and backgrounds ▶
- Have effective **visitor management** to preserve the unspoilt nature of our region ▶
- Support **motorhomes** to contribute to the visitor economy in responsible ways ▶

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Executive Summary:

The South of Scotland set itself a five-year (2020-2025) Covid-recovery target of establishing a visitor economy worth £750m and increasing the associated number of jobs by 6,500. It successfully achieved these targets two years earlier than planned.

We want to maintain the positive momentum and build on this success by thinking with unprecedented ambition about the coming decade. We want to develop and grow the potential of tourism and hospitality in the South of Scotland, and we will achieve this through a 'Team South' approach which has partnership and collaboration at its heart.

Following consultations with hundreds of businesses, enterprises and communities, this strategy has been developed by the two local authorities, VisitScotland, the SSDA and SOSE. It sets out an inspiring vision for the coming decade:

“We will make the South of Scotland a thriving, responsible, year-round destination; leveraging our unique geography, culture, history and landscape to create Scotland’s fastest growing visitor economy, attracting international visitors, creating quality employment and powering community prosperity.”

Through this Responsible Tourism Strategy, we will:

- **increase our visitor economy by £1 billion**, to £1.76bn by 2034.
- **support a further 6,000 jobs**, to 20,000 FTE posts by 2034.

We will achieve this radical growth by:

- a) extending the season and developing the South of Scotland as a year-round 'rural escape' destination for the 14m people within 2-4 hours travel time;
- b) becoming a 'go to' rather than a 'go through' destination; and
- c) increasing international visitor numbers, who spend significantly more and stay longer than domestic visitors.

We will invest in building reasons to visit the South of Scotland, developing high quality experiences for visitors, developing our voice and brand, and better telling our story. We will be loud and we will be proud.

While achieving this, we will always remember that this is a Responsible Tourism Strategy. We will not shy from our responsibilities to: our communities, our climate, our natural capital, our culture, our visitors, our children and our workforce. We will create a thriving visitor economy which: delivers economic prosperity and community benefit; supports quality, year-round employment; minimises negative economic, environmental and social impacts; champions accessibility, inclusion and diversity; enhances our natural world; supports the industry on its journey to achieving Net Zero; and has community leadership, collaboration and partnership at its core.



Having listened to communities and business, we set out 22 priority areas in which we will work to achieve our vision, spread across four strategic objectives:

1) **Inspire visitors to come to the South of Scotland:**

Developing our destination position and profile, and bringing our overarching 'Scotland Starts Here' brand alive; transforming the South of Scotland into a year-round destination; inspiring the travel trade as to the potential of the region; better leveraging our designations; and working with game-changing ambition to attract high-spending international visitors.

2) **Develop the visitor experience, with a focus on quality:**

Actively supporting businesses and enterprises to increase the quality of their offering; establishing Growth and Development Hubs in areas like cycling, literary tourism, dark skies, agritourism and equestrianism, which we know can have a catalytic impact; offering clear, consistent, and centrally located visitor information to make it an easy destination to visit, encouraging people to stay longer and spend more; increasing, and better connecting, our programme of events across the region, with a strategic spread throughout the year; ensuring we have the right accommodation, in the right place, at the right price-point; ensuring we have the underlying infrastructure for tourism to succeed; and attracting scalable, sustainable inward investment.

3) **Support business to succeed:**

Building new destination-wide collaborations, with peer learning and mutual support; actively listening to, representing and acting on the views of communities and local business; building a skilled, valued, motivated local workforce; and better use of data to help businesses and enterprises make successful decisions based on local market insights.

4) **Act responsibly for long-term collective benefit:**

Supporting businesses on their journey to achieving Net Zero; embracing community-led tourism; ensuring the South of Scotland is an accessible, inclusive and diverse destination; building visitor management systems into all new growth; protecting the environment while maximising the local economic benefit of all those who visit us, no matter how they choose to arrive or move around the region. This will mitigate potential risks and community concerns and help protect and enhance our natural capital which is our greatest asset and our overriding responsibility to future generations.

The South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA), VisitScotland, South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), Scottish Borders Council, and Dumfries and Galloway Council are committed to achieving the vision set out in this strategy, which forms part of the wider Regional Economic Strategy. We recognise that significant delivery lies with our businesses and communities, and commit to supporting their endeavours to achieve this vision.

Behind this strategy is the first of three, three-year Action Plans which tracks in detail exactly what actions each organisation is responsible for, over the coming years, to ensure we are collectively accountable for the delivery of every component of the strategy. We will also develop a new, innovative and long-term funding model to secure the capacity needed to achieve our collective goals for the South of Scotland's visitor economy.

We will, together, make the South of Scotland the most sustainable, talked about, successful, energetic, and coveted destination in Scotland. Because #ScotlandStartsHere.

Join us on this journey.



Caerlaverock Castle, Dumfries and Galloway

The time for the South of Scotland is now.

There has never been such effective partnership, collaboration and collective action across public agencies, businesses, communities and individuals within the South of Scotland.

Through our 'Team South' approach, we will build a thriving, year-round visitor economy, with tourism and hospitality powering community and economic prosperity for the coming decade.

Momentum within and for the South has been building since before the Covid pandemic but now, with the combined forces of Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders, the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA) as a united destination management and marketing organisation, SOSE as our first dedicated enterprise agency, increased levels of inward investment, and our first ever Regional Economic Strategy, the opportunity is ours for the taking.

We're thinking differently, planning differently and doing things differently, all in order to make a real, positive and lasting change for the people who live, work and visit here.

We have had significant strategic wins in recent years as a result of this approach and our collective energy, including the formation of the SSDA, the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, the Galloway & Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere, and our success with cycling.

Tourism has always played an invaluable role in the economy of the South of Scotland and our local industry has shown consistent improvement and an encouraging growth trajectory in recent years. However, we believe that **if we think ambitiously, plan strategically, work collaboratively and act decisively, we can move from incremental growth to transformative, game-changing growth.** This is our vision.

This strategy sets out how we will achieve this vision. It is informed by consultations with hundreds of businesses and communities, and it has been co-written by industry representatives, local authorities, VisitScotland, SOSE, businesses, enterprises and communities. It harnesses our collective ambition, passion, and enthusiasm to build a destination of first choice – first choice for visitors, first choice for investment and first choice for business.

Scale and ambition are key to the successful delivery of this strategy. To achieve the ambition we set, we need to do more to develop game-changing, large-scale, compelling propositions which inspire public support and private investment.

Crucially, this strategy is more than just a plan. It is a rallying call for all those who want to see economic transformation in the South of Scotland to come together, work together, and succeed together. It is a solemn commitment from all our public agencies, businesses, enterprises and communities that we will do what it takes to supercharge our visitor economy, for the benefit of all, including generations to come.

Our Visitor Economy:

This strategy is not just about tourism, hospitality or events; rather, it takes a holistic view of our visitor economy in its totality.

Understanding the 'visitor economy':

The visitor economy is a place-centred concept, it is about the whole environment in which visitors, locals and tourists interact. It is the sum economic benefit of bringing visitors into an area: not just the accommodation, attractions and restaurants but the wider goods and services – the local butcher, the newsagent, the launderette, the petrol station. These secondary businesses and enterprises may not consider themselves as 'tourism businesses', *per se*, but they are an integral part of the visitor economy. Many of the facilities and attractions local communities enjoy are made viable by visitors. A thriving visitor economy benefits all.

History:

The South of Scotland's visitor economy dates back almost two centuries, when the railways first linked the historic towns and abbeys of the Scottish Borders with Edinburgh and then into Dumfries and Galloway, and as first Portpatrick and then Stranraer became the main Scottish port for ferries to Ireland. These new transport links, combined with raised and romanticised awareness of the beauties of the South of Scotland, fuelled by the writings of Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns and James Hogg, stimulated demand for accommodation and a range of visitor activities across the towns and villages of the south, creating new resorts and attracting visitors in their thousands.

Contemporary identity:

As the world has changed around us, the South of Scotland has retained its unique charm and identity as a rural, rolling, romantic destination. Our region spans the English border, with Irish and North Sea coastlines, and outstanding natural landscapes, uplands, rivers and seascapes. We have an abundance of open space and dark skies, and we are committed to safeguarding our natural capital. Our industrial heritage is linked to farming, fishing, forestry, textiles, food and drink. Our distinct cultures and places are shaped by centuries of history and landmark events, such as Springfling, often due to being a contested borderland. We are a vibrant and fiercely proud community with a rich and diverse tapestry of people and businesses, thriving artists and creative minds, and we have a passion for embracing the great outdoors, adventure, leisure and sport. We also have a strong track record in third sector and community-led tourism initiatives which help our communities be even better places to live work and visit.

Our point of differentiation as a destination is our geographic location: we are a sparsely populated, welcoming, rural escape within 2-4 hours travel of 14m people. Our message to those arriving from south of the border is: 'Scotland Starts Here'.

Visitors, value and volume:

Our visitors largely originate from the domestic UK market, but close proximity to the ferries from Newcastle and Hull provide access to near European markets. Our market-share of wider international, higher-spending visitors to Scotland is currently very low but, with airports at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Prestwick, Newcastle and Manchester, has potential for significant growth.

The most recent findings from the Scottish Tourism Index states that the top two activities undertaken on 2023 home holidays were ‘rest and relaxation’ at 63% and ‘visits to the outdoors’ at 51%. These provide an excellent match for what the South of Scotland has to offer.

As happened worldwide, the onset of the Covid pandemic had an adverse impact upon the tourism industry, with large reductions in visitor numbers and loss of economic impact across the South of Scotland in 2020. The South of Scotland Destination Alliance established a five-year, 2020-2025 Covid-recovery plan, aiming to reach a visitor economy of £750m and increasing jobs by 6,500. According to 2022 STEAM data, both targets were achieved two years ahead of schedule.

Together, we now look to build on this remarkable, double-time Covid recovery, by looking forwards with unfettered ambition at what we can achieve in this coming decade.

TOURISM TRENDS IN THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND 2018 - 2022

| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|----------------------------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| Visitor Numbers (million) | 4.46 | 4.64 | 1.85 | 2.84 | 4.13 |
| Total Economic Impact (£m) | £574m | £610m | £253m | £465m | £762m |
| Employment (FTE) | 11,797 | 12,036 | 6,623 | 10,695 | 13,759 |

Source STEAM data 2018 - 2023

Our Responsibilities:

This is a Responsible Tourism Strategy.

Responsible tourism isn't just about holidaying in an environmentally-friendly way. It is about making better places for people to visit and live in. It minimises any negative economic, environmental, and social impacts, ensuring that business success generates greater economic benefits for local people, enhances the well-being of communities and actively preserves an area's natural and cultural heritage.

We are responsible to:

- Our communities
- Our climate
- Our natural capital
- Our culture
- Our visitors
- Our children
- Our workforce

Rapid, unsustainable growth which exceeds infrastructure capacities and community appetite, saturates and devalues our place and product, and damages our natural capital, is *not* responsible tourism.

Responsible tourism:

- Creates collective economic prosperity and community benefit
- Supports quality, year-round employment
- Maximises positive economic, environmental and social impact
- Ensures the correct infrastructure and services are in place before seeking growth in visitor numbers
- Embraces our communities as key players in the visitor economy
- Supports and educates visitors to respect our communities, nature and landscape
- Slows visitors down, so they linger longer
- Supports local enterprises and prioritises food and drink of local provenance
- Provides a high quality, authentic experience for visitors which exceeds expectations
- Champions accessibility, inclusion and diversity
- Is culturally sensitive and builds local pride and confidence
- Has local ownership, community leadership, collaboration and partnership at its core
- Enhances our natural capital and actively contributes to our march to Net Zero
- Prioritises long-term, sustainable benefit for all, over short-term economic growth for the few.

Our Strategic Context:

In keeping with our commitment to partnership and collaboration, this South of Scotland Responsible Tourism Strategy is embedded in its wider strategic context. It is informed by, dovetails with, and contributes to the delivery of, more than a dozen different existing national and local strategies.



Through this Responsible Tourism Strategy, we aspire to:

- **increase our visitor economy by £1 billion**, to £1.76bn by 2034
- **support a further 6,000 jobs**, to 20,000 FTE posts by 2034

This is unprecedented ambition for the South of Scotland.

To achieve this growth responsibly, we cannot simply rely on attracting more domestic, summer visitors, when many businesses and enterprises are already at capacity. Rather, we must:

a) Become a year-round destination:

Through targeted marketing, strategic messaging, and locally-led destination development we will work collaboratively to attract more visitors in the shoulder and winter seasons, where there is capacity for growth. To extend the season we will particularly target those within four hours' travel of the region, promoting the South of Scotland as a year-round destination which shines in all seasons. We must work collaboratively and supportively at a local level, to ensure we have the right products and services open for visitors as we increase off-season visitor numbers.

b) Become a 'go to' rather than a 'go through' a destination:

Significant numbers of visitors pass through the South of Scotland on their way to other areas, most especially on the A74(M), A68, A7 and A1. This is because they do not yet see the South of Scotland as a destination. We can change this by bringing alive our collective consumer-facing brand 'Scotland Starts Here', including through strategic partnerships at Gretna, to get people to come off the A74(M) and learn about all our region has to offer. We can use our unique geographic position and proximity to major urban centres, to attract new and higher spending visitors.

c) Radically increase international visitor numbers:

International visitors stay for longer and spend significantly more than domestic visitors. They are key to achieving significant, responsible growth because they allow us to double the value of our visitor economy without doubling the volume of visitors and risking saturation. We will target the high-spending North American market by capitalising on the unique history of emigration from Lowland Scotland, to catalyse game-changing growth in our visitor economy. We will use the ferry crossings in Cairnryan in the west, and Newcastle to the south-east, to bring in new visitors from the island of Ireland and the Low Countries and Germany, respectively. Crucially, once we have attracted new international visitors, we must retain them in the South of Scotland, disrupting the gravitational pull which has historically drawn visitors to the central belt and Highlands. We will offer high quality, connected itineraries which see visitors stay in, or move across, the South of Scotland.

To achieve these three growth-levers we must invest in building reasons to visit the South of Scotland. We must raise our voice, build our brand, and better tell our story. We must develop a series of compelling and connected attractions and offerings which attract and inspire high-spending visitors.

Crucially, we recognise the importance of a wellbeing economy, as set out in Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation. So, in addition to total economic impact and new jobs created, we will work with others to develop innovative and insightful wellbeing indicators, to ensure this strategy delivers inclusive prosperity for *all* the South of Scotland's people and places.

Our Target Markets and Segments:

 [BACK TO MENU](#)

In an increasingly dynamic global market, in which new trends and visitor flows are fast emerging, it is important this ten-year strategy does not prescribe too rigidly our target markets for the South of Scotland to 2034. Rather, we must be alert to the changing landscape, actively seeking market insights; we must be agile, innovative and responsive to a changing world.

We want the South of Scotland to have a well-balanced market portfolio, minimising over reliance on any one market.

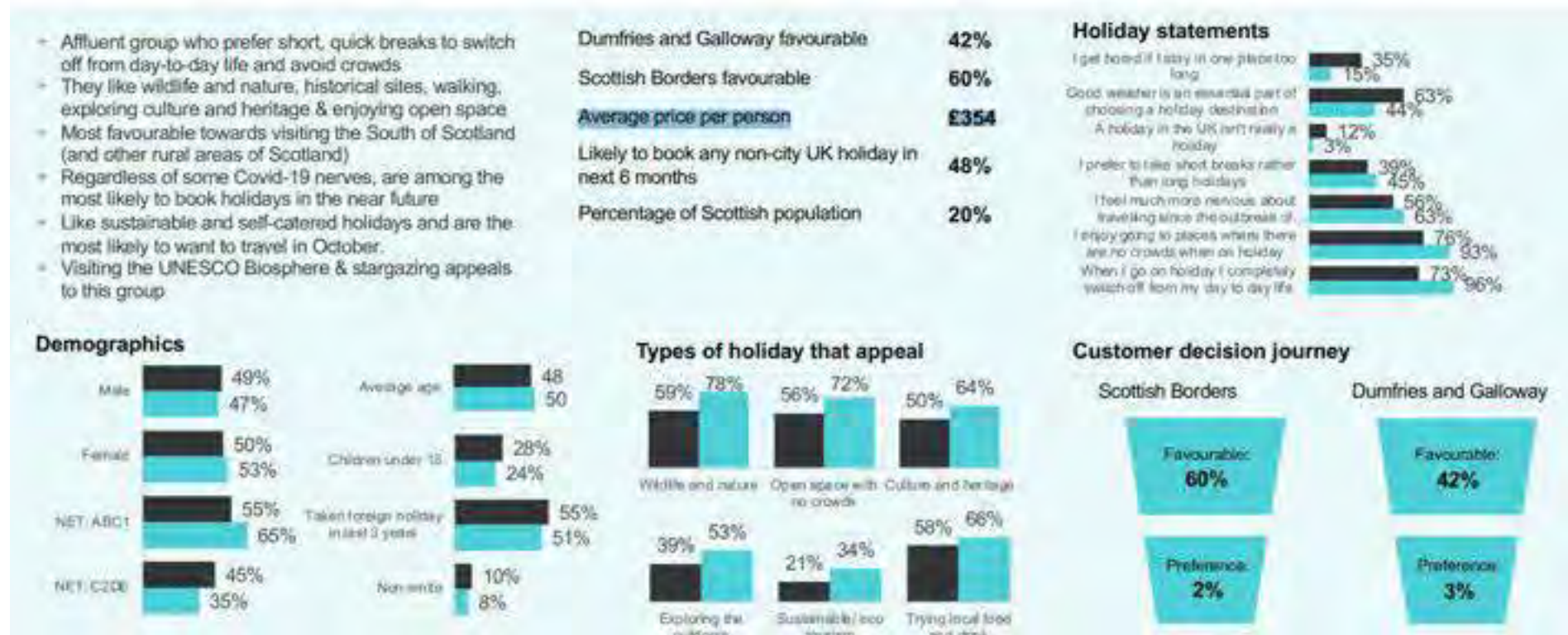


Glentress, Scottish Borders

Domestic:

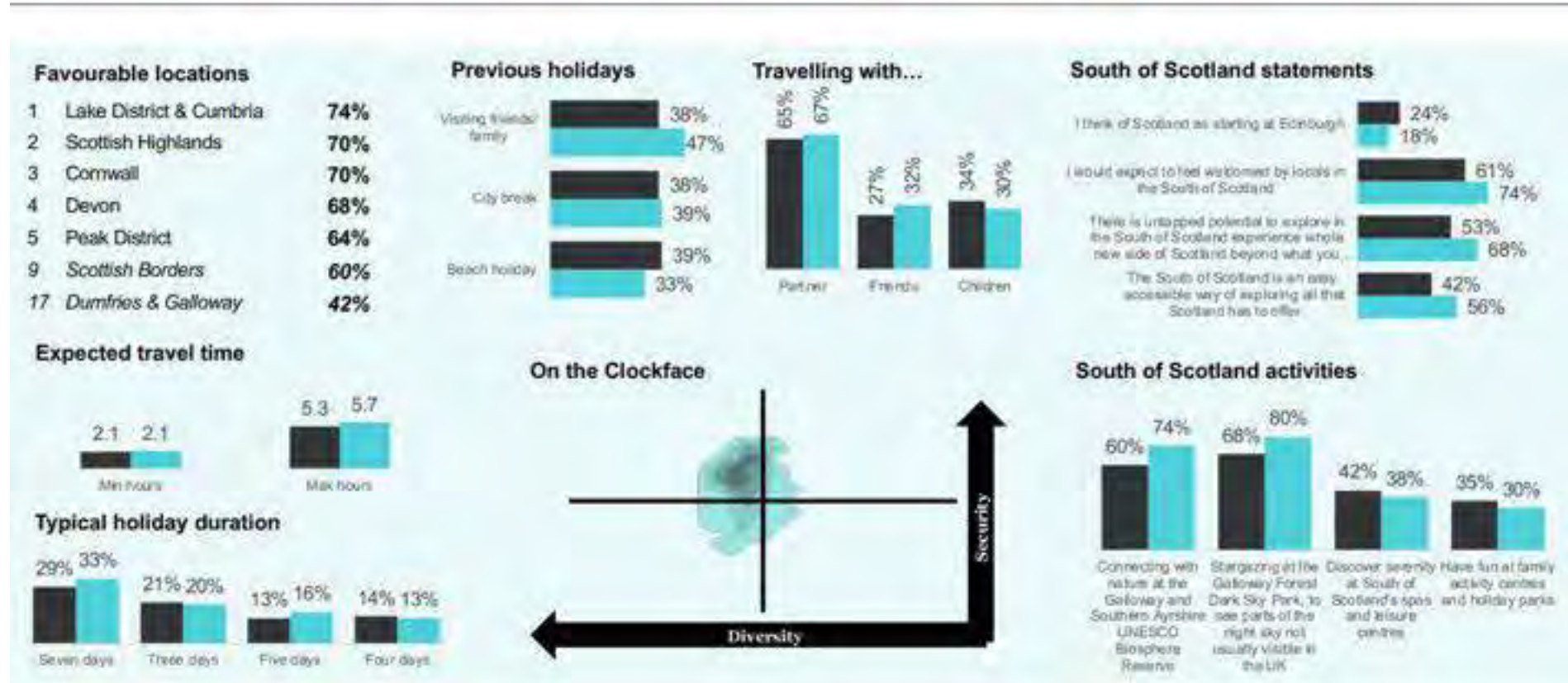
Our primary market will remain domestic visitors within 2-4 hours travel of the region. In this market we will particularly target ‘metropolitan adventurers’: this is an affluent segment of the market which makes up 14% of the population, who prefer short breaks, want to switch off from the day-to-day, and like the great outdoors, nature, culture and heritage. This segment aligns well with the core activities most associated with South of Scotland: exploring and wildlife, walking, cycling, visiting historical sites, food and drink, local arts, crafts and culture, and exploring galleries and museums¹.

Metropolitan adventurers: 14% of the UK population



1 Source: South of Scotland Segmentation research by Yonder, October 2021

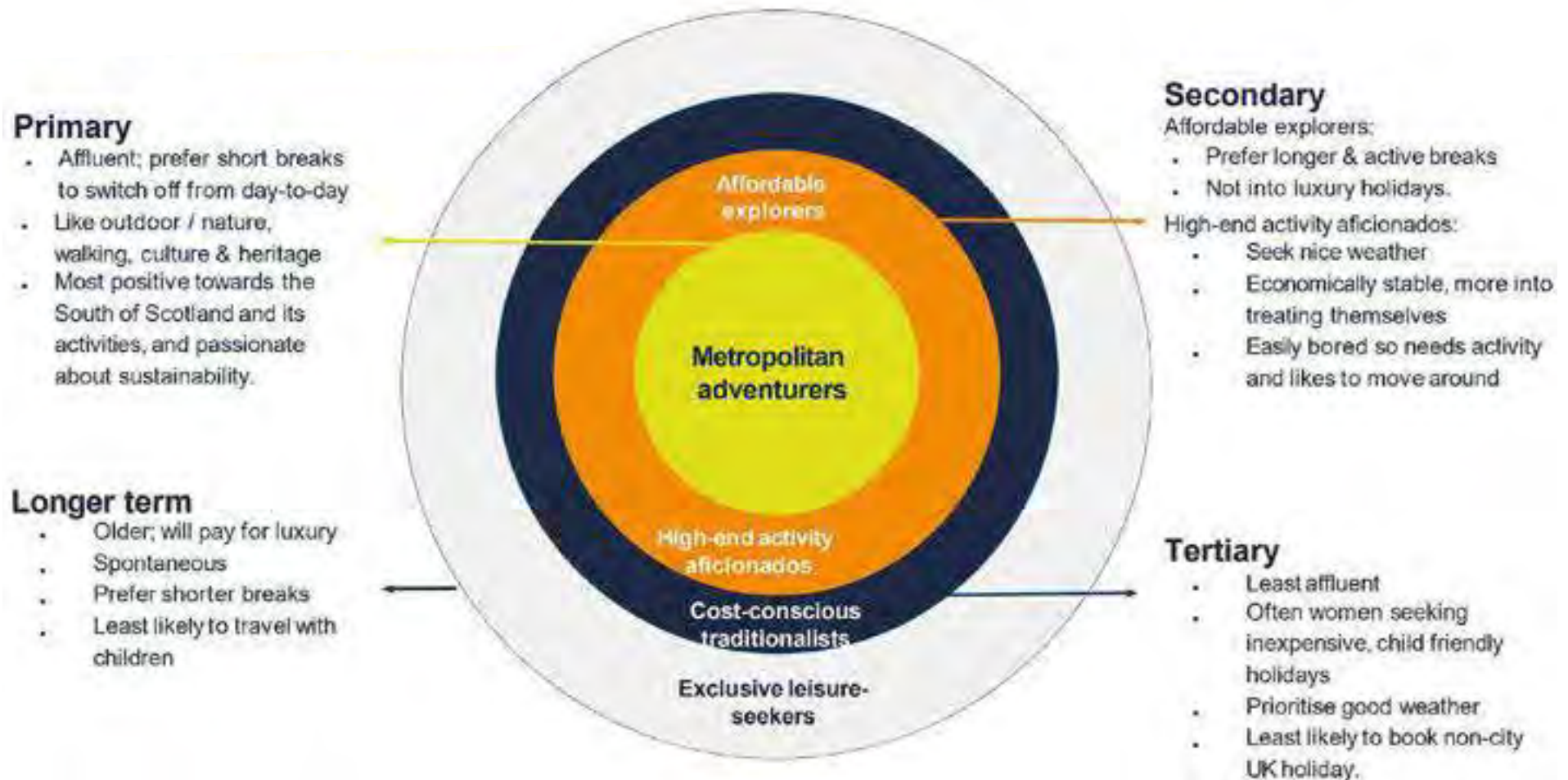
Metropolitan adventurers: 14% of the UK population



1 Source: South of Scotland Segmentation research by Yonder, October 2021

The right segment...

While 'metropolitan adventurers' will be our primary target segment, our secondary segment will be 'affordable explorers' and 'high-end activity aficionados', tertiary will be 'cost-conscious traditionalists' and longer term we will look to attract 'exclusive leisure-seekers'.





Max hours willing to travel (approx hrs)

| | | |
|------------|--|----------------------|
| 5.7 | Metropolitan adventurers 5.8M 'considerers' worth £2.1 billion 3.5M 'existing' worth £1.3 billion | CORE AUDIENCE |
| 6 | Affordable explorers 3.7M 'considerers' worth £1.3 billion 2.4M 'existing' worth £915 million | |
| 5.2 | High-end activity aficionados 6.0M 'considerers' worth £2.4 billion 4.0M 'existing' worth £1.7 billion | |
| 4.9 | Cost-conscious traditionalists 5.5M 'considerers' worth £1.7 billion 3.9M 'existing' worth £1.5 billion | |
| 5.5 | Exclusive leisure-seekers 4.2M 'considerers' worth £1.7 billion 3.9M 'existing' worth £1.7 billion | LONGER TERM |

Source: SSSA Segmentation research - Oct, 2021
 'Considerers' likely to go on non-city UK hol and favourable to SoS
 'Existing' those who have previously visited SoS

International:

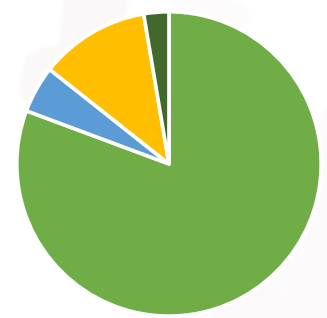
Currently just 6% of overnight visitors to the South of Scotland are international, compared to a 22% Scotland-average. This is striking given most of the region is within 90 minutes of an international airport, and it is significant given international visitors typically spend twice as much a day, compared to domestic visitors.

In 2022 19% of visitors to Scotland were international, yet 49% of spend came from international visitors, with over half of all international spend coming from North America visitors. It looks like this trend will have continued in 2023, with considerable further increase in US spend.

We will grow the South of Scotland's international market-share by specifically targeting:

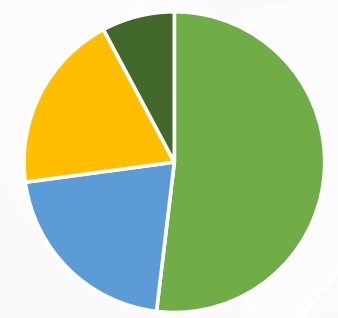
- North America: Leveraging our region's story of emigration and targeting those with Scots-Irish ancestry.
- Europe: Particularly targeting the self-drive German and Dutch markets, arriving by ferry into Newcastle.
- Asia: With the Chinese market forecast to reopen in earnest from 2025.

Scotland Visits



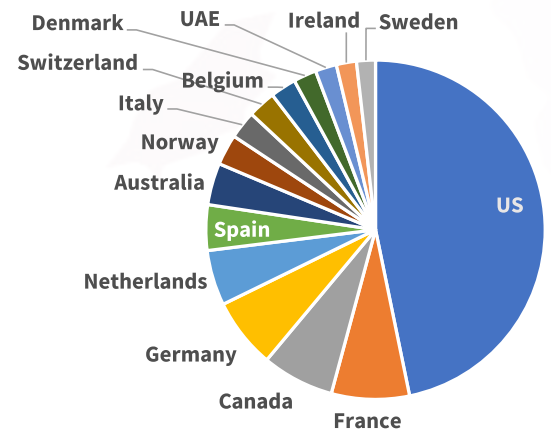
■ GB ■ North America
■ Europe ■ Rest of World

Scotland Spend



■ GB ■ North America
■ Europe ■ Rest of World

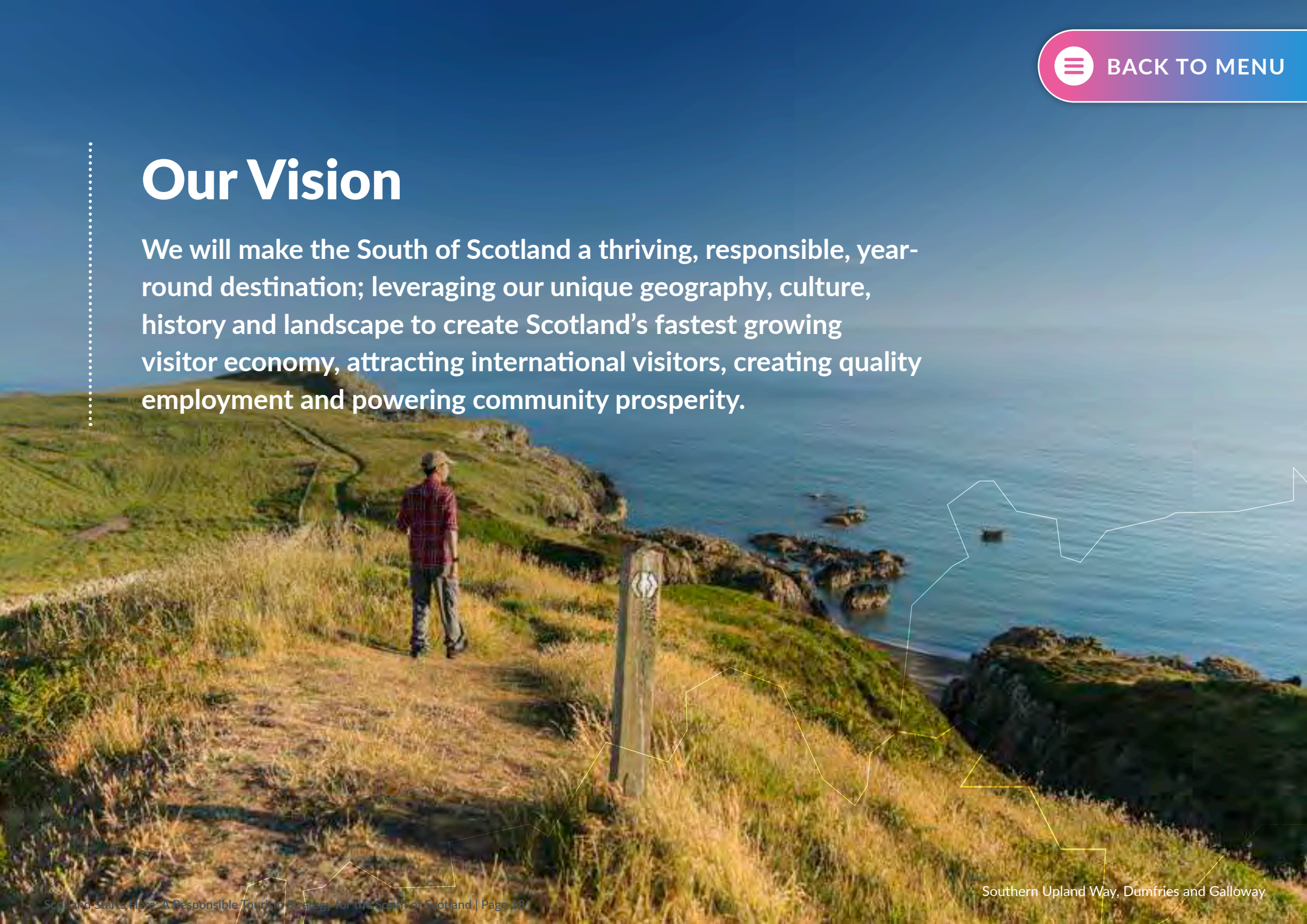
Spend by Top 15 Countries (80% of Int'l spend)



Source: GBTS 2022, IPS 2022

Our Vision

We will make the South of Scotland a thriving, responsible, year-round destination; leveraging our unique geography, culture, history and landscape to create Scotland's fastest growing visitor economy, attracting international visitors, creating quality employment and powering community prosperity.



Our strategic objectives:

To achieve our vision, we will:

1. **Inspire visitors** to come to the South of Scotland
2. **Develop the visitor experience** with a focus on quality
3. **Support business** to succeed
4. **Act responsibly** for long-term collective benefit

Our Commitments:

For each of the above four strategic objectives, this strategy sets out a handful of key delivery areas we will prioritise over the next decade, all of which have come from listening to businesses and communities across the South of Scotland.

In each delivery area, we give examples of the sort of actions we will be taking over the coming decade. However, sitting behind the strategy is a far more comprehensive series of three-year Action Plans. These plans go through in detail exactly what actions each organisation is responsible for, over the coming three years, to deliver each component of the strategy. They will be updated and shared publicly on an annual basis, with an annual progress report. We are committed to transparency and accountability.

This Strategy is co-authored by: SOSE, the SSDA, VisitScotland, Dumfries and Galloway Council and Scottish Borders Council. Together, we commit to achieving our shared vision for the future of the South of Scotland's Visitor Economy.

Crucially, this strategy is owned, and will be delivered by, many more organisations than these five co-authors. To succeed, it must be owned and collectively delivered by all relevant organisations across the public, private and third sector.

This strategy is of, for and by 'Team South of Scotland'.

Our Capacity:

We recognise that achieving the hugely ambitious vision we set out in this strategy will require dedicated capacity.

We want a responsible visitor economy which delivers sustained collective benefit for the South of Scotland. This cannot be achieved without appropriate funding.

We will build on the success of the region in securing resources to develop projects of national significance including the creation of Borders Rail, developments related to the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal including Destination Tweed, Stranraer Harbour and the 7Stanes, and the hosting of major events including the UCI World Cycling Championships 2023.

We want to develop a genuinely sustainable funding model to achieve this collective good and will think innovatively, but practically, about how to achieve this. We will establish a Funding Working Group, with representatives from each of the partner agencies, to develop, share and report back against this model. We must be open-minded and far-sighted, thinking differently about how we secure the necessary resource for the common good.

1. Inspire visitors to come to the South of Scotland

We need to connect with our visitor markets, both domestic and international, telling the story of the South of Scotland as a world-class destination, with pride and passion, to inspire each new generation of visitor.

The South of Scotland has much to offer and is uniquely well positioned to be the 'go to' rural destination for the 14 million people within 2-4 hours travel of the region.

We are a welcoming, green, authentic, rural escape: these are sought-after attributes in an increasingly busy, noisy, time-poor, stressed, urban and digital world.

Visitors have the space and freedom to relax and unwind how they wish: whether through quiet rural immersion, engaging our unique culture and heritage, or embracing our outdoor and adventure offerings.

We need to be more discoverable and better communicate the emotional benefits of visiting the region.



Developing the Destination Position and Profile:

Put simply, we need to disrupt the habit of visitors bypassing the South of Scotland. Our profile is low; visitors are not aware of, or emotionally engaged enough with, what we have to offer. We need to make the destination 'stickier' to encourage them to visit – but visitors need to know about us, what the benefits are and why they should visit. We need to bring our collective 'Scotland Starts Here' destination brand alive to reflect our culture, history, heritage, people and natural environment.

We will do this by:

- Developing our collective marketing approach with key target markets and segments to attract higher spending visitors who stay longer, with clear and consistent messaging to help build brand awareness and emotional connections
- Ensuring more of our visitor experiences are digitally discoverable and bookable
- Encouraging and supporting our businesses, enterprises and communities to adopt the 'Scotland Starts Here' branding and feed into the design and delivery of marketing campaigns through the SSDA, so this becomes our collective voice
- Making the 'Scotland Starts Here' branding significantly more visible within the region
- Sustained long-term financial commitment to marketing the region
- Creating effective digital means to track attitudes to holidaying in our region by our target markets.

Develop a year-round destination:

We currently have a comparatively short season. Extending the season will provide greater economic benefit and enhanced year-round employment. Having capacity throughout the year and across the region provides the opportunity to spread visitors seasonally and geographically. Extending the season is not an easy task and will not happen overnight: not all businesses wish to open year-round. It will require a collective approach taking incremental steps to get there. We need to bring new visitors in through the shoulder months and off-season, and ensure there is a quality experience for them in the destination when they do.

We will do this by:

- Undertaking a baseline seasonality audit and track progress annually
- Facilitating local collaboration between businesses to support the development of a year-round offering, in which visitors can be signposted to attractions, restaurants and accommodation which are open, whenever they visit
- Identifying potential clusters – these could be locations, themes, activities, events – and work with businesses and communities to develop a seasonal offer, where relevant maximising our natural capital
- Market the region as a year-round destination, highlighting the key offerings in each season to relevant target segments within a 2-4 hour drive.

Inspire the travel trade to the potential of the region:

There is already a compelling South of Scotland product for the travel trade, but more needs to be done to reach a critical 'tipping point' where tour operators see the quantity and quality available for them to include the region in their programmes. There is a requirement to enable more tourism businesses and enterprises to become travel trade ready to appeal to operators programming individuals, small groups and, as relevant, coach parties. Consideration needs to be given to developing more responsible products to satisfy the requests tour operators are receiving from their own customers.

We will do this by:

- Developing and delivering a programme for businesses comprising travel trade training, 1:1 bespoke support and funding opportunities for businesses to allow them to promote to the trade. This programme should include how responsible products might be developed and taken to market
- Enhancing the travel trade portal on SSDA, with new content and listings and take this to the travel trade market
- Representation of the region by the SSDA at travel trade events, with dedicated capacity to manage key relationships with the travel trade, organise educational visits, help develop new products, etc
- Utilise the expertise of VisitScotland in supporting tourism businesses to develop bookable experiences to new and existing markets through activity including VisitScotland Connect
- Tracking % of international visitors and number of businesses that are part of the SSDA travel trade offering.

Leverage our designations, accolades and awards:

It is important to make the best possible use of our key assets, to raise awareness of our destination and inspire visitors:

Designations: We value our internationally recognised designations, such as: the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere, the Galloway Dark Sky Park (Gold Tier), and the Moffat Dark Sky Community, alongside our outstanding National Scenic Areas, Local Landscape Areas, and Wildlife and Marine Reserves. By upholding these designations, we highlight our rich natural and cultural heritage, attract visitors seeking authentic experiences, foster a profound connection with our environment, and promote stewardship and accountability among all tourism stakeholders.

Accolades: The South of Scotland is increasingly securing prestigious global accolades, for example: it was awarded a coveted UCI Bike Region label in 2023; it was named 'Best in Travel 2023' by Lonely Planet; and the Galloway & Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere featured on the National Geographic 'Cool List 2024' and is part of the world's first UNESCO trail.

Awards: In 2023 the regional South of Scotland Thistle Awards was created not only to inspire and recognise excellence within the industry but also to enhance the region's reputation as a must-visit destination. This had immediate impact, with, for the first time ever, the South of Scotland winning more national Thistle Awards than any other part of Scotland in 2023. Through strategic collaboration and continuous support, the South of Scotland Thistle Awards play a vital role in defining the region's unique tourism offering, fostering growth, ensuring unforgettable experiences and repeat visits.

We need to continue to secure such designations, accolades and awards, and leverage maximum benefit for the visitor economy when we do.

We will do this by:

- Actively engaging with the media to showcase the best of the South of Scotland to garner further 'best in class' accolades
- Actively using our accolades and designations in our destination marketing activity – targeting segments as relevant
- Where appropriate, using our designations -such as the UNESCO biosphere- to pilot new ways of responsible business practice
- Securing the new Scottish Dark Sky Observatory in the Galloway Forest Park, to better leverage the economic benefits of the Galloway Dark Sky Park (Gold Tier).

Game-changing ambition to attract international visitors:

While most of our efforts should be focused on the incremental, tangible actions which will gradually bring about progress, we also want to think ambitiously about what would be genuinely transformative for the South of Scotland's visitor economy.

We need to build greater ambition into our thinking and planning, such that we can collaboratively develop responsible, large-scale, compelling propositions which inspire not just public sector support but also significant private inward investment. We need to build reasons to visit the South of Scotland which are not just regionally significant, but nationally and internationally. Borderlands and the Borders Railway are just two examples of this sort of thinking and we need more at this scale.

We know that as a rural destination we have limited capacity, infrastructure, and appetite for mass tourism, so to radically transform the visitor economy we need to attract more high-spending visitors who stay longer.

Most of the c25 million North Americans with Scottish ancestry came from the lowlands of Scotland: this gives us a unique opportunity to tell the story of Scottish emigration, which has the South at its heart. We need to think with unprecedented ambition about how we tell this story to the world in ways that inspire people to visit and be a part of this story.

We will do this by:

- Capitalising on the story of lowland emigration by building an iconic, totemic, national flagship visitor attraction in the South of Scotland, designed to attract higher spending international visitors
- Build a 'stepping stone' pathway of satellite attractions and related stories (the birth of Christianity in the UK at Whithorn, Burns at Dumfries, etc) to encourage international visitors to move west-east across the region, rather than travel up to the central belt and Highlands
- Embracing, and being ready for, other game-changing opportunities including the potential for a National Park and a significantly strengthened Burns tourism product through the Burns Tourism Partnership
- Position ourselves to maximise the chance of attracting significant and game-changing investment.

2. Develop the visitor experience, with a focus on quality

To elevate our offer as a destination, we need to increase the number and quality of visitor experiences. We need to encourage entrepreneurship in the development of new attractions, whilst ensuring that training and advice are available to those already operating in the industry to enhance quality. We need to facilitate new ideas and collaborations amongst businesses, enterprises and communities, so the South of Scotland becomes an easy destination to visit, with one experience directly leading to the next, such that visitors stay longer and spend more.

Quality:

Increasingly, visitors are looking for quality experiences across every part of their trip: attractions, accommodation, food and drink. We need to build quality into every part of the South of Scotland's offering: it needs to be built into our DNA if we are to establish a reputation for quality. We have many outstanding businesses which are shining beacons of quality but we also have many others that need to be supported to reach this level. As a destination, we need to ensure that we do not stand still, instead encouraging and supporting our tourism businesses to improve the quality of their offering across the region.

We will do this by:

- Curating existing, and developing new, training and mentoring programmes that focus on raising the quality of the visitor experience at a regional and national level
- Continuing to develop and promote the South of Scotland Thistle Awards, to inspire and celebrate quality and excellence
- Developing peer-sharing systems and case studies to share learning between businesses
- Promoting the South of Scotland as a quality destination to our target markets
- Actively supporting businesses to improve the quality of their food and drink offering, with systems established to make it easier to use local ingredients and products.



Growth and Development Hubs:

There is a need to think strategically about how to grow and develop the South of Scotland as a destination and to maximise the impact of projects linked to Borderlands Inclusive Growth investment. The region has a number of key assets, linked to its unique geography, culture and history, which can become catalytic growth centres with the right investment and collaboration. Together these areas become the story we tell about the South of Scotland and determine the visitors we attract.

These areas may include, *inter alia*:

- Cycling – building on the UCI Bike Region, Kirkpatrick C2C, Galloway Gravel, etc to make the South of Scotland the UK’s leading cycle-destination
- Literary tourism – investing in literary history including Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, James Hogg, J.M. Barrie, and our two renowned book festivals
- Dark Skies – using our dark skies status as a key attraction to extend the season
- Agritourism and Food & Drink – building our reputation as a leading rural destination with outstanding local products
- Equestrian – establishing the South as the equestrian capital of the UK to attract high-spending visitors
- Film and TV – showcasing the destination as a filming location and building visitors from this
- History and heritage – including our unique Roman, Iron Age and early Christian history, and rich textile heritage.

We will do this by:

- Systematically identifying key growth hubs and developing stakeholder working groups for each, with agreed outcomes and clear timescales to develop the offering, inspire new bookable products and bring in new audiences
- Developing a tourism ‘incubator’ programme to provide a space for collaborative ideas to be developed into new quality visitor experiences
- Golf and country sports – better connecting-up our various offerings and building our destination brand, to bring in more off-season visitors.



Visitor Information:

Visitors need to be able to access information easily during the planning and booking phase, and throughout their visit. Our visitor information needs to be clear, consistent, and centrally held in a digital one-stop shop – ‘Scotland Starts Here’. Visitors need to be able to digitally discover the region and book the various elements of their trip in one simple step. This information needs to be accessible, inspiring and accurate to ensure views convert to bookings.

Whilst in the destination, visitors need to be signposted to relevant digital information, with effective online booking for experiences etc, so visitors stay longer and spend more.

We will do this by:

- Reviewing current visitor information usage and effectiveness, with clear development plan agreed
- Encouraging and facilitating collaboration between businesses and making the product more connected, to make it easier for visitors to find and book joined-up experiences and to linger longer
- Ensuring every visitor economy business is listed on ‘Scotland Starts Here’ and is supported to keep their listing up to date
- Integrating ‘Scotland Starts Here’ with other sources of visitor information across the region
- Ensuring ‘Scotland Starts Here’ branding, with QR codes directing to the website and app, is visible across the region.





Borders Book Festival, Scottish Borders

Events:

Events provide a reason to visit. They play an important role in a visitor's experience of a destination, with cultural or community events allowing the visitor to connect in an authentic way. The South of Scotland has a good calendar of events during peak season but is light on events at other times of the year. There is a need to improve how we connect events with the visitor economy such that those who come into the region for an event are encouraged to stay longer in the destination.

We will do this by:

- Developing the festivals, music and events content on 'Scotland Starts Here' and using events to engage with our visitors
- Linking the two Local Authority Events Strategies and the new National Events Strategy directly with the relevant actions in this strategy
- Building on learnings from the recent hosting of the 2023 UCI Cycling World Championships in the region, with a view to hosting similar events of scale
- Supporting those attending events to stay longer and spend more in the region
- Encouraging the creation of further out of season events, as part of our ambitions to develop a year-round destination
- Connecting existing, or encouraging new, events to create themed festivals, linked to the established strengths of the region.

Accommodation:

It is crucial we have the right accommodation, in the right place, at the right price-point, if we are to grow our visitor economy.

VisitScotland acknowledge that the sample sizes at regional level in their Accommodation Occupancy Survey are small, particularly in areas such as D&G and Scottish Borders. It is therefore difficult to get an accurate annual picture on occupancy.

SOSE's 2021 bed-stock audit, provides a snapshot in time of what is available to visitors, although it will have evolved since then, not least as a result of the Short-term Let Licensing. As of December 2021, the bed-stock in the South of Scotland comprised:

- 4,711 accommodation properties
- 27,342 bedrooms or units (mainly pitches) and
- 70,014 beds

The number of properties is dominated by self-catering (76%) but the majority of bedspaces – which better reflects the number of visitors who can be accommodated – are provided by camping and caravan providers, at 57%, due to their considerably larger capacity.

It is clear that some events suffer from a lack of accommodation for visiting attendees. Encouraging more people to dwell and stay overnight would be of economic benefit to communities. The pop-up campsites for the 2023 UCI Cycling World Championships in the Tweed Valley provided an interesting case study of what might be possible for other events.

There are few accommodation properties suited to the groups market and whilst this limits opportunities to work with elements of the travel trade, there is a stronger opportunity to develop activity with FIT operators focussing on smaller accommodation businesses.

There is a need to better understand the accommodation sector and match it to the needs and preferences of visitor segments, ensuring we have a diverse range of accommodation, at appropriate scale, to meet demand at different price points from five star to holiday parks; offering quality and value at every level.

We will do this by:

- Better understanding what visitors want and encouraging investment in new bed-stock to meet these needs and opportunities
- Improving the quality and resilience of accommodation data for the South of Scotland through encouraging and incentivising local businesses and enterprises to participate in accommodation occupancy surveys
- Developing a framework on how best to facilitate temporary campsites for events considering the impact on/benefit to communities
- Increasing the amount of travel trade ready accommodation.
- Attracting external investment to create increased capacity and quality.

Infrastructure:

Tourism can only succeed where the right infrastructure is in place. For the South of Scotland, this includes: an effective integrated public transport network (bus and rail), a well-maintained road network which is safe for active travel, an EV charging network which makes all parts of the destination accessible by electric vehicle, road and street signage, 4G and 5G digital connectivity, accessible public toilets in good repair, and appropriate public bins and street recycling.

Amongst the most important infrastructure for the visitor economy in the South of Scotland is the trunk road network which is necessary for visitors to arrive into and travel across the destination. It is vital that there is further investment in the key routes, including the A74(M), A75, A77, A1, A7, A697 and A68.

With specific regard to our region's local food and drink offering, there is a need to develop the necessary supporting industry, including an effective distribution network, a distribution centre, and an abattoir.

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund is designed to support collaborative projects which focus on improving the visitor experience in rural parts of Scotland that are facing pressure on their infrastructure and communities as a result of visitor numbers. The types of projects that could be supported include parking, motorhome facilities (including disposal points), viewpoints, paths, toilet provision and EV and e-bike charge points. Priority will be given to early actions identified by Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans.

Significant new public funded initiatives emerging from Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal such as Destination Tweed, Stranraer Harbour, 7stanes at Glentworth, Kirroughtree, Dalbeattie, Mabie, Ae, Newcastleton

and the Glentworth Masterplan can be used as a catalyst to unlock further tourism potential for entrepreneurial tourism businesses, communities and ultimately the visitor.

We have an opportunity to build upon the success of the long-term ambition and blueprints of the Borders Rail project, including the Borders Rail Extension and current plans for Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal projects. We need to identify the infrastructure gaps and solutions, whilst providing support for the industry and working more effectively with policymakers to improve the infrastructure for our businesses and visitors.

We will do this by:

- Developing a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan for the region identifying key areas for improvement
- Applying for the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund to take forward key priorities
- Fully integrating this Responsible Tourism Strategy into the Regional Economic Strategy and ensuring the visitor economy's infrastructure needs are recognised within the Regional Economic Partnership and the Convention of the South of Scotland
- Establishing effective logistics and distribution systems to support businesses to use local ingredients
- Establishing an EV charging network integral within the visitor economy, with charging stations at most accommodation and visitor attractions
- Identifying locations where the provision of toilet facilities and bins can be improved and work with partners and communities to find locally-appropriate solutions.

Inward investment:

Developing our bed-stock, visitor attractions and food and drink offerings requires the South of Scotland to attract significant inward investment. To achieve this, we must make the South of Scotland an investment-friendly region: ensuring we have a skilled workforce, a resilient local economy, and the right incentives, such that businesses succeed. With a partnership approach, we have an opportunity to work together for the good of the region and develop a stronger collective understanding of planning, licensing and regulations. This approach will help to position the region to new investment and development in a cohesive manner.

Most importantly, we must set the collective tone, vision and ambition for the South of Scotland's visitor economy. We make no apology for the fact that this strategy charts a hugely ambitious path to sustained, game-changing growth in our visitor economy. We have set a bold vision, which we *will* achieve. Articulating this vision and showing clear leadership, allows us to invite appropriate investors to join us on this journey of growth and prosperity.

In recent years there have been significant investments into the region, including for example Borders Railway and the five-star SCHLOSS Roxburgh in the Scottish Borders. We must ensure that these investments succeed, if we wish others to follow.

We will do this by:

- Identifying key strategic opportunities for investment and working together to offer the right package of business support to secure appropriate investment
- Establish sustained, open communication channels which allow us to listen to businesses and prospective investors, so we understand and can address potential blockers and impediments to investments
- Establish integrated efficient systems with the two local authorities to ensure that significant prospective investments are well supported through planning and licensing, in an effective and timely way
- Maximising current tourism investment pipeline opportunities linked to the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, Edinburgh and South-east Scotland City Regional – Regional Prosperity Framework and Levelling Up funding to develop the visitor experience.

3. Support business to succeed:

Without businesses and enterprises there would be no visitor economy. We must support them to succeed.

The years leading up to this strategy were a uniquely challenging business environment, with Brexit, Covid, cost of living (and doing business), rising energy costs, new regulations, and increasing business rates. If we want a thriving visitor economy we must get behind businesses. Their success is our success.

The visitor economy is like a bar stool with three legs: the private sector, the public sector and communities/the third sector. To succeed, all three must support, and benefit from, the visitor economy. We must build a culture of mutual support and collective endeavour, dismantling any barriers of mutual suspicion.

The public sector needs to create the conditions for businesses and enterprises to thrive; it benefits from their success through tax receipts and collective prosperity. Communities need to get behind businesses and welcome visitors; they benefit from the jobs created and local products and services sustained by tourism. And business needs to work closely with community interests and ensure that their success is putting back into the local economy, with tangible community benefit.



Stranraer Harbour, Dumfries and Galloway

Collaboration and Support:

Effective collaboration and mutual support is key to success. We need to use the collective strength of all partners – local, regional and national - to support our businesses and allow them to flourish in welcoming our visitors. We want to make it easier for businesses to thrive. Key elements of support will include helping businesses be digitally discoverable and bookable, improving quality, contributing to, and accessing, data and supporting businesses on their Net Zero journey.

We will do this by:

- Having a strong, effective and well-supported destination management and marketing organisation which functions as an inclusive network representing and supporting all of the visitor economy.
- Building mutual understanding between the private and public sector, with informed decision-making, unblocking investment pipelines by having direct channels to resolve issues in planning and licensing, and easing bureaucratic hurdles, ensuring that regulation is proportionate and effective.
- Facilitating collaboration, sharing and peer learning between organisations, such that each individual business isn't having to reinvent solutions to the same challenges, and success breeds success.
- Developing a clear and coordinated programme of needs-led business support from all organisations (SSDA, VS, SDS, Business Gateway, SOSE, LAs, Scotland Food & Drink, etc), so businesses know exactly what support is available where and are able to easily tap into it.
- Developing a locally-led approach to destination development by regularly bringing together businesses and communities to understand and respond to local priorities and to allow towns, such as Kirkcudbright, the artists's town, to showcase their unique identities.



Floors Castle, Scottish Borders

Representation:

It is all too easy for well-intended regulation or investment to have unintended negative consequences if either communities or local businesses and enterprises are not well listened to or understood. As partners, we therefore commit to active listening and engagement with the industry and with communities, to understand their needs, concerns and priorities. We will have clear systems to ensure these local views are formally represented and acted upon, with channels for sustained two-way dialogue, and public reporting.

We will do this by:

- Having bi-annual Locally Led Destination Development meetings in every part of the region, specifically to listen to, represent and act on the experience of local businesses and communities
- Developing specific new mechanisms for businesses to share information about how/where prospective new investments are being delayed or deterred by planning or licensing, with a quarterly review of this data by the SSDA and Council leaders to develop practical solutions
- Having bi-annual meetings between the SSDA and the senior leadership of the two local authorities, SOSE and VisitScotland, to share views heard from businesses and communities
- Bi-annually reporting back on the views and priorities communicated by business and communities, and what action has been taken
- Having the SSDA and VisitScotland actively represented on the Regional Economic Partnership.



Workforce development:

There are many challenges in recruiting and retaining staff across the industry, including a lack of housing, seasonal employment, fair wages, and career development. Although these issues are not unique to the South of Scotland, or the tourism sector, ageing demography and early retirement means that the region has a smaller workforce than other areas – put simply, there is less of a pool of people to draw upon.

This workforce challenge is exacerbated by negative perceptions of the industry, which is putting off young people from embarking on a career in tourism and hospitality. Too often, the prevailing narrative is of poor wages, long hours, little career progression and poor mental health. This needs to change. We need to build a strong visitor economy, proudly at the heart of the community, providing quality year-round employment for a skilled local workforce.

We will do this by:

- Developing a workforce skills plan for the South of Scotland's visitor economy
- Advocating for careers in tourism and hospitality, building respect and recognition
- Working closely with Skills Development Scotland and other stakeholders to have a clear and compelling package of services to support workforce development
- Looking for practical solutions to the specific shortage of trained chefs in the region
- Supporting the development of relevant qualifications and pathways, to encourage our young people to choose it as a career as they leave school
- Working directly with the two colleges in the South of Scotland to provide appropriate practical training, which is linked to industry and embedded in the South of Scotland, such that young people can train, work and stay in the region
- Encouraging and supporting businesses and enterprises to adopt a Fair Work approach to their staffing policies to ensure that the South of Scotland is a Fair Work destination
- Establishing the South of Scotland as a year-round destination, with year-round employment.



Data insights sharing:

Data-led decision-making allows businesses and enterprises to embrace commercial opportunities and see what is working and what isn't, it allows investments to be targeted and successful. The uniquely dynamic business landscape means trends and insights are harder than ever to understand and act on: one businesses' experience can be radically different to the next, and a seemingly clear business trend can be reversed in a moment by sudden political, cultural or economic change. Our current data systems are not well suited to this challenging and changing business environment: we need to be collecting the right data, in the right way, in the right timescales and we need to support businesses to understand and use this data. To achieve this, we need to not try to measure everything for everyone. Rather, we need a pragmatic and needs-led approach to data, focussed on the data insights which will genuinely inform decision-making and contribute to success.

We will do this by:

- Consulting business to understand their data needs and what insights would inform successful decision-making
- Developing a regional tourism barometer that collects key data on visitor numbers, visitor satisfaction and destination awareness – to be publicly shared quarterly
- Creating a central data hub for businesses to access the latest data from relevant public sector/industry sources with easy to digest 'headlines'
- Actively supporting businesses to interpret, understand and use key data insights.



4. Act responsibly for long-term collective benefit

Responsible tourism is all about a collaborative approach for growing the collective value of tourism and contributing to the wellbeing economy. It does so in a way that makes better places for people to visit and live in. It maximises the positive benefits of tourism for everyone, including host communities and the environment.

Our approach to developing responsible tourism focuses on four priority areas:

- Supporting Scotland's transition to a low carbon economy
- Ensuring tourism and events are inclusive and accessible
- Embracing community-led tourism and optimising community benefits from tourism
- Supporting the protection of the South of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage.

Responsible Tourism is the golden thread that runs through this strategy and should influence every action.



Natural Capital:

The South of Scotland is a profoundly beautiful and diverse rural destination. As we grow our visitor economy, we must protect and help enhance our natural capital, as this is our greatest asset and our responsibility to future generations.

We must provide, and actively maintain, the necessary infrastructure for visitors to responsibly enjoy our natural world, remaining alert and responsive to environmental degradation, and building a visitor economy which has nature at its heart.

We will do this by:

- Working with communities and partner agencies to actively monitor the environmental impact of visitors in key areas and adjust practises as required
- Working collaboratively with regional partners to deliver the Natural Capital aspirations of the Regional Economic Partnership and the Borderlands Natural Capital Programme
- Measuring customer perception of access and seeking feedback on improvements to target future spend appropriately
- Working collectively to develop and support our paths network, recognising the 'hero' routes, including a Solway Coastal Path and locations, and agreeing on priority areas for improvement
- Investing in sustainable marine and coastal tourism
- Securing permanent funding to resource officers to work with funding bodies and the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.



Thirlestane Castle, Scottish Borders

Net Zero:

The Scottish Government has set an ambitious target for Scotland to become Net Zero by 2045. This strategy is committed to supporting Scotland achieve this target by helping businesses and communities to learn, adapt and benefit from their journey to Net Zero.

There are challenges in reaching Net Zero but also significant opportunities. We will develop, brand and celebrate the South of Scotland as a responsible, 'green' destination to bring in new visitors and help power our visitor economy.

As a UCI Bike Region we are already well placed to attract cycling visitors to our many routes and trails; however, we recognise that as an expansive, rural destination with limited east-west public transport, it is likely most visitors will continue to arrive by car. We therefore need to ensure we have an effective EV charging network across the region, so we are able to welcome electric vehicles.

We will do this by:

- Signing up to the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism
- Creating EV charging points at accommodation and visitor attractions to allow visitors to charge their vehicles
- Influencing Scottish Power to provide the necessary power supply required at accommodation and attractions for EV charging
- Encouraging and supporting EV hire at public transport hubs
- Providing a framework to support and encourage tourism businesses on a journey to Net Zero by utilising the expertise of SSDA, SOSE, VisitScotland, FLS, NatureScot, the local authorities, and the Galloway and South Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere
- Building a destination brand which has Net Zero proudly at its heart.



Wind turbines, Dumfries and Galloway

Community-led Tourism:

As we move with speed and ambition to grow our visitor economy we must learn from other areas' experience, ensuring we work within the infrastructure capacities of the region and maintain respect for local communities, their traditions and individual priorities. We must not only encourage and support community-benefit but also embrace community-led tourism, recognising communities as not only hosts but also delivery partners in the visitor economy. This is especially important in rural areas and helps build the South of Scotland's identity as an authentic and welcoming destination.

The South of Scotland is fast developing a reputation as a leader in community-led tourism, with many new social enterprises, community asset transfers, and community-led events and festivals. As the public purse tightens, we must support and enable innovative community-led solutions for the provision of key local services, such as public toilets and information points.

Working with SCOTO, the Scottish Community Tourism Network, we will explore ways of bringing community and business interests together, to ensure that tourism is actively supporting community empowerment and community-wealth building. In this way, local communities can develop visitor propositions, products and events that celebrate localness, with the community's interests at the heart.

We will embrace this locally-led, grass-roots approach to tourism, offering support and helping connect community-led projects with the wider visitor economy.

Crucially, this Responsible Tourism Strategy will integrate with the Place Plans which are currently under development across the region, to ensure we build a visitor economy which supports locally-owned community prosperity.

We will do this by:

- Having a locally-led approach to destination development, which supports the delivery of locally agreed Place Plans and recognises our communities as delivery partners
- Supporting the role of the third sector and social enterprises within the visitor economy and embedding them in product development and promotional activity
- Focusing on high-value tourism, rather than high volume
- Supporting community asset transfer initiatives which relate to a visitor proposition, to access routes to markets when ready
- Establishing an initiative to look into the creation and adoption of a circular economy, to pursue sustainability and increase wealth for communities
- Encouraging and supporting businesses and enterprises to use locally sourced and seasonal products to support and create local jobs and enhance authenticity for the visitor
- Embedding the principles of community benefit in new tourism investments
- Working with communities and the third sector to develop visitor experiences around unique elements of regional culture and heritage, including Roman and Iron Age, early Christianity, textile heritage and literary and language including Gaelic and Scots.

Accessible and Inclusive Tourism:

We want the South of Scotland to be an inclusive, welcoming, accessible and diverse destination. This has to be built into our thinking and planning from the outset: we must actively look to understand and mitigate barriers and restrictions which might exist. We are keen to attract visitors of all ages and backgrounds, including those with disabilities, the elderly, and families with young children.

We will look to support inclusive employment opportunities in the sector to help build a diverse workforce, in keeping with the Fair Work Framework.

We will work within VisitScotland's five key focus areas of inclusive tourism development:

- customer service
- information provision
- inclusive design
- inclusive events
- social tourism

We will do this by:

- Undertaking an inclusivity and accessibility audit of the destination, to identify key priority areas and tangible actions which we will report against annually
- Ensuring that accessible and inclusive tourism is included in the support and training made available to our businesses on customer service, information provision and inclusive design
- Supporting our event organisers to ensure their events are accessible
- Encouraging our businesses and communities to support social tourism schemes in the region.



Visitor management:

It is essential that we preserve the unspoiled nature of our region. We must encourage our visitors to leave no trace and to abide by the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. If there are instances in which tourism is having an adverse negative impact in a local area, whether to the community, the built environment or our natural world, we will be ready to act with appropriate collective interventions to mitigate this.

We will do this by:

- Raising awareness of responsible practices among visitors
- Encouraging businesses and enterprises to communicate these practices directly to their customers
- Working with businesses and communities at a local level to understand the impact of tourism and be ready to work with the appropriate council if active mitigations are required
- Considering the impact of new developments on the preservation of the unique charm of the South of Scotland
- Using the 'Scotland Starts Here' app and other digital tools, to track visitor movements across the South of Scotland and steer visitors away from certain areas, where required.



Motorhome visitor experience:

Scotland is a popular destination for those travelling in motorhomes. The South of Scotland will embrace the economic opportunities afforded by this growing sector while mitigating potential risks and community concerns.

We want our region to be welcoming to all visitors. We will look to specifically strengthen our motorhome offering by providing:

- More Aires (authorised motorhome overnight stop-over locations)
- Facilities for the disposal of black (toilet) and grey (washing up) waste
- Recycling and waste disposal facilities
- Clear and consistent daytime and overnight parking regulations.

Crucially, we will ensure that motorhomes meaningfully contribute to the visitor economy rather than just passing through, designing services which actively encourage local spend and which actively benefit local businesses and communities. We want to encourage motorhomes to stay in existing campsites where possible but we recognise that a number are after a more isolated and 'wild' experience.

We will do this by:

- Actively manage our motorhome offering to maximise spend in region
- Creating a region-wide motorhome experience through the development of a motorhome policy framework that covers expectations of motorhome users, waste management (black, grey and litter) and details on locations where users can/cannot park
- Creating a network of free/low-cost black/grey waste disposal on local authority properties and via the private sector
- Creating a network of overnight parking options provided by local authorities, communities and the private sector for which motorhome users should be expected to pay appropriate charges, and are encouraged to spend at existing local businesses.

SCAN TO PLAY 

