

**Report from Highland Network Office
Highland Tourism Partnership, Wednesday 23 September, 2011**

1. VisitScotland Information Centres (VICs)

The table below shows visitor numbers for the Highland and Moray VICs operated across the region. VIC figures 1 January 2011 – 31 October 2011 versus same period in 2010.

Centre	Year	Visitors	
Aviemore	2010	103668	+1.53
	2011	105262	
Daviot Wood	2010	29130	-2.58
	2011	28377	
Drumnadrochit	2010	39455	-9.31
	2011	35780	
Dufftown (figures from 1 April)	2010	5133	+4.87
	2011	5383	
Dunvegan	2010	17768	-9.67
	2011	16049	
Durness	2010	23903	+14.83
	2011	27448	
Elgin	2010	16570	-11.49
	2011	14665	
Fort Augustus	2010	59803	+13.04
	2011	67604	
Fort William	2010	188942	-1.16
	2011	186739	
Grantown	2010	22576	-3.98
	2011	21676	
Inverness	2010	138075	-14.47
	2011	118083	
Lochinver	2010	13591	+59.46
	2011	21673	
North Kessock	2010	19825	-2.3
	2011	19368	
Portree	2010	125112	-2.36
	2011	122159	
Strontian	2010	15323	-29.15
	2011	10855	
Thurso	2010	14646	-8.15
	2011	13452	
Ullapool	2010	30933	+5.07
	2011	32503	
Total	2010	864453	-2.1
	2011	847076	

Poor weather, high fuel costs and the general economic climate most likely factors for the drop in figures. Fort Augustus continues to achieve high footfall mainly due to high number of coach tours which visit the village. Inverness footfall has suffered again in 2011 due to lack of city centre pedestrian signage, however this has now been addressed. Lochinver footfall up due to new electronic counting system which counts all visitors to Assynt Visitor Centre/toilets where the VIC is located. Dufftown are showing an increase in visitor numbers, this may be due to the fact the VIC wasn't open during April last year with work being carried out on the roof. Elgin is showing a slight decrease on last year, general feedback from staff is that many visitors can't find the VIC due to the lack of signage.

2. Marketing Activity

Surprise Yourself autumn/winter



The spring /summer phase of the £3.5 million Surprise Yourself campaign has proved to be very successful generating nearly £90 million of additional economic benefit for Scotland since the start of the campaign in March - our best ever results for a domestic campaign.

Surprise Yourself autumn/winter began on 1 September, the website has taken on a new autumnal theme,

which is transferred across all surprise yourself activity. During phase one, the website well exceeded our target of 350,000 visitors with over 790,000 consumers viewing the site.

The Highland section of the updated website offers ideas for exploring the region, including suggestions to: board a boat at Neptune's Staircase; dine in a former ice house; and to discover arts & crafts in an old jail to name a few.



A new direct mail campaign, in partnership with the Highland Council, was sent to 50,000 households in September, encouraging those who may already be familiar with the Highlands to discover more of what the region has to offer during the autumn and winter months.

The ten-page promotional insert includes some of the many attractions in the region including Badcall Bay in Sutherland, the Cromarty Firth, the Isle of Ewe Smokehouse, Strathconnon, Traigh Golf Course, the Highland Wildlife Park, Torridon, Dalwhinnie and skiing in Glencoe.

The pack also includes a competition to win a romantic break to the 4 Star Duisdale Hotel on the Isle of Skye and is supported by 54 seasonal industry offers from local businesses; further offers are also available on the [Surprise Yourself website](#). In the spring /summer season the offers and promotions pages of the website were in the top 5 most visited pages with voucher downloads reaching almost 65,000.

Making Things Happen for Tourism in Caithness & Sutherland

VisitScotland in partnership with The Federation of Small Businesses, Caithness Chamber of Commerce and North Highland Tourism hosted a free industry event at Mackays Hotel in Wick on Friday 11 November.

Dr Mike Cantlay, VisitScotland Chairman was the keynote speaker at the event which featured a number of workshops and offered plenty of time for businesses to discuss opportunities, issues and priorities for their individual business and for Caithness and Sutherland as a destination.

Workshops focused on Marketing; Digital & Media and 'Setting the Local Scene'.

There were almost 100 attendees with the vast majority of feedback very positive. Similar events will be held in Fort William, Inverness & Aviemore in early 2012.

Dear Diary...



VisitScotland's first ever interactive diary designed to promote some of Scotland's best and well known as well as more surprising active pursuits is proving very popular.

VisitScotland has enlisted the help of top travel writer Robin McKelvie to write about his travels including recent visits to the Cairngorm National Park; Fort William & Lochaber (including walking part of the Great Glen Way); Speyside and Caithness & Sutherland.

The travel diary, in which Robin blogged about his visits to the Highlands is central to VisitScotland's 'Grab a Glen' campaign as part of the year of Active Scotland. Users can also share experiences, photographs and videos and influence Robin's trip through VisitScotland's Facebook sites. Robin's travel diary will also host hints, tips, and maps of Scotland, as well a competition and money-saving vouchers.

To read about Robin's trips to the Highlands visit www.visitscotland.com/grabaglen

Elgin Library Information Point

Following a review of provision by VisitScotland, the management of the tourist information function at Elgin library transferred to Moray Council's libraries and museums service from 1 November.

The new arrangement mirrors the service currently delivered from the Falconer Museum in Forres and Tomintoul Museum, both of which have scored very highly under the VisitScotland quality scheme. The Elgin information point will retain its existing winter hours of 10am to 4pm Monday to Saturday and will continue as a branded VisitScotland Information Centre.

Growth Fund Awards

Destination Loch Ness was recently awarded more than £17,000 from VisitScotland's Growth Fund to help promote Loch Ness as the perfect place to take a short break.

Destination Loch Ness will use part of the grant to further develop its online activity, targeting visitors from England and Central Scotland with social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and YouTube.

Ardnamurchan Tourist Association was recently awarded £8,175 from VisitScotland's Growth Fund. The cash boost will be used by the group to encourage more visitors from Northern England and Central Scotland into the area, especially out with the traditional summer months.

The association will use the funding to run a publicity campaign to highlight the sightseeing, walking and creative pursuits that exist to tempt visitors to the area.

3. Industry Engagement

The Quality and Tourism Partnership team north have completed their appointments with partners for 2012 accommodation and visitor guides and are now in the planning stage for next year. The focus is now being turned on training requirements and areas for improvement whilst tidying up completion of grading visits for this scheme year.

The reintroduction of flights between Inverness and Amsterdam Schipol are proving successful so far and it is hoped that this will translate into increased numbers of international visitors to the Highlands in 2012.

Prospect enquiries are continuing to come in with a view to 2012/13 and the team are following up as required.

The Surprise Yourself campaign has been well received and is still seeing positive results in terms of consumers downloading vouchers.

4. Business Tourism Unit

A summary of recent and forthcoming activity by the North office of the BTU.

September:

- Sales calls to conference agents in Manchester.
- Organisation of a VisitScotland exhibition stand at the Euromontana conference in Inverness. Local visitor guides supplied for delegates.
- Attendance of Inverness City Marketing Group Meeting.

October:

- Bid produced in conjunction with a local Ambassador to host a major surgical conference in the Highlands in 2015.
- Local visitor guides supplied for an international conference on Lipids held in Inverness.

November:

- Presentation on the Business Tourism Unit to HIE's tourism team.
- North team assisted with the organisation of Scotland Means Business, BTU's main B2B workshop attracting 40 worldwide buyers in Glasgow on 8 and 9 November.
- Hosting of a week long familiarisation visit for Russian conference organisers attending Scotland Means Business.
- Presentation on the Business Tourism Unit on the Chairman's tour to Shetland on the 15 November.
- Organisation of a familiarisation visit for 12 staff from the Expotel office in Glasgow who deal with all Scottish procurement worth £35 million.
- Attendance of Aberdeen PA event which attracts 200 guests.

December:

- Organisation of a familiarisation visit for 10 staff from leading conference agent Banks Sadler who have offices in York and London.
- Organisation and hosting of Scotland in Leeds on December 14 - a Christmas networking event for Leeds and York based conference agents.

January:

- Organisation of Scotland in Manchester on January 26 a networking dinner for Manchester based conference organisers.
- Attendance of the Events Event in Aberdeen.

February:

- Working with Flybe to host a group of Dutch based conference organisers.

Ongoing:

- Attendance of monthly Inverness Hotels Association meetings.
- Business tourism web-site www.conventionscotland.com - local partners all receive a free listing but can now opt for a new enhanced listing at a cost of £150 per annum.
- Following the launch of a new on-line bid builder which easily and quickly produces a professional bid documents, the BTU team are promoting the resource to local Ambassadors to stimulate interest in bidding for events.
www.conventionscotland.com/ambassador

5. The 2011 Season

Accommodation Occupancy (research by TNS Travel and Tourism)

The tables below show occupancy figures for July & August 2011 versus 2010.

Sector	Area	Occupancy (%)	
		July	
		2010	2011
Hotels (room occupancy)	Scotland	76	77
	Highland	81	82
Guest House / B&B (room occupancy)	Scotland	68	65
	Highland	74	74
Self-catering (unit occupancy)	Scotland	75	71
	Highland	82	76

Sector	Area	Occupancy (%)	
		August	
		2010	2011
Hotels (room occupancy)	Scotland	80	82
	Highland	87	86
Guest House / B&B (room occupancy)	Scotland	73	73
	Highland	80	80
Self-catering (unit occupancy)	Scotland	77	75
	Highland	87	86