

Focus is on making successful tourism sustainable

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The last day of this month marks what is being dubbed as 'Megxit Day'. When the Duke and Duchess of Sussex will cease to be senior royals.

Environmental campaigners will be hoping Prince Harry's positive influence in promoting sustainable tourism will, however, continue apace within his new role. The Prince is a passionate advocate on this issue and was in Edinburgh last month to address a conference organised by his Travalyst initiative, a group supported by some big industry hitters including Booking.com, TripAdvisor and Visa.

Tourism is increasingly important, currently worth an estimated GBP 5.5bn per year to Scotland's economy and accounting for more than 200,000 jobs. While the Scottish Government is keen to expand tourism, it also faces a huge challenge in achieving this without inflicting long-term damage to our environment.

It's an extremely delicate balance as some residents in tourism pressure points such as Edinburgh are already complaining of tourist saturation. An estimated 500,000 to 600,000 people now visit Skye each year. As its residents know only too well, that's a lot of visitors to be absorbed by a community with a population of only 10,000.

However many other parts of Scotland have yet to experience the full economic benefits of tourism and would like a slice of this cake. The way forward must therefore include dispersing visitors more widely across the nation.

The City of Edinburgh Council has acknowledged this and is investing in projects such as the redevelopment of the Granton coastline to help better spread visitors around the city. Persuading more tourists to travel beyond the capital to other parts of Scotland is another challenge in growing the sector in a sustainable manner.

Glasgow is well placed to capitalise on such a development. Its recent hotels boom, largely built on business travellers and the renowned SSE Hydro concert venue, now enables the city to better promote itself as a tourist destination, leveraging attractions such as the Riverside Museum, Gallery of Modern Art and the People's Palace.

Likewise, following the opening of Scotland's first V&A Museum, Dundee has also seen a rise in hotel investment and is now well-equipped to welcome additional visitors. The Heart 200 initiative, launched last summer, aims to attract visitors to and around Perth, Stirling, the Trossachs and Highland Perthshire. And Inverclyde, with its rich heritage in shipbuilding, is also investing in ambitious tourism initiatives to help alleviate pockets of deprivation across that region.

Meanwhile, VisitScotland's first trends paper of the current decade makes the point that taking advantage of traditionally quieter periods to disrupt seasonality is a sustainable activity. By developing new events and offering specialist group discounts in these periods Edinburgh's tourism industry can attract a more balanced visitor spread throughout the year.



The Scottish Government must also continue working with partners to promote other forms of tourism sustainability such as better public facilities, including improved waste disposal infrastructure, in high volume areas. Promoting greener travel is also key. This could include working imaginatively with rail providers to promote discounted travel to Scotland and facilitating more electric vehicle charging points, especially across the popular North Coast 500 motoring route.

Delivering successful and responsible tourism will require close cooperation between all players within the sector, from businesses and agencies that benefit from tourism, to organisations such as Travalyst, which are committed to achieving the right balance between economic growth and protecting our natural habitat. Ambassadors, including Prince Harry, who advocate this balanced approach remain essential to this intention.



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