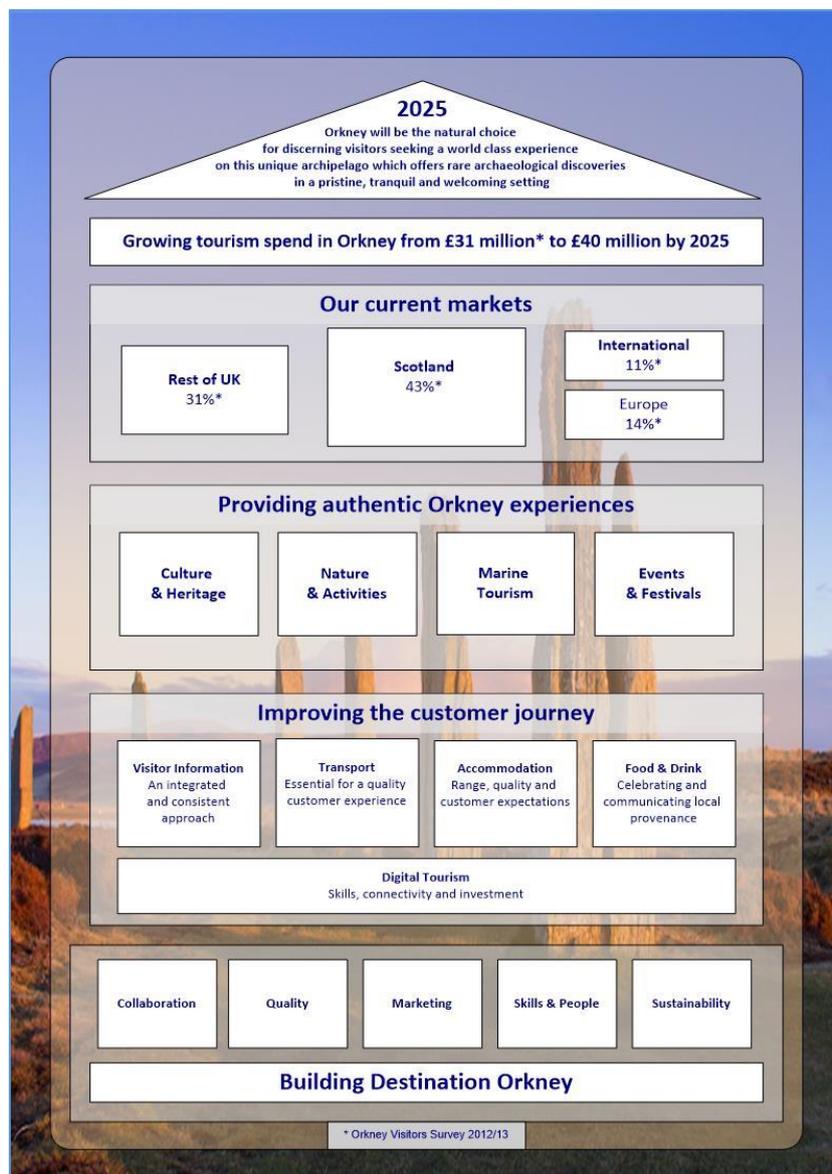


Destination Orkney

The Orkney Tourism Strategy Summary

Introduction

Adopted by Destination Orkney (formerly Orkney’s Area Tourism Partnership), the strategy ‘rocket’ is a one-page summary of the strategy for tourism to 2025. It is intended to provide a context within which projects designed to contribute to the 2025 vision can be undertaken.



On the following pages, the strategy summary is explained in more detail.

The strategy summary explained

The summary 'rocket' diagram is based on a model created by the Scottish Tourism Alliance and adapted by destination marketing/management organisations across Scotland. It provides a powerful snapshot of the strategy in a visual way, with the detail set out in a few underpinning strategies.

The vision at the top sums up our aspirations for tourism in 'soft' terms, with a hard target of 40 million pounds tourism spend in Orkney by 2025.

Our current markets

The next part of the summary diagram shows the current markets, illustrating the dominance of the UK market. International tourism, at 25% of the total, is not insignificant, but our ability to directly and cost-effectively promote Orkney as a destination to international visitors is constrained. That said, international visitors tend to stay longer and spend more, and their economic contribution is significant.

Providing authentic Orkney experiences

It is the authenticity of the Orkney experience which attracts visitors, offering us a potential competitive advantage at a time when the trend among consumers is for unique experiences to become more and more important. This section of the diagram includes the four priority themes for marketing activity. The areas are broadly defined, giving us flexibility in how each theme is developed over time.

1. Culture and heritage

Our culture and heritage is distinctly 'Orkadian' and this is expressed in many ways. For example: place names; dialect; community events; arts and crafts; quality local produce; the unique archaeology of Orkney, including the Heart of Neolithic Orkney and the ongoing internationally famous discoveries at the Ness of Brodgar and on Westray; the distinctive culture and heritage of the smaller islands; our history in two world wars; the deep connection with Canada created by the legacy of the Hudson's Bay Company; and our Viking past.

2. Nature and activities

The natural environment, our landscapes and seascapes and the wildlife with which the islands abound, is an important resource. It is a fragile resource. The views which are so persuasive in attracting visitors, and which form the backdrop for many a holiday selfie shared widely on social media, will be impacted negatively if development is inappropriate and visually intrusive. The seas and beaches need to be kept clear of pollution and litter. The wildlife species which make Orkney their home, or which stop here on passage, need to be managed and protected. For example, one current threat receiving public attention is the presence of non-native stoats, which prey on ground-nesting birds.

Outdoor activities in Orkney are popular. Some, such as diving and fishing, bring visitors directly. Others are enjoyed by visitors who are motivated to come to Orkney for more general reasons – walking and cycling for instance. Outdoor activities bring visitors into direct contact with our natural environment, and footpath creation (and maintenance) is, for example, an important part of the infrastructure we create to be enjoyed by visitors and residents alike.

3. Marine tourism

This broad theme includes leisure sailing, windsurfing and other uses of the marine environment. It also, crucially, includes cruise liners. The cruise liner market for Orkney has grown rapidly, with the islands becoming the most popular cruise liner port of call in the UK. Visiting cruise liners create a demand for local services such as tour guides and transport.

They also, however, have the potential to overwhelm local services and create conflict between ‘day’ and ‘staying’ visitors. This is reflected now in some (more or less heated) debate between different interest groups and community members. It is hoped that the Volume Tourism study under way at present will provide evidence and recommendations to move this issue from debate to resolution in the context of a more general need to manage the visitor experience of Orkney.

4. Events and Festivals

Orkney’s events and festivals calendar is diverse, appealing to a wide range of interests. Scotland’s national theme years provide opportunities to keep festivals fresh and current, such as *Magnus 900*, part of the St. Magnus Festival, in the *2017 Year of History, heritage and archaeology*. Creating linkages between festivals will be of benefit in strengthening the annual calendar, making best-use of investment in festival/even infrastructure and cross-promoting festivals and events.

Improving the customer journey

The principal focus of the preceding section of the diagram was on destination marketing. This section focuses more on destination management, broken down into five topics. Destination management can only be undertaken effectively by each of the organisations involved in it working in partnership to a common, shared, agenda.

1. Visitor information

Providing accurate, motivational information to visitors is essential at each stage of their ‘customer journey’. Visitor information provision is very fragmented at present, lacking an integrated and consistent approach. The Visitor Information Centre, VisitScotland web site, VisitOrkney web site and individual businesses and organisations all provide information but there is little consistency, and weak linkage to the *Orcadian authentic experiences* themes identified above.

2. Transport

Transport to Orkney whether by car, train, bus, ferry or flight, or some combination of these, is essential for a quality and affordable customer experience. We are perceived as difficult and expensive to get to and this is a barrier to some consumers. Schedules, integrated timetabling, ease of booking and inclusion of transport companies in the provision of consistent visitor information are all important issues.

Similar issues affect internal transport, made even more critical by the need to make travel to and from the outer islands as seamless as possible.

3. Accommodation

The range, quality and 'bookability' of accommodation has a direct impact on persuading a visitor to commit to visit Orkney. Meeting or exceeding their expectations is equally important in encouraging repeat visits. Ongoing investment in Orkney's accommodation stock in line with trends in visitor behaviour will be important for the long-term growth of tourism.

4. Food and drink

Orkney's food and drink is of high quality, and is an integral part of the appeal of the islands. Celebrating the range and quality of our food and drink, and telling the story of the provenance of the food visitors enjoy during their stay in Orkney, adds to the experience and will encourage visitors to look for Orkney produce in the shops when they get back home. Collaboration between the food & drink and tourism sectors has always been a characteristic of the authentic Orkney experience but renewing and deepening the connections will be to everyone's benefit.

5. Digital tourism

Underpinning all aspects of how we improve the customer journey is digital tourism. Whether we like it or not, the digital agenda is changing how tourism operates all over the world and the harsh reality is that destinations (and businesses) which fail to harness the potential of digital technologies will be left at a competitive disadvantage. Most consumers begin their journey online. Orkney needs to be there with compelling stories, integrated and consistent visitor information and easily bookable travel and accommodation.

Within Orkney, visitors will look for free wifi and ubiquitous 4G connectivity, and will expect information to be available in the right format, on the appropriate technologies, throughout their visit. If they know in advance that they won't get it, they may well go elsewhere. If they visit and it isn't available then Orkney will have disappointed them, and we will have missed an opportunity to harness the huge potential of user-generated live social media content.

Building Destination Orkney

This final section of the diagram is the foundation on which everything else is built: a set of principles including –

- a commitment to **collaborative working**, making partnership a reality instead of merely an aspiration;
- an emphasis on **quality**. Everything does not have to be five-star luxury standard but we need to set standards and achieve them, recognising that consumers expect quality and value for money;
- **marketing** Orkney effectively, emphasising the authenticity of the experience we offer;
- a recognition that the **skills** of the people involved in tourism in Orkney will benefit from continuous improvement;
- throughout everything we do, **sustainability** is essential.

Conclusion

Using the strategy summary as context, the Destination Orkney group is currently preparing an action plan designed to co-ordinate activities focussed on achieving the vision for Orkney tourism.

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