

Sustainable Tourism – STA Council Position Statement

Why is sustainable tourism important?

‘Sustainable Tourism’ is an underpinning capability within the *Tourism Scotland 2020* industry strategy and this statement clarifies what we mean and how the industry can promote and enhance sustainable tourism. The role of the STA is to show leadership in setting out our industry objectives and enabling others – including individual businesses, trade bodies and Destination Management Organisations – to address them.

The success of Scotland’s tourism industry rests not only on its economic competitiveness but also on its interactions with the natural, cultural and social environment upon which it depends.

A focus on sustainability can also give Scottish tourism businesses a competitive edge by generating greater community support for tourism, achieving cost savings through increased efficiency, improving the customer journey and creating new market opportunities. Protecting and enhancing the Scottish environment, society and culture are vital to the brand, the industry and sustaining Scotland’s economic growth.

What do we mean by sustainable tourism?

The Scottish Tourism Alliance (STA) has adopted a definition of sustainable tourism closely based on that used by the UN World Tourism Organisation:

Sustainable tourism takes full responsibility for its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, host communities and future generations.

To be sustainable, tourism needs to be competitive and profitable as well as environmentally and socially responsible. It is important that the terminology should not get in the way here. Sustainable tourism essentially means good, successful and beneficial tourism – a concept relevant to all operators and policy makers.

Inevitably, tensions can arise in promoting sustainable tourism, most notably owing to the transport impacts from visitor travel to Scotland. However, we must manage these complexities responsibly in order to help the industry and visitors to Scotland take informed decisions.

How can the industry policy address sustainable tourism?

Becoming a more sustainable industry is a journey rather than a destination: while recognising and celebrating the positive progress already being made, there will always be more to do. Crucially, sustainability is not an add-on or an afterthought. It is vital that actions to develop our sustainable tourism capabilities are *integrated* into the delivery of the industry strategy at three distinct levels:

- **Stimulating Scotland’s growth markets**, helping to make Scotland a destination of first choice by 2020;
- **Providing authentic experiences** in relation to Nature, Heritage and Activities; Destination Towns and Cities; Events and Festivals; and Business Tourism; and
- **Improving the customer journey** – particularly at the level of individual tourism businesses – around Food and Drink, Transport, Accommodation and Digital Connectivity.

Based on work from the European Tourism Sustainability Group and the VisitScotland Sustainable Tourism Strategy, the STA has identified eight policy objectives that will help build the industry’s capabilities around sustainable tourism. The objectives relate both to the industry as a whole as well as individual businesses; sustainability starts with assuming greater *personal* responsibility for change.

Growth: Capitalise on the market opportunities associated with sustainable tourism

Develop and grow Scotland's authentic experiences specifically associated with sustainable tourism including walking, cycling, nature-based tourism and adventure tourism. Promote the use of local food and drink with strong Scottish provenance. Develop and promote year-round tourism activity to support growth in revenue. Showcase businesses that have strong CSR (corporate social responsibility) policies and environmental accreditations.

Transport: Reduce the impact of tourism transport

Reduce the impact of tourism transport, focus on promoting a shift towards more environmentally friendly forms of transport (train, coach/bus, ferry, cycle, foot), both to and within tourism destinations in Scotland. Encourage longer trips to Scotland, providing economic and sustainability benefits. Anticipate and prepare for future shifts in travel behaviour.

Waste and resources: Minimise tourism resource use and waste production

Take actions to reduce resource use and waste produced; where resources cannot be reduced, to re-use and recycle wherever possible.

Natural and cultural heritage: Protect and enhance Scotland's natural and cultural heritage

Promote Scotland's natural and cultural heritage to visitors and support the activities of organisations responsible for its protection and enhancement.

Communities: Enhance quality of life for Scottish communities

Support Scottish communities through developing local accommodation, events, attractions and products (e.g. food and drink, arts, crafts). Advocate local engagement and empowerment in tourism planning and management within the wider community development process.

Employment and skills: Improve the quality of tourism jobs

Encourage best practice in workplace and workforce development, including investing in skills and career development, to offer more satisfying and higher quality employment across the industry.

Accessibility: Make visits to Scotland accessible to all

Improve access in Scotland to help those who are elderly or infirm, have visual/hearing impairments and other access needs, and economically disadvantaged persons.

Climate Change adaptation: reduce greenhouse gases and adapt to climate change

Support tourism businesses and destinations to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) and adapt to the unavoidable consequences of climate change.

What support is available for the industry?

There are a great many tourism businesses who are *already* taking positive steps to become more sustainable. Sharing ideas is one of the best communications channels that we have and it is the STA's role to help empower existing advocates. In addition, the STA will support a range of other practical tools that can help make sustainable tourism 'real' to businesses including:

- the STA itself being a strong ambassador for sustainable tourism practices and aspirations;
- establishing an online focus for information, case studies and other resources;
- providing simple, practical information to businesses on who to contact for support;
- building industry capacity by sharing best practice and promoting skills training;
- collaborating with public and private sector organisations that offer advice to tourism businesses to ensure that sustainable tourism practices are consistently promoted at all levels within the industry.

How will we monitor and review the implementation of the 'sustainable tourism' underpinning capability ?

The STA Strategy Leadership Group is responsible for monitoring and reviewing progress in delivering these objectives on an annual basis as part of the broader exercise of monitoring the delivery of the *Tourism Scotland 2020 strategy*. This will involve identifying knowledge gaps and collating the evidence needed to build a strong case for action for promoting and implementing sustainable tourism practices.