

First Minister's expenses for US trip released

The First Minister's trip to the US interested The Edinburgh Reporter, particularly the second half of it, as she arrived in New York when I was already there for Tartan Week.

I had the opportunity of following the First Minister around Manhattan for the day and interviewing her there without too many other news outlets in evidence. Glenn Campbell from the BBC was there and had been out in California too, but apart from Reuters we were the only other.



I published an account of the Day in New York in magazine form and you can read it again below. There was some criticism of the expense and the effect of the visit, and as you will see the First Minister herself gave us her own reply to that.

Now we have the full facts and figures on the visit, and the expenses incurred, which might be weighed against the inward investment attracted, or indeed just the effect of the First Minister being in the US to 'press the flesh'.

The future relationships which that might engender are as yet unknown of course, but Nicola Sturgeon is, in my own experience of seeing her in action, always well briefed and on message. She knows the facts and numbers inside out and did not appear to put a foot wrong during her time in the States.



She began her visit in California and then worked back east across the US to New York and then flew home to Scotland from there just a day ahead of the Tartan Day Parade. This was a

bit of a pity as her presence on that day when Scots from all across the States gather, would have been welcomed by the ex-pats and Scots who parade down Sixth Avenue.

So her visit was very much about business and investment, not tartan and bagpipes. It was left to some SNP MPs to represent the political party and the Presiding Officer, Ken Mackintosh MSP to represent the Scottish Parliament, which he did with his customary grace and style.



The First Minister's visit to the US lasted from 2-7 April and was choc-full of meetings from end to end.

We made an FOI request to The Scottish Government, and discovered that the expenses of Ms Sturgeon's travel and accommodation were as follows :

First Minister

Flights £7053.95

Accommodation £1426.03

Subsistence £0

Seven accompanying officials (who included press and media officers as well as security)

Flight costs £15,502.13

Accommodation £7145.45

Subsistence £2045.85

The total cost of car travel in the US was £7494.73. This sounds high if you equate it to what you might have paid for one saloon car if you were visiting on holiday, but then the

First Minister and her staff travelled in several cars, in much the same way as Barack Obama did when he visited Scotland the other day. (We counted 12 vehicles in the former President's entourage.)

So how do you balance those expenses of £40,668.14 against the potential benefit of spending this money and time in the US?



The Prime Minister Theresa May on the campaign trail in Edinburgh

Just as a reminder, the 2017 General Election had not yet been announced; the snap election was declared by the Prime Minister Theresa May on 18 April 2017. All that anyone knew at the time was that Britain was, and still is, on course for Brexit as Section 50 had been triggered.

Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop MSP, explained the context of US trade and the reasons behind the First Minister's visit in an answer made to Ash Denham MSP in the Scottish Parliament on 20 April 2017.

Here is the answer in full :

“The visit focused on promoting trade and investment, boosting tourism, sharing best practice across the public and private sector and promoting Scottish innovation, entrepreneurship and culture.

“The relationship between Scotland and America is an important one with deep and long-standing ties reflected by the strong economic, cultural and personal links of our citizens. The US is Scotland's top source of inward investment, accounting for 36% of projects and is Scotland's second largest export partner – worth £4.56 billion or 15.9% of all international exports.

“This visit came at a crucial time following the UK's vote to

leave the EU and the single market, and only days after the formal triggering of Article 50. It was important that the First Minister took this opportunity to reassure businesses and visitors from the United States that Scotland is an outward looking, welcoming country and remains open for business.

“Beginning her engagements in California the First Minister, joined by Dr Lena Wilson of Scottish Enterprise and Chief Scientific Advisor Professor Sheila Rowan, focussed on opportunities for Scotland’s technology sector, low carbon innovation, university collaborations, and Scottish start-ups.

“The First Minister met representatives from Par Equity and confirmed that Par Equity will open its first office in San Francisco and launch a \$125 million fund, focussed on providing investment opportunities in health technology in Scotland and access to the US market for Scottish companies.

“At Stanford the First Minister hosted a business breakfast for an influential business and academic audience in which she promoted Scottish Government support for high quality international research partnerships that further the economic, scientific and social aims of both Scotland and California, with specific reference to Strathclyde, Stanford and the SU2P initiative which also includes the universities of St Andrews, Edinburgh, Heriot Watt and Glasgow.

“Meetings with Apple and Tesla concentrated on opportunities for shared public and private sector collaboration in the areas of next generation health and well-being research, including the use of digital health and care to deliver better results through personalised, proactive and self-managed care and on opportunities to further develop Scotland’s sustainable energy initiatives and reinforce the strategic importance of energy storage technology to Scotland’s wider energy strategy, highlighting the common

goal of a holistic energy system.



Funding for women in business doubled Photo First Minister of Scotland on Flickr

“The First Minister also hosted a dinner with representatives of major US firms to discuss opportunities for Scotland in Silicon Valley and met with American angel investors, ahead of a delegation of seven female CEOs supported by [Investing Women to California](#), to highlight the Scottish Governments vision of Scotland as a world-leading entrepreneurial and innovative nation committed to unleashing the economic potential of women.

“Building on the technology focus of the visit, the First Minister later visited the Flatiron School, a digital skills academy in New York that is helping equip people with skills to gain employment in ICT and digital technology occupations. The Flatiron school provided an opportunity to learn from one of the foremost digital skills academies in the world and followed the announcement that the Scottish Government is to make £36 million available in loans to business to support digital skills training.

“The visit also focussed on key economic opportunities in the financial services sector, food and drink and tourism.



The First Minister and Dr Lena Wilson at Marriott Starlab in New York

“In New York the First Minister met with representatives of Marriott Hotels and welcomed their continued investment and strong growth pipeline in Scotland including their commitment to create 7 new hotels and 1,400 new rooms in Scotland by 2021, reinforcing Scotland’s key tourism investment and visitor attraction strengths at a global leadership level.

“She also met with Executives from TripAdvisor and announced a European-first, multi-year collaboration, with VisitScotland. The unique partnership with the world’s largest travel website will attract up to 70 million new visitors every year generating a potential additional spend of £150million.



“Celebrating Scotland’s food and drink industry success the First Minister attended a showcase event in New York organised by Scottish Development International to promote Scottish produce to an audience of over 100 North American buyers and industry influencers and to showcase new agreements secured by Scottish firms worth £8m of export sales to North America, further strengthening food and drink exports in a market that was worth £1billion in 2016.

“The First Minister also held business meetings with Morgan Stanley and BlackRock to further develop the relationships with key inward investors and met with staff and graduates at Aberdeen Asset Management, officially opening their expansion in New York and discussed economic developments in Scotland, Europe and the US with Professor Joseph Stiglitz of the Council of Economic Advisers.



Visit to Tisch School of Performing Arts to meet Scottish ballet students on an exchange trip

“In addition to the focus on business and investment, the First Minister met Scottish Ballet Youth Exchange students studying at the prestigious New York University TISCH School of the Performing Arts, supported by Scottish Government funding.

“Fourteen participants from Scotland’s leading performing arts schools aged between 14 and 24 are currently taking part

in a two week visit to the US, collaborating with dance students from TISCH. This allows Scottish Ballet to showcase Scottish dance training abroad and to create a new work to be premiered at The Joyce Theater in New York City.

“This initiative was part of a wider £100,000 International Touring Fund awarded to Scottish Ballet this year to enable their first ever run in New York

“The First Minister also hosted a reception to celebrate the Scottish Ballet’s first tenure in New York City, and promoted the world-class calibre of Scottish performing arts.

“The visit also provided an opportunity to highlight the contribution Scotland can make to key global challenges.

“During the California leg of her visit the First Minister reaffirmed Scotland’s role in tackling climate change during a meeting with the Governor of California. She signed a joint agreement between Scotland and California committing to work together on climate change. The First Minister and the Governor discussed how the two administrations could work together to achieve the ambitions set out in the Under2 MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) and the importance of offshore wind in tackling climate change and considered how the two governments could share knowledge and best practice in developing this technology.

“The First Minister followed the agreement with a speech to over 250 Stanford academics and students on Scotland’s Place in the World which can be viewed here:

“The First Minister then took part in a Q&A, hosted by Professor Michael McFaul, Director at The Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University.



“Attending the 8th Women in the World Summit, the First

Minister discussed Scotland's commitment to equality, her personal experience of being a female leader and the importance of empowering women and girls."

This was part of what she had to say:

"This followed on from a visit by the First Minister to the UN where she held meetings with UN Women, the Head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UK's Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

"During a speech at the UN, the First Minister announced £1.2m of funding to train more than 200 women from conflict zones around the world on peacekeeping and conflict resolution. The First Minister used her address to highlight the importance of mediation and respect for human rights as a way of preventing conflict, and lent her support to the UN Secretary General's call for more female representation in the United Nations."

In full the announcements made during the visit were as follows :

Xilinx Inc is to invest £3.8million in its specialist research centre in Edinburgh. 12 new jobs and protection for 30 existing jobs.

Spiritus Partners Limited, ION Geophysical Corporation and PPS UK to invest £6.3 million in Scotland creating or safeguarding 44 jobs.

Par Equity opened a new US office launching a \$125 million fund supporting Scottish companies to expand into the US.

Scottish Food and Drink companies secured £8 million of export sales to North America contributing to a market worth £1

billion in 2016 to Scotland.

Marriott International will open 7 new hotels and 1400 new hotel rooms in Scotland by 2021 including a major hotel in Edinburgh.

European first collaboration between VisitScotland and TripAdvisor promoting 70 million potential new visitors with an additional spend of £150 million.

Cooperation Agreement on Climate Change signed with California Governor Jerry Brown.

£1.2m funding to train women in conflict zones on peacekeeping and conflict resolution.

Funding for Investing Women a Scottish social enterprise supporting women led businesses doubled to £120,000.



I travelled to New York courtesy of [Delta Airlines](#). When they launched the year round flight last year from Edinburgh to JFK the airline quoted Scottish Government figures on the US being the number one inbound tourism market to Scotland. There were nearly 500,000 US visitors to Scotland in 2014 and that had increased by 20% from the previous year.

I attended the VisitScotland business breakfast at the Yale Club in downtown Manhattan and it was clear that there is a huge push to increase the US visitor numbers even further, using springboards like the Outlander series around which American tourists can build their trip.

Particularly in 2017 the Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology this kind of tourism is key to helping people find out about the past through initiatives led by The Scottish Government and assisted by many other bodies including VisitScotland.

VisitScotland has at its core an ambition to grow tourism revenues by £1 billion by 2010. According to VS figures tourist spending in Scotland contributes £6 billion to Scottish GDP which is about 5% of the total Scottish GDP so it is an important arm of the Scottish economy.

So these are the facts. The expenses amounted to just over £40,000 for five days in the US for eight people including the First Minister.

If Scotland or the UK is to perform on the international economic stage, it seems to us it is important to get out and speak to the people who make such decisions. Is it not?