

# Walking and hiking on the up in Scotland

**Walking, hiking and rambling is the number one planned activity for visitors to Scotland this summer, according to new figures coinciding with National Walking Month.**

The new VisitScotland stats show that tourists are flocking to Scotland from around the UK and overseas for short walks and coast-to-coast trails as well as Munro-bagging.

Scotland's national tourism organisation said visitors then spend millions on food and drink, accommodation and other attractions alongside their walks.

VisitScotland's Domestic Sentiment Tracker for intended short breaks up to September 2024, shows that 43% of UK visitors plan on "walking, hiking or rambling".

The figures make walking the most popular activity, ahead of sampling local food and drink, visiting heritage sites, visiting cultural attractions and exploring scenic areas by car.

Tourists seeking walking content on VisitScotland.com have also increased sharply since January, generating almost 40,000 page views in March alone – 69% higher than March 2023.

Meanwhile, a new visitor survey showed that "scenery and landscape" was the top reason (70%) given by UK and international visitors combined for choosing Scotland as a destination, while over a quarter (27%) mentioned outdoor

activities.

There were 28.4 million leisure day visits lasting over three hours in Scotland in 2023, where people took part in outdoor leisure activities and sports such as walking or cycling, generating £460 million of spend to Scotland.

VisitScotland found that over a third of “older independents” (36%) actively seek to “connect with nature” compared with nearly a quarter of families (23%) and people of retirement age (24%).

Nearly half of people (47%) visiting Scotland from elsewhere in the UK said they sought to connect with nature. The most popular activity among “nature visitors” was “walking, hiking or rambling”, ahead of visiting heritage sites such as castles and wildlife experiences such as birdwatching.

Jacqui Soutar, Senior Marketing Insight Manager at VisitScotland said: “We know walking and hiking remain one of the most popular activities for visitors to Scotland.

“Every part of the country has something to offer, from accessible trails and guided walks to long-distance routes and our world-famous Munros.

“Not only is it a fantastic way to enjoy Scotland’s unrivalled scenery and wildlife while also staying active, it helps encourage visitors to slow down and immerse themselves in the communities and landscapes they encounter.

“This in turn provides an opportunity to explore local attractions and food and drink experiences en route which supports jobs and contributes to the economy.”

Scotland is renowned for its walking options, from easy walks for families to hill walks, long distance routes, coastal and woodland rambles and accessible trails.

Scotland has 28 long distance walking routes or “Great

Trails”, including the John Muir Way which has just celebrated its tenth anniversary and long-established favourites like the West Highland Way and the Southern Upland Way, which this year celebrates its 40th anniversary, going from coast to coast.

Others, including Fife’s Pilgrim Way and Rob Roy Way help visitors get to know a particular area and its heritage.

There are also 282 Munros (over 3000ft), 222 Corbetts (2500-2999ft), numerous Grahams (2000-2499ft with a drop of at least 150m all round) and even Marilyn’s, which cover any hill with a prominence of 150m.

Visitors enjoying walks in Scotland can also take advantage of visitor attractions, wildlife watching, historical sites and food and drink en route, providing a positive impact on other tourism businesses from cafés and restaurants to accommodation.

Stuart Chalmers, Forestry and Land Scotland’s National Visitor Services Manager, said: “As Scotland’s largest provider of outdoor recreation opportunities, we look after 300 visitor destinations around Scotland.

“Between them, these destinations are visited around 11 million times a year and almost three quarters of those visits are from walkers.

“With options ranging from local woodland walks to longer, out-of-the-way hikes and some of Scotland’s most spectacular landscapes, it’s no surprise that so many people enjoy the restful and energising experience of a walk in our forests.”

Gordon Pearson, founder of tour company Wow Scotland, which specialises in trips to Skye, said there had been a noticeable surge in interest in hiking tours since the pandemic.

He said: “In the last couple of years, post pandemic, there has been increasing demand for hiking. There is an insatiable

demand for Skye, and we see all nationalities on our hiking tours.

“For a lot of people, hiking to the Old Man of Storr, the Quiraing and the foot of the Cuillin Mountains is a dream. They’ve seen photographs and can’t quite believe the reality is even better.”



Walking in the John Muir Country Park, Dunbar.