

More visits to Scottish tourist spots

Many of Scotland's visitor attractions enjoyed an increase in the number of visits last year with one in three exceeding pre-pandemic levels – and Edinburgh attractions are leading the way.

The latest annual Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (ALVA) members' visitor figures show that visits to Scotland's most popular sites increased by 3.2% in 2024 compared to 2023.

The top ten alone drew more than 12 million visits compared with 11,967,989 in 2023.

Scotland was also home to six of the 30 most visited attractions in the UK, compared with just five for the whole of the rest of the UK outside London.

The National Museum of Scotland (NMS) remained the nation's most popular attraction, climbing one place to 11th overall in the UK, ahead of National Galleries Scotland (14th) and Edinburgh Castle (15th).

The NMS, with 2,314,974 visitors, exceeded its 2019 pre-pandemic high by 5% – beating its 2023 total by 128,133 visits.

Edinburgh Castle, the most popular paid-for attraction, enjoyed a 4% increase to 1,981,152, while National Galleries Scotland had a record-breaking year with nearly two million

visitors up 9% on the previous year.

The Riverside Museum in Glasgow (1,301,989), Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum (1,182,204), Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (the most popular outdoor attraction with 1,041,767), National War Museum, Edinburgh (756,200), Stirling Castle (594,938), Burrell Collection (556,081) and Glenfinnan Monument (546,377) made up Scotland's top ten.

The largest percentage increases in Scotland included Craigievar Castle (32,852 visitors), which reopened after a period of closure for repairs, and Caerlaverock Castle, which welcomed 39,692 visitors.

Edinburgh Zoo, in the year following the departure of its famous giant pandas back to China, dropped out of Scotland's top ten after falling 14% from 618,719 visits in 2023 to 531,557 last year.

And a reduction in the number of visits to the Gallery of Modern Art (125%) in Glasgow last year could be partly attributed to the success of Banksy's sell-out Cut and Run exhibition in 2023.

Although last year's 3.2% increase in Scotland was marginally behind the UK average (3.4%), only the East Midlands (+4.5%), Yorkshire and the Humber (+4.2%) and North East (+3.3%) were higher with Wales at +0.7% and Northern Ireland +3.2%.

Bernard Donoghue, Director of ALVA, said: "Scotland has been outperforming the rest of the UK for a number of years and is still punching above its weight.

"Last year, Scotland saw good international visitor numbers, particularly from North America – both the USA and Canada – and near Europe and Scandinavia.

"There was steady growth of inbound tourists but also a degree of caution on the part of the domestic audience about how they

spend their leisure pounds and hours.

“I’m very optimistic about the extent and the depth of Scottish recovery in 2025 – about an increase in international visitors but also a domestic surge.”

ALVA members

ALVA’s members are the UK’s most popular and important museums, galleries, palaces, castles, cathedrals, zoos, historic houses, heritage sites, gardens and leisure attractions.

The total number of visits to 400 ALVA sites in the UK last year was 157.2 million – 3.4% more than the previous year (146.6 million) but still 8.8% less than the 169.7 million visits in 2019.

Top in the UK in 2024 was the British Museum (6,479,952 visits) with an 11% increase on 2023 (5,820,860 visits), followed by the Natural History Museum (6,301,972, up 11%); The Crown Estate, Windsor Great Park (5,670,430 visits, up 3%); Tate Modern (4,603,025 visits, down 3%) and Southbank Centre (3,734,075 visits, up 17%).

Mr Donoghue added: “Across the UK, the recovery from the end of lockdown is proving longer than we thought because we went straight out of lockdown into a cost of living crisis.

“We said on lockdown – five years ago – that tourism was hit first, hit hardest and would take the longest time to recover.

“We have been proved correct. What is really reassuring is that people seem to be keeping up their memberships for organisations like Historic Environment Scotland and National Trust for Scotland. Spending special time with special people in special places is not something that people want to sacrifice.”

Anne Lyden, Director General, National Galleries of Scotland, said: "We're elated that the National Galleries of Scotland were able to achieve such incredible visitor numbers in 2024 with over 2.6million people visiting our three Edinburgh galleries, especially in what is becoming an increasingly challenging financial landscape for the arts.

"Despite this, the National had a record-breaking year, welcoming nearly 2 million visitors."



Modern Two © 2025 Martin McAdam