

Talking Business

[CONFERENCE & EVENTS



Talking Business - Boosting Scotland's Tourism

Caroline Packman,
Head of Business Tourism, VisitScotland

Caroline Packman, Head of Business Tourism at VisitScotland, looks at how business tourism is boosting the Scottish economy.



Caroline Packman

If there is one thing that VisitScotland has always been confident about, it is the fact that right at the top of the list of the many benefits Scotland offers is good value for money. With recent research from VisitBritain highlighting that Edinburgh and Glasgow are both in the top three most competitive European destinations in terms of price for association conferences, it is proven that Scotland really does provide a great return on investment. And, recognising that business tourism contributes £723 million a year to the Scottish economy, the sector is responding with continual investment in new and improved facilities.

Many associations already understand and benefit from the value for money message and put Scotland top of their agenda. Hosting on average more than two association events a week, the

country's portion of all international association meetings hosted in the UK rose to 29 per cent in 2009. Undoubtedly, Scotland's key industries and centres of academic excellence play a major role in attracting that business. On average a major conference took place every day in Scotland in 2009, including several high-profile events and conferences, such as: the Forbes European CEO conference at the Gleneagles Hotel; Offshore Europe in Aberdeen; plus the British Open Golf at Turnberry. In addition, the Open Championship marks its 150th anniversary with a grand return to the home of golf at The Old Course, St Andrews in 2010. Significant conferences in 2010 also include: The Institute of Occupational Safety and Health at the SECC; the British Society for Rheumatology also at the SECC; and the European Society of

Biomechanics at Edinburgh First. All of these underline just how important it is for VisitScotland's BTU (Business Tourism Unit) to keep Scotland front of mind for meeting planners and buyers throughout the world.

Anyone looking for a conference destination that has it all needs look no further than Scotland, which, for a relatively small country, offers an immense and diverse range of venues and accommodation. Purpose-built conference centres in all major cities, combined with academic venues that offer a wide range of options plus accommodation options to suit every budget, make planning an event simply a question of choice.

The flagship conference centres in Edinburgh and Glasgow each provide a superb facility within their own cities and both of them are currently undergoing major expansion and improvement. The

iconic Scottish Exhibition + Conference Centre in Glasgow is this year celebrating its 25th anniversary. As part of the celebrations, the conference centre will be implementing a range of initiatives throughout the year, ranging from concerts through to delegate support packages and including collaborations with local institutes. At the forefront of these initiatives will be a campaign focusing on commemorating the SECC's 25 'champions'. These champions will be people and organisations that have helped position the SECC and Glasgow as a globally respected destination for events and business travel and could be anyone from a taxi driver to a hotel general manager.

In Edinburgh, the Edinburgh International Conference Centre, also one of Scotland's cutting edge conference centres, has just received planning permission to begin a major expansion programme which will include a 1600-seat events hall that will double the capacity of the venue.

Our academic venues include some of the UK's most venerable universities: St Andrews; Edinburgh; Glasgow; Heriot Watt; and Aberdeen, to name just a few. With a focus on attracting the larger institutions and associations in particular, these universities have geared up their conference offerings to ensure they are on the map for some of the bigger events hosted in Scotland. It is the flexibility of their accommodation, coupled with location and academic excellence, as well as our indigenous expertise in sectors such as medicine, bio-technology, renewable energy and other key industries for Scotland that involve research and development, which have helped them punch above their weight in this sector. Once again, these are not institutions that are resting on their laurels, either.

Edinburgh First, the successful conferencing arm of Edinburgh University, has recently launched its £9 million extension of the John McIntyre Conference Centre. The newly extended building is now able to host 350 delegates theatre-style with impressive views of Edinburgh's famous Arthur's Seat landmark. The venue's ground floor also features a stylish new restaurant seating up to 650, with an adjoining bar and lounge. Further afield in St Andrews, a new £45 million School of Medicine is due to open in June 2011. Currently under construction, the school will be among the most sustainable and environmentally friendly buildings in the



Aldourie Castle

UK. With exciting plans for a large auditorium, exhibition area and two additional lecture theatres, it is no surprise the venue is already attracting interest from conference organisers looking for a world class Scottish destination.

Scotland is also a wonderful example of a country that uses its history to market itself. Throughout the country, historic and beautiful castles have been brought up to date as unique locations for corporate events. Some stunning examples include: the iconic Edinburgh Castle managed by Historic Scotland; Lennoxlove House in East Lothian, which combines inspirational meeting space with sumptuous bedrooms and spacious grounds; or the newly opened Aldourie Castle on the south side of Loch Ness, which has been restored to its Victorian splendour and is now the perfect place for teambuilding. Whether it is for a small corporate getaway in an exclusive use castle, or a larger teambuilding event, or even a gala dinner, the castles of Scotland are fast becoming the most popular venues for corporate events.

VisitScotland's Business Tourism Unit is dedicated to marketing Scotland as a destination for meetings, conferences, incentives and exhibitions. From a fully-fledged Ambassador Programme which

builds relationships with key academics within associations and supports their bids to host major conferences, to in-depth knowledge of the best venues, the team is there to help find the perfect solution and bring it to fruition. Through a range of partnerships with organisations such as Scottish Development International (SDI) and Scottish Enterprise globalscots, we tap into networks of influential people worldwide to further develop our business tourism industry.

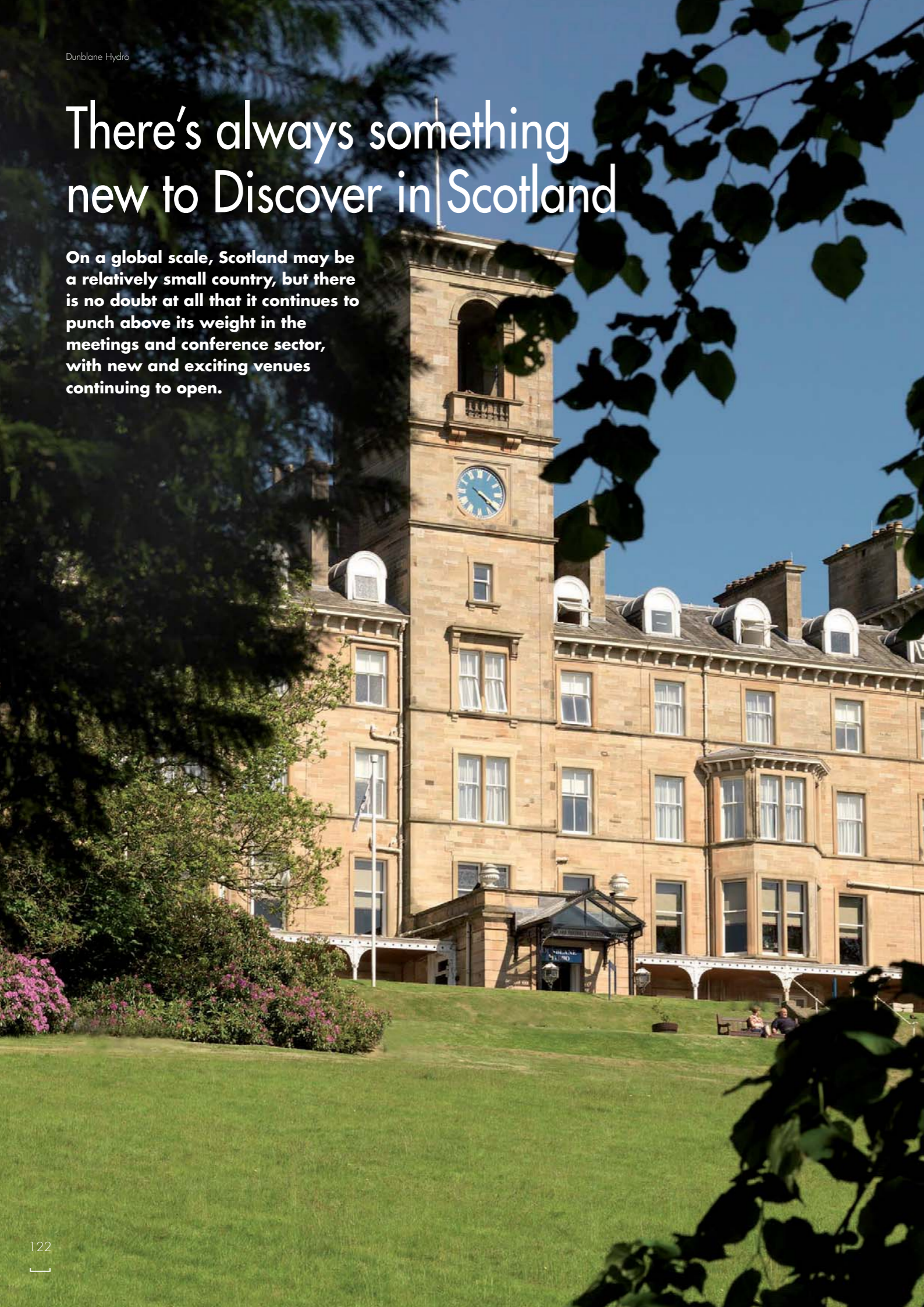
The Business Tourism Unit is putting considerable effort into providing strategic direction in the marketing of Scotland as a destination, building a brand and ensuring Scotland has a competitive edge against the worldwide competition. The BTU helps organisations choose their destination and venue by making it easy to see what Scotland has to offer. This is done through considerable investment in online services, attendance at a range of internationally focused exhibitions, plus tailored and highly targeted marketing events which bring the conference organisers and the Scottish-based service providers face-to-face. The marketing, relationship building and events result in millions of pounds worth of income to Scotland and ensure that our country continues to punch above its weight in the world conference market.



VisitScotland Business Tourism Unit
Lindsay Brown
UK Marketing Manager
Tel: 0131 472 2355
Email: lindsay.brown@visitscotland.com
www.conventionscotland.com

There's always something new to Discover in Scotland

On a global scale, Scotland may be a relatively small country, but there is no doubt at all that it continues to punch above its weight in the meetings and conference sector, with new and exciting venues continuing to open.



The meetings and conference sector accounts for £723 million a year and with refurbishments and new openings coming on stream all the time, it is clear that investment in the industry will go a long way to keep that figure rising.

From intimate, exclusive-use venues ideal for a corporate board brainstorm, to large and impressive projects, such as the high profile plans for the Trump International Golf Links in Aberdeenshire, there is something for every organisation opening all the time.

Glasgow has recently welcomed its newest luxury venue, the Blythswood Square Spa Hotel. Following the major renovation of an historic building to five star splendour, the hotel houses 100 guest rooms and suites, a superb spa and a glorious restaurant and cocktail bar located in the former ballroom. Other plans for Glasgow include the proposed six star Jumeirah Hotel and the latest announcement of a significant refurbishment of the historic Grand Central Hotel – bringing the hotel back to its Victorian splendour with a modern touch.

Other hotel news for Scotland includes the newly refurbished Turnberry Resort, which has just completed a multi-million pound renovation programme focusing on the restoration of the iconic public spaces and 46 of its 198 luxuriously appointed guest rooms. Unashamedly a golf hotel, the resort also includes a spa as well as its famous courses, making it a superb location for golf-focused corporate events. Another landmark opening is the Doubletree by Hilton Dunblane Hydro where a luxurious new look has been unveiled including a stunning new restaurant, 200 beautiful bedrooms and suites and a superb range of meeting options including event space, syndicate rooms and a dedicated conference centre catering for up to 200 delegates.

For those looking to mix business with pleasure, there is always something new to try in Scotland, too. Highland Safaris in Aberfeldy has launched a 'Rough Diamond' package for groups, which can include a mountain top feast in a bothy or any one of a wide range of outdoor activities focused on their 4 x 4 safaris. Stunning exclusive-use venue, Lodge on Loch Goil in Argyll, has recently introduced a cook school, while the Arran Adventure Company has launched a range of packages that include outdoor exhilaration, including the 'Sea & Summit' experience. For the truly adventurous, new



Lennoxlove



Gosford House

[For those looking to mix business with pleasure, there is always something new to try in Scotland]

experiences with a real difference include winter eco-camping at Comrie Croft; plus luxury hotel Ardeonaig on the shores of Loch Tay has linked up with local estate Ardtalnaig to offer visitors a full outdoor package.

The exclusive-use market is lucrative in Scotland, too and takes advantage of the superb range of castles and stately homes that offer a real home-from-home for groups large or small. New on the market is impressive Gosford House, just under an hour's drive from Edinburgh airport and one of Scotland's most significant stately homes, which is now offering teambuilding events and dinners for up to 120. Having been lovingly restored to its former glory and awarded five stars by VisitScotland's Quality Assurance Scheme, Lethan House

is another property that is now available. This beautiful 17th Century mansion, also in East Lothian, is perfect for a small corporate event.

These developments are just a few of the many major investments going on throughout Scotland that are targeting the meetings and conference market. With so much happening that is exciting and at the top of the range, it is clear that our small country is making a big impact in this important sector.