

Recreation

Scotland's natural and historic environment provides many opportunities for outdoor activity and attracts millions of visitors a year, generating £2.6 billion of expenditure.

Summary

Key messages

- Scotland's natural and historic environment provides a fantastic backdrop for a wide range of outdoor recreation activities, ranging from dog walking and visiting parks to mountain biking, golfing and water sports.
- People who enjoy outdoor recreation contribute to the local economy by spending money on food and fuel, or on hotels and guest houses when they go on longer excursions.
- In 2012 outdoor recreation visits generated around £2.6 billion of expenditure.
- Participation in outdoor recreation, even in activities which aren't particularly energetic, is of great benefit to our health and well-being.
- The state of Scotland's environment is key to the enjoyment of outdoor recreation and can influence whether visitors return to Scotland and recommend it to others.
- Recreation can inadvertently damage the environment, and in very popular destinations visitor management may be needed to protect it.

State and trend

A summarised assessment of the state and trend has not been made for this topic.

Please read the topic for more information; if you have any questions about Scotland's recreation please feel free to contact us using the comment button above.

Overview

People enjoy and are inspired by the outdoors in different ways – from the simple tonic of breathing fresh air and observing familiar landmarks, to the physical challenge of energetic activities.

Outdoor recreation includes informal outings such as going for picnics, as well as visits to historic buildings and gardens and more specialist pursuits like mountain biking, climbing and kayaking. It can be enjoyed in countryside, urban or marine environments and in many different settings such as parks, woods and beaches.

In many wild or remote areas, people expect very little in the way of visitor facilities. However, in other places – particularly those close to large population centres – paths, ranger services, signs, toilets and play areas can help make the outdoors accessible to everyone and increase participation. These places include city parks and other urban green spaces, regional parks, and historic buildings.

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Managed places further from large population centres include national parks, National Nature Reserves and forest parks.

The importance of outdoor leisure and recreation

The main benefits of visiting the outdoors are:

Improving health and well-being: walking is recognised as the most cost-effective means of improving physical health. Enjoying the outdoors and participating in challenging activities can also contribute to good mental health and well-being.

Increasing understanding of the natural world: participation in outdoor recreation and activities like volunteering provides opportunities for people to learn more about the natural world and to care for a resource that is valuable to the whole community.

Increasing understanding of our cultural heritage: visits to historic attractions and sites can help provide a sense of place and cultural identity, ensuring we can confidently pass these assets to the next generation.

Contributing to the economy: Outdoor recreation is a valuable part of Scotland's economy. It is estimated that all visits to the outdoors made by people living in Scotland generated around [£2.6 billion in expenditure](#) in 2012. Mountain biking alone generates around [£119 million a year](#) and this is predicted to grow over the next five years, with potential additional revenue estimated at around £36 million a year. [Scottish Golf Tourism Market Analysis](#) estimates that golf tourism (not including day visitors, most of whom are Scottish residents) is worth almost £220 million a year.

Social inclusion: well-planned and managed recreation facilities with links to public transport can offer opportunities for everyone.

Settings for outdoor recreation

Urban green space

Most people in Scotland live in urban areas and many live near to urban green spaces, such as parks, gardens, playing fields and natural green spaces. Well-designed and managed green spaces make settlements more pleasant places to live, provide space for wildlife and can encourage healthy, active lifestyles by giving people an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors close to home.

In 2012 the [Scottish Household Survey](#) estimated that 71% of Scottish adults have access to a useable green space that they can walk to within six minutes and that 42% use this space every week. There are many green-space partnerships, organisations and groups working in urban areas throughout Scotland to create, improve and manage places for outdoor recreation. Improved access to good-quality urban green space, along with improvements in the provision and promotion of paths (especially paths close to home), is likely to play a key role in increasing recreation in urban areas in the future.

National parks

Scotland's two national parks, the Cairngorms (established in 2003) and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs (established in 2002) were created under the National Parks (Scotland) Act to safeguard areas of outstanding and diverse landscapes, habitats and communities. Together, the national parks offer visitors and local communities a wide variety of opportunities to enjoy our natural and cultural heritage and are estimated to attract more than 6 million visits each year. These include visits for sightseeing, walking, cycling, mountain biking, climbing, kayaking, horse riding and visits to historic and cultural properties and sites.

National forest estate and other public land

The national forest estate in Scotland is the largest single public land resource held by the Scottish Government, comprising over 660,000 hectares and more than 35% of Scotland's woodland. In 2012, the [Scottish Recreation Survey](#) estimated that adults in Scotland made 62 million visits to Scottish woodland, including 27 million visits to the national forest estate.

Scotland's 47 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) cover less than 1.5% of Scotland, and contain some of the very best of the country's nature and wildlife, including habitats and species of national and international significance. These sites provide a range of education and recreation opportunities and are estimated to attract more than 400,000 visits each year.

State

Almost 80% of adults in Scotland take part in some outdoor recreational activity; just over 40% do so on a weekly basis. Around half of outdoor visits are taken in the countryside while just over one third are to parks and other open spaces in urban areas.

Around three quarters of visits use paths of some description, most of which are signposted or waymarked.

People visit the outdoors to take part in a wide range of recreational activities. Walking is by far and away the most common activity followed by family outings and cycling.

Enjoying the outdoors brings many positive benefits. Participation in outdoor recreation and contact with nature helps encourage an interest in, and a concern for, the natural and historic environment. However, outdoor recreation also has the potential to put pressure on the environment.

Frequency of visits

In 2012 the [Scottish Recreation Survey](#) estimated that 79% of adults in Scotland made at least one visit to the outdoors for recreation. This was lower than in 2010 and 2011, but similar to the levels recorded between 2006 and 2009.

Under half (42%) of adults in Scotland visited the outdoors for recreation at least once a week in 2012, a significant decrease since 2011 (46%), although the longer-term trend for weekly visits remains stable.

Outdoor recreation takes place in a variety of settings (Figure 1). The countryside accounted for around half of all outdoor visits for recreation in 2012 (51%), whereas visits made to, or within, towns and cities (including visits to parks and other urban open spaces) accounted for 36% of the total (30% in 2005).

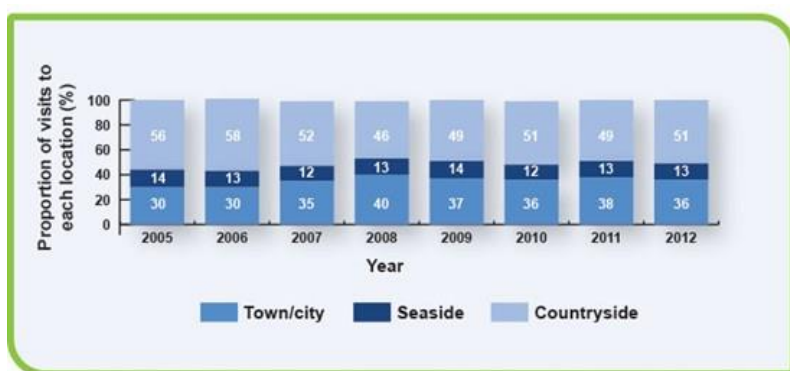


Figure 1: Type of environment for outdoor recreation visits 2005–2012

Source: [Scottish Recreation Survey](#)

Places visited

Local parks and open spaces were the most popular places for outdoor visits in 2012 (Figure 2). They were the reason for 36% of all outdoor visits made by adults living in Scotland and the main reason for 64% of outdoor visits made in towns and cities.

Visits to woodlands and forests (the main reason for 15% of all visits) and beaches and cliffs (the main reason for 11% of all visits) were the next most popular.

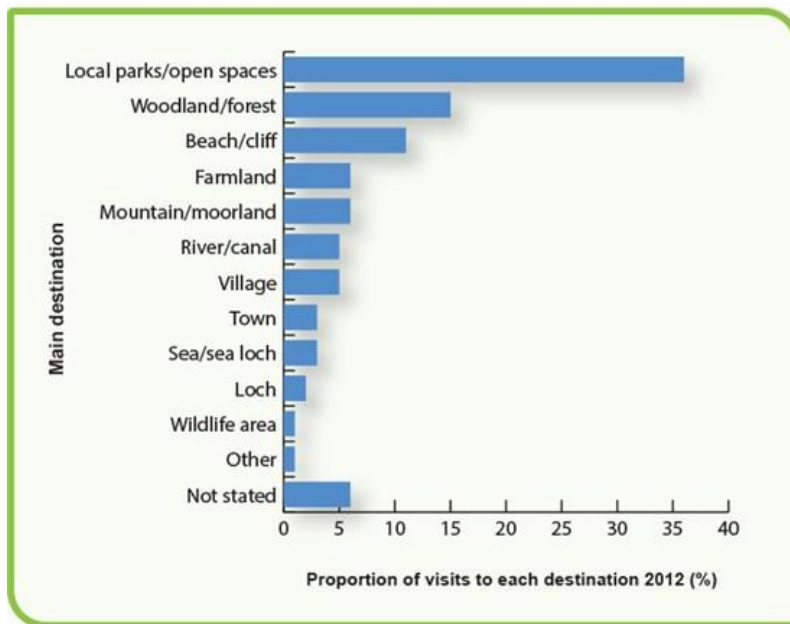


Figure 2: Main destination of outdoor visits 2012

Source: [Scottish Recreation Survey](#)

In 2012 the [Scottish Recreation Survey](#) estimated that 77% of visits to the outdoors for recreation involved the use of a path or network of paths and 55% involved the use of a path with signposts or waymarks.

In 2003 the Scottish Paths Record estimated that there were around 84,000 km of paths in Scotland, including:

- community paths (such as core path networks, rights of way, local footways and cycleways);
- long-distance routes;
- the national cycle network;
- [heritage paths](#);
- upland paths;
- other types of paths, such as farm, forestry and estate roads, canal tow-paths, coastal and riverside paths.

Over the last decade the path network in Scotland has been improved. Many new paths have been created, additional long-distance routes have been established and many popular mountain paths have been successfully restored. [In March 2013](#), there were 22,218 km of signposted or waymarked paths in Scotland.

Core paths network

The core paths network is provided by Scotland's 32 local authorities and two national park authorities to give the public reasonable access throughout the area. The core paths planning process began in February 2005 and is now nearing completion. In March 2013:

- thirty-one out of the 34 access authorities had adopted a core paths plan, covering 19,612 km of core paths;
- of these, 7,890 km (40%) were signposted or waymarked and the maintenance of 4,776 km (24%) was paid for by a local authority or national park.

Since 2013, another authority has adopted its core path plan.

National cycle network

The national cycle network in Scotland is made up of more than 2,100 miles of traffic-free, quiet-lane and on-road cycling routes around the country, taking in all of Scotland's major cities as well as remote areas of natural beauty.

Long-distance routes

Long-distance routes (LDRs) are routes of 40 km or more that are signposted, maintained and promoted to some extent. There are four officially designated LDRs in Scotland, which make up a total length of 743 km. In 2010 [Developing the network of longer distance routes](#) identified a further 29 LDRs that comprise a total length of 2,797 km, as well as an additional eight routes with a total length of 678 km that were at an advanced stage of development or planning. In 2014, 26 of these routes, covering more than 2,700 km of well-managed paths, are being marketed as [Scotland's Great Trails](#). The John Muir Way, a 216 km trail stretching across central Scotland from John Muir's birthplace in Dunbar to the Clyde at Helensburgh, will open in April 2014.

Activities

Walking

Walking is the most popular outdoor activity enjoyed by adults in Scotland – and is the main activity on at least seven out of ten outdoor visits each year. In 2012 the [Scottish Recreation Survey](#) estimated that more than half of walking trips included a dog (56%). Walking is also a popular pastime for people taking a holiday or short break in Scotland. In 2012 the [Scotland Visitor Survey](#) estimated that 45% of summer visitors in Scotland took a short walk and 33% took a longer walk or hike during their visit. In 2005 [holidaymakers](#) rated the Scottish walking experience very favourably, highlighting in particular the natural environment, the diversity and quality of walks, the supporting infrastructure and the opportunities to experience our culture, history and people.

Mountain biking

Scotland is one of the best destinations in the world for mountain biking. Specially-constructed trail facilities, such as the 7stanes network in the south of Scotland and centres such as Laggan Wolftrax and Learnie Red Rock in the north, attract hundreds of thousands of visitors each year and produce significant economic benefits for local communities. [The economic value of mountain biking in Scotland report](#) estimates that there are 1.3 million mountain-biking visits made in Scotland each year.

Water-based activities

With thousands of kilometres of coastline, over 800 islands, numerous sea and inland lochs and white-water rivers, Scotland's renowned water environment appeals to sailors and canoeists. In November 2012, a survey of Royal Yachting Association Scotland affiliated clubs indicated that there were 20,294 sailors in Scotland who are members of clubs. Although much of Scotland's Canadian canoeing and kayaking activity is informal and takes place outside of organised clubs, membership figures provided by the Scottish Canoe Association (SCA) indicate a growing level of interest in the sport. The 95-km Great Glen Canoe Trail, from Fort William to Inverness, was formally opened in March 2012.

Scotland also plays host to a number of water-sports events each year, including the Tiree Wave Classic, a windsurfing national championship event that attracts some of the world's best windsurfers to the island each autumn.

Scotland's beaches and coasts provide great opportunities for family outings and other informal activities, such as walking, paddling, swimming and exploring rock pools.

Equestrian activities

Membership of the British Horse Society Scotland (BHSS) has grown by around 22% in recent years – from 4,095 in 2006 to more than 5,000 in 2012, accounting for 7% of total British membership (71,000).

In 2011 the [National Equestrian Survey](#) estimated that 3.5 million people in Britain had ridden a horse during 2010–2011, with 1.6 million riding at least once a month. Using BHSS membership figures as a guide, and the 2011 National Equestrian Survey, it is estimated that there are 245,000 horse-riders in Scotland, almost half of whom ride at least once a month.

Golf

Scotland is known throughout the world as the home of golf and has one of the highest participation rates in the world, with 240,000 golf-club members in 2012, representing 5% of the population. In 2012 the [Scottish Household Survey](#) found that 11% of men and 2% of women had played golf at one of the country's 580 courses in the four weeks before the interview.

Fishing and other game sports

Scotland offers extensive opportunities for world-class game and coarse angling on its rivers and lochs, and sea angling from its shoreline or from a boat.

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In 2012 the [Scottish Recreation Survey](#) estimated that around 2% of adults in Scotland go fishing and the [Consumer Fishing Market Research](#), undertaken in 2007, indicated that the majority of this activity (71% of trips) is game angling.

According to the [Country Sports Tourism Review](#) undertaken in 2004, more than 70,000 people in Scotland participate in other game sports, such as deer-stalking and hunting.

Culture and history

Scotland's historic monuments, buildings and sites attract millions of visitors each year, providing opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors and learn more about our history and culture. In 2012 the [Scottish Household Survey](#) estimated that 28% of adults had visited a historic or archaeological site in the 12 months prior to interview.

Pressures affecting the recreation environment

Pressures on space for outdoor recreation

Building development can sometimes take away open spaces that were used for recreation. On the other hand, well-situated and well-designed developments can offer additional outdoor recreation and learning opportunities.

Changing weather patterns could limit the availability of some types of outdoor activity in future, particularly those that rely on snow and ice. A changing climate could also have an impact on safe access to the outdoors, especially if storms become more frequent and violent.

Pressures on the quality of outdoor recreation

Even when development makes no significant impact on the available space for recreation, it may have other impacts (for example, visual impacts on the landscape) that reduce the quality of outdoor recreation for some people.

The most popular destinations can suffer from pressures that are directly related to recreational visitors. Outdoor recreation can cause wear and tear on historic buildings, sites and gardens; erode footpaths; and damage other sensitive sites, even when visitors behave responsibly. When visitors don't behave responsibly the environment can suffer additional pressures, such as wildlife disturbance, littering and dog fouling.

Changing weather patterns could have an impact on the quality of recreation for some people. While a wetter climate might make hill-walking or golfing less enjoyable for some, there could be benefits for surfers or kayakers, who enjoy more challenging conditions.

What is being done

Increasing participation in outdoor recreation is good for Scotland's economy and can help to address health and community problems, as well as encourage a lasting interest in the natural environment.

There are a range of policies in place to help and encourage a wide range of people to take part in outdoor activities. These include ensuring access to outdoor spaces is available as well as actively managing areas suitable for recreation.

A key target for the Scottish Government is to '[increase people's use of Scotland's outdoors](#)', and progress has been measured since 2006.

Access rights and responsibilities

The [enjoying the outdoors policy](#) sets out a vision in which everyone in Scotland is able to enjoy the outdoors as part of their daily life. An ongoing [programme of research](#) will help those involved in providing opportunities for outdoor recreation to better understand the diversity of Scotland's people. This will ensure that effort is targeted effectively to encourage participation from the broadest range of backgrounds, abilities, cultures and needs.

Access to the outdoor environment is provided by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, which established a right of responsible access to most land and inland water in Scotland, and also set out new responsibilities for visitors to the outdoors and for land managers. These rights and responsibilities came into effect in February 2005 and are explained in the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#).

Providing and protecting recreation space

Several initiatives are helping to create opportunities to improve the number, size, and quality of places managed for outdoor recreation.

- Scottish planning policy encourages local authorities to prepare 'open space strategies' to guide future provision within their areas, in particular through the planning system.
- Scottish Government's [National Planning Framework 3](#) (NPF3) includes as one of its Proposed National Developments the National Long Distance Cycling and Walking Network to support recreation, tourism and active travel.
- The [Central Scotland Green Network](#) is being developed to enhance landscapes, wildlife and recreational opportunities in central Scotland.
- Local and national park authorities are completing the planning phase of the [core paths network](#).
- Future development of mountain biking in Scotland is being guided by the [National Strategic Framework for the Sustainable Development of Mountain Biking in Scotland](#), which involves key stakeholders at local and national levels.
- The [Scottish Historic Environment Policy](#) sets out Scottish ministers' policies on issues including access to historic sites and the important recreational opportunities afforded through volunteering.

Developing good practice and managing recreation sustainably

An ongoing programme of communications and education – [Know The Code Before You Go](#) – will continue to help raise awareness and understanding of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code's messages by targeting key audiences, such as young people, campers and dog owners. A series of good-practice guides offers guidance on responsible behaviour for people who take part in individual activities (e.g. canoeing horse riding and cycling) and in specific places (e.g. beaches, riverbanks, woods, and fields containing animals).

Many local and national projects illustrate the ways in which potentially negative impacts can be managed and minimised. These include:

- the [Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code](#), which raises awareness of the need for responsible behaviour and offers practical guidance for visitors and commercial operators;
- the [Mountains for People Project](#), which aims to conserve and repair some of the most challenging upland routes in Torridon, Glencoe and on Arran;
- the [Cairngorm Outdoor Access Trust](#), which is working to repair eroded mountain paths so that access can be sustained;
- Hillphones and the [Heading for the Scottish Hills](#) project, which will help walkers plan routes that are unlikely to disturb deer-stalking.

The provision of paths and trails for all abilities helps to improve access to the countryside for everyone, and being able to source information about the accessibility of paths helps people plan their trips. [The Fieldfare Trust](#) works with countryside managers and less-mobile people to improve access to the countryside for everyone. The trust's [Phototrails](#) website allows users to look at a series of photos of countryside routes and read descriptions of path features, enabling disabled visitors to decide whether a trail is likely to be accessible to them. Scottish Natural Heritage's 2011 [research on path attributes](#) explores how best to provide information describing the physical characteristics of a path so that potential users can decide if it is suitable for them.

New opportunities

Major events and infrastructure projects create opportunities for new outdoor recreation space, sometimes in remote places and sometimes close to towns and cities.

Sites chosen for wind farm development can sometimes be used for outdoor recreation. [Good practice during windfarm construction](#) gives advice on providing and managing public access both during and after construction. Providing a ranger service and trails for walking, cycling and horse riding can boost recreational opportunities for local people, as demonstrated at Whitelee wind farm.

Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) has developed path networks and mountain-bike trail centres throughout the country based on local and national demand. FCS is also restructuring the national forest estate by acquiring land that can be easily accessed close to population centres, creating new opportunities for recreation outdoors.

The 2014 Commonwealth Games have been the catalyst for a large regeneration programme in Glasgow's east end. This will include the creation of more outdoor recreation space through a range of green-space projects, such as the regeneration of the Cuningar Loop woodland, managed by Clyde Gateway in partnership with the Forestry Commission. Other permanent outdoor recreation facilities will be created elsewhere in Glasgow, such as the mountain-bike trails in [Cathkin Braes Country Park](#). Built to international standards and located on the southern edge of the city, the trails will be within easy reach of 1.8 million people.

Paths and climate change

In 2011 an investigation highlighted the possible impacts of predicted climate change trends on path features. The research considered adaptations to planning, designing, constructing and managing paths in Scotland to minimise the negative effects of changing weather patterns and protect investment in the infrastructure of paths.