

Castles Defy Economic Downturn at Historic Scotland

Scotland's iconic castles are bucking the economic downturn by posting record visitor numbers and increased income.

Historic Scotland has this year announced an unprecedented surge in visitors to Edinburgh Castle, where more than 920,000 people passed through the gates in the six months to September, up around ten per cent on the same time last year, including an all-time monthly record of more than 205,000 visitors in August.



The rise in numbers has been repeated at numerous other Historic Scotland sites, including Urquhart Castle, Stirling Castle and St Andrews Castle, which also posted similar increases.

The trend was reflected across a broad spectrum of Historic Scotland properties, with sites such as Linlithgow Palace, Melrose Abbey and Skara Brae all showing rises in visitor footfall.

Director of Commercial and Tourism at Historic Scotland, Stephen Duncan, said the figures reflected the agency's strong brand image and reputation, at home and abroad.

"These new figures, at a time of economic recession, confirm that Historic Scotland is a world class brand, and shows that the power of our sites to attract visitors from across the world is stronger than ever."

He said: "This surge in interest also reflects our continued efforts to enhance the visitor experience at our sites. Across the wider Historic Scotland estate, we achieved a 5.3 per cent increase in admissions between April and September."

For Edinburgh Castle, the admissions success became a double celebration when Scotland's top visitor attraction beat stiff competition from across the United Kingdom to scoop the title of Best UK Heritage Attraction.

Awarded at the 2011 British Travel Awards ceremony in London, this accolade is widely regarded as the Oscar of the travel industry. For the Castle's Executive Manager Nick Finnigan, this double achievement was a "great honour".

He said: "Edinburgh Castle is a global icon and home to Scottish Crown Jewels, and also houses the Stone of Destiny. We are very proud of its history and heritage.

"It is also a fantastic venue for events, from rock concerts and re-enactments, to spectacular fireworks displays celebrating Edinburgh's world renowned festivals and New Year celebrations."



Mr Finnigan explained that Historic Scotland would be building on this success by completing a major refurbishment of the Castle shop, which would greatly enhance the retail experience for visitors. Interpretation would also be improved, with new interactive activities, including costumed performers and handling sessions.

Mr Finnigan said he was delighted the Castle had recorded its best-ever visitor numbers in August. "Our aim," he added, "is always to improve the visitor experience, and to continue attracting people from all over the world."

At Stirling Castle, during a busy summer crowned by the completion of the newly refurbished Royal Palace, visitor numbers soared around the time of the unveiling.

The 15 per cent rise recorded in June, compared to the previous year, helped the Castle achieve an overall summer increase of 12 per cent between April and September.

The Royal Apartments, restored to their former sumptuous glory at a cost of £12 million, have been a major project for Historic Scotland, and involved painstaking work by archaeologists, historians and skilled craftsmen.



The new Palace, featuring interactive activities for children and costumed performers, also helped boost visitor numbers in July, up 13 per cent on last year to more than 72,000.

Executive Manager at Stirling Castle, Gillian MacDonald said she was very pleased at the rise in visitor numbers.

"It is clear that the refurbishment of the Royal Palace has had a big impact on admissions this year. We focused much of our marketing on the Scotland's Central Belt, and it was rewarding to see that we increased our share of home visitors immediately after the opening."

For Historic Scotland's wider estate, which includes 78 staffed properties in a portfolio of 345 sites, the five per cent growth in visitors this summer is welcome news.

Director of Commercial and Tourism Stephen Duncan said: "It is testament to our continuing efforts to improve the visitor experience that we are seeing our business grow. Coupled with the recent recognition for Edinburgh Castle at the British Travel Awards, we are in a strong position to go on to even greater achievements in the coming months and years."

Mr Duncan was hopeful that admissions would be boosted further between now and the end of the year, with the approach of the Agency's free weekend and the festive period.

"Edinburgh Castle and Stirling Castle are good places to go Christmas shopping," he added.

Photos: © CROWN COPYRIGHT REPRODUCED COURTESY OF HISTORIC SCOTLAND -
www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk

By David Gray

Date: 2011-11-28

Article link:

<https://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-historic-scotland-castles-growing-in-popularity-article1674>