# Tourism growth in Inverness sparks concerns over local community impact



# Tourism in Inverness: A Double-Edged Sword

Tourism stands as a cornerstone of the economy in Inverness and the wider Highlands, a sentiment almost universally acknowledged. Recent figures from Visit Scotland reveal that approximately 14.8% of the workforce in the Highlands is directly employed in the tourism sector. In 2022 alone, this vibrant industry generated an impressive turnover of £587 million, highlighting its significant contribution to the local economy. Efforts to enhance this sector continue to unfold, most notably with the anticipated unveiling of the Inverness Castle attraction, which is set to create 60 to 65 new jobs.

While the economic impacts of tourism are undeniably positive, the situation is not without complexities. A stroll down Inverness High Street reveals a staggering number of tourist-oriented shops. This trend was recently encapsulated by the opening of a new souvenir store, which brings the total on the High Street to six, or seven if you include the neighbouring Bridge Street. This shift raises questions about the diversity of retail offerings available to local residents.

Conversations with young locals during a recent visit to Achnasheen underscored a common sentiment: while tourism is beneficial for the economy, the proliferation of shops targeting tourists at the expense of local enterprises is viewed as detrimental. The residents expressed a desire for a retail environment that better caters to their needs rather than solely focusing on transient visitors. This phenomenon is not confined to Inverness; many European cities now reflect a similar trend, with traditional businesses being overshadowed by shops selling generic souvenirs.

The escalating focus on short-term lets further complicates the tourism narrative in Inverness. Recently, six new short-term let approvals received community backlash, a worrying trend in a city already grappling with housing shortages. Official reports indicate that the Highlands region processes over 8,000 applications for short-term letting, with Airbnb properties dominating the market. The situation echoes housing crises faced in destinations like Spain, where short-term rentals have strained local communities, attracting concerns of losing neighbourly ties in favour of a transient visitor culture.

Housing in Inverness should be preserved for residents and families, rather than converted into vacation rentals. As noted in previous discussions, such investment strategies diminish the residential character of towns, transforming them into quasi-themes parks devoid of authenticity. The ongoing trend threatens to reshape the identity of Inverness, turning it from a lively community into a nomadic habitat lacking genuine local flavour.

Authorities are now challenged to balance the economic benefits of tourism with the vital need to maintain community integrity. Despite the positive contributions of tourism—evidenced by the 2.29 million overnight visits in 2023 that generated a staggering £762 million in expenditure—there’s an urgent need to reflect on who benefits most from this boom. Local communities are at risk of being overshadowed by market pressures prioritising short-term gains over long-term sustainability.

In summary, the duality of tourism's impact in Inverness necessitates careful examination and action. While it is an economic lifeline, measures must be taken to ensure that it enhances rather than erodes the character and community spirit of the Highlands. If these challenges are not addressed, Inverness risks losing its essence as a vibrant city and could ultimately become just another stop on the tourist map.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/opinion/6748082/inverness-tourist-shops-opinion/), [[2]](https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/regions/highlands)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/opinion/6748082/inverness-tourist-shops-opinion/), [[3]](https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/latest-statistics/tourism-performance)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/regions/highlands), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uks-2-million-tourism-fund-working-for-the-highlands)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.hie.co.uk/our-region/our-growth-sectors/tourism/), [[6]](https://www.johnogroat-journal.co.uk/news/councillors-told-tourism-is-vital-to-the-economic-recovery-o-293287/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/opinion/6748082/inverness-tourist-shops-opinion/), [[7]](https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/about-our-visitors/international/annual-performance-report)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/opinion/6748082/inverness-tourist-shops-opinion/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/regions/highlands> - VisitScotland's Highlands page provides comprehensive statistics on tourism in the region. In 2023, the Highlands saw 2.29 million overnight visits, with a total spend of £762 million. The tourism sector employed 18,000 people, representing 14.8% of all employment in the area. The page also offers insights into domestic and international visitor numbers, average spend, and the economic impact of tourism in the Highlands.
3. <https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/latest-statistics/tourism-performance> - This VisitScotland page presents the latest statistics on Scotland's tourism performance. In 2023, Scotland welcomed 109 million tourism visits, including domestic and international overnight trips and day visits, with a total visitor spend of £10.8 billion. The page details the volume and value of tourism, top international markets, and provides official statistics and partners involved in the research.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uks-2-million-tourism-fund-working-for-the-highlands> - The UK Government's £2 million tourism fund aims to promote tourism in Inverness and the Highlands over the next four years. In the previous year, over 340,000 international visitors brought more than £115 million in additional spending to the region, marking a 46% increase since 2015. The fund supports initiatives to boost tourism and deliver economic benefits to local communities and businesses.
5. <https://www.hie.co.uk/our-region/our-growth-sectors/tourism/> - Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) highlights the significance of tourism in the region, noting that in some areas, tourism-related jobs can represent up to 43% of the workforce. The sector sustains many local, regional, and island economies and communities, with 3,200 registered tourism businesses locally and an average pre-COVID visitor spend of £1.5 billion.
6. <https://www.johnogroat-journal.co.uk/news/councillors-told-tourism-is-vital-to-the-economic-recovery-o-293287/> - An article from the John O'Groat Journal discusses the vital role of tourism in the economic recovery of the Highlands. It mentions that tourism-related jobs can represent up to 43% of the workforce in some areas across Highland. The article also highlights the importance of improving infrastructure and managing the growth in visitor numbers in Highland communities.
7. <https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/about-our-visitors/international/annual-performance-report> - VisitScotland's annual performance report details the recovery of international tourism to Scotland post-pandemic. In 2023, international visitors made 4 million visits, stayed for 34.4 million nights, and spent £3,593 million. These figures represent a 23% increase in visits compared to 2022 and a 15% increase compared to 2019, indicating a strong rebound in the sector.