

Richard Knight, Director of Marketing – The Americas, VisitScotland Business Events

What are the most important trends that you're seeing for international meetings in your destination this year — especially among groups that are coming from the USA?

Towards the end of 2023 and in the first quarter of 2024, it became very apparent that in addition to the normal enquiries received for corporate meetings and incentives, we started to see a high volume of shorter lead time smaller corporate meetings, which could be considered corporate retreats. This has obviously had a huge impact on the volume and value of enquiries received into Scotland as well as the levels of confirmed programs.

Planners are seeking destinations that can accommodate these evolving preferences efficiently and effectively. Companies are prioritizing opportunities for collaboration, team-building, and strategic planning in unique and inspiring settings, and Scotland's diverse range of venues and flexible event spaces ideally cater to this trend. On the whole, the level of interest in Scotland as a destination for meetings and incentives is the highest I can remember and certainly surpasses the levels of 2019.

The overall experience and exposure to unique cultures, traditions and activities, against a backdrop of dramatic scenery and history that reaches back thousands of years, also delivers that all important aspect of ROI which is desire to visit and creation of life long memories and experiences.

Now more than ever, meeting planners recognize that the success of an event lies in the ability to ensure the safety and comfort of every participant, and attendees must leave feeling valued, heard, and safe. Scotland has a reputation for not only being a safe destination, but cities like Edinburgh and Glasgow are named among the top friendliest cities in the world year after year, to bring peace of mind to planners. The ease of walking or utilizing public transport makes navigating Scotland convenient and stress-free. Additionally, being an English-speaking destination further enhances accessibility for international delegates, facilitating seamless communication and interaction.

Scotland is also commended as a beacon of inclusivity and accessibility, making it a standout international destination choice for groups coming from the U.S. Its commitment to welcoming all attendees, regardless of background or ability, aligns seamlessly with the values driving today's meetings industry.

What are the most effective ways that meeting planners can maximize the effectiveness of their meetings while staying on budget and getting the most for their money?

Maximizing the effectiveness of meetings while staying on budget requires a strategic approach that encompasses both financial considerations and qualitative experiences. Meeting planners can achieve this balance in Scotland first by considering the strength of the U.S. dollar. The favourable exchange rate enhances the return on investment from the delegate experience, allowing planners to stretch their budgets further without compromising on quality. Beyond the financial consideration, Scotland is poised to offer a profound return on personal experiences. VisitScotland Business Events specializes in curating unforgettable experiences that go beyond traditional meeting settings, by incorporating unique cultural activities, immersive excursions, and exclusive experiences – from exploring historic castles to sampling local cuisine and enjoying traditional music performances – meeting planners can offer delegates a breadth of experiences that will be cherished long after the meeting concludes.

VISITSCOTLAND BUSINESS EVENTS | www.businessevents.visitscotland.com

WHAT IS NEW FOR MEETING PLANNERS:

Invisible Cities (Scottish Borders) – Q1 2024:

Scotland offers creative ways to work with local communities and further the interests in having a social responsibility objective as part of an incentive or meetings group experience. Invisible Cities is one of the city tours that VisitScotland Business Events (VSBE) partners with for group programs.

Invisible Cities is an award-winning social enterprise that trains people who have experienced homelessness to become walking tour guides of their own city and offer alternative tours to visitors and locals alike. Since launching in Edinburgh in 2016, they are now in six cities across the UK, they were awarded best community tour by Lonely Planet for their Best in Travel 2021 List, and they continue to be a model for how we can support the UK's homeless in getting back on their feet.

Invisible Cities recently announced they are working with the Scottish Borders Council and the Local Action Group (LAG) to support Community Led Local development (CLLD) and launch Invisible (Scottish Borders). Though work has started on the ground right, they expect to be launching a tour (in person and/or virtual) as well as exciting content on the area in the first quarter of 2024.

Since it was conceived in 2016, Invisible Cities has trained more than 70 people, providing one-to-one training focusing on developing transferable skills such as public speaking, confidence building and customer service. Beyond professional development, Invisible Cities assists in finding housing, food provision, access to further education, counselling and reuniting with families.

The long term goal is to foster an inclusive and empowering community and encourage the guides to continue to build on their Invisible Cities skills into their next career. While some of the guides have gone on to other careers, many still actively work with Invisible Cities. The program not only strives to build up these individuals, but to also tear down the stigma around homelessness.

For incentive groups and business events, corporate social responsibility is a paramount requirement for any program. Invisible Cities offers groups a city tour that covers sites of historical interest, but the tour also showcases the 'invisible' sides of a city and the unknown history and knowledge behind it.

Each tour is unique, as it is designed by the specific guide who then chooses the theme and content for the tour. The guide provides unique tours that shares their own background stories and personal experiences of the city. For the groups taking part in the tour, it supports their guide and the greater organization, and helps raise awareness of social issues.

Find out more here: www.invisible-cities.org

Ian MacLead Distillers, Rosebank Distillery – Opening 2024 (After 30 Years):

Rosebank Distillery has completed initial distillation runs after 30 years silence and cask no. 001 is now maturing. The new spirit is maturing in a refill bourbon barrel which will create a rich, fruity, and floral

whisky, reminiscent of the original Rosebank's signature flavour profile. This is a major milestone on the distillery's restoration journey since the reconstruction began in 2019. Ian Macleod Distillers has lovingly restored the Falkirk-based distillery from the ground up at its original location.

With close attention to detail, the new distillery has retained the format of the original production plant. Blueprints of the original stills were found and used to recreate the shape and characteristics of those from the original distillery. New worm tub condensers have been installed replacing the original ones. They impart a special element of the Rosebank distillation process and yield a heavier style of spirit as there is less copper contact during vapour condensation. The landmark chimney has been repaired and continues to dominate the skyline and centres the distillery site.

From 2024, the distillery will offer a world-class visitor experience for Rosebank fans around the world, with the finishing touches being applied to a series of amazing spaces across the historic site. The final key element of the final part of the build is a two-storey car park ensuring the local community are shielded from visitor parking needs. The car park could allow more than 50,000 whisky visitors to visit the highly anticipated attraction each year.

Ian MacLeod Distillers, Edinburgh Gin – Opening Summer 2024:

Unique to Scotland, Edinburgh Gin's Rutland Street and Leith distillery is relocating to The Arches on East Market Street. The highly anticipated Edinburgh Gin state-of-the-art Distillery and Visitor Experience opens in early summer 2024 and will bring with it an array of meeting spaces and only-in-Scotland gin immersive experiences.

Glengoyne Distillery – Awarded Green Tourism Award:

The Green Tourism Gold Award is in recognition of the distillery's commitment to achieving the highest standards of sustainability in all aspects of distillery life, from whisky-making to visitor experiences. It is independently assessed using sustainable standards widely recognized across the tourism sector. The distillery's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint, minimize waste and promote sustainable tourism were all key areas of focus.

Glengoyne's sustainability journey started several years ago when it became the first distillery to introduce a wetlands facility for naturally managing liquid waste. Today, the wetlands are a thriving haven for local wildlife, including migrating geese, and investment in sustainable practices has grown to include wind power.

W Edinburgh (Hotel) - November 2023:

Opening November 14, 2023, the W Hotels brand debuts in Scotland with the W Edinburgh, adding an innovative twist to the historical St James Quarter district. The hotel will be situated in the heart of St James Quarter, a stylish lifestyle district where guests can benefit from world-class retail on their doorstep.

This new luxury destination offers visionary design, eclectic gastronomy and a socially-driven spirit drawn from its creative surrounds. From the Ribbon Building to James Craig Walk and the Quarter House, each of the 199 rooms and 45 suites, many with outdoor terraces, offer a new perspective on the city. Interior designers, Jestico + Whiles, have reimagined the best of Scotland with locally-rooted influences and creative collaborations throughout the design.

The hotel's top floors will bring energy and flair to Edinburgh's lively social scene. Highlights include a buzzing W Lounge, SUSHISAMBA restaurant, Joao's Place cocktail bar and terrace, chef's table and outdoor terrace, offering locals, visitors to the city and hotel guests incredible 360-degree panoramic views of the historic skyline. W Lounge reimagines Gaelic cuisine throughout day and night, and the unique rooftop W deck rewards visitors with the finest unfettered 360-degree views of Edinburgh and beyond.

An ideal central city venue for meetings and events, W Edinburgh will provide two levels of ultra-modern meeting and event space, including five meeting rooms along with WIRED, a 24-hour business centre.

www.marriott.com/en-us/hotels/ediwh-w-edinburgh/

Virgin Glasgow – Opened August 2023:

In August 2023, on the heels of Scotland's first Virgin Hotel opening in Edinburgh, the second Virgin property opened in Glasgow. Located on Clydebank on Clyde Street, the 240-room hotel adorns nautical décor and bespoke artwork by local Scottish illustrators, painters and photographers.

Meeting and events spaces include the Bonnie and Clyde meeting rooms, and the (comically named) Shag room for more intimate gatherings. Food and beverage venues include Virgin Hotels' signature Commons Club restaurant bar, which offers a range of Scottish whiskies, liquors, beer and wine. The mezzanine level features all-day dining and entertainment space, and Highyard has a terrace overlooking the River Clyde, complete with two living walls, and a retractable roof for the winter season or rainy weather.

Virgin Edinburgh – Opened June 2022:

In June 2022, Virgin Hotels debuted its first European property in Edinburgh. The historic hotel is perched at the top of Victoria Street in Edinburgh's Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and located in the India Buildings nestled in the city center a stone's throw from Edinburgh Castle.

The hotel features 222 Chambers and Grand Chamber Suites and multiple dining and drinking venues, all with their own unique space and distinct design. This includes Commons Club, Virgin Hotels' flagship restaurant and bar, and Eve. The hotel is also home to a 19th century church, now known as Greyfriars Hall, that has been restored and repurposed as a special event venue. In addition, the hotel offers a rooftop sanctuary with unobstructed Edinburgh Castle views.

Mount Royal Edinburgh – Winter 2024:

Mount Royal Hotel Edinburgh is currently undergoing a £7m transformation incorporating a complete make-over of guest rooms, the restaurant and all public areas which will finish in early 2024.

Set within the hustle and bustle of Princes Street, the Mount Royal Hotel boasts spectacular views of the beautiful Princes Street Gardens, The Scott Monument and Edinburgh Castle. With Waverley Station just a short walk away, and the city's tram network on the doorstep, the hotel is an ideal location for business travellers and tourists alike.

Designs for the multi-million-pound refurbishment are infused with the vintage charm of Scottish culture and the surrounding architecture, incorporating the colour palette of Princes Street Gardens and capturing the city's literary history, to reclaim the long-standing heritage of the hotel at the heart of Edinburgh's city centre.

The project will deliver an impactful sense of arrival, upgrading the main entrance to increase the hotel's presence on Princes Street, and will totally reconfigure the impressive restaurant space on the first floor to a create warm and vibrant setting with panoramic views of the iconic Edinburgh Castle.

Cafe 1857 at Mount Royal Hotel – a brand new bistro concept – will showcase the best of Scotland's world-famous larder, focusing on quality food, simply executed with the best of Scottish hospitality for intimate dinners, family celebrations and group gatherings in the heart of the city.



VisitScotland Business Events Returns for IMEX America 2023

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OCTOBER 4, 2023 – Demonstrating their commitment to the industry, [VisitScotland Business Events \(VSBE\)](#) returns to Las Vegas, NV for one of the largest business events conferences in North America, [IMEX America \(October 17-19\)](#).

As an organization driven by purpose, VSBE continues to champion sustainability and DE&I by anchoring all efforts around the Journey To Change campaign to elevate business events in Scotland and empower change through new ideas and partnerships.

In 2022, VSBE hosted the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) Board of Trustees for its Annual Board Meeting, and in 2023 VSBE worked alongside IRF to produce a thought leadership piece that leverages key insights, research and trends to educate meetings and employment professionals on this key industry segment.

Looking forward, Scotland will be the backdrop of important conferences that continue to serve the purpose of the Journey to Change campaign. In addition, Scotland is welcoming new hotels, and the opening of iconic Scottish experiences, and reimaged programs through their exceptional partners.

On **Tuesday, October 17** beginning at 4pm, enjoy famous Scottish Hospitality during Scotland's Happy Hour supported by Ian Macleod Distillers, Glasgow / Scottish Event Campus, Edinburgh and their Partners to unwind after a busy first day at IMEX America.

On **Wednesday, October 18**, beginning at 4pm, enjoy the tastes of Scotland at the Scottish Reception supported by Ian Macleod Distillers, Glasgow, Edinburgh and their Partners. Learn about the developments and opportunities Scotland has to offer with a backdrop of culture, traditions and history.

VSBE will be joined on the stand by a range of partners, including:

- [2B UK](#)
- [Convention Edinburgh](#)
- [Edinburgh International Convention Centre](#)
- [Glasgow Convention Bureau](#)
- [Mount Royal Hotel Edinburgh](#)
- [The Gleneagles Hotel](#)
- [Radisson Blu Edinburgh City Centre](#)
- [MacDonald Hotels & Resorts](#)
- [Ian Macleod Distillers](#)
- [Scottish Events Campus](#)
- [Sheraton Grand Hotel & Spa, Edinburgh](#)
- [InterContinental® Edinburgh The George](#)

- [Kimpton Charlotte Square Hotel](#)
- [Clearly Scotland](#)

Richard Knight, VisitScotland Business Events' Director of Marketing to the Americas, is eager to bolster Scotland's visibility as a top destination for planners, and re-connecting and building new relationships with IMEX attendees: "The VisitScotland Business Events team will be accompanied by some of Scotland's finest partners, shining a spotlight on our beautiful country. We're excited to bring our Scottish energy and excitement to IMEX America once again and take this opportunity to demonstrate and reinforce our position as a leader and ally in the industry, as we drive the momentum for positive change," Knight said.

A world class array of conference centres, hotels and international travel infrastructure paired with unmatched history, culture and legacy makes Scotland a legendary and innovative destination for international conferences, meetings, incentives and exhibitions. With a focus on providing creative ways to work with local communities, inspire change, and further corporate social responsibility objectives, VisitScotland Business Events can help shape events, connect with the local expertise to make events worthwhile, and create transformational experiences that will leave a lasting impression for years to come.

For more information on how Scotland is shaping the future of MICE tourism and business events, get in touch with Ashley Kotar, ashley.kotar@aboutdci.com. Interview opportunities are available.

For more information on how to plan an event or conference in Scotland, contact +1 647-261-9989 or email businesstourism@visitscotland.com.

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Hi Xx,

VisitScotland Business Events (VSBE) recently took part in the 2023 IMEX America conference, sharing exciting updates and developments that are set to entice both travellers and business planners to the destination. Scotland's commitment to fostering international and business collaborations in an environment of innovation, luxury, and commitment to the future of new energy production showcases the destination's readiness to host impactful and forward-thinking events.

A few of these recent developments include VSBE's partnership with [Invisible Cities](#), an award-winning social enterprise, for group programs that train individuals who have experienced homelessness to become walking tour guides, offering alternative tours across the UK. This initiative, lauded for its impact, is expanding through collaboration with the Scottish Borders Council and the Local Action Group to launch "Invisible (Scottish Borders)" in the **first quarter of 2024**.

Beyond partnerships, Scotland, which is home to some of the most historic and environment-friendly distilleries in the world, also shares [Glengoyne Distillery](#)'s recent achievement as they were honoured with the Green Tourism Gold Award, in recognition of the distillery's commitment to achieving the highest standards of sustainability in all aspects of distillery life, from whisky-making to visitor experiences. The destination is also anticipating the opening of [Rosebank Distillery](#) in 2024, owned by Ian Macleod Distillers, after a 30-year hiatus. Rosebank has reached a significant milestone by completing initial distillation runs, with cask no. 001 currently in the maturation process and plans to provide a world-class visitor experience, focusing on historical accuracy and an impressive array of spaces across the site. Apart from this, **Edinburgh Gin's Rutland Street and Leith distillery**, which is relocating to The Arches on East Market Street, is set to open in early summer 2024 and will bring with it an array of meeting spaces and only-in-Scotland gin immersive experiences.

Scotland also welcomes new hotels and developments that bring over 700+ new rooms to the destination. These include W Hotels, which made its debut in Scotland with the opening of [W Edinburgh](#), adding an innovative twist to the historical St James Quarter district this November 2023. This luxury destination offers 199 rooms and 45 suites, many featuring outdoor terraces, and two levels of ultra-modern meeting spaces, five meeting rooms, and WIRED, a 24-hour business center. In 2022, **Virgin Hotels** debuted its first European property in Edinburgh and a year after, opened its **second property in Glasgow**. The historic hotel in Edinburgh, which features 222 Chambers and Grand Chamber Suites and multiple dining and drinking venues, is perched at the top of Victoria Street in Edinburgh's Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage site, nestled in the city center a stone's throw from Edinburgh Castle. On the other hand, the Glasgow property features a 240-room hotel that adorns nautical décor and bespoke artwork by local Scottish illustrators, painters and photographers. In Glasgow, [Radisson Blu Glasgow](#) has unveiled almost 250 completely renovated bedrooms as part of a £15 million refurbishment project, marking a new era for the Glasgow venue, with additions planned for 2024. Lastly, **Mount Royal Hotel** in Edinburgh is undergoing a £7m transformation set to conclude in early 2024. Mount Royal Hotel boasts stunning views of Princes Street Gardens, The Scott Monument, and Edinburgh Castle, making it an ideal

choice for business travellers and tourists due to its strategic proximity to Waverley Station and the city's tram network.

With these recent developments, Scotland not only positions itself as a vibrant and accommodating host for conferences and conventions but also as a destination that values sustainability, social responsibility, and providing unique, memorable experiences for attendees. The upcoming year promises a dynamic and enriching environment for business gatherings in the heart of Scotland.

Should you have any questions or if you have any story ideas you'd like to further explore, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Thank you,
Hannah