



# Outer Hebrides Cruise Forum

## Cruise Destination Plan







## CONTENTS

- Background ..... 4
- Stornoway Deep Water Terminal – A Catalyst for Change ..... 5
- Where are we now?..... 6
- Realising the opportunity ..... 7
- Capacity building ..... 8
- Visitor management ..... 9
- Infrastructure ..... 10
- Operational improvements ..... 12
- Shore excursion improvements ..... 14
- Sustainability ..... 16
- Communication plan..... 17
- Appendix 1 – plan consultees..... 18
- Appendix 2 – case study: a typical busy cruise day ..... 19



## BACKGROUND

### The construction of a new £60 million Deep Water Terminal in Stornoway is due to be completed prior to the 2024 cruise season.

The new facility will accommodate the largest cruise ships in the world, establishing Stornoway as the only port in the north-west of Scotland where these ships can berth, this presents a significant opportunity for businesses and communities in Lewis and Harris.

Growth in cruise tourism will bring many benefits to our islands – increased visitor numbers and spend, increased awareness and profile of the Outer Hebrides and all it has to offer, and wider economic and social impact – helping to sustain local communities, provide local employment and new business opportunities.

The Outer Hebrides Cruise Tourism Destination Plan sets out the Vision for the future:

“To work with communities to be the must-see cruise destination in Scotland”

# STORNOWAY DEEP WATER TERMINAL – A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

The investment in a new cruise facility on the west coast of Scotland, opens the entire region to more visitors from across the world, offering them a unique experience matching the very best in Europe.

The Outer Hebrides Cruise Tourism Destination plan sets out the region's ambitious mission:

“We shall deliver sustainable high levels of cruise visitor satisfaction with the development of a wider variety of bespoke and authentic cruise visitor experiences and activities across the islands, in turn capturing more value, growth and benefits within the communities and businesses of the Outer Hebrides.

We shall ensure this is aligned, complementary to, and not detrimental to, the high value overnight market, and the positive visitor experience of our other core visitor markets.”

The ambition is to grow cruise tourism numbers sustainably, by:

- offering new itineraries
- offering unique experiences
- expanding popular sites
- improving local infrastructure

The opening of the Deep Water Terminal, accompanied by continued development of the destination, gives Lewis and Harris the prospect to become a must-see cruise destination in Northern Europe and provides the opportunity to showcase our beautiful islands and culture.

Cruise market growth in Lewis and Harris will provide an opportunity to develop tourism products and boost the local economy. Cruise passengers are now typically younger, and technology driven, which provides a fantastic opportunity for our innovative island communities. These innovations could include hydrogen shuttle buses, electric shuttle boats and technology to support visitor itinerary planning.

Welcoming larger number of visitors offers the opportunity to promote the Gaelic language as an asset and commercial contributor to the local and national economy. It is one of our unique selling points and offers a window to showcase our unique Gaelic culture to worldwide visitors, enriching their experience in our community and offering additional opportunities for local growth of the language.

The Deep Water Terminal offers a potential catalyst for positive change in our community, allowing new and existing tourism companies to thrive, grow and become part of the wider success story. Sustainable shore excursions will include not only activities that responsibly manage their environmental impact, but also preserve and promote local history and culture, whilst protecting the rights and resources of the local community. The Cruise Tourism Destination Plan demonstrates the high worth and value of our marine environment and its significance, reflecting the outcomes of Scotland's vision for the Blue Economy:

- **Natural Capital Outcome:** Scotland's marine ecosystems are healthy and functioning, with nature protected and activities managed using an ecosystem-based approach, to ensure negative impacts on marine ecosystems are minimised and, where possible, reversed.
- **Climate Change Outcome:** Scotland's Blue Economy is resilient to climate change, contributing to climate mitigation and adaptation, supporting Scotland's Net Zero and Nature Positive commitments.
- **Economic and Trade Outcome:** Established and emerging marine sectors are innovative, entrepreneurial, productive and internationally competitive.
- **Food Security, Nutrition and Health Outcome:** Scotland is a global leader in healthy, quality, sustainably harvested and farmed Blue Foods, for our own population and beyond.
- **Social Inclusion and Equalities Outcome:** Thriving, resilient, regenerated, healthy communities have more equal access to the benefits that ocean resources provide.
- **Ocean Literacy Outcome:** Scotland is an ocean literate and aware nation.



## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

**Pre-pandemic, the cruise tourism industry was growing rapidly in Scotland, with almost 900 cruise ship calls and over 800,000 cruise passengers visiting Scotland in 2019. The forecast for 2020 had been for over 1,000 cruise ship calls and one million cruise passengers. Since the end of the pandemic, there has been a resurgence in cruise numbers with most forecasts expecting cruise numbers to return to pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2023 and continue to grow steadily.**

The Outer Hebrides has historically attracted mostly smaller cruise ships with the ability to berth alongside in Stornoway. However, Stornoway has also successfully hosted occasional much larger vessels, the largest being a 3,000 passenger vessel in 2016. A case study has been developed outlining a day in the life of a large cruise ship visiting Stornoway and details on how Lewis and Harris can provide a high quality, welcoming and sustainable cruise experience, bringing increased value and spend into the local economy, with minimal disruption to local communities (see Appendix 2).

Cruise calls in 2022 evidenced the Outer Hebrides is an increasingly popular destination for all types of cruise ships, including luxury and family cruises, as well as the growing adventure and expedition cruise market. With its current infrastructure, cruise call days and cruise visitor numbers to Stornoway in 2022, across the summer season, grew to c.22,000 visitors.

Stornoway's Deep Water Terminal will provide a new gateway to the Outer Hebrides and enable the islands to realise their full potential as a perfect location for UK cruise ships to visit.

## REALISING THE OPPORTUNITY

### Larger numbers of visitors to our community strengthens the economic sustainability and wider growth opportunity for our tourism businesses and facilities.

Stornoway Port Authority, Highlands and Island Enterprise, Outer Hebrides Tourism, Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar and VisitScotland, have established the Outer Hebrides Cruise Forum. The forum is working closely together to ensure the opportunities presented are realised. A dedicated resource has been created to ensure the successful development of local shoreside opportunities. With assistance from HIE, Outer Hebrides Tourism will employ a Cruise Destination Development Project Manager to support the development of the shoreside requirements.





## CAPACITY BUILDING

### Cruise visitors are seeking more authentic and memorable local experiences.

There is increased demand for a wider range of onshore activities, more personalised experiences and engagement with local people, communities and culture of the islands.

There is an immediate need to develop the visitor offer within Stornoway town centre for cruise passengers disembarking into the town whilst simultaneously creating new itineraries which spread cruise visitors across Lewis and Harris.

The Cruise Destination Development Project Manager will assist businesses and communities to capitalise on the increased opportunities created by the Deep Water Terminal.

Working with Business Gateway and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Manager will support business-to-business collaboration, and communities to come together to develop new or enhanced itineraries and experiences for cruise visitors

embedded into, and benefitting, the local community and businesses, for example:

- allowing cruise visitors to more easily experience the unique wildlife and environment, and adventure activities
- developing new cultural experiences around our Gaelic language, genealogy and heritage
- developing cultural immersion experiences
- experiencing the uniqueness of the islands from Harris Tweed through to island crofting, adventure activities and the high-quality crafts and gifts produced by our artisan businesses

Customer service training will be made available to any tourism / retail customer-facing organisations in Lewis and Harris that wish to take it up. Integrated training will be developed and available for tour guides and cruise ambassadors, to ensure consistent messaging and a welcoming reception for all cruise visitors.

# VISITOR MANAGEMENT

Increased visitor demand will place greater pressure on the current visitor infrastructure in Lewis and Harris in the short-term as our innovative, entrepreneurial communities and businesses develop products and services to meet the market needs.

Targeted investment is required to ensure that the growth in visitor numbers from both cruise and other tourism sectors is sustainable and that there are pro-active infrastructure and visitor management plans in place.

Wider tourism infrastructure opportunities and challenges are being planned for and addressed – infrastructure improvements for key tourism attractions are highlighted as priorities within the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

A Cruise Destination Action Plan, which is an evolving document reflecting community and cruise line priorities, provides a framework for the Cruise Forum of the improvements and efficiencies identified to ensure:

- a positive cruise visitor experience
- efficient and effective cruise visitor management and dispersal throughout our communities
- minimal negative social or environmental impact
- maximum local economic benefits for our businesses and communities



# Top Tier Instructure

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	OBJECTIVE	PROPOSAL
Calanais Stones	5,000-year-old standing stones which pre-date Stonehenge, which currently attracts between 3,000 and 5000 cruise passengers a year (approx. one third of total cruise visitors).	Increase visitor capacity ensuring unique and popular visitor experience is maintained.	Increase coach parking capacity.  Major redevelopment of the whole Calanais campus.
Gearrannan Village	Traditional blackhouses, showcasing life in the last two hundred years. The village has become a highlight for island visitors.	Resolve issues surrounding the existing single track access road which restricts the ability of the community to welcome visitors.	Improve the existing single-track road by installing additional passing places and improve the general road condition.  Increase capacity of the coach parking area.
Cromwell St Quay	An underutilised, but prominent public area around Stornoway harbour, which has great potential to be the central public space in Stornoway town centre.	Ensure passengers arriving via shuttle bus have a pleasant welcome into the town. Increase visitor appeal and safe passage through the town towards the Castle. Create additional space for pop-up and events within the town centre.	Create cruise shuttle bus waiting area.  Create pavilion areas which will allow performances as well as stall areas in the waiting area. Create walkway along harbour passing through a new access into Lewis Castle grounds.
lolaire Centre	Proposed new visitor centre in Stornoway Town centre which will detail the implications of the 1919 lolaire tragedy.	Ensure that there is a visitor attraction within Stornoway Town centre.	Construction of new visitor centre.
St Kilda Visitor Centres	Proposed new visitor centres in Uig and Northton to showcase life in St Kilda.	Disperse cruise visitors throughout the islands and create unique tours.	Construction of new visitor centre.
Butt of Lewis Lighthouse	Proposed new visitor centre at Butt of Lewis lighthouse, the most north-westerly point in the UK (excluding Rockall).	Disperse cruise visitors throughout the islands and create additional opportunities in the Galson Trust area.	Major redevelopment of Butt of Lewis lighthouse and creation of new visitor experience.

# Medium Tier Infrastructure

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	OBJECTIVE	PROPOSAL
Bosta Beach and Iron Age village	Iron age village uncovered by a storm in 1996 situated beside one of the most beautiful beaches in the Outer Hebrides.	Ensure the access road is suitable for coaches.	Improve the existing single track access road and parking area for coaches.
Ui Church	13th century church which was burial place of Macleod chieftains.	Create additional cruise passenger experience in close proximity to Stornoway.	Increase car/coach parking facilities and visitor information facilities.
Carloway Broch	2,000-year-old stone fort of a type only found in Scotland.	Ensure the Coach parking and toilet facilities are upgraded to cope with increased numbers. Improve access through grazing lands.	Alterations to the existing parking area and improvements to the toilets and visitor centre.  Improve access track through the grazing land.
Garrabost Mill	Former meal mill dates back to 1893, powered initially by water and latterly by a unique paraffin-driven engine, believed to be the only one in Scotland.	Restore the mill and surrounding structures and improve accessibility to the mill. Introduce the mill as a new excursion.	Restore the building's structure.  Develop access roads, parking and pathways. Work with other local attractions and excursion providers/cruise lines to develop cruise visitor commercial offering.
Lewis Castle Museum	Recently opened museum showcasing the history of the islands.	Develop the visitor experience to give greater prominence of Lewis chessmen at the museum.	Develop the experience associated with the worldwide significance of the Lewis Chessmen.

## Lower Tier Infrastructure

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	OBJECTIVE	PROPOSAL
Public Toilets	Toilet availability is a necessity for the successful development and dispersal of shore excursion opportunities.	The limited availability of public toilets is restricting tourism development across the island. Excursion development will be limited in areas with no public toilet provision.	Work with local communities to provide public toilets across the island.
Coach Laybys	A major aspect of coach tours is stopping for “the picture”.	More parking spaces are required in specific areas which will allow coaches to stop, and visitors take a short walk for “the picture”.	Develop proposals for additional parking spaces across the islands which will allow more local opportunities including pop-up shops.
Town centre	Stornoway town centre will be the focal point for cruise arrivals.	Stornoway Town centre has some scenic spaces, but areas within the town centre require improvement.	<p>Improve all visitor information signage around town, including incorporation of Gaelic into visitor signage.</p> <p>Investigate options in respect boarded up premises General improvements to all public spaces.</p> <p>Identify historically and culturally significant spaces, identifying them to visitors with interpretation boards as part of walking tours. Identify appropriate areas to develop interpretation/attractions related to marine life and the wider local blue economy.</p>

## Operational Improvements

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	OBJECTIVE	PROPOSAL
Visitor Information	Increased number of cruise visitors will require increased communication options.	<p>Minimise impact on non-cruise tourists on busy cruise days.</p> <p>Improve the tourist information available locally and online.</p> <p>Provide clear communication of cruise arrival information for local businesses and members of the public.</p>	<p>Develop a web application which allows public access to real-time visitor centre capacity constraints.</p> <p>Increase cruise relevant tourist information on Outer Hebrides Tourism and Stornoway Port Authority websites. Increase language provision.</p> <p>Web application accessible by public as well as tourists. Stornoway Port Authority to provide information on cruise arrivals in advance.</p>

	Attraction and shop opening times	To ensure all businesses can take advantage of cruise visitors, ensure shops and visitor attractions are open during cruise visits.	Stornoway Port will continue to make available cruise bookings. Additionally, the port authority will provide more regular updates of any unusual timings or additional visits.
Stornoway town centre	Higher profile due to increased visitor numbers	Ensure the town provides a welcome, clean and memorable environment. Ensure economic opportunities are achieved.	Ensure Stornoway town centre is clean and with improvements planned.  Identify and map out walking routes around the town.  Soft landscaping improvements. Increase number of photo points.
Customer Experience	Increased visitor numbers will impact shops and tourist attractions	Shops and visitor attractions to be able to deal with increased footfall. Visitors need to see a consistent and professional welcome across all activities. Visitors to be exposed to Gaelic language and culture at every opportunity.	Develop customer experience training for rolling out to public facing local people.  Include Gaelic phrases which will provide a unique and consistent welcome across shops and visitor attractions.
Destination Marketing	Improve cruise marketing to further cater for cruise trade and cruise passenger.	Prepare marketing material which concentrates on cruise passenger requirements, which is consistent with other OHT branding. Take advantage of the huge opportunity to promote cultural tourism.	Stornoway Port Authority to continue to develop its B2B marketing strategy.  All partners work together to provide a marketing strategy for cruise passengers which recognises overall Outer Hebrides strategy.  Increase focus of Gaelic language and local culture within marketing materials.  Identify and reinforce Outer Hebrides' USP for cruise customers.  Promote location within Scotland and Europe.  Reinforce "Outer Hebrides" brand.

# Shore Excursion Improvements

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	OBJECTIVE	PROPOSAL
Tour Guides	Tour guides are required for bus trips and also for walking tours around Stornoway	<p>Increase number of tour guides to meet increased demand.</p> <p>Assist with training to improve technical knowledge.</p> <p>Ensure consistent commentary.</p> <p>Increase use of Gaelic on all tours.</p>	<p>Increase tour guide numbers by undertaking specific tour guide training.</p> <p>Improve quality of technical knowledge by having a knowledge bank of all tours including increased use of Gaelic within tour guiding resource.</p> <p>Increased collaboration between tour guides, OHT, Shore excursions, etc.</p>
Cruise Ambassadors	Stornoway Port Authority cruise ambassadors provide the welcome party for arriving passengers, giving leaflets, information and general discussion.	<p>Ensure there are sufficient cruise ambassadors available for increased vessel numbers.</p> <p>Ensure literature is available for increased numbers, promoting digital downloads where possible.</p> <p>Ensure cruise ambassadors will deliver consistent message.</p>	<p>Stornoway Port to work closely with cruise ambassador organisation.</p> <p>Use the newly branded material to provide both paper and digital literature.</p> <p>Work to provide knowledge bank and digital resource.</p>
Coach resource	Coaches are required to disperse cruise passengers around the island.	<p>Increase coach availability for cruise shore excursions.</p> <p>Shuttle buses available to take passengers from Deep Water Terminal into town centre and castle.</p> <p>Suitable timings for public buses.</p>	<p>Work with shore excursion providers and coach providers to ensure future capacity requirements are realised.</p> <p>Stornoway Port Authority to arrange shuttle buses on Deep Water Terminal cruise days.</p> <p>Work with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to review timetabling.</p>

Excursion Development	Shore excursions are provided by specialist companies employed by the cruise lines to give a positive passenger experience in a destination.	Increase capacity of existing excursions.	Infrastructure and other improvements noted above will enable increased capacity at existing visitor attractions.
		Increase range of excursions. Vary dispersal of cruise visitors around the island.	Promote opportunities ensuring that all ideas are considered and presented
		Increase small tour options.	Promotion will ensure that ideas can be realised for experiences around the island.
		Increase unique experience options for private tours.	Work with Shore excursion companies to determine realistic options.
		Increase range of walks around the wider Stornoway area, including Point Coastal walks.	Assist local businesses where direct approach to passengers may be the only option.  Develop additional walking tours, including tours to Point Ui church and the Iolaire Memorial.
		Ensure community groups around Lewis and Harris take advantage of the opportunities to present their local heritage to cruise passenger groups.	Work with local communities and coman eachdraidh to develop commercial packages for cruise visitors.
		Ensure that shore excursion providers move new products forward to the cruise lines.	Work with the wide range of community groups and centres around the islands to assist them in providing commercially achievable tours in their area.
			Work with shore excursion companies to develop a local presence.

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Polemic or paradoxical issues of sustainable tourism are brought to the forefront in cruise tourism. There is a need for a balanced approach that focuses on minimising impacts and risks.

The Outer Hebrides Cruise Destination Plan is aligned with the WTO definition of sustainable tourism. This is not only in terms of addressing the social or community pressures that an increase in cruise tourism numbers may bring, and in maximising the value to host communities and visitors, but also in terms of the environmental impact of cruise tourism.

Best practices to mitigate cruise tourism impacts and maximise benefits across the value chain and its visitor flows are overarching themes in this strategy, these include:

- Proactive management of cruise traffic to ensure visitor numbers are manageable and sustainable for both the green and blue economy;
- Staff training on environmental and cultural issues, including operational procedures and requirements to minimise environmental impact as well as cultural references and stories to engage and attract the tourists;
- Inclusion and promotion of the local marine economy and seafood sector within local attractions and information spots
- Capacity building, training and facilitation of market access for local businesses to provide goods and services throughout the value chain;
- Measuring and tracking sustainability indicators and setting related process-and outcome-based goals;
- Embedding sustainability into the supply chain;
- Benchmarking and sharing best practices within the sector, overcoming challenges by finding opportunities for improvement and changing behaviour.

Cruise operators are interested in working with the local destination organisations to ensure each cruise visit is a positive experience for both their customers and the local host population. This supports the principal aim of dispersing visitors around the islands through providing new itineraries and experiences, relieving pressure on the main visitor attractions, whilst generating new income streams and opportunities to other communities.

# COMMUNICATION PLAN

AUDIENCE	OBJECTIVE	CHANNEL	OWNER
<b>Local Visitor Attractions, Businesses and Communities</b>	Continuous improvement of destination	Pre and Post Season Survey – what worked/ what didn't	SPA/CDDPM
		Trade communications	OHT
	Improved awareness of demand levels	Weekly Text Alert / Email – advance notice of anticipated visitors the following week	SPA
		Itinerary published 12 months in advance	SPA
	Business Development support	Targeted support towards those developing businesses to support this growth market	HIE / BG
Supply chain events to be held as the market develops		HIE	
<b>Cruise Passengers</b>	Improved awareness of Lewis and Harris as a destination	Active online promotion of Stornoway as a cruise destination on local partner websites	OHT / SPA
		Actively seek promotion opportunities of Stornoway in cruise publications, bloggers, influencers	SPA
	Continuous improvement of destination	Survey of passengers prior to departure – exploring perception prior to and following visit	CDDPM
	Improved awareness of independent traveller options	Development of a variety of themed tourist literature and maps in a range of language options	VS / OHT
		Development of website to include section assisting independent cruise travellers to plan itinerary	OHT
<b>Shorex</b>	Continuous improvement of destination	Post season meeting – what worked well / what didn't	SPA
	Create awareness of all potential excursion opportunities in Lewis and Harris	Regular communication channels to be agreed with Shorex	CDDPM
		Annual meet the buyer event to be held as the market develops	HIE / SPA
<b>Cruise Lines</b>	Improved awareness of Stornoway Port as destination	Continued liaison with cruise lines	SPA
		Continued representation at worldwide trade fairs	SPA
		Continued representation at national level	SPA
		Actively seeking online promotion in trade publication	SPA
<b>Port Supply Chain</b>	Continuous improvement of destination	Post departure survey	SPA
	Continuous improvement of destination	Pre and Post Season engagement – what worked/ what didn't	SPA
		Weekly Text Alert / Email – advance notice of anticipated visitors the following week.	SPA
		Itinerary published 12 months in advance	SPA

# APPENDIX 1

## List of Consultees

- Excursions Ltd
- European Cruise Service UK Ltd
- Travel Yields
- Western Isles Tour Guide Association
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Arnol Blackhouse
- Seatrek
- Ionad Hiort
- Heb 360
- An Lanntair
- Car Hire Hebrides
- Lews Castle Museum
- Together Travel
- Community Land Outer Hebrides
- Galson Trust
- Carloway Community Association
- Comunn Eachdraidh Nis
- Air An Lot
- Seallam! Visitor Centre
- Point and Sandwick Trust
- Cala Hotels
- Harris Tweed Authority
- Calanais Visitor Centre
- Loch Motors Transport
- Sandwick Bay Candles
- Heritage Forum
- Storas Uibhist
- Harris Development Ltd
- Barra & Vatersay Community Ltd
- Castlebay Hotel
- Scottish Government – Tourism Team
- Destination Orkney
- Orkney Harbour
- Lerwick Port Authority

## APPENDIX 2

# CASE STUDY: A TYPICAL BUSY CRUISE DAY



### CARNIVAL PRIDE STORNOWAY CALL 18TH JULY 2022

Carnival Pride is a 2,000 passenger cruise ship, which made two calls to Stornoway in 2022, the vessel had not been to Stornoway previously. Her maiden visit to Stornoway was on 18 July 2022.

### MARINE INFORMATION

Due to the size of the vessel she was unable to berth in the harbour however she was able to sit (on DP) in the middle harbour all day. A Stornoway Port Authority pilot was required to stay on the vessel whilst it sat in the middle harbour. Tender operations commenced at 7am taking passengers to the pontoon at pier no.3.



### PASSENGER ARRIVAL INFORMATION

At Pier no.3, Stornoway Port Authority security staff attended the Port Security post all day, whilst the Cruise Ambassadors were in attendance to welcome passengers and provide local information.

### SHORE EXCURSIONS

Inter cruises were the main shore excursion provider for this call and arranged a variety of tours for the vessel. They had arranged the following tours:

- North Lewis Lewis Far North Discovery
- Lewis & Arrol Blackhouse
- Breathtaking Harris
- Hebridean Rib Adventure
- Bostadh Sands & Iron Age House
- Walking tour of Lewis Castle grounds and museum

Tour guides from the Western Isles Tour Guide Association accompanied cruise passengers on the bus and walking tours.

### VISITORS

2,000 mainly American passengers who were interested in the history of the islands and wandering around Stornoway.

### CHALLENGES

The HebCelt Festival was on that weekend, and the overlap between the departing ferry resulted in a very busy ferry terminal.

### FEEDBACK

Local feedback was very positive, with a busy town and local shops very happy with the sales.



## For further information:

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Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean