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# The Dornoch Report

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Dornoch Area Community  
Interest Company 2013

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## Dornoch, the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Dornoch Area Community Interest Company (DACIC) decided in late June of 2013, to gather information on Dornoch as a destination for visitors to the town and local area. The information would be used to inform future marketing plans and developments as well as to highlight areas of performance both good and bad. The good could be celebrated and used as a promotional tool and problem areas could be considered and addressed.

This activity is part of DACIC's response to the Dornoch Economic Masterplan, commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The Masterplan's first two objectives are to "Build Brand Profile" and to "Increase visitor numbers to Dornoch and South East Sutherland" and this exercise is our first step towards those objectives.

DACIC sought to gain understanding of three primary aspects of its offering to visitors:

- how Dornoch appears to first time visitors who might be arriving for an extended stay or just visiting for a day,
- what visitors actually think about the area
- what accommodation is available

Additional information was gathered on who our customers are in terms of age groups, length of visit and where they come from.

The first survey was conducted by DACIC and directed at visitors. The greatest response came from those staying in B&Bs with very few from people staying in caravans so this will be reflected in the results.

The second report, How Our Customers See Us was conducted by Highland Retail Academy and DACIC is grateful to Highlands and Islands Enterprise, East Sutherland Ward Discretionary Fund and Dornoch Common Good Fund for assistance in meeting the cost of this exercise.

The final report was conducted by North Highland Initiative for DACIC and we are grateful to them for their support.

## The Good

The best news from all sources is that visitors to Dornoch like the area, would return in future and recommend it to their friends. Of all those completing the survey, 99% said they would come back and the remaining 1% said they would probably return. This is a resounding endorsement and should be celebrated. Of those completing the form, 50% were first time visitors and 50% returning and both groups responded equally positively. How many destinations enjoy such a spectacular success rate?

Visitors frequently refer to the excellent hospitality they've enjoyed and the warm welcome of "friendly locals". They also enjoy the lovely town and stunning scenery in the surrounding area. Over one third noted that it is beautiful as it is.

How Our Customers See Us also notes how attractive the town is, how pleasant to wander around and how it benefits from a good range of shops, cafes and eating places. We are fortunate that our core “product” is so strong.

The accommodation survey shows that Dornoch has little spare capacity in the high season of July and August. Dornoch also attracts significantly more overseas travellers than the Highland average.

### The Bad

While visitors liked Dornoch they noted some areas which were poor.

It can be no surprise to anyone local that a number of visitors commented unfavourably on the public lavatories. This has long been an issue in Dornoch and isn't it time that the Highland Council took some steps to address this problem? How can Dornoch really progress as a holiday town with such a fundamental inadequacy?

And Dornoch's boomerang issue, the one that just keeps coming back, signage, is again noted as a problem. Visitors commented specifically on poor signage to the beach but also wanted more shops but we have to ask were they finding all of Dornoch's shops? They wanted an Indian restaurant, there is one. They wanted a tourist information point, there is one and many similar requests and suggestions.

How Our Customers See Us comments that we have one of the very best golf courses in the entire world. Are we taking advantage of that to bring people here, certainly not in terms of simple signage. Would it not be a good plan to have a sign on the A9 saying something about Royal Dornoch or any other attractions? Currently the only sign to the golf course is on Church St, within sight of the club house. The report also notes that two of the major hotels and employers in the town, the Bay Dornoch Hotel and the Royal Golf Hotel are completely hidden. A visitor to the town could stay in Dornoch for days and never find them.

Highland Council has frequently been asked for help in improving Dornoch's signage over recent years but so far without any satisfactory result. These reports demonstrate clearly that there is a significant need for improvement if Dornoch is to progress and it is time the Highland Council played its part.

### The Ugly

Happily, very little in Dornoch is in any way ugly but there is one exception, the former abattoir, now falling into ruin. It is a carbuncle on Dornoch's lovely face. We are aware that Highlands and Islands Enterprise is taking an interest in the site and wish them all success in plans for clearance and then development.

# **Dornoch Area Community Interest Company**

## **Visitor Experience Survey 2013**

Dornoch Area Community Interest Company  
A company limited by guarantee  
Registered in Scotland No 327565  
Registered Office, Whinhill, Dornoch, IV25 3RW

## **Introduction**

As part of its plan to develop a marketing strategy for the town, the Dornoch Area Community Interest Company (DACIC) considered it important to understand the views of those visiting the Dornoch area. A visitor survey inviting the views of those staying in local hotels, B&Bs and self catering accommodation in Dornoch during the summer of 2013 was used to invite comment. A blank copy of the form used is appended to this report.

The questionnaire was short and simple, seeking to gather very basic information on who our visitors are, how long they stay and what they like or dislike about the town. The questionnaire was made available in local accommodation and in shops around the town so the results are a snapshot of one summer and are not necessarily a wholly accurate reflection of all visitors.

## The Findings

The most striking finding of the survey is that Dornoch is greatly enjoyed by visitors. Almost every comment is positive with very frequent references to excellent accommodation in all categories, friendly locals and warm hospitality.

The responses indicated that half were completed by first time visitors to Dornoch and half by return visitors. They show that Dornoch is as popular for new visitors as it is for people who have been returning for many years. This is an indication of great potential for the future, assuming there is the accommodation available to include everyone. The trends across the various kinds of visitors, including those travelling alone, couples, family groups and golfers all show similar views on their experiences while in Dornoch.

### *What is it that attracts people?*

- The big attraction for visitors causing them to come to Dornoch is the scenery and wildlife. It is therefore important that steps are taken to preserve this natural heritage.
- Golf is the second most popular attraction, as many golfer wish to play the world famous Royal Dornoch golf course.
- Other popular reasons for people staying in Dornoch include making a Highland tour, visiting friends and family or attending a wedding.

### *How long do people stay?*

- The fast majority of those travelling alone stay for 3 days or less
- Couples, whether retired or not, tend to stay for three days or less or for up to seven days
- Family groups tend to stay longer, for up to seven days
- Golfing groups also stay up to seven days

### *What does Dornoch need to make it more attractive?*

People from all the categories surveyed stated that Dornoch is beautiful as it is. However the following lists the most popular requests mentioned in the completed forms. It must be noted that the need for improvements in these areas was stated by all groups.

- Improved public toilets
- More leisure facilities particularly wet weather activities
- Improvements at the beach area, specifically better car park and some catering
- Clean up the burn
- A better range of restaurants and bars
- Improved signage around the town to the beach, B&Bs and other facilities

### *What has been enjoyed most?*

- The scenery
- Peace and quiet
- Friendly locals
- The dry weather
- Good golf course
- Good food and hospitality
- Clean and tidy town
- Castles
- Beaches

## Information gathered

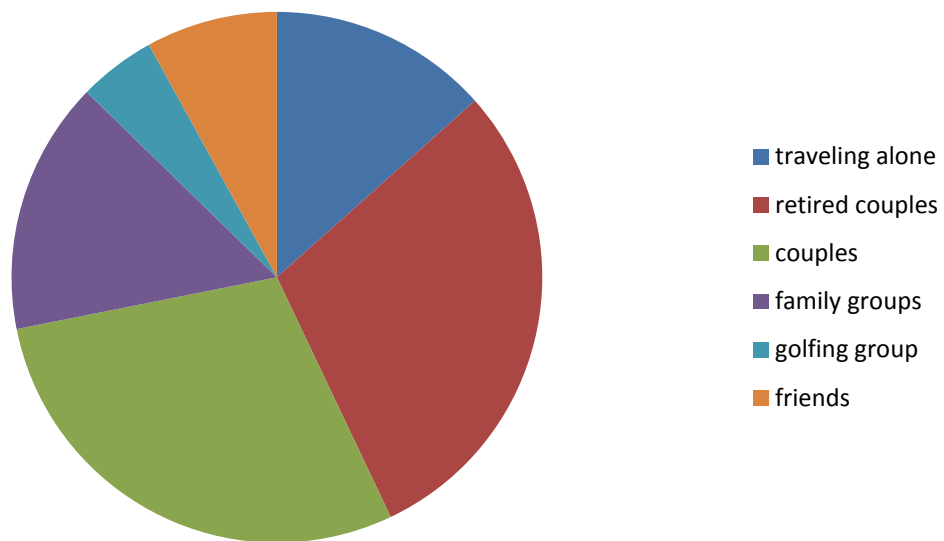
Just over 50% of those who completed the survey were first time visitors

99% of the first time visitor stated they would return to the area or recommend others to come, 1% of first time visitors stated that would "maybe return".

100% of those who had returned to visit Dornoch stated they would return to the area or recommend others to come.

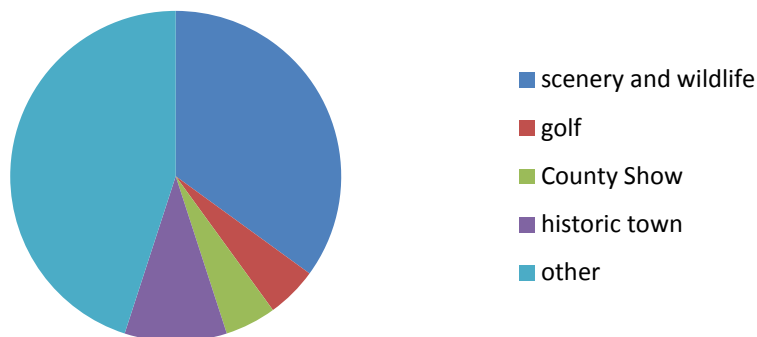
Those completing the form were:

### visitor information

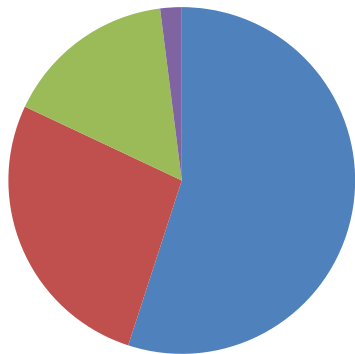


## What attracted people to Dornoch?

### lone travellers

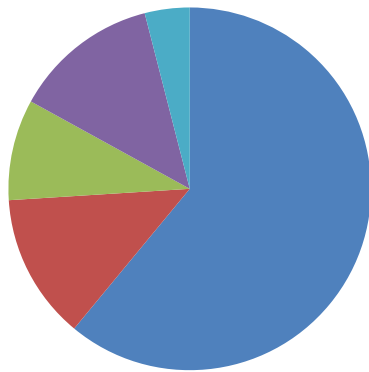


### retired couples



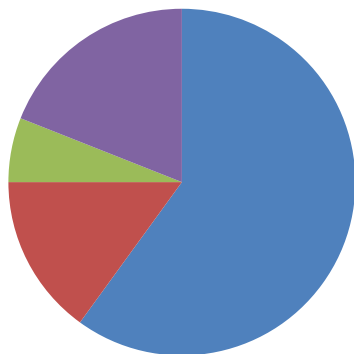
- scenery and wildlife
- golf
- touring north
- other

### family groups



- scenery and wildlife
- visiting family
- golf
- other
- wedding

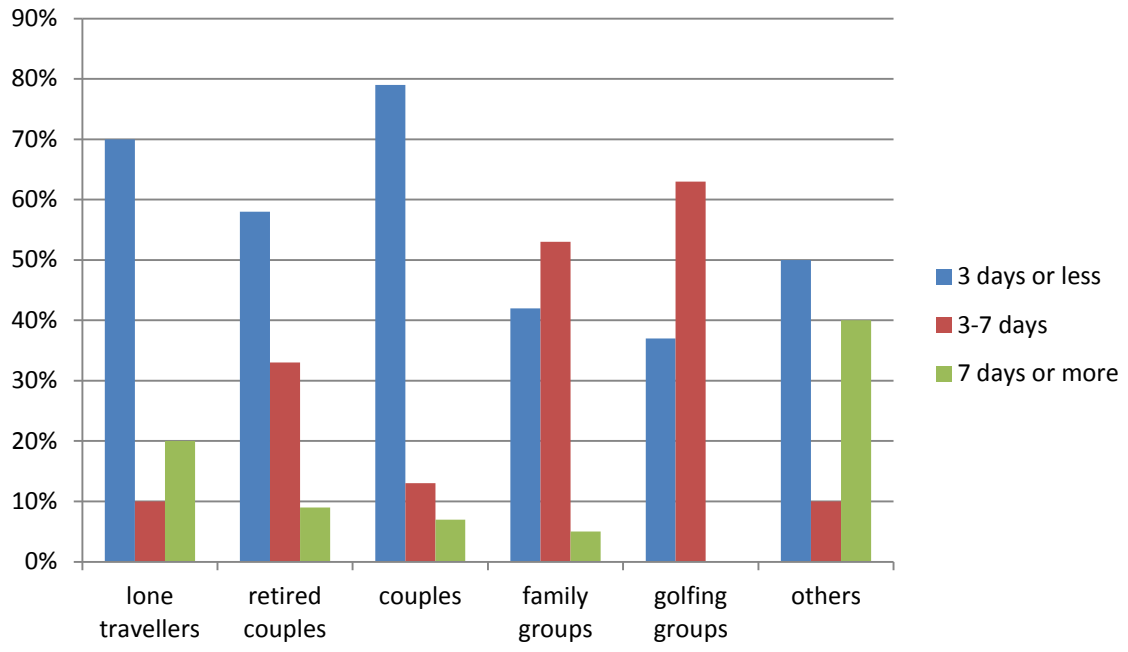
### others



- scenery and wildlife
- golf
- weddings
- other



## Length of stay



# Dornoch Area Community Interest Co., Visitor Experience Survey 2013

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Thank you for choosing to visit the Dornoch Area. We're delighted to welcome you here.

To help us to continue improving Dornoch for visitors, please help us by answering a few questions.

Is this your first visit to this area?	
Would you come back or recommend us to others?	

Are you?

- a) Travelling alone
- b) A retired couple
- c) Family group with more than one generation
- d) Other (please explain).....

What has attracted you to come here?

- a) Scenery and wildlife
- b) Golf
- c) Wedding
- d) Other (please explain).....

How long is your visit?

- a) 3 days or less
- b) 3-7 days
- c) More than 7 days

What does Dornoch need to make it a more attractive or better place to visit?

What have you enjoyed most during your visit?

Thank you for your help!