

# Herald Scotland

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## National travel body created by industry groups

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**TOUR firms have banded together to make nature pay through a new scheme that aims to increase trip numbers by 50% in the next four years.**

Industry groups Wild Scotland and Activity Scotland are today merging to create one of the largest umbrella bodies in national travel, to be known as the Wildlife and Adventure Tourism Association.

They said the move would help them tap into a lucrative domestic travel market and increase revenue to £848 million a year by 2015. Outdoor travel in Scotland was worth £759m annually before the recession hit, they said.

Fuelled by environmental awareness among consumers and soaring travel costs due to rising oil prices, domestic travel options have become increasingly appealing to UK tourists.

Europe has also been identified as a growing market for Scottish outdoor firms, though relatively untapped tourist sources in China, Russia and the Middle East remain off the radar for now. The new group aims to promote Scotland as "Europe's number one wildlife watching destination" while pushing adventure sports and outdoor pursuits to a growing customer base and representing its members' interests on the political stage.

In 2008, the last year for which figures were available, Scotland hosted 2.5m nature-related trips - a figure the new Association said would grow to 3.7m by 2015.

Ben Mardall, chairman of Wild Scotland – one of the two groups in the merger – said: "This is a logical move for both organisations. We are able to pool resources and leverage the synergy between Activity Scotland and Wild Scotland.

"In the current economic climate it is critical that we ensure the strongest possible foundation for our members. This move will allow us to represent Scotland far better on an international stage."

Frieda Bos, chair of Activity Scotland, said high-adrenalin sports could play a valuable role alongside more sedate outdoor pursuits.

"With the two organisations coming together we can really showcase what Scotland has to offer across the whole spectrum of adventure," she said.

The merger got a favourable response from international tour operators.

Shannon Stowell, president of the international Adventure Travel Trade Association, said: "Clearly there is a global trend towards more authentic and adventurous travel being demanded by customers.

"The more united our organisations are worldwide, the more this industry can drive economic value and be about the business of protecting the planet's best offerings of wildlife, environment and unique human culture."

VisitScotland chairman Mike Cantlay stressed the importance of the operators working together to boost economic growth. "Adventure tourism is a focal point of our current marketing activity and the creation of the Wildlife and Adventure Tourism Association is exciting news for anyone looking to get out and about and enjoy Scotland's great outdoors," he said.

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