

Media release

Immediate release

Images:

- A selection of images, which are free to use for this story only, can be downloaded from this OneDrive folder: [GSA Biosphere](#). Please credit the GSA Biosphere.
- A selection of images of the Galloway Forest Park, which can be used in the promotion of tourism in the South of Scotland, crediting South of Scotland Destination Alliance, can be downloaded [here](#).
- Further images can be downloaded from the VisitScotland toolkit [here](#).

Scotland's first UNESCO Biosphere named on National Geographic 'Cool List' for 2024



The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, Scotland's first UNESCO Biosphere, is celebrating the news that National Geographic Traveller (UK) has named it as the only Scottish destination in the prestigious global Cool List for 2024.

The "editors' selection of global destinations set to make the news over the next 12 months" identifies the top places around world "where tourism benefits communities and the environment as much as the visitors and locals themselves." The full results appear in the December 2023 issue of National Geographic Traveller (UK), which hits the newsstands today (2 November).

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere's listing celebrates the reserve's natural heritage, its UNESCO designation and its recently extended boundary, which recognises the site's cultural significance. It was revealed earlier this year that the site has now almost doubled in size from more than 5,200 km² to almost 9,800 km² - incorporating Alloway (the birthplace of Scotland's national bard Robert Burns), the Rhins of Galloway (Scotland's most southernly point) and the marine environment out to 12 nautical miles offshore. The listing also reflects the key role the Biosphere played in the development of the world's first UNESCO trail, a gamechanger for Scottish tourism.

Welcoming the news from National Geographic Traveller UK on behalf of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Partnership Board, Chair Melanie Allen, said: "We are thrilled that this year's National Geographic Traveller (UK) Cool List recognises the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere for developing tourism as a force for good. This is fantastic recognition of southwest Scotland as an outstanding visitor destination and highlights the importance of the Biosphere's collaborative approach - working with Biosphere Certified Businesses,

strategic leaders and partners - to build a secure and greener economic future for Scotland and the UK.

“Thanks to this ethos visitors can truly enjoy Galloway and Southern Ayrshire safe in the knowledge that their visit is as good for our communities and environment, as it is for their soul. With its awe-inspiring natural landscapes, fascinating heritage, and culture, we already knew the Biosphere was ‘cool’ and now its official!”

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Director, Ed Forrest said: “It is crucial that we all work together to find new ways of tackling the biggest interconnected challenges of our time. UNESCO Biospheres provide a blueprint for living in cultures all around the world, and the proof of their value is already being realised, as people begin to realise that sustainability in living, learning and leisure has to become our societal norm. So it is brilliant to see National Geographic Traveller has included the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere among the top places around the world where visitors can do this.

“Participation is at the very heart of the UNESCO Biosphere model and our success to date is absolutely testament to the incredible support our team has had from residents, community groups, business leaders, land managers, schools, local authorities, South of Scotland Enterprise, Dumfries and Galloway Council, South and East Ayrshire Councils, VisitScotland, the South of Scotland Destination Alliance, the Ayrshire and Arran Destination Alliance and more.”

Congratulating the Biosphere, VisitScotland Destination Development Director Gordon Smith said: “The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere is an area of outstanding significance for its geological and scientific interest, as well as its stunning scenery. Part of Scotland’s UNESCO Trail, the Biosphere has a key role in contributing to make Scotland a world-leading responsible tourism destination and it is fantastic to see the Biosphere included in National Geographic’s Cool List for 2024. This accolade will help shine the spotlight on the awe-inspiring beauty and diversity of the region as well as the invaluable work between the Biosphere and the local community.”

Daniel Steel, Chief Executive of the Ayrshire and Arran Destination Alliance said: “There is a huge amount to be excited about in the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, so it’s no surprise to hear it has been named on The National Geographic Traveller Cool List. This incredible accolade, and the UNESCO Biosphere’s recently boundary extension, reflects Ayrshire’s cultural significance and provides a fantastic platform to encourage visitors to enjoy our national assets in a sustainable way.”

David Hope-Jones OBE, Chief Executive of the South of Scotland Destination Alliance, said: “This is tremendously exciting news for the Biosphere, and indeed for the whole of the South of Scotland. Scotland’s first UNESCO Biosphere in Galloway and Southern Ayrshire is a world class environment connecting people with the natural world. Newly expanded and with community collaboration and participation at its heart, it has rightly forged a reputation as one of the leading sustainable travel destinations in the UK, featuring benchmark-setting businesses like Nithbank Country Estate – which is up for the Climate

Action Award at the national Scottish Thistle Awards next month – and Loch Ken Eco Bothies.

“The Biosphere’s international recognition by this fantastic list of exciting global destinations is another huge confidence boost for the region, following on from the South of Scotland being the only Scottish destination under the spotlight in Lonely Planet’s Best in Travel guide for 2023. Many congratulations to the whole Biosphere team and community.”

Professor Russel Griggs, Chair of SOSE, the South of Scotland enterprise agency, which has supported the project with five years of funding worth £1.9 million, said: “In 2020 South of Scotland Enterprise committed to supporting the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere with one of our most significant funding awards to date, because we could see that the organisation was bold, collaborative, fully embedded in the communities of the south of Scotland and offered great potential for further sustainable development in the region. We’re delighted to see that The National Geographic Traveller Cool List agree. This is excellent recognition for the south of Scotland.”

The Cool List 2024 will be published in full in the December 2023 issue of National Geographic Traveller (UK), available for UK readers to purchase, from 2 November 2023, priced £5.25. To see the full list online, visit: nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/uk-cool-list-2024

The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere is committed to ensuring that tourism is a force for good and brings only positive impacts to people and nature through truly special and memorable visitor experiences to visitors. The Biosphere’s website is full of information on how visitors can explore the area responsibly. Fifty businesses in the area have been awarded the Biosphere Certification Mark, which provides assurance to customers and guests that their spend will be sustainably reinvested in the local community and economy, and that it will support positive environmental practice. More here:

gsabiosphere.org.uk/explore-the-biosphere

UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere programme promotes a long-lasting connection between people and nature through over 740 designated sites across the world, including Yellowstone (USA), Niagara Escarpment (Canada), the Everglades (USA) and the Black Forest (Germany). National governments nominate Biospheres for UNESCO accreditation, which is then awarded by the Director-General of UNESCO following the decisions of the MAB international Coordinating Council (MAB ICC).

UNESCO Biosphere are models of sustainable development demonstrating how living in harmony with our natural environment is good for people, the economy and nature.

For more information about the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere, visit: gsabiosphere.org.uk

Ends

For more media information contact, Kirsty Innes, kirsty@kirstyinnespr.com

Notes to editors:

- Galloway & Southern Ayrshire (GSA) UNESCO Biosphere was designated in 2012, recognising the region's world class heritage and natural environments.
- One of a network of more than 740 UNESCO Biospheres in 134 countries, Galloway and Southern Ayrshire was the first such designation in Scotland.
- The GSA UNESCO Biosphere now covers almost 9,800 km² of southwest Scotland and is home to 110,000 people.
- Its original geographical boundary was based on catchments of the rivers flowing out of the Galloway Hills.
- Businesses that hold the Biosphere Certification Mark are helping Galloway and Southern Ayrshire play its part in achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The award of certification recognises the commitment of local business owners to the communities and environment of southwest Scotland, and their passion for Biosphere life.
- The Core Area of any UNESCO Biosphere is the region of highest conservation value – in the case of Galloway and Southern Ayrshire, these are the wetlands at Silver Flowe, the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Merrick-Kells, and the National Nature Reserve (NNR) at Cairnsmore of Fleet. Silver Flowe is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a wetland habitat of international importance. Cairnsmore of Fleet is an upland region where a mix of heath, heather and blanket bog supports a wide range of wildlife. The Biosphere's Core Area is focused on research and the protection of species, habitats, landscapes and ecosystems.
- In its first ten years, with funding from SOSE and three local authority partners, the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere:
 - championed sustainable development in the area's seven primary river catchments, 110 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and 22 European designated sites, including Silver Flowe, the most important patterned blanket bog in Britain; Cairnsmore of Fleet National Nature Reserve one of the wildest places in Southern Scotland; and The Merrick, identified by NatureScot as a nationally important Wild Land Area.
 - played a key role in the development of Scotland's award-winning UNESCO Trail – the first of its kind anywhere in the world – a network of thirteen UNESCO designations across Scotland including World Heritage Sites, Global Geoparks, Creative Cities and Biospheres. This game changer demonstrates the Biosphere's commitment to raising the profile of this region and developing tourism on a national level as a force for good.
 - launched the innovative Blackface Wool Project, supported by the Blackface Breeders' Association and British Wool, to promote the versatility of local wool (an integral part of the local heritage and community) and its diverse potential as a sustainable resource.
 - pioneered Biosphere Communities and the Biosphere Certification Mark, which recognise exemplars in local sustainable enterprise.
 - launched the innovative Biosphere Footsteps Programme, which supports local residents to make positive environmental impacts while cutting domestic costs.

- fostered international collaborations, including hosting colleagues from UNESCO Biospheres from around the world on learning journeys.
 - launched a Learning for Sustainability Toolkit, to support the Scottish Government's Curriculum for excellence, which is packed with ideas for teachers to use the region's UNESCO Biosphere designation as a giant outdoor classroom, helping young learners connect with nature and better understand some of the most critical issues their generation will face.
 - secured more than 500 individuals, businesses, organisations, schools and community groups as official Biosphere Proud Supporters.
 - piloted groundbreaking Community Visioning workshops, which are part of a project involving the UK Commission for UNESCO, the GSA Biosphere and other UNESCO designations in Scotland. Led by the University of Manchester, the workshops bring together local residents, land managers and other stakeholders to look at specific area's importance sustainability plans for the region as a whole. It is believed these could lead to a significant landscape restoration project. Due to the success of this first workshop the GSA Biosphere, Nith Life and The Stove will be working together in running a series of similar community visioning events at locations along the entire length of the Nith.
- The GSA Biosphere is very much a part of Scotland's rural southwest, where the land and its uses remain integral to everyday life. Beyond its central Core Area the Biosphere is home to historic industries such as farming, fishing and forestry; a dynamic variety of micro-businesses and SMEs; and communities that range in size from tiny hamlets to small towns.
 - The Biosphere and its partners are working together to promote the idea that ecologically sound activity can take place alongside conservation and research. Education, employment, tourism and enterprise can all be sustainable, and through a cooperative approach, they can achieve a balanced relationship between people and nature.
 - Right across Galloway and Southern Ayrshire, the Biosphere celebrates positive cultural values and identity, to help people learn more about where they live and better understand the heritage they all share.
 - The original biosphere boundary followed the rivers that flow out of the Galloway Hills through forests and farmland, historic villages and towns, all the way to a ruggedly scenic coast.
 - Backed by funding from South of Scotland Enterprise and three local authority partners, the last decade has seen the organisation grow from just 1.5 FTE staff to a team of twelve delivering partnership projects in conservation, education, enterprise, and climate resilience.
 - The Biosphere region was represented by community leaders, owners of businesses that have been awarded the Biosphere Certification Mark, local councillors and MSPs.
 - Public consultations conducted in 2021-22 showed overwhelming support for the proposed expansion among residents in the Rhins, especially for the opportunities offered for community development and coastal conservation.

- Now that UNESCO status has been assured the Biosphere will commence a programme of engagement to help the new areas connect with a diverse range of initiatives from destination marketing to landscape-scale nature restoration.
- The 748 UNESCO Biospheres around the world all share the same goals:
 - promoting the conservation of landscapes, wildlife and habitats.
 - Supporting a better understanding of global challenges.
 - Fostering a sustainable economy and society.
 - supporting the resilience of communities in facing climate change impacts.
- Biosphere Reserves are nominated by national governments and remain under the sovereign jurisdiction of the states where they are located. Biosphere Reserves are designated under the intergovernmental MAB Programme by the Director-General of UNESCO following the decisions of the MAB International Coordinating Council (MAB ICC). Their status is internationally recognized.