

‘British FBI’ helps Scots force tackle Costa del Crime

By Mary Wright
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The National Crime Agency (NCA) has assisted Police Scotland with a number of Costa del-Sol “threat-to-life” cases over the last year, a new report has revealed.

In addition to those cases – where either victims or suspects were based in Spain – the NCA helped Police Scotland arrest some of its “most wanted” fugitives.

The NCA has provided more assistance to Police Scotland than to than any other UK force in dealing with such cases, as the single Scottish force battles organised crime gangs with links to Spain.

The Costa del Sol – often known as the “Costa del Crime” – has long been a bolthole for some of Scotland’s most wanted organised crime figures.

The NCA – dubbed Britain’s FBI – says that, in recent months, its International Liaison Officers (ILO) have helped track fugitives, dismantle criminal networks and close down safe havens used by Scots gangsters.

The NCA report said: “Scottish Organised Crime Groups have a significant footprint in the Costa del Sol.

“This is reflected in Police Scotland requesting and being provided with more support than any other force by NCA ILOs Spain.

“Recent operations supporting Police

Scotland have resulted in the NCA sharing over 1,000 intelligence reports between Scotland and Spain and facilitating Police Scotland’s engagement with law enforcement agencies throughout the world through the ILO Network.

“NCA ILOs currently manage four high-profile Police Scotland fugitive inquiries and, in the past 12 months, have facilitated the arrest of a number of Police Scotland’s most wanted fugitives for money laundering and serious assault offences.”

Police Scotland operates two specialised branches that work directly alongside the NCA to target organised crime networks in Spain and locate fugitives hiding there.

The Fugitive Active Search Team (FAST) focuses on tracking down, arresting and extraditing high-level criminals who have fled Scotland.

The International Assistance Unit, based at the Scottish Crime Campus in Gartcosh, North Lanarkshire, is the central point of contact for all international cross-border operations.

Spanish police said in April they had “dismantled” a drugs gang linked to members of the Lyons family, following a three-year investigation carried out in collaboration with Police Scotland.

“Recent operations supporting Police

The tourist season is in full swing around the country

Hungry and thirsty visitors now want a lot more than just a See You Jimmy hat and a trip to a castle

By Lauren Robertson
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Once they’ve bought a tartan See You Jimmy hat and had a moment at Outlander’s standing stones, visitors to Scotland want to sample the finest food and drink the country has to offer.

Visit Scotland found 15% of tourists cite food and drink as a reason for travelling here, while more than 60% seek out a food and drink experience – such as a tour, workshop or cooking class – while

visiting. With our food and drink sector now valued at £19 billion, it’s not surprising that people from across the globe want to experience it.

Scotland Food and Drink has identified whisky, haggis, beef and seafood as the products most strongly associated with the country, and a rising interest in a “Made in Scotland” label indicates our provenance is more respected than ever before.

But, beyond having a decent bite to eat, or a damn good dram, how does our food and drink help people connect with the real Scotland? We spoke to three women who have made it their mission to tell our tales through taste buds.



Scones made by tourists who join cookery classes run by Anna Pelikan, right, in her home.



ANNA PELIKAN

The Scottish Cooking Experience

Anna Pelikan grew up on Skye, speaking Gaelic and going to ceilidhs.

When she started travelling, she realised a lot of people were interested in her ‘normal’.

After attending a cooking class in Prague, hosted in someone’s home, she realised she could offer something similar, and help people discover the true Scotland.

“I wanted to share the culture I grew up in with people who were actually interested in slowing down as opposed to the quick tours where you take a picture and go home,” said Anna.

“Tourists come here and maybe take a tour from a guide who is incredibly knowledgeable, but obviously not local to every area on the tour. It can be tricky to integrate into that culture they are looking for.”

At her home in Inverness, Anna launched The Scottish Cooking Experience, welcoming visitors from across the globe in to make

Cook mixes island culture and family history into her unique classes in kitchen

scones in her kitchen and chat about all things Scotland.

While she is proud of where she comes from, she doesn’t hold back on sharing the reality. “The class isn’t only about food, it’s about sitting down and teaching them some Gaelic and the history behind it, as well as my experience growing up on Skye, both the good and the bad,” said Anna.

“A lot of groups will either have been to Skye or be heading there, so they want to know why I left. It is one of the most beautiful places in the world but practically, day to day, it was a nightmare. They ask me about what jobs people have and what the industries are like.”

Anna is keen to show off good

old Highland hospitality, and does so by making sure every experience she hosts is personal – down to her connection to the woman who helped Bonnie Prince Charlie flee over the sea to Skye.

She said: “Flora MacDonald is my sixth great-grand aunt, so I can give them an overview of her story, then we can talk about their family history too.

“I think we have lost a bit of that connection with the tourism boom – the idea of sitting down together around a table and just learning about one another. That’s what I want to create.”

Find out more at
thescottishcookingexperience.com

and three hospitality experts tell how guests now seek an authentic experience

GHILLIE BASAN

Holidaymakers want to sample our way of life

When it snows, Ghillie Basan has to ski to her remote Highland home. In the warmer months, it’s always full of people, most visiting Scotland for the first time and hoping to delve into the culture through food and whisky.

“They all want food and drink experiences, but not necessarily restaurants,” said Ghillie.

“They also want to meet Scottish people and hear real stories they can relate to. They are in our home so they can see our lived experience.”

Ghillie – a writer, broadcaster and food anthropologist – hosts a wide variety of workshops in her home, from a Whisky Food Safari to Forage, Flavour and Traditions with her son Zeki and his traditional

skills expertise. Having lived all over the world, Ghillie combines Scottish recipes and ingredients with those she has picked up along the way.

“A lot of people don’t want haggis, but if they do, I often do it differently – like a little haggis dolma wrapped in a wild garlic,” said Ghillie.

“They don’t have to have it, but if they try it, they usually love it. Americans want salmon much more than any other culture and can’t understand why some restaurants don’t serve it,

experience, it’s not about having to do



Visitors roll up their sleeves to get to work in one of Ghillie’s workshops.

which is a great opportunity for an open conversation about salmon farming, the ethics surrounding it and the huge industry it is here.”

Of course, many are keen to try whisky, and Ghillie has shared in many people’s first tastings.

“I’ve curated food and whisky pairings but everybody’s palate is different, so people love being the judge of whether or not something works for them,” she said.

“At the end of the day, it’s an experience, it’s not about having to do

something a certain way. There’s a lot of humour, and because I have lived all over the world, I can tailor things to different cultures.

“Someone might say a whisky has an apricot note, but if you’re from Indonesia, you’ve probably never had an apricot. Why not ask them if they have a fruit that has a honeyed flavour and go from there? Then they make that connection between here and home, and they love it.”

Find out more at ghilliebasan.com

VICTORIA MILLER

Sip Seekers



Drinks flow as visitors make whisky blends, right, and taste their own concoctions, left. Victoria Miller, below.

Further whisky boom is just a Sip away

Over the last decade, the Scotch whisky industry has poured more than £300 million into distillery tourism. With competition continually rising, visitor experience is more important than ever.

“When people come here, their bucket list must-dos are to see a Highland cow, visit a castle and experience whisky in some form,” said Victoria Miller.

She launched Sip Seekers, a Scottish drinks tourism platform, after she struggled with confusing and multi-step tour booking. With more than 60 distilleries signed up to the specialised search engine, she can guide tourists and Scottish residents alike towards the experiences that will suit them

best. And people aren’t always filtering ‘price: low to high’.

“We have found since launching that elevated experiences are more popular than expected,” said Victoria.

“Things like drawing from the cask or blending your own whisky are really unique offerings, and a lot of places are now doing whisky and food pairings, which can bring local businesses together. Even people who think whisky isn’t for them will find something they enjoy on a tour, then it snowballs from there.”

Though the industry is booming, Victoria thinks we could be doing far more to make the most of it.

“Whisky is a really prestigious spirit – we should be proud

of that and protect it,” she said. “I don’t believe we are showcasing it enough – it’s not front and centre when tourists arrive. When people visit distilleries, they don’t just buy a dram, they stay locally, eat, shop and explore surrounding areas. Tourism spend filters into wider communities and creates meaningful economic value far beyond the distillery itself. The opportunity for Scotland is enormous. Whisky tourism is already hugely valuable, but Scotland is only scratching the surface of what this side of the industry could become.”

Find out more at
sipseekers.com

