Stirling Named the UK's Top Destination for 2026 as Highland Games Take Centre Stage

Sunday 18 January, 2026

Stirling has been officially recognised as the **best place to visit in the UK** for 2026, according to ***Time Out*****,** reinforcing the city's position as a top-tier destination for heritage-led tourism and major cultural events—including the **Stirling Highland Games and International Gathering**.

The accolade places Stirling at the top of a curated list of 14 UK destinations, ahead of established tourism powerhouses such as Edinburgh and Glasgow. The ranking highlights Stirling's **historic credentials, natural landscape, transport connectivity and flagship events calendar**, with the Highland Games singled out as a key driver of visitor appeal.

This follows Stirling's designation as **Scotland's top visitor destination by Lonely Planet** last year, underlining a consistent upward trajectory for the area's tourism economy.

A Strong Endorsement of Stirling's Tourism Strategy

Stirling Council Leader Susan McGill welcomed the recognition, positioning it as validation of the area's long-term investment in culture, place-making and visitor experience.

"We are proud to have been named as the best place to visit in the UK by *Time Out*. This recognition reflects Stirling's world-class tourism offering—from our scenery and heritage to our attractions, communities and events. We look forward to welcoming visitors from across the world in 2026."

With **world-famous landmarks**
such as Stirling Castle and the National Wallace Monument, direct access to **Loch Lomond and the Trossachs**, and a compact, walkable city centre, Stirling offers a high-value, high-impact visitor experience.

Highland Games Identified as a Must-See UK Cultural Event

In naming Stirling as its top pick, *Time Out* explicitly advised visitors to plan their trip around the **Stirling Highland Games and International Gathering**, taking place on **15 August 2026**.

UK News Editor Ed Cunningham wrote:

"We suggest taking advantage of the new train route in August, when you can combine your city break with the Stirling Highland Games and International Gathering."

The Games were described as **one of the country's mightiest cultural events**, reinforcing their status not just as a local tradition, but as a **national and international draw**—combining elite competition, music, dance, heritage and spectacle at scale.

Stirling Highland Games President Matt McGrandles was delighted with the recognition from *Time Out*:

"Having taken the reins more than a decade ago, this recognition is extremely welcome. That said, the credit rightly belongs to the team behind the scenes. Our organisers, committee and volunteer stewards put in an extraordinary effort each year, and without their commitment—alongside the continued support of our Supporting Partners and Friends of the Games—we simply could not deliver an event of this scale or significance. There is no room for complacency. We are focused on building on recent success, and investing in improvements to our location is now a critical priority."

Improved Access, Major Milestones and a Packed 2026 Calendar

Stirling's appeal is set to increase further with the launch of a **new direct and affordable Lumo rail service from London in 2026**, significantly improving access for UK and international visitors.

Additional highlights strengthening Stirling's destination offer this year include:

- The themed **Culture Night** project called Carnival of the Wolf in May

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- The **Stirling Walking the Marches** in May
- The **Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Regimental Showcase** on Armed Forces Day in June

Together, these developments create a **compelling commercial and cultural proposition**, with the Stirling Highland Games positioned as a flagship moment within a broader, high-performing events ecosystem.

City of Stirling Culture and Heritage

The message from *Time Out*
is clear: **Stirling's organisations are delivering**. Collaboration, authentic heritage, serious cultural assets and globally recognisable events—led by the **Stirling Highland Games and International Gathering**—are translating into measurable destination credibility.

For visitors planning 2026, and for stakeholders invested in Scotland's tourism economy, Stirling is no longer a hidden gem. It's **market-leading, event-driven and firmly on the UK's cultural map**.

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