MRI OnLocation for Footfall Analytics (formerly MRI Springboard)

Footfall Monitor and Insights

Scotland's High Street December 2023

A healthy boost for festive footfall in December compared to the previous month across Scotland's retail destinations despite a challenging economic climate

Covering the five weeks 26th November - 30th December 2023

High Street Index

December

2023 VS 2022
-2.1%

Dec VS Nov
+1.2%

2023 VS 2019
-16.5%

November

2023 VS 2022
+0.7%

Nov VS Oct
+2.7%

2023 VS 2019
-18.0%

Despite weather and rail disruptions, coupled with challenging economic conditions, December witnessed a surge in footfall of +6.2% from the month before in Scotland's retail destinations. This was predominantly boosted by the fourth week of the month, the final trading week before Christmas day, with footfall rising by +12.6% across Scotland's retail destinations.

Shopping centres led the charge with a rise in footfall of +16.2% in December from November followed by retail parks (+6.2%) and high streets (+1.2%). This is indicative of the diverse offerings of shopping centre destinations, from eating out to a multitude of retail brands, making them a preferred choice for consumers during the festive season.

Compared to 2022, footfall declined by -1.9% across Scotland's retail destinations, however this was largely driven by shopping centre activity dipping by -2.5% followed by a decline in high streets (-2.1%), and a marginal drop in retail park activity (-0.8%).

The month of December witnessed an improvement in footfall performance from the 2019 level as it narrowed to -14.5% across Scotland's retail destinations. In high streets this narrowed to -16.5% from -18% in the month before, shopping centres witnessed an improvement to -21.9% from -26.2% in November and retail parks also noticed this improve to -2.4% from -4.5% in the month prior.

THE MONTH OF DECEMBER BROKEN DOWN BY WEEK

The month began on a weak note, with footfall declining by an average of -1.1% in the first two weeks across all retail destinations from the week before, however this was much more noticeable in high streets where footfall dropped by an average of -4.6%. This was likely influenced by rail disruptions and poor weather deterring people from venturing out.

However, as we approached the pivotal festive trading period footfall took an optimistic turn with the penultimate Christmas week (w/c 10th December) seeing footfall reach +8.2% and then growing to +12.6% in that all important last week before Christmas (w/c 17th December).

This final week of Christmas trading was largely driven by activity in retail parks and shopping centres where footfall increased by +22.4% and +15.1%, respectively, from the week before as consumers made that last minute 'dash' for gifts and groceries. High streets also witnessed a surge in activity however this was much more noticeable in the penultimate trading week where footfall rose by +13.4% from the week before. This suggests that the investment made by many historic and market towns in festive events and attractions were worthwhile in driving footfall during the Golden Quarter ahead of consumers finalising their festive shops.

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BOXING DAY AND BEYOND

The week between Christmas and New Year tends to follow a historical trend of lower footfall from the week before. In 2023, Boxing Day footfall in Scotland's retail destinations was +14.3% higher than Boxing Day 2022, primarily driven by high streets (+25%) followed by retail parks (+9.4%) whereas shopping centres experienced a year-on-year decline of -2.9%. Despite the increase, footfall on Boxing Day remained -27.4% lower than 2019 levels, indicating continued travel or the growing trend to use this day to shop online which may have even started as soon as Christmas Day.

With so many retailers and outlets going into 'sale' from Black Friday the opportunity for further reductions during Boxing Day and beyond is likely to have lessened, this coupled with ongoing tightening of spend as a result of increased cost of living could account for these lower footfall figures.

LOOKING AHEAD TO JANUARY AND 2024

As we look ahead to January, a natural post-Christmas slump is anticipated, with footfall projected to decline in the region of -20% to -25%. Weather warnings across the country may lead to subdued footfall at the start of the month. However, this should improve as the month progresses, compared to 2023 levels, particularly with more and more employees returning to offices. The financial constraints felt in the latter part of 2023 for many consumers are likely to continue into the early part of 2024 which may also impact footfall in Scotland's retail destinations.

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