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FOREWORD FROM CLAIRE BRUCE CHAIR, VISITABERDEENSHIRE

I'm writing in June 2022 as we prepare to launch a long-term plan for tourism growth in the North-east. Without doubt, this remains an incredibly challenging time to be working in the tourism sector. Freedom to travel – that most fundamental requirement to create a tourism industry – is thankfully restored after two years of stop-start and stop again, but the knock-on effects of the pandemic, from labour supply and the cost of doing business, to the pound in the visitor pocket, all temper optimism for the short term at least.

But amid the challenges, the resilience of local businesses throughout the past year has yet again illustrated the grit,

determination and innovation that exists across the North-east tourism sector, and despite the obstacles to actually travelling, the enduring appeal of our part of Scotland remains strong among our visitors.

This review reflects upon the work delivered by VisitAberdeenshire to drive demand to visit the North-east, and to support local businesses to meet that demand. Throughout 2021 and early 2022, VisitAberdeenshire applied the learnings from the first year of the pandemic and adapted to adopt opportunities to enhance that work – quite often to meet very short funding deadlines.

Behind the scenes, we have continued to collaborate with businesses and destinations across Scotland to inform government of the reality of restrictions. Along with the Aberdeen City and Shire Hotel Association we maintained direct dialogue with government to ensure that the particular challenges faced by the North-east have been recognised.

This time last year I wrote that our aspiration for June 2022 was that we would “look back with confidence knowing that VisitAberdeenshire and its partners took every opportunity within our knowledge and resources to put the North-east visitor economy on the best possible footing to thrive in changing market conditions”. I would like to thank the whole team at VisitAberdeenshire for the hard work and flexibility demonstrated throughout the year to achieve that outcome.



INTRODUCTION FROM CHRIS FOY CEO, VISITABERDEENSHIRE

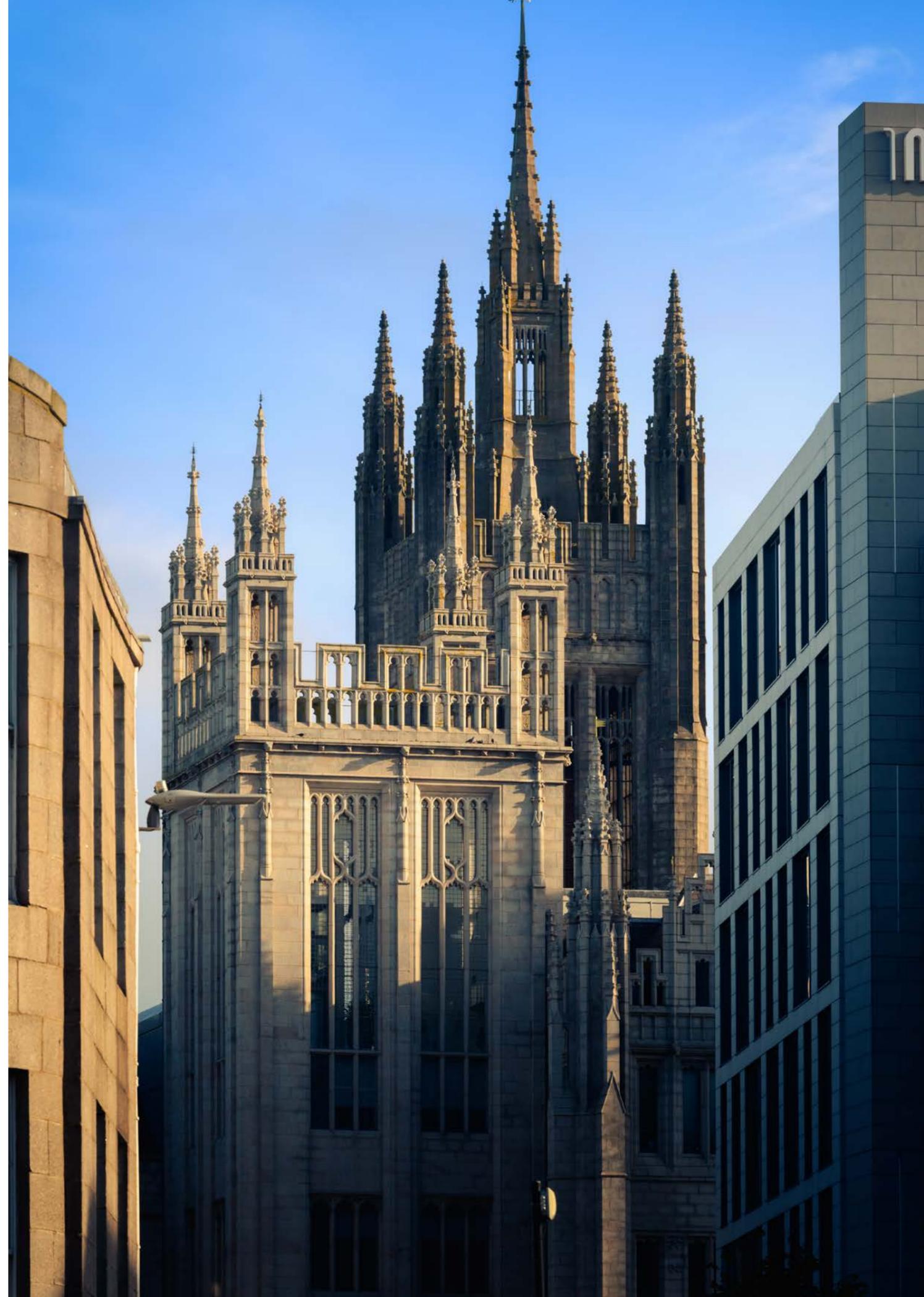
'Above and Beyond'. It's an idiom that has resonated around VisitAberdeenshire since the phrase was adopted as our marketing creative in early 2021. We settled on it as a confident statement about the quality of experience on offer to visitors in the North-east, as well as a nod towards our location that is a little, but not too far, off the beaten track.

As 2021 progressed, 'above and beyond' took on a whole new dimension within VisitAberdeenshire. Exceeding expectations was reflected in the work delivered across the organisation as



VisitAberdeenshire continued to adapt its work to support regional tourism. The pioneering Business Recovery Programme evolved to meet demand from the sector and adapted to accommodate new initiatives and funding. In a very crowded marketplace in which to influence short term travel decisions, VisitAberdeenshire's creativity shone through with arguably the most compelling content, and use of channels in our short history. With an eye on further horizons, the groundwork was put in place for a revigorated approach to travel trade and convention bids. Once again, market insights have been as important to guide decision making, and efficient spending, both for VisitAberdeenshire and for local businesses. Likewise the evaluation of outcomes has remained critical to inform future work, albeit that evaluation models have had to adapt to reflect the reality of limitations on travel.

Our work would not have been possible without the support of our Board, and in particular our funders at Opportunity North East, Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council. Our work was further supported by the project-based funding received from Scottish Enterprise and VisitScotland. I would also like to extend a thank you to all our private sector partners who have worked with us to grow our destination brand and to attract visitors to our region, and most of all to everyone who works in the tourism and hospitality sector across the North-east who have endured the most challenging time known to the industry.



LOCAL BUSINESS AND DESTINATION FOCUS

“The Tourism Development team provides advice and support to help tourism businesses develop skills and products to meet demand from an ever-changing market.”

Building on the success of the first year of the Business Recovery Programme, VisitAberdeenshire continued to invest in supporting tourism businesses to recover and grow.

Utilising insights gathered on industry needs and the learnings from year one, the Tourism Development team curated and delivered another multi-strand programme, open to all types of tourism businesses in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. This was designed to help businesses survive, develop skills, build resilience and return to growth. Specifically, the programme has helped businesses to sharpen their marketing skills, grow their market knowledge, develop new products and experiences, and adopt sustainable business practices.

OVERALL THE PROGRAMME DELIVERED:

47

webinars/workshops

491

attendances

282

tailored one-to-one
advice sessions

27

new travel trade
bookable products

94%

of respondents cited
specific actions that they
wanted to implement as a result
of their participation

BUSINESS RECOVERY PROGRAMME

The programme covered several themes and in addition to webinars, live workshops were reintroduced, providing all important networking opportunities. Many sessions were followed by the opportunity for tailored one-to-one advice.

Customer and Market Insights webinars responded to demand for current insights on consumer preferences and intended holiday taking, with **four** webinars focused on developing skills in gathering, analysing and utilising customer insights.

Digital Marketing workshops and webinars included four digital marketing masterclasses featuring a review of each business' digital presence with a set of recommendations for improvement. In partnership with Business Gateway, a further **eight** sessions were held on search engine optimisation, Facebook, analytics, creating engaging content and social media marketing.

Sustainability was a new addition to the programme with **four** webinars on “starting your sustainability journey”, customer expectations and communications, identifying practical changes and developing a sustainable policy and plan. A webinar in partnership with Zero Waste Scotland focused on reducing food waste. The offer of a free sustainability audit and specialist advice leading to a prioritised action plan was taken up by **44** businesses.

The pioneering **Travel Trade Ready** programme continued, a key feature of which was one-to-one advice on developing new trade bookable products and experiences. Webinars and workshops included working with online travel agents and making the most of familiarisation visits.

Utilising recognised specialists, a webinar was delivered and advice offered on **Package Travel Regulations**. This helped businesses understand the implications of the regulations and the options for compliance, reducing barriers to creative product packaging.

The fourth **Tourism Business Game Changer Growth Programme**, funded by Opportunity North East, was delivered for **14** businesses. With funding also from the North East Economic Recovery & Skills Fund, the programme was expanded to include more businesses and additional mentoring. Customer-centric in focus, Game Changer takes participating businesses through a journey of identifying target markets, defining customer demands and refining product concepts, leading to the development of an actionable growth plan.

North East Adventure Tourism (NEAT) VisitAberdeenshire participated fully in the NEAT project, led by Opportunity North East and designed to support the development and growth of adventure tourism.



INDUSTRY COMMUNICATIONS

The industry e-newsletter continued to be issued more frequently with **60** newsletters issued over the year. Research was undertaken to understand the usefulness of the newsletter and identify any improvements to be made. Many respondents commented that the newsletter helped them to feel informed and kept them up-to-date. When asked to describe the newsletter, many said it was informative, useful, worthwhile and timely. Here are some quotes from the research:

“It provides me with information I would not otherwise have access to.”

“A compact summary/overview of relevant information and training opportunities and helpful to understand what is a priority for VisitAberdeenshire.”



As part of a successful application to VisitScotland for recovery funding, VisitAberdeenshire redeveloped its industry website to make it more comprehensive and improve the user experience, with particular focus on ease of use. The changes were informed by insights from two focus groups involving local tourism businesses.

Five new online training modules have been developed, designed to help frontline staff in the tourism and hospitality industry increase their knowledge of the destination. The modules are split into four themes – a general one about Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, food and drink, adventure tourism and the ‘great outdoors in the city’. The adventure tourism and food and drink modules are produced in partnership with Opportunity North East and the great outdoors in the city module in partnership with NatureScot. The modules have the potential to increase visitor satisfaction levels and to increase dwell time in the destination, with benefits for all types of tourism businesses. Four focus groups were held involving end users to ensure the modules meet their needs and the same individuals were invited to test the modules prior to finalising.

This activity was delivered by Yvonne Cook, Christina Wright, Kayleigh McLeish, Lucia Campbell and Lynn Harwood.

AND HERE'S WHAT A FEW BUSINESSES HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE IMPACT OF OUR WORK:

“Lockdown was an incredibly tough time for our industry and as a tourist attraction forced to close just after a £6million transformational refurbishment, we were extremely grateful for the support we received from VisitAberdeenshire, including the opportunity to take part in the Business Recovery Programme, as we reopened to the public.”

“The programme content was relevant and topical, with engaging speakers. I took part in a range of interesting marketing webinars and also had one-to-one coaching with a digital consultant, which helped us develop a strategic plan and positively impact our digital marketing.”

“It was also fantastic to have the opportunity to hear what others in the industry were doing and the challenges they were having, making it feel like a supportive community with shared experiences.”

“The advice and expertise gained on the programme helped to pave the way for our 5-Star Quality Assurance status, which is testament to the team’s dedication to provide a memorable experience at Aberdeen Science Centre every single time.”

India Copeland Events and Marketing Co-ordinator,
Aberdeen Science Centre

“The Business Recovery Programme offered by VisitAberdeenshire was interesting and helpful for us. It provided a positive focus and an opportunity which we used to refresh our current knowledge and also to upskill across some new areas, during what was a very uncertain time for so many tourism businesses.”

“Having access to virtual webinars, courses, and speakers on a wide range of topics and subjects, which were both meaningful and practical for us, was great. Equally, if we missed any sessions that we had wanted to cover, having access to the recorded presentations afterwards helped when managing our time and resources.”

“We found the practical one-to-one sessions offered after some courses particularly helpful. These enabled us to ask questions, get direct answers, feedback, and possible solutions from knowledgeable specialists on certain topics”

Moira Gash, Deetour Ltd



“Having started working with VisitAberdeenshire in just the last year, I can honestly say they’ve been one of the best local destination organisations to work with across the country. All of the staff interactions have been enthusiastic for our tour launch, supportive and just as open as can be. They’ve been proactive in getting us ready to sell to travel trade and had a team Wellness Wednesday session on our tour on our first week of launch. I can’t wait to continue to grow and work with the team over the coming years, and already feel a great relationship building.”

Jenny Benson, Owner, Walking Tours in Aberdeen/Scotland

“I enrolled myself on to VisitAberdeenshire’s Digital Masterclass which included a one-to-one session looking at my website. This was invaluable to me; the consultant helped me so much with my website and gave suggestions for a local web design company who were absolutely first class in helping me deliver a beautiful, very easy to use website with lots of interactive social media platforms. I couldn’t be happier with the result!”

Nicola Fraser, Highland Journeys

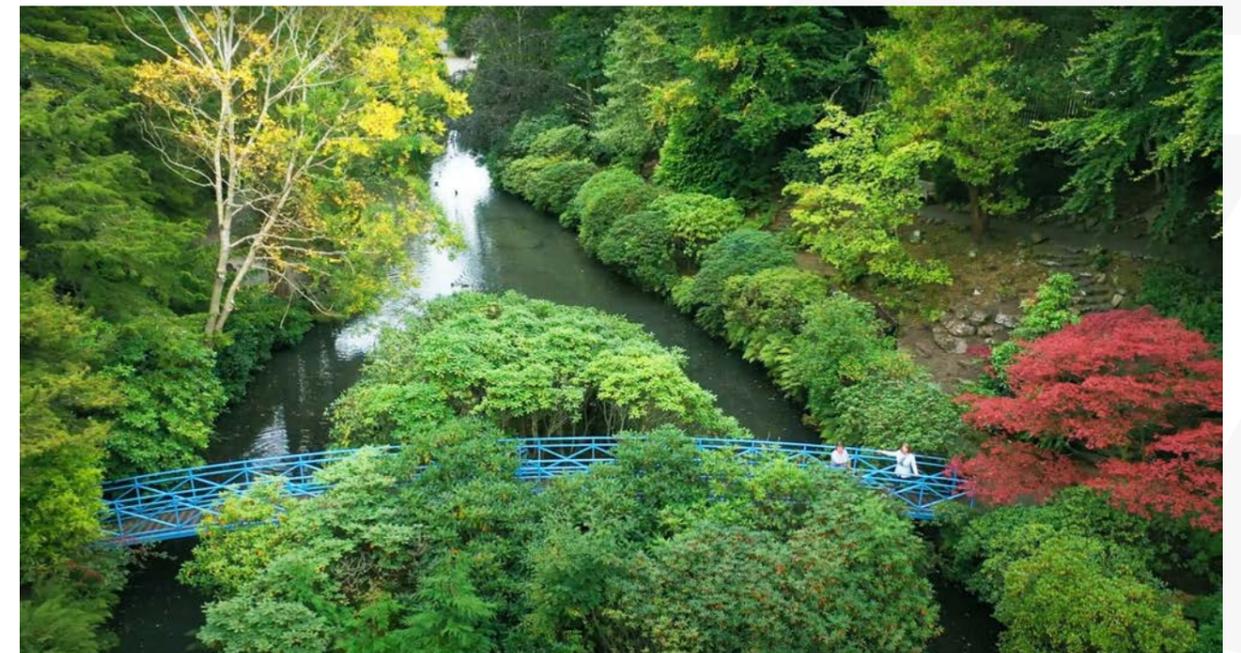
AND SPECIFICALLY ON THE TOURISM BUSINESS GAME CHANGER GROWTH PROGRAMME:

“The last 24 months have been a challenging time for all travel and tourism related businesses. We certainly found this to be the case. As a new venture, we managed to open for a grand total of three months before we had to shut down for five months due to the Covid restrictions in place at the time. As a new business it felt like a difficult time to be operating, and we were positioned in a mindset where we were just satisfied to have customers booking and staying. I believe this would still be the case if I hadn’t applied for the Game Changer programme. After successful application, I took part in the programme and can honestly say that it lives up to the name. It taught me a great deal about fundamental aspects of running and growing a business. It also provided me with an invaluable opportunity to network with other likeminded businesses, who I have already started making plans to work with moving forward. The tuition and support offered on the Game Changer programme has really opened my eyes to the opportunities available and encouraged me to think and plan on a larger scale. The support VisitAberdeenshire has offered during this difficult period has had such a positive impact. From a business perspective, they have made the difference between surviving and thriving.”

Daniel Barry, Owner, Wildflower Eco Lodges

“I was accepted on to the Tourism Business Game Changer Programme and I have not looked back since! The programme was not just incredibly helpful but enjoyable and inspiring. I met 13 other business owners/managers who had the same outlook and goals as me. It was a great opportunity to share our experiences and discuss potential solutions and options for current ideas or problems. Getting physically away from the office and the business was also very refreshing as it gave me space and time to think outside the box.”

Sarah Cruickshank, Deveronside Fishings and Lodges



SHORT TERM MARKET FOCUS

“The Marketing team helps grow the visitor economy through destination marketing, campaign and PR activities to continually raise awareness of – and drive visits to – Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire in targeted markets.”

2021/2022 brought with it yet more pandemic-related challenges, but it also brought opportunities in abundance with periods of travel permitted locally, and further afield, encouraging an uplift in movement throughout the country.

Throughout the year, VisitAberdeenshire maintained an ‘always on’ approach to marketing and communications, ensuring a consistent and steadfast presence in market. Highly targeted and creative marketing, communications and media activity endeavoured to continue raising awareness of the destination, and ultimately driving visits.



GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND IN MAJESTIC ABERDEENSHIRE

The early part of the year saw the launch of Majestic Aberdeenshire and the Above and Beyond creative.

The sense of ‘majestic’ has infused VisitAberdeenshire’s marketing activity since 2019 so an in-market rebrand to Majestic Aberdeenshire was a natural extension - an invitation for visitors to come and experience Scotland at its most majestic.

Above and Beyond campaign activity has been the regular drumbeat throughout the year, with four waves of targeted campaign activity boosting awareness, intrigue and visits to the region while keeping Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire front of mind.

Stunning photography, a multi-channel approach and content conveying the sense of majesty were the order of the day throughout the year. A signature fly-through style for campaign films depicting the region from above helped to create cut-through in an ever-crowded marketplace.

Above and Beyond campaigns generally took on a one-destination approach however an exception to this was the Autumn 2021 partnership campaign with LNER to address the specific challenge of attracting visitors back in to the city. The pitch was the “best of both worlds”, with Aberdeen’s unique outdoor experience complimenting its cultural offer.

The Above and Beyond audience ranges from age 25-64, with an interest in, and propensity to, travel to Scotland, living throughout Scotland (excluding Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire), and in Northern England. Multi-channel digital campaigns were deployed to reach audiences in contextually relevant environments, including paid social, digital display, video on demand (across Sky On Demand, All4, ITV and STV players), commissioned influencer content and owned-channel promotion.

- Paid social delivered clicks up to **203% over target**
- Digital display delivered impressions up to **114% over target**
- **62,281 visitors** to campaign landing pages

“After a significant period of restricted rail travel, in Autumn 2021, we had the pleasure of working with the VisitAberdeenshire Marketing team to support LNER awareness and journey growth to the region. We valued VisitAberdeenshire’s expertise and collaborative approach to ensure the end campaign inspired our target audience to visit Aberdeenshire by LNER train. The campaign results overdelivered KPIs by 25%, which is testimony to the great working relationship we had with the team. We look forward to any potential opportunities to work together again in the future.”

Ellie Tyrrell, Advertising and Partnerships, LNER

REDISCOVERING ABERDEENSHIRE

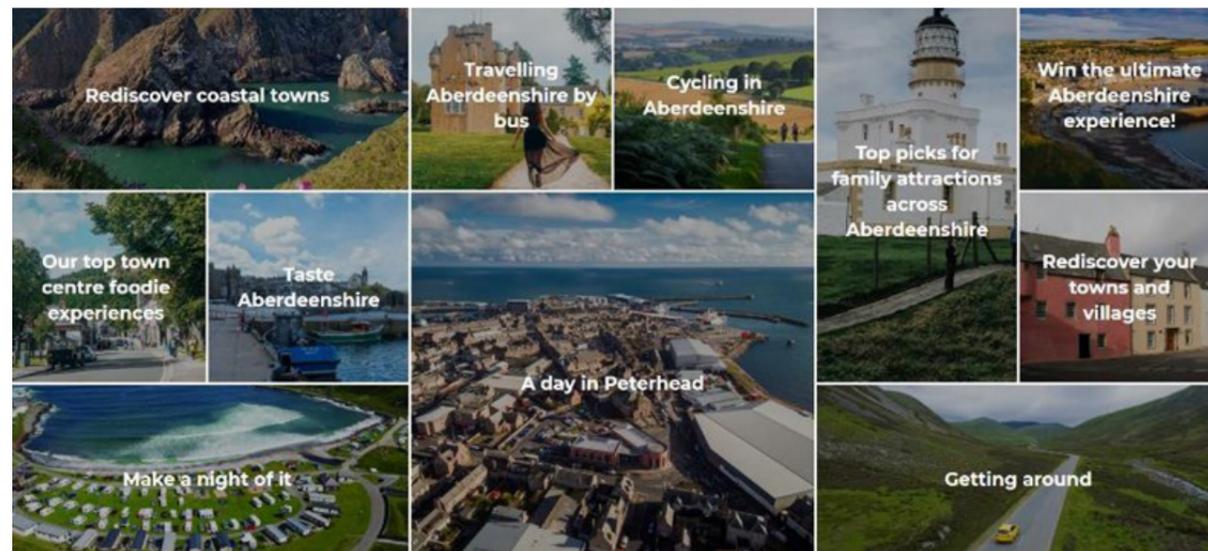
Maintaining the momentum built with the local audience over the last year, this year saw several successful bursts of campaign activity designed to encourage locals to get out and about and 'rediscover' the delights on their doorsteps.

Local audiences from Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Angus and Moray were engaged with radio adverts, paid social, digital display, competitions, influencer activity, video on demand and TV advertising in a bid to encourage them to explore the region, and revisit places of nostalgia with their families.

A successful 'Aberdeenshire Towns' campaign in partnership with Aberdeenshire Council and part-funded by the Scotland Loves Local initiative enjoyed high profile coverage when STV broadcast the ad for four weeks in slots including during Euro 2020 matches and Coronation Street ad breaks. The ad also featured on video on demand services including ITVHub, STV Player and All4 - a fantastic and much-needed boost for local town centres.



Owned-channel support continued to feature as a matter of course throughout local campaigns with a number of guest bloggers being invited to contribute, campaign landing pages showcasing local accommodation, things to do, competitions and links to local businesses created, and scores of social media posts promoting the region attracting thousands of engagements.

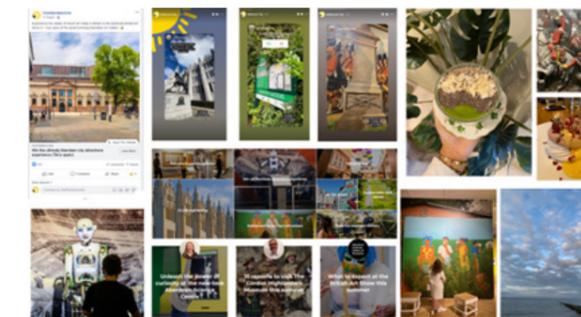


ABERDEEN CITY ATTRACTIONS

Insight indicated that when lockdown restrictions began to lift, people were likely to travel around and explore their local area first (City Nation Place 2020) so midsummer saw the launch of the Aberdeen City Attractions campaign targeting an Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire audience.

Locals were invited to enter the competition to win a mini-break in Aberdeen, while being served key messages about all that the city has to offer. A mix of paid social, DAX (digital audio advertising) and influencer activity promoted Aberdeen's offering, including museums and galleries, open spaces and quality food and drink.

Paid social was responsible for delivering **2.7 million** impressions and **12.9K clicks**, equating to over **19% above target**. The Aberdeen Art Gallery creative was responsible for delivering the strongest result, with **total impressions of 2,079,324**.



#makeadayofit

Make a day of it!

- p4 Royal Deeside
- p6 Banff and Buchan
- p8 Peterhead and area
- p10 Turriff and Ellon
- p12 Inverurie and Garioch
- p14 Kincardine and Meams

Make a day of it in Aberdeenshire

Swimmers at Aberferry Beach

Welcome to beautiful Aberdeenshire! Although many of us live or work in the region, there's a lot of it we haven't explored and admittedly know very little about. For example, Aberdeenshire boasts 305 miles of coastline, from beautiful sandy beaches to jagged cliffs, dotted all the way with picturesque towns and villages.

Inland there are hills and mountains, with the Cairngorms marking the western-most point of Aberdeenshire, that are great for hiking, mountain-biking, wildlife spotting and more.

For golfers, you can pick between links and parkland courses, internationally renowned championship courses to less challenging courses, 9 holes or 18 holes. There are dozens of courses throughout the area, but every one of them offers a great time and fantastic views of the area. The biggest choice for history fans will be how to choose where to visit! There are more than 250 historic castles in the area, many of which are open to the public for tours. While some have been reduced to ruins you can still see how Aberdeenshire played an important role in history and learn about the famous figures who called it home or stayed for a while.

A day out isn't complete without great food and drink and Aberdeenshire is well-known for producing both. Locally caught seafood is paired with local produce to create mouth-watering dishes that will delight any foodie. And of course, the Aberdeen Angus beef that is known and enjoyed the world over.

But it's not just food. Aberdeenshire has whisky distilleries – some centuries old – that are producing the finest drams. The area has also become home to breweries and gin distilleries. Many breweries and distilleries offer tours and tastings so you can find out what goes into each bottle or can, and learn about all the different varieties.

We have divided 'the drive' into six different areas, each of which can be explored during a day-out. Over the coming pages, we'll tell you everything you need to know, see, do, try and rediscover across the area – whether you are looking for family outings, historical sites, a great place to grab a bite or 18 holes to enjoy!

So if you are looking to 'make a day of it', make it in Aberdeenshire.

You can get more information about Aberdeenshire, as well as maps, suggested itineraries and self-guided tours at the VisitAberdeenshire website: visitabdn.com

MAKING A DAY OF IT WITH THE LOCALS

February 2022 saw Rediscover metamorphose into 'Make a Day of It'. While the sentiment remained the same, it was time to leave the pandemic behind while continuing to engage a local audience. Make a day of it launched as a publishing partnership with DC Thomson and included a 16-page supplement inserted into over 71,000 copies of The Press & Journal, digital adverts, radio, competitions, paid social, several native content articles and print adverts.

With results overachieving targets by up to 150% across the board, DC Thomson confirmed it was their highest performing social campaign ever, demonstrating the strength of the partnership and the benefits of DC Thomson's reach into a local audience.

Additional highlights include:

- Most successful social engagements on a campaign for DC Thomson
- The content was in the **top three** results ever for social clicks
- Delivered over **10K** page views
- Reached over **90k** users, 150% more than the expected target
- Received **1.35 million** impressions
- The digital version of the supplement had **2,266 views** with 1,795 unique users and 471 returning to view again, meaning it was engaging content.

This activity was part-funded by the VisitScotland Destination Marketing Fund.

10k page views **90k** users reached **1.35m** impressions received

A SENSE OF ADVENTURE

This year saw four main bursts of Adventure campaign activity, complemented by regular owned-channel support including social media posts, guest blogs and dedicated newsletters.

We invited visitors to experience the great outdoors in Aberdeenshire, alluring them with the idea that their next great adventure was just around the corner. Prize draws featured in each campaign, offering one lucky person the chance to visit the region and experience the breadth of adventure activities on offer for themselves.

Insight indicated that lunch and coffee stops were almost as important as the activities themselves, so this insight was used to design compelling campaigns and communications that allowed consumers to visualise themselves in the region, partaking in their favourite activity with the promise of a great meal at the end.

A mix of channels produced strong results for all four campaigns with Facebook ads responsible for delivering the highest impressions and click-through rates overall. Campaign videos were snappy edits of the region's adventure offering, with a brief to inspire visits.





STORIES FROM OUR HOME

Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire is a region steeped in rich culture, history and heritage. When it was announced that VisitScotland had chosen ‘Year of Stories’ for their themed year 2022, the Marketing and Communications team at VisitAberdeenshire got together to plan how to leverage the Year of Stories by inviting people who live and work in the region to share their stories of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. Characters behind local tourism businesses were invited to put themselves forward and share their charming and inspiring tales of what Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire means to them, and what they love most about the region. The response from industry was incredible – while diverse in their nature, the participants all shared one thing, their passion for the region, the place they call home.

At the heart of 2022’s themed year is ‘storytelling’, and the marketing team

worked on the ‘Stories from our Home’ concept. Storytelling conjures thoughts of bedside tales or relaxing with a book in a comfortable chair.

The producers created the classic storytelling environment, outdoors and at various locations around Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. The yellow chair was transported on location all over the local countryside to film the characters telling their stories in their own environment.

With **seven** films already produced by March 2022, and another **four** under commission as at May 2022, the response to the series of stories has been incredible. Each video is innovative, attention-grabbing and memorable whilst invoking memories of ‘home’.

This activity was funded by the VisitScotland Destination Marketing Fund.

CONTENT IS KING

“When we re-opened Aberdeen Art Gallery, Maritime Museum and Provost Skene’s House following the major disruptions caused by Covid-19, it was vital that we worked closely with VisitAberdeenshire to get the “Rediscover Aberdeen” message out to local people and visitors to the city and region. We were pleased to work with the VisitAberdeenshire marketing team on the “Above and Beyond” campaign (the drone footage of the Art Gallery and Maritime Museum is stunning) and to pick up where we’d (abruptly) left off with the travel trade team on developing our offer.

“At a time when we have lots to shout about, including the fact that Aberdeen Art Gallery is Scotland’s Building of the Year, and Aberdeen’s newest attraction at Provost Skene’s House is now open, we are working closely with colleagues across the VisitAberdeenshire team to tell a compelling story about the vibrant culture, heritage and attractions Aberdeen has to offer visitors.”

Richard Sweetnam, Chief Officer – City Growth, Aberdeen City Council

Visitabdn.com is the virtual shopfront for VisitAberdeenshire, attracting **1,828,574** page views during the past year. The newsletter database continues to grow steadily with over **76,470** active subscribers and social media channels have enjoyed an **11%** increase in followers throughout the year.

The team has commissioned photography throughout the year, resulting in hundreds of images being captured and used to promote Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. A selection of the best images has been uploaded to the Content Hub.

Headlines

579 assets on the content hub available for industry to use in their promotions

178,780 blogs viewed on the VisitAberdeenshire website

254,152 recipients of VisitAberdeenshire marketing newsletters

1,047 posts on social media yielding **308,599 engagements**

Leisure consumer activity was delivered by Elaine Bisset, Laura Delaney, Lisa Law and Rohan Angus



READ ALL ABOUT IT

VisitAberdeenshire has continued to make its voice heard loud and clear through its corporate communications. Early outcomes included coverage in high profile titles and publications such as The Guardian, Daily Mail, Telegraph and Sunday Times, and Wanderlust and LoveExploring websites.

VisitAberdeenshire's ongoing support for the tourism sector through the Tourism Business Game Changer programme received coverage for both its graduation and the launch of its second round of applications. Sustainability audits being offered to tourism businesses was picked up in print and online.

The Rediscover photography competition continued in the Evening Express in print and online, with supporting social media posts, while the relaunch of VisitAberdeenshire's Volunteer programme in January gained coverage in print, online and on local radio.

February saw print and online coverage of the "Make a Day of It" campaign launch and later that month, an in-depth feature in the Press and Journal's business pages, with our CEO highlighting VisitAberdeenshire's vision for the year ahead.

VisitAberdeenshire's suite of "Stories" videos launched in April and was covered by local media while the launch of the



Aberdeenshire Ascents in May was picked up by local media, BBC Radio Scotland and STV news and will form the basis of a cycling themed press trip to the region in July.

In addition, VisitAberdeenshire has commented on topics including the reintroduction of seasonal routes from Aberdeen to Manchester and the return of the Tour of Britain.

In total, VisitAberdeenshire's PR activity reached over **115,807,406** people and generated **106** articles throughout the past year.



PR EVENTS AND PRESS TRIPS

In 2021, VisitAberdeenshire upweighted its Destination PR focus by appointing a London-based consultancy to reach more targeted travel and lifestyle media.

In March, VisitAberdeenshire took a taste of the city and shire to the heart of London and hosted an event at Scotland House to promote the region as a go-to destination and rich food and drink larder. It was attended by **34** leisure and travel writers, representing over **50** titles. This led to a press visit in April from the deputy editor of Good Housekeeping magazine which resulted in a feature article on the Platinum Jubilee in their

June issue. A follow up meeting with the editor of the BBC Travel Show led to a piece on Balmoral and Ballater for broadcast during the weekend of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

Channel 4's "Best of Britain by the Sea" presented by Ainsley Harriott and Grace Dent, was filmed across the region in March and aired in June. The programme featured Aberdeen, Gardenstown, Macduff, Inverurie and Deeside.

PR and Communications activity was delivered by Laura Delaney, Jeannie Price and Rohan Angus



MID TO LONG TERM MARKET FOCUS

“The Business Development team promotes the region to travel intermediaries and conference and event planners in the UK and overseas to ensure the region is a first-choice destination for both leisure visits and business events.”

Building and maintaining strong links within tourism distribution channels ensures destination awareness and drives visits to the region.

Despite challenging conditions throughout 2021-22, the Business Development team's flexible and professional approach ensured that a comprehensive programme of activity was delivered to promote the region to various audiences.

The team attended a number of travel trade events, both in-person and online throughout the year, meeting with tour operators from the UK and overseas, as well as specialist intermediaries with a specific focus, such as golf and incentives.

In addition, the Aberdeen Convention & Events Bureau team worked with key partners to secure a variety of future business events for the region.

“It is a pleasure to work with VisitAberdeenshire and the incredible team behind the scenes.

“The team are truly a joy to communicate with and we enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship that inspires us at each turn. Every event and familiarisation trip we have worked on together has been undertaken in an efficient, considered and creative manner with the results enjoyed being wonderful.

“We share a passion for Aberdeen and the wider country and greatly appreciate the work the team do to promote our wonderful part of the world. Our work

together has allowed us to see a significant effect on visitor numbers and guests coming through the doors of our property.

“We share a combined mission to increase awareness and visitors to the area and reinforce the region's location as a first-rate tourism destination.

“We look forward to a successful future working together.”

Anne Martin, Sales Manager, Sandman Signature Aberdeen Hotel & Spa

TRAVEL TRADE

VisitAberdeenshire had a presence at **eight** travel trade events throughout the year, managing over **150** appointments with UK and international buyers. The events were a mix of in-person and virtual shows, including;

- VisitScotland Reconnect in April 2021 (virtual)
- UKinbound Convention, September 2021 (Manchester)
- World Travel Market, November 2021 (London)
- ETOA Britain & Ireland Marketplace, January 2022 (London)
- Coach Tourism Association Conference, February 2022 (Liverpool)
- The Excursions Show, March 2022 (Twickenham)
- Explore GB, March 2022 (virtual)
- TravelMatch, March 2022 (Oslo)

In addition, VisitAberdeenshire hosted a private event in Edinburgh in November 2021, which was attended by **13** Scottish inbound tour operators. The team also worked with UKinbound, the leading UK trade association for inbound tourism businesses, to deliver a networking event at The Shard in London in March 2022, which was attended by over **100** UKinbound members. Both events provided a unique opportunity to showcase the region to an engaged audience.

During 2021-22, VisitAberdeenshire continued to work with industry to develop new travel trade products and delivered regular sales calls and product updates to buyers. In addition, **five** new travel trade itineraries were produced.

The team managed over **40** sales calls, including **10** focused calls with golf tour operators.

Product updates are shared via a monthly e-newsletter issued to over **1,100** contacts.

VisitAberdeenshire also works with Wilfried Klöpping, who provides specialist in-market German representation, and facilitates sales calls and product updates with targeted German based tour operators.

In September 2021, VisitAberdeenshire partnered with Rabbie's Tours, the UK based small group tour operator, to deliver a series of **three** webinars to targeted travel agents and tour operators based in North America, Scandinavia and Germany. The webinars focused on Rabbie's new Aberdeenshire tours in addition to the wider regional product offering.

Familiarisation visits are a valuable way to showcase the region to buyers. VisitAberdeenshire had to find new and innovative ways to deliver this support during the last year. Many of the familiarisation trips organised last year were for individuals visiting alone, or were delivered virtually, because of the various restrictions in place. However, despite this, **nine** such visits were organised between July 2021 and March 2022.

VisitAberdeenshire was delighted to organise a visit for Ramblers Walking Holidays in March 2022. As a direct result, a new product was created called 'Royal Aberdeenshire' which allows visitors to enjoy the beauty of Aberdeenshire whilst experiencing some great walking, wildlife spotting and culture.



“Adagio Holidays recently contacted VisitAberdeenshire to discuss putting together a week-long walking and cultural holiday based in Aberdeen. Working with Kirsten was an absolute pleasure from scoping out the itinerary to arranging a visit for me to check everything once we had the itinerary in place. I can't recall a better partnership with a tourism promotion organisation than the one I enjoyed with VisitAberdeenshire.”

David Kay, Product Manager, RWH Travel Limited



BUSINESS EVENTS

The work of the Convention Bureau team helps to bring business events to Aberdeen.

P&J Live, which opened in September 2019, is the most sustainable venue in the UK, powered by local, renewable energy sources. This provides the city with a unique, competitive advantage.

As a result of the pandemic, several trade events did not take place. However, the team did attend a number of events to promote Aberdeen as a business events destination; to showcase the breadth of venues available, as well as the support on offer to event organisers. These included The Meeting Show in

London in September 2021 and Meet GB, which was held virtually in February 2022. The team managed **26** appointments across both events.

The team also attended TravelMatch in Norway in Oslo in March 2022, carrying out **eight** appointments. TravelMatch was an opportunity to promote Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire as an incentive travel destination to Norwegian buyers. March also saw the renewal of the Convention Bureau's membership of SITE Scotland (Society of Incentive Travel Excellence) which is proving key in building relationships and knowledge within the incentive market.



The Convention Bureau partnered with P&J Live on a two-day familiarisation visit in November 2021 for **19** conference and corporate event planners.

Working in partnership with P&J Live and the University of Aberdeen, **51** bids were submitted, which could contribute **£38.6m** to the local economy and secure **118,538** bed nights across the region.

Once shortlisted, the team hosted **six** site inspections, which provided the opportunity for event organisers to visit the destination and see how it might work for their conference, before making their final decision.

Over the course of the year, **13** conferences were confirmed, with a value of **£3.4m** and **11,860** bed nights.

The Aberdeen Ambassador Network plays a key role in helping to secure conferences for the region. Ambassadors are predominantly from academia and their role is to lead or support bids for events in their field of expertise. A review of the ambassador programme was undertaken, and activity introduced to recruit new members and increase engagement. Activity was strategically

aligned to four key knowledge hubs: Health and Life Sciences, Environment and Sustainability, Food and Primary Industries and Culture and Tourism. There are currently **80** ambassadors in the network, and this continues to grow. A networking event was held for members in March 2022. **35** ambassadors attended.



As part of the efforts to further promote the services of the Convention Bureau to academics, a series of webinars was undertaken in partnership with the University of Aberdeen and P&J Live to target individual academic schools to showcase the process of bidding for academic conferences, and the teams involved. **Six** sessions have been undertaken thus far with more scheduled for the year ahead.

“The University of Aberdeen works closely with the Aberdeen Convention & Events Bureau at VisitAberdeenshire and other partners as part of ‘Team Aberdeen’ to identify, bid for and host conferences and events in the city and shire. The Ambassadors’ network provides a focus for academic colleagues to share experiences and promote the region.”

“This joined up approach not only provides fantastic end-to-end support for organisers, associations, attendees, and stakeholders, but is repeatedly recognised as a valuable asset and there is no doubt of the benefit in terms of profile-raising of research excellence as well as economic benefit for the North-east.”

Nikki Pearce, CPD and Events Manager, University of Aberdeen.

A new marketing campaign was introduced to promote Aberdeen as a business events destination. The **‘Above and Beyond’** narrative focuses on the city’s pioneering strengths (Health & Life Sciences, Energy Transition and Hydrogen) and its strengths as an event destination (Well-connected, Open Spaces and Sustainable Venue). The campaign was shared across the bureau’s own social media channels. In addition, sponsored content advertising was undertaken with the North Star Meetings Group to target both international and domestic

markets; a viewing figure of **14,524** was achieved and dedicated an average of 4-5 minutes on our campaign. Further advertising was undertaken with the Delegate Wranglers (DW) which included a Destination Spotlight Blog and Newsletter; a total of 4,262 users were targeted across all DW platforms as well as a 723 active readership of the newsletter.

Travel Trade and Business Events activity was delivered by Millie Clarke, Kirsten Stitchell, Jill Sinclair, Philip Chan, Laurie Scott and Raeanne Verlegh.



...AND ON TO THE GREEN



VisitAberdeenshire continued to promote the North-east as a golf tourism destination and to support local suppliers in the sector.

September 2021 saw the return of the Scottish Seniors Open to Royal Aberdeen, and VisitAberdeenshire worked with Sky TV coverage that included a spectacular promotion of the region. VisitAberdeenshire also helped to promote this summer's Deeside Golf Week, and to enhance knowledge of the sector, VisitAberdeenshire staff embarked on a golf familiarisation day to better understand the golf experience in the region.

The region's strong golf offer was embedded into consumer facing promotions including social media activity that has a following of over 100,000 worldwide, in e-marketing that reaches over 75,000, and on visitabdn.com that has an audience of over 100,000 monthly users.

VisitScotland Reconnect presented opportunities to build relations with operators with a dedicated meeting diary and VisitAberdeenshire supported the familiarisation visits to the region delivered by Scottish Golf Tourism Week. As a member of the Scottish Golf Tourism Development Group, VisitAberdeenshire ensures that the North-east voice is heard nationally, putting the organisation in a position to identify opportunities arising from publication of the national golf tourism strategy.

VisitAberdeenshire's tourism development work opened up webinars, workshops and other programmes to golf related businesses, many of whom benefit from this activity including the Tourism Business Game Changer Growth Programme. Looking ahead, golf tourism businesses from across the region contributed to the reassessment of the regional destination strategy, emphasising the important role of golf among the outdoor activities that can drive growth within the local visitor economy.

WORKING WITH VISITSCOTLAND

VisitAberdeenshire works closely with VisitScotland to ensure the best possible opportunities for tourism in the North-east. In turn, VisitScotland works closely with regional partners to develop and support responsible destination development and the visitor economy. As part of the national tourism recovery programmes, VisitScotland has awarded over £200,000 to destination groups in the North-east, and invested over £610,000 in Aberdeenshire to help manage visitor pressures through the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

Regular dialogue between VisitAberdeenshire and VisitScotland's regional and central marketing teams aims to ensure consistency in action where respective work adds value to overall objectives. In addition, a representative from VisitScotland is invited as an observer at VisitAberdeenshire board meetings.

Examples from the last year include:

- VisitAberdeenshire benefited from two recovery grants from VisitScotland.
- Common marketing agency representation created opportunities for synergy in messaging and campaign channel strategy.
- VisitAberdeenshire referred relevant local tourism businesses to VisitScotland and vice versa, and the website for tourism businesses includes links to selected pages on visitscotland.org.
- Leveraging VisitScotland's themed years allowed greater reach of VisitAberdeenshire content, thus spreading regional messages to a wider audience.
- VisitAberdeenshire inputted to the VisitScotland-led Scottish Tourism Observatory Group development and discussions.
- Ongoing conversations in relation to research, included sharing any new insights, identifying potential suppliers when commissioning work and discussing survey format within the Quarterly Business Monitor.
- VisitAberdeenshire had a presence on the Business Event Scotland stand at The Meetings Show in London and co-ordinated bid support letters where appropriate.



CAPTURING INSIGHTS TO INFORM DIRECTION

“The Insights and Evaluation team curates and shares insights to inform business decision-making, and strives to demonstrate the value and impact of our activity through tracking, measurement and reporting.”

This year saw a step change in the way new insights are shared, both internally and with businesses across the region, with greater use being made of Infographic style Factsheets, VisitAberdeenshire’s industry newsletter and website.



“I have found all the information provided by VisitAberdeenshire extremely useful and insightful over the past year. The research and insights gives a young business like ourselves access to valuable information that we could never afford to gain or achieve by ourselves.”

“It has enabled us to focus our marketing and customer avatar to achieve, what will hopefully be, the most likely customers to buy our product. I have attended the online sessions and also reviewed the research documents and both have been interesting, rewarding and beneficial.”

Laura Hay, Harestone Moss Limited

SUPPLY SIDE INSIGHTS

In October 2021, VisitAberdeenshire launched the Quarterly Business Monitor, aiming to gather industry feedback on current and future business performance. Each quarter’s results are shared with VisitAberdeenshire’s Board and then more widely with industry.

The Insights and Evaluation team scoped and supported the delivery of the Customer and Market Insights workstream: resulting in a suite of three practical insights sessions plus a webinar, delivered by Scattered Clouds, sharing latest results from our consumer database survey.

The Insights & Evaluation Manager delivered specialist input within industry-facing webinars and programmes. They also sit on the Scottish Tourism Advisory Group, providing an opportunity to learn from and feed into tourism research discussions at a national level.

Further specialist research was undertaken within the context of the North East Adventure Tourism project, including project management of industry focus groups, interviews and an online survey.

DEMAND SIDE INSIGHTS

Due to ongoing imposing and lifting of restrictions in relation to the pandemic, consumer behaviour and visitation was difficult to track with confidence. VisitAberdeenshire therefore looked to VisitBritain and VisitScotland national sentiment trackers for input on this changing behaviour.

To augment these insights, VisitAberdeenshire commissioned two pieces of research, funded by the DMO Recovery Fund

- the first focused on online sentiment towards the region as a whole and our product strengths, for example outdoor activities and touring;
- the second explored visitor perception and sentiment towards the region using six focus groups. Both research approaches were innovative and yielded invaluable insights for our marketing team, the wider organisation, and industry.

In a bid to understand its engaged audience even better, VisitAberdeenshire carried out an in-depth survey with a sample of its consumer database. The resulting sample of over 1,000 respondents, provided current data on the types of holidays and activities they will be prioritising, the information sources they use when planning trips, together with key words/phrases they associate with the region and how it compares to other urban and rural destinations.

EVALUATION

VisitAberdeenshire introduced the Quarterly Reporting Dashboard at the October 2021 Board, the purpose of which is to provide a clear line of sight between VisitAberdeenshire’s departmental KPIs and the progress being made towards these on a quarterly basis.

A positive development was the return to full marketing campaign evaluation activity, which focuses on what VisitAberdeenshire campaigns make visitors, and potential visitors, think, feel and do. VisitAberdeenshire evaluated **eight** campaigns, undertaking ROI measurements where possible and appropriate. VisitAberdeenshire also extended evaluation to its newsletter activity and social media channels, both exercises being extremely beneficial in informing future activity and focus. A key finding was that an estimated visitor spend of **£466,000** in the region could be attributed to the newsletter activity undertaken in this last year.

Further progress was made within the Tourism Development and Business Development teams to support with the evaluation of their activity. Listen and Learn” sessions were carried out, in partnership with an external insights consultant, to understand the level and type of activities being undertaken. As a result of these sessions, **two** surveys were carried out (travel trade newsletter survey, and industry newsletter survey).

This activity was delivered by Deirdre O’Donnell.

WORKING AT VISITABERDEENSHIRE

“The Business Services team supports the employees, volunteers, Board of Directors and business with all aspects of human resources, finance, facilities, health & safety and maintains good corporate governance for the organisation.”

Employees are a business' greatest advocates and without a team of committed employees VisitAberdeenshire could not deliver its operating plan.

In April 2021 VisitAberdeenshire moved from Amicable House which had been its home since 2016 to a new office at P&J Live in Stoneywood, thus strengthening the existing working relationship between the Convention Bureau team and the sales team at P&J Live.

The office move provided new energy for the organisation as it coincided with the commencement of a new phase of hybrid working and the reintroduction of in-person working after a lengthy period of time spent working remotely from home.

The organisation saw a number of employee changes during the year and the introduction of eight new employees to the team, Elaine Bisset, Rohan Angus, Kirsten Stitchell, Philip Chan, Kayleigh McLeish, Jeannie Price, Lisa Law and Millie Clarke. A dynamic and enthusiastic new team has been established to drive the organisation forward into 2022 and beyond.

VisitAberdeenshire values the importance of its employees and their views on the organisation. Regular engagement with employees is undertaken to help identify and build upon the strengths and talents in the team. The annual employee engagement survey seeks feedback on professional development, personal accomplishment, work/life balance and the ability to influence the company's direction.

The results for the 2021 annual employee engagement survey recorded an overall employee engagement score of 89%, a significant increase from the 79% achieved in 2020. The health and wellbeing of the team remained a key focus in the organisation especially as the team continued to mainly work remotely during the year.

Monthly Wellness Wednesday sessions continued during 2021. On one Wednesday of each month employees are encouraged to take an hour out of the day for a different health and wellbeing activity. Late 2021 saw the return of the popular face-to-face sessions which included the team experiencing the Light the North trail, and visits to Greyhope Bay and Aberdeen Science Centre.



VisitAberdeenshire empowers employees to upskill and take ownership of their personal development through the annual appraisal process and encouragement from Line Managers to undertake regular CPD. In 2021, the business supported the team by providing key memberships to professional organisations including the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and the Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD).

The business supported and encouraged staff development with employees undertaking distance learning qualifications in various Microsoft Office packages and a Certificate in the Principles of Leadership and Management. Mentoring opportunities were secured through Women in Tourism and European Cities Marketing.

This activity was delivered by Fiona Douglas.

The Welcome to Aberdeenshire Volunteer scheme, which was developed in late 2019, finally came into fruition in 2021.

VisitAberdeenshire now has a team of **13** enthusiastic and engaged volunteers who are ready and waiting to provide a warm North-east welcome to business and leisure visitors as they arrive in the region. The Volunteers welcomed visitors arriving in the city at the transport hubs and the conference venue at a number of key business events including The British Orthopaedic Association Conference, the Association of Surgeons in Training Conference and the Scottish Conservative Party Conference.

This activity was delivered by Fiona Douglas and Jill Sinclair.



MEET THE VISITABERDEENSHIRE TEAM



CHRIS FOY
Chief Executive



FIONA DOUGLAS
Office & Finance Manager



DEIRDRE O'DONNELL
Insights & Evaluation Manager



YVONNE COOK
Head of Tourism
Development



CHRISTINA WRIGHT
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