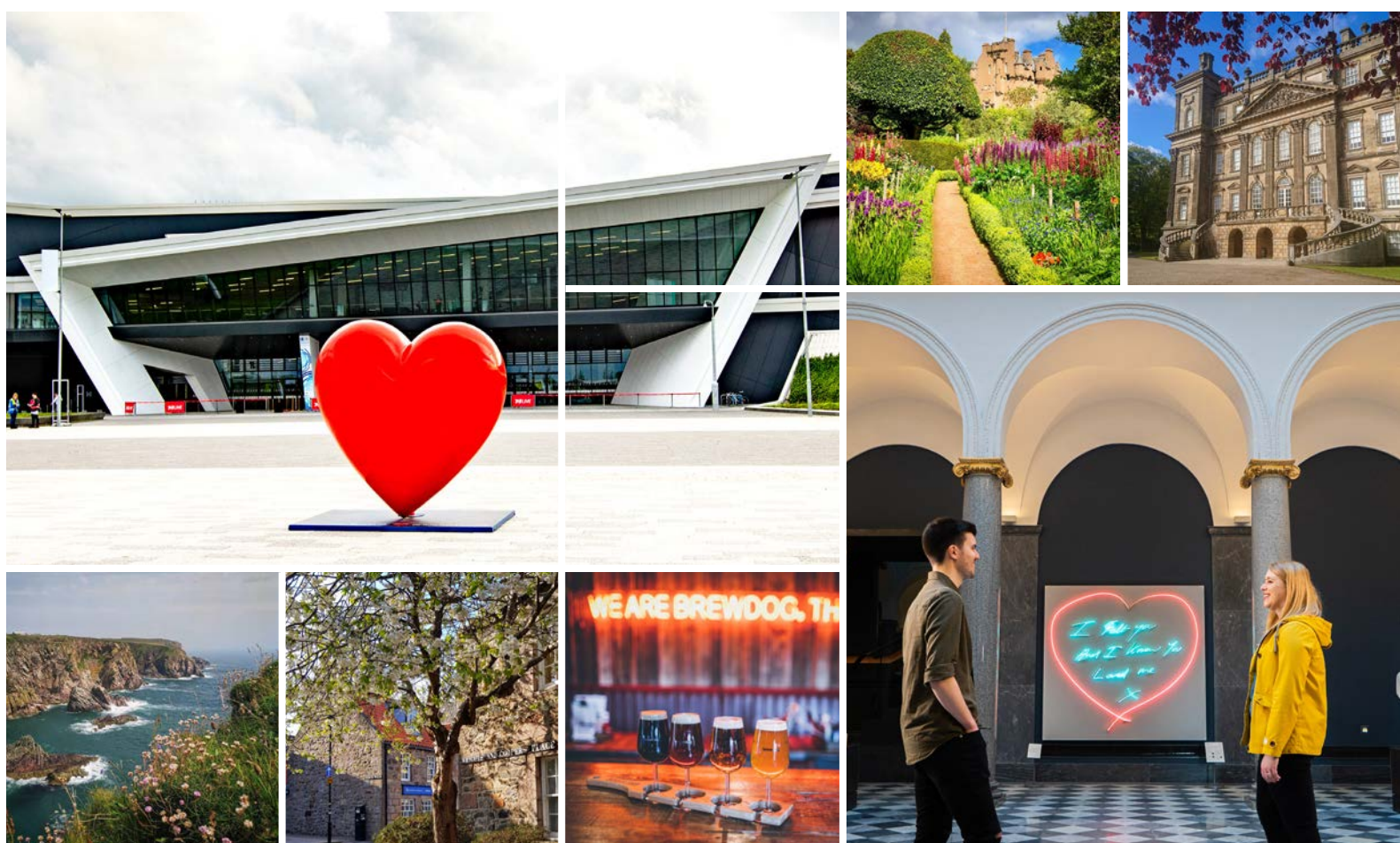




ANNUAL REVIEW 2019



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MESSAGE FROM CLAIRE BRUCE
CHAIR, VISITABERDEENSHIRE

The outbreak of Coronavirus Covid-19 presents the tourism industry with a significant and evolving challenge ahead. More than ever we need sound judgment and a considered approach in response. Getting it right has never been more important for the future of our people, our communities and our industry.

As we take stock of what lies ahead, we can also look back on a buoyant twelve months for Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. New and restored spaces like the Music Hall, P&J Live and Aberdeen Art Gallery have sparked the curiosity of culture enthusiasts, and it's

important we keep the momentum up in this sector. Our visitors continue to be wowed by the majesty of the region, enjoying the sweeping coastlines and wide-open spaces to reflect, breathe and take stock. Aberdeenshire's food and drink offering could impress the toughest of critics and with eight Michelin Guide restaurants on our doorstep, our culinary expertise is attractive to visitors.

As we progress through 2020, we will need to adapt and change our focus, possibly more than once.

One key sector will be the adventure offering in the region which is growing at pace. We want to be in the mix with other destinations, as adventure seekers make their decision when selecting a venue for thrilling activities. Our region is well-equipped with the resources and skilled individuals to make this happen.

While the current situation may be unknown, we can reflect on tourism's historic resilience in the face of crises. Guided by an experienced Board, VisitAberdeenshire will work alongside local businesses as we enter a new phase of the tourism landscape. Our region's appeal is vast and by putting our people and businesses first, we will remain strong in the coming period of recovery.



MESSAGE FROM CHRIS FOY CEO, VISITABERDEENSHIRE

As we enter a stark and challenging period for global tourism and hospitality, this review reflects on highlights and outcomes from 2019. In doing so it illustrates that while things will change significantly in the years ahead, we should have every confidence that the innovation and skills across the sector that achieved so much in 2019 will be the driving force behind future recovery efforts. VisitAberdeenshire's own role cross-pollinates marketing, tourism development, insights and evaluation and the Convention and Events Bureau. All elements intrinsically linked together in 2019 to create a strong



DMO that served stakeholders across the private and public sectors to grow the North-east visitor economy.

Our team delivered product and market development programmes that provided local businesses with tools to develop their experiences to meet customer demand and achieve a competitive advantage in the market. This programme is regarded as pioneering in Scotland and continues to enhance the skills and knowledge of ambitious people working across our tourism industry.

In taking these products to market, the tourism development team worked tirelessly with inspirational businesses across the region to successfully connect them to trade buyers near and far. Trade fairs, sales calls and familiarisation visits to the region have helped to increase sales conversion with over £1.6m in new business generated through intervention by our team alone. This helped VisitAberdeenshire achieve a coveted short-listing for DMO of the Year at UKinbound's annual excellence awards.

Our marketing activity stepped up to another level in 2019. We created vibrant joint marketing campaigns with big Scottish brands such as Loganair and Mackie's of Scotland to extend the reach of our activity across the UK and scooped the Northern Star Marketing award in recognition of the spring campaign. We're able to measure our impact with detailed and thorough evaluation, ensuring we're on the right track when talking to our audiences and spending budget wisely.

We continued to work with specially selected social media influencers to spread the word about authentic visitor experiences. Journalists, both from the UK and Germany, visited the city and shire helping to forge lasting relationships with national media and generated a news reach of almost 80 million people.

In the business events space, we're making waves. Aberdeen City Council's visionary investment saw P&J Live open in 2019. This has put the city on the map as a world-class location for both business and entertainment events. This milestone has been the stimulus for the Convention Bureau team to increase

its promotional and bid activity, working with the team at P&J Live to secure key events up until 2023 with more in the pipeline.

We ended 2019 on a high with BBC Sports Personality of the Year in town, and in the eyes of 8.6 million viewers across the UK. The occasion was used as a catalyst to enhance our work in partner marketing, travel trade and conferencing. Quick thinking from the marketing team also ensured that our fond 'haste ye back' message at Aberdeen International Airport hit the right notes with an influential celebrity audience.

None of this would have been possible without the backing of our funders, Opportunity North East, Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council, along with support from Scottish Enterprise throughout 2019.

'Happy to meet, sorry to part, and happy to meet again'. The motto of Aberdeen will continue to influence our message, and we will be working hard to ensure that we are welcoming visitors to enjoy great North-experiences again very soon.

WORKING WITH BUSINESSES IN THE REGION DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

VisitAberdeenshire's talented tourism development team liaises with businesses so that they are agile, adaptable and understand an ever-changing marketplace. In the last twelve months, VisitAberdeenshire has provided essential training to ensure businesses are travel trade ready and geared up to welcome visitors, and ultimately, grow. The team has devised a multi-strand market development programme, suitable for all tourism-related businesses.

The Travel Trade Readiness programme is regarded as pioneering in Scotland. The team helps businesses understand the role of travel trade intermediaries as a route to market and provide an assessment of their travel trade readiness so VisitAberdeenshire can help fill the gaps. The programme comprised a series of seminars including Introduction to Working with Destination Management Companies, Monetising Your Visitor Attraction, Working with Online Travel Agents, as well as Travel Trade Masterclasses. All advice is tailored, as VisitAberdeenshire provides one-to-one guidance on developing trade bookable products and how to pitch them. This project benefited from Scottish Enterprise support in 2019 and the programme was a key element to VisitAberdeenshire's shortlisting as a finalist in the UKinbound Excellence awards.

VisitAberdeenshire's German Market Travel Trade Development Programme is conducted in partnership with Scottish Enterprise, VisitScotland and Scottish Development International (SDI). The programme provides essential information on the structure of German travel trade, insights on the German market and visitor profiles, and includes translation of sales materials helping local businesses make the first step into Germany. Ten businesses joined VisitAberdeenshire last year on the German programme, as six travelled to Frankfurt in November to experience a VisitScotland Business Development Mission. Included in the trip were representatives from Ardoe House Hotel, Braemar Highland Games Centre, Maryculter House Hotel, Peterhead Prison Museum, The Aberdeen Altens Hotel and The Tippling House/10 Dollar Shake.

VisitAberdeenshire provides practical advice for businesses and the team has delivered three Marketing for SMEs workshops across the region. The workshops help businesses realise the power of effective marketing and how to utilise the marketing channels available to them.

Networking is a key element of VisitAberdeenshire's work with events held across the City and Shire where businesses can meet exchange views and spark new ideas for collaboration.

In 2019 these included Insights and Product Development events, and a Food and Drink showcase delivered in conjunction with Opportunity North East to encourage greater use of local produce in the hospitality sector.

VisitAberdeenshire's largest annual tourism conference was held in March. Taking place at Aberdeen Music Hall and attended by 210 tourism professionals, the event was enriched by contributions from tourism insights expert David Edwards, Joss Croft, CEO of

UKinbound and Suzanne Donnelly, Commercial Director from event sponsor London North East Railways. Focussed workshops and a panel debate with key tourism stakeholders in the region completed the line-up.

Beyond these set piece events, VisitAberdeenshire engages with local tourism groups and attends regular meetings with representatives all year round.



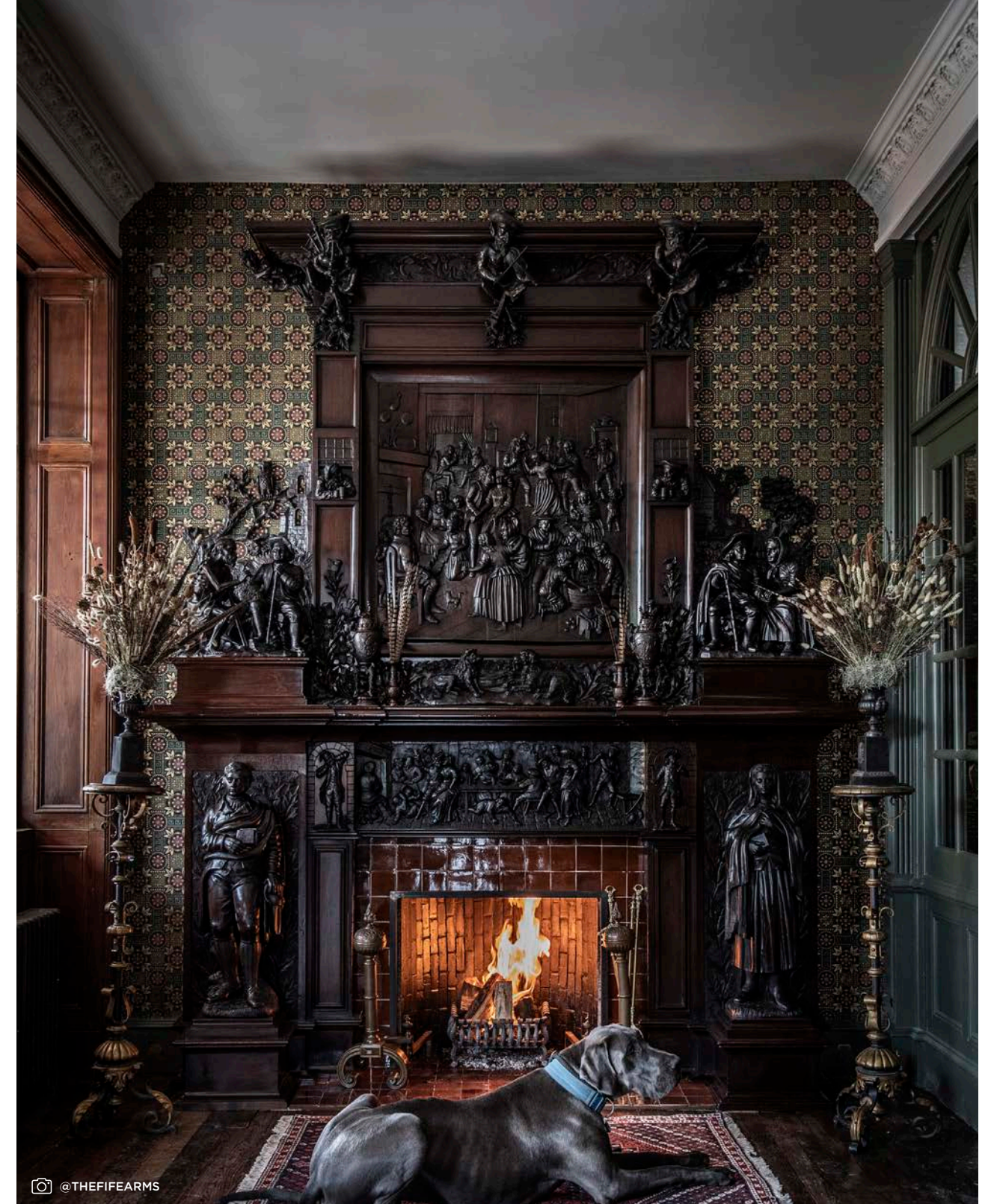
“Working with VisitAberdeenshire has been great in helping the Peterhead Prison Museum understand the travel trade, how to get involved with the cruise market and arranging not only familiarisation visits from a wide range of partners from the travel industry, but also the wider media that can be very influential on where tourists might decide to take their next vacation.

The travel trade ready workshops we attended and 1-2-1 support given in advance of the 2019 VisitScotland Expo and German Market Development Programme (including a business development mission to Frankfurt) were valuable in helping us understand how to communicate with the travel trade effectively, and enabled us to prepare for these events in a professional and timely way.

All the support has been remarkable and for us as a young visitor attraction has allowed us to pave the way to a bright future and already we have seen confirmed business from both domestic and international travel trade.

The current market of course has collapsed, but even though our 2020 bookings have been cancelled, the operators are already matching this with interest for 2021, so we are still hopeful of a positive uptake once the current issues have been resolved. I am certain once the restrictions are removed on travel, that VisitAberdeenshire will once again lead the way to attract visitors to the area and thus save the tourism market for NE Scotland.”

Peterhead Prison Museum



146

businesses are engaged in VA's market development programme to grow their business

404

in-depth advice sessions with individual businesses have been delivered by VA since January 2019

491

attendances at VA workshops / masterclasses

95

businesses have been assessed for travel trade readiness

MAKING THE CONNECTION
DOING BUSINESS WITH THE TRAVEL TRADE

Working with the travel trade is a fundamental part of VisitAberdeenshire's role. Visit-Aberdeenshire's aim is to grow volume leisure business by working closely with travel trade intermediaries. The team nurtures positive relationships with the travel trade community and makes key introductions to the right people at the right time.

A key ingredient to convert interest into signed contracts is hosting familiarisation visits to the region. The team works with local suppliers to present the very best of what Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire has to offer by working with businesses with an attractive, sellable product that leaves a lasting impression long after the trip has ended. Itineraries are meticulously planned, so buyers can experience bookable products relevant to their client base.

The range of services offered by Visit-Aberdeenshire are hugely valued. These include a free quotation service, itinerary

planning, full access to VisitAberdeenshire's image and video bank, as well as in-depth sales training.

VisitAberdeenshire has had a strong presence at trade shows in key markets including VisitScotland Expo in Glasgow when 12 local businesses joined Visit-Aberdeenshire as stand partners, also Travelmatch in Oslo, International Golf Travel Market in Marrakech, ITB Berlin and a targeted German Sales Mission.

These events are essential exercises to build the VisitAberdeenshire team's knowledge and promote the destination to important buyers. It's VisitAberdeenshire's aim to trigger curiosity in the region and convert interest into sales.

All interventions by the trade travel team in 2019 generated **£1.6 million** of business, emphasising the key role of VisitAberdeenshire in the local economy.



“The support I have received at Maryculter House this past 12 months has been more than I could have imagined. A big part of what I have to do with the hotel is making people aware of it and getting it back on the map and the opportunities we have had via VisitAberdeenshire have really helped with that. Through familiarisation visits organised by VisitAberdeenshire we have had the opportunity to meet potential trade buyers, allowing us to show what we have to offer as a business. The German Market Development Programme including the business development mission to Frankfurt was particularly beneficial for us. It was affordable and the contacts and clients we met were so valuable, resulting in eight live enquiries.



I am also grateful for the events that are booked with us, as it shows the property to the local tourism audience. I have developed a couple of new offerings for different markets and knowing that I can get help and advice on these from the Tourism Development Team before they are published is invaluable.”

Maryculter House Hotel

“VisitAberdeenshire has been a massive assistance to us in growing the tourism aspect of our business. Through the travel trade master-class and 1-2-1 tutoring we have gained a great insight into how the travel trade operates, how we should approach buyers and what buyers will expect from us. Through familiarisation visits organised by VisitAberdeenshire we have had the opportunity to meet potential trade buyers, allowing us to show what we have to offer as a business. VisitAberdeenshire has guided us through the first six months of operating as a tourist business and we would be a lot less knowledgeable if we had not received this assistance.”

Lost Loch Distillery



A CONFERENCE CITY REBORN

ABERDEEN CONVENTION AND EVENTS BUREAU

The Aberdeen Convention and Events Bureau spent 2019 putting Aberdeen back on the conference and meetings map. Its work provides a competitive edge when bidding for events, acting as a catalyst for the city region's event facilities and services.

The opening of P&J Live in September marked the start of a new era for events in Aberdeen. The City Council's vision to invest in such a game changing facility puts the city to the fore of the UK meetings and events market. Among its state of the art facilities, its green credentials make it the most sustainable venue in the UK, powered by local, renewable energy sources.

Most business event bids start with detailed research and in 2019, analysis undertaken by the team identified 1,564 conferences with the potential to come to Aberdeen based on size, rotation and sector expertise.

To meet potential clients, a joint effort with P&J Live resulted in a strong presence at IMEX in Frankfurt, the Meeting Show in London, IBTM World in Barcelona and the Association World Congress in Gothenburg, combining 75 one-to-one appointments with key representatives from around the world.

Arising from this work and from hosting familiarisation visits to the city, the Bureau submitted **34** bids for new business, with a value of **£30.5m** and **104,410** bed nights.

Once shortlisted, the Bureau hosted 18 associations and agencies on site visits to Aberdeen in 2019 to allow buyers a first-hand feel for the benefits of hosting their event in Aberdeen before recommending a final decision.

The Aberdeen Ambassador Network also plays a vital role in helping to win major conferences. The network, run by Visit-Aberdeenshire, is underpinned by a collaboration between the University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University, James Hutton Institute and P&J Live. The work of these Ambassadors is celebrated with an annual awards ceremony.

So far **£4.3m** of national conference and events business has been secured - **£3million** of which resulted from the Ambassador Network's endeavours - bolstering the local economy and resulting in **14,578** bed nights for future years.

The team also bid for and secured an event for itself. In May, 50 of the UK's top academic event industry professionals from the Great Ambassador Networking Group were welcomed to Aberdeen for a two-day conference to share best practice. Attendees included VisitBritain, Failte Ireland, Visit Wales and VisitScotland along with universities, convention bureaux and venues from across the country plus representatives from Stavanger as part of the Energy Cities Alliance.



The Bureau submitted

34 bids

for new business, with a value of

£30.5m



and

104,410

bed nights



“As part of an international project comprising of six countries holding annual training events, I put my name forward as a host. The help and support I received through Aberdeen Ambassador Network was invaluable. The three day event was a great success, with many guests using their free time to explore the area. They reported that their time in Aberdeen was too short and that they were determined to return. I would encourage anyone who has the chance to host an event here.”

Professor Angela Kydd, Robert Gordon University

SO FAR...



£4.3m

of national conference and
events business has been
secured



£3m

of which resulted from
the Ambassador Network's
endeavours



resulting in

14,578

bed nights for future years
and bolstering the local
economy



MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

PROMOTING THE REGION TO LEISURE VISITORS

Effective marketing and communications are a core strand of VisitAberdeenshire's work. Despite giant strides in recent years, the city and region still have some distance to travel to become established as a leisure tourism destination. Seasonal campaigns, partner campaigns and destination PR activity combined to raise awareness of the region during 2019 and drive real spend into the visitor economy. To cap off an impressive year, VisitAberdeenshire was awarded the Marketing Magic award at the 2019 Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce Northern Star Business Awards.

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL CHANNELS

The digital landscape is a key element of VisitAberdeenshire's positive promotion of the region. The VisitAberdeenshire website is a hub of information for visitors and locals

alike. In 2019, content was refreshed and updated to inspire and inform the digital audience. Blogs written by the VisitAberdeenshire team were uploaded weekly, with additional social media influencer content also feeding into the home page of the website. Features and articles generated from press visits were also linked on the website. During **2019 764,741** users visited visitabdn.com resulting in **2,464,228** page views. VisitAberdeenshire works closely with industry, and **917** businesses, locations and experiences were featured on visitabdn.com.

VisitAberdeenshire's newsletter reached a database of **58,916** subscribers, enjoying inspirational email content approximately twice a month. VisitAberdeenshire operates on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook and in 2019, **71,832** followers enjoyed engaging and relevant content on these channels.

VISITABERDEENSHIRE'S ONLINE RESOURCES ACT AS A CONSTANT SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND INFORMATION

71,832
followers across social
media channels



764,741
users visiting
its website

SPRING BREAK AWAY IN ABERDEEN AND ABERDEENSHIRE

VisitAberdeenshire's spring 2019 marketing campaign was driven towards audiences in the rest of UK and Germany over a ten-week period during January to March 2019.

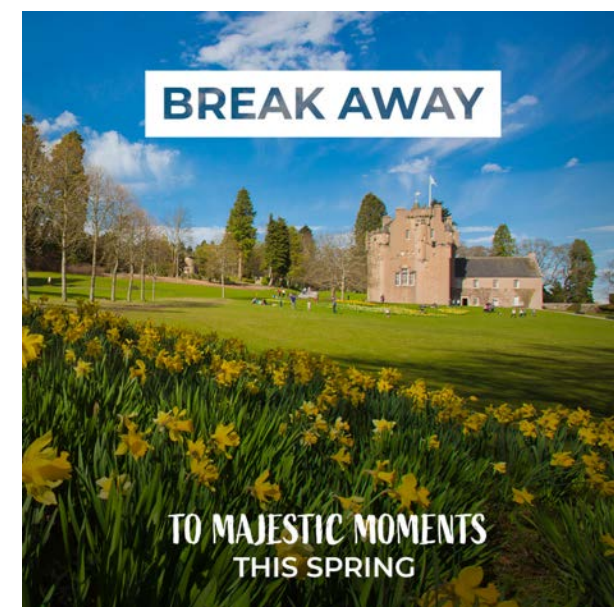
The objective of the campaign was to increase destination awareness and positive sentiment amongst tactically targeted audiences, position Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire as a 'spring break' destination and to increase visitor numbers and spend.

The campaign focused on Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire's spring offering using a new creative concept. The 'Break Away' creative featured emotive language, captivating content, inspiring imagery and an eye-catching video. The spring campaign utilised digital advertising channels including Facebook and Instagram and placement of adverts on sites such as TripAdvisor, The

Guardian and The Daily Mail. The ads spoke to four of VisitScotland's visitor profiles; food-loving culturalists, curious travellers, engaged sightseers and adventure seekers. The campaign generated more than **8 million** impressions, reached over **1.5 million** people on social media and generated **55,727** link clicks across Scotland, the rest of the UK and Germany.

ENJOY ENGAGING THE PEOPLE OF ABERDEEN AND ABERDEENSHIRE

The 'Enjoy' campaign ran in January through to March with the aim of enthusing people in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. The campaign focussed on encouraging locals to attend local festivals and events. VisitAberdeenshire generated **1,317,143** advert impressions and **15,420** link clicks. Locals engaged with the campaign, as demonstrated by a 110% increase in traffic to the what's on guide.



1,317,143 
advert impressions

15,420 link clicks 



SCOTRAIL

An additional element to the Spring campaign was a partnership with ScotRail in February and March. This activity targeted audiences in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness. On digital channels alone, the campaign generated 3,009,411 advert impressions and 21,017 link clicks. Campaign included posters in Scottish train stations and on train carriages. There was a **50%** increase in website users from Scotland and ScotRail reported seat sale increases of up to **14%**.

50%
increase
in website
users from
Scotland

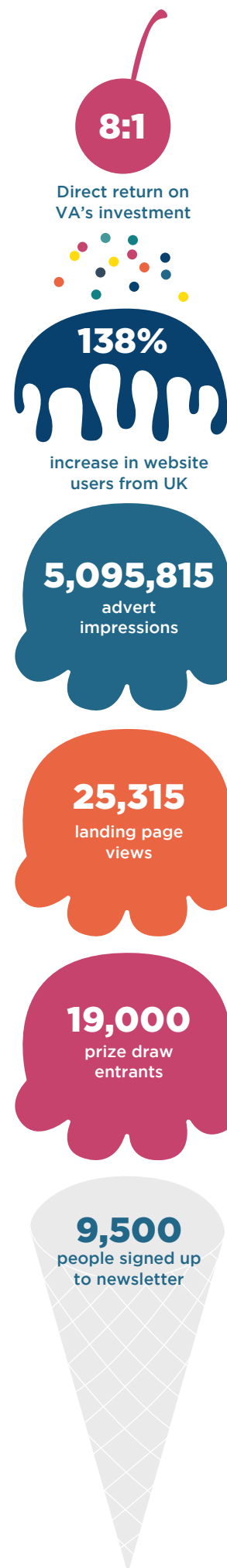
14%
increase in
reported
seat sales

MACKIE'S OF SCOTLAND A TASTE OF ABERDEENSHIRE

During 2019, VisitAberdeenshire created two campaigns with national brand, Mackie's of Scotland. With roots firmly in Aberdeenshire, Mackie's of Scotland is a well-known name in Scotland and the rest of the UK. In summer, VisitAberdeenshire and Mackie's worked together on an inspiring campaign to reinforce the region's association with food and drink, but also to position Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire as a summer holiday destination for UK travellers. 'A taste of summer, made in Aberdeenshire' campaign advert was included on **250,000** tubs of Mackie's ice cream, distributed to major supermarkets across the UK. Within the four-week summer campaign, VisitAberdeenshire hosted social media influencers, rolled out digital advertising on Facebook and created a bespoke campaign website. Lively and engaging blog content was produced and hosted on the site and shared on both partner and VisitAberdeenshire channels. As a result, the campaign generated an economic impact of **£118,740**, a direct return on VisitAberdeenshire's investment of **8:1**.



@TRAVELQUEENNORWAY



PHASE 1 (APRIL - JUNE 2019)
Targeted a UK-wide audience

During November and December, VisitAberdeenshire worked again with Mackie's of Scotland, this time to promote the region's winter proposition. This feelgood campaign focused on the promotion of Mackie's chocolate brand, only available in stores in Scotland. The campaign featured on-pack promotion and **90,000** printed inserts, with the chance to win a break in Aberdeenshire. As part of the campaign, VisitAberdeenshire invited a social media influencer to taste the best of the region's food and drink offering, visit the Mackie's farm and sample Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire's winter events. Marketing activity generated a direct return on VisitAberdeenshire's investment of **12:1**, with more than **2** million impressions and **5,727** sign ups to VisitAberdeenshire's digital newsletter.

PHASE 2 (NOV-DEC 2019) Targeted Scotland



"VisitAberdeenshire and Mackie's of Scotland share a joint enthusiasm for the region we call home and were delighted with the response to our two exciting, feelgood campaigns in 2019. Together we came up with content designed to promote Aberdeenshire's brilliant offering - from castles to chocolate! We achieved great results, increasing awareness of the Aberdeenshire region and Mackie's of Scotland brand along with a positive emotional response and desire to act - to visit Aberdeenshire or try our products. We hugely enjoyed working together to successfully promote Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire's food sector."

Karin Hayhow, Marketing Director, Mackie's of Scotland

Enchanting escapes



Made in
Aberdeenshire

Craigievar Castle @monologue

Find your taste of winter in Aberdeenshire

Go to
visitabdn.com/chocolate
for a chance to win
a break in Aberdeenshire

T&Cs apply. Prize draw closes 15/03/2020.

LOGANAIR WORKING WITH SCOTLAND’S AIRLINE

VisitAberdeenshire and Loganair collaborated on a joint campaign designed to support the launch of a new route from London Southend to Aberdeen, but also position Aberdeen as an attractive short break destination to a London audience. Live from late March to mid-June, VisitAberdeenshire created an effective campaign utilising PR and marketing channels to raise awareness, drive traffic and generate leads.

The key call to action in the advertising was to ‘plan your own Scottish adventure’ and lead the user to a specially created loganair-toaberdeen.com website for further information and inspiration. VisitAberdeenshire created a campaign website, calling on users to ‘book your trip now’ allowing passengers to book a flight directly on the Loganair website.

The theme of the campaign was to promote Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire’s summer offering, inspiring visitors with Scotland’s wild scenery and panoramic landscape, and to explore ancient history and fairy-tale castles. Advertising promoted the region’s impressive food and drink larder from famous fresh food to craft drinking experiences. VisitAberdeenshire invited two social media influencers from London to visit the region, capturing the Loganair journey whilst also promoting the visitor offering. Working with online influencers boosted the reach of the campaign, providing genuine experiences from trusted sources. The influencers were selected based on their London following, the

size of their audiences and the engagement with their content.

The campaign targeted people in London, East Anglia and Kent and generated **5,974,200** advert impressions, **16,000** link clicks, **1,743** prize draw entrants and had a massive **222,000** video views of the YouTube advertisement. There was a **77%** increase in website users from the London catchment area.

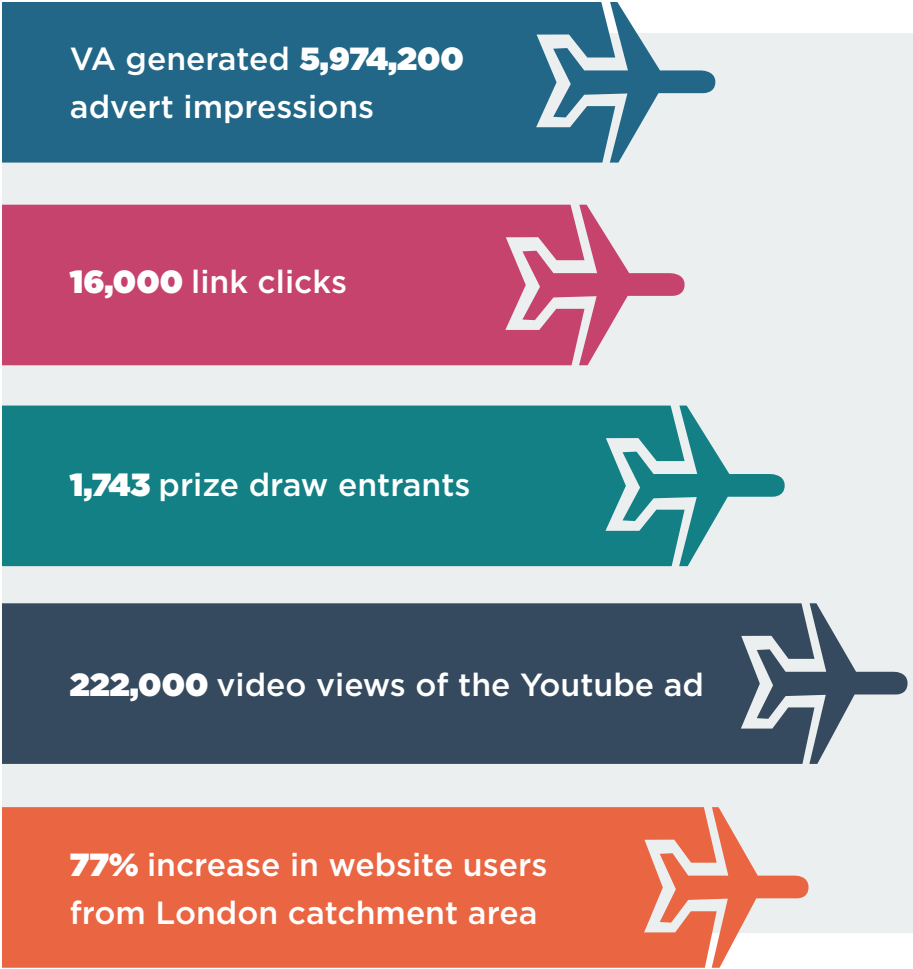
In September, VisitAberdeenshire and Loganair worked together again to attract leisure travellers on its new Newcastle to Aberdeen service. Typically a route aligned with corporate travel and the oil and gas sector, the aim of the campaign was to increase leisure visitors from the Newcastle area to the North-east of Scotland. Marketing activity had a distinct call to action to ‘book your trip now’ on the specially created campaign website, with supporting Facebook and Google advertising and PR activity. VisitAberdeenshire and Loganair targeted those living within a 40-mile radius of Newcastle International Airport, highlighting the best of what Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire had to offer, positioning the region as an alternative to other areas of Scotland. VisitAberdeenshire worked with a Newcastle-based lifestyle blogger, who captured inspiring and engaging content for use in the campaign. The campaign generated new VisitAberdeenshire website users from the Newcastle area, with an increase of more than **1106%** on visits from the same period in 2018.

“Loganair and VisitAberdeenshire worked together on two successful marketing campaigns during 2019 to promote new services to Aberdeen. VisitAberdeenshire is a key partner for us in our promotional activity and we value the team’s expertise, knowledge and passion for the region.”

Kay Ryan, Chief Commercial Officer, Loganair



LOGANAIR CAMPAIGN (London Southend, March-June 2019)
Targeted audiences in London, East Anglia and Kent



AUTUMN

VisitAberdeenshire's autumn campaign targeted audiences in UK towns and cities with a direct link by air or rail to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

This was a digital campaign with advertising on Facebook, Instagram, Google Display Network and Google AdWords, designed to match customer profiles. To accompany this robust suite of digital ads. VisitAberdeenshire hosted thematic press trips including adventure, haunted and food & drink.

The campaign ran during July to September and generated **9,772,505** advert impressions, **94,930** link clicks, **13,489** prize draw entrants, and over **90,000** video views. VisitAberdeenshire's autumn campaign ensured there was an **87%** increase in website users from the UK. As a result of VisitAberdeenshire's activity, an ROI of **6:1** was generated.



WINTER

VisitAberdeenshire's winter campaign ran throughout October and November and targeted audiences in Scotland and North-east England. The winter campaign generated **5,819,683** impressions, **65,626** landing page views and clicks, and **8,599** prize draw entrants. There was an **151%** increase in website users from the UK and an ROI of **3:1**.

5,819,683
impressions



65,626 landing page
views & clicks



READ ALL ABOUT IT VISITABERDEENSHIRE HIT THE HEADLINES IN 2019

VisitAberdeenshire helped positively promote the region in the news during 2019 and achieved some impressive results. In January, the New York Times placed Aberdeen in its top 52 places to visit in 2019 and the BBC The One Show visited Stonehaven to cover the metal art works along the coastal path. During the month of January alone, VisitAberdeenshire's PR activity reached **10,863,806** people.

Press trips throughout the year have seen a total of 40 social media influencers and journalists make the trip to the region, from across the UK and Germany. VisitAberdeenshire arranged for 21 social media influencers to come to the region, with a combined reach across their social media channels of **4,095,029**.

This year, VisitAberdeenshire's corporate communications activity has generated thought leadership commentary in local and national publications, covering topics such as the Tour of Britain, the Aberdeen South Harbour, and the changing trends of travel.

As part of the VisitScotland Growth Fund project, VisitAberdeenshire commissioned two musicians as winners of the 'Sound of the North-east' music competition. Composer Ben McMillan and renowned Scottish fiddler Paul Anderson created the winning piece, 'The Ballad of Blue, Granite and Green', with news of the project appearing in local and national media.

Throughout 2019, VisitAberdeenshire invested in an in-house PR programme and worked



with culture experts FOUR communications as part of the wider promotion of the North-east's cultural renaissance with city and regional partners.

VisitAberdeenshire organised and supported press events and trips to tie in with the re-opening of Aberdeen Art Gallery. Press trip attendees included representatives from The Sunday Times, The Guardian, The I, Country Life, a freelancer writing on behalf of The Independent and Conde Nast Traveller. Art media also covered the opening with art features in Elephant, Architect's Journal and Urban Realm amongst others. Promotion of the reopening of Aberdeen Art Gallery equated to a total news reach of **39,834,768**, helping highlight Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire's cultural prowess.

In 2019, VisitAberdeenshire's
news reach was

79.2m

TOP 52 PLACES TO VISIT

In January, the **New York Times** placed Aberdeen in its **top 52** places to visit in 2019

GOLF



The North-east's golf offering is hugely attractive, and the region's reputation is growing within the travel industry. To support the sector, VisitAberdeenshire has focussed on targeted press trips with international media and the travel trade.

Highlights have included nine familiarisation visits with attendees from Europe, USA and the UK, national and international TV features including Sky Sports broadcasting from the Euro Pro Challenge Tour, hosted at Newmachar Golf club.

VisitAberdeenshire's flagship press event, the Six Nations Media Challenge, pits journalists from around the world against each other over a variety of the area's top links and parkland courses.

The team attended the Golf & Wellness Show in Stuttgart, the renowned PGA Show and the International Golf Travel Market with VisitScotland. These attendances alone generated more than 120 business leads.

CRUISE

As work progressed on the construction of the Aberdeen South Harbour throughout 2019, VisitAberdeenshire maintained the pace with the Cruise Aberdeenshire project.

Together with partners at Aberdeen Harbour Board, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and Scottish Enterprise, VisitAberdeenshire worked with local businesses and the cruise industry to ensure the port of call experience will be of the highest standard for these high-end, high spending visitors from across the world. The team has worked together on practical measures like traffic management, passenger way-finding and quayside assistance.

Throughout 2019 VisitAberdeenshire hosted workshops for tourism businesses, keen to understand how the new cruise market may work for them. VisitAberdeenshire 'Day in the Life of' workshops acted as due diligence exercises to ensure that collectively partners have everything covered to prepare for cruise liners.

Tailored advice for local businesses has helped to develop new products and experiences for the cruise sector, many of which can be adopted by existing smaller scale operators using the north harbour, and indeed by the travel trade.

A key activity during 2019 was to create a volunteer pool that would become the friendly face of the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire cruise experience. The 'Welcome to Aberdeenshire' volunteering programme was launched, with the recruitment campaign in the media encouraging the sign up of 12 volunteers whose skills can also be deployed at other events aside from cruise arrivals.

Attendance at cruise industry trade events with Aberdeen Harbour Board including SeaTrade Global in Miami and SeaTrade Europe in Hamburg has positioned Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire as a must see port-of-call.

“10 Dollar Shake has been an avid participant for several years in a number of VisitAberdeenshire initiatives including Expo and familiarisation visits. Over the last 12 months we have benefitted from increased support, including social media workshops, the German market programme, a trade delegation to Frankfurt and in-depth analysis, including 1-2-1 support of our travel trade products. These have enabled us to focus on our offering and have raised our awareness of the cultural and regional differences that can impact the success of our products. Were it not for the current COVID-19 situation and the postponement of VS Expo 2020 in Aberdeen, we would have been able to build on that momentum with solid trade relationships and confirmed business. Instead, I believe the benefits are only delayed and once we are all able to pick up where we left off, the gains from VisitAberdeenshire’s support will become tangible.”

10 Dollar Shake

HOW VA ASSESSES THE IMPACT OF ITS WORK

VisitAberdeenshire has developed an evaluation model based on what is used by VisitBritain and Visit Jersey. This evaluation model summarises VisitAberdeenshire’s work in the context of inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes, providing a framework against to measure progress and performance.

VisitAberdeenshire aims to answer these questions:

- **What impact does VA’s work have?**
- **What value does VA create?**
- **How can VA use the insights to inform VA’s next steps?**

To understand progress and performance, VisitAberdeenshire has been working with a leading UK tourism analyst to develop tools to evaluate the impact of interventions, for example, the value associated with leisure marketing campaigns.

For each campaign, for example Mackie’s of Scotland ice-cream, VisitAberdeenshire distributes a conversion survey to those who engaged with the campaign and signed up to the newsletter. This provides first hand insight to what the campaign made them think, feel and do. These surveys capture:

- **Recall**
- **Actions taken as a result of seeing the campaign;**
- **Insights on visits to the region (taken place/intended) and the spend associated with these visits.**

By capturing this information, VisitAberdeenshire is able to calculate the visits and bed nights associated with the campaign, and can therefore calculate the return on investment for VisitAberdeenshire’s direct investment. Beyond financial impact information, the results give a wealth of information to inform refinements to VA’s work and future campaigns.

VisitAberdeenshire has now undertaken several conversion surveys to identify the impact of leisure consumer campaigns and the return on investment, some examples of which are summarised earlier within this review.

The team at VisitAberdeenshire is now extending evaluation work in the leisure marketing area to include surveying consumers who engage through the website, monthly newsletters and social channels, giving the team the opportunity to evaluate all touchpoints.

Moving beyond leisure marketing, VisitAberdeenshire has recently started evaluating activity with the travel trade, specifically focusing on the value of interventions in this area and look forward to reporting on this in the future.

BUSINESS SERVICES: WORKING AT VISITABERDEENSHIRE
EMPLOYEES ARE A BUSINESS' GREATEST ADVOCATES

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. VisitAberdeenshire asks employees to take part in an annual employee engagement survey to delve deeper than the drivers of pay and job security and seek feedback on professional development, personal accomplishment, work/life balance and the ability to influence the company's direction. The 2019 staff engagement survey recorded the highest total overall employee engagement score since the surveys began in 2017.

VisitAberdeenshire empowers employees to upskill and take ownership of their personal development through the annual appraisal process and mapped departmental

competence frameworks. In 2019, 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 several employees undertaking distance learning qualifications in areas of Human Resources and Digital Marketing.

An essential part of VisitAberdeenshire's commitment to staff was the introduction of the Wellness Wednesdays programme in 2019. In order to help promote health and wellbeing across the organisation, the second Wednesday of each month was labelled 'Wellness Wednesday', where the entire organisation takes an hour out of the day to promote a different health and well-being activity. During 2019, the team took part in a number of different sessions from yoga, to a mindfulness seminar from Sport-Aberdeen and a Nuart city walking tour. An exciting programme of sessions for 2020 has been developed to maintain the monthly initiative.

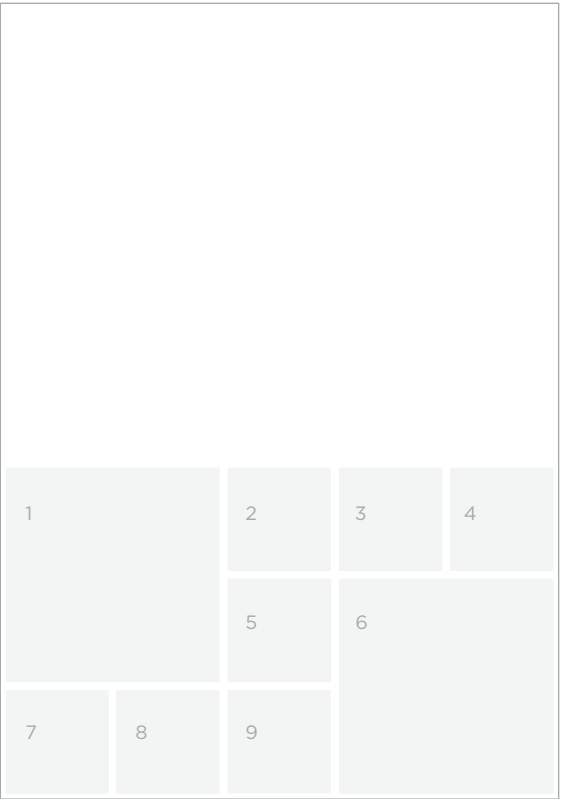


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Throughout the year, VisitAberdeenshire worked closely with tourism partners across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire to positively promote the region. VisitAberdeenshire would like to thank commercial and tourism partners for valuable in-kind support, allowing these familiarisation visits, press trips and site visits to take place.

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