

Dark Sky Tourism Business Toolkit

Image Credit: Lee Fowlie

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Introducing Northern Nights

This winter, VisitAberdeenshire will be promoting the region's illuminating experiences and dark skies. From the city's vibrant festivals to Aberdeenshire's stargazing credentials – we want visitors to immerse themselves in the sights and sounds of winter. Our campaign will be called '*Northern Nights*.'

The campaign is due to be in market in mid-November through to the end of January. Targeted advertising will feature stunning imagery of starry skies and the city buzz in the darker months. Content created around the region's experiences and sensory outdoor adventures will encourage potential visitors to explore the region's dark beauty.

Dark Skies. Why Now?

We know that season extension matters. VisitAberdeenshire understands the need to drive visits in traditionally quieter periods.

Timing is everything, and statistically 2024, 2025 and 2026 are believed to be the best years in decades for spotting the Aurora Borealis, and our northern latitude, natural environment and clear night skies combine to make the North-east a prime destination for stellar experiences.

Some of Aberdeen's most popular festivals and events run in the autumn and winter months and we want our visitors to be inspired to travel to our region.



Data and Insights.

As part of the post-campaign evaluation for *Northern Nights 2024-25*, we sought to understand how the initiative influenced visitor perceptions and behaviours.

When asked whether the campaign had changed their view of the region:



84% of respondents agreed with the statement
'The region is a great place to enjoy the night sky'.



This strong level of agreement highlights the success of the campaign in positioning Aberdeenshire as a desirable destination for dark skies experiences.

Visitors were also asked how the campaign impacted their travel decisions. A notable response was: *"I visited the region at a different time of year than I usually would have."* This feedback supports one of the core goals of Northern Nights - encouraging off-season travel and extending tourism activity into the traditionally quieter autumn and winter months.

Lastly, in our campaign evaluation survey, we asked respondents which themes or personal interests would encourage them to visit the region. While *'Night Sky Activities'* was a new addition to this list, it is already featuring alongside more established themes such as music events and natural landscapes. This early demand highlights the growing potential of night-sky related tourism to attract a wider audience, and its alignment with other cultural and outdoor interests.

Further afield, national and international travel trends are also reflecting a growing appetite for night-time and celestial experiences. A 2024 global survey by Booking.com, involving 27,000 travellers across 33 countries, found that:



62% of respondents planned to visit a dark sky destination as part of their 2025 travel plans.



The following after-dark activities were among the most sought-after:



72% Starbathing Experiences



59% Guided Stargazing ('Star Guides')

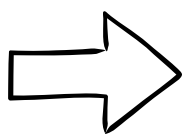
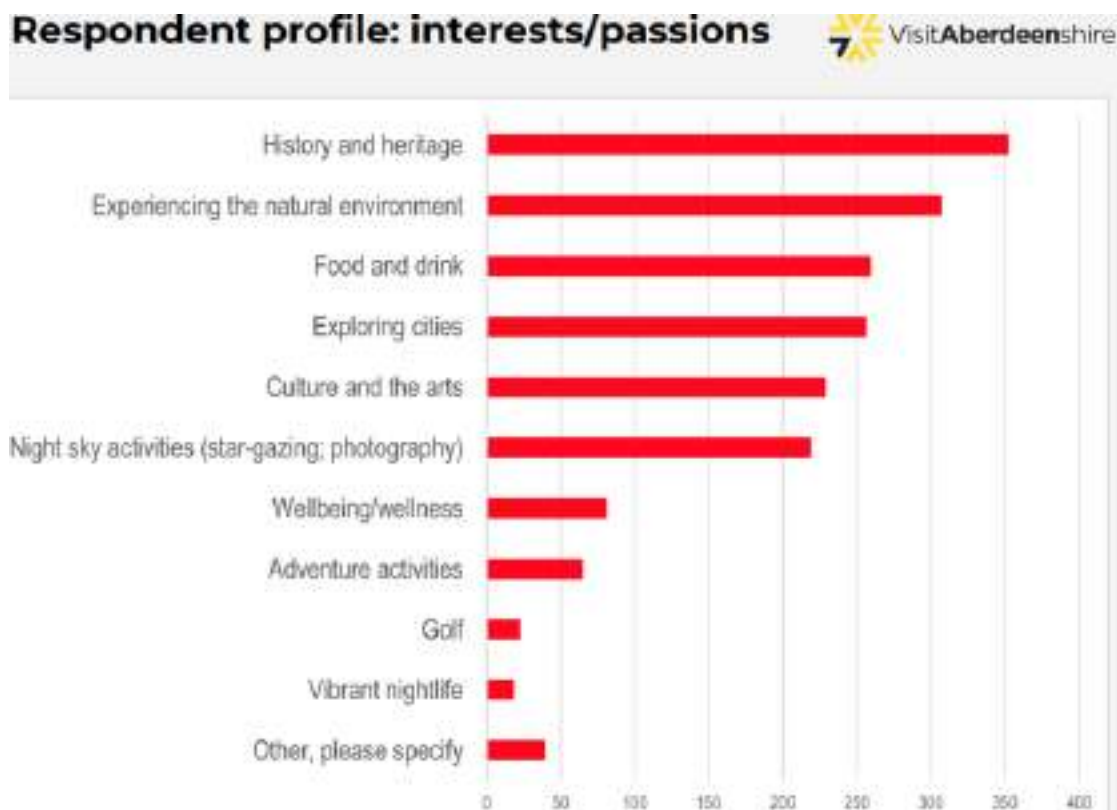


59% Once-in-a-Lifetime Cosmic Events



57% Constellation Tracking

This data reinforces the relevance of dark skies tourism and demonstrates that it's not only resonating locally but is also aligned with broader global travel trends.



Making the Most of Dark Sky Tourism.

As the UK gives way to darker nights, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire is an ideal location to spend the days exploring our landscapes, and the nights admiring the beauty of above.

According to light pollution maps, the region is one of the best places in Scotland for a stargazing getaway with some of the darkest skies anywhere in the UK (or in fact Western Europe). On clear evenings the Milky Way can be seen arching across the sky and you can expect to see over 2,000 stars at any one time, compared with just a handful from urban areas.



Image Credit: Ollie Taylor

Within our region, the Cairngorms National Park is a Dark Sky Park, and designated stargazing locations offer a number of locations perfect for a night of enjoying the night skies with many local businesses already prepared to reap the benefits.

As a local tourism business, we want you to join VisitAberdeenshire in promoting our region to your audiences, both old and new, and for your business to benefit.

Advantages of Dark Sky Tourism.

VisitAberdeenshire is moving forward with an autumn and winter campaign for the following reasons:



Dark skies promotion *extends the season* and promotes winter tourism during traditionally quieter periods.



Encourages *longer dwell time* due to the nature of stargazing activities which take place during the evening, therefore boosting overnight stays and increasing spend.



Inspires visits to locations across the county which visitors may not have experienced before.



Stargazing is *accessible* to a wide audience due to the variety of experiences available, therefore gives the opportunity to enhance your offer quickly and easily from the traditional peak market.



Opportunity for tourism businesses to provide new and exciting enriching products and packages, giving visitors the chance to explore our region in an immersive way they can both see and do - *more reasons* for visitors to book with you.

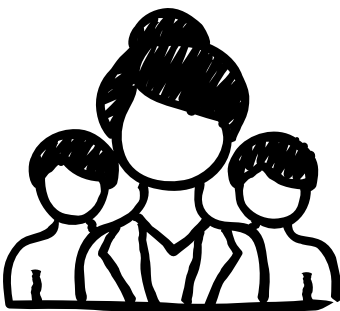


Provides new ways for visitors to fulfil their desire to explore the outdoors and get closer to nature.

Hints and Tips for Creating Your Dark Sky Experience

Unleash your entrepreneurial spirit and become part of the Northern Nights campaign. That could be as simple as telling us more about your current offering, or by creating something new for guests to enjoy.

The list below provides some inspiration for what you could offer.



Know the market.

There are two kinds of visitors attracted by the prospect of dark skies:

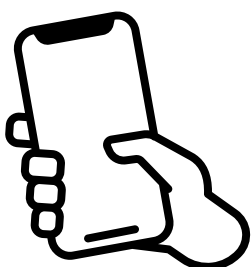
- Novices with little knowledge of the heavens, but intrigued to find out more. These will be the majority.
- More experienced astronomers who may have their own gear and want to escape their light polluted homes to view under a dark sky.



Checklist for your guests and visitors.

For businesses in rural locations, imagine yourself taking part in a stargazing trip, what would help you enjoy a magical night under the stars?

Most stargazing activities and events take place outdoors during the cooler months, so let visitors know what they will need to bring. Advise them to take scarves, gloves, a hat, sensible footwear, a torch for map reading, binoculars and a flask for example.

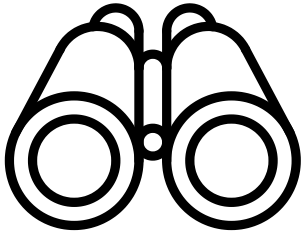


Provide access to the internet.

Make sure your business offers good Wi-Fi to enable your guests to access websites and apps, as well as to upload their best photos, sharing their stargazing experience to social media sites in real time.

Equipment and the little extras.

There's no need to purchase expensive equipment for your guests to experience dark skies.

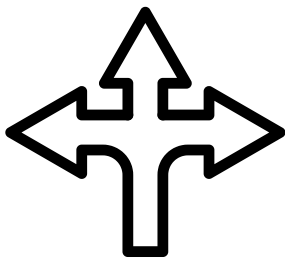


Whilst the naked eye can explore the night sky, providing binoculars allows visitors to see even more. The best sizes are a 10x50 or 7x50. You could even designate an outdoor area for stargazing which offers minimal outdoor lighting, but enough to keep your guests safe. You could provide reclining chairs, blankets, even flasks with hot drinks, to help guests stay warm and comfortable.

Supply your guests with star maps, charts and make recommendations for apps which they can access on tablets or mobile phones. SkyView® Lite is available to download free from Google Play and Apple's App Store. If guests are bringing a laptop, they could try Stellarium - a free open-source planetarium for their computer showing a realistic sky in 3D.

Offer your guests flexibility.

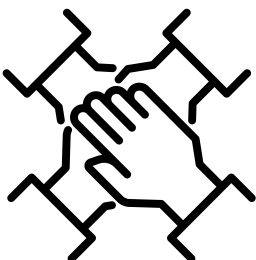
If your guests are attending an evening stargazing activity, this could mean that they return to their accommodation later in the evening. If you can offer a later breakfast the following morning and even the option for a later checkout, then make sure to highlight this.

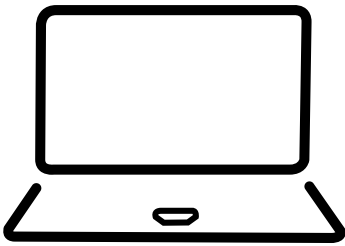


Also, if you offer evening catering, could you be more flexible on when your guests can dine, either before or after their stargazing activity?

Work with other businesses and members of the stargazing community.

Promote stargazing activities and events via your promotional channels which may bring additional business. Organised stargazing events and gatherings offer guests the opportunity to join off-site stargazing adventures.



**Use your existing communication channels.**

You could include dark skies information alongside your existing content on your website or consider adding an extra page on your website. Make full use of social media channels and share images of the night-sky where possible.

Here are some suggested key messages to use in your marketing:



Aberdeenshire has some of the UK's starriest skies.

We see thousands of stars overhead compared with a handful from towns and cities.

We are one of the best places in the UK to see the Northern Lights and Milky Way.

Our dark skies are good for nocturnal wildlife like owls and moths.



If your business is offering stargazing breaks or running dark skies activities and events, then make sure that you are sharing this with your audience and shout about them across your channels, including social media.



If you can't offer stargazing on-site, then point out sites close by which are good for stargazing. Make sure to let your visitors know how to get there and what facilities are available, such as carparking, toilets, and where to get food and drink.

Remember if you are running an event, these can be promoted on visitabdn.com's 'What's On' section. To submit your event, please complete the form [here](#).

Organising your own event or experience.

VisitAberdeenshire's Tourism Development team can assist you in developing a visitor experience to offer your visitors. Here are some ideas that you could try:

- Introduction to Dark Skies: Stargazing Walk

Organise an easy night-time stroll under the cover of darkness to really soak up the wonders of the region's dark skies, providing advice on how to keep safe and warm while pointing out the perfect places to view the stars.

- Dine and Stargaze Packages

Wrap up warm for an al fresco experience under the stars the let your guests enjoy a hearty meal afterwards.

- Astronomy or Space Talk

Give visitors more of an insight into what's above them by hosting an expert in the field, or an enthusiastic amateur.

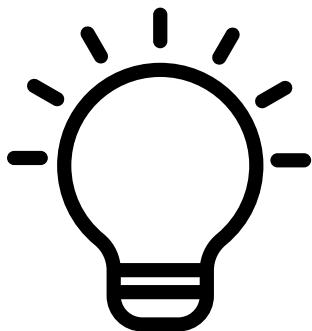
- Night-time Art Events and Installations

Arrange a night viewing for arts and installations to give visitors the chance to experience a new perspective

- Astro-Photography Workshop

Perfect for keen night-time photographers, give visitors a chance to brush up on their photography skills and snap the perfect long exposure by arranging stargazing photography classes.



**Outdoor lighting.**

If external lighting at your venue is required, ensure the lighting is well shielded, shining downwards and avoiding upward glare.

Only use as much light as you need and consider whether you need external lighting at all. This will help reduce light pollution, save money and preserve our view of the stars. Look at whether you could be using less powerful, lower wattage lights.

Alternatively, make your lighting controls easy to operate – labelling it as a dark skies feature. You can browse what qualifies as a dark sky friendly lighting at www.darks skylighting.co.uk.

Don't forget to look down as well as up.

Guided by the light of the stars, don't forget to encourage your guests to look down and see the thriving wildlife in their natural habitat. Nocturnal creatures flourish under dark skies without artificial light confusing their natural behaviours. Listen out for the sounds of the autumn and winter too.

Next Steps and Resources

Utilise our Marketing Toolkit. Find a host of resources including digital and print assets, social media support and campaign guidance.

Click here to access campaign resources

If you'd like tailored advice on developing experiences, book a one-to-one session with our team.

Book a one-to-one advice session

Useful links

[Go Stargazing](#)

[Dark Sky Discovery Sites](#)



Image Credit: David Fowlie