



Aberdeenshire was ranked number one among the world's best sustainable travel destinations by Time Out magazine in 2025, and credited with 'leading the way in sustainable tourism' by Wanderlust magazine

Sustainable Tourism Report 2025-2026



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Tourism has enormous potential to drive positive economic and social change. Managed well, it can and should enrich the lives of our visitors, the livelihoods of our communities and the life of our natural environment.

VisitAberdeenshire has a role to play through its own actions and through the advice it provides for tourism businesses.

Our latest report continues to put a spotlight on our initiatives throughout the community, designed to make our region a more welcoming, and sustainable destination.



Sustainable tourism at VisitAberdeenshire goes beyond internal actions or business guidance. It focuses on delivering long-term benefits for communities, the environment, and the economy.

A sustainable visitor economy creates meaningful experiences while supporting local livelihoods and strengthening places. As tourism evolves, the sector must adapt to new markets, changing expectations, and remain accessible to all - including older visitors and people with disabilities.

Long-term success depends on investing in people. Building a skilled workforce and involving local communities through education, training, and community initiatives helps shape authentic visitor experiences.

Through collaboration across industry, education, and communities, VisitAberdeenshire supports a tourism sector that is inclusive, resilient, and sustainable.

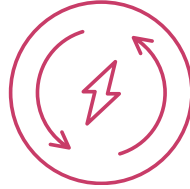


Our working environment

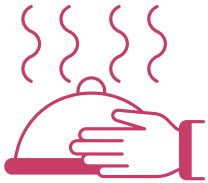
Our office space is based within P&J Live who are “***proud to be the most sustainable venue of its type in the United Kingdom.***” We actively support their endeavours.



P&J LIVE HAVE SIGNED THE **NET ZERO CARBON EVENTS PLEDGE**



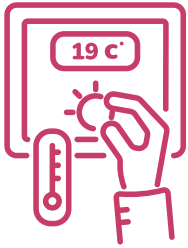
THE AD PLANT **TURNS FOOD, DISTILLERY, AND FARM WASTE INTO BIOGAS**, WHICH IS THEN REFINED INTO BIOMETHANE AND SENT TO THE NATIONAL GRID.



ALL **FOOD WASTE IS COMPOSTED LOCALLY**. ZERO WASTE IS SENT TO LANDFILL



WASTE COLLECTION IS MINIMISED BY **USING ONSITE COMPACTORS**.



THE ENERGY CENTRE PROVIDES **HEATING, COOLING AND POWER** VIA A SITE-WIDE NETWORK. EXCESS ENERGY IS FED BACK TO THE GRID



LOCAL SUPPLIERS ARE USED WHEREVER POSSIBLE, **REDUCING FOOD MILES**.

- We recycle all waste and minimise printed documents wherever possible.
- We prioritise sourcing goods and services locally.
- We promote sustainable travel such as cycling, EVs and public transport.
- The team car share wherever feasible.



By working with local businesses and communities, we strive to protect our natural capital by implementing initiatives to ensure that Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire remains a vibrant and welcoming destination for future generations.

Sustainable tourism toolkit

Launched in 2024, VisitAberdeenshire developed a [Sustainable Tourism Toolkit](#) to offer businesses practical tools and direct support to implement sustainable strategies effectively.

This is a comprehensive resource, designed with input from industry experts and local businesses, it provides an overview of the importance of sustainable tourism and highlights changes can have on businesses and their customers, with practical checklists to support short, medium and long term actions for improvement.

VisitAberdeenshire offers one-to-one advice to local businesses to identify sustainable tourism goals and provide an action plan to work towards these goals using the toolkit.



Tourism development programme

We partner with industry bodies to ensure that local businesses have access to the latest information on how to improve business operations and what support is available to them. This year we partnered with Business Energy Scotland to deliver a webinar about the energy-saving support and funding available to businesses to help tackle rising energy costs. And we worked in partnership with Tourism for All to deliver an informative session where we explored the economic opportunity that being more accessible presents to businesses and the low cost actions that can be taken to create a more welcoming space for everyone.

We record and publish our sessions to enable businesses to rewatch and share with their teams. Find our latest recordings on our Business Community website.

[Sustainability webinars](#)

[Inclusive tourism webinars](#)

In October 2025, we hosted a short information session with Inspiring Scotland and PAMIS (Promoting A More Inclusive Society) to raise awareness of The Changing Places Toilets Scotland Fund to increase the number of Changing Places Toilets across Scotland.

Looking ahead, we will continue to nurture industry partnerships to enhance our resources and signpost opportunities for businesses to continue to work towards a sustainable future.





We continue to invest in education partnerships that support the long-term sustainability of the region's tourism and hospitality sector. By working directly with schools, colleges and employability partners, the organisation helps young people recognise tourism as a skilled and rewarding career pathway while developing the future workforce needed to sustain destination growth.

During 2025–26, we strengthened collaboration with Developing the Young Workforce North East and Peterhead Academy, continuing support for SCQF Level 6 Travel and Tourism students delivering the annual Taste of Buchan event. Through mentoring sessions, classroom engagement and practical guidance, students gained hands-on experience in event planning, stakeholder engagement, marketing and visitor experience design.

This experiential learning approach builds local skills capacity and encourages young people to identify opportunities within their own region, supporting talent retention within Aberdeenshire's visitor economy. Students were also introduced to sustainable event principles, including community collaboration, local supply chains and responsible visitor engagement.

“The Taste of Buchan event has become a key date in the local community and recognised nationally as sector-leading work.”

Mr Greig Summers, PT Social Subjects, Peterhead Academy

We also host apprentices through the North East Scotland College Business Skills Foundation Apprenticeship programme. Over a seven-month placement, our two apprentices worked across the Tourism Development and Marketing teams, gaining experience in destination marketing, stakeholder engagement and project delivery. The programme supports inclusive access to career pathways while embedding sustainability awareness early in professional development.

These initiatives:

- strengthen local employability pathways
- develop skills aligned with industry needs
- help reduce future workforce shortages
- encourage long-term career retention within the region

“Working in a real workplace has made me realise how integral real-world experience is in learning.”

Oliver Raine, Foundation Apprentice Student

By investing in young people and skills development, we support a resilient tourism economy where future growth is underpinned by locally developed talent and an understanding of responsible tourism practices.



The Welcome to Aberdeenshire volunteer programme demonstrates how community participation can support socially sustainable tourism development. Launched in 2023 to enhance cruise visitor experiences, the initiative places local people at the heart of destination delivery, strengthening connections between residents, visitors and place.

During the 2025 cruise season, volunteers welcomed visitors to the region by providing local knowledge, orientation support and a warm North-east welcome. Their presence enhances visitor confidence and encourages respectful engagement with local communities, a key principle of sustainable destination management. The programme supports:

- community ownership of tourism growth
- authentic storytelling and cultural exchange
- improved visitor dispersal and local economic benefit
- strengthened civic pride and social cohesion

In 2025, the programme expanded to 35 active volunteers, including eight new recruits. Volunteers contributed 1,011 hours between April and September, supporting 38 cruise ship visits, cruise familiarisation activity and major events at P&J Live.

Using the 2025 UK Living Wage rate as a recognised social value proxy, volunteer contributions equate to an estimated £12,344 in community investment, demonstrating the tangible economic and social value created through community participation.

Supported by funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (administered by Aberdeen City Council), we delivered an enhanced training programme totalling 627 volunteer training hours, focused on visitor engagement and destination storytelling. Funding also enabled the creation of a digital SharePoint resource hub to support communication, learning and programme sustainability.

“The support and training from VisitAberdeenshire has been incredible and helps us see the city from a visitor’s perspective.”

Gavin Barclay, Volunteer

The programme is supported through collaboration between public and private partners, including Peterson Energy Logistics and Port of Aberdeen, demonstrating how corporate and public investment can enable sustainable, community-led tourism.

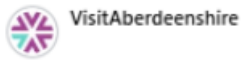
“It gives me pride to play a part in improving visitors’ perceptions of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.”

Eleanor Brennan, Volunteer

The initiative provides a scalable model of inclusive tourism growth, ensuring visitor experiences remain aligned with community wellbeing and local values.



Promoting sustainable travel



Caledonian Sleeper – a unique and sustainable way to travel to the heart of Aberdeen 🍷



In 2025 and 2026, two of our visitor marketing campaigns partnered with public transport providers.

Our partnership with CityLink for our 2025 spring campaign highlighted eco-friendly regional bus routes, encouraging visitors to reduce car use and enjoy scenic journeys responsibly.

Meanwhile, our Northern Nights campaign partnered with Caledonian Sleeper to showcase overnight rail travel as a low-carbon, comfortable, and immersive way to reach Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire from London and Birmingham.

Both campaigns demonstrated that sustainable travel can be practical, enjoyable, and accessible, reinforcing our commitment to environmentally responsible tourism.

By inspiring visitors to choose low-impact transport, we support local communities, protect natural resources, and strengthen a tourism sector built for a sustainable future.

The Aberdeen Convention Bureau is committed to promoting more sustainable travel choices for conference and event delegates.

We work in close partnership with key transport providers across Scotland and throughout the UK including Scotrail, LNER, Loganair, Avanti, TransPennine Express and NorthLink Ferries to facilitate accessible, lower-carbon travel to and within the region.

Through these partnerships, we are able to secure discounted travel options for delegates, travelling to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, actively encouraging the use of public transport and lower-emission travel in our service offering, giving event delegates and conference organisers the option to make more sustainable choices, at a lower cost, when making travel plans.

We believe that sustainable business tourism starts with the journey, and we are proud to make that easier and more affordable for every delegate who chooses Aberdeen.



UN sustainable development goals

The Responsible Tourism group were tasked with identifying the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that align with VisitAberdeenshire's activities. To support this, the group maintains an organisational tracker to monitor the company's initiatives and their alignment with the SDGs. This tracker is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure VisitAberdeenshire maximises its positive impact.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Aligning our programmes with the UNSDGs'

Activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Our working environment			●	●		●	●	●	●			●	●				●
Our tourism community				●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●		●
Education and School Support				●				●				●	●				●
Volunteer Programme			●	●				●		●	●						●
Promoting sustainable travel							●		●		●	●	●				●



For more
information
please visit our website
at: www.visitabdn.com

Find visitabdn on:



VisitAberdeenshire is funded by Opportunity North East,
Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council.

10 years of
tourism
leadership