



Photo: Kris Romanski

**Annual Review 2025-2026**

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## Foreword from Stephen Gow, Chair

The North-east visitor economy continued to demonstrate strong progress during 2025-2026, building on sustained growth in visitor

demand and reinforcing tourism's importance to the regional economy. Latest STEAM analysis indicates that tourism generated **£1.37 billion** in economic impact during 2025, representing a real-term increase of **4.5%** compared with 2024 and highlighting the sector's continued contribution to jobs, businesses and communities across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

A particular highlight was The Tall Ships Races Aberdeen 2025, an event was widely recognised as the largest event ever hosted in Aberdeen welcoming hundreds of thousands of visits to the sites, generating an estimated **£32.2 million** economic impact. The wider tourism market also

benefited from growth in cruise activity, business events, increased day visits and a world class visitor experience for golfers and mountain bikers alike.

Together, these achievements demonstrate a resilient and increasingly confident visitor economy at a time when pressures on the bottom line remain high for many businesses in a highly competitive market. VisitAberdeenshire's role in driving forward our visitor economy would not have been possible without the continued support of our funders, Opportunity North East, Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council.

I would also like to thank my fellow Board members for their guidance and commitment throughout my first year as chair, and the VisitAberdeenshire team for their professionalism, creativity and dedication throughout our tenth anniversary year.

While much has been achieved over the past decade, there remains substantial opportunity to grow the visitor economy further. The foundations are strong, and I am excited about what we can achieve together in the years ahead.



## Message from Chris Foy, CEO

2025-2026 was another year of innovation and impact from the VisitAberdeenshire team and I am immensely proud of what our staff have achieved. Our

work continues to be guided by the Destination Strategy, with an understanding that sustainable growth is best achieved through collaboration, and the team has worked closely with industry partners to create opportunities that directly benefit the visitor economy.

Through our Tourism Development programme, businesses received practical support to enhance their products, improve their market readiness and develop new visitor experiences.

Against a backdrop of rebuilding and future proofing our digital ecosystem, our marketing focus has been on driving demand to experience the region beyond traditional peak periods, helping to shift perceptions and attract visitors to the region during key growth periods.

The continued success of Aberdeen Convention Bureau in attracting high-value business events strengthens the region's reputation in key sectors and brings additional economic benefit to City and 'Shire businesses. This is echoed in the travel trade environment where VisitAberdeenshire has had an effective presence at key trade events in the UK and overseas, extending reach into the golf and cruise sectors.

We enter our second decade with an ever-increasing understanding of the markets in which the region's visitor economy operates with valuable trend data enabling us and our industry partners to make more informed decisions about future activity.

# 1 Tourism Development



Travel Trade Masterclass, June 2025

# 1. Tourism Development

## Supporting businesses to adapt, grow and remain competitive.

The Tourism Development Programme continues to play a central role in supporting the North-east tourism sector to respond to change, build resilience and identify new opportunities for growth. In an increasingly competitive environment, businesses are required to adapt quickly to evolving visitor expectations while ensuring they are well positioned to convert demand into revenue.

Over the past year, the programme has been shaped to address sector challenges through a balanced mix of insight-led content and practical support. A programme of webinars, workshops and one-to-one sessions focused on key themes including travel trade, digital marketing, sustainability and accessibility, enabling businesses to build capability across areas critical to growth in the tourism landscape.



Left to right, Rachel Smith, Tourism Business Adviser, Kayleigh McLeish, Tourism Development Manager

*"I would say that VisitAberdeenshire is the go to organisation for providing you with up to date information and stats, plus advice and training on tourism. The main thing that I took away [from the event] was how the tourism industry is changing, how visitors are more demanding and they're expecting something different.. And aren't we lucky that we've got an organisation like VisitAberdeenshire that can put that difference served on a plate."*

**Rita Stephen Tour Guide.**

A particular focus has been placed on enhancing **engagement with the travel trade**. Through targeted masterclasses, networking opportunities and tailored support, businesses were able to develop and refine bookable products, resulting in **34** new travel trade-ready experiences. This activity helps strengthen the region's presence within the supply chain and increase its visibility to new markets.

Alongside this, work to explore opportunities for extending the visitor season has continued, including a focus on dark sky tourism and winter experiences. Businesses were supported through dedicated webinars, toolkits and one-to-one sessions to translate these opportunities into viable products.

### Tourism Development Programme 2025-2026



**324**  
ATTENDEES



**84%**  
RATED WEBINARS/  
WORKSHOPS VERY  
GOOD OR EXCELLENT



**86%**  
IDENTIFIED CHANGES  
TO IMPROVE THEIR  
BUSINESS



**66**  
BUSINESSES TOOK  
UP OPPORTUNITY TO  
RECEIVE ONE-TO-ONE  
SUPPORT SESSION



**34**  
NEW PRODUCTS  
DEVELOPED

# 1. Tourism Development

**The Tourism Business Growth Programme** returned for its 8th year, supporting **12** businesses through a structured series of workshops and coaching sessions. Participants developed clear growth plans, underpinned by market insight and practical learning. Feedback from participants highlights the value of this approach:

*"The Tourism Business Growth Programme was very well organised and put together, from useful handouts, onsite trips to classroom lectures and group sessions, the course was well thought through and delivered. The team from VisitAberdeenshire were highly professional and helpful at all times and the course lecturer was exceptional."*

**Nicol Paton,**  
**The Scottish Fly Fishing Co.**



2025-2026 Tourism Business Growth Programme Cohort

The impact of this work is further reflected in the outcomes for participating businesses. A high proportion of attendees identified actions they intend to implement, including developing year-round experiences and events, introducing greater planning and structure, enhancing their marketing activity, and increasing collaboration with other local businesses. This reflects the programme's role in driving meaningful change. For the region, this translates into a stronger, more competitive tourism offer capable of converting demand into real economic value.



## Tourism Business Growth Programme 2025-2026



**8<sup>th</sup>**  
YEAR



**12**  
BUSINESSES  
SUPPORTED  
IN 2025-2026



**36**  
ONE TO ONE  
COACHING  
SESSIONS  
DELIVERED IN  
2025-2026

# 1. Tourism Development



Tourism Forum meeting at Milton of Crathes, June 2025

Engagement with industry stakeholders has remained a key priority, with three **Tourism Forum meetings** delivered over the year, including one in partnership with Howden. The Forum, comprising Game Changer alumni and key sector stakeholders, plays an important role as a sounding board for VisitAberdeenshire's activity. Through these sessions, members provide valuable feedback on a range of initiatives, helping to ensure that programmes and campaigns are informed by industry insight and aligned with the needs of businesses across the region.



Local networking meeting for Banff & Buchan area at Museum of Scottish Lighthouses, March 2026

In addition to the Tourism Forum, a **programme of local networking meetings** supported wider industry engagement, bringing together a total of **133** attendees across both networking and Tourism Forum events. These sessions provide an opportunity for tourism and hospitality businesses to connect, share experiences and build relationships, while also strengthening links between businesses and VisitAberdeenshire. This ongoing engagement supports collaboration, encourages knowledge exchange and helps to build a more joined-up and resilient sector.



Macduff Aquarium

The **Tourism Development team** also participate in numerous industry-led groups, including:

- Banff & Buchan Tourism Group
- Climate Ready Aberdeenshire
- Macduff Aquarium Stakeholder Group
- Mearns Connect
- North-east Visitor Attractions Forum

They have regular engagement with:

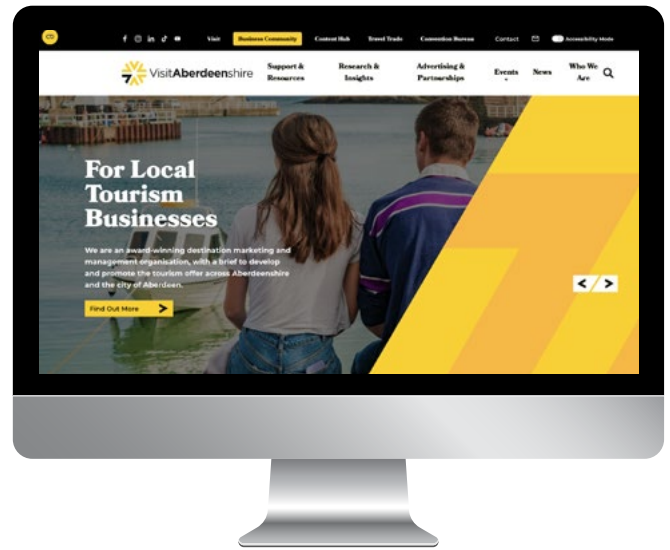
- North East Adventure Tourism (NEAT)
- VisitScotland

# 1. Tourism Development

**Communication with industry** has continued to be delivered through a regular and targeted approach. Over the year, **12** industry newsletters were issued to a database of around **1,300** subscribers, achieving an average open rate of **35%**. In addition, **83** standalone communications were distributed, focusing on key topics or tailored to specific audiences, with an average open rate of **41%**. This consistent flow of information ensures that businesses are kept up to date with relevant opportunities, insights and support, enabling them to make informed decisions and respond to emerging trends.

To further enhance access to support and resources, a new **'Business Community' website** was launched in November. The site replaces the previous Industry website and includes **64** refreshed and updated pages of content, providing a comprehensive and accessible hub for industry information. Key toolkit resources were updated, including content on Dark Sky Tourism and Cruise Ready, while new resource pages were introduced for Golf and Food and Drink. This platform strengthens the digital offer available to businesses, supporting them to develop products, improve their offer and better align with key market opportunities.

*This work was delivered by Kayleigh McLeish, Rachel Smith, Stacey Milne and Maryn Reid, with travel trade work supported by Alanna Fowler.*



## Industry communications 2025-2026



**12**

INDUSTRY  
NEWSLETTERS

**1,300**

NEWSLETTER  
SUBSCRIBERS



**83**

STAND ALONE  
COMMUNICATIONS

**35%**



NEWSLETTER  
OPEN RATE

# 2 Aberdeen Convention Bureau



## 2. Aberdeen Convention Bureau

### Securing high-value events and strengthening the region's global profile.

Business events remain a significant driver of high-value tourism, attracting visitors who stay longer, spend more and contribute to the region's reputation in key sectors. In a highly competitive market, success depends on long-term collaboration, strong networks and the ability to present a compelling and coordinated destination offer.

Over the past year, the Aberdeen Convention Bureau has continued to build on this approach, advancing the development of a long-term business events strategy while strengthening partnerships, securing future opportunities and delivering events that demonstrate the region's strengths as a business events destination. Activity has included targeted sales engagement, site inspections and ongoing support for conference organisers, underpinned by close partnership working across the region.



Left to right, Viktoriia Kuzienkova, Business Events Sales Executive, Laura Wilson, Head of Aberdeen Convention Bureau, Rebecca McIntyre, Business Events Executive, Alanna Fowler, Travel Trade & Incentive Executive



Dr Jenna Ross OBE, UK Agri-Tech Centre, and Fiona Anderson, Northlink Ferries

The Aberdeen Ambassador Network continues to play a vital role, growing to **243** members. The introduction of a new Ambassador Steering Group has strengthened this further, providing a structured link between academia and business events activity. This approach is already generating results, with new leads, confirmed conferences and a growing pipeline for future years.

Across the year **55** bids were submitted, with **34** of these moving to confirmed business, representing over **£36 million** in potential economic value, alongside **60,000+** projected bed nights. This pipeline reflects sustained engagement and positions the region strongly for continued growth.

#### Conference pipeline



**55**

BIDS SUBMITTED



**34**

CONFIRMED EVENTS  
AFTER BIDS SUBMITTED



**£36m+**

PIPELINE VALUE



**60,000+**

BED NIGHTS



**13**

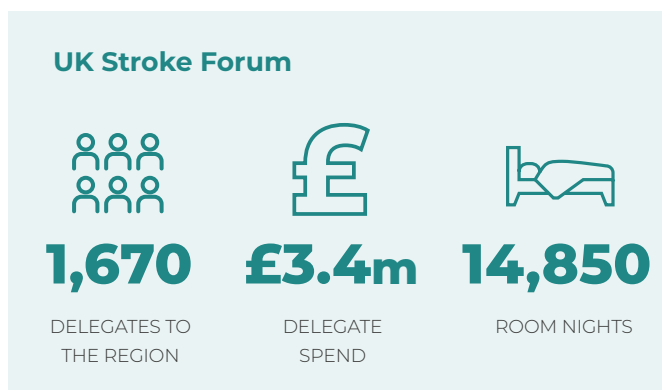
SITE INSPECTIONS

## 2. Aberdeen Convention Bureau

A standout example of impact is the **UK Stroke Forum**, secured following an eight-year effort. The conference brought **1,670** delegates to the region, generating **£3.4 million** in economic impact and **14,850** room nights. Beyond the immediate economic benefit, the event reinforced Aberdeen's reputation in health & life sciences, demonstrated the strength of collaboration within the region and introduced **308** students to potential career paths within stroke, thanks to conference outreach activity, plus providing Robert Gordon University Event Management students with live conference experience.



Aberdeen stand at UK Stroke Forum



*"Laura and the Aberdeen Convention Bureau team were nothing short of brilliant. They truly rolled out the red carpet for us, ensuring everything was taken care of from site visits to logistics, both before and during the event. They are one of the best local teams I've ever had the pleasure of working with – hardworking, personable, and an absolute joy to collaborate with."*

**Jon Roe, Events Lead, UK Stroke Forum**

2026/2027 conferences, including **European Association of Geoscientists and Engineers Annual Conference** and the **Global Agritourism Conference** (which took place during June 2026), have built on this momentum, bringing significant economic value while showcasing the region to international audiences.

Looking ahead, significant effort has been invested in preparing for major conferences taking place in 2026 and beyond, including Floating Offshore Wind and the International Handbell Ringers Symposium. Throughout the year, the Convention Bureau work closely with organisers, ambassadors, local and national suppliers to support event planning and ensure a seamless delegate experience.

This activity has been complemented by attendance at key industry trade events, targeted sales engagement and the delivery of site inspections and familiarisation visits, helping to raise the profile of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire amongst event organisers and decision-makers. Together, these activities strengthen the pipeline of future business, support the successful delivery of major events and reinforce the region's position as a competitive destination for high-value conferences and business events.

*This work was delivered by Laura Wilson, Rebecca McIntyre, Rachel Mumford and Viktoriia Kuzienkova.*

## 2. Travel Trade and Incentive

### Growing demand through travel trade and incentive engagement

Alongside conference activity, Aberdeen Convention Bureau has continued to strengthen its engagement with **travel trade and incentive** intermediaries, recognising its importance in building a sustainable pipeline of future business and increasing the region's visibility within national and international markets. Activity across the year focused on creating meaningful connections with buyers and intermediaries, ensuring they have the confidence and the knowledge required to include Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire in their itineraries.

This was delivered through a combination of **13** targeted sales activities, including key industry events such as **UKinbound** and **Meet the Nordics**, alongside networking opportunities and sector-specific engagement. In total, this activity resulted in **159** buyer appointments, supported by **81** additional remote and in-person meetings, enabling more detailed discussions and tailored support.

Looking ahead, the team will continue to promote the region proactively to both travel trade and incentive buyers, with plans to host a workshop event during 2026-2027 which aims to introduce Destination Management Companies (DMCs) to the region's supplier network; increasing regional knowledge, creating confidence in promoting the region to buyers and building upon the work carried out by the Aberdeen Convention Bureau team during 2025-2026.

*"Thank you again to Alanna, Viktoriia and Laura for inviting us and organising the trip. It was highly educational and a great way to experience distances, spaces and meet key members within the industry face to face and not just over email. We will be back to view more spots as there is a lot in Aberdeen/Aberdeenshire to see."*

**Spectra DMC**

#### Sales activity 2025-2026



**13**

TARGETED SALES ACTIVITIES



**159**

BUYER APPOINTMENTS



**81**

ADDITIONAL REMOTE AND IN-PERSON MEETINGS



Left to right, Rachel Smith and Alanna Fowler at VisitScotland Connect 2025

## 2. Travel Trade and Incentive



Scottish Golf Tourism Week,  
February 2026, Manar House

**Familiarisation visits** remained a key element of this approach, with **11** FAM trips delivered (hosting a total of **55** participants), allowing buyers to experience the destination first-hand and understand the quality and breadth of the regional offer.

The impact of this activity is reflected not only in the scale of engagement, but in the strength of relationships developed and the confidence it builds among buyers. Across the year, **138** supplier-buyer connections were facilitated, helping local businesses access new markets and strengthening the region's presence within the travel trade and incentive supply chain. This has contributed to **48** confirmed travel trade and incentive business opportunities secured, demonstrating the conversion potential of sustained engagement.



Spectra DMC Visit, March 2026,  
Meldrum House



Association FAM Visit, July 2025,  
Crathes Castle

Feedback from industry partners highlights the importance of this work in influencing decision making and future pipeline activity.

*"Thank-you so much to Alanna and everyone involved for taking the time to showcase Aberdeenshire and all the venues to us. It was so beneficial and we have already come back and spoken to the team about everything that can be offered in the region. Without a doubt we will now be more confident to include Aberdeenshire in our proposals and hopefully have a group here soon."*

**Jenn Little and Rianna Steele,  
Hello Scotland.**

This illustrates how familiarisation and partnership working not only raise awareness but directly influence intent to sell, helping to secure future bookings and ensuring the region remains competitive within the travel trade and incentive marketplace.

*This work was delivered by Alanna Fowler.*

# 3 Marketing



### 3. Marketing

#### Driving demand, extending the season and strengthening destination positioning.

The Marketing team plays a critical role in driving demand to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, shaping how the region is perceived and influencing travel decisions across key markets. In a competitive landscape, success depends on not only reaching audiences, but inspiring them to visit, stay longer and explore more of the region.

Activity over the past year has been firmly aligned with strategic priorities, particularly the need to extend visitation into shoulder and off-peak periods, while strengthening the region's overall positioning.

The **Northern Nights** campaign is a clear example of this approach. Designed to reposition Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire as a compelling winter destination, the campaign highlighted dark skies, seasonal experiences and overnight stays. Running from November 2025 to January 2026, it generated an estimated **£1.8 million** in visitor spend, including **£1.3 million** from pan-region activity and **£550,000** from Aberdeen city activity. The city campaign was enabled through **£50,000** of UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment, demonstrating the team's ability to secure external funding and increase campaign scale and impact.

The campaign delivered **4.5 million** impressions, **47,747** website clicks and generated **44,168** leads, creating a substantial audience pipeline



Left to right, Maryn Reid, Digital Marketing Executive, Ashleigh Pirie, Marketing Manager

for future destination marketing activity. Strategic partnerships, including collaboration with **Caledonian Sleeper**, extended campaign visibility and aligned destination promotion with sustainable travel and overnight visitor audiences.

*"Our objective was to increase awareness of Caledonian Sleeper as a unique, convenient and sustainable way to travel to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, while driving consideration and bookings from key leisure audiences. Working with VisitAberdeenshire was a highly collaborative and positive experience, with excellent communication and a shared commitment to promoting the region. The campaign delivered strong visibility and engagement for our brand, and I would highly recommend partnering with VisitAberdeenshire thanks to their expertise, local knowledge and ability to create impactful destination marketing opportunities."*

**Steven Marshall, Head of Sales and Marketing, Caledonian Sleeper**

### 3. Marketing

The **Destination Delicious** campaign built on this momentum by promoting Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire's food and drink offer across key UK markets. Delivered in partnership with headline partner **Loganair** and supporting partner **Fettercairn Distillery**, the campaign demonstrated the value of collaborative destination marketing and co-investment.

Through a combination of destination storytelling, digital advertising and partnership activity, the campaign increased awareness of the region's food and drink experiences among priority visitor audiences. It helped raise the profile of local businesses, extended the reach of destination messaging into key markets and reinforced Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire's reputation as a destination offering authentic, high-quality culinary experiences.

The campaign also highlighted the strength of partnership working, creating additional value through shared promotion, aligned messaging and collaborative investment while supporting wider objectives around visitor growth and destination positioning.

*The Destination Delicious campaign demonstrated the value of combining VisitAberdeenshire's destination expertise with Loganair's UK regional connectivity at Aberdeen Airport. From campaign planning through to evaluation, the team provided a professional and collaborative service that made the process straightforward and effective.*

*The partnership enabled us to reach targeted audiences, support inbound travel to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, and benefit from detailed post-campaign insights. VisitAberdeenshire is a trusted and proactive partner, and we would strongly recommend them to organisations looking to grow awareness and visitation to the region.*

**Callum Bell, Campaign Marketing Manager, Loganair**



Partnership working has also evolved through new delivery models. In June 2025, VisitAberdeenshire delivered its first fully funded partner campaign on behalf of **Scottish Citylink Coaches**, acting as a strategic marketing agency without drawing on VisitAberdeenshire marketing budgets. Working closely with Citylink to identify target audiences, develop messaging and deliver campaign activity, the two-week campaign generated **1.16 million** impressions, over **7,000** competition entries and **3,776** new subscribers for Citylink. The success of the campaign demonstrated the potential for future partnership-led marketing activity and new revenue-generating opportunities.

*"Aberdeen is a key destination on our network which we wanted to highlight for our 40th Anniversary year, while showcasing all the beauty the region has to offer. A co-branded campaign with VisitAberdeenshire was a perfect fit, enabling us to increase brand awareness and deliver impactful results. The creativity and enthusiasm of the VisitAberdeenshire team were instrumental to the campaign's success, and we look forward to future collaboration opportunities."*

**Katie McCallum, Marketing & Communications Assistant, Scottish Citylink Coaches**

### 3. Marketing



Major events have also been amplified through coordinated marketing activity. VisitAberdeenshire played a key role in supporting **Tall Ships Aberdeen** through paid content partnerships, digital marketing and social media activity delivered in collaboration with Port of Aberdeen, Aberdeen City Council and the wider Tall Ships marketing group.

The integrated campaign generated a combined audience reach of **2.74 million**, including print,

digital and radio activity across Scotland and Northern England. VisitAberdeenshire's Meta and TikTok campaigns alone delivered **7.2 million** impressions, **82,269** clicks and **43,745** video views, significantly increasing awareness and engagement ahead of one of the region's flagship events. The campaign demonstrated the value of collaborative destination marketing in supporting major regional events and extending destination visibility beyond the event itself.



The team also supported the growth of adventure tourism through collaboration with **North East Adventure Tourism (NEAT)** and content creator Scotty Laughland. The campaign highlighted mountain biking routes, outdoor experiences and family-friendly activities, helping broaden awareness of the region's adventure tourism offer. In addition to promoting the destination, the project created a valuable library of photography and video assets that continue to support VisitAberdeenshire and partner marketing activity.

### 3. Marketing

Alongside campaigns, the **website redevelopment programme** has been a major focus this year. This work has gone beyond design, creating a stronger digital foundation for destination marketing. New structures, improved navigation and refreshed content have enhanced the ability to inspire and convert visitors, while dynamic content approaches allow more efficient use of resources. This creates a more agile platform that can evolve alongside changing visitor behaviours.

The introduction of new user experience features, including improved navigation tools and a fully mobile responsive site supports stronger engagement and helps visitors more easily discover experiences across the region.

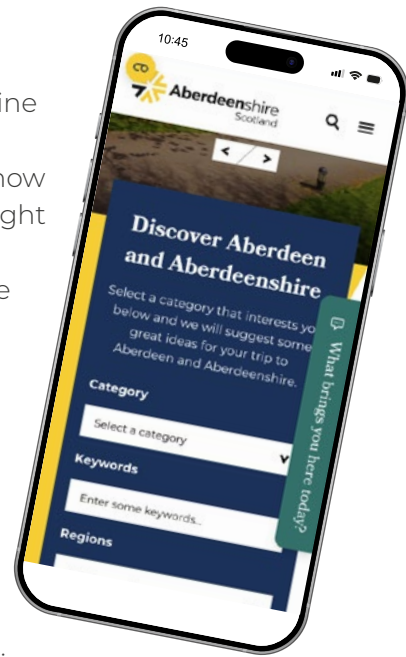
This work is supported by an ongoing programme of content development, optimisation and collaboration across teams to ensure visitors can continue to discover fresh experiences, itineraries, businesses and offers across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

The Marketing team has also invested in **digital transformation** and organisational capability. During the year, the team completed the Destination AI Programme and established a

shared AI capability baseline through the AI Opener Programme. AI tools are now supporting reporting, insight generation and planning, improving efficiency while maintaining quality and brand standards.

Work has also begun on AI-supported website content personalisation and Answer Engine Optimisation (AEO), helping ensure destination content remains visible and competitive as consumer search behaviour evolves towards AI-powered experiences.

The significance of the Marketing team's work lies in its ability to connect insight, creativity and delivery. Campaigns are not only generating reach and engagement, but contributing to wider strategic objectives, supporting demand generation, encouraging year-round visitation and strengthening the region's position in the market.



#### Destination Delicious 2026 campaign results

**£326,000+**

ATTRIBUTABLE VISITOR SPEND



**14,207**

LEADS GENERATED



TARGETED AUDIENCES ACROSS SCOTLAND, MANCHESTER, BIRMINGHAM AND SOUTHAMPTON



**10.4m**

IMPRESSIONS



**100,392**

CLICKS



**141,151**

VIDEO VIEWS



DELIVERED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LOGANAIR AND FETTERCAIRN DISTILLERY

*This work was delivered by Ashleigh Pirie, Maryn Reid, Laura Delaney and Morgan Dunn.*

# 4 Insights & Evaluation



## 4. Insights and Evaluation

### Using insight to inform decisions and demonstrate impact.

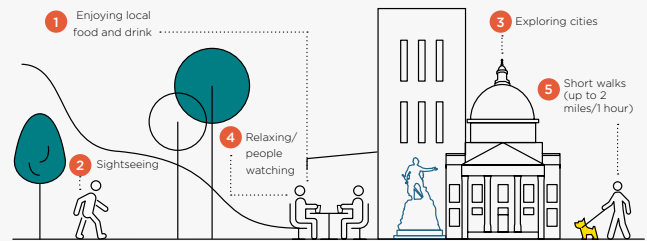
Data and insight are fundamental to VisitAberdeenshire's work, ensuring that activity is targeted, effective and accountable. As expectations around accountability and impact continue to increase, the role of Insights & Evaluation has become central to both performance measurement and strategic planning.

Two of VisitAberdeenshire's insight pillars are **STEAM** and the **annual consumer research programme**.

**The Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Model (STEAM)** continues to provide a comprehensive view of the visitor economy, with the latest results indicating a value of **£1.37 billion**, representing a **4.5%** real-term increase. Team involvement is two-fold: maximising outputs from the latest published results, and gathering intelligence on an ongoing basis to feed into the model for future annual reporting. With multiple years of data now available, the organisation is increasingly able to identify longer-term trends and opportunities.

Alongside this, the fourth wave of annual consumer research has further strengthened understanding of visitor behaviour and perceptions. This consistent dataset enables meaningful comparisons over time, providing valuable insight to inform both organisational activity and wider industry decision making.

#### TOP 5 ACTIVITIES ON HOLIDAY/SHORT BREAK



#### SMARTPHONE USE ON HOLIDAY/SHORT BREAK

This year we took a deeper look at smartphone use on holiday. The **top five uses** were:

1. Checking the weather
2. Sharing photos with friends/family
3. Opening maps: wayfinding and places to visit
4. Showing a ticket/boarding pass
5. Finding general tourist information



The team prioritises the sharing of all these key insights. Through webinars, presentations and “focus-on” content across the year, businesses within the region have access to clear, actionable data to support their own planning and development.



*“The insights session delivered by VisitAberdeenshire was really valuable and gave us a much clearer understanding of how to use data and visitor trends to support our business. It was particularly useful to see how these insights could be applied in a practical way to help us make more informed decisions around our marketing, guest experience and future planning.”*

**Natacha Stewart, Holiday Cottages Manager, GlenKindie Estate Holiday Cottages**

#### Annual consumer research:

UK CONSUMERS =

**1,600**

CONSISTENT  
METHODOLOGY  
SINCE

**2022**

OCTOBER 2025  
REPRESENTED

**wave 4**



MOVING BEYOND SNAPSHOTS TO  
TREND LINE OPPORTUNITIES

## 4. Insights and Evaluation



Evaluation of marketing activity continues to demonstrate the link between marketing initiatives and economic impact. Key campaigns in 2025-2026 included **Above & Beyond Spring** and **Northern Nights**. These campaigns helped shift perceptions, encouraging visitors to consider the region outside traditional peak periods.

The significance of this work lies in its ability to ensure that decisions are evidence-led, resources are effectively targeted and outcomes are clearly understood. By embedding insight and evaluation across all areas of activity, VisitAberdeenshire is strengthening accountability, supporting industry partners and enabling more effective delivery of the Destination Strategy and associated Key Performance Indicators.

*This work was delivered by Deirdre O'Donnell*

### Northern Nights 2025-2026



**£1.28m**

ATTRIBUTABLE SPEND GENERATED  
- PAN-REGION CAMPAIGN



**92%**

AGREED THE REGION IS A GREAT PLACE  
TO ENJOY THE NIGHT SKY



**84%**

OF VISITORS RATED THEIR IN-DESTINATION  
EXPERIENCE AN 8, 9 OR 10 OUT OF 10

### Destination Delicious Spring 2026



**£326,000+**

ATTRIBUTABLE SPEND GENERATED



**77%**

AGREED THE CAMPAIGN MADE THE  
REGION FEEL LIKE A HIDDEN GEM OR  
UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY



**82%**

AGREED THE CAMPAIGN MADE THEM  
REALISE THAT SPRING/EARLY SUMMER IS A  
GOOD TIME TO VISIT THE REGION

# 5 Business Services



## 5. Business Services

### Supporting people, governance and organisational delivery

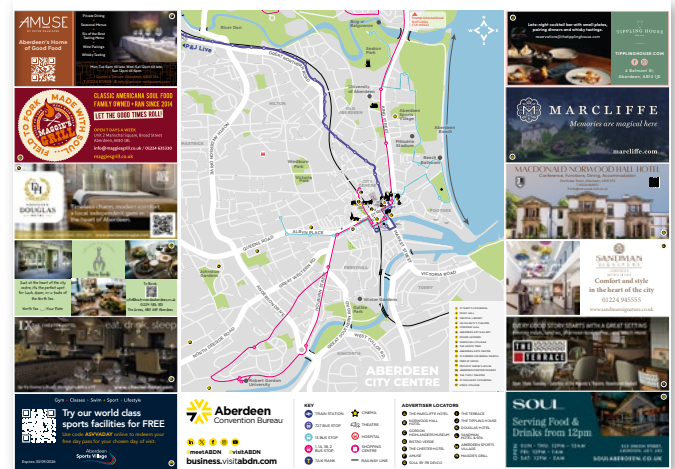
VisitAberdeenshire's Business Services function provides the foundations that enable the organisation to operate effectively and deliver against its strategic objectives. Supporting employees, Board Directors, and volunteers, the function encompasses governance, finance, human resources, business administration, and commercial activity, ensuring the organisation remains well managed, compliant, and equipped to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges.

### Commercial

Through sponsorship, partnership and advertising opportunities, the Commercial team generates income that complements public and private sector investment. This extends the reach of existing programmes, and supports stand-alone projects that would otherwise not be funded.

During 2025-2026, sponsorship from Peterson Energies supported the Welcome to Aberdeenshire Volunteer Programme, while Howden Insurance sponsored the 2026 Tourism Forum meetings. The Aberdeen Ambassador Awards also benefitted from the support of Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeen City & Shire Hotels Association, Citylink, Appetite for Business, Hilton Aberdeen & Aloft Aberdeen, Northlink Ferries and Premier Coaches, helping ensure continued recognition of individuals securing valuable business events for the region. Inkind support from across the region also adds significant value to activities like site visits for trade buyers and conference organisers.

Advertising opportunities connect businesses with highly engaged audiences through digital channels, including website advertising, sponsored content, social media promotion, newsletters, destination campaigns and visitor publications.



Aberdeen Convention Bureau delegate map 2025

Together, commercial partnerships and advertising activity provide a sustainable model that strengthens collaboration, creates value for partners and contributes to the long-term growth of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire's visitor economy.

*This work was delivered by Fiona Douglas, Nikki Walters and Gemma Laing.*



Left to right, Nikki Walters, Partnerships Manager, Gemma Laing, Advertising Sales Executive, Deirdre O'Donnell, Insights & Evaluation Manager, Fiona Douglas, HR & Business Services Manager.

## 5. Business Services



### Welcome to Aberdeenshire Volunteer Programme



Members of Welcome to Aberdeenshire Volunteer group, Costa Favolosa cruise call, September 2025

The Welcome to Aberdeenshire Volunteer Programme continues to play an important role in enhancing the visitor experience in the region. During 2025-2026, **35** volunteers contributed more than **1,000** hours supporting **38** cruise ship visits and a range of tourism events. The programme provides a welcoming first point of contact for visitors, helping them navigate the destination, discover local attractions and gain a positive impression of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. The value of the programme extends beyond visitor support. Volunteers help strengthen connections between visitors and local communities while encouraging wider exploration of the region and supporting local economic activity. Their knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment make a valuable contribution to the overall visitor experience.

Investment in volunteer training and development ensures a consistently high standard of delivery and supports the long-term sustainability of the programme. The initiative also delivers social benefits for participants, who frequently highlight the opportunities for learning, community involvement and personal fulfilment that volunteering provides.

*"I most enjoy meeting and helping visitors from all over the world who are keen to see our city and beyond. It gives me a real sense of pride to highlight the many unique and beautiful attractions Aberdeen and the north east of Scotland has to offer."*

**Albert Swinborn, Volunteer**

*"I feel involved with a very important part of Aberdeen's economic revival. It gives me pleasure to think that we are making visitors' perception of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire more positive and personal."*

**Eleanor Brennan, Volunteer**

*This work was delivered by Fiona Douglas.*

#### Welcome to Aberdeenshire Volunteer group, 2025 season



**35** VOLUNTEERS



**38**  
CRUISE SHIPS



**1,011**  
HOURS

**£12,000+**

COMMUNITY  
INVESTMENT VALUE

## 5. Business Services

### Educational Support

A key area of Business Services activity is supporting future talent development and strengthening connections between education and industry. Through the organisation's partnership with Peterhead Academy, students continued to develop practical skills by planning and delivering the Taste of Buchan event, a community initiative that now attracts around **750** attendees and has become an established part of the local calendar. Students gain hands-on experience across event delivery, marketing, stakeholder engagement and operations, providing valuable insight into career opportunities within the visitor economy.



Left to right, Amelie Robertson, Stacey Milne, Oliver Raine

*"The partnership between VisitAberdeenshire and Peterhead Academy has been invaluable to our learners. The Taste of Buchan event has now become a key date in the local community and something which has been recognised at a national level and described as sector leading work."*

**Greig Summers, Principal Teacher Social Subjects, Peterhead Academy**

Alongside this work, VisitAberdeenshire continued to support a range of work-based learning opportunities, including Foundation Apprenticeship placements through North East Scotland College and a year-long student placement in partnership with Robert Gordon University. During 2025-2026, Foundation Apprentices Amelie Robertson and Oliver Raine gained valuable experience supporting a range of tourism and business support activities, while Stacey Milne completed a student placement with the organisation, contributing to live projects across the business. These opportunities provide practical experience of organisational operations and the wider visitor economy, helping to develop skills, build confidence and strengthen awareness of tourism-related career opportunities. Together, these initiatives contribute to the development of future talent and strengthen links between education and industry.

*This work was delivered by Fiona Douglas and Rachel Smith.*



Left to right, Fiona Douglas, 2025-2026 Taste of Buchan class, Rachel Smith

## Reflecting on ten years of VisitAberdeenshire



Stephen Gow, Chair and Claire Bruce, past Chair with VisitAberdeenshire team

2026 marks a significant milestone for VisitAberdeenshire, as the organisation celebrates ten years since its formation. Established through the merger of Visit Aberdeen, Visit Royal Deeside and the Banffshire Coast Tourism Partnership, and supported by Opportunity North East, Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council, VisitAberdeenshire was created with a clear purpose: to provide a unified, strategic approach to growing the visitor economy across the North-east of Scotland.

Since establishing a consistent baseline in 2019, the value of the visitor economy has grown by **41%**, reaching over **£1.37 billion** by 2025.

The organisation has played a central role in shaping the development of the sector during this time. This includes stewardship of the region's Destination Strategy, the delivery of the Tourism Business Growth Programme supporting more than **80** local businesses, and a responsive approach during periods of significant challenge, most notably through the Business Recovery Programme following the pandemic.

Business events have also contributed significantly to this growth. Over the past decade, the Convention Bureau has helped secure more than **140** conferences, strengthening the region's reputation as a destination for high-value events. Hosting key national industry events such as

UKinbound Convention, the Scottish Tourism Alliance Signature Conference and VisitScotland Connect has further reinforced Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire's position as an important and credible player within the UK visitor economy.

This work has been recognised through industry awards, including a **Northern Star Marketing Magic Award** in 2019 and **UKinbound's Destination of the Year** in 2024 accolade, reflecting both the quality and impact of the organisation's activity.

As VisitAberdeenshire looks to its second decade, the focus remains clear. Building on strong foundations, the organisation will continue to drive growth through partnership-led marketing, innovative approaches to destination development and ongoing support for local businesses. At the heart of this will be a continued commitment to collaboration, ensuring that the benefits of tourism are shared widely across the region.

The story of VisitAberdeenshire is one of ambition, resilience and partnership. Over ten years, it has helped shape a stronger, more confident visitor economy. The next chapter will build on this success, ensuring that Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire continues to grow as a destination of choice for visitors, businesses and communities alike.

## Our Purpose, Vision, Values and Behaviours

### Purpose

Our purpose is to deliver initiatives that will grow the North-east visitor economy.

### Vision

Our vision is to be the leading destination organisation in Scotland, continually championing regional tourism businesses.

### Collaborative

We work openly internally and externally with trust and integrity to create mutually beneficial partnerships.



#### Behaviours

- Build strong, trusted relationships with industry partners and stakeholders for success of the region.
- Actively listen and act on constructive output from colleagues and stakeholders to create a one team approach.
- Communicate clearly and transparently to support effective work.

### Ambitious

We are creative, forward thinking and passionate about making a positive impact.



#### Behaviours

- Anticipate change and adapt to take advantage of opportunities.
- Be curious and feel empowered to make suggestions.
- Take initiative to inspire and lead within the visitor economy.

### Responsible

We take an insights-led approach that values sustainability, inclusion and respect.



#### Behaviours

- Use insight, and analysis to inform decisions and priorities.
- Support local business and communities.
- Take accountability for our actions and outcomes.
- Prioritise procurement of goods and services locally whenever they best meet our requirements.

### Empathetic

We create an environment where all voices are valued in a trusted space.



#### Behaviours

- Embrace flexible teamwork with colleagues and stakeholders.
- Be approachable, supportive and willing to listen without judgement.
- Respect different perspectives, experiences and styles of working.
- Communicate with clarity and consideration.
- Approach challenges with compassion, understanding and a solution focused mindset.

● = Met +/- 10%    ● = Mitigation    ● = Missed

## Key Performance Indicators 2025-2026

### Activity

#### Tourism Development

|                                                       |     |     |   |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|---|
| 1-2-1 Business Advice Sessions delivered              | 100 | 102 | ● |
| Quality rating for Game Changer v good /excellent     | 90% | 82% | ● |
| Attendees at VA activations (in person + webinar)     | 275 | 324 | ● |
| Quality rating for VA activation as v good/ excellent | 85% | 84% | ● |
| % citing positive impact arising from VA activity     | 80% | 86% | ● |
| New trade bookable products delivered                 | 25  | 34  | ● |

#### Marketing & Communications

|                                           |       |        |   |
|-------------------------------------------|-------|--------|---|
| Average attributable RoI from campaigns   | 10:01 | 22.3:1 | ● |
| Visitor spend due to own channel activity | £5.5m | 2.7m   | ● |
| Published articles arising from PR work   | 45    | 40     | ● |
| e-news subscribers at Y/E                 | 140k  | 138k   | ● |
| Combined social media following at Y/E    | 116k  | 103k   | ● |
| Sessions on visitabdn.com at Y/E          | 730k  | 403k   | ● |

#### Travel Trade

|                                              |     |     |   |
|----------------------------------------------|-----|-----|---|
| Targeted buyers engaged with at trade events | 150 | 214 | ● |
| Operators committed to including the NE      | 25  | 46  | ● |

#### Aberdeen Convention Bureau

|                                           |       |        |   |
|-------------------------------------------|-------|--------|---|
| Conference bids submitted in year         | 35    | 50     | ● |
| Value of confirmed conferences in year ## | £ 35m | £36.4m | ● |

#### Corporate

|                                           |      |        |   |
|-------------------------------------------|------|--------|---|
| Employee Engagement Score                 | 85%  | 88%    | ● |
| Employee Turnover                         | 15%  | 14%    | ● |
| Educational projects supported            | 4    | 4      | ● |
| YE Budget variance (2025-2026)            | 2%   | 2.30%  | ● |
| Advertising sales target                  | £33k | £35.2k | ● |
| Advertising sales meetings/calls          | 48   | 50     | ● |
| Commercial partnerships (value)           | £70k | £46.7k | ● |
| Commercial partnership discovery meetings | 72   | 62     | ● |
| Value of in-kind support received         | £30k | £18.6k | ● |
| No of cruise welcome volunteers           | 35   | 35     | ● |
| No of volunteer hours delivered           | 650  | 1011   | ● |

## Meet the Team



**Chris Foy**  
Chief Executive



**Fiona Douglas**  
HR & Business Services Manager



**Deirdre O'Donnell**  
Insights & Evaluation Manager



**Nikki Walters**  
Partnerships Manager



**Gemma Laing**  
Advertising Sales Executive



**Kayleigh McLeish**  
Tourism Development Manager



**Rachel Smith**  
Tourism Business Adviser



**Laura Wilson**  
Head of Convention Bureau



**Rebecca McIntyre**  
Business Events Executive



**Viktoriia Kuzienkova**  
Business Events Sales Executive



**Jaden Lumsden**  
Business Events Sales Executive



**Alanna Fowler**  
Travel Trade & Incentive Executive



**Ashleigh Pirie**  
Marketing Manager



**Maryn Reid**  
Digital Marketing Executive

## Meet the Volunteers

- |                                            |                     |                     |                      |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Yvonne Cook<br>Volunteer<br>Co-Ordinator | 10 Cath Munro       | 22 Hazel McBain     | 34 Katherine Pickles |
| 2 Alistair Johnston<br>Lead Volunteer      | 11 Charlie Allan    | 23 Jackie Gibb      | 35 Katrina Ingram    |
| 3 Angela Thain<br>Lead Volunteer           | 12 Clare Northfield | 24 Jackie Smith     | 36 Keith Burness     |
| 4 Dot Adam<br>Lead Volunteer               | 13 Dagmar Grant     | 25 Janet Hosie      | 37 Linda Tulloch     |
| 5 Frances Richards<br>Lead Volunteer       | 14 Dave Malcolm     | 26 Jenny Singer     | 38 Morna Forbes      |
| 6 Ali Kendal                               | 15 David Craig      | 27 Jenny Thomson    | 39 Norman Ross       |
| 7 Ali McIntosh                             | 16 Debra Malcolm    | 28 Jim Davies       | 40 Sandra Jefferson  |
| 8 Bert Swinborn                            | 17 Denise Mullen    | 29 Jo Pilskog       | 41 Sandra Thomson    |
| 9 Bev Angus                                | 18 Eleanor Brennan  | 30 John Barbour     | 42 Steve Robertson   |
|                                            | 19 Fiona McKibbin   | 31 John R Robertson | 43 Wilma Williamson  |
|                                            | 20 Gavin Barclay    | 32 John Robertson   |                      |
|                                            | 21 Gladys Arthur    | 33 Joyce Petrie     |                      |



For more information  
please visit our website at:

[www.visitabdn.com](http://www.visitabdn.com)

Find visitabdn on:



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