



## CONTENTS

1 | FOREWORD FROM CHAIR

2 | INTRODUCTION FROM CEO

4 | LOCAL BUSINESS AND DESTINATION FOCUS

11 | MID TO LONG TERM MARKET FOCUS

15 | SHORT TERM MARKET FOCUS

26 | INSIGHTS AND EVALUATION

28 | WORKING AT VISITABERDEENSHIRE

30 | MEET THE VISITABERDEENSHIRE TEAM

## FOREWORD FROM CLAIRE BRUCE CHAIR, VISITABERDEENSHIRE

I'm writing this foreword in June 2021 during yet another period of uncertainty for the Scottish, and indeed global tourism sector.

We know that a successful tourism industry should enrich the lives of our visitors, the livelihoods of our local businesses and communities, and the life of the environment around us in which we operate. The effect of the pandemic challenged all three of these elements throughout 2020, but arguably the most direct impact had been on the livelihoods of those who work in, employ, and invest in the sector.

Amid the challenge, disappointment, and often despair of 2020, there has been

great resilience and that continues into 2021. The normal rules of supply and demand have been disrupted by lockdowns that have at various times prevented visitors from entering our region, and at other times, preventing them from leaving their homes when we were open for business.

This review reflects upon the work delivered by VisitAberdeenshire during this phenomenal period in our lives during 2020 and early 2021. Throughout, VisitAberdeenshire has adapted its operations to maintain a focus on the immediate need to drive demand, to pursue longer term business opportunities, and crucially, to provide a level of business advice and support that went above and beyond anything delivered previously.

Behind the scenes, we have collaborated with businesses and destinations across Scotland to inform government of the reality of restrictions. Along with the Aberdeen City and Shire Hotel Association we maintained direct dialogue with the Cabinet Secretary to ensure that the particular challenges faced by the North-East have been recognised. We have contributed to national recovery plans through the Scottish Tourism Alliance.

The road to recovery will be a long haul, and it is clear that the visitor economy desperately needs the return of international travel, corporate business and events to secure a sustainable future. In a year's time when we review this current year, our aspiration is that we will look back with confidence knowing that VisitAberdeenshire and its partners took every opportunity within our knowledge and resources to put the North-East visitor economy in the best possible footing to thrive in changing market conditions.



## INTRODUCTION FROM CHRIS FOY CEO, VISITABERDEENSHIRE

Reflecting on VisitAberdeenshire's previous Annual Review from 2019 can feel like looking through a window at another world. We published that review in April 2020 just as the pandemic was taking its grip, and the first lockdown was beginning to bite on the tourism sector. Frustratingly, so much of the groundwork laid in 2019 did not come to fruition.

At the time, we had the hope that we have now – that our sector will bounce back when restrictions permit pent up demand to meet the supply of great visitor experiences on offer in the North-



east. A year of course is a long time, and sadly our visitor offer has changed due to the impact on businesses.

Throughout 2020, VisitAberdeenshire adapted its work to support our industry. Our previous development programme metamorphosed into a recovery programme; our marketing plans were shelved, re-shaped, retargeted, then paused again, and our endeavours to secure long term business from tour operators and conference organisers adapted as normal routes to market were closed. Never have market insights been as important to guide decision making, both for VisitAberdeenshire and for local businesses. Likewise the evaluation of outcomes has remained critical to inform future work, albeit that evaluation models have had to adapt to reflect the reality of limitations on travel.

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



## LOCAL BUSINESS AND DESTINATION FOCUS

In response to sector challenges, VisitAberdeenshire significantly increased its allocation of both financial and people resources to support recovery during 2020.

The Tourism Development team led on the creation and delivery of a multi strand Business Recovery Programme, relevant for all business types, and informed by both online and face to face research to ensure that industry needs were fully understood and addressed. Designed to help businesses survive and build resilience in the short term and return to growth, the programme has helped to strengthen marketing skills, grow market knowledge, stimulate product development and utilise optimum routes to market.

### OVERALL, VISITABERDEENSHIRE DELIVERED:

**36** webinars with **773** attendances **232** tailored one to one advice sessions, including **52** product development or refinement sessions, leading to **30** new products and **48** new pieces of travel trade facing sales collateral. **80%** of participants in the recovery programme cited specific actions they wanted to implement as a result of participation.



### BUSINESS RECOVERY PROGRAMME

There were several themes to the programme, comprising webinars and one to one tailored advice sessions, full of practical ideas and tips:

**GETTING READY TO REOPEN**, in partnership with Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council, on health and safety regulation and guidelines.

**FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**, including managing and projecting cash flow with templates and tools.

**CUSTOMER AND MARKET INSIGHTS** to help cut through the vast amount of available data and understand how to gather customer data to inform business decision making for businesses. A best practice manual was produced and there were regular sessions on the latest insights, including one specifically for the adventure tourism sector.

**MARKETING**, covering target markets and best routes to market, digital content creation in partnership with Elevator, website reviews in partnership

with VisitScotland, and developing a marketing strategy. A variety of tools and templates helped with practical implementation.

Continuation of the established **TRAVEL TRADE READY** programme, featuring working with the travel trade for decision makers, working with online travel agents, and developing and selling products through the travel trade, including one webinar for adventure tourism operators.

The **GAME CHANGER** programme continued in partnership with Opportunity North East and Scottish Enterprise, aimed at senior managers and business owners and with a customer centric focus. Content included identifying target markets, defining customer demands and product refinement, leading to the development of a return to growth plan.

**NORTH EAST ADVENTURE TOURISM** VisitAberdeenshire continued to work with colleagues across the region on the development of the Opportunity North East-led North East Adventure Tourism (NEAT) project.



## INDUSTRY COMMUNICATIONS

The monthly industry e-newsletter became weekly at times, a reflection of the vast amount of urgent news to be communicated, and the result of continuously scanning the environment for the latest developments. Key themes included sources of help and information, availability of funding and grant opportunities, signposting to relevant agencies, the business recovery programme and other skills development opportunities, and VisitAberdeenshire's marketing activity to retain a presence in the marketplace.

**These projects were delivered by Yvonne Cook, Christina Wright, Lucia Campbell, Lynn Harwood, Raeanne Verlegh, and Colin Fraser.**

# 53

newsletters issued

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

*"We have learned a great deal from the staff within Visit- Aberdeenshire, as well as the experts that they invite to present the wide range of webinars and courses on offer. Having a dedicated resource to support the tourism businesses within the region and promote us on the world stage is a fantastic commitment. We are delighted with the results that have been achieved by working together."*

**Bob McAlpine, Chief Executive,** Dalriada Luxury Lodges

*"A number of key organisations were right there for us from day one. Prominent among them was Visit Aberdeenshire and we immediately signed up for their Business Recovery Programme.*

*It helped us to achieve that positive outcome, making full use of the time to upskill staff in a number of key areas; marketing being a central theme. Five key personnel have benefitted from great workshops and one to one discussions with some inspirational specialists."*

**Mike Ward MBE,** Curator, Grampian Transport Museum



*"The specialists who delivered the webinars were excellent, with lots of practical advice and useful tools which we used as a road map to give structure to recovery planning. The emphasis on the customer journey and customer needs was particularly useful. We also benefited from interaction with other businesses and sharing of common challenges and best practice solutions."*

**Mary Martin,** Director, Aberdeen Douglas Hotel

*"The Industry Engagement section of the website provides the latest news on what is happening in the tourist industry and is updated regularly to provide us with the latest amendments to Covid guidelines. I have also made good use of the image/video bank available to businesses, giving us access to an extensive range of marketing materials, an indispensable tool for a young business. I have found the one to one sessions offered by VisitAberdeenshire particularly useful to keep me on track."*

**Rita Stephen,** Tour Guide

## AND, SPECIFICALLY ON THE TOURISM BUSINESS GAME CHANGER PROGRAMME

*"I can wholeheartedly say that the Game Changer Programme was a very positive experience. Vanilla Ink - The Smiddy has been weathering the Covid pandemic and having this opportunity during furlough was a very positive way to take a new look at certain areas of our business, including marketing strategies. The canvases we were introduced to were very useful and helped us to strengthen our thoughts on the business and identify areas that we needed to work on. They will become an integral part of our business development and daily running. Participation in the programme has generated honest conversations within the business and made us re-evaluate certain areas. For me personally, it has allowed me to understand areas of business development in a new way which has definitely helped me to make better informed decisions. I utilised the canvases to develop a marketing strategy for our Wedding Ring Experience and tested it in a real-life situation. It has generated a lot of interest online and actual "clicks" and calls to our business. Within 4 weeks it had generated about £5,000 in income, which was a great outcome for us. Thank you for the opportunity to take part."*

**Alison Arrowsmith**, Co-ordinator, Vanilla Ink - The Smiddy





## MID TO LONG TERM MARKET FOCUS

The business development department is responsible for bringing business events, travel trade, golf, and cruise business to the region. Maintaining a mid to long terms focus through strong links into the tourism supply chain is fundamental to support the region's economic recovery. VisitAberdeenshire's focus within the industry allows us to promote the region and develop future wholesale opportunities for local tourism business.

The 2020/21 operating environment meant that much of VisitAberdeenshire's planned activity could not happen. VisitAberdeenshire adapted and took advantage of online promotional platforms while using its in depth database and knowledge of buyers to maintain a profile for the region for future business and created and promoted its own digital assets.

### TRAVEL TRADE

VisitAberdeenshire had a strong presence at eight virtual trade shows in key markets managing **185** 1-2-1 appointments with UK and international buyers. Trade shows included VisitScotland Reconnect,

Explore GB, World Travel Market, ITB Berlin and the International Golf Travel Market.

**39** sales calls and product updates were delivered virtually with operators including two dedicated familiarisation visits.

### VIRTUAL FAMILIARISATION VISITS

Working in partnership with UKinbound and supported by ONE Food and Drink VisitAberdeenshire delivered a virtual visit for **26** UK based buyers. This included a product update on bookable food and drink experiences within the region which was supported by a virtual gin tasting by The City of Aberdeen Gin Distillery.

### GOLF

A virtual golf tour operator familiarisation was delivered for 8 UK based golf tour operators. The virtual event included a product update on bookable golf, plus food and drink in addition to exploring relevant experiences within the region.

# 185

sales appointments



virtual familiarisation visits



# PRODUCT GUIDE



2021/2022

## PRODUCT GUIDE

VisitAberdeenshire produced a comprehensive digital travel trade guide to assist with the promotion of the region and product available to international and UK buyers. This includes sample itineraries, practical information and is modular so that itineraries and product can be edited as required. The guide has been translated into German.

## MONTHLY PRODUCT UPDATE

VisitAberdeenshire developed a monthly e-trade newsletter featuring bookable product and is e mailed to the trade database of **483** buyers. The aim is to increase communication with the trade and to grow our sales enquires.

## CONVENTION AND EVENTS BUREAU

VisitAberdeenshire attended three virtual trade shows managing 48 1-2-1 appointments with UK and international buyers. Trade shows included Visit-Britain Meet GB, The Meeting Show and IBTM World.

Working in partnership with P&J Live and the University of Aberdeen **24** bids were submitted with a combined value of **£24M** to the local economy with **£1.1M** confirming for future years.

**INSTITUTE OF ANIMAL TECHNOLOGY CONGRESS 2024**

Build Day: Mon 11th March 2024  
Live Event Days: Tue 12th March - Thur 14th March 2024

**ABERDEEN**

**P&J LIVE**

**Aberdeen**  
Convention & Events Bureau

*“A lot of time and effort goes into attracting business events to the North-east, well before the hard work of staging a live event has even started. The Aberdeen Convention & Events Bureau is key player and invaluable part of “Team Aberdeen”, supporting bid creation, working closely with our team at P&J Live, both Universities and NHS Grampian team to obtain support in hosting conferences, as well as providing destination support directly to organisers. Combined, this ultimately helps deliver an economic benefit to the wider region, and our team approach is highly regarded by clients as a great asset to Aberdeen.”*

**Kim Stephen**, Head of Sales - Conferences, Meetings & Banqueting, P&J Live

**24 bids**  
submitted

**£24m**  
combined VisitAberdeenshire  
to the local economy

**£1.1m**  
confirming for future years

**DESTINATION VIDEO**

VisitAberdeenshire produced a promotional video to use across the Convention & Events industry, bid work, exhibitions, and sales calls. The objective was to overcome misperceptions of the city and to highlight great infrastructure, support, and ease of access. The approach taken was to secure third party endorsement from three different organisations that successfully hosted conferences in Aberdeen since P&J Live opened. Companies interviewed were Reed for Offshore Europe, RenewableUK and the Physiological Society (UK).

**AMBASSADOR SEMINAR**

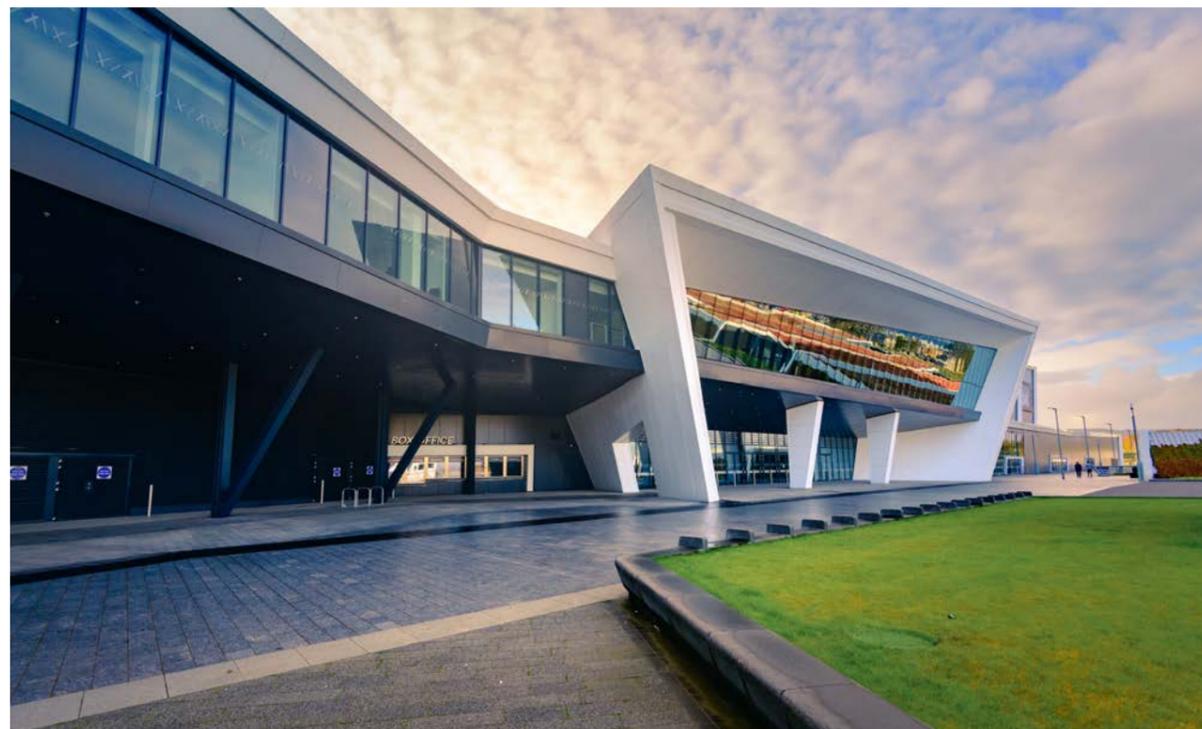
Working with The University of Aberdeen, P&J Live VisitAberdeenshire hosted an online seminar about bidding for conferences and the support available. The seminar gave an overview of Aberdeen as a competitive destination

as well as highlighting the support that is available to ambassadors when bidding for conferences.

**RECONNECT IN ABERDEEN**

Partnering with Meetings and Incentive Travel magazine VisitAberdeenshire created sponsored content which was hosted on their website in March and featured in two editions of their digital newsletters. The objective was to keep Aberdeen top of mind with UK buyers, dovetailing with our sales push to the UK Association market. The feature highlighted Aberdeen as a great business event destination, very accessible with open space and the most sustainable conference centre in the UK. The feature also included the talking heads testimonial video as part of the content.

**These projects were delivered by Laurie Scott, Jill Sinclair, Hector Emslie, Raeanne Verlegh and Graeme Mackay**



**SHORT TERM MARKET FOCUS**

In such an unprecedented year, the need to attract visitors at times when they could visit was never as important. This triggered a dynamic response to a disrupted marketing and communications environment

VisitAberdeenshire proactively kept the city and shire in market with engaging marketing campaigns throughout the year, aiming to provide a competitive advantage as other destinations re-enter the crowded and noisy marketplace.

**INTRODUCING REDISCOVER: TALKING TO A NEW AUDIENCE**

VisitAberdeenshire turned its attention to a new audience, residents of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. With travel restrictions in place, free flowing travel was not permitted, but Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire residents were key to boosting the local economy.

The 'Rediscover your Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire' campaign was created to inform a local audience of the delights on their doorstep and the unsung heroes of the region. The first wave of the campaign tied in a partnership with DC Thomson, showcasing the best of the North-east in a week-long editorial series, digital advertisements and radio placements.

Throughout the year, VisitAberdeenshire kept the local audience warm, with further waves of the Rediscover campaign as the region began to unlock. Winter-themed content supporting initiatives like the Aberdeen Inspired Gift Card and lead generation paid social campaigns ensured VisitAberdeenshire built up a new audience of locals, in turn helping to become ambassadors for the region.





By positioning Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire as the idyllic, perfect getaway post-lockdown, VisitAberdeenshire was able to keep the region top of mind with the 'Great Escapes' campaign.

Stunning photography that effectively captured the majesty of the region helped create a sense of excitement, and the region would be a consideration for those longing for a break following the easing of restrictions.

While in lockdown, the Great Escapes campaign served a targeted audience based in the rest of Scotland, North-east and North-west England with paid social media advertising, as well as Video on Demand services, a first for VisitAberdeenshire.

Two waves of the Great Escapes campaign ensured audiences were warmed up to a North-east of Scotland visit, with the aim of future travel.

 VisitAberdeenshire  
Sponsored

Your great escape is made in Aberdeenshire 🏡

We're giving one lucky person the chance to win a break for two people in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire 📧

T&Cs apply. Prize draw closes 31/10/2020.



**Win a break in Aberdeen & Aberdeenshire**  
Enter now >>

[Learn More](#)

 VisitAberdeenshire  
Sponsored

Your great escape is made in Aberdeenshire 🏡

We're giving one lucky person the chance to win a break for two people in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire 📧

T&Cs apply. Prize draw closes 31/10/2020.



**Win a break in Aberdeen & Aberdeenshire**  
Enter now >>

[Learn More](#)

## REACHING NEW AUDIENCES IN THE NORTH

For the second wave of the Great Escapes campaign, VisitAberdeenshire worked with Reach plc - the owner of some of the largest news publications in Northern England including Manchester Evening News, Liverpool Echo and the Daily Record. As part of the advertising agreement, VisitAberdeenshire received three feature articles across five online titles: DailyRecord.co.uk, LiverpoolEcho.co.uk, ManchesterEveningNews.co.uk, ChronicleLive.co.uk, TeesideLive.co.uk and LeedsLive.co.uk.

All articles performed well with an average dwell time of 2.5 minutes.



## CONNECTING WITH THE GREAT OUTDOORS

As part of the emerging North East Adventure Tourism project, VisitAberdeenshire delivered two targeted campaigns to test the appetite for the region as an adventure destination.

The first wave of activity occurred in July 2020; utilising paid social media to its full impact. Positive results from the campaign indicated there was a tangible interest in the North-east of Scotland.

Wave one used the 'Your great escape is made in Aberdeenshire' creative, with a particular focus on walking and hiking, cycling and 'soft' adventure activities.

To inform further adventure tourism campaigns, VisitAberdeenshire commissioned research to delve deeper into this market.

The research undertaken by 56 Degree Insight helped to shape the campaign and the pen portraits provided profiles of types of audiences for use by both VisitAberdeenshire and local operators. The advertisements featured soft, moderate and hard adventure activities, using Balmedie beach creative as the example of soft adventure, paddle

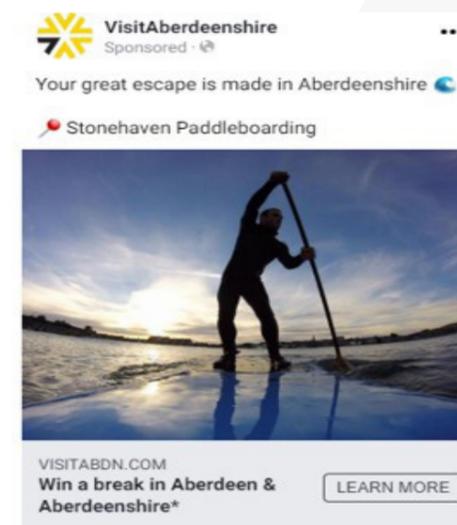
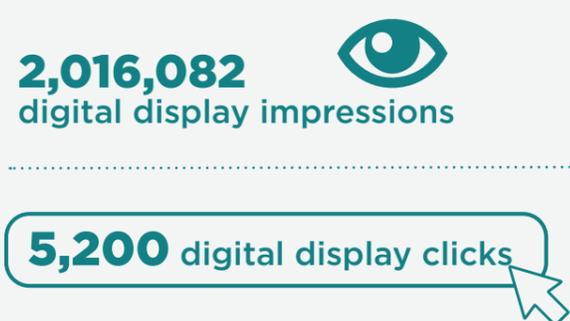
boarding as moderate and mountain biking as an example of hard adventure.

In March 2021, wave two consisted of Avid short form and Avid InRead advertising platforms using a combination of video and images advertisements. The video was a snappy, 15 second edit highlighting mountain biking, hiking and water sports. Results were positive, with creative featuring paddle boarding creative performing best, generating 540,399 impressions alone.

### IN ADDITION, ADVERTISEMENTS DELIVERED THE FOLLOWING RESULTS:



\*23% over the guaranteed 18,000 views target



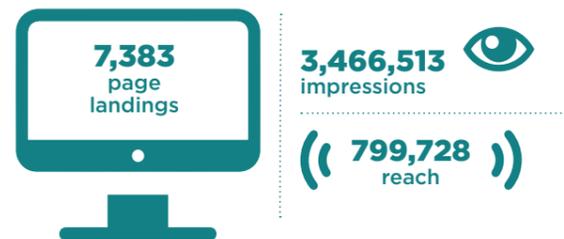
## UNLOCKING ABERDEEN'S CITY BREAK POTENTIAL

In response to the Aberdeen lockdown in August 2020, VisitAberdeenshire devised a city focused campaign to reassure future visitors.

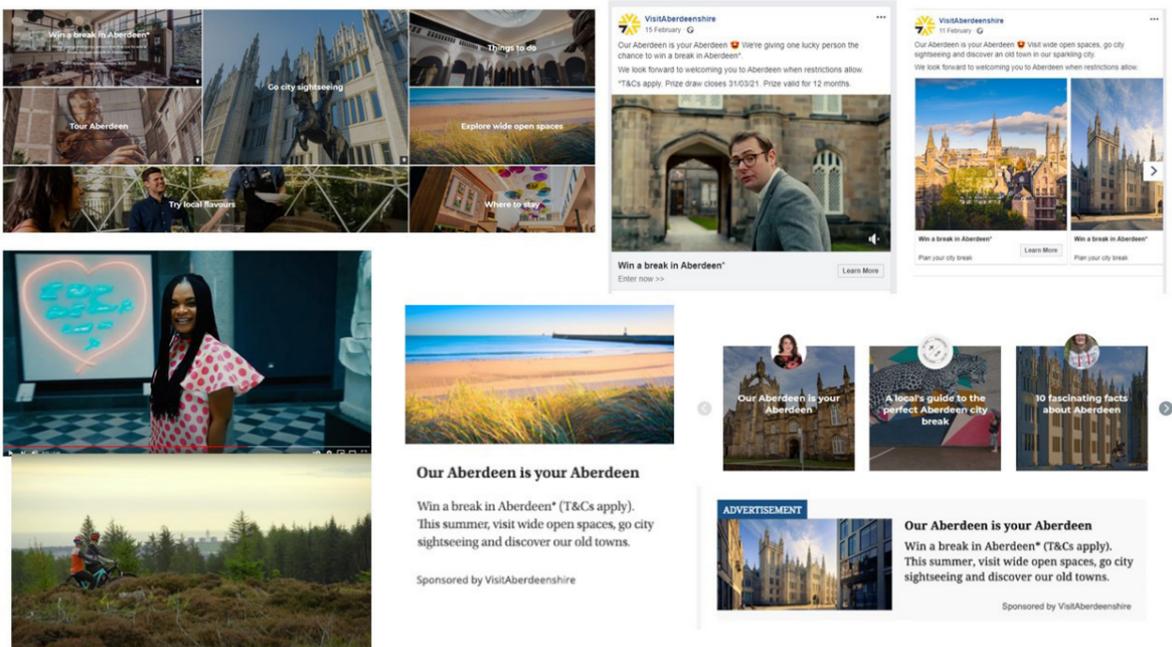
This campaign was created in the autumn but was not launched until February due to regional travel restrictions in targeted regions. Featuring the 'Our Aberdeen is your Aberdeen' tagline, the campaign creative used images from Aberdeen beach, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Old Aberdeen.

Campaign assets included engaged locals talking to camera, proving popular on VisitAberdeenshire's organic channels and paid social media adverts.

### PAID SOCIAL MEDIA STATISTICS INCLUDED:



VisitAberdeenshire also used digital display advertisements, with the contextual advertisements and video appearing in various news outlets including theguardian.com, thescottishsun.co.uk and telegraph.co.uk.



## WHAT'S THE SCOOP MACKIE'S OF SCOTLAND

VisitAberdeenshire continued to partner with Mackie's of Scotland as part of the Great Escapes campaign. The campaign promoted the region alongside its mini-tubs collection with a successful digital campaign and engaging influencer activity. The chance to win a mini-break in Aberdeenshire was contained within a printed flyer packed in mini-tub selection packs, available from Tesco and Sainsbury's stores across Scotland. The campaign ran from late October to late November and was designed to inspire future travel.

During the Mackie's campaign period, VisitAberdeenshire commissioned The Aye Life to capture engaging and vibrant content for the campaign. This generated a reach of 35,000 and 2,400 engagements across Instagram and TikTok.



## RECONNECTING WITH THE SOUTH OF ENGLAND

To support the return of the London Gatwick service VisitAberdeenshire promoted the destination to encourage users to fly direct to Aberdeen. Users living in London and South-east England ages 25-64 were targeted with an interest in travel to Scotland, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire's offering, city breaks, history and heritage, arts and culture, great outdoors food and drink, and touring.

VisitAberdeenshire used digital display (a channel called MIQ which places advertisements among relevant editorial) and paid social media channels to promote the region, using inspirational imagery and video. Top performing sites were variety.com, express.co.uk and metro.co.uk.

easyJet provided in-kind support with a mention in the Gatwick-specific newsletter and featured Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire on its homepage as a hero destination.

Outputs from this activity included **10,560** page landings from a reach of **762,367**, and **393,912** video views through the MIQ channel.



## ROUTES BACK TO THE REGION WITH LOGANAIR

VisitAberdeenshire worked together with Loganair to promote the region to potential visitors living in the catchment of an airport with a direct route to Aberdeen, including Belfast, Birmingham, Newcastle and Manchester.

Loganair co-funded this campaign and provided flights as part of a prize draw.

The prospecting phase of the campaign drove traffic to the [visitabdn.com/loganair](http://visitabdn.com/loganair) website.

### PAID SOCIAL PROSPECTING



*“The last twelve months have been some of the most extraordinary I have experienced in my career, for reasons we are all aware of.*

*Marketing, sales promotion and public relations have all been extremely challenging to implement and manage. Issues such as timing and tone have been more critical than ever and I’m delighted to say that the team at VisitAberdeenshire have been cognisant of all this and more, allowing our partnership to continue and flourish which we recognise and are grateful. I know we will build on this in the coming year and look forward to working together again in the future.”*

**Kay Ryan**, Chief Commercial Officer, Loganair

## KEEPING IT ORGANIC THE POWER OF OWNED CHANNELS

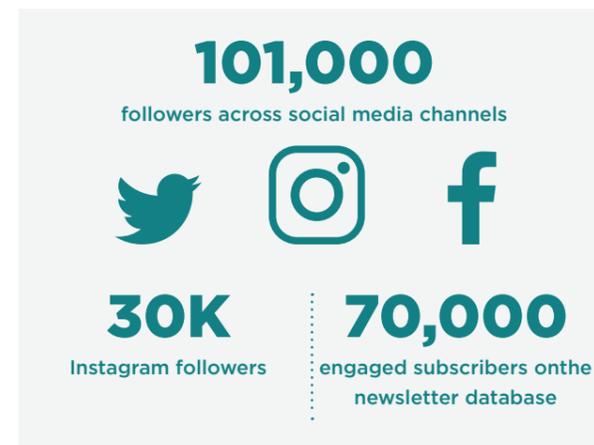
VisitAberdeenshire ensures its own channels, most notably [visitabdn.com](http://visitabdn.com), a healthy email database and flourishing social media accounts are kept fresh and up to date.

The newsletter database remains consistent, with more than **70,000** engaged subscribers on hand to quickly receive and engage tailored messaging.

Hitting the right tone has never been more important. Messaging on social media has been light, friendly and welcoming, but with a ‘plan ahead’ descriptor.

Social media following has passed **101,000** across VisitAberdeenshire’s three consumer channels (Instagram, Facebook and Twitter). VisitAberdeenshire reached an important milestone of **30,000** Instagram followers in March 2021.

VisitAberdeenshire has made improvements to the website throughout the year, most notably the inclusion of a new content hub, housing updated imagery, video and other resources available for download.



## GOLF

With the prospect of golf courses being among the first businesses to reopen in 2021 VisitAberdeenshire initiated tactical paid-for activity to bolster market presence in addition to its usual travel trade and PR activity.

This campaign targeted golfers in the rest of Scotland and throughout the UK. Advertisements ran in National Club Golfer, Today’s Golfer and Golf Monthly, with a combined readership of nearly one million. In addition, Golf News ran an Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire feature online, providing 80,000 impressions and circulated a dedicated promotion to their subscribers.

This activity was supported by VisitAberdeenshire’s own digital display ads and video featuring in publications including [telegraph.co.uk](http://telegraph.co.uk) and [sportwitness.co.uk](http://sportwitness.co.uk). The Trump Golf Scotland creative was the best performer.

## READ ALL ABOUT IT MAINTAINING MOMENTUM WITH MAINSTREAM MEDIA

While press trips and influencer visits from outside of the immediate area have not been possible, keeping travel media journalists warm has paid off, with some high-profile news coverage during the last year.

Features in publications like The Guardian, Conde Nast Traveller and BBC Travel ensured the region was not an afterthought. Relationships with key travel media during the last year has spiked interest in a in person visit to the region, with press trips planned for the later in the summer of 2021.

VisitAberdeenshire has kept its corporate profile high, responding quickly and efficiently to relevant media, and at the right time. As restrictions were imposed, lifted and reinstated, VisitAberdeenshire has provided an authoritative voice, supporting the local tourism sector in its time of need.

It is estimated that VisitAberdeenshire generated news that reached 300 million pairs of eyes and ears in 2020/21 despite a competitive communications arena.



## THE SHOW MUST GO ON

As Highland Games events were cancelled across the country, the idea of a virtual event in the heart of Highland Games territory was conceived. For the visitor economy, the benefit would be to maintain attention and attract future visits.

VisitAberdeenshire worked with Aberdeenshire Council to help turn the Virtual Games concept into a reality on 12 September with VisitAberdeenshire leading the communications and website activity. By working with Clarence House, footage, news releases and imagery were Palace-approved.

As Gathering social media pages has been viewed more than **250,000** times, with Royal social media accounts engaging with #virtualhighlandgames and posting memories of games gone by. On Instagram, the #virtualhighlandgames post was liked by more than **270,000** followers.

Press coverage was secured in Hello! Tatler, Scottish Mail on Sunday and Mail Online as well as locally on BBC Radio Scotland, Press and Journal and Evening Express.

These projects were delivered by Laura Delaney, Julia Heys and Katie Milne

## INSIGHTS AND EVALUATION

### GATHERING AND SHARING INSIGHTS

The need to understand consumers and their changing behaviours came even more to the fore in 2020/2021. Coupled with this was the need to understand the ongoing impact on businesses in the region. VisitAberdeenshire put in place a regular industry survey which captured the views from businesses as each restriction change/lockdown easing was announced.

Additionally, VisitAberdeenshire carried out a sizeable survey with a sample of its engaged UK consumer database. Over 2,500 respondents shared their confidence levels in various elements of the visitor experience and what they would seek in a future holiday/short break. The results from this survey were invaluable in shaping VisitAberdeenshire's short to mid-term consumer messaging.

Consumer insight continued to remain a priority for VisitAberdeenshire, undertaking for the first time a local consumer survey to explore how locals have experienced the region as a "tourist" and suggestions for visitors, when they return. This survey, carried out late November/early December 2020 resulted in almost 350 responses, producing key insights on a previously under researched market.

VisitAberdeenshire ran a series of market insight seminars for local businesses throughout the year. These focused on latest wave results from the Scottish Tourism Index carried out by Scottish based research agency, 56 Degree Insights, and also the foresight research by Scattered Clouds.

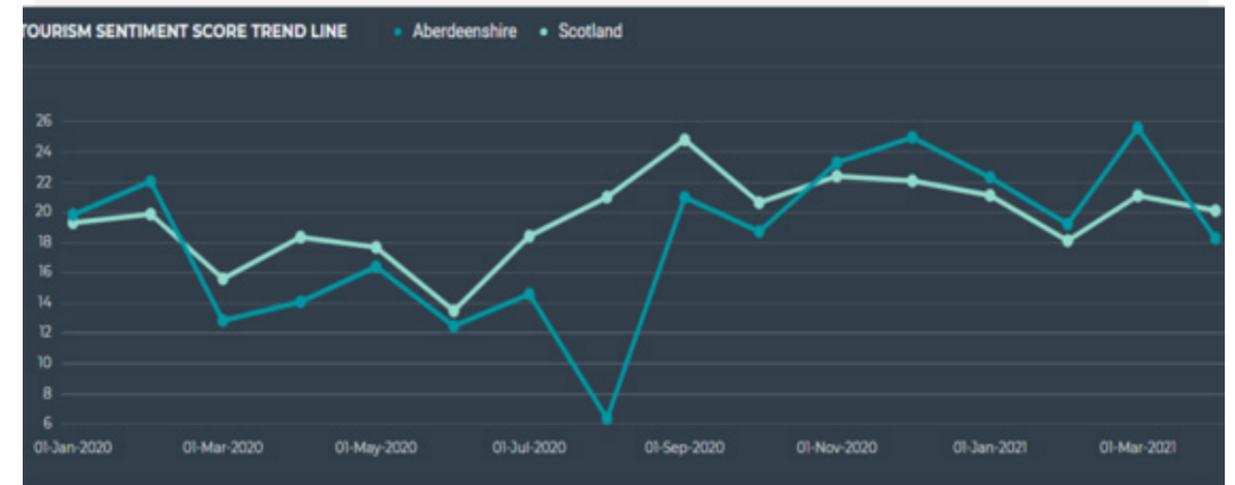
As part of the North East Adventure Tourism project, VisitAberdeenshire commissioned consumer research to gain a deeper insight into the Adventure Tourism market. This research resulted in a suite of practical outputs, including sub-sector pen portraits to inform campaign planning activity, for example watersports and cycling.

VisitAberdeenshire continued to subscribe to the Tourism Sentiment Index, a global platform which measures sentiment towards the region and how it benchmarks against the national levels and competitor levels also. Monthly snapshots are provided internally and category edits have been produced for industry stakeholders, for example Food + Culinary and Outdoor Activities.

VisitAberdeenshire's Insights and Evaluation Manager delivered 6 specialist webinars during the year, helping to profile the specialist resource available to businesses across the region and sharing relevant and current insights at the same time.

## Aberdeen & Aberdeenshire's COVID-19 journey to date

- By leveraging the full TSI:Live database (started January 2020) we can track our destination's journey through COVID-19, compare to the national average and identify positive stories



2<sup>nd</sup> August: Aberdeen COVID Cluster reported in media

5<sup>th</sup> August: Aberdeen local lockdown announced

industry.visitabdn.com

## EVALUATION

In consultation with a leading UK tourism analyst, VisitAberdeenshire has developed and embedded a tool to evaluate the value associated with leisure marketing campaigns. Whilst this was applied successfully to several campaigns in 2019/2020, it wasn't possible to apply this approach in 2020/2021. The team did continue to survey consumers to understand what each campaign made them "think, feel and do", which resulted in rich data in relation to perceptions of destination and word association with the destination, for example the Visit-Aberdeenshire/Mackie's Mini Collection leisure campaign.

Key evaluation activity this year has related to the Tourism Development Business Recovery Programme. The Insights and Evaluation Manager worked closely with the Tourism Development team to shape the measures and Key

Performance Indicators associated with the Programme as a whole and each component within it. In conjunction with the Tourism Development team, 10 BRP surveys were developed and distributed between November 2020 and March 2021.

Focusing back on leisure marketing - paused in 2020/21, the team at Visit-Aberdeenshire is now extending evaluation work in the leisure marketing area to include surveying consumers who engage through the website, monthly newsletters and social channels. This activity will take place in Autumn and Winter 2021.

Moving beyond leisure marketing, VisitAberdeenshire will revisit evaluating activity within the travel trade, specifically focusing on the value of interventions in this area.

These projects were delivered by Deirdre O'Donnell

## WORKING AT VISITABERDEENSHIRE ADAPTING TO A NEW WAY OF WORKING

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

In March 2020 like many organisations across the UK, VisitAberdeenshire began a period of home working for all employees. Remaining in regular communication with all employees during this period has been critical to provide support and guidance as we all navigated through a new working situation. Regular virtual team meetings and virtual social activities took place during 2020 to maintain moral and engagement across the VisitAberdeenshire team.

VisitAberdeenshire values the importance of its employees and their views on the

organisation. Regularly engagement with employees is undertaken to help identify and build upon the strengths and talents in the team. In addition to the annual employee engagement survey which seeks feedback on professional development, personal accomplishment, work/life balance and the ability to influence the company's direction VisitAberdeenshire undertook a number of employee surveys on homeworking and returning to the office environment. The results of these surveys allowed VisitAberdeenshire to monitor the sentiment of the team on the current homeworking situation and any additional considerations for when a return to the office was permitted.

The results for the 2020, annual employee engagement survey recorded an overall



employee engagement score of 79% retaining the score achieved in 2019 despite the global pandemic.

Building on the Wellness Wednesday programme launched in 2019 and placing a firm focus on health and wellbeing for the team during 2020 was a key objective for the organisation. In order to help promote health and wellbeing across the organisation, one Wednesday of each month is labelled 'Wellness Wednesday', where the entire organisation takes an hour out of the day to promote a different health and wellbeing activity. During 2020, the team has taken part in a number of different virtual sessions from nutrition, empathy, journalling, yoga and financial wellbeing.

A Health and Wellbeing Policy was introduced by VisitAberdeenshire during 2020 to detail the commitment from the organisation to all employees. An Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) was launched through Health Assured where employees can seek help to deal with personal problems that might adversely impact their work performance,

health and wellbeing. In addition, a Financial Wellbeing Programme was launched through Johnston Carmichael where employees can receive advice and assistance to feel confident and have peace of mind to make personal financial decisions.

VisitAberdeenshire empowers employees to upskill and take ownership of their personal development through the annual appraisal process and encouragement from Line Managers to undertake regular CPD. In 2020, the business supported the team by providing key memberships to professional organisations including the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and the Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD). The business supported and encouraged staff development with employees undertaking distance learning qualifications in areas of Data Analysis, Digital Marketing and Chartership of the Institute of Public Relations. Mentoring opportunities were secured through Women in Tourism and European Cities Marketing.



These projects were delivered by Fiona Douglas

## MEET THE VISITABERDEENSHIRE TEAM



**CHRIS FOY**  
Chief Executive



**FIONA DOUGLAS**  
Office & Finance Manager



**DEIRDRE O'DONNELL**  
Insights & Evaluation Manager



**LAURA DELANEY**  
Head of Communications



**ELAINE BISSET**  
Marketing Manager



**ROHAN ANGUS**  
Marketing & Communications Assistant



**YVONNE COOK**  
Head of Tourism Development



**CHRISTINA WRIGHT**  
Senior Tourism Development Executive



**LUCIA CAMPBELL**  
Senior Tourism Development Executive



**LAURIE SCOTT**  
Head of Business Development



**JILL SINCLAIR**  
Business Development Executive



**KIRSTEN MURRAY**  
Business Development Executive



**PHILIP CHAN**  
Business Development Executive



**HECTOR EMSLIE**  
Golf Tourism Manager



VisitAberdeenshire is funded by



visitabdn.com | twitter: @tourismabdn |  
facebook: visitabdn | instagram: visitabdn

VisitAberdeenshire, East Burn Road,  
Stoneywood, Aberdeen AB21 9FX