



 Visit **Aberdeenshire**

**ANNUAL REVIEW**

**2022/23**



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## FOREWORD FROM CLAIRE BRUCE CHAIR, VISITABERDEENSHIRE

The last twelve months were significant for tourism as COVID restrictions and consumer uncertainty eased, allowing travel plans to be made and something resembling normality returned. However, the costs of doing business meant that challenges for the sector did not go away and continue to be felt.

Events during the year put the spotlight on the region from the Platinum Jubilee via the Tour of Britain to the events around the passing of HM Queen Elizabeth II. The VisitAberdeenshire team - supported and guided by our board - continued to plan for, and respond to opportunities through work that does justice to our destination

from mountain to city to sea. Running in parallel, we began work to plot priorities for the future, publishing a revision of the Destination Strategy. The outcome of this work including its associated Action Plan connects to the Regional Economic Strategy. It is not just a guiding light for VisitAberdeenshire, but for anyone with an interest in the growth and success of the North-east visitor economy.

I would like to thank our funders at Opportunity North East, Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council, for their continued support of VisitAberdeenshire and the tourism sector.



## MESSAGE FROM CHRIS FOY CEO, VISITABERDEENSHIRE

With the visitor pound, euro, krone and dollar coveted by destinations across the UK, success in such a highly competitive environment requires focus and ambition. Our vision is to be the leading destination organisation in Scotland, increasingly recognised for growing the visitor economy through bold and dynamic initiatives. That means building a high profile for the destination, strengthening links into the supply chain, and helping to develop visitor experiences that substantiate the promise in promotional activity.

The VisitAberdeenshire team has been focussed on this outcome throughout 2022/23. Significant steps have been taken to establish the destination identity with a growing following and conversion through the organisation's promotional channels, not least our work to raise the profile of the region among travel media. The UK's

leading inbound trade buyers were welcomed to the region at the Annual UKinbound Convention in September and many more business across the sector are both 'trade ready' to sell into the supply chain, and are adopting new, sustainable business practices as a result of VisitAberdeenshire's pioneering development programme. Our convention bureau continued to bid for, and win more business events alongside our venue and academic partners.

Although the future is by no means clear, we have the momentum, and support to continue to build the tourism industry in our corner of Scotland and we are now seeing outcomes from the organisation's investment in tourism promotion and development initiatives as we work to attract more visitors, who will stay longer, spend more, and leave happier.



## TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

*The Tourism Development team provides advice and support to help tourism businesses develop skills and products to meet demand from an ever-changing market.*

A key priority for VisitAberdeenshire is to support tourism businesses to grow. The Tourism Development team curated and delivered a multi-strand Industry Development Programme for tourism and hospitality businesses in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire to help them survive, build resilience and return to growth.



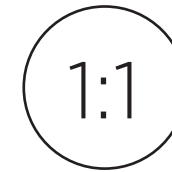
**28**

webinars and  
workshops



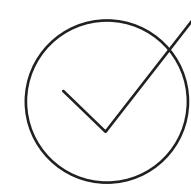
**275**

attendees



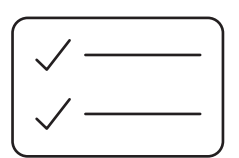
**225**

tailored one-to-one  
advice sessions



**39**

new travel  
trade bookable  
products created



**97%**

cited specific actions  
that they wanted to  
implement as a result  
of their participation

The programme covered several themes in a mix of webinars and live workshops, providing networking opportunities and tailored one-to-one advice.

**Customer and Market Insights** workshops and webinars delved deeper into insights, consumer preferences and holiday intentions, with **three** sessions delivered.

**Four Digital Marketing** masterclasses featured a review of each business's digital presence. Delivered in partnership with **Business Gateway**, a further **ten** sessions covered topics including website and social media analytics, managing online reputation and creating video content.

Businesses were offered support to improve **Sustainability** credentials, including free sustainability reviews, specialist advice and a tailored action plan. **Two** introductory webinars on calculating carbon footprint and getting started on a sustainability journey were also delivered.

**Inclusive Tourism** was a new addition to the programme, designed to increase awareness and build confidence in creating an inclusive welcome, to strengthen the inclusive offering and make Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire an attractive destination to this market. **Two** workshops were delivered, one introducing the scope of the market, as well as providing inspiration and practical tips, and the second was a full day training course on developing an inclusive customer experience.





The pioneering **Travel Trade Ready programme** continued to support local businesses to develop new trade bookable products and experiences. Webinars and workshops included **two** masterclasses on working with online travel agents and **two** workshops to support businesses in the adventure tourism and golf sectors. Support was also provided to businesses participating in trade events, including the UKinbound Annual Convention and VisitScotland Connect.

External specialist advice was offered on **Package Travel Regulations**, so businesses could understand specific regulations and the options for compliance, reducing barriers to creative product packaging.

## INDUSTRY COMMUNICATIONS

VisitAberdeenshire kept local businesses up to date with regular e-newsletters containing information about VisitAberdeenshire's activity, latest news and training opportunities.

**Online training modules** were launched to help frontline staff in the tourism and hospitality industry increase their knowledge of the destination. Since the launch in November 2022, **207** individuals from **42** businesses have signed up to complete the training modules.

This activity was delivered by Yvonne Cook, Christina Wright, Kayleigh McLeish, Katie Morrison and Rachel Smith.



The fifth **Tourism Business Game Changer Growth Programme**, funded by Opportunity North East, was delivered to **12** businesses. Game Changer took businesses through a journey of identifying target markets, defining customer demands and refining product concepts, leading to the development of an actionable growth plan.

**Local Networking Meetings** were delivered to businesses in Banff and Macduff, Deeside, and

Fraserburgh and Peterhead, with **62** businesses in attendance. Each meeting included an opportunity for businesses to hear about plans for the future, marketing and PR activity and how to work together with VisitAberdeenshire.

### North East Adventure Tourism (NEAT)

VisitAberdeenshire is a partner in the NEAT project. This is led by Opportunity North East and designed to support the development and growth of adventure tourism across the region.







## MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

*The Marketing and Communications team promotes compelling visitor experiences in North-east Scotland to targeted audiences in the UK through inspirational advertising activity. The team also works to influence potential visitation by retelling the region's story through travel and lifestyle media.*

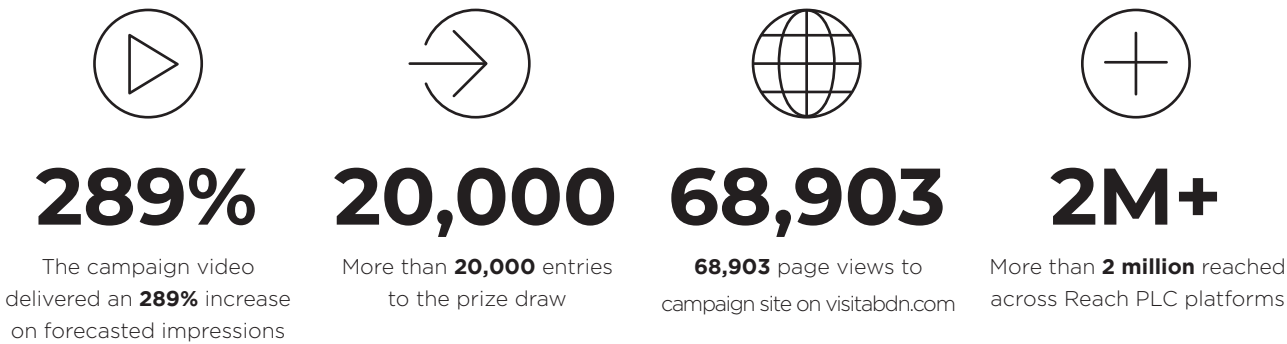
VisitAberdeenshire's marketing and communications work is designed to drive visitation, inspire action and influence visitors to **stay longer, spend more, explore deeper and leave happier**. It has maintained an 'always on' approach to ensure a bold, consistent presence in market and to raise awareness of the destination.





# GOING ‘ABOVE AND BEYOND’

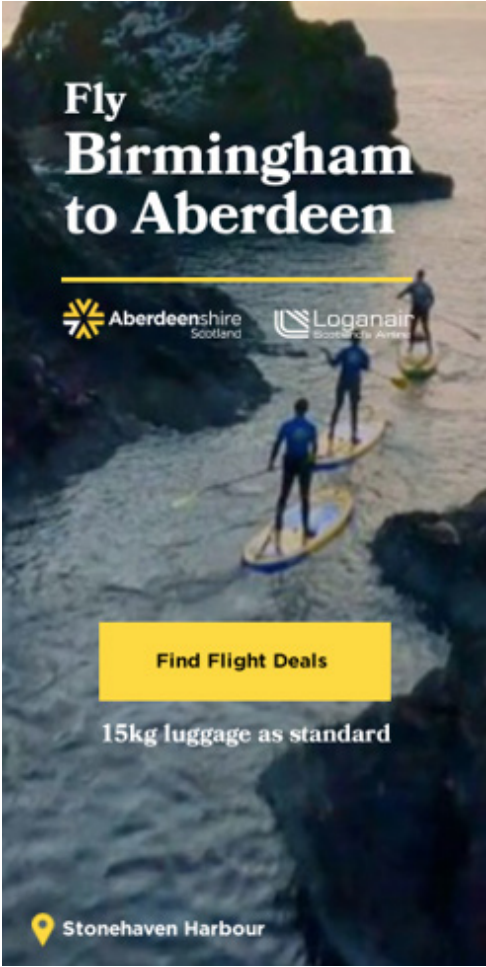
VisitAberdeenshire’s **‘Above and beyond’** campaigns promote the North-east of Scotland to a domestic audience, targeting potential visitors living in the rest of Scotland as well as North and North-west England. In the summer of 2022, VisitAberdeenshire delivered an engaging, multi-channel ‘Taste of summer’ campaign in partnership with **Mackie’s of Scotland**. VisitAberdeenshire-branded ads featured on ice cream tubs **UK-wide**. The vibrant and engaging campaign also featured paid social, digital display ads, and an online and print content partnership with Reach PLC.



The **‘Escape to the city’** campaign **targeted those with an interest in city breaks**, with a broad age profile of 25 to 64, originating from the rest of Scotland and North England to Manchester. The lead generation and traffic driving campaign performed strongly, with video adverts delivering more than **3.5 million impressions**, over **8000 competition entries** and **9,687 landing page hits** to the campaign website.

**This campaign was funded by VisitScotland’s Destination and Sector Marketing Fund.**

VisitAberdeenshire used the ‘Above and beyond’ creative in autumn, communicating the region’s diverse visitor experience. VisitAberdeenshire worked together with Loganair to raise awareness of the region and to drive sales in targeted areas, including Manchester and Birmingham. The campaign delivered more than **5.1 million impressions**, **4,400 link clicks**, and **3.6 million ad views**.



# ENGAGING LOCAL AUDIENCES

Local residents were targeted in the summer of 2022, with a **multi-channel ‘Make a day of It’** campaign to encourage spend throughout the region. A dedicated campaign in partnership with DC Thomson provided readers with inspiration about **things to see and do in Aberdeenshire**. Online and print editorial supported Original 106 ads, paid social media and a lively competition element. The multi-channel campaign overachieved DC Thomson’s benchmarks in recall, brand recognition, engagement and actions.

**This activity was supported by the VisitScotland Destination and Sector Marketing Fund**



VisitAberdeenshire promoted unique visitor experiences like the **Galloway Hoard** exhibition at Aberdeen Art Gallery. This one-of-a-kind exhibition gave people living in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Angus and Moray a reason to visit now. Digital advertising was supported by owned channel content to drive traffic to the website.

**This activity was funded by National Museums of Scotland.**



ADVENTURES AWAIT

VisitAberdeenshire created an engaging, family-friendly adventure-themed campaign in partnership with **Active Traveller**. The content partnership with Active Traveller also allowed for further extension of the destination message to a new audience. The campaign is to be fully evaluated in summer 2023.

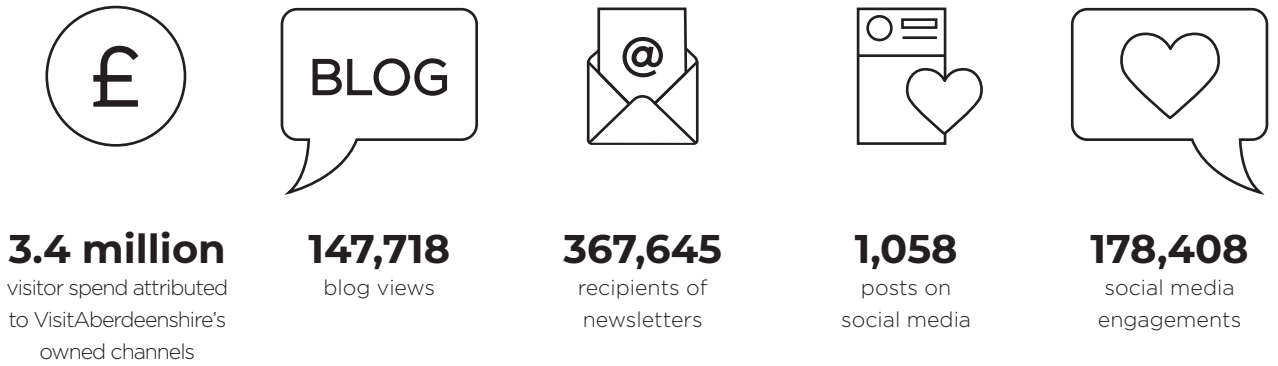
The **Tour of Britain** Grand Depart was held in both Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire in September, and VisitAberdeenshire worked closely with Aberdeenshire Council and the region’s cycling community to launch the **‘Aberdeenshire Ascents’** - ten of the most iconic hill climbs for the cyclists to scale.



ADDING VALUE - OWNED CHANNELS

VisitAberdeenshire maintained a strong social media presence and communicated regularly with its audience with engaging, informative newsletters. The website is a hub of information, giving potential visitors inspiration with itineraries, blogs and maps.

Thorough evaluation of VisitAberdeenshire’s owned channels indicated that **£3.4 million** visitor spend in the region this year can be attributed directly to VisitAberdeenshire’s work across social media, website and e-newsletters.



Leisure consumer activity was delivered by Elaine Bisset, Laura Delaney, Lisa Law, Rohan Angus and Hayley McNab.

DESTINATION PR

In the last twelve months, VisitAberdeenshire has turned up the volume on consumer PR, resulting in strong, national coverage for Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. Press trips are the optimum means of wowing visiting journalists. Itineraries are expertly curated by the VisitAberdeenshire team, designed to provide the best experience the region has to offer. As a result, Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire has featured in national titles including **The Telegraph**, **The I** and **The Guardian**. The region was also named as the number one holiday destination in **Good Housekeeping** and **Country Living**.



CORPORATE PR

VisitAberdeenshire continued to build on relationships with local news media, and supported local businesses through timely corporate communications. VisitAberdeenshire has appeared in the news to launch the **Framework for Growth**, celebrated local businesses involvement in the **Game Changer** and industry development programmes, and the launch of the online training modules, as well as other initiatives.

LONDON CALLING

In March, VisitAberdeenshire hosted an event at Scotland House, London to kick-off the summer season and trigger journalists’ curiosity about Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. The event welcomed **35** travel and lifestyle journalists, and was designed to plant the seed about the destination for future consideration for features, top ten listings or visits.

PR and Communications activity was delivered by Laura Delaney, Jeannie Price and Rohan Angus.



# UKINBOUND ANNUAL CONVENTION 2022



## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

### TRAVEL TRADE

*VisitAberdeenshire promotes the region to travel intermediaries in the UK and overseas to ensure the region is a first-choice destination for travellers from all over the world. Working with the travel trade is a cost effective way to reach new markets and attract more visitors to the region.*

The team delivered a comprehensive programme of activity to increase destination awareness and secure a pipeline of new business which will drive visits to the region in future years. VisitAberdeenshire attended **nine** travel trade events throughout the year, managing over **140** appointments with UK and international buyers. The events were a mix of in-person and virtual shows, including;



#### UKinbound Annual Convention 2022

VisitAberdeenshire bid for, and hosted, UKinbound's annual convention, held at P&J Live in Aberdeen in September 2022. This flagship event attracted 300 UK travel trade professionals for two days of networking, seminars and workshops and discussions on the critical issues facing the industry. VisitAberdeenshire supported **19** local businesses to participate in a supplier showcase attended by **70** buyers. VisitAberdeenshire also hosted a networking event and organised **three** familiarisation visits around the region.

Familiarisation visits are a valuable way to showcase the region to buyers. VisitAberdeenshire organised a further **six** visits to the region, working with VisitScotland, Loganair and the National Trust for Scotland.

#### German Market Representation

VisitAberdeenshire worked closely with a German market specialist who facilitated sales calls and product updates with targeted German based tour operators.

#### Golf

VisitAberdeenshire targeted golf tour operators across Europe to help raise awareness of the region as a **golf destination**. A number of golf-focused familiarisation visits will take place in spring and summer 2023.

#### Cruise Aberdeenshire

VisitAberdeenshire is a member of Cruise Aberdeenshire, a group of stakeholders working together to provide a quality experience for cruise guests to the region.

**Travel Trade activity was delivered by Millie Clarke and Kirsten Stitchell.**



# ABERDEEN CONVENTION BUREAU

*Aberdeen Convention Bureau promotes the destination to conference and event planners in the UK and overseas to position the region as a first-choice host location for business events.*

By adopting a collaborative “Team Aberdeen” approach, the team worked with industry partners to generate leads, identify and engage with potential ambassadors, collaborate on bids and deliver joint events and familiarisation visits.



In the last year, VisitAberdeenshire provided destination support and delivered site visits for potential and confirmed clients. The team hosted **13** site inspections and supported familiarisation visits to showcase the destination, including a two-day showcase for the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE) Scotland.

### Aberdeen Ambassador Network

The Aberdeen Ambassador Network played a key role in helping to secure conferences for the region. There are currently **125** ambassadors in the network drawn from academia and business. A Celebration of Success event was held in March 2023, with **45** academics and other stakeholders in attendance to hear conference case studies from University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University.

### Trade Events

The team attended **two** events in May and June 2022, IMEX Frankfurt and The Meeting Show in London. These events promoted Aberdeen as a business events destination and highlighted the support on offer to event organisers. The team managed a busy diary of **44** appointments across both events.

### Marketing

The Aberdeen Convention Bureau website was refreshed with new content and improved navigation. In addition, **three** new films were produced to help raise awareness of the destination, its connectivity and to encourage engagement in the Aberdeen Ambassador Network.

**Business Events activity was delivered by Millie Clarke, Jill Sinclair, Philip Chan and Rebecca McIntyre.**







## INSIGHTS AND EVALUATION

*Insights and Evaluation is a cross-departmental role, the key functions of which are to lead on research, project managing activity that gathers and interprets market data, and to lead and guide teams with their evaluation activity.*

### SUPPLY SIDE INSIGHTS

This year saw delivery of **four** waves of the Quarterly Business Monitor. Each quarter's results were shared with VisitAberdeenshire's Board and then more widely with industry. Funded by Aberdeenshire Council, an **Aberdeenshire Accommodation Audit** was scoped and commissioned. The outputs from this work will be presented and an action plan developed in Q1 of 2023/2024. As part of VisitAberdeenshire's Industry Development Programme, the team supported with the delivery of the Customer and Market Insights and the Inclusive Tourism sessions. The team also inputted into Game Changer programme and Working with OTAs webinar.

### DEMAND SIDE INSIGHTS

VisitAberdeenshire continued to prioritise understanding changes in consumer behaviour by surveying the consumer database further, and commissioning consumer related research:

- Project managed wave two of the consumer database survey
- Scoped and commissioned wider consumer research (to gain an understanding of views/attitudes from those who are not yet engaged/have not yet started their journey with Aberdeenshire as a destination)
- Project managed the Aberdeenshire sentiment research project, social listening research across key destination themes. Internal debrief of results takes place quarterly.

### EVALUATION

VisitAberdeenshire continued to evaluate marketing activity, focusing on what campaigns make visitors, and potential visitors, **think, feel and do**. VisitAberdeenshire evaluated **six** campaigns, undertaking ROI measurements where possible and appropriate. Evaluation was extended to e-newsletter activity, social media channels and consumer facing website. An estimated visitor spend of **£3.4 million** in the region could be attributed to this activity in the last year.

The Insights and Evaluation Manager worked with the Business Development team to develop survey templates for all core activity. In addition, a pilot formula was developed for measuring value of Travel Trade activity, and a Surveyhero training session was undertaken with the whole team.

**This activity was led by Deirdre O'Donnell**





## BUSINESS SERVICES

*The Business Services team supports the employees, volunteers, Board of Directors and business with all aspects of human resources, finance, facilities, health and safety and maintains good corporate governance for the organisation.*

Employees are a business' greatest advocates and without a team of talented and committed employees VisitAberdeenshire could not deliver the bold, engaging initiatives and programmes designed to drive visitation.

Three new employees joined during the year, Rachel Smith, Rebecca McIntyre and Hayley McNab. The end of March saw the retirement of Yvonne Cook, Head of Tourism Development after five years with the organisation.

The health and wellbeing of the team is a key focus area for the organisation.

Wellness Wednesday sessions continued, as the team enjoyed walks exploring Old Aberdeen, Nuart street art, as well as visits to the Art Gallery, Duthie Park and Ythan Estuary experiencing the tourism products the region has to offer.

During 2022 Fiona Douglas, HR & Business Services Manager, undertook a First Aid for Mental Health training course for the organisation. The role of the Mental Health First Aider is to provide support to colleagues if they are experiencing any signs or symptoms of mental health issues and signpost them to appropriate professional care and support available.



VisitAberdeenshire values its employees and their views on the organisation. Regular engagement with employees was undertaken to help identify and build upon the strengths and talents in the team. The staff voice survey was completed in December and sought feedback on professional development, personal accomplishment and work/life balance.

The results for the 2022 annual staff voice survey recorded an overall engagement score of 92%, an increase from the 89% achieved in 2021.

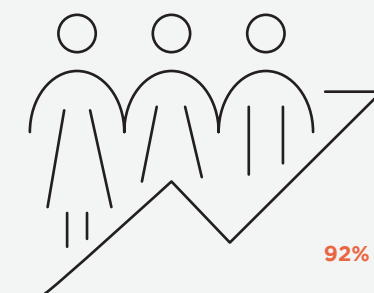
vision, values and behaviours for the organisation. Following workshops and feedback from employees, a set of values and behaviours were created.

During 2022 VisitAberdeenshire undertook a project to move the business onto SharePoint cloud-based storage. The move to SharePoint allows for greater collaboration across the team and externally with suppliers, and the creation of a company intranet site.

**This activity was delivered by Fiona Douglas**

A number of internal workshops took place with the team to focus on the purpose,

### Annual Staff Voice Survey Highlights



**92%** total staff engagement



**86%** recognition and development



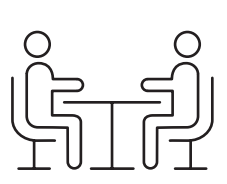
**95%** commitment and motivation



**90%** employer and employee relationship



**95%** internal business environment



**92%** management and leadership support





The Welcome to Aberdeenshire Volunteer scheme continued to support at key business events during 2022 including the Scottish Trade Union Conference at Aberdeen Music Hall, and the Energy Exports Conference and NHS Scotland Conference both at P&J Live. The volunteers welcomed visitors arriving in the city region at transport hubs and the conference venues.

At the start of 2023 a recruitment drive was undertaken to increase the number of volunteers in the scheme. Additional volunteers were sought to support with the arrival of cruise ships into the South Harbour during the 2023 cruise season.

This activity was delivered by Fiona Douglas, Jill Sinclair and Kayleigh McLeish

13

volunteers recruited

5

Business Events supported  
by volunteers

100

volunteering hours logged

# KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2022-23

Figures in brackets represent annual targets

## TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Industry Development Programme	225	1-2-1 advice sessions delivered (200)
	97%	cited specific actions taken as a result (85%)
	96%	rated 1 to 1 advice sessions very or extremely useful (85%)
	275	attendees at workshops and webinars
	88%	rated webinar/workshop very good or excellent (80%)
	84%	cited actions to be implemented as a result of engagement (80%)

Product Development	39	new trade bookable products developed (20)
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## MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Campaigns, Content and PR	6:1	attributable Return on Investment from campaigns
	£3.4m	visitor spend resulting from own channel activity
	26	articles in targeted media from proactive PR including 10 syndicated features (10)
	81,500	VA e-newsletter subscribers (88,000)
	1.76m	website page views (2.2m)
	106,400	social media following (113,000)

## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Travel trade	141	engagements with targeted buyers at trade events
	6	familiarisation visits delivered (3)
Convention Bureau	38	bids submitted (60)
	44	new bid ambassadors recruited (40)
	16	confirmed association conferences (12)
	13	site inspections delivered (10)
	4	familiarisation visits delivered (3)



## ENDORSEMENTS

### Marketing

“VisitAberdeenshire’s marketing of reasons to visit supports the region’s broad appeal in a very competitive market. At the same time, the work on higher margin business events is crucial in supporting hotels’ profit flow – which are challenged by very abnormal costs of doing business. ACSHA members appreciate that work done on hotel revenue generation at hotel level benefits from VisitAberdeenshire’s activity in the market and support available on upskilling the tourism sector.”

**Frank Whitaker, Chair, ASCHA**

### Game Changer Programme

“The Game Changer Programme has provided us, at TwinPeakes Fly Fishing, with invaluable knowledge and skills to enable us to review our current business offering. By providing time out of the everyday we enjoyed an opportunity to reflect upon our current offering and our future. We were impressed by the overall programme, which had clearly been developed with small businesses from the tourism sector in mind. Overall, we cannot recommend the Game Changer programme highly enough. It has exceeded our expectations and has equipped us with the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to drive our business forward.”

**Lesley Peake, Business Support to TwinPeakes Fly Fishing**

### Travel Trade Masterclass

“Every business would find it a lot more difficult to entice folk to the area if it were not for the fantastic work of the team at VisitAberdeenshire – the effort that is put in to really sell the North-east as a tourism destination is something we all benefit from.”

**Dan Barnett and Alan Milne, City of Aberdeen Distillery**

### Convention Bureau

“Working with VisitAberdeenshire and CPD Services to pull together the bid for hosting the 10th International Symposium on Environmental Hydraulics (ISEH) was a tremendous team effort; everyone worked on the bid to ensure Aberdeen had the strongest chance of securing the symposium to the region. The benefits to bringing the conference to the University of Aberdeen are vast and the Fluid Mechanics Research Group are looking forward to building lasting connections and advancing research in the field.”

**Dr Dominic Van der A, University of Aberdeen**

### Travel Trade

“I wanted to thank you again for everything you did for me last week and everything prior to that too! The week was very helpful. It gives me a much clearer vision of what we can offer and how to make calls to Aberdeen a memorable one for our guests! I would never have made it to as many places or have been introduced to so many potential new clients if it wasn’t for you.”

**Barrie Bruce, Excursions Ltd**

### Marketing

“We’ve worked with VisitAberdeenshire on a number of partnership marketing campaigns over the past decade. We’ve been consistently impressed by the level of organisation and detail that goes into both the campaign’s creation and its subsequent, highly detailed, analysis.”

**Angus Hayhow, Head of Marketing, Mackie’s of Scotland**



MEET THE VISITABERDEENSHIRE TEAM



**CHRIS FOY**  
Chief Executive



**FIONA DOUGLAS**  
HR & Business Services  
Manager



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



**LAURA DELANEY**  
Head of Communications



**ELAINE BISSET**  
Marketing Manager



**HAYLEY MCNAB**  
Digital Marketing  
Executive



**REBECCA MCINTYRE**  
Business Events  
Executive



**PHILIP CHAN**  
Business Development  
Executive



**MILLIE CLARKE**  
Head of Tourism  
Development



**CHRISTINA WRIGHT**  
Tourism Development  
Manager



**KAYLEIGH MCLEISH**  
Tourism Development  
Executive



**RACHEL SMITH**  
Tourism Development  
Executive

PURPOSE, VISION, VALUES AND BEHAVIOURS

***Our purpose** is to help drive demand to visit Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, and to support businesses to develop and to meet that demand. Our work has a clear line of sight to the regional destination strategy.*

***Our vision** is to be the leading destination organisation in Scotland increasingly recognised for growing the visitor economy through bold and dynamic initiatives.*



**Collaborative**  
We work in partnership, internally and externally to work towards our company vision.

- Cross team working.
- Working with industry.
- Value and listen to counsel from key stakeholders and Board of Directors.



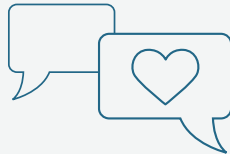
**Ambitious**  
We are creative, forward-thinkers and passionate about what we do.

- Be curious and question the status quo.
- Feel empowered to bring ideas to the table.
- Pursue bold and dynamic ways to inspire and engage with colleagues and industry.



**Responsible**  
We take an environmentally responsible and insights driven approach, operate inclusively and are respectful of others.

- Understand insights and customer/s needs in all decision making.
- Strive to source and buy local to support wider sustainability and net zero ambitions of the region.
- Celebrate and support colleagues to create a one-team approach.



**Empathic**  
We listen and respond to the needs of others.

- Be friendly, approachable and open to listening to colleagues and industry partners.
- Demonstrate flexibility to our colleagues and industry partners.
- Approach challenges with a positive perspective.



VisitAberdeenshire is funded by



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