

PERCEPTIONS OF ABERDEEN AND ABERDEENSHIRE: VIEWS FROM SCOTTISH AND NORTH OF ENGLAND RESIDENTS

Opinions of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire as a short break and holiday destination

56
DEGREE
INSIGHT



In February 2022, VisitAberdeenshire commissioned 56 Degree Insight to carry out sentiment research to gain a deeper understanding of consumer perceptions and sentiment in relation to Scotland and its assets. A further component, and the one that is summarised here, is understanding how and where Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire fits within these perceptions and sentiment.

The context for this commissioned research was a recognition that the coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact on the tourism sector and the factors which consumers take into account when considering potential destinations and planning future trips. This exploratory research helps us understand the current views of visitors, and potential visitors, to the region as we emerge from the pandemic.

KEY THEMES EXPLORED



Changing consumer attitudes



Consumer perceptions of Scotland and Aberdeenshire



Consumer sentiment towards Scotland and Aberdeenshire



Actions emerging from the research

WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

To set the scene within the focus groups, the research opened with discussing participants' attitudes towards international and domestic travel, before exploring their opinions of Scotland as a short break and holiday destination. The groups then moved on to look at opinions of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire specifically as a short break and holiday destination.

FIRSTLY, WHAT WERE THEIR UNPROMPTED OPINIONS OF ABERDEEN AND ABERDEENSHIRE?

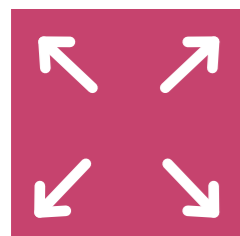
Opinions varied most significantly by previous experiences of visiting the area (as would be anticipated), with Scots generally much more familiar than those living in the North of England.



...AND THEIR OPINIONS ONCE SHOWN THE LOCATION, SCALE AND GEOGRAPHY OF THE DESTINATION?

Some were surprised at the scale of the area, but others worried about the time needed to get there.

Pleasant surprises (especially amongst those less familiar with destination/English participants)



Larger than expected



More coastline than expected



Extent to which region stretches inland

"When you add in the Cairngorms that puts a different perspective on it - fantastic."

"I'd love to go there - just to escape the city."

"You forget that these places are in Aberdeenshire."

But also some further concerns raised:



Location suggests a long drive



Would require a break/ overnight stop



A car would be needed to explore the area

HOW IS THE REGION PERCEIVED/WHAT IS IT KNOWN FOR?

When asked to rank, the largest share of respondents associated the area with being rich in culture and heritage, beautiful and traditional.

<p>Rich in culture and heritage</p> <p>Predominantly related to castles, villages, Balmoral but also for some fishing and the oil industry</p>	<p>Beautiful</p> <p>With a focus on the coast and countryside</p>	<p>Traditional</p> <p>Proud of its Scottishness, authentic - for some not as 'touristy' as some other areas</p>	<p>...but also surprising</p> <p>Some respondents expect to be surprised at what is to be found in the region and the variety it offers.</p>	<p><i>"lots of castles, fishing culture - quite interesting stuff like that."</i></p>
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"I'm optimistic that I'll be surprised!"

"It just felt dead Scottish when I was there!"

"It's traditional as in proud. Not trying to be anything other than Scottish."

It is welcoming to see the views towards the area are predominantly positive but the respondents did also express some concerns and barriers to visiting.

ABERDEEN CITY (esp. for Scots)	NORTH = COLD? (for Scots & English)	LESS TOURISTY = NO FACILITIES? (esp. for English)	'RISKIER' THAN CHOOSING A BETTER KNOWN DESTINATION? (esp. for English)	TOO DIFFICULT TO GET TO? (esp. for English)
A bit grim and gritty Windy Depressing Expensive due to oil	A feeling that it will be colder in this area than alternatives to the south such as Northumbria.	Some concerns (perceived and experienced) that the region will have a lack of places to eat, accommodation, supermarkets, etc.	While a change of scene would be welcome, previously visited places which offer a similar product might be considered to be a safer bet.	While seen as relatively easy to get to by most Central Belt Scots it is expected to be a long drive from North of England - for some too far for anything but a longer visit.

HOW DID PERCEPTIONS SHIFT HAVING SEEN KEY IMAGERY FOR THE REGION?

At this point in each of the focus groups, respondents were taken through a series of images representing the range of what is on offer to visitors to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. These were clustered within the following themes: city break; history and heritage; outdoors and sightseeing; culture and arts; adventure activities.

After seeing the images and hearing the descriptions, **almost all said that there's more to the area than they expected.**

For those that had been before: the images were a reminder of what the area had to offer, sometimes more than they remembered/realised.

For those who had never been/were unfamiliar with the area: they were excited to hear about somewhere new which they could explore.

"It's not what I thought...it looks like the sort of place that me and my husband would go away to without the kids"

"I know it's somewhere I need to go!"

"It's the corner of Scotland I've not visited and that's inexcusable."

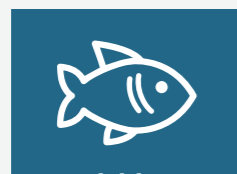
"Looking at those pictures just makes me want to go back and do more."

Common areas of appeal...

It became clear that several areas of appeal were mentioned regularly by our respondents.



Coastline



Fishing communities



Watersports



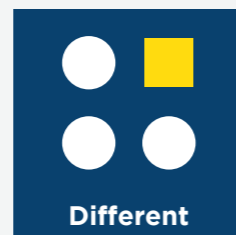
Countryside & Mountains



Inland villages



Local Food



Different

DESPITE THE POSITIVE IMAGERY, THERE WERE SOME CONTINUING CONCERNS

While nearly all feel more inclined to visit after seeing the images, some have continuing reservations/practical concerns which need to be overcome:

- The weather
- Better for a longer holiday (given the distance required. However most would save longer holidays for international trips)
- Too far (other similar destinations are more convenient)
- Need to know more about what's in the area

USING THESE RESULTS

Key actions for VisitAberdeenshire and businesses within the destination to consider:

- Continue to **raise awareness** in key markets, particularly in the North of England, to create knowledge and dispel misconceptions – **almost universally once consumers hear more about the area its appeal increases.**
- **Cut through by focusing communications on points of differentiation** – future campaigns should continue to focus on aspects that make the area different – diversity on offer (coast and mountains/city and rural), Royal Connections, different/authentic local culture, food and drink.
- **"Balancing" Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire** – the coastal and rural aspects of the area tend to hold most appeal (especially for Scots) but the discussions uncovered opportunities to promote the less known aspects of Aberdeen (old city, university city, gastronomy) and/or to make the city a base for exploration ("countryside by day, city by night").
- **Promotion of the area's appeal need to be supported by information to address practical concerns**, eg. Around distance, amenities, things to do, itineraries.
- Where possible, marketing needs to be **differentiated for Scottish and North of England markets:**
 - Scots are more inclined (able) to take shorter breaks, more attracted to rural aspects, more likely to need to have misconceptions re. Aberdeen addressed.
 - North of England residents are more likely to need reassurance over distance/practicalities/amenities, eg. itineraries, alternatives to the long drive, lots to do indoors and out (potentially to justify a longer visit).

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

VisitAberdeenshire was keen to understand current perceived strengths and weaknesses of Scotland, from a UK leisure consumer perspective, particularly within the context of a pandemic/post-pandemic world. Having a deeper understanding of this helps inform our business decisions and activity, and those of tourism businesses across the region.

A qualitative approach was adopted to obtain an in-depth understanding of opinions amongst residents of Scotland and the North of England.

- 6 zoom focus groups each attended by five respondents undertaken between 14th and 23rd February.
- A mix of demographics and places of origin were included (Scotland and North of England).
- 40:60 mix of previous visitors to area and those who would not reject the idea of visiting.

You can review the more detailed results slide deck at

<https://industry.visitabdn.com/home/research-and-insights/>

This project was funded by the DMO Recovery Fund, managed by VisitScotland.

INSIGHTS & EVALUATION AT VISITABERDEENSHIRE

VisitAberdeenshire has an ongoing commitment to learning and understanding as much as we can about our current and future visitors. This deeper understanding helps inform our own activity and that of the businesses within the region.

To discuss the findings within this Factsheet in more detail, or any aspects of Insights in relation to your business do contact us on

insights@visitabdn.com