



VisitAberdeenshire

# RESPONSIBLE TOURISM TOOLKIT



Version 1 – October 2024

# Introduction

---

## Welcome to the VisitAberdeenshire Responsible Tourism Toolkit

This guide is made for tourism businesses in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, to help you adopt sustainable and inclusive tourism practices.

### Why this Toolkit was created

VisitAberdeenshire created this Toolkit to address inclusive tourism and sustainability as areas for your business, to build resilience and achieve growth, while minimising negative impacts.

By using the tips and strategies in this guide, you can enhance the sustainability of your business, improve your reputation, be more inclusive, and help preserve Aberdeenshire and the city of Aberdeen's beautiful nature and rich cultural heritage.

The content is in line with VisitScotland's four Responsible Tourism objectives:

**1**

Support Scotland's transition to a low carbon economy – Scotland target net zero greenhouse gases (GHG) by 2045

**2**

Ensure tourism contributes to thriving communities

**3**

Ensure tourism in Scotland is inclusive

**4**

Support the protection, considerate enjoyment of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage

### How to use the Toolkit

The Toolkit is in PDF format, so you can easily download it and save it on your computer or mobile device, and access it whenever you need.

The Toolkit covers key areas such as accessibility, biodiversity, reducing carbon emissions, and circular economy, under two main headings – Inclusive Tourism and Sustainable Tourism.



We recommend using it as a handy reference guide, checking different sections as needed to help with your business decisions and daily operations. We encourage you not to print the full Toolkit, to reduce the environmental impact.

There are simple steps towards responsible tourism practices, and we have provided action lists throughout the Toolkit to help you. We have also created two handy checklists – one for inclusive tourism, and one for sustainability. These checklists include quick wins as well as more advanced actions. You can tick off each action as you complete it, making it easy to track your progress.

We have included a list of resources and next steps at the end of the Toolkit, as well as a handy glossary for any jargon or terminology you are not yet familiar with.

Businesses that have already started on their Responsible Tourism journey have kindly shared their experiences in some case studies, which will hopefully inspire you. These can be found at the end of the Toolkit.

At the bottom of each page, there are two symbols:



If you click on the arrow on the left, it will take you back to the contents list.



If you click on the list symbol on the right, it will take you to the glossary.

Any words that are **bold, underlined pink**, will take you to the relevant section of the Toolkit. And any words that are underlined green, will take you to an external website. There is also a Contents list, with hyperlinks to navigate the Toolkit.

This toolkit will be reviewed annually, and we would love to hear from you if there is anything you think should be improved or included in the Toolkit. Please contact [industry@visitabdn.com](mailto:industry@visitabdn.com) with any feedback.

## Why Responsible Tourism matters

Responsible Tourism is not just a box-ticking exercise, it is crucial for the future of the tourism industry. There are benefits to Responsible Tourism - for the environment and your community, but also commercially and reputationally.

By practicing Responsible Tourism, your business can:

- Help protect the region's natural beauty and cultural heritage for future generations.
- Reduce its environmental impact and help fight climate change.
- Support local communities and economies.
- Attract eco-conscious travellers and stand out in the market.
- Be more welcoming by being inclusive and accessible.
- Become more resilient to environmental and economic challenges.

Committing to Responsible Tourism means you're not just securing the future of your business, but also contributing to the sustainable development of the North-east as a destination of choice for UK and inbound visitors.

We hope this Toolkit becomes a valuable resource for you on your responsible tourism journey.



# Contents

---

<a href="#">Introduction to the Toolkit</a>	<b>Page 2</b>
<a href="#">Contents</a>	<b>Page 4</b>
<a href="#">Inclusive Tourism</a>	<b>Page 5</b>
<a href="#">Introduction to inclusive tourism</a> .....	Page 6
<a href="#">Data and insights</a> .....	Page 8
<a href="#">Understanding your customer needs</a> .....	Page 11
<a href="#">Providing an inclusive customer experience</a> .....	Page 14
<a href="#">Accessible texts</a> .....	Page 19
<a href="#">Accessible and inclusive design</a> .....	Page 22
<a href="#">Creating accessibility guides</a> .....	Page 24
<a href="#">Inclusive language</a> .....	Page 26
<a href="#">Community engagement</a> .....	Page 28
<a href="#">Inclusive recruitment</a> .....	Page 29
<a href="#">Checklists – Inclusive Tourism</a>	<b>Page 31</b>
<a href="#">Sustainable Tourism</a>	<b>Page 36</b>
<a href="#">Introduction to sustainable tourism</a> .....	Page 37
<a href="#">Data and insights</a> .....	Page 39
<a href="#">Circular economy</a> .....	Page 41
<a href="#">Reducing food waste</a> .....	Page 42
<a href="#">Decarbonisation and resource efficiency</a> .....	Page 44
<a href="#">Energy efficiency</a> .....	Page 45
<a href="#">Sustainable transport</a> .....	Page 46
<a href="#">Biodiversity</a> .....	Page 47
<a href="#">Adapting to climate change</a> .....	Page 49
<a href="#">Developing a climate action plan</a> .....	Page 52
<a href="#">Checklists – Sustainable Tourism</a>	<b>Page 54</b>
<a href="#">Telling your Responsible Tourism story</a>	<b>Page 59</b>
<a href="#">Resources</a>	<b>Page 68</b>
<a href="#">Next Steps</a>	<b>Page 75</b>
<a href="#">Case Studies</a>	<b>Page 81</b>
<a href="#">Glossary</a>	<b>Page 107</b>



# Inclusive Tourism



Visit**Aberdeenshire**

# Introduction to inclusive tourism

---

## Introduction

Responsible Tourism is not just about sustainability, it's also about being as inclusive and welcoming as possible.

While much emphasis in this section will be on accessibility, “inclusive tourism” also covers other important aspects such as community engagement, recruitment and inclusivity.

## What is inclusive tourism?

Inclusive tourism involves developing and managing tourism services and experiences that are accessible and beneficial to everyone, regardless of their physical abilities, socioeconomic background, age, gender, or other factors.

The aim is to remove barriers and create welcoming environments where everyone can participate in and enjoy tourism activities.

This includes:

- Providing accessible facilities, both on-site and online.
- Offering diverse travel options.
- Ensuring that all members of the community, including marginalised and underrepresented groups, can benefit from tourism opportunities.

In essence, inclusive tourism strives to promote equality, diversity, and social inclusion within the tourism industry.

## Insights from VisitScotland

The UK Government has the ambition for the UK “to become the most accessible tourism destination in Europe by 2025”. Their key measure of success is a 33% increase in inbound visits by disabled people.

VisitScotland has identified the key to unlocking the potential of inclusive tourism, summarised under four key components (the “Four Ps”):



### 1) Prioritisation

Many tourism businesses struggle to find the time to review their inclusivity practices, but it's worth the effort, not only from the perspective of being welcoming, but also commercially (return on investment).



In the UK, it is thought that some 7 million people of working age have a disability, representing significant spending power. Taking the time to improve accessibility and inclusivity can yield substantial returns, and there are many quick wins that won't take too much time or effort (see below).

## 2) People first

Good customer service is always important, but sometimes we are unsure how to welcome people with disabilities or those from minority groups.

It's important to give your staff the confidence to provide the best possible welcome. A quick win here is to review and update your customer service training, giving your staff the confidence and skills they need to welcome everyone.

## 3) Product information

Are you providing information about your accessibility and inclusivity? A quick win is to check your website, are you highlighting your accessibility features?

If you don't already have accessibility information online, you can read more about creating accessibility guides here: [Creating accessibility guides](#)

## 4) Promotion

You need to communicate your inclusivity and accessibility efforts, so ensure that this information is easily accessible to your visitors / guests. Your website is your main shop window, but you should also share your inclusivity message on social media.

You can read more about telling your story here: [Telling your Responsible Tourism story](#)

## What can you do?

- Review and update your website – highlight your access facilities and services. Create an “access for all” page or section to summarise what you offer.
- Create an accessibility guide – describe in detail your access facilities and services, such as hearing loops, quiet spaces, wheelchair access etc.
- Make sure that your accessible bedrooms are available to book online, with images so people can see how they are laid out.
- Arrange staff training, for example Purple Tuesday offer free customer service training, NESS offer sensory awareness training, and Welcome to Excellence offer a full day course called “Welcoming All Customers”.
- Add your business to Euan's Guide (read more: [Resources – Euan's Guide](#)).
- Measure your success and ask for feedback from your customers. People will return to venues that make an effort and listen to their needs.

Training your team and updating your website with your accessibility are quick wins, and you can then build on this over time.

An excellent resource to help you is available here: [VisitScotland Accessible and Inclusive Tourism](#)


Source: VisitScotland



# Data and insights

## The “Purple Pound”

The “purple pound” is the term used to describe the collective spending power of disabled people and their households.

<b>\$13 trillion</b> Worldwide, this market is currently estimated to be worth \$13 trillion (2024) <b>14%</b> This number increases by an average of 14% per year. 	<b>£274 billion</b> In the UK alone, households with at least one disabled person have a combined spending power estimated at £274 billion per year.	<b>£17.7 billion</b> When it comes to the value of accessible tourism in Britain, the total market value is £17.7 billion.
	<b>£106 million</b> £106 million is spent by international visitors to Scotland with an impairment.	<b>£1.69 billion</b> The estimated total spend on all tourism trips in Scotland by those with an impairment is £1.69 billion per year.

**10%**

So, the “purple pound” is immensely valuable, yet only 10% of businesses have a targeted strategy for this huge market.

**75%**

Even more concerning, a massive 75% of disabled people and their families have walked away from a business due to poor accessibility, disability awareness or customer service.

## Disabilities

The universal sign for disability is a wheelchair user, so it’s natural to associate disability with mobility issues. However, it’s important to remember that accessibility is not just about wheelchair users:

- 17% of the global population have a disability.
- Only 8% of those use a wheelchair (9% in the UK).
- And up to 80% of those have “hidden impairments” or “hidden disabilities”.

It’s important to consider how to accommodate not just wheelchair users, but also visually impaired or hearing-impaired visitors, as well as those with mental health conditions or other hidden disabilities.

- 9% of children in the UK have a disability.
- 21% of working age people in the UK have a disability (approximately 7 million people)
- 59% of people aged over 80 have a disability in the UK
- 1 in 3 people over 60 have hearing loss in the UK

Source: Purple Tuesday and VisitScotland





## Hidden disabilities

According to Hidden Disabilities Sunflower, there are more than 800 hidden disabilities and health conditions.

1 in 5 people live with a disability - that is around 11 million people in the UK alone - and of those, 70-80% are hidden disabilities. These hidden disabilities can be situational (e.g. a nut allergy), temporary (e.g. recovering from an injury) or permanent (e.g. dementia, hearing loss, autism).

Source: Hidden Disabilities Sunflower

## Hearing loss

12 million people in the UK are D/deaf or have some form of hearing loss.

## Visual impairments

The World Health Organization estimate that about 285 million people are visually impaired worldwide: 39 million are blind and 246 million have low vision.

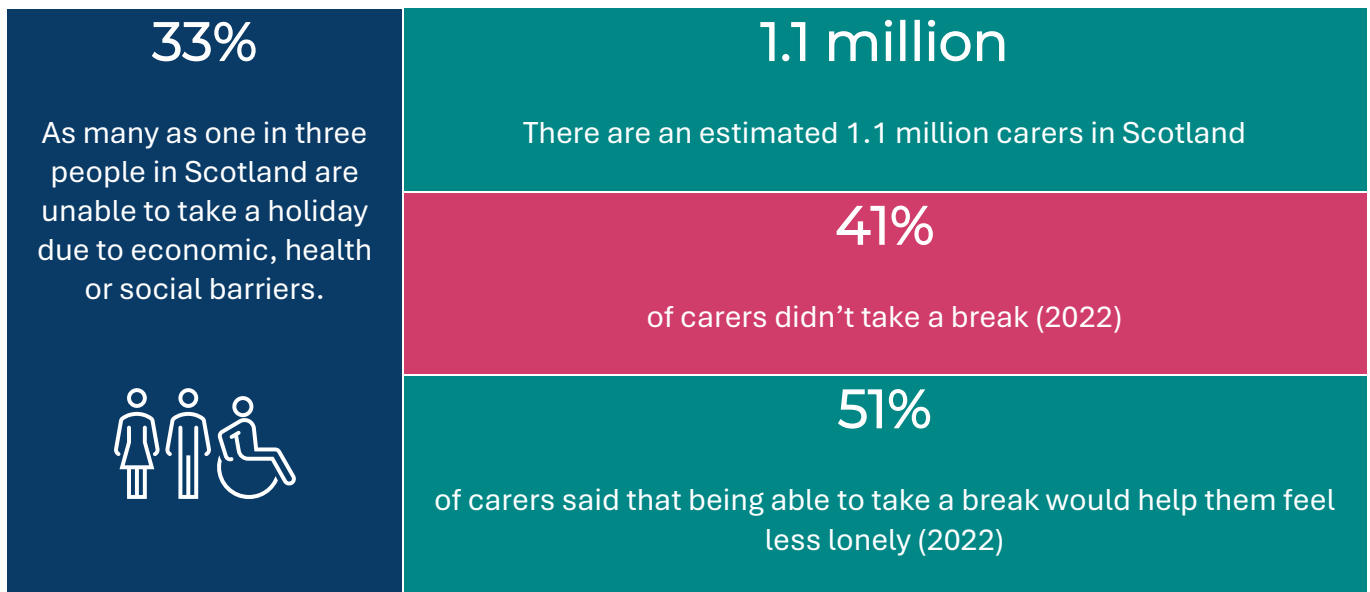
In the UK, over 2 million people live with visual impairments severe enough to disqualify them from holding a driver's licence. 320,000 people are registered blind or partially sighted.

Colour blindness affects 8% of the male population and 0.5% of the female population globally.

## Inclusive to all

Inclusive tourism is not only about accommodating people with disabilities, it also covers socioeconomic background, age, gender, sexual orientation etc.

## Social tourism



Source: VisitScotland



## Why should you be inclusive and accessible?

We all want to be as welcoming as possible and provide excellent customer service, but there are additional benefits of accessible and inclusive tourism:

### Growth potential and increased demand

As the population ages, the demand for inclusive tourism is set to grow.

Businesses and destinations that cater to this market stand to benefit significantly.

### Spending power

Disabled and senior travellers tend to spend more on holidays than other market groups. As outlined above, the 'Purple Pound' is valued at \$13 trillion worldwide per year, so there is a lot of disposable income to be spent on your services.

### Loyal, repeat customers

Inclusive businesses often enjoy higher occupancy rates and a more loyal customer base.

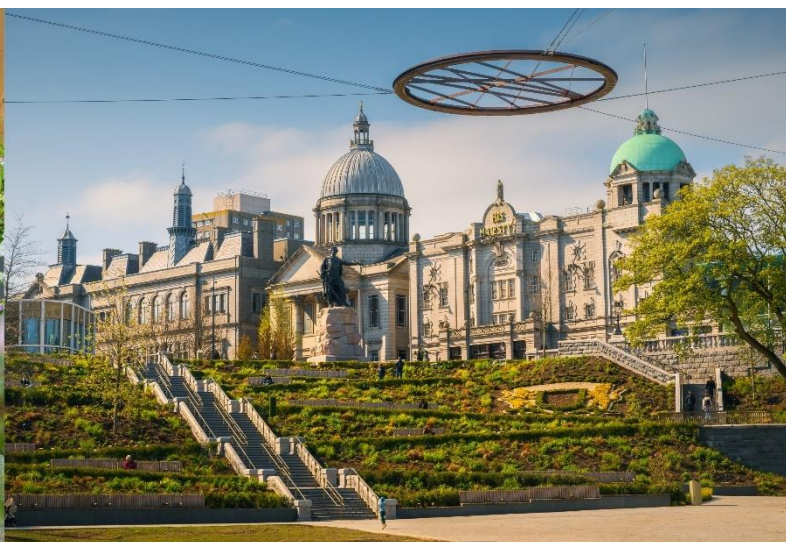
Customers who feel welcome are more likely to return and recommend your business to their family and friends. In fact, 86% of this market will make a return visit, which is higher than the return rate of many other demographics.

### Customer satisfaction

Becoming more inclusive can improve the experience for a wide range of customers.

Consider the unique needs of people with hearing loss, visual impairments, wheelchair users, senior travellers and families with young children. They will appreciate you being more understanding of their needs, which will improve the customer satisfaction.

Source: VisitScotland



# Understanding your customers' needs

The first step in providing an inclusive customer experience is to understand your customer needs.

As we have already covered, accessibility and inclusivity cover a wide range of demographics:

- Age
- Families with children
- LGBTQ+
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Socioeconomic background
- People with disabilities and impairments

Hopefully, you are not doing anything to exclude visitors based on their age, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, so the focus of inclusive tourism often naturally shifts to accommodating people with disabilities and impairments.

## Introduction to different impairments

When we think of people with disabilities, wheelchair users often come to mind. However, there are many other disabilities and impairments to consider.

As mentioned in the introduction, 1 in 5 people live with a disability (that is 11 million in the UK alone), and out of those, 70-80% have hidden disabilities.

There are three main types of impairments:

- Situational (e.g. allergies)
- Temporary (e.g. injuries and recovering from surgery)
- Permanent (this could be physical, neurodevelopmental, cognitive, respiratory, neurological, mental health, sensory etc)

With more than 800 hidden disabilities identified by Hidden Disabilities Sunflower, here is a small sample of different impairments your customers may live with:

### Situational

#### Allergies and intolerances

- Nuts
- Dietary (e.g. gluten, lactose)
- Pets
- Bees

### Temporary

#### Injuries

- Broken bones

#### Recovering from surgery



## Permanent

### Physical impairments:

- Wheelchair users
- Those using mobility equipment (e.g. walking frames, crutches)
- Arthritis

### Sensory impairments:

- Visually impaired (blind or partially sighted)
- Colour blindness
- Deaf or hearing loss
- Lack of spatial awareness
- Vertigo
- Other sensory impairments (e.g. loss of smell, touch, taste, and sensory processing disorders)

### Respiratory conditions:

- Asthma

### Neurodiversity and neurodevelopmental conditions:

- Autism
- Learning disabilities
- ADHD
- Dyslexia

### Cognitive:

- Dementia
- Alzheimer's

### Mental health:

- Depression
- Anxiety

### Neurological:

- ME (myalgic encephalomyelitis)
- Parkinson's

## Important considerations:

- Some customers may have multiple impairments.
- Only 17% of people with disabilities were born with the disability, so it's important to keep in mind that the needs of your customers will change over time. They may also have good and bad days, so their needs may vary depending on the day.
- Assistance dogs are not only for the visually impaired, they also assist people with hearing loss, epilepsy, diabetes, autism, allergies and other physical impairments.

## Social tourism

As highlighted in the data and insights section, as many as one in three people in Scotland are unable to take a holiday due to economic, health or social barriers. Many of these individuals – around 1.1 million – are carers.

Social tourism aims to provide those who can't take a break with the chance to enjoy tourism experiences.

Beyond promoting inclusivity, offering social tourism brings other advantages to a business – it can boost low season bookings and improve staff morale by making a meaningful impact, for example.

If you are interested in getting involved, simply fill out this form on the VisitScotland website, and a representative from Shared Care Scotland will get in touch: [Social Tourism application form](#)



For 99% of customers,  
it is all about the  
context rather than  
what is said.

“How can I  
help you?”

## Be part of the solution

Create an environment where your customers feel comfortable asking for help. Ask if they need assistance, and don't be afraid to ask the question “how can I help you”, without expecting them to justify why they need your help. People with disabilities are often frustrated with having to constantly explain themselves.

Speak directly to the visitor with a disability or impairment, not to their companion. And don't speak quickly, shout or speak patronisingly slow.

Don't assume that everyone's needs are the same. For example, if someone asks for directions even though there are clear signs, they may have dyslexia and need someone to tell them where to go. Don't just point to the sign.



# Providing an inclusive customer experience

---

Once you understand your customers and their diverse needs, consider how you can provide an inclusive customer experience.

An inclusive welcome means being honest about your accessibility, and offering assistance when needed, for example, by asking visitors if they have access requirements when they book.

While you may not be able to meet everyone's needs, aim to be as welcoming as possible. Remember, no one expects you to be an expert, so don't hesitate to ask questions and learn from people with lived experience.

There are three main areas to consider when evaluating your accessibility and inclusivity:

- **Onsite (at your venue, in person):** consider not just your own venue, but also the surrounding area, and how to get to your venue.
- **Online (digital):** make sure your website, booking system, social media and accessibility guides are both inclusive and accessible.
- **Printed materials (non-digital):** this includes guidebooks, leaflets, brochures, menus, letters and signs.

## On site (at your venue):

Here are a few things to consider at your venue:

**Provide access for wheelchairs and walking frames** – ensure that ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms are available wherever possible.

**Offer access information about the general area as well, not just your venue** – can visitors easily get to you?

**Consider colours and patterns** – calm colours are generally better than bright ones, and try to avoid too many clashing patterns. Contrasting colours, e.g. for door fixtures and switches, can help visually impaired people navigate buildings safely and independently.

**Offer sensory-friendly options** – do you have quiet spaces, or can you provide noise-cancelling headphones or sensory guides?

**Use clear signage** - display signs with large text, high contrast, and simple language.

**Train your team** - provide training on assisting visitors / guests with disabilities and promoting inclusivity. For example, Purple Tuesday offer free online training, NESS provide sensory awareness training, and Welcome to Excellence can arrange in-person training.

**Provide assistive technology** – consider offering hearing loops, braille menus, and audio guides. The RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) and the RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf People) provide excellent advice on assistive technology.

**Manage noise levels** – avoid playing loud music in the background.

**Emergencies** - make sure your emergency evacuation plans consider all customers.



## Providing an inclusive welcome in person:

Here are a few examples of how to be inclusive in person:

<b>Visitors with hearing impairments</b>	<p>Face the person you are speaking to and don't cover your mouth. Speak clearly and use gestures to support what you are saying.</p> <p>If someone asks you to clarify, try rephrasing it with clear and concise language.</p> <p>Don't shout, instead, move to a quieter area if necessary. If it helps, write down what you are trying to say.</p>
<b>Visual impairments</b>	<p>Introduce yourself and explain that you work at the venue and are there to help.</p> <p>Don't grab their arm, they will hold on to you if they need to, usually by taking your arm or shoulder. This gives them control of the situation.</p> <p>Use clear and descriptive language, and describe the layout and surroundings.</p>
<b>Autistic visitors</b>	<p>Offer them the opportunity to prepare for the visit or stay. This may involve coming for a pre-visit or providing a video tour of your venue.</p> <p>If plans change, make sure to inform them as soon as possible.</p> <p>Provide quiet areas or offer noise-cancelling headphones if needed.</p> <p>Be patient and calm, and answer any questions they have, even if you have already provided the information.</p>
<b>Visitors with dementia</b>	<p>Provide quiet spaces, away from busy areas like check-in desks, using calm colours.</p> <p>Make sure they know where the toilets are located.</p> <p>Speak clearly and concisely, and check that they understand. Be patient.</p> <p>Provide written confirmation of their booking, including all relevant details and payment instructions, as they may forget that they have already paid. Include a name in the confirmation email, so they know who to reach out to.</p>



## Online (digital):

You should also review how accessible and inclusive your online presence is, including your website and social media.

Here are a few key points to consider:

### Make your website accessible

Digital accessibility laws are relatively new in the UK, and can be quite unclear compared to other laws, but the basic expectation is that any organisation with a website should make it accessible to disabled users.

#### How do you know if your website is accessible?

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (known as WCAG) are an internationally recognised recommendations for improving web accessibility: [Understanding WCAG](#)

If you used a web designer, ask if they followed these guidelines when they created your website.

If not, you can perform a “basic accessibility check” to see if your website complies with the guidelines: [Doing a basic accessibility check](#)

Ideally, users of your website should be able to:

- Use a keyboard instead of a mouse to navigate the site.
- Adjust browser settings to make content easier to read.
- Use a screen reader to ‘read’ (speak) content out loud.
- Use a screen magnifier to enlarge parts of a screen.
- Navigate the site using voice commands.

### Top tips for things to consider on your website:

- Provide sufficient contrast using colours and textures.
- Limit the number of colours you use.
- Avoid background and font colours that make your pages difficult to read for colourblind users.
- Allow font size adjustment.
- Don’t rely on colour alone to communicate important information.
- Enable keyboard accessibility and shortcuts, rather than having to use a mouse to navigate.
- Use descriptive labels for links and buttons, avoid vague labels such as “click here”. Instead, provide context such as “click here to book”.
- Provide alt text descriptions for images.
- Use headings to organise page content.
- Use descriptive titles for every page.
- Offer clear navigation. Use simple menus and clear calls to action for easy navigation.





## Accessibility software

If your website isn't accessible, there are accessibility software that can help you conform to WCAG standards and make your website more inclusive, for example "TextHelp" and "Recite Me".

Here is a handy guide to accessibility software: [Guide to accessibility software](#)

## Screen readers

The internet is inherently visual, so how do people with visual impairments access it? The simple answer is that they often use screen readers (also known as text-to-speech software). This is why it is important to make sure your website is accessible to screen readers.

If you want to learn more about screen readers and how they work, here is a fact sheet from AbilityNet: [Introduction to screen readers](#)

## Booking systems

Even if your website is accessible, your booking system may not be. Many booking system vendors are still developing their systems to meet the WCAG 2.2 level AA accessibility requirements.

It's important to provide accessible booking options. Ideally, your online booking system should be easy to use and accessible to everyone, but if it is not, offer alternative ways to book, such as by phone or email.

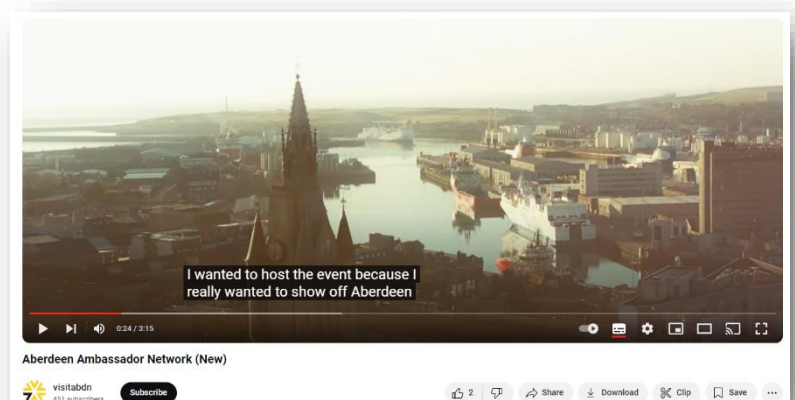
Remember, this doesn't just apply to visually impaired visitors or people with dyslexia. Many older people may not have smartphones, so not everyone can access online information or booking pages. Some may also be unable or unwilling to pay online.

We would recommend that you check with your booking system provider to see if their system is accessible, or if they have a timeline for meeting these guidelines.

## Social media

There are different ways to make your social media more accessible, for example:

- Capitalise words in hashtags on social media, to make them readable by screen readers.
- Add captions to videos and provide transcripts for audio content.
- Provide alt text to describe images.



## In writing (non-digital):

In the next couple of chapters, we will cover accessible text and design, as well as inclusive language, so you are aware of the key considerations when creating printed materials like guidebooks, brochures, leaflets, menus and signs, as well as when sending letters.

The goal is to make sure that the non-digital aspects of your service are accessible too.

### What can you do?

- Instead of only directing customers to your website for information, offer other options to contact you. This could include in writing (text message, email) or in-person assistance, such as using a BSL translator for Deaf or speech-impaired users.
- Provide multiple formats, for example by offering brochures and promotional materials in large print, braille, or easy-read versions.
- People with visual impairments should have the option to contact you by phone.
- If possible, provide an email address on your website, as not everyone is able to fill out forms online.
- If you send out letters as part of your service, make sure you can also provide these in accessible formats, such as large print, braille, or audio CD.

Source: gov.uk



# Accessible texts

---

When writing texts – whether for your website, documents, or accessibility guides – it’s important to follow some basic principles to ensure the texts are accessible to your audience.

There are two key aspects to consider when it comes to accessible texts: Is the text easy to understand (writing)? And is it easy to read (design)?

## Accessible writing

In this context, accessible writing means using language that can be understood by the widest possible audience, including people who use screen readers, and those with autism or dyslexia.

Here are some tips to make your text as accessible as possible:

### Headings

- Use a clear structure, including proper headings. For example, in word processing documents and website builders, use Heading 1, Heading 2 etc.
- Use descriptive headings to guide your readers.

### Structure

- Write short, simple sentences. Aim for an average sentence length of no more than 15-20 words, and no more than three pieces of information per sentence.
- Break your text into paragraphs.
- Align text to the left to ensure even spacing between words. Avoid justifying your text, i.e. don’t distribute the text evenly between the margins.

### Language

- Use simple language. Write in a simple, clear style.
- Avoid jargon and “corporate words”. Consider your audience’s knowledge level and adapt your language accordingly.
- Use consistent terminology to avoid confusion.
- If you need to use abbreviations or acronyms, provide an explanation when they first appear.
- Provide clear and concise instructions.
- Write in an active voice to make sentences more direct. An example of an active sentence is “I will send you a confirmation email”. A passive sentence would be “a confirmation email will be issued at the time of booking”.
- Avoid using All Caps (i.e. capitalising all letters in a word).

### Lists

- Format lists properly with numbers or bullet points.
- Use bullet point lists or numbered lists to break down complex information into digestible chunks.

### Numbers

- Numbers from one to nine are easier to read in normal text if they are written as words, while numbers from 10 upwards should be numerals.



## Highlighting text

- Use bold or large font for emphasis rather than italics or underlining, which can make the text more difficult to read.

## Social media

- Capitalise each word in your hashtags on social media to make them easier for screen readers to interpret. For example, #VisitAberdeenshireResponsibleTourismToolkit is easier to read than #visitaberdeenshireresponsibletourismtoolkit.
- And don't rely on emojis to get your message across, make sure the text is clear and makes sense on its own.

## Readability and accessibility tests

Consider asking someone else to read your text before publishing, to make sure the text is as clear and easy to understand as possible.

There are also different tools available to check your text's readability and accessibility:

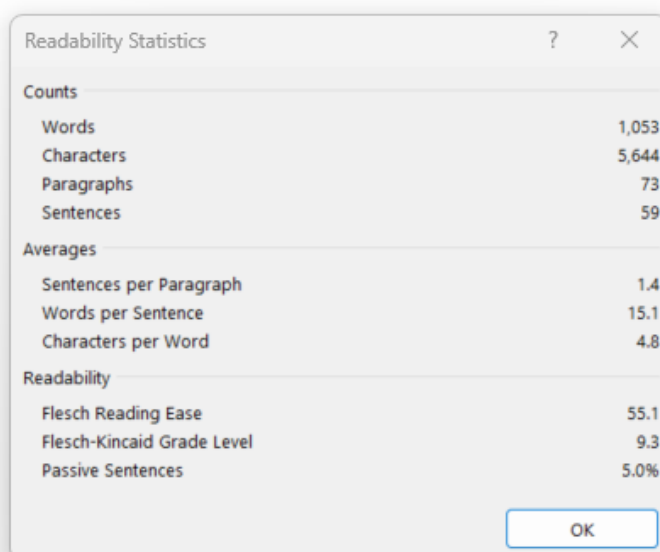
### Readability check

You can assess the readability level of a text using tools like "Editor" (Home > Editor > Document stats) in Microsoft Words.

Two common tests are:

- **"Flesch Reading Ease"** – aim for a score of 60 - 70 (the higher the number, the easier the text is to understand).
- **"Flesch Kincaid Grade Level"** – aim for a score of 7.0 - 8.0 (the lower the number, the easier it is to understand).

In this example, the text is a little bit too complicated for a general audience:



Readability Statistics	
<b>Counts</b>	
Words	1,053
Characters	5,644
Paragraphs	73
Sentences	59
<b>Averages</b>	
Sentences per Paragraph	1.4
Words per Sentence	15.1
Characters per Word	4.8
<b>Readability</b>	
Flesch Reading Ease	55.1
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	9.3
Passive Sentences	5.0%

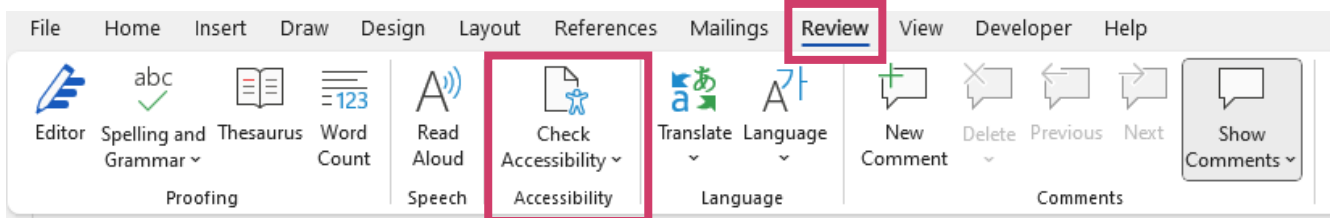


## Accessibility checker

Most word processing software include an inbuilt accessibility checker, that offers tips on how to make your document more accessible.

For example, if you use Google Docs, click on **Tools** in the menu, and choose **Accessibility**.

In Microsoft Words, click on **Review** in the toolbar menu, and then **Check Accessibility**.



## Resources

### AbilityNet

AbilityNet offers an excellent online resource for creating accessible documents, both for print and online: [Creating accessible documents](#)



# Accessible and inclusive design

You also want to make sure that your design doesn't affect the readability of your text.

## Font

Use a common, plain font, ideally a clear "sans serif" font such as Arial, Verdana or Helvetica. Try to avoid light or thin fonts, and fonts with a lot of flourishes.

Text size (especially in printed documents) should be at least 12 points. Consider providing "large print" versions of documents or brochures, which should be 16 points or larger.

## Colours

Keep in mind that many people are colourblind, so avoid using colour alone to convey meaning. Include text instructions as well.

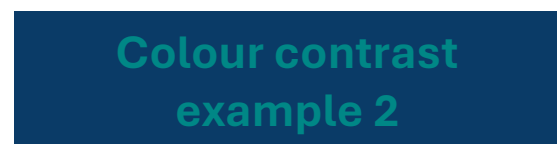
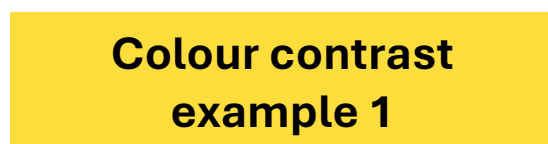
## Colour contrast

Make sure that there is sufficient contrast between the background (image or colour) and the text.

Microsoft's Accessibility Checker (see above) can help identify and fix colour contrast issues.

There is also an excellent online tool to check how accessible a colour combination is. You need to know the hex codes for your colours to use this tool: [WebAim Contrast Checker](#)

For example:



Contrast Ratio  
**15.65:1**

[permalink](#)

### Normal Text

WCAG AA: **Pass**

WCAG AAA: **Pass**

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

### Large Text

WCAG AA: **Pass**

WCAG AAA: **Pass**

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

### Graphical Objects and User Interface Components

WCAG AA: **Pass**

Text Input ✓

Contrast Ratio  
**2.62:1**

[permalink](#)

### Normal Text

WCAG AA: **Fail**

WCAG AAA: **Fail**

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

### Large Text

WCAG AA: **Fail**

WCAG AAA: **Fail**

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

### Graphical Objects and User Interface Components

WCAG AA: **Fail**

Text Input ✓

WCAG 2.0 level AA requires a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text (14 point or larger).



## Images

Images can be a great way to convey complex information, after all, “a picture is worth a thousand words”. This is especially true for people with dyslexia or other learning difficulties.

### Alt text

However, not everyone reading your document or website will be able to see your image.

To assist visually impaired users, make sure images have alt text descriptions. This is a text that describes the image, which can be interpreted by screen readers.

Make sure the description is meaningful and descriptive, and try to keep the alt text to less than 150 words. There is no need to mention that it is an image in the alt text, as the screen reader will announce that it is an image.

For example, for the screenshot below, instead of writing “an image of a bridge”, you might say:

*A screenshot from a website, showing an old stone bridge over a river, surrounded by trees, on a sunny day, with the text “welcome to Aberdeen” across it.*



### Diverse images

Use images that represent diverse abilities, ages, and backgrounds. For instance, why not feature images of a same-sex couple or people with disabilities on your website and on social media? Your images should reflect your audience, so they can picture themselves visiting you.

### Closed captions

If you use videos, make sure to add closed captions, so that they are accessible to those who are deaf or hard of hearing. It also benefits people who prefer watching videos without sound or those who speak English as a second language.

Most video platforms like YouTube and Vimeo offer easy-to-use tools to add closed captions. These tools can automatically generate captions (which you may need to edit) or allow you to type in or upload a transcript. It's a small step that can make a big difference.



# Creating accessibility guides

---

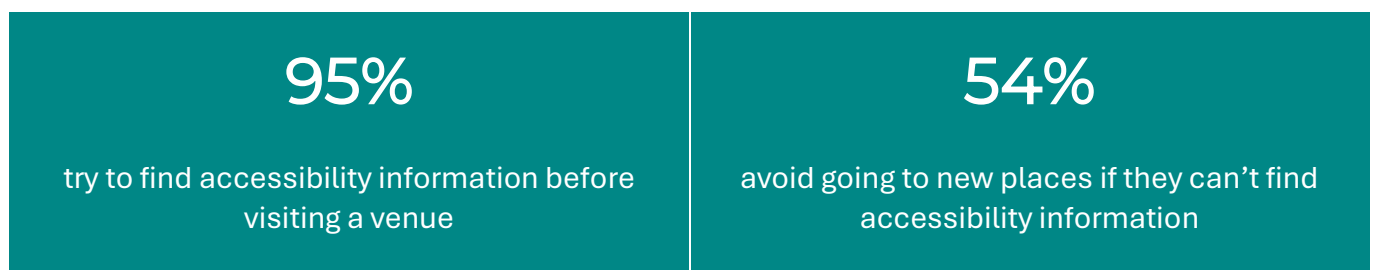
One of the key actions identified by VisitScotland is to provide honest and clear information by creating an Accessibility Guide. This guide should be available as a link or a dedicated page on your website.

## Why should I have an Accessibility Guide?

Both Euan's Guide (the accessibility review site) and AccessAble (a website with detailed access guide listings) have conducted surveys showing that over 95% of disabled people check for accessibility information before visiting a venue, and up to 76% of them decided not to visit because of lack of accessibility information.

Additionally, VisitScotland found that 73% of customers have found information on a venue's website to be misleading, confusing or inaccurate.

### Euan's Guides' access survey:



### AccessAble survey:





## How do I create an Accessibility Guide?

VisitScotland have joined forces with AccessAble to provide an access guide service for tourism businesses.

AccessAble can either conduct a survey via video call or carry out an in-person audit. Afterward, they will create a detailed Accessibility Guide for you, which will also be listed on their website.

You can learn more about this VisitScotland and AccessAble collaboration, including guideline rates for this service, here: [Enhancing Information Provision](#)

Read more about AccessAble here: [Resources - AccessAble](#)

## Some things to include in your Accessibility Guide:

- Information about accessibility for both your physical venue and online (e.g. website and booking system).
- Directions to your business and access details (e.g. level access, parking, drop off points, signage).
- Do you offer virtual or video tours of your venue?
- Details about toilet facilities, and any available changing places (adult and child).
- Services and equipment you offer, such as hearing loops, braille brochures, visual fire alarms, quieter times, and quiet spaces.
- Facilities for assistance dogs (e.g. water bowls, nearby parks).
- All the different ways to contact you.
- Any accessibility training your team have completed.
- A listing of any specific accessibility features you provide, including measurements.

## Promote your Accessibility Guide

Once you have created an accessibility guide, make sure it's accessible online. Ideally, include a link to the guide on your website, or a dedicated Accessibility page.

You might also consider listing your business on Euan's Guide. If you are not already listed, you can upload your own accessibility guide and information. If you are already listed, you can update your listing for free.

Link: [Resources – Euan's Guide](#)

And don't forget to share the news that you have an accessibility guide on your social media.

Sources: VisitScotland, AccessAble, Euan's Guide



# Inclusive language

---

One of the main concerns regarding inclusivity is the fear of unintentionally offending customers by using the wrong terminology or simply saying “the wrong thing”. For example, how should you refer to different ethnic minorities and orientations, and is it OK to say “see you later” to a visually impaired person? \*

This concern applies across all demographics – age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability etc.

Identity is very personal, so if in doubt - listen, learn, and politely ask about preferences.

Recommendations change frequently, and language continuously evolves, but here is some general advice with links for further information:

## Disabilities

Refer to individuals as “disabled” or “people with disabilities”, rather than handicapped.

Try to avoid negative or emotionally charged expressions. For instance, instead of saying that someone “suffers from dementia”, say they are “living with dementia”.

Terms like 'fully accessible' aren't very helpful - fully accessible to whom? You need to provide detailed information about accessibility, so people can determine if it suits their specific needs.

Purple Tuesday have created an excellent resource to help you know what to say about different disabilities: [Hello can I help you](#)

## Race or ethnicity?

There is often confusion around when to use these words. The simple answer (and the government’s advice) is to use “ethnicity”, rather than “race” when speaking in general terms.

Some expressions, such as “BAME”, “non-white”, “mixed-race” and “coloured people” are now considered problematic and should be avoided. The most common general term used today is “BPOC” (black people, and people of colour), but it’s generally best to refer to ethnic minority groups individually, rather than as one single group.

If in doubt, The Law Society provide some general advice: [A guide to race and ethnicity terminology and language](#)

The government also offers good advice on their website: [Writing about ethnicity](#)

## LGBTQ+

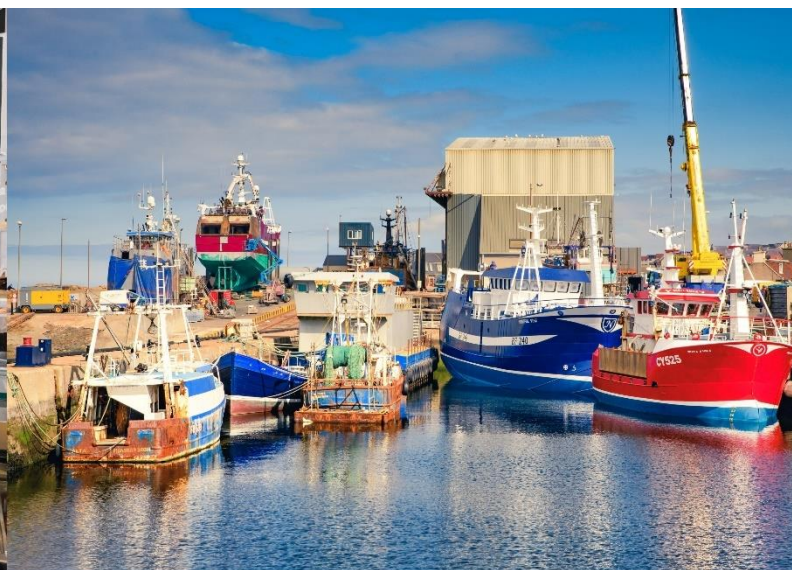
Acceptable umbrella terms are LGBT, LGBTQ or LGBTQ+ (the Q stands for queer or questioning). You should refer to it as “sexual orientation”, or just “orientation”.



When referring to a specific person, use the term (and pronouns) they are comfortable with – usually gay or lesbian, rather than homosexual – but this is up to the individual, so don't be afraid to ask.

NICE have compiled a useful list of terms for all demographics, including LGBTQ+: [Talking about people](#)

*\*By the way, the answer is yes...*



# Community engagement

---

Supporting your local community can take many forms. The goal is to make the area more attractive to visitors, while strengthening the local economy. You can achieve this by supporting local businesses, protecting and conserving the area's natural and cultural heritage, and providing job opportunities for local people.

Remember, you are part of the local community too. Other local businesses and organisations might be able to support you as well.

Here are some ways you can get involved:

**Sponsorship:** Is there a local festival or event you could sponsor?

**Partnerships:** Could you stock products from local artisans or producers in your shop? Or use locally sourced ingredients for your breakfast or dinner menu?

Working with local suppliers and artisans helps build stronger community connections and adds something special to what you offer. By featuring authentic, locally made products, you create a more unique and memorable experience for your visitors.

**Local recruitment:** Are there local schemes that help long-term unemployed people or recent school leavers find work? Could you recruit through these?

**Apprenticeships:** Could you offer training opportunities to local people and recent school leavers?

**Conservation charities:** How can you support conservation efforts in your area?

One approach is to connect with anchor organisations like Historic Environment Scotland or the National Trust for Scotland, to explore opportunities for involvement.

**Fundraising:** Are there local causes or charities you could help by fundraising or hosting events?

**Community business networking:** Can you connect with other local businesses to share ideas, resources, and opportunities?

Check if there is a local business network already or consider starting one for your local area if not. Building strong networks benefits everyone.

**Encouraging local visitors:** Sometimes locals don't think about visiting nearby attractions or staying at local accommodations. Could you offer a community discount or organise open days to welcome them?

One reason locals may not visit is the perception that your attraction or activity is too expensive. Could you offer taster experiences at a lower price, so that more people have the opportunity to experience it?



# Inclusive recruitment

---

Supporting the local community also means making your recruitment process more inclusive, giving everyone a fair chance to secure work. Here are some initiatives to consider:

## Inclusive recruitment – people with disabilities

The disability employment rate in the UK was just over 50% in 2022, and many employers feel they lack the confidence to employ disabled people.

There are several myths about hiring disabled people. For example, some believe it's expensive to hire employees with disabilities. While you might need to make some reasonable adjustments, many disabled people don't need them, and the average cost of a reasonable adjustment is less than £80.

Another common misconception is that disabled people are more likely to take time off work. In fact, some studies have shown that disabled employees are less likely to miss work.

Being an inclusive employer has many benefits and can open up more opportunities for your business.

### A few things to consider when recruiting:

- Review your job descriptions and requirements, and make sure they don't unnecessarily exclude anyone. For example, does this role really require a driver's licence?
- Use inclusive language in your job adverts, and mention that you encourage applications from people with protected characteristics.
- Keep the application process simple and straightforward.
- Make sure the interview venue is accessible, including being accessible by public transport.
- Provide constructive feedback after the interview.
- If the applicant is successful, discuss any support or adjustments they might need before their start date.

If you want to learn more about inclusive recruitment, or explore the support available to employers, the government offer a scheme called Access to Work: [Access to work guide for employers](#)

There is also the "Disability Confident" employer scheme, which can help your business recruit and support employees with disabilities: [Disability Confident](#)

Source: Disability Confident



## Inclusive recruitment – young carers

A recent Carers Trust survey showed that over 41% of young adult carers worry about their future job prospects. Young carers are less likely to go on to higher education or secure jobs, compared to others their age without caring responsibilities. Their education is often disrupted, which means they may miss out on qualifications.

However, their caring roles help young adult carers develop a wide range of skills and attributes that can be invaluable in the workplace. Constantly juggling schoolwork with their caring duties often turn young adult carers into natural multi-taskers, who know how to effectively prioritise tasks.

Carers Trust offer specialist support to young carers, in partnership with local organisations.

Read more about what they do here: [Young Carers Futures Hub](#)

## Inclusive recruitment – disadvantaged young people

Currently, 40,000 young people in Scotland struggle to succeed after leaving school and are unfairly disadvantaged by their circumstances. In 2019, a 10-year youth employment fund called Our Future Now (OFN), delivered by the charity “Inspiring Scotland”, was founded to support these young people.

Working with other charities, the fund supported almost 25,000 young people aged 14-25 in its first 5 years, with over 62% of those successfully securing an employability outcome, either of work, education, training, or volunteering.

Read more about OFN here: [Inspiring Scotland - Our Future Now](#)



# Checklists – inclusive tourism

---

## Introduction

We have summarised the suggested actions in three checklists for you.

The first one covers quick wins – actions that will only take a few minutes or involve a simple behavioural change. The second checklist includes actions that require a bit more effort and may involve some cost.

When you are ready for more, there is an advanced checklist with actions that may take longer, and could also involve an investment or external assistance.

You can track your progress too. We have included three columns of tick boxes so you can tick off what you have already done (completed), what you are currently implementing (in progress), and highlight the things you have left to implement (to do).

If you need support at any stage with your checklists and actions, contact the Tourism Development Team at VisitAberdeenshire who are there to help. Their email address is: [industry@visitabdn.com](mailto:industry@visitabdn.com)



# 1. QUICK WINS

Actions that will only take a few minutes or involve a behavioural change.

Action	Completed	In progress	To do	Read more here	Action plan if not completed
Do you ask visitors if they have access requirements when they book?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you include a name in confirmation emails to provide a contact for the visit / stay?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you offer pre-visits or provide a video tour of your venue?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you design and display signs with large text, high contrast, and simple language?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you manage noise levels, for example by avoiding playing loud music in the background?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you provide an email address on your website, as not everyone can fill out forms online?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you share your inclusivity message on social media?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you use alt text to describe images when you post on social media?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you capitalise each word in hashtags on social media?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you add captions to videos and provide transcripts for audio content you post on social media?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you use diverse images that represent different abilities, ages, and backgrounds on social media?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you involve your team in inclusivity efforts; do you ask them for ideas and feedback?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you use language that can be understood by the widest possible audience?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	





## 2. MEDIUM TERM

May require some more time and may involve a cost.

Action	Completed	In progress	To do	Read more here	Action plan, if not completed
Review your website and any other information source, to make sure you are honest about your accessibility.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Update your customer service training, giving your staff the confidence and skills they need to welcome everyone.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Train your team on assisting guests with disabilities and promoting inclusivity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Ensure your venue offers quiet areas or sensory-friendly spaces for those who need them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Consider colours and patterns in your venue.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Provide noise-cancelling headphones and sensory guides.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Provide assistive technology, for example hearing loops, braille menus, and audio guides.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Research and offer access information about the general area, not just your venue.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Review and update your website to highlight your access facilities and services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Review how accessible and inclusive your website is.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Explore accessibility software to improve your website accessibility if necessary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Make sure that your accessible bedrooms are available to book online, with images so people can see how they are laid out.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Add alt text to any images on your website.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Source diverse images that represent different abilities, ages, and backgrounds, and use them on your website and on social media.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Check with your booking system provider to see if their system is accessible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Offer alternative ways to book, such as by phone or email.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Provide brochures and information in large print, braille, or easy-read versions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Review your website and any printed materials, and make sure you use accessible designs (fonts, colours, and colour contrasts)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Use accessible format and structure for texts, making sure your content is easy to read and understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	



Use tools to check the readability and accessibility of texts on your website and promotional materials.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
If you used a web designer, check if they followed the web accessibility guidelines when they created your website.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
If not, perform a “basic accessibility check” to see if your website complies with the guidelines.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Look into sponsorship of local events.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Look for local partnerships with suppliers and artisans to support community initiatives.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Join community business networking groups to engage with local businesses and share best practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Help fundraise for local charities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Engage with local anchor organisations, such as NTS or Historic Environment Scotland.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Recruit locally and consider hiring people with disabilities, young carers, or people from disadvantaged backgrounds.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Review your recruitment process - job descriptions, application process, interview format, etc - to make sure it is inclusive and accessible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>



### 3. LONGER TERM

May require investment, external help, and commitment.

Action	Completed	In progress	To do	Read more here	Action plan if not completed
Create an accessibility guide, describing in detail your access facilities and services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Make your accessibility guide available on your website.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Engage with AccessAble to explore the services they provide.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Promote your accessibility guide on your website and social media.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Create an accessibility and inclusivity policy, and add to website and staff training.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Create an “access for all” page or section to your website to summarise what you offer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Review your access on-site, and make sure you provide access for wheelchairs and walking frames; ensure that ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms are available wherever possible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Invest in assistive technology to make your venue and services more accessible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Encourage local visitors, for example through a community discount or by organising open days.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Join local conservation or social initiatives to engage with the community and promote inclusive tourism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Support conservation charities through donations or fundraising efforts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Add closed captions to all video content on your website, and ensure transcripts are available for audio content.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Consider hiring a photographer to provide a diverse range of images, to be used in your promotional materials, on your website and on social media to reflect the inclusivity of your business.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Offer apprenticeships or training opportunities to local people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Measure your success and ask for feedback from your customers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Add your listing to Euan’s Guide.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Apply for inclusivity awards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Join Green Tourism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	



# Sustainable Tourism



Visit**Aberdeenshire**

# Introduction to sustainable tourism

---

## What is sustainability?

A simple definition is: “Sustainability is about meeting our needs today without harming the ability of future generations to meet theirs.”

In the context of Responsible Tourism, sustainability means using resources in a way that keeps the environment, communities, and economy in balance.

## What is sustainable tourism?

Sustainable tourism practices focus on protecting and improving the places and destinations tourists visit, so they remain attractive and welcoming for future visitors while also benefiting the people who live there now. This involves reducing harm to natural and cultural sites, helping local communities thrive, and making sure economic benefits are fairly distributed.

Under sustainable tourism we will cover circular economy, biodiversity, decarbonisation, energy efficiency, food waste, and adapting to climate change.

We have also included some information on how to create your own climate action plan, and some checklists to provide you with simple steps to take.

## Why should you be sustainable?

There are many benefits to being sustainable:

<b>Positive environmental impact</b>	Reducing carbon footprints and promoting biodiversity helps protect the region’s unique landscapes and wildlife.
<b>Better reputation and brand loyalty</b>	Sustainable practices can improve a business’s reputation, attract environmentally conscious visitors and build brand loyalty and repeat customers.
<b>Cost savings</b>	Using energy-efficient methods and reducing waste can lower operational costs.
<b>Increased competitiveness</b>	Offering sustainable tourism can help your business stand out in a competitive market, and appeal to a growing segment of environmentally conscious tourists.



<b>Customer demand and satisfaction</b>	Visitors are increasingly looking for authentic, responsible travel experiences, leading to higher customer satisfaction and repeat bookings.
<b>Marketing advantages</b>	Sustainable practices, as well as certifications and awards, can be used in marketing to attract specific market segments.
<b>Long-term success</b>	Sustainable practices help preserve natural and cultural resources, ensuring the long-term attractiveness of the region as a destination.
<b>Complying with regulations</b>	Adhering to sustainability guidelines can help businesses stay ahead of environmental regulations and avoid potential fines.
<b>Community support</b>	Engaging with and supporting local communities and suppliers can build strong relationships and make the overall visitor experience more unique and memorable.
<b>Support for local economies</b>	Sustainable tourism helps local economies by supporting local suppliers and creating jobs.
<b>Staff recruitment, satisfaction and retention</b>	A commitment to sustainability can improve staff morale and attract employees who value corporate responsibility.
<b>Resilience to market changes</b>	Sustainable businesses are often better equipped to adapt to changes in the market, such as shifts in consumer preferences or resource availability.
<b>Risk management</b>	By addressing climate change impacts, such as rising insurance costs and unpredictable weather, sustainable practices safeguard your business's long-term viability.



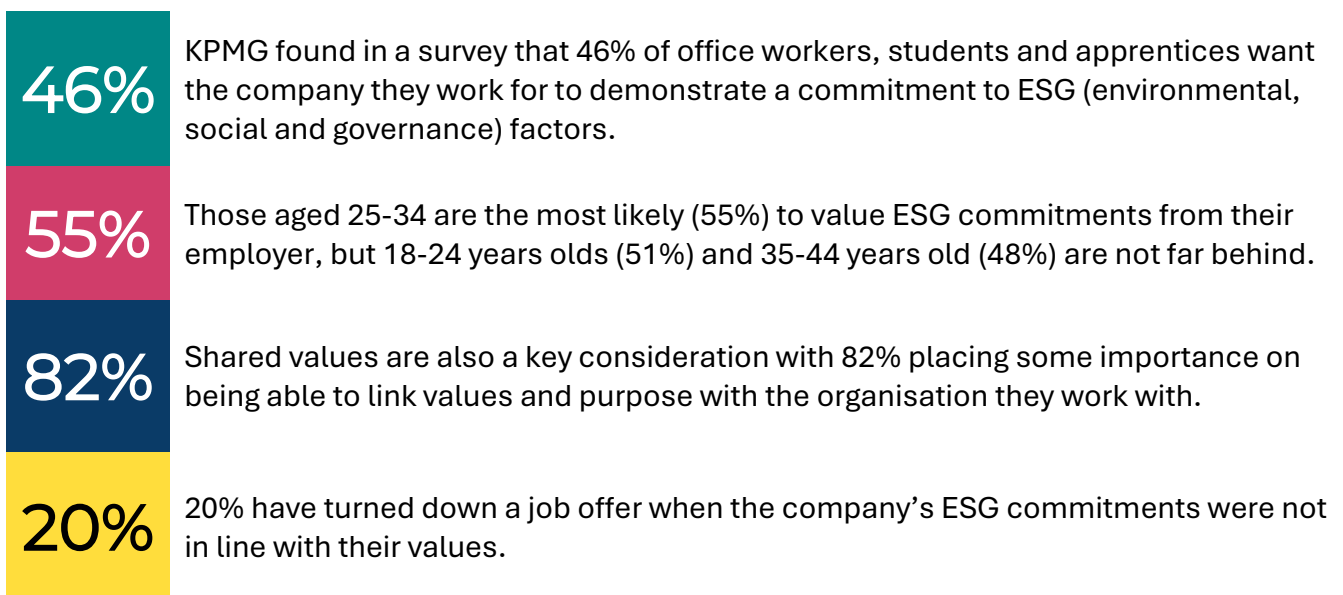
# Data and insights

## Sustainable travel choices:



Source: Booking.com Sustainable Travel Report 2021 and 2022 and ETAG presentation by Xavier Font

## Employee retention:



Source: [Climate quitting KPMG press release](#)



# Barriers, and how to overcome them

---

The most common reasons businesses haven't adopted sustainable business practices include:

- Lack of time
- Lack of technical skills
- Lack of support
- Lack of buy-in
- Lack of funding

The good news for SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) is that Business Energy Scotland offer solutions to all these barriers.

They offer free training sessions and provide advisors to support you, even technical specialists if needed. They can help you put a business case in place, and there is also funding support available, for example interest free loans.

Read more about what Business Energy Scotland offer here: [Resources - Business Energy Scotland](#)

Source: [Business Energy Scotland](#)





# Circular economy

## What is circular economy?

A circular economy is about reducing waste and keeping resources in use for as long as possible by reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and recycling materials and products. Unlike the traditional 'take, make, dispose' model (referred to as linear economy), a circular economy focuses on making the most out of what we have.



Recycle,  
reduce  
and  
reuse

In tourism and hospitality, this means designing services, products and operations that cut down on waste, using resources efficiently and extending the life of materials.

By adopting circular economy principles, tourism businesses can reduce their environmental impact, improve efficiency, and help make the region a more sustainable and resilient destination.

## What can you do?

Following circular economy principles could include initiatives like:

- Reduce single-use plastics, for example by offering water refill stations to your visitors instead of selling bottled water.
- Encourage recycling and composting, for example by providing clearly marked recycling bins for visitors, and composting food waste from your kitchen.
- Source goods and services sustainably, for example by choosing suppliers that prioritise ethical and sustainable business practices and follow circular economy principles like recycling.
- Shop locally - buy from local companies as much as possible, to reduce your carbon footprint (and boost the local economy).
- Repurpose materials, for example by refurbishing and upcycling old furniture, to use in your business.
- Minimise printing, by using online tools to electronically send and sign documents (such as contracts), issue tickets, and send communications.
- Encourage your customers not to print their tickets or booking confirmations.
- Offer digital brochures, reducing paper use and waste.

## Resources

There are several recycling centres in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, you can find them here:

[Recycling](#)

While recycling is important, it's just as important to reduce the amount we waste and reusing what we already have. Reusing materials has many benefits – not only does it cut down on what we produce, it also reduces emissions, saves energy, and lowers cost.

Aberdeen City offers a helpful guide to “ReUse” facilities in Aberdeen, showing locations of charity shops, clothes banks and other places that can help you reuse items: [ReUse](#)



# Reducing food waste

---

Part of circular economy is about reducing waste, and this is especially important when it comes to food waste.

## What is food waste?

A simple definition of food waste is when “food that could have been eaten gets thrown away”.

This waste can happen at any stage, from farms to kitchens, and could be leftover meals, spoiled fruits and vegetables, and unused ingredients.

In Scotland’s hospitality sector, one out of every six meals served is discarded – that is a staggering 106 million meals wasted every year (source: Zero Waste Scotland). Not only is this costing businesses money, but it also has a significant impact on the environment and society.

## What can you do?

Tourism and hospitality businesses can take practical steps to prevent and reduce food waste, such as:

- Plan meals more carefully.
- Store food properly.
- Track inventory and monitor food stocks to avoid over-ordering.
- Give guests the option of smaller portion sizes.
- Get creative with leftovers.
- Use more seasonal and local ingredients.
- Encourage customers to take home their leftovers, by providing containers.
- Share tips with guests on how they can help reduce food waste.

## Resources

For even more tips, **Zero Waste Scotland** offer a comprehensive online guide on reducing food waste in the hospitality and food sector: [Zero Waste Scotland Hospitality and Food Service](#)

You can also train your staff on best practices, and Zero Waste Scotland offer free, bite-sized online training on food waste: [Bitesize Food Waste Course](#)

But you can’t always avoid waste completely, so you may want to consider setting up a scheme to compost food scraps, as well as donating excess food to local charities or foodbanks.

Here is a list of a few solutions to avoid food from going to waste:



## Too Good To Go

Consider signing up to “Too Good To Go”, an app that connects businesses with customers to sell surplus food at a reduced price.

Hotels, restaurants, cafes, and even food stores can sign up and offer Surprise Bags containing leftover food, for users to come and collect at a predetermined time. For example, many hotels sell breakfast bags with leftover buffet items, instead of throwing the food away.

Read more here: [Too Good to Go](#)

## Foodbanks

There are local foodbanks throughout Aberdeenshire, for example in Ellon, Inverurie, Banchory, Fraserburgh, and multiple locations throughout the city of Aberdeen that welcome donations. Each foodbank may have specific requirements, so it’s worth reaching out to see how you can support them.

Here is a list of a few of the foodbanks in the region:

- [Aberdeenshire North Foodbank](#)
- [Aberdeenshire South Foodbank](#)
- [Aberdeen North Foodbank](#)
- [List of foodbanks in Aberdeen](#)

## BankTheFood app

One way to check what your local foodbank needs in real time, is to download the BankTheFood app. This free app, run by a registered charity, allows foodbanks to post their current requirements.

As a user, you can download the app and check it, for example while shopping, to see what items your local foodbank needs and choose what you would like to donate. Simply leave your donation in your food bank’s donation box at the end of your shopping trip. The app will notify the foodbank of your (anonymous) gift, so they can locate items they really need.

This app could also be used by businesses, to check if any of their surplus food matches the needs of local foodbanks.

Read more here: [BankTheFood website](#)



# Decarbonisation and resource efficiency

## What is decarbonisation?

Decarbonisation means reducing the carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions caused by human activities, particularly those linked to energy use.

For tourism businesses, this means adopting strategies and technologies to lower the carbon footprint of your operations.

Actions you can take include:

- Switching to renewable energy sources.
- Improving energy efficiency.
- Promoting sustainable transport options.
- Encouraging behaviours that lower overall greenhouse gas emissions.

By committing to decarbonisation, tourism businesses in North-east Scotland can help combat climate change and build a more sustainable, environmentally friendly industry in the region.

## What can you do?

We recommend making decarbonisation a key objective of your climate action plan - see "[Developing a climate action plan](#)" below for more details.

Some of the specific decarbonisation actions include:

1. **Measure your carbon emissions:** Understand how much CO<sub>2</sub> your business is currently producing.
2. **Identify reduction strategies:** Find practical ways to cut emissions and improve energy efficiency.
3. **Switch to renewable energy:** Check that your energy provider offers 100% renewable energy, or switch to a green tariff.
4. **Monitor and set goals:** Track your carbon emissions and set realistic targets for reducing emissions.

Source: VisitScotland and Business Energy Scotland



# Energy efficiency

---

## What is energy efficiency?

A simple definition of energy efficiency is to use less energy to perform the same task or produce the same outcome.

This involves adopting practices and technologies that reduce energy consumption, such as using LED lighting, energy-efficient appliances, and improving insulation.

For tourism businesses, energy efficiency not only lowers operating costs, but also reduces the environmental impact, making your business more sustainable.

Examples of energy efficient practices:

- Air source heat pump (air to air, or air to water)
- LED lighting
- Solar panels
- Insulation
- Biomass systems

## Renewable energy in Scotland

The Scottish Government has set ambitious targets, aiming to generate 50% of Scotland's energy consumption from renewable sources by 2030, and achieve net-zero emissions by 2045.

We are fortunate to live here, as Scotland is playing a leading role in the global shift towards renewable energy, investing in solar, wind, and hydro power.

In 2022, renewable technologies generated the equivalent of 113% of Scotland's electricity consumption – the highest figure ever recorded, and a 26% rise compared to 2021.

The government's commitment to renewable energy is backed by a range of initiatives and incentives, including Renewable Energy Investment grants and energy efficiency programmes for both homes and businesses.

Source: Scottish Government

## What can you do?

- **Switch off the lights when you leave the room.**
- **Install motion sensors for lighting.**
- **Turn the heating settings down.**
- **Explore other ways of being more energy efficient, like improving insulation, installing heat pumps, solar panels, or biomass systems.**
- **Review different government initiatives and schemes.**



# Sustainable transport

---

Transport, as a sector, is the largest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, accounting for 26% of the UK's total emissions in 2021.

This means that an important part of your decarbonisation and energy efficiency efforts is to try to use more sustainable transport options.

Source: gov.uk

## What can you do?

There are a lot of simple steps you can take, for example:

- Track business travel, and aim to reduce emissions.
- Choose local transport instead of driving where possible.
- Introduce cycle to work schemes – see [Resources - Bike2Work](#) for more information.
- Choose trains over planes where feasible.
- Consider investing in electric vehicles.
- Share information about local EV charging points with your visitors.
- Encourage your suppliers and visitors to make responsible travel choices.

## Summary – decarbonisation and resource efficiency

In all aspects of decarbonisation, the same principles apply – review what you already do, track and monitor consumption, and find ways to reduce emissions.

Additionally, it's important to try to influence your customers and suppliers to make responsible choices, and to communicate your climate actions clearly.



# Biodiversity

---

## What is biodiversity?

Biodiversity, short for “biological diversity”, refers to the variety of all living things on Earth.

It includes different species, the differences within those species, the various environments they live in, and the ecosystems they form.

Understanding biodiversity is important in Responsible Tourism because tourism can have a significant impact on natural habitats and wildlife.

Tourism businesses can play a key role in protecting biodiversity, ensuring that ecosystems remain healthy and resilient. This also supports sustainable tourism and brings long-term benefits to local communities and economies.

## Biodiversity in North-east Scotland

North-east Scotland is home to a rich and diverse variety of wildlife and natural landscapes that are worth protecting. From our woodlands to our beaches, and the animals and insects that inhabit them, every part of our environment contributes to the region’s unique biodiversity and attractiveness as a destination:

- Rivers, lochs, and coastal waters
- Ancient woodlands and forests
- Wildlife, from red squirrels to deer
- Insects, including bees and butterflies
- Sandy beaches and rocky shores

## What can you do?

As a tourism business, there are several ways you can help protect and even enhance local biodiversity:

<b>Minimise your impact</b>	Ensure your activities don’t harm local ecosystems. Be mindful of where and how your business operates.
<b>Support conservation efforts</b>	Partner with local conservation projects or donate to environmental causes. Or encourage your visitors to support local environmental projects.
<b>Reduce pollution and manage waste</b>	Proper waste disposal and reducing single-use plastics are simple ways to cut down on pollution. Encourage guests to use reusable water bottles, bags, and containers to cut down on waste.



<b>Educate visitors</b>	Share information with your guests about the importance of biodiversity and how they can help protect it.
<b>Conserve water and energy</b>	Use resources efficiently and encourage your guests to do the same.
<b>Practice wildlife-friendly tourism</b>	Avoid disturbing wildlife and support initiatives that protect habitats.
<b>Promote sustainable transport</b>	Encourage visitors to use public transport, cycle, or walk to reduce their carbon footprint.
<b>Source locally</b>	Offer locally sourced, sustainable food options to reduce your carbon footprint and support local farmers and fishermen.
<b>Plant native species</b>	Use native plants in your landscaping to support local wildlife and improve habitat diversity.
<b>Reduce light pollution</b>	Install outdoor lighting that minimises disruption to nocturnal wildlife and preserves natural night skies.





# Adapting to climate change

---

## What is climate change?

Climate change refers to long-term changes in temperatures and weather patterns.

While some of these changes are natural, human activities like burning fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas) have sped them up, leading to global warming, melting ice caps, rising sea levels, and more extreme weather.

In the North-east, we have already seen the impact with recent floods and storms disrupting lives and businesses. These weather events are expected to become more frequent and intense over the coming years.

## Climate trends in Scotland

According to Adaptation Scotland, the long-term trends we can expect in Scotland are:

- More variable and unpredictable weather
- Hotter, drier summers
- Milder, wetter autumns and winters
- Rising sea levels

Additionally, we may also face:

- More summer heat waves, extreme temperatures and droughts
- Increased heavy rainfall and flooding
- Less frost and snowfall

Source: Adaptation Scotland

## How climate change could impact tourism in North-east Scotland

### Changing visitor patterns

Unpredictable weather (more frequent storms, unpredictable rainfall, warmer winters etc) could discourage visitors, particularly those looking for outdoor activities.

The traditional tourist season could shift if the weather pattern changes. Peak periods may shorten, leading to reduced visitor numbers. Visitors may also start choosing destinations with more stable climates, which could affect the local tourism economy.

### Rising sea levels

Rising sea levels, combined with stronger storms, could cause coastal erosion and increase the risk of flooding along the coast and rivers.

This could damage attractions, historic sites, and infrastructure in these areas, leading to expensive measures to protect and repair these sites.

It may potentially reduce the appeal of coastal tourism as well.



## Unpredictable weather

Extreme weather events could damage properties, but also disrupt transport routes which could affect not just visitor access, but also deliveries.

This could cause business interruptions, and additional costs for repairs and insurance.

It could also affect the availability and cost of supplies.

## Impact on natural landscapes and loss of biodiversity

North-east Scotland's iconic landscapes could be affected by changing weather patterns and climate change could also disrupt local ecosystems.

This could lead to the loss of wildlife and plant species, which could affect nature based tourism and the overall appeal of the region.

## Impact on food and drink production

Changes in climate may affect food and drink production, raising costs for businesses that serve food and drink or offer them as part of the experience.



## Water scarcity

Warmer temperatures and changing rainfall patterns could lead to water shortages, which would increase utility costs.

Water restrictions may limit services and affect attractions such as gardens, which could impact the visitor experience.

## What can you do?

However, it's not all doom and gloom. There are still proactive steps businesses can take to prevent and adapt to the impacts of climate change:

### 1) Assess your risks

Evaluate how climate change could impact your business, using tools like Adaptation Scotland's risk assessment guide. Link: [Adaptation Scotland](#)

Collaborate with your local community and government agencies to assess and manage risks for your area.

### 2) Build resilience

Develop attractions or experiences that are less reliant on weather. A few examples could be indoor activities, cultural events, and culinary tourism.

Encourage tourists to visit the area in off-peak seasons with special offers or unique experiences.

Raise awareness about the impacts of climate change and the importance of sustainability among your team and guests.



### 3) Strengthen infrastructure

Invest in flood defences and improve drainage to protect properties from flooding.

Switch to renewable energy, cut waste and encourage sustainable practices.

Ensure your buildings, roads, and other infrastructure can handle extreme weather, such as stronger winds and heavier rainfall.

### 4) Protect nature

Get involved in local conservation projects to protect landscapes and biodiversity.

### 5) Develop a climate action plan

This all leads us neatly onto our next chapter – develop a climate action plan for your business.



# Developing a climate action plan

---

Developing a climate action plan is a great step towards making your tourism business more sustainable and adaptable. It doesn't need to be overly detailed at the start - just getting something in place is what matters.

A climate action plan will provide you and your team with a roadmap, so you know what you want to achieve, and the steps to take to get there.

Both VisitScotland and Business Energy Scotland offer templates to help you get started.

## VisitScotland

VisitScotland have provided a list of suggested actions:

- Conduct an energy audit.
- Switch to a green energy tariff or supplier.
- Adopt more sustainable business travel.
- Encourage Responsible Tourism practices.
- Increase your recycling.
- Phase out single-use items.

Find more detailed information, including useful links and templates, here: [Climate Impact Guide](#)

## Business Energy Scotland

If this all seems overwhelming, Business Energy Scotland also offer support and funding options, and you can read more about the resources they offer here: [Resources – Business Energy Scotland](#)

## Involve your team

We would recommend that you involve your team by asking for their ideas and input. Everyone can contribute to making your business greener, and getting involved from the start will ensure buy-in from your team.

## Quick actions to take

If you don't know where to start, some quick actions to take is to “turn it down or reduce”.

This means lowering the settings on your heating, hot water and appliances, and switching the lights off when not needed.



## Longer-term actions to consider

Longer term, you may want to consider installing and using heating, boiler, and lighting controls to avoid wasting energy.

You may also want to invest in draught-proofing and insulation to reduce heat loss, and explore renewable energy options like heat pumps, solar panels, or biomass systems.

We would also recommend that you share your actions with your customers; consider creating a Responsible Tourism or sustainability policy document, and share online. You may even want to add a dedicated Responsible Tourism page to your website.

And once you have a climate action plan and a sustainability policy, consider joining Green Tourism, read more here: [Next Steps – Green Tourism](#)

But for now – start by putting an achievable plan in place. Simple steps can make a big difference.



# Checklists – sustainable tourism

---

## Introduction

We have summarised the suggested actions in three checklists for you.

The first one covers quick wins – actions that will only take a few minutes or involve a simple behavioural change. The second checklist includes actions that require a bit more effort and may involve some cost.

When you are ready for more, there is an advanced checklist with actions that may take longer, and could also involve an investment or external assistance.

You can track your progress too. We have included three columns of tick boxes so you can tick off what you have already done (completed), what you are currently implementing (in progress), and highlight the things you have left to implement (to do).

If you need support at any stage with your checklists and actions, contact the Tourism Development Team at VisitAberdeenshire who are there to help. Their email address is: [industry@visitabdn.com](mailto:industry@visitabdn.com)



# 1. QUICK WINS

Actions that will only take a few minutes or involve a behavioural change.

Action	Completed	In progress	To do	Read more here	Action plan if not completed
Are you encouraging recycling by providing clearly marked recycling bins for visitors and staff?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Are you reducing waste in daily operations, for example by reducing single-use plastics?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Have you looked up your nearest recycling or ReUse facilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you switch off lights when not needed, and when rooms are unoccupied?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you lower the settings on heating, hot water and other appliances when possible?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you encourage customers not to print tickets or booking confirmations, and do you accept e-tickets?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you plan meals carefully to reduce waste?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you store food properly to extend its shelf life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you get creative with leftovers to reduce waste?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you encourage guests to take home leftovers by providing containers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you share tips with guests on how they can help reduce food waste?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you promote sustainable modes of transport for visitors to get to your area, such as trains?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you encourage visitors and staff to use public transport, cycle, or walk when they are in your area, to reduce their carbon footprint?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you use native plants in your landscaping to support local wildlife?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Do you involve your team in sustainability efforts, do you ask them for ideas and feedback?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	



## 2. MEDIUM TERM

May require some more time and may involve a cost.

Action	Completed	In progress	To do	Read more here	Action plan, if not completed
Engage with Business Energy Scotland to explore the free advice and support they offer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Offer locally sourced, sustainable food options to reduce your carbon footprint and support local farmers and fishermen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Set up compost bins for kitchen waste.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Track inventory and monitor food stocks to avoid over-ordering.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Use more seasonal and local ingredients in your food offerings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Give guests the option of smaller portion sizes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Consider joining “Too Good To Go” to reduce food waste.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Explore how you can support local food banks.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Consider using the BankTheFood app.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Buy locally sourced products from local companies to support local community and cut down on transport emissions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Research your suppliers’ business practices, to make sure you source goods and services sustainably.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Offer refill water bottle stations to visitors.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Reuse materials – refurbish and recycle – for example by buying second-hand furniture and refurbished equipment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Donate or sell items you no longer need instead of throwing them away.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Minimise printing by using online tools to electronically send and sign documents (such as contracts), issue tickets, and send communications.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Create and offer digital brochures to reduce paper use.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Check that your energy provider offers 100% renewable energy, or switch to a green tariff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Install motion sensors for lighting to improve energy efficiency.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	





Explore other ways of being more energy efficient, such as improving insulation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Research and share information about local EV charging points with your visitors.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Introduce cycle-to-work schemes, for example Bike2Work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Promote low season travel with special offers or unique experiences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Partner with local conservation projects or donate to environmental causes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Share information with guests about the importance of biodiversity and how they can help protect it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Conserve water and energy, and encourage your guests to do the same.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Avoid disturbing wildlife and support initiatives that protect habitats.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Install outdoor lighting that minimises disruption to nocturnal wildlife and preserves natural night skies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Collaborate with your local community and government agencies to assess and manage climate change risks for your area.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Measure and track your carbon emissions, and set realistic targets for reducing emissions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Track business travel and aim to reduce emissions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Where feasible, choose travelling by train over planes, and using public transport instead of driving.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>
Ask for ideas, not just from staff, but also from customers and suppliers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>



### 3. LONGER TERM

May require investment, external help, and commitment.

	Completed	In progress	To do	Read more here	Action plan if not completed
Develop a climate action plan for your business; identify and prioritise actions, and measure progress.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Create policy documents on sustainability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Create a Responsible Tourism page on your website.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Evaluate how climate change could impact your business, using tools like Adaptation Scotland's risk assessment guide.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Ensure your buildings, roads, and other infrastructure can handle extreme weather, such as stronger winds and heavier rainfall.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Invest in flood defences and improve drainage to protect properties from flooding.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Explore renewable energy options like heat pumps, solar panels, or biomass systems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Install and use heating, boiler, and lighting controls to avoid wasting energy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Consider investing in electric vehicles.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Invest in draught-proofing and insulation to reduce heat loss.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Develop attractions or experiences that are less reliant on weather.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Get involved in local conservation projects to protect landscapes and biodiversity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Raise awareness about the impacts of climate change and the importance of sustainability among your team and guests.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Apply for sustainability awards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	
Join Green Tourism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Link here</a>	



# Telling your story



Visit**Aberdeenshire**

# Telling your Responsible Tourism story

---

## Why is it important to tell your Responsible Tourism story?

Telling your Responsible Tourism story is not just about showing that you care about sustainability and inclusivity, it's also a great way to connect with your customers.

Visitors to North-east Scotland are increasingly looking for experiences that are authentic and genuine, and showing that you are respectful of the environment and local communities will make you stand out from the crowd.

This approach can also help extend the seasonality of your business and increase customer spending. Plus, when customers see the positive impact of their choices, they're more likely to spread the word and keep coming back.

### Business benefits from marketing your Responsible Tourism story include:

- Improve your service
- Increase customer spending
- Improve customer satisfaction
- Increase loyalty and repeat bookings
- Extend booking season

However, telling your responsible tourism story can sometimes be challenging.

Many businesses struggle to find the balance between greenwashing and greenhushing. They worry about making claims they can't provide evidence of (greenwashing), which means that most companies don't share their efforts (greenhushing), out of fear of consumer backlash. In fact, 70% of sustainability actions are **not** communicated.

Sharing your story is important, so here are some tips on how to strike the right balance:

## Know your audience

To tell your story effectively, start by identifying your audience.

There are usually two types of audiences: your customers and other stakeholders, such as potential employees, suppliers, or destination authorities.

### Stakeholders:

#### Potential employees

They will check your website and social media for evidence of your commitment to sustainability. Having a Responsible Tourism policy on your website is a good start. Also, highlight practical examples, like promoting public transport or cycling to work schemes on your website, social media, and in job adverts.



## Destination authorities (for example VisitAberdeenshire and VisitScotland)

These organisations will look for your commitment to VisitScotland's 4 pillars (see [Introduction](#)). If you are applying for awards or certifications, showcasing your responsible tourism efforts on your website and social media can be used as evidence as part of the application process.

## Suppliers

They are more likely to stay loyal if you share their story and show appreciation for them on your website and on social media.

## Customers:

Your customers can be split into two types:

- **B2C** – these are your direct customers
- **B2B** – these include third parties that book on behalf of the end-consumer. They are often referred to as the travel trade (e.g. tour operators, travel agents, DMCs, online travel agents).

B2B customers are increasingly looking to work with suppliers that have a Responsible Tourism policy and may ask for this information before booking your services. Having your policy clearly displayed on your website, along with any accreditations and awards, will make it easier for them to choose you to work with.

## How do you reach your customers?

- **Share your Responsible Tourism story across all channels.**
- **Provide clear, engaging information at all stages of the visitor journey.**
- **Use certifications to provide credible evidence of your commitment and to build consumer confidence (read more here: [Next Steps](#)).**
- **Make it easier for customers to live their values, even on holiday.**

## Visitor journey – all stages

To communicate effectively, you need to provide clear and engaging information at every stage of the visitor journey, across all available channels. This includes (with some examples of actions):

### Before the visit:

- Website – display your responsible tourism policy, blog about your initiatives.
- Social media – post about your sustainability and inclusivity initiatives.
- Confirmation emails – include useful information such as public transport options and links to your accessibility guide.
- Awards, accreditations – mention them on your website and social media, be proud of them.
- Reviews – share positive reviews that highlight your responsible practices.



## During the visit

- Menus – tell the story behind your food and drink, especially if locally sourced, and showcase your suppliers on the menu.
- Guides and instructions – include your responsible tourism messaging in any guide books or instructions you share with customers.
- Awards – display them on site.
- Plan the flow of the visit – visitors often remember the best moment and the last moment of a visit. What does the last moment look like when they visit you? How can you make their final experience positive (e.g. don't collect payment at the end of the experience.)

## After the visit

- Thank you emails – make them feel good about their visit or stay afterwards. For example, say “by booking with us, you have contributed to...” and mention your sustainability efforts in your follow up email.
- Reviews – share positive reviews by people who have visited / stayed with you.
- Social media – reshare posts from your customers, make them feel valued and seen.

## Language

One of the most common challenges when it comes to talking about responsible tourism is around language – how do you tell your sustainability and inclusivity story without sounding preachy, or making people feel guilty?

## Sustainability

People love the idea of sustainability, but few people change their behaviour. As mentioned in our [data insights](#) previously, 78% of people intend to stay in sustainable accommodation, but only 46% actually do.

The word “sustainable” can sometimes carry negative connotations and be seen as a risky option. Some people associate “sustainable” with more expensive, lower quality offerings, and inconvenience.

While people are willing to pay more for quality, convenience and location, they may not be willing to pay extra for sustainability alone. Your sustainability commitment should complement those aspects, not compete with them.

Instead of focusing solely on saving the planet, which makes some people feel guilty, frame your sustainability efforts in a way that highlights benefits to the customer, like comfort or quality. You don't want to put them off travelling.

Different nationalities may also have varying levels of interest in sustainability. For example, customers from Germany and Scandinavia might be more engaged, while those from the USA and China might have less interest.

So, sustainability may not be what attracts customers initially, but it may be something that turns them into repeat customers, if you tell your story in the right way.

Use words like genuine, caring, authentic, quality, local, rather than “sustainable”.



For instance, if you are a distillery, you might talk about how your gin is made with love and care on social media and on your website, then mention your sustainability practices during the guided tour.

## Inclusivity

Telling your inclusivity story can sometimes feel like a box ticking exercise, and some businesses worry about appearing overly politically correct.

For example, many companies post about their LGBTQ+ commitment during Pride Month, but then neglect to mention it for the rest of the year.

To avoid this, make inclusivity a natural part of your storytelling. Feature a wide range of team members and visitors on social media, show (don't just tell) your accessibility features, mention staff training, and show your support for all aspects of the local community, including underrepresented groups.

Use welcoming language and the accepted terminology (read more here: [Inclusive language](#)).

## Images

Using the right images is very important, as the right image can tell a whole story at a glance and resonate with your audience on an emotional level.

A well-chosen image can capture the essence of your Responsible Tourism story, making it even more impactful.

A few things to consider when selecting images:

- Showcase all seasons – it's tempting to use only sunny, summer images, but it's important to show your destination throughout the year. Highlight the beauty of each season, like a crisp winter morning or a colourful autumn day. This helps visitors see that your business has something special to offer, no matter the time of year.
- Be inclusive - make sure your images reflect the diversity of your visitors and the inclusive values of your business. Show people of different ages, backgrounds, and abilities, as well as same-sex couples. This helps everyone feel welcome and valued when they see themselves in your photos.
- People find it difficult to visualise sustainability – a sustainable bedroom or lightbulb looks very much like a non-sustainable version. However, there are other ways to show your sustainability story – photos of local products, natural scenery, and activity days can also tell a story.
- Highlight quality – there is a misconception that sustainability means lower quality, so use images to show that you are not compromising on the quality of your products or services.
- Be honest - it's important to be authentic and honest with your images. Make sure they give an accurate view of what visitors can expect.



## Break it down – what are you doing already?

You may already be doing a lot of things that you haven't considered as "telling a story" – review what you already do, and weave it into your story. A few examples could be:

### Local supply chains

For example, if you are an accommodation provider using locally sourced eggs for breakfast, mention it on your menu, maybe even include the name and a photo of the supplier. Feature them on your website under "meet our suppliers" and include a photo to make it personal.

### Retail

Is there a story there? For example, Craigievar Castle recently underwent a renovation project to make it "Pink Again". They now collaborate with a local gin distillery (Lost Loch Distillery in Aboyne) to sell a Pink Castle Gin in their gift shop. This is an example of a great story to share.

### Your team

Do they have a story to tell? Get your team involved and share their ideas and stories on social media.



## Create a social media plan

Social media is something that a lot of people find challenging. It's time consuming and it can be discouraging when a post you have spent a lot of time on doesn't get a lot of engagement.

Social media is not an exact science, so experiment to see what works best for you. If you are short on time, set aside an hour at the start of each month to plan a few posts. This will give you a solid foundation for your posting, and you can then be reactive throughout the month.

Test different times and days to find when you get the most engagement. If something works, repeat it.

You can feature recurring themes, for example, post about a local supplier once a month, or share different sustainability initiatives a couple of times a month. Mix these posts up with other content, so you don't become solely a sustainability account.

Returning to the accommodation provider example above; if you use locally sourced eggs, post on social media about your eggs and the supplier. If someone has posted a positive review about your breakfast, use that as an opportunity to mention that the eggs are locally sourced. That's two posts already.





## How to communicate with your customers

As mentioned above, it's important to communicate in a way that doesn't make your visitors feel guilty or uncomfortable. You want them to engage with your story, in a positive way, that makes them feel good. Here are some tips:

**Be humorous** – avoid doom and gloom, make it fun. It is easier to change someone's behaviour if you share a joke than if you make them feel forced to do it against their will. However, keep in mind that humour doesn't always translate well.

**Be personal** - make yourself relatable. Write in the first person and include a photo of the owner or manager on your website. Introduce your team to your followers (and potential customers) on social media.

**Be trustworthy** - make them trust you and show empathy. Providing evidence of your claims is essential, and one way of doing that is to get other people to say it for you (testimonials, meet our suppliers, awards, certificates etc).

**Make your audience feel involved** - making them the protagonists and enhancing the experience increases the willingness to pay. For example, someone would pay more for a garden experience where they pick their own food and then enjoy it for dinner, rather than just a standard garden tour.

**Make them feel good** – use your menu descriptions, provenance statements and cross-selling opportunities to show that you care. Share the pride of making a difference together.

**Make your audience feel special** – for example, post an appreciation post about a supplier, or share a success story, thanking your customers for contributing to it. Unique service and sense of exclusivity increase willingness to pay. You may want to consider offering specific products only for loyal visitors.

**Be engaging** - show your audience that you share their values, whether it's ethical practices, social values, or being a good employer. Make them feel like they are helping you personally, as well as the environment.

**Make it easy for them** – remove the stress and responsibility from customers when it comes to making sustainable choices. Offer sustainable products as the default option and provide evidence to back up these choices. This should be part of your customer service.

**Guilt alleviation** – instead of making customers feel guilty about not doing enough, show them that they are contributing by booking you. The message “don't worry, we will look after it”, will make them feel good about booking you.

**Help them take decisions** - present information that is useful at that point in time. Make it convenient and straightforward, so it becomes the normal choice:

1. Before booking or purchase
2. After booking and confirmation
3. On arrival or start of the tour
4. During the tour or stay
5. After the stay or visit



**Behaviour that is already accepted** – for example, instead of asking guests to “save the planet” by reusing their towels, why not say: “reuse your towel, just like at home”. This simple change makes the sustainable choice feel more natural to the guests.

**Focus on “what’s in it for me”** - instead of focusing on “what’s in it for the planet”, tell customers what’s in it for them and how they benefit. For example, if you have invested in better insulation, mention how cosy it makes their rooms, while also being energy efficient.

**Make it tangible** – after purchase or booking, reinforce their perception of having made the right choice by letting them know how their visit also helps sustainability, in addition to a great experience. “By booking with us, you have contributed to...”

**Tell your story compellingly** – make sure it’s relevant to your audience and that it is what they want to hear, not just what you want to say. Adapt it to your audience’s knowledge, or lack thereof. Find the universal elements of your story, that anyone can relate to.

**Ask nicely** - when designing your sustainability communications, using your logo and adding personal touches to signs produces better results with your customers. Avoid generic phrases like “be eco-friendly”, which could be read as an order.

**Make all seasons appealing** – show that your offer is attractive year-round. Weatherproof your offer - tell them what to do when there are midges, it rains, or it’s too hot. Add a calendar to your website to highlight the best features at your venue each month. This is also great content for social media, such as:

- Which birds and flowers can they expect to see?
- Are there any festivals or events happening?
- What seasonal food will you be serving?
- What will your garden look like?
- Use photos from that time of year.

**Give them reasons to recommend or return** – attracting new customers is more costly and complex, so value your repeat visitors.

## Build and share knowledge

It is also important to continuously improve your and your team’s knowledge.

Get your team involved in your Responsible Tourism journey and storytelling, both onsite and on social media. Encourage staff engagement by asking for ideas and suggestions. Learn from each other and make sure every new member of staff is familiar with your values.

Learn from other tourism businesses in the region as well as your suppliers. Look at their social media and websites, what are they doing well?

Look for partnerships and collaborations – are there other businesses you can collaborate with in the area, who can help you tell your story?

Create a sustainability policy / statement and make sure it's available both externally (website) and internally (induction, training manuals). Some tour operators may require sustainability policies to book your services, so it's beneficial to have one for many reasons.



Provide an accessibility guide and ensure it's available on your website, and that your team are all aware of its content.

## VisitAberdeenshire

If you implement these suggestions, let VisitAberdeenshire know so they can share your story in presentations and with buyers. Tag VisitAberdeenshire in your social media posts, using their handle and hashtags:

@visitabdn  
#VisitABDN  
#BeautifulABDN  
#Aberdeenshire

## Be part of our promotions

VisitAberdeenshire work with a PR consultancy to help pitch potential stories and items of interest about the region to travel journalists and specialist titles, and we are always on the lookout for positive stories to share.

If you have a good news story or would like to share any new developments to enhance your sustainability or inclusivity, please feel free to share it by emailing: [industry@visitabdn.com](mailto:industry@visitabdn.com)

Businesses can also be featured and promoted to our engaged audiences through a range of paid-for advertising opportunities including advertorials, social media and e-newsletters.

Our paid-for advertising opportunities are an additional offering to our day-to-day free promotional activities such as website listings.

Find out more using this link: [Advertising Opportunities](#)

## Case study

For some good examples of how to communicate your sustainability story, see “[Case Study – The Bay](#)”.

Sources: ETAG conference with Professor Xavier Font, National Trust for Scotland



# Resources



Visit**Aberdeenshire**

# Resources (A-Z)

---

This is a list of the resources and organisations we have mentioned throughout the Toolkit, in alphabetical order.

## AccessAble

AccessAble is a website and app that provide detailed Access Guides for venues across Britain and Ireland, covering attractions, hotels, restaurants, shops and more. Each venue is assessed on a video call or surveyed in person by an auditor, and the access guides are available for free on their website and app, which was used by more than 1.8 million people in 2018.



Read more here: [AccessAble website](#)

They have joined forces with VisitScotland to provide an access guide service for tourism businesses in Scotland. You can learn more about this collaboration, including guideline rates for this service here: [VisitScotland Enhancing Information Provision](#)

They also offer AccessAble Consultancy, a service for businesses which can help develop access guides, provide access audits and best practice guidance, as well as training.

Read more here: [AccessAble Consultancy](#)

AccessAble also work with VisitScotland to offer a Disability Essentials eLearning course, to give you the skills to provide great customer service to disabled visitors.

You can sign up here: [Create AccessAble eLearning Account](#)

## Adaptation Scotland

Adaptation Scotland is a Scottish Government funded programme that provides advice and support to help organisations, businesses and communities in Scotland prepare for, and build resilience to, the impacts of climate change.

Read more here: [Adaptation Scotland website](#)

## Bike2Work

The Bike2Work Scheme is a free, government approved employee benefit aimed at encouraging more people to cycle to work and lead healthier lives.

Employers benefit from a healthier workforce and can include the scheme as part of their benefits package for employees and candidates. Employees can save up to 48.25% on the cost of bikes and equipment.

Read more here: [Bike2Work website](#)



## Business Energy Scotland

Business Energy Scotland provide free, impartial support and funding opportunities to help SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) save energy, reduce carbon emissions, and cut costs. They offer local support covering all of Scotland, helping businesses identify and implement energy-saving projects.

They can help overcome challenges like time constraints and lack of knowledge and support, by offering:

- A dedicated advisor to support you.
- Access to a technical specialist if needed.
- Assistance with building a strong business case.

They also offer a range of free online resources, including:

- Energy saving tools and guides.
- Staff engagement toolkit.
- CPD-certified Green Champions training (available online or via webinars).
- Webinars, case studies, events, and training.

Read more about what they offer here: [Business Energy Scotland website](#)

In addition to the above, they also provide funding options, for example interest free loans for SMEs, to help cover the cost of energy and carbon-saving upgrades in your business.

Read more here: [SME loan information](#)

## Energy Saving Trust

If you are considering switching to low emission or electric vehicles, or installing EV chargers, Energy Saving Trust may have funding available to support you.

Read more about their funding options here: [Energy Saving Trust grants and loans](#)

## EnviroRental

If you manage vacation rentals and want to make them more sustainable, EnviroRental offer a wealth of free resources, including webinars, case studies, surveys, and data.

Sign up on their website to access these resources: [EnviroRental website](#)



## Euan's Guide

Euan's Guide is a disabled access charity, best known for its review website, where people with disabilities and their family and friends can share their experiences and rate venues. The charity also works to make accessible toilets safer, and conducts an annual Access Survey, which offers valuable insights into access challenges and experiences from people with disabilities.



The charity was set up in 2013 when the founder realised how the lack of disabled access information made everyday experiences stressful for people with disabilities. Just one review from someone with similar access requirements can give someone else the confidence to visit a new place.

There are currently 71 businesses in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen listed on their website (as of September 2024). We recommend searching for your business on their site and reading any feedback, to see if there are ways you can improve your experience.

You can also claim your business listing and add information for free: [Euan's Guide Claim Your Business Listing](#)

Read more here: [Euan's Guide website](#)

## Hidden Disabilities Sunflower

The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower is a simple tool for people with non-visible disabilities to signal that they may need additional support, patience, time or just a helping hand.

Hidden Disabilities Sunflower have identified more than 800 hidden disabilities and health conditions that someone would consider using the Sunflower for.

These hidden disabilities can include neurological, cognitive, physical, visual, sensory, auditory or processing difficulties, as well as chronic health conditions like diabetes, arthritis, chronic pain, respiratory or sleep disorders.

The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower is an international company, and in the UK, they have a lanyard scheme, where people can buy a sunflower-patterned lanyard and an ID card that explains the wearer's hidden disability.

The Sunflower lanyard is meant to "make the non-visible visible", so if someone has chosen to wear the Sunflower lanyard, they want to be seen.

Businesses can become a member to access training and insights, and to be listed on their website as a hidden disabilities-inclusive business.

Read more here: [Hidden Disabilities Sunflower website](#)



## North East Sensory Services

North East Sensory Services (NESS) is an independent, local charity delivering the first joint sensory services in Scotland.

Based in Aberdeen, NESS provide training to raise awareness of the practical and emotional impact of sight and / or hearing loss. Training can help businesses gain confidence to support customers living with a sensory impairment.

Read more here: [NESS Awareness Training](#)

## Purple Tuesday

Purple Tuesday describes themselves as a global movement that is working to improve the disabled customer experience by providing businesses with insights into areas such as digital and physical accessibility.

“Connecting the business community with the disability community”

They offer advice and resources, for example:

- Audits - digital accessibility and physical site accessibility.
- Training - sign language, customer service tutorials etc.
- Recruitment - they can help you audit your recruitment process, to make it more accessible.
- Listing on their website - opportunity to connect your brand to the disability community on their website.

Purple Tuesday have identified “the fear of unintentionally offending a disabled customer by saying or doing the wrong thing” as the biggest barrier for frontline staff. To address this, they have created a short guide to help you interact more confidently with disabled customers: [Hello, can I help you](#)

## How to get involved

To be featured, you simply have to make one new commitment each year to improve the disabled customer experience, and get involved in the celebration day (Purple Tuesday) which is held on the first Tuesday of November each year.

Currently (2024), only 4 businesses in Aberdeenshire are featured on their map – consider registering with them online by submitting a form that only takes a few minutes to fill in: [Register with Purple Tuesday](#)

Read more about Purple Tuesday here: [Purple Tuesday website](#)

## RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People)

The RNIB have free resources on their website, and they also offer an online shop that gives ideas and advice on how to provide support for visually impaired guests, and the kind of equipment you may consider buying: [RNIB shop](#)

Read more here: [RNIB website](#)





## RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf People)

The RNID offer advice on supporting people who are D/deaf or have hearing loss or tinnitus.

They also have a listing of different technologies and products that can help people who live with hearing loss, such as smoke alarms, smartphone apps etc: [Technology and products](#)

Read more here: [RNID website](#)

## United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals can help businesses improve their sustainability goals and communicate them using a common language.

You can use the goals to understand global issues and identify where you can have the most impact to form your sustainability strategy.

Read more here: [Sustainable Development](#)



## VisitAberdeenshire

VisitAberdeenshire offers dedicated support to tourism and hospitality businesses in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. Our dynamic Tourism Development Programme blends the needs of local businesses with up-to-date market insights, to empower businesses to develop the skills needed to scale up and meet consumer demand.

We provide:

- [Promotion opportunities](#)
- [Business support](#)
- [Research and insights](#)
- [Industry events and training](#)

## Growth programme for tourism businesses – Game Changer

Game Changer is our flagship growth programme, delivered by VisitAberdeenshire and Opportunity North East annually. This tailored, deep-dive course has taken over 50 businesses on a journey to identify target markets and understand consumer needs since it started in 2019.

To find out more about how to apply for this programme, please contact: [industry@visitabdn.com](mailto:industry@visitabdn.com)



## VisitScotland

VisitScotland offer a wide range of Responsible Tourism resources on their website: [VisitScotland Responsible Tourism](#)

For instance, they provide a Climate Action Guide to help you develop your own climate action plan: [VisitScotland Sustainable Factsheets](#)

VisitScotland also have an “Inclusive Tourism Manager” available to support your business. For support with any of the resources on VisitScotland’s industry website, contact them via email: [customer.service@visitscotland.com](mailto:customer.service@visitscotland.com)

Additionally, they also offer regular webinars on Responsible Tourism - sign up for their travel trade newsletter to get notified of any upcoming webinars or training sessions.

## WelcoMe

WelcoMe is a cloud-based platform, designed to help you manage, understand and assist disabled visitors.

It allows visitors to plan their assistance in advance of arriving at the venue, ensuring a smoother operation for everyone involved.

The platform also offers staff training, to improve the relationship between your team and visitors, recognising that both sides benefit from preparation and support before your visitors’ arrival.

Learn more here: [WelcoMe website](#)

“Making face-to-face transactions between staff and disabled people as informed, anxiety-free and friendly as possible.”

## Welcome to Excellence

Welcome to Excellence is a customer service training initiative. They have been operating since 1993, and more than 400,000 people have participated in their training courses.

They offer a training course called “Welcoming All Customers”, which provides training on customer service and accessibility. The course provides participants with practical advice to give them confidence in meeting the needs of all their customers.

Read more here: [Welcoming All Customers](#)

They offer scheduled courses in some locations (per person price) that individuals can book, but they also offer in-house courses (per session price), and train-the-trainer courses.



# Next steps



Visit**Aberdeenshire**

# Next steps

---

Once you have started on your Responsible Tourism journey and made your business more sustainable and inclusive, you might want to look for recognition for your hard work through certificates, accreditations or awards.

You may also want to expand your network by connecting with other businesses and joining relevant membership organisations and associations.



## Awards, associations and accreditations

---

### Scottish Thistle Awards

#### **Suitable for:**

All tourism businesses (accommodation providers, attractions, activity companies, tour operators, events, festivals, restaurants, pubs, etc).

#### **Description:**

The annual Scottish Thistle Awards are VisitScotland's way of celebrating excellence and recognising businesses in Scotland's tourism industry.

Responsible Tourism is central to these awards, so if you are committed to sustainability and inclusivity, you may want to consider applying. Each entry must provide evidence of responsible and sustainable practices and ambitions.

#### **How to apply:**

- Nominations usually open in March.
- If you are nominated by someone, you will receive an email with details of how to enter the awards.
- It's not essential to receive a public nomination to enter. You can still enter your chosen award categories directly online.
- There are a lot of different categories to choose from (see list below), so you may want to apply for more than one category.
- Take your time filling in the application, and really consider your answers.
- The Scottish Thistle Awards panel will consider the entries during May and June, and the shortlist is usually announced in July
- The regional awards take place in the autumn.
- Winners from each regional award ceremony advance to the national final which is usually held in November or December.
- The overall winner for each category is announced at the national final.



## Categories:

- Best B&B or guesthouse experience
- Best bar or pub
- Best eating experience
- Best hotel experience
- Best outdoor and adventure experience
- Best self-catering accommodation experience
- Best visitor attraction
- Celebrating thriving communities
- Climate action award
- Inclusive tourism award
- Innovation in tourism
- Outstanding cultural event or festival
- Tourism and hospitality employer of the year
- Tourism individual of the year
- Rising star award



## Regional awards:

- Aberdeen City and Shire Tourism Awards (ACSTA)
- Central and East Regional Final
- South of Scotland Thistle Awards
- The Highland and Islands Tourism Awards (HITA)
- West Regional Final

Read more here: [VisitScotland Scottish Thistle Awards information page](#)

Source: VisitScotland

## Green Tourism certification

### Suitable for:

All tourism businesses (accommodation providers, attractions, activity companies, tour operators, venues, etc).

### Description:

Green Tourism is a world-leading sustainability certification for the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors. Their aim is to help embed responsible, sustainable and environmentally friendly practices across businesses and the wider tourism sector.

Despite being called “Green” Tourism, it’s not just about sustainability and green practices. They also cover communication, inclusivity and accessibility, all under three headings (people, places and planet – see below). Basically, everything we cover in this Responsible Tourism Toolkit.

They provide expert advice and manageable actions to help tourism businesses achieve a sustainability certification, which lets your customers know your business is invested in a healthy future.



You will have clear and practical actions to run a more sustainable business, embrace the circular economy, and reduce your carbon footprint. You might find that you are probably doing more than you realise already.

### PEOPLE GOALS



Communication



Awareness



Community



Health & Well-being



Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity

### PLACES GOALS



Destinations



Experiences



Travel



Food and Drink



Biodiversity

### OUR PLANET GOALS



Energy



Water



Waste



Carbon



Chemicals

#### How to apply:

You can do a quick eligibility test on their website. If eligible, you can fill in an online application form and pay the membership fee.

You don't have to fill in all the information at once, the application is an online form, so you can save your progress and revisit the form as needed.

You will also need to submit evidence, such as photos, links to social media or screenshots. The Green Tourism team will support you throughout the application process.

Once your application is ready, submit it for assessment. The Green Tourism team will then review your assessment and award you a Green Tourism Award – Bronze, Silver or Gold.

Read more here: [Green Tourism website](#)

## Other Green Certification schemes in Scotland

There are other Green Certification schemes available in Scotland, and you can read more about them here: [VisitScotland Green Certification Schemes](#)



## Tourism Cares

### Suitable for:

All tourism businesses who are ready to engage with the travel trade (Tourism Cares is a B2B website).

### Description:

VisitScotland are working to support Scotland's Responsible Tourism objectives, and as part of that project, they have developed a partnership with Tourism Cares.

Tourism cares is a US non-profit who are closely aligned with USTOA (the US Tour Operator Association). USTOA is a major influencer in bringing North American visitors to Scotland.

Tourism Cares believes that tourism can be a real force for good, and they work with over 160 members (including travel advisors, tour operators and airlines) to reach millions of travellers worldwide who are planning and booking their holidays.

They have created an interactive [Meaningful Travel Map](#), allowing the travel trade to search for 'meaningful travel' providers across the globe.

Scotland is the first European destination to feature on the map, and VisitScotland aim to showcase as many responsible tourism products and experiences as possible, that meet the eligibility criteria.

### How to apply:

To be considered, you need:

- 1) A tour, product or experience that is relevant to tourists (this includes accommodation, as well as attractions and activities).
- 2) To be visitor ready – i.e. have a website, social media, have all necessary permissions and licences and respond to enquiries.
- 3) The capacity to benefit from additional marketing (i.e. have room to grow your business).
- 4) To adhere to Tourism Cares' child safety and animal welfare policies.
- 5) To meet at least two of the eligibility criteria listed on their website.

Take a look at the criteria on the Tourism Cares website: [Tourism Cares Criteria](#)

If you believe you meet these criteria, you would need to complete an application form. The form takes about 20 minutes to fill in, but you may need more time to consider and write your submission texts. You will need to describe your experiences, write an impact statement, outline your mission / vision, and provide a couple of high-resolution images.

Read more here: [VisitScotland Tourism Cares](#)



## Make Travel Matter® Experience

### Suitable for:

Tourism businesses that offer experiences to the travel trade (B2B).

### Description:

The Travel Corporation (TTC) is the parent company of tour operators such as Insight Vacations, Trafalgar, Contiki, Highland Explorer Tours and Brendan Vacations, as well as other tourism businesses such as The Red Carnation Hotel Collection and Evan Evans.

In 2020, they launched a 5-year sustainability strategy called **How We Tread Right (HWTR)** for its family of brands, based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

This led to the creation of Make Travel Matter®, a tool to allow their brands to select experiences that benefit the people and communities they visit, with a clear social or environmental mission at the core of their operations.

Their brand teams identify experiences that are suitable for this programme. The experiences must meet the criteria of at least 1 of the 11 Global Goals they have selected from the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals ([see above](#)).

### How to apply:

If your experience aligns with at least one of the Global Goals, reach out to your TTC contractor to be considered.

Learn more here: [Make Travel Matter Experiences](#)

## Wild Scotland

### Suitable for:

Organisations and individuals that offer wildlife, adventure or activity tourism services to visitors in Scotland.

### Description:

Wild Scotland is a membership organisation, committed to sharing best practices across the outdoor sector in Scotland. Every member is required to pledge their commitment through signing up to the Wild Scotland Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines, focusing on 4 key principles: Care, Sustainability, Responsibility and Excellence.

### How to apply:

Apply online on their website.

Read more here: [Wild Scotland](#)





# Case studies



Visit**Aberdeenshire**

# Case studies – introduction

---

In August 2024, we spoke to five different tourism businesses in Aberdeenshire and asked them to share their responsible tourism journey. We also asked them to offer advice for other businesses considering becoming more sustainable and inclusive.

The result is five case studies, covering topics from developing sustainable products and applying for accreditations, to sharing your story online and welcoming everyone.

A common piece of advice they all shared was this: share your knowledge and talk to each other. We are incredibly grateful that they have been so generous in sharing their stories and insights with us, and we hope that their advice and experiences will inspire more tourism businesses to adopt Responsible Tourism practices.

## Contents:

### **Case study 1 - Crathie Opportunity Holidays**

“Don’t be afraid to welcome disabled guests”

Website: [www.crathieholidays.org.uk](http://www.crathieholidays.org.uk)

- Welcoming people with disabilities
- Applying for awards and accreditations

### **Case study 2 - Aberdeen Performing Arts**

“Everyone is welcome here”

Website: [www.aberdeenperformingarts.com](http://www.aberdeenperformingarts.com)

- An inclusive welcome
- Being sustainable
- Telling their story

### **Case study 3 - Dalriada Luxury Lodges**

“Don’t be afraid to ask questions”

Website: [www.dalriadalodges.com](http://www.dalriadalodges.com)

- Welcoming people with disabilities
- Being sustainable
- Applying for awards and accreditations
- Telling their story

### **Case study 4 - Fyvie Castle**

“Make it easy for people to make responsible choices”

Website: [www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/fyvie-castle](http://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/fyvie-castle)

- Developing sustainable products and taking them to market
- Applying for awards and accreditations

### **Case study 5 - The Bay**

“Putting sustainable, locally sourced fish and chips at the top of the menu”

Website: [thebayfishandchips.co.uk](http://thebayfishandchips.co.uk)

- Telling your story
- Working with the local community



# Case study - Crathie Opportunity Holidays

## Background

The idea for Crathie Opportunity Holidays came about in the 1990s, when Christine Sloan, who lived in Crathie Manse with her husband, the local minister, realised that the derelict stables in the grounds had the potential for a new purpose.

“Don’t be afraid to welcome disabled guests”

With a background in social care, and an awareness of how challenging it was for her disabled friends to find suitable holiday accommodations, she came up with plans to convert the old buildings into holiday cottages that people with disabilities and their families could hire.

They arranged consultations with various disability organisations and developed plans to renovate and adapt the cottages to meet the needs of all guests. Through fundraising, they managed to raise the necessary funds to bring the project to life.

Today, Crathie Opportunity Holidays operates as a charity and their mission is to provide disabled people and their families with the opportunity to enjoy a worry-free holiday, with accessibility as a given rather than an afterthought.

Thanks to a loyal base of repeat customers and word of mouth, the cottages are popular, and as a result, their only current advertising activity is through Google ads.

## Current set up

They offer 4 cottages, each thoughtfully adapted to meet different needs. All of them are wheelchair accessible, with one featuring additional aids for guests with visual or hearing impairments, and one cottage is designed to be allergy free.

Their website provides detailed accessibility guides for each cottage, covering specifics like door width, the height of the bed and toilet etc. These guides are available as PDFs, making them easy to download or print. Example: [Gairn Cottage Accessibility Guide](#)

When they began renting out the cottages, the team received training in disability awareness, and they now have a comprehensive in-house training programme for new staff. This includes a housekeeping manual and equipment training for the housekeepers.



## Audience and how to provide for them

On their website, they describe their accommodation as “disabled-friendly holiday cottages with access for all”. While this might seem like a broad claim, they truly cater to a wide range of disabilities, in different ways, as Maggie – who manages the cottages - explains:

### Wheelchair users

The cottages feature amenities like ceiling track hoists, adjustable washbasins in the bathrooms, adjustable profiling beds, wide doors to ensure easy access etc.

### Visual impairments

The cottages have contrasting colours between the floor, skirting and walls to aid navigation. They offer information about the cottages in large print, and equipment such as page magnifier, boil alerts, and liquid level indicators.

### Hearing loss

They have the Bellman system installed, which is essentially a pager with lights and vibrations. This includes a pad under the pillow that vibrates if smoke detectors (attached to the ceiling) go off at night.

### Allergies

The cottages have non-feather duvets and pillows, and the housekeepers take extra care when cleaning. This includes changing vacuum bags before cleaning the allergy free cottage, and avoiding placing flowers or potpourri in the cottage.

### Autism and dementia

This year, they are taking accessibility even further by converting one of the cottages into an autism-friendly environment, and a second cottage which will be made dementia-friendly. This includes avoiding certain bright colours (reds and yellows mainly) and patterns (steering clear of stripes) for example.

They also understand the importance of consistency and familiarity for guests with autism. To help guests prepare, they will provide photos of the cottage’s interior in advance, ensuring that what is shown matches the real setup down to details like bed linens. This attention to detail helps guests feel comfortable and reassured before they even arrive.

### Some other things they offer:

- They have contacted over 100 visitor attractions, places to eat, parks etc in the region to find out about their accessibility, and have compiled the information into a visitor’s guide. Each cottage has a copy of this book.
- They are also planning to change their garden areas to have a sensory area, wildlife area, quiet area and an upgraded children’s play area.
- They put a bird feeder in easy view of each cottage, and many guests have commented on the mental health benefits of watching the birds.



## Website listings

They are featured on **Euan's Guide**, where they currently have an excellent rating of 4.8 out of 5. This website is particularly valuable, because the reviews are from actual guests who have stayed with them. If the cottages are fully booked, Maggie often directs people to Euan's Guide, so they can find other accessible accommodation.

Crathie Opportunity Holidays are also listed on **AccessAble**, although the process for this is slightly different. AccessAble visited them to carry out an in-person audit in winter, which means the images might not fully capture the experience at other times of the year. Unfortunately, it's not possible to upload your own photos to the listing.

They also take part in a scheme called **Respitality** and offer a couple of short breaks for carers each year as part of this scheme. You can read more about this scheme here: [Aberdeen Carers Support Service](#)

## Awards

### Green Tourism

Crathie Opportunity Holidays have had a Green Tourism Gold Award since 2006. Alongside their commitment to inclusive and accessible tourism, they have also focused on sustainability since the charity's inception.

For example, they have biomass heating and solar panels, they use environmentally friendly cleaning and laundry products, and they use LED lighting. They only offer Fairtrade coffee, tea and sugar to the guests, and recycle a wide range of materials, such as office products, glass, cans, cardboard and printer cartridges.

Applying for the Green Tourism Award was relatively straightforward for them. Since sustainability and inclusivity had been a core focus from the start of the project, they already had many of the necessary practices in place. As a result, they didn't need to make significant changes to meet the award criteria.

### Thistle Awards

In 2023, Crathie Opportunity Holidays were shortlisted for, and ultimately won the "Inclusive Tourism" category at the regional Aberdeen City and Shire Thistle Awards.

As regional winners, they advanced to the national awards, where they competed against three other finalists but narrowly missed out on the top prize.

Maggie felt that the application process was straightforward, they received a link with a list of questions to answer, and their submission was reviewed by a panel of experts who determined the shortlist.



## Advice from Maggie

### 1) Ask your customers what they need

Disabled guests understand that not everything will be perfect, so it's important to find out what the non-negotiables are before they book. Asking questions makes people feel that their needs are considered and valued.

### 2) Get disability awareness training

Maggie found it very beneficial to have disability awareness training. For instance, they visited Ballater to experience navigating the town in a wheelchair, and they used special glasses to understand different visual impairments. This hands-on experience has helped them better cater to their guests' needs.

### 3) Identify simple steps to take

Providing a good service doesn't have to be complicated. For example, if a customer rearranges the furniture to suit their needs, Crathie Opportunity Holidays tell the guests to leave it as they like it, and they take a photo of the room and keep it on file. This way, they can make sure to arrange the room in the same way for future stays.

And it doesn't have to be expensive, for example, the RNIB online shop is a great resource for ideas for visually impaired guests, and their equipment is reasonably priced: [RNIB shop](#)

### 4) Provide detailed information

Provide detailed information on your website, such as door measurements, space between the bed and the wall, how high the toilet is and if a toilet is left or right transfer. Accessibility guides should be easily accessible online. Not everyone will read the information, a lot of people will still call to ask the questions, so be prepared to answer their questions.

### 5) Use accurate photos

Avoid using wide-angle shots on your website. Instead, use photos that realistically represent the size of the room and its accessibility features. This helps ensure that guests have a clear and honest view of what to expect.

### 6) Don't overpromise

It's impossible for any venue to meet every individual's needs perfectly. Be honest about what you can offer and suggest alternative options if necessary. For example, sharing a link to Euan's Guide can help guests find other accessible accommodations.

### 7) Get feedback from your guests

Encourage guests to provide feedback by asking questions like, "is there anything we could have done differently?" They really are the experts, so this helps you understand areas for improvement or offer better advice to future guests. If you can't act on every piece of feedback, explain why clearly.

### 8) Don't be afraid to welcome disabled guests

Don't worry about what to say or making mistakes, disabled people are just people after all. While accessibility is important to them, it's also important to match your product to your audience. For instance, a cottage in Royal Deeside may not suit someone looking for a city break, no matter how well-adapted it is. Know your product and your audience to ensure a good fit.



# Case study – Aberdeen Performing Arts

## Background:

Aberdeen Performing Arts manage three venues in Aberdeen city centre: His Majesty’s Theatre, Music Hall and Lemon Tree (a smaller lounge and studio space).

“Everyone is welcome here”

Aberdeen Performing Arts are dedicated to making their venues accessible to everyone. They take a broad view of accessibility, ensuring their spaces are accessible and welcoming to all, regardless of background, disabilities, gender, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. The mantra across all three venues is simple: “Everyone is welcome here”. They are determined to create a space where everyone can join in.

Sustainability is also a priority for Aberdeen Performing Arts. They have developed a high-level 10-year action plan aimed at reducing their carbon footprint.

To achieve these objectives, Aberdeen Performing Arts have introduced two specialised roles: a Creative Changemaker for Climate Action, and a Creative Change Maker for Inclusion and Relevance.

Additionally, Aberdeen Performing Arts have also invested in staff training to make sure the team understand diverse needs. For example, they have invited different disability groups to provide training on understanding different needs, such as working with guide dogs and people with autism.



## What they do:

Matt Godfrey, the Director of Finance and Commercial at Aberdeen Performing Arts explains that Aberdeen Performing Arts ensure that their programme offers something for everyone, across all demographics, and they have adapted their buildings to be accessible and sustainable.

They take a practical approach, asking themselves questions like “what can we do”, “what are the quick wins”? They have an active Green Team, so sustainability is very much part of their operations, and staff are encouraged to share their ideas.

Here are some examples of what they have put in place:

## Sustainability:

**Buildings** – they have switched to LED lights, installed motion sensors so lights only come on when needed, and use 100% renewable electricity.



**Food and beverages** – they try to source as much as possible from local suppliers (butchers, greengrocers etc) at their café at Music Hall and restaurant at His Majesty’s Theatre, and they have a food waste reduction scheme in place.

**Climate action** – they encourage conversations about climate change from an arts perspective. They believe that art can be a playful way to encourage climate action, rather than making people feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation. The idea is to engage people in a way which makes them think about what they can do to help, and that no action is too small.

**Transport** – being in Aberdeen presents some transport challenges, as their location means that they inevitably need a certain amount of transport. They are finding some creative solutions to this according to Matt; for instance, they introduced an international festival in 2024 to coincide with the Edinburgh Fringe. This allows international artists to perform in Aberdeen before and after the Fringe, which reduces their travel to Scotland. They call this “sustainable touring”.

### Inclusivity:

They are committed to being accessible and inclusive, both in-person and online.

#### At the venues:

**Wheelchair access** – while His Majesty’s Theatre already had ground floor access, Music Hall presented challenges with its imposing front steps. Previously, wheelchair users had to enter through a side door, making them feel excluded. In 2019, Aberdeen Performing Arts addressed this by installing a lift that cleverly collapses the steps at the front of the building, allowing wheelchairs to be transported up from street level to the main entrance, providing the same front door access as everyone else.



**Free essential companion** - they provide one free ticket for those who need someone with them to come to an event. Their definition of an “essential companion” is someone who assists the customer with mobility or guidance, and also ensures their safety and enjoyment at the venues. Once registered, customers have the option to book online or via the Box Office.

**Access Champions** – ten of their front of house team have been trained to be “Access Champions” so they can assist autistic, visually impaired, or deaf visitors from the moment they arrive. They explain what will happen step-by-step and remain their point of contact throughout the visit. Their training sessions were held by local service providers, but also people with lived experience. The training programme for these Access Champions has included:

- best practice for guiding visually impaired customers
- understanding audio description
- deaf awareness





**BSL (British sign language) interpreter** – for visitors with hearing loss, they offer performances with a dedicated BSL interpreter, who works with them on every performance.

**Audio description** – a team of audio describers watch the performances in advance. Visitors with visual impairments can then request earpieces to listen to the audio description during the show. The audio description doesn't just cover the action on stage, but also describes the set and costumes, to bring the show to life. Customers have the option of using their own smartphone (an app called Mobile Connect), or using headsets provided by the venue.

**Captions** – some performances feature caption screens, one at either side of the stage. Their captioners work to provide the actors' words on the screens at the same time they are spoken or sung, just like subtitles on TV. Speaker names, sound effects and offstage noises are also shown. The captioning units can be seen from every seat in the house, allowing you to watch the action on stage and read the subtitles at the same time. While this service is suitable for those who are D/deaf or hard of hearing, it is also popular for those who don't have English as their first language.

**Brochure** – they print a brochure with information about their performances, and they provide it in various formats; a traditional print brochure, but also a large format brochure, and a video version. There are symbols in the brochure to indicate which access services are available, as well as any concession pricing.

**Touch tours** – their audio describers work with visiting theatre companies to offer pre-show touch tours, where they invite visually-impaired visitors to come and feel the props and explore the stage before the performance.



**Relaxed performances** – National Theatre of Scotland, Scottish Ballet and Scottish Opera offer relaxed performances when they visit Aberdeen. This includes adjusting the performance, the lights are slightly up, doors are open, there is more spacing between seats, so that families or people with additional needs have a more relaxed and comfortable experience.

**LGBTQ+** - Aberdeen Performing Arts have a Creative Change Maker for Inclusion and Relevance, who works with the programming team to make the programme inclusive and relevant to the diverse communities within the North-east. The Change Maker partners with organisations like Sanctuary Queer Arts and Look Again to produce cabaret nights for the LGBTQ+ community at the Lemon Tree.

**Young people and children** – they offer a dedicated programme of performances for children, particularly as part of their summer schedule. They also have a programme of youth theatre groups, early years creative activities, and music making. All activities offer free spaces, no questions asked, for those who would otherwise not be able to afford to take part.

A highlight is their annual festival called "Light the Blue" in June every year, which is an event "for young people, by young people". The festival culminates in "The Big Gig", where children from local groups across North-east Scotland showcase their talents. Throughout the festival, the children



and young adults also have the chance to attend workshops and go backstage to learn directly from the technical team at the theatre.

**Diversity** – Aberdeen Performing Arts collaborate with a community interest group called “We are here Scotland” to produce a three-day festival called “Rise Up!” for black people and people of colour (BPOC). Now in its third year (2024), the festival includes art, music and events for different cultures, and celebrates the creativity of the BPOC communities.

**Inclusion** - Aberdeen Performing Arts offer workshops and performances that are relevant to groups which are under-represented. The idea is to develop their audiences and build an inclusive and welcoming offer. Some examples:

- The Changemaker for Inclusion and Relevance works with refugees and asylum seekers to offer opportunities to take part at no cost.
- A new strand of workshops called “Encore!” offers creative activity for those over 60.
- There is a community choir which is open to all, with no need to audition.



Adult workshops offer a “pay what you can” ticket option to make activities accessible to all, and this model is offered across many events produced by Aberdeen Performing Arts.

### Digital and online:

While their website isn’t fully accessible yet, it’s on their roadmap to make the website more accessible and reduce the clutter.

They currently have an “Access” page listing on their website, listing all their accessible services and performances, and they also offer video brochures online.

Aberdeen Performing Arts had planned to include virtual tours of the theatre interiors on their website to allow visitors to prepare before the visit. However, they have had to reconsider these plans to make sure they find a balance between making their spaces more open and ensuring security. As the theatres are public buildings, detailed online videos, especially of backstage areas, could pose safety risks. Instead, they offer familiarisation visits on request, to allow customers to come in and see the spaces and walk through the customer journey ahead of their visit.

They provide both online and phone booking options, with ticketing schemes for carers and companions. They try to ensure that all information is available online, allowing people to confidently book online without having to phone to ask questions.

They are working with their ticketing solution platform (Spektrix) to ensure that the booking process is made as accessible as possible for online bookings.



## Telling their story

Aberdeen Performing Arts use humour to encourage their visitors to be eco-friendly while at their venues. For example, in the public bathrooms at Music Hall, colourful signs provide playful instructions. Next to the electric hand dryer, a sign reads:

*10 seconds is all it takes  
To dry your hands enough  
Finish reading these words  
Your hands have had enough puff*

They also try to explain their sustainability initiative in a light-hearted way. For instance, on the wall of the bathroom are pictures of lightbulbs, saying “Not in? We dim!” to explain their motion sensor lighting. They also have Doric inspired bin covers, encouraging audience and visitors to recycle their waste.



Aberdeen Performing Arts have a dedicated page on their website called “Our Environment”, where they share their sustainable practices and link to their Environmental Sustainability Policy.

When it comes to marketing, they aim to strike a balance between promoting performances and telling their broader story.

Matt mentioned that they plan to share more about their sustainability story and inclusivity journey on social media and online. However, they recognise the challenges; any statement they make must be backed up not just by words, but also with evidence.

## Awards and accreditations

Communicating what you do is important, and as mentioned above, statements are good, but evidence is even better. One way to prove your commitment is to achieve awards and accreditations.

Aberdeen Performing Arts are delighted to have been shortlisted for the Aberdeen City and Shire **Thistle Awards** in 2024, in the “Celebrating Thriving Communities” category, for their work engaging with and supporting the local community,

They are also members of **Springboard**, an initiative led by Creative Carbon Scotland. It involves a series of local assemblies that builds networks of people and organisations across Scotland to collaboratively share knowledge on climate action and sustainability.

While they are considering applying for the **Green Tourism Award**, they acknowledge the challenges in obtaining certificates and accreditations; evidencing sustainability and inclusivity can be complex, but it is an important part of the assessment.



Aberdeen Performing Arts are working through the “**Theatre Green Book**”, a network of theatre communities dedicated to sustainable practices. This initiative provides guidance not just for theatre buildings, but also for the performances and operationally. The programme has evolved into a self-accreditation system, where theatres can achieve a preliminary, basic, intermediate or advanced rating. It’s a valuable industry benchmark, allowing Aberdeen Performing Arts to compare their sustainability efforts with other theatres.

## Some advice from Matt

### 1) Don't be afraid

Starting your journey towards being sustainable and inclusive can be overwhelming, but focus on the quick wins first, things you can easily do or reduce (for example gas and electricity), before branching out and trying larger initiatives.

### 2) Do something, anything

It doesn't have to be a grand gesture or big investment. Simple steps, such as encouraging staff to switch the lights off when they leave a room, can make a big difference. Behavioural changes don't cost much or take much effort.

Identify:

Step 1 – things you can do or influence directly

Step 2 – things you can't influence (audience habits, location etc)

While step 2 can be challenging, there may be creative solutions, such as the “sustainable touring” approach mentioned above.

### 3) Look for support

Don't hesitate to seek advice from others - talk to other businesses to get their advice, talk to charities and organisations who offer support, like VisitAberdeenshire.

### 4) Share the conversation

Sharing your challenges and successes can be incredibly valuable. Collaborate, exchange ideas, and learn from each other's experiences.



# Case study - Dalriada Lodges

## Background:

Dalriada Lodges is a family-run business offering eight luxury self-catering lodges just outside of Stonehaven.

When Kelly and her parents developed the concept, they knew they wanted to provide a high-end experience, while being as sustainable and inclusive as possible.

They followed VisitScotland's guidelines for 5-star accommodation and adopted green building standards when constructing the lodges. From the start, they made the decision to insulate the cottages, install smart heaters, LED lighting, fibre broadband etc.

“Don't be afraid to ask questions”



Since opening in 2018, it's been a learning experience for Kelly, who has adapted quickly by taking onboard feedback and future-proofing the business across all areas of the business:

## Transport

They initially installed just two EV charging points, but now offer one at every lodge. They encourage sustainable ways to travel - secure bike storage is available next to each lodge, and they offer up-to-date information on public transport to their guests.

## Energy

The lodges feature energy-efficient appliances and LED lighting throughout. Guests are encouraged to switch the lights off when not in use. The electric heating system includes smart heaters, so if someone turns the heating up and opens the window, the heater will adjust the temperature down. Thanks to excellent insulation, the lodges don't need much heating.

## Recycling

Each cottage has three bins: general landfill, recycling and glass.

## Water conservation

Guests are encouraged to reuse bed linens and towels during their stay. The landscaping around the lodges has been designed to require minimal watering.



## Biodiversity

The lodges have eco-friendly sedum roofs which encourage native biodiversity.

## Accessibility

All doors are wide enough for wheelchair access, with level entry from vehicles to the front door. Furniture can be rearranged or removed to suit individual needs.

Skirting boards are in a contrasting colour to help delineate walls and floors, and calm colours are used throughout.

The lodges have two bedrooms, allowing space for accompanying carers if needed.

## Allergies

Two of the lodges are guaranteed pet-free, and all lodges have hypo-allergenic bedding. Cleaning standards are very high.

The air filtration system is so effective that a guest with breathing difficulties installed the same system at home after staying at Dalriada Lodges.

## Website

They have dedicated pages on sustainability and inclusivity on their website, that Kelly can easily update as needed. The website also has a link to AccessAble, so guests can find detailed information about accessibility features, measurements etc there.

Kelly has received feedback from clients that a screen reader has no problems reading the website.

## Booking journey

Bookings can be made online or by phone. However, Kelly discovered that screen readers can't currently navigate their booking system (SuperControl).

A visually impaired client phoned Kelly to let her know, so Kelly contacted the booking system, who is now exploring improvements.

## Digital app

All their guests have access to an app, which was developed through "Touch Stay", a US company. The app can be used online or downloaded as an app on your phone.

The app includes content similar to the website, plus instruction manuals, cheat sheets for the appliances, and short videos, such as walk-arounds and instructions videos like "how to use the keypad".

The app translates information into 17 languages and offers adjustable font sizes.

Having the app means that they can offer a completely paper free booking journey and stay.

## Accessibility guides

A detailed accessibility guide to all the lodges is available on AccessAble.

Additionally, Kelly has created one-page instruction sheets for all appliances in the lodges, available as printed copies in the lodges, and on the app.



For example, the user manual for the washing machine is more than 10 pages, so Kelly has condensed it into a one-page cheat sheet, to make it as simple as possible for guests to use the washing machine. She has done the same for the grill, oven, microwave, heated towel rail etc.

## Check-in and check-out

Guests receive an email with a link to the app a week before their stay. They are also given the codes for the gate and front door, as well as wi-fi joining instructions, allowing them to check in with ease, at a time to suit them.

The key-less entry system means they can access their lodge when they arrive without having to wait for Kelly to meet them. Kelly can then stop by to welcome them, once they have settled in. There is no formal check-out process either, the guests can simply leave when they are ready.

## Community engagement

As a seaside town, tourism is important to Stonehaven. Kelly collaborates closely with the local community, as they all want to attract tourists, who spend money in local shops and restaurants, to the area.

The business also does what it can to support the local community:

- Sponsoring the annual Stonehaven Fireballs Festival on Hogmanay.
- Sponsoring the land train that transports visitors from Stonehaven to Dunnottar Castle.
- They promote local charities on social media whenever they can.

They also work with the town's tourism and business associations, which provides networking opportunities.

They prioritise using local tradesmen and sourcing as much as possible from local shops.

## Associations:

### AccessAble

When they signed up to AccessAble, an auditor visited them and did a very thorough assessment. Their website now links to AccessAble, as the information on AccessAble is very detailed, and includes dimensions, measurements and sizes. This allows potential guests to make up their own mind if the lodges meet their needs.

### Green Tourism Gold Award

After opening in 2018, they applied for the Green Tourism Award and initially received a Silver Award. They were given an action plan that included practical advice, such as working more with local suppliers and making sure their suppliers also recycle, and they quickly achieved a Gold Award.

When applying, they were in the fortunate position that they had made sure the lodges were as sustainable as possible when they were built, so Kelly didn't find it too difficult to apply for the Green Tourism Award.

### Scottish Thistle Awards

Dalriada Lodges won the Best Self-Catering Accommodation award in the Aberdeen City and Shire Thistle Awards shortly after they opened in 2018. They were also shortlisted in 2023, in the new "Inclusive Tourism" category.



## Telling their story:

Kelly has found telling the business's story a steep learning curve. She updates the website herself, adding new information as needed.

When it comes to social media, Kelly is mindful of terminology and tries to keep the tone positive without being condescending. She prefers to show, rather than tell, allowing people to make their own assessments. For example, she shares photos to show that the lodges offer level access, without explicitly mentioning disability.

Another example is that many people with disabilities travel with a carer, which often means they need two separate rooms. By posting on social media about the lodges having two bedrooms and two bathrooms, Kelly can effectively communicate that the lodges are suitable for guests with these needs without specifically mentioning carers. This subtle approach allows guests to draw their own conclusions about its suitability.

Their message is simple: "Everybody is welcome", without singling out specific demographics or disabilities.

Kelly asks the guests if they would like their towels or bedding changed during longer stays. The message is simple: "Help us be better for the environment". It seems this message works, as her guests appreciate Kelly being so passionate about sustainability and inclusivity, so they feel like they are helping her personally, as well as the environment.

## Advice from Kelly:

### 1) Look at what you already do

A lot of businesses may already be doing more than they realise.

For instance, Kelly discovered she offered a lot of features that work for people with dementia, without realising it.

### 2) Be open and honest

Dalriada Lodges don't describe themselves as "fully inclusive" as they recognise that their accommodations may not suit everyone.

The key is being open and honest, for example, make sure your photos are realistic, and provide clear and accurate information.

### 3) Offer different options to book and find information

Some guests prefer to book online, while others like to call to book.

Make sure your website has enough information for those who don't want to phone, but also, provide the option to speak to someone directly - not everyone is comfortable online.

### 4) Put yourself in your guests' shoes

Consider what you would want as a guest. For example, Kelly realised she wouldn't want to read a lengthy instruction manual while on holiday, so she created simple instructions for all appliances.

Once in a while, try finding information or making a booking on your own website, to check that it all makes sense.





### 5) Ask questions and share knowledge

When they first started planning the lodges, Kelly and her parents asked hundreds of people questions to gather valuable insights, such as “what would give you the wow factor?” The feedback was crucial in shaping their approach when they were starting out.

Don't be afraid to ask questions of guests, industry experts and suppliers. Kelly doesn't pretend to be an expert; she admits that she is still learning every day.

Share pitfalls and advice with others – the best webinars Kelly has attended are those that include break-out sessions, so you can learn from other tourism businesses and share knowledge.

### 6) Ask for guest feedback

It is very important to ask for feedback from your guests, in person and via email. It's an opportunity to learn and improve, but it also makes the customer feel valued. Always thank them and take their suggestions seriously.

Send follow-up emails to guests within a week of their stay, but not on the day of departure - give them time to return home and reflect on their stay.

### 7) Ask “how did you find us?”

A really useful question is “how did you find us”. This simple question helps you understand which marketing activities work best.

Kelly has tried Google ads, TV ads, booking.com etc, but has found that recommendations from friends and family is the most effective marketing.

### 8) Automate processes...

Try to automate as many processes as possible. For example, the app has been a game changer for them – it's easy to update and it streamlines so many processes, not just for Kelly, but for the guests as well.

### 9) ...but don't make it too complicated

Try to avoid making things too complicated for guests. A lot of people, especially older guests, may not be very tech-savvy, and may not even have the internet on their phones.

For instance, Kelly chose not to upgrade to more advanced door locks that require smartphones, to make sure no one felt excluded.

Offering both online and phone bookings is crucial – some guests don't trust online payments for example.



# Case study – Fyvie Castle

## Introduction:

Fyvie Castle is a 13<sup>th</sup> century fortress located in the village of Fyvie, near Turriff in Aberdeenshire. The castle offers guided tours of both the historic building and the gardens.

“Make it easy for people to make responsible choices”.

Fyvie Castle is part of the National Trust for Scotland (NTS). The NTS is a conservation charity dedicated to protecting Scotland’s heritage.

NTS are committed to sustainability, with a Climate Change Officer on staff and a “[Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone](#)” strategy, alongside a [plan to protect nature](#).

NTS have identified climate change as a significant risk to their business. For example, recent storms caused extensive damage when 100,000 trees came down at Haddo House, and a tree crashed through the roof of the group lunch venue at Fyvie Castle. As a result, they won’t be able to offer group lunches at Fyvie Castle until 2025, which has had a significant impact on their financial plans. The climate change impact is something they address in their sustainability strategies.

## Developing sustainable experiences:

### Initial idea

In 2022, Raeanne Verlegh, the Travel Trade & Hospitality Business Development Manager at NTS, was having a chat with Gordon, the Head Gardener at Fyvie Castle, about the sustainable gardening practices at the castle. They started to wonder if this could be shared with visitors by turning it into a bookable experience.

They started to develop an experience that they called “The Future of Sustainable Gardening”, a unique product that includes a tour of the gardens led by the Head Gardener, as well as a tour of the castle. But it’s not just a regular garden tour; the Head Gardener also teaches visitors how to care for the produce in the garden, offering hands-on advice and insights.

Among other things, they wanted the tour to highlight the importance of seasonality, showing how the weather and seasonal changes impact what can be grown in Aberdeenshire. Additionally, there is an option to include a tasting experience, where the visitors can sample seasonal produce, like summer berries, or squash in the autumn.

This experience was developed with the Travel Trade in mind, so it’s available on request rather than a scheduled tour. As it’s led by an expert, it has a higher price point than their regular tours.



### Raeanne's top tips for developing sustainable products:

- Look at what you already have and think about how you can create products and experiences around it. In this case, Fyvie Castle already had a stunning garden and a passionate Head Gardener, so the product didn't require any extra investment or new hires.
- If you are developing a new experience, make sure to conduct a risk assessment. Visitors love hands-on experience, but you may need to limit group sizes to ensure they are supervised, and that they don't do more damage than good.

### Testing and promoting the product

Given the higher price point, they decided to test it on MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and events) agents first. For instance, the networking group SITE was invited to try it out.

VisitScotland also picked up the product, featuring it in presentations and information packs for MICE agents in Germany and France, as well as leisure agents in North America.

NTS also promoted the product through their regular B2B channels, such as newsletters and trade shows.

### Raeanne's top tips for testing the product:

- Test your new product with the travel trade first before offering it to the public. The travel trade can provide valuable feedback, and while the general public may not yet be actively looking for sustainable products, the Travel Trade are very interested in new products in general, and sustainable products in particular.
- Be patient, it takes time to launch a new product. The Travel Trade often work 18-24 months in advance, so bookings won't come overnight.

### Launch

The first booking for this experience came in the summer of 2024 when a luxury operator booked it for an exclusive group of 11 people.

### Raeanne's top tips for launching the product:

- Tell your story in a compelling way, relevant to your audience.
- Avoid being too preachy or making them feel guilty, but don't dumb it down either. Instead, focus on making them feel good about their visit and the positive impact they're contributing to by booking your experience.



## Tourism Cares:

After the launch, VisitScotland approached NTS to feature the experience on the Tourism Cares Meaningful Travel Map. Visit Scotland wanted regional spread, i.e. to highlight experiences in less-visited areas, and Aberdeenshire fit the bill, being slightly off the beaten track. Overtourism is one of the challenges that Tourism Cares hope to address.

Raeanne completed the application and wrote the submission details, which included a description of the experience, an impact statement, and information on rates, group sizes, accessibility etc. The whole process didn't take too long.

The focus was on biodiversity, inclusivity, equality, sustainability and the local community – Fyvie Castle is actively working to attract a diverse audience for example.

### Raeanne's top tip for joining Tourism Cares:

- If you are thinking of applying for Tourism Cares, have a look at the Meaningful Travel Map on their website and see what other tourism businesses have said, and let that inspire your application.
- Complete the form with as much detail as possible, the team at Tourism Cares will get back to you with questions if there is something they need you to clarify.
- The impact statement is important. It should clearly show how your new products positively affect the local community, sustainability, accessibility or biodiversity.

### Summary of top tips:

- Create products and experiences based on what you already have.
- Be prepared for it to take 2-3 years before you start seeing bookings for new travel trade bookings.
- Test your product with the travel trade first.
- Conduct a risk assessment of your experience, and limit visitor numbers if necessary.
- Consider applying for Tourism Cares.

The final words of the case study go to Raeanne and this top tip:

**Not every visitor is actively looking for sustainable experiences, but some are, especially in the travel trade. Even people who aren't actively looking for sustainable experiences might be interested if you "make it easy for people to make responsible choices".**



# Case study – The Bay

## Background

The Bay, an award-winning fish and chip shop in Stonehaven, are committed to being as sustainable as possible. Viktorija, the Business Development Manager at The Bay, told us: *“we are proud to work with local suppliers and excited to tell their stories”*.

The team at The Bay want to ensure full traceability of every ingredient - trust from the customers is a key factor for them. For example, they display the farm and variety of potatoes they are serving that day, as well as the name and number of the boat which caught today's haddock. This is also a great conversation starter with the customers.

Fish is the most popular item on their menu, so the team at The Bay feel that it is their responsibility to protect the waters the fish is caught in. To do so, they must be as sustainable as they possibly can - starting from the energy they use, packaging and cleaning products, to the way they operate.

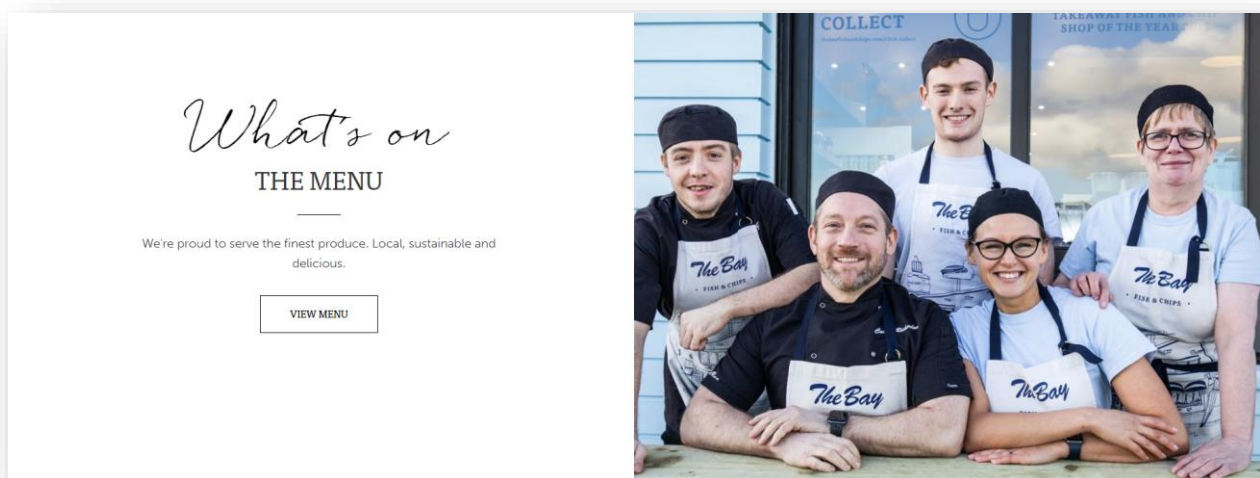
Part of their ethos is to look after their staff and showing their appreciation every day. They recognise that the team are the ones who communicate their story to the customers, so they invest time and resources in training their team members on sustainability and the importance of it.

However, when it comes to sharing your responsible tourism story, it's not just about communicating your story to customers in the shop, it's also about getting the message across on social media and your website, without coming across as preachy or putting people off. The Bay have found a great way to do just that.

## Website

The Bay does a great job of weaving in mentions of their locally sourced produce throughout their website, while still making it clear that their food is high quality and tastes fantastic.

They also keep it informal and personal, with lots of photos of their team and the owners sprinkled across the site. A great example is this: *“We're proud to serve the finest produce. Local, sustainable and delicious.”*



They have a page dedicated to their awards, which they are rightly proud of. This helps back up their claim that they offer a quality product.

Along with awards for their excellent food, they have also won awards for their responsible tourism practices, including fundraising awards, Footprint Awards (an awards scheme for sustainability and responsible business practices in the foodservice industry), and several environmental awards.

Their blog is another great way they share their responsible tourism story. For instance, on National Fish and Chips Day, they posted an interview with Calum, the owner of The Bay, about sourcing ingredients the right way. They have also written blogs about mental well-being, team profiles (again, keeping it personal) and fundraising for the local community.

Some examples from their blogs:

“The Bay’s Calum Richardson celebrates National Fish and Chip Day, and the importance of sourcing ingredients the right way.”

The Bay’s Calum Richardson celebrates National Fish and Chip Day, and the importance of sourcing ingredients the right way.



“The Bay fundraises a total of £8,366 for the local community.”

July 14, 2022

## The Bay fundraises a total of £8,366 for the local community

---

We're big believers in giving back at The Bay Fish and Chips, which is why we launched our community fundraising initiative in 2020. We're donating every 20p bag charge we receive for online orders at The Bay Fish and Chips to charity or local groups. Thank you to everyone who nominated charities, community groups or [...]

READ MORE...

Check out their website here: [The Bay website](#)

## Social media

Viktorija explained their approach to social media:



**“We plan our social media one month in advance, with 2-3 ideas for each day. We update this in a shared Google document so the whole team have access to the plan.**

**Anyone who is working in the shop that day can use the company's phone to do social posts, and we also encourage the team to improvise.”**



On social media, The Bay strike a good balance between sales and marketing messages, and being entertaining and informative, while using fantastic images to grab attention.

They also make their hashtags easy to read by capitalising each word, which makes them more accessible for screen readers, and they write in a way that is both easy to understand and engaging.

Here are some examples of how they tell their Responsible Tourism story on Instagram:





**Locally sourced food**

A great example of making it personal by sharing a photo of the fishermen who supply their locally sourced fish.

**Catering to people with food allergies or intolerances**

They highlight that they offer gluten-free alternatives, making it clear it tastes just as great as regular fish & chips.





## Cycle to work scheme

On Cycle to Work Day, they shared information about a scheme they are part of called Bike2Work, which promotes sustainable commutes.



## Supporting the local community, local partnerships and events

The Bay support the local community in many different ways – sponsoring events, fundraising, buying locally and more, which they regularly share with their followers.



## Making it personal

They celebrate their team's milestones, and introduce new team members, which means their followers and potential customers get to know the people behind the brand.



43 likes  
thebayfish 🎉 Yesterday marked 12 years of Paul working at the bay! We are incredibly grateful for his hard work and dedication. Thank you, Paul, for your commitment and contributions over the years. Here's to many more years with us! 🍷 #WorkAnniversary #Dedication #TeamSpirit #teambay



Follow their Instagram page here: [@thebayfish](https://www.instagram.com/thebayfish)

## Final advice

Viktorija's advice to other tourism businesses is to try to be 1% better each day - small improvements will make a huge difference. It does not have to be a big thing - smile at your customers a little more, research the products you use, ask why and how more often, get involved in community events.

As Calum always says: "You are only as good as the last fish supper you served".



# Glossary



Visit**Aberdeenshire**

# Glossary (A-Z)

---

Here is a list of some abbreviations and expressions you may come across in Responsible Tourism, in alphabetical order.

## **Accessibility software**

Accessibility software refers to tools and programmes designed to help people with disabilities use computers, smartphones, and other digital devices.

This type of software includes features like screen readers for the visually impaired, voice recognition for those who can't use a keyboard, and magnifiers for people with low vision.

The goal of accessibility software is to make digital content and technology usable for everyone, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities.

## **Anchor organisations**

Anchor organisations (or institutions) are large, stable entities like hospitals, universities, or local councils that are deeply rooted in their communities. They play a vital role in the local economy by providing jobs, delivering services, and purchasing goods from local suppliers. Because they are unlikely to relocate, they are seen as "anchors" in the community, helping to support local development and improve social and economic wellbeing. Examples in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen would be the NHS and the National Trust for Scotland.

## **B2B**

Short for business-to-business.

In tourism, this means selling your products / services through another company, such as a tour operator, OTA, travel agent etc.

## **B2B2C**

Short for business-to-business-to-consumer.

The end consumer often books a package with a tour operator or travel agent, who have booked the services that make up the package with a DMC, who will book with you. So, your product / service will be sold to a business, who are selling it to another business, who sells it to the end-consumer.

## **B2C**

Short for business-to-consumer.

In tourism, this refers to tourism businesses selling their products / services direct to the end-consumer.

## **BAME**

Short for Black Asian and Minority Ethnic.

While there is no legal restriction on using this acronym, it is widely acknowledged that the term is no longer considered acceptable. The advice is to avoid using it as a replacement for directly naming a specific ethnic group or individual.

## **BPOC**

Short for Black People and People of Colour.

This term is acceptable as a general reference in certain contexts, such as when discussing data or making comparisons with the white population in the UK. It usually reflects a common way of gathering and presenting statistics.



**BSL**

Short for British sign language.

**Buyer**

In a travel trade context, the person working for a DMC, tour operator or wholesaler who sources and negotiates the contracts to buy products from the tourism supplier. They can have varying job titles – business development manager, product development manager, contracting manager, sourcing manager, product manager etc.

**Climate quitting**

This term refers to the growing trend of employees choosing to leave their jobs or decline job offers because they believe their employer is not doing enough to address climate change or lacks meaningful sustainability practices. It highlights a rising demand among workers, particularly younger generations, for employers to take serious action on environmental issues.

**D/deaf**

There is a difference if someone is described as Deaf or deaf.

Deaf with an upper case D generally refers to people who have been deaf all their lives, and are engaged with the Deaf community. This is sometimes referred to as culturally Deaf.

Deaf with lower case d is for people with hearing loss, who are predominantly oral and may not engage or identify with the Deaf community.

**DMC**

Short for destination management company.

A UK based operator that works exclusively B2B, providing ground handling services (booking accommodation, transfers, attractions etc) and local expertise to international tour operators and travel agents.

Examples of DMCs in Scotland: Abbey Ireland & UK, JacTravel, ASA, AC Group

**DMO**

Short for destination marketing organisation.

Basically, what we used to refer to as local tourist boards. Usually a non-profit organisation, dedicated to the promotion of their region and driving inbound tourism to a destination.

Example of a DMO: VisitAberdeenshire

**ESG**

Short for environmental, social and governance.

It refers to a set of criteria used to evaluate a company's performance and practices in three key areas: environmental impact, social responsibility, and corporate governance.

**EV**

Short for electric vehicle.

**GHG**

Short for greenhouse gas.

**Greenhushing**

A practice where companies intentionally under-communicate or avoid publicising their environmental initiatives and sustainability efforts.



This is often done to avoid scrutiny, criticism, or accusations of greenwashing, even if their efforts are genuine and impactful. By not promoting their green practices, companies aim to steer clear of potential backlash or the challenges of proving their environmental claims.

### **Greenwashing**

This is a deceptive practice where a company or organisation falsely promotes its products, services, or overall operations as environmentally friendly or sustainable, often through misleading information or superficial actions.

This tactic is used to attract environmentally conscious consumers and create a positive public image without making substantial efforts to reduce their actual environmental impact.

### **LED**

Short for light emitting diode.

LED lighting products produce light up to 90% more efficiently than traditional light bulbs.

### **ME**

Short for myalgic encephalomyelitis.

ME is also known as chronic fatigue syndrome and is a long-term condition that can affect different parts of the body. The most common symptom is extreme tiredness.

### **MICE**

Short for meetings, incentives, corporate and events.

It's often used to describe a type of DMC or travel agent, who specialises in organising events, conferences or team activities for companies.

### **NTO**

National tourist organisations, what we used to refer to as national tourist boards.

Example of an NTO: VisitScotland

### **OTA**

Short for online travel agent.

An online travel agent (OTA) is a digital platform that allows consumers to research and book travel services, such as flights, hotels, car rentals, tours, and attractions, in one place online.

OTAs serve as intermediaries between travel service providers (suppliers) and customers, offering a convenient way to compare prices, read reviews, and make reservations from a variety of providers in one place.

Some OTAs specialise in accommodation, while some specialise in attractions and activities.

Examples of OTAs: Viator, GetYourGuide, Trip.com, Expedia

### **Protected characteristics**

Specific characteristics that are protected against discrimination in the UK, under the Equality Act 2010. These include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

### **Purple pound**

The collective spending power of disabled people and their households.

### **RNIB**

Short for Royal National Institute of Blind People.



RNIB is the leading sight loss charity in the UK, and they offer support and advice to people in the UK with sight loss.

### **RNID**

Short for Royal National Institute for Deaf People.

The RNID is a charitable organization working on behalf of people who are D/deaf or have hearing loss in the UK.

### **Screen reader**

Also known as text-to-speech software.

A screen reader is a software tool, used by people with visual impairments, to be able to “read” online. It basically reads aloud the text on a computer screen (websites, documents, apps etc). The screen reader converts text, buttons, and other visual elements into spoken words or braille, allowing users to interact with digital content using a keyboard or touch commands.

### **SITE**

Short for Society for Incentive Travel Excellence.

SITE is a professional association for people who work in incentive travel (MICE).

### **SMEs**

Short for small and medium-sized enterprises.

The UK government definition of SMEs (amounts in Euros to align with the EU):

- Micro - less than 10 employees and an annual turnover under €2 million
- Small - less than 50 employees and an annual turnover under €10 million
- Medium-sized - less than 250 employees and an annual turnover under €50 million

### **Travel Trade**

“Travel Trade” is a term that covers all intermediaries that book and sell your products (B2B), rather than direct bookings from the general public (B2C).

Intermediaries could be tour operators, wholesalers, destination management companies (DMCs), travel agents or online retailers / marketplaces such as OTAs (online travel agents).

There is sometimes a misconception that travel trade = groups, but these intermediaries would also book individuals and small groups with you. Any individuals they book are usually referred to as FIT.

The Travel Trade usually have a wide client base, both domestically and internationally. Some of them sell exclusively B2B, while some of them sell both B2B and B2C, and some sell just direct to consumers (B2C).

### **UX**

Short for user experience.

Basically, how a person feels when interacting with a system, for example a website or an app.

UX covers all aspects, such as ease of use, accessibility, and how enjoyable the experience is.

Good UX design aims to create websites and apps that are intuitive and meet the needs of users effectively.



# VisitAberdeenshire

c/o P&J Live  
East Burn Road  
Aberdeen  
AB21 9FX

Tel: 01224 900490

Email: [industry@visitabdn.com](mailto:industry@visitabdn.com)

Website: [industry.visitabdn.com](http://industry.visitabdn.com)

Whilst all the information in this guide is believed to be correct at time of publication (September 2024), VisitAberdeenshire can accept no responsibility for any error or misrepresentation and cannot accept liability for loss or damage caused by any reliance placed on the information contained in the guide.



**VisitAberdeenshire**