

Tourism hits £1 billion milestone

Tourism contributed more than £1 billion to Durham's economy for the first time ever in 2022 and, with so many incredible developments underway and in the pipeline, the future is looking bright for the county.



The most recent economic impact assessment figures certainly showed there was a great deal to be optimistic about.

Visitor numbers may not yet have reached pre-pandemic levels, but Visit County Durham work to promote the county through national and international marketing campaigns, improve the visitor experience and develop new products, is encouraging visitors to stay longer.

The number of day and overnight visitors both increased in 2022 and we are continuing with efforts to convert more day visitors into staying visitors. This will deliver further economic growth, with overnight visitors spending on average 89 per cent more than day visitors per trip.

Visit County Durham will continue to seize opportunities and work in partnership across the region to develop the destination sustainably.

Michelle Gorman reflects on a memorable six months...

“It’s hard to believe Christmas is just over a month away. We knew 2023 was going to be a busy year, but I don’t think we anticipated just how fast-paced it would be. News that Durham hit the £1 billion visitor economy milestone in 2022 was definitely one of the highlights. This is an amazing achievement and testament to the hard work and resilience of the county’s tourism businesses.

Developments at attractions and accommodation across the county have further strengthened the county’s offer with both domestic and overseas audiences. And with even more exciting new products due to open over the next six months, Durham’s profile and appeal is set to reach new heights.



“ I would like to thank Ivor for everything he has done for Visit County Durham and the county’s visitor economy. ”



Ivor Stolliday, centre right, with members of the Visit County Durham Board at his last board meeting in June.

We have also seen significant change, as we said goodbye to our long-serving chair Ivor Stolliday who retired in June. I would like to thank Ivor for everything he has done for Visit County Durham and the county’s visitor economy. Duncan Peake, currently serving as interim chair, is perfectly placed to see Visit County Durham through this transition period, bringing with him a wealth of skills and experience.



A sustainable destination

Developing and supporting sustainability in destinations is a key focus for Durham and the wider North East region. This year, Visit County Durham, as part of Destination North East England – the new name for the national Destination Development Partnership pilot– joined the Global Destination Sustainability index. The index measures and benchmarks the sustainability performance of a destination with a view to driving innovation and regeneration. It allows us to compare Durham’s performance against other cities around the world and provides opportunities to share best practise. Setting a baseline for the county’s sustainability is an important outcome of the first year of our membership, enabling us to work with our partners to identify and implement activities and initiatives that will further improve the destination’s performance.

National destination marketing campaign set to drive visits to Durham



Our latest national destination marketing campaign aims to showcase the wealth of unique and diverse experiences on offer in the county. Do Durham Differently encourages visitors to take a fresh look at what Durham offers, explore more and try out new activities.

Between autumn 2023 and spring 2024, Visit County Durham will work with campaign partners to deliver high profile activity, including partnerships with national media titles, digital advertising, influencer commissions and media visits.

The campaign follows on from the success of the Memorable Moments national destination marketing campaign, which ran from autumn 2022 to spring 2023, reaching more than 2.25 million consumers and generating £86.6 million in additional visitor spend.

For further information about the campaign and how to get involved, visit: visitcountydurham.org/differently

Reaching global audiences

Raising awareness of Durham in key overseas markets is a priority for Visit County Durham, supporting our commitment to growing inbound tourism.

In September, Visit County Durham represented Durham and Destination North East England at VisitBritain's Destination Britain North America flagship trade event and attended the UKInbound Annual Convention. During these events we met with and showcased Durham to top travel buyers, travel agents and group travel organisers from across North America and around the world.

Over the last six months, we have also delivered 12 international visits for the travel trade, media and social media influencers, including:

- A VisitBritain trip attended by journalists from Australia, Canada, Germany, India, Japan, the Netherlands and Sweden.
- High profile North American influencer Vineyards & Voyages.
- Three media visits for journalists and influencers from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.
- Chinese influencer visit in partnership with LNER.
- German travel trade familiarisation trip.
- Dutch and German influencer trip in partnership with Dusseldorf Airport.



Journalists and influencers from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia visiting Durham Cathedral.

A focus on quality

One of the great benefits of being a Visit County Durham partner is having access to a large range of free resources, networking opportunities and discounted training courses. Here we review some of the courses delivered over the last six months and take a look at what is to come.

Product Knowledge Day

Our annual Product Knowledge Day provides an insight into tourism developments taking place across the county, as well as local suppliers. This year's event took place at Hardwick Hall Hotel in April.

Visit County Durham Garden Party

One of the networking highlights of the year, the Visit County Durham Garden Party is a great opportunity to meet with contacts old and new. It is also where we announce the winner of Durham Tourism Superstar. This year's event took place at Beamish Hall Country Hotel in July and was attended by more than 100 people.

Welcome to Durham

In May, we relaunched our popular customer service course, Welcome to Durham, with demand proving so high we delivered a second session the following month. Welcome to Durham aims to improve the visitor welcome, equipping partners with the skills that can make the difference to a visitor feeling satisfied or dissatisfied. It also provided an overview of the county's tourism offer so that businesses can share this knowledge with customers.



Group Travel Training

Group travel makes a valuable contribution to Durham's visitor economy, and we are working to grow this further by helping businesses gain the skills and knowledge they need to take advantage of the opportunity it presents. In May, we delivered a group travel course to provide training on how to welcome groups and meet the needs of this highly competitive market.



Upcoming courses

Astro Tourism Workshop

The Astro Tourism Workshop aims to grow awareness and knowledge of this growing market. This year's workshop takes place on Tuesday 14 November and will be followed by a guided tour of some of the county's key stargazing sites on Wednesday 6 December.

Business and Events Training

Following the launch of our Meet in Durham website, we are holding a business meetings and events training session on Wednesday 22 November. Aimed at helping businesses maximise opportunities presented by this market, the course covers subjects including hybrid events, working with agents and perfecting show-around skills.

To find out more about these courses, visit [visitcountydurham.org/industry-training-calendar](https://www.visitcountydurham.org/industry-training-calendar)

Coming in 2024

We will be sharing more details of 2024 courses over the months ahead. Highlights will include enhancing bookability, developing social media skills and how to take advantage of screen tourism.

Free business support

Don't forget to visit the business support hub at [visitcountydurham.org](https://www.visitcountydurham.org). You will find toolkits on how to target specific markets, the latest market intelligence, upcoming events, social media guides and training courses.

'Penny Farthing Guy' crowned Durham Tourism Superstar



Ian Bean, a museum engager at Beamish, The Living Museum of the North, was crowned Durham Tourism Superstar 2023 at our annual Garden Party in July.

Known as 'Penny Farthing Guy' after his cycling antics clocked up more than 300,000 views on the Beamish Museum's TikTok account, Ian has worked and volunteered at the attraction for almost 40 years. He has embraced many different roles - from riding penny farthings, restoring vehicles and taking part in Suffragette rallies to helping deliver sessions for people living with dementia and marshalling events.

Ian secured the most public votes in the competition after being nominated alongside staff and volunteers from a range of visitor attractions. He will now go forward as Visit County Durham's nomination for the Visit England and Mirror Travel National Tourism Superstar contest.



Recognising Ivor's contribution

In June, Visit County Durham's long-serving chair Ivor Stolliday retired following more than 14 years of dedicated service.

During Ivor's tenure, Durham's visitor economy saw significant growth and Visit County Durham's destination management model was recognised internationally as an example of best practice. It was also a time of unprecedented challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic.

To celebrate Ivor's incredible contribution to tourism, we presented him with his own Durham Tourism Superstar award.

A destination for all

Diversity, inclusivity and accessibility are integral to Visit County Durham's strategy to develop Durham as a sustainable destination.

This summer, a series of Proud Allies workshops were staged across the region to raise awareness and increase confidence around inclusive language and engaging with LGBTQIA+ people.

And, in August, we welcomed disability influencer Wheelie Fab Times to Durham to showcase accessible staycations. As well as sharing content on their Instagram channel, the couple wrote a blog for our website.

Find it at: thisisdurham.com/wheeliefabtimes



Six months in numbers

4 in-person training and networking events attended by 204 people.

657,855 visits to our consumer website thisisdurham.com.

£6.4 million (equivalent advertising value) in destination media coverage.

15 media and influencer trips to the county.

2,606 new followers across This is Durham social media channels, taking our total number to 90,793.

95 per cent customer satisfaction rate in the 2023 Mystery Shopping Survey for the Visitor Information Network.

Figures relate to April 2023 - September 2023

Looking ahead

2023 may be drawing to a close but the pace of progress shows no sign of slowing down, with even more openings, exhibitions and events to look forward to.

In 2024, a new collections building will open at Locomotion in Shildon. New Hall will house around 50 additional rail vehicles, meaning Locomotion will boast the largest collection of historic railway vehicles under cover on one site anywhere in the world.

At Raby Castle, Raby Estate's ambitious Rising development is due for completion next spring. The

Rising will see the creation of reimagined walled gardens, new events spaces and exciting dining and shopping experiences.



Diary Dates

Events

Durham's festivals and events programme provides added incentives for visitors to come to the county. Incorporating events in your marketing activity is a great way to help to ensure your business benefits from the increased footfall.



Key autumn/winter events:

Lumiere	16-19 November
Durham Christmas Festival	1-3 December
The Flying Scotsman Centenary Festival	13 December - 2 January
Fire & Ice Durham	February

Awareness days

Awareness days give businesses the opportunity to take part in topical social media conversations and reach new audiences. Two key dates for the diary are:

Small Business Saturday	2 December
English Tourism Week	18 - 27 March

Marketing Themes

Visit County Durham's upcoming consumer marketing themes include classic Christmas, romance and spa, Easter holidays and nature. Please let us know about any events, experiences or new developments that tie in with these themes by emailing marketing@visitcountydurham.org. When posting content on social media, don't forget to tag @thisisdurham and use the #LoveDurham hashtag.

Stay informed

To stay up to date with the latest news, blogs and events from Visit County Durham, visit our website at visitcountydurham.org. You can also follow us on social media, and don't forget to sign up to Grapevine, our weekly e-newsletter, via the website.

Tel: 03000 261220

Email: info@visitcountydurham.org

Web: visitcountydurham.org



VCDBusiness



VCDBusiness



Visit County Durham

Supported by:

