



Bumper investment drives continued growth for Durham's visitor economy

Latest tourism figures show a major boost for Durham's visitor economy as the county sees overall visitor expenditure rise to a record £1.38billion, with the number of day visitors now 7.6% higher than pre-pandemic figures, and overnight visitors also rising by 1.8%.

The results show visitor expenditure rose by 11.7% in 2024, with the value of the county's visitor economy reaching record levels for the third year in a row. Overall, 21.56 million people visited the county last year, an increase of 7%.

The number of people employed in tourism in Durham has also risen and is up by 4.7% according to the latest STEAM* results.

The major study, which tracked visitors to the region and spend throughout 2024, has shown an increase in the number of people staying overnight, and has highlighted the county as the only area in the North East to see a rise in overall visitor numbers.

Significant levels of investment in the county's visitor offer have helped to drive this continued growth, whilst marketing campaigns and strategic partnerships have raised the profile and appeal of the county on a global scale. New and enhanced visitor attractions have played a major part in this success, with the New Hall expansion at Locomotion, the transformation of Raby Castle through its Rising development, new experiences at Beamish Museum and further developments at The Auckland Project.

For more information visit: visitcountydurham.org/destination-performance

Photograph: Anna Warnecke, CEO, 11 Arches and Councillor Lyndsey Fox

Michelle Gorman reflects on 2025 so far...

It has been a busy start to the year with the Visit County Durham team continuing to work hard to support the visitor economy.

As well as the excellent volume and value of tourism results, we have also seen the recent launch of a place brand - 'The Durham Story'. This exciting new approach to promoting the county was unveiled to over 80 stakeholders at a launch event at Gala Durham in March.

The event, hosted by Durham County Council and Durham University, was the culmination of a 12-month project which has seen engagement with hundreds of stakeholders from across the region, to identify a compelling new proposition for the county which will showcase Durham on a global scale.

The new brand and story for the county takes inspiration from the past and encourages us to use it to help shape Durham's future. It is based on The Big Idea for Durham, an emotional and behavioural statement of intent: 'Durham: confidently championing its regional, national and international role'.



The new approach will see organisations and individuals unite behind the brand to build the county's image

Spearheaded by Durham County Council, Durham University, Visit County Durham and Business Durham, this new approach will see organisations and individuals join forces and unite behind the brand to build the county's image, identity and reputation, and harness profile-raising opportunities to reach key audiences.

The Durham Story is an extraordinary blend of beauty, enterprise, heritage, culture and ambition, found in all four corners of the county. It shines a light on what makes us special, the distinctiveness and character of Durham, and the opportunities for the growth, development and promotion of the county.

It is embodied by four key themes of 'our natural lifestyle', 'contemporising and connecting our culture', 'space to innovate and grow', and 'a special city that attracts and radiates'.

With a consistent approach across multiple sectors, the Durham Story will enable us to engage and inspire potential investors, businesses, visitors and students, whilst instilling pride in our resident and business communities. To find out more about the Durham Story, and how to get involved, visit: Durham-UK.com



“ The Durham Story is an extraordinary blend of beauty, enterprise, heritage, culture and ambition, found in all four corners of the county. ”



S&DR200 Launch

It is full steam ahead for the S&DR200 Festival. The nine-month international festival officially launched at the end of March and runs until November 2025. Events are taking place across County Durham and the Tees Valley, celebrating 200 years since the first journey on the Stockton and Darlington Railway. VCD is using the anniversary and festival as a hook to attract visitors from across the globe to visit the county and join in the celebrations. SDR200.co.uk



Maundy Thursday

The world's media was focused on Durham as King Charles and Queen Camilla visited Durham Cathedral to attend the Maundy ceremony in April. Durham was cast into the international spotlight leading to a huge spike in destination media coverage as images of the Cathedral were shown around the globe.

Reaching global audiences

Raising awareness of Durham with international audiences is a priority for Visit County Durham, supporting our commitment to growing inbound tourism.

The first part of 2025 has seen a significant amount of engagement with the media and travel trade, and we continue to work closely with VisitBritain, VisitEngland, and in partnership with the wider North East to showcase the county.

Highlights include welcoming influencers from the USA, Germany, Scotland and the UK, and journalists from across the UK, the Netherlands, China, Ireland, France and Italy writing for titles including The Guardian, The i Paper and Discover Britain.

This year we have partnered with Newcastle International Airport, NewcastleGateshead Initiative, Visit Northumberland and Sunderland City Council to deliver a £40k marketing campaign with Expedia to drive an increase in visitors from France, capitalising on a new easyJet route between Paris and Newcastle. Funding through VisitBritain's GREAT Gateway Innovation Fund was secured by the region to promote the North East to the German market, in partnership with DFDS. And Visit County Durham has also delivered a campaign on behalf of the region, targeting the US, in partnership with VisitBritain.

In addition, we have partnered with the Tees Valley Combined Authority to represent Durham and the Tees Valley at international travel trade and media events where we have promoted our region's shared rail heritage.



Cat Thomson visited Durham City to gather content for a feature in The Scotsman



Journalist Micke MacEacheran finding out about The S&DR200 Trail of Discovery

Northern Saints Trail takes next step

A new regional strategic group has been established to take the Northern Saints Trails project on the next phase of its journey. The trails bring the fascinating stories of the region's saints to life, set against a backdrop of the very best of the region's attractions, landscapes, places to eat and drink, and accommodation.

The network of six trails stretches over 205 miles and showcases more than 500 visitor economy related businesses and venues. The new group will focus on raising the profile of the project, and establishing capacity to develop the network of trails as a must do for regional, national and international visitors.

northernsaints.com

Awards and accolades

Durham has been chosen as a finalist in the Group Travel World Awards 2025, for Best Collective Destination, with the nomination coming from group travel organisers who have experienced the county's excellent group travel offer for themselves.

Voting is now open, and everyone is being encouraged to get behind Durham, which is up against other top UK locations including the Isle of Wight, Liverpool, Wiltshire, Southend on Sea and Newmarket.

Kynren has also been chosen as a finalist, with the annual outdoor production up against ABBA Voyage, Thursford, the Eden Project, Milton Keynes Theatre and Ironbridge in the Best Group Friendly Attraction category.

Lumiere

One of the region's most-popular cultural events, Lumiere will light up the night skies of Durham City once more in 2025. The biennial runs from Thursday 13 to Saturday 15 November 2025. Visit County Durham will be working closely with the festival team to maximise the impact of the event by encouraging longer stays and visits to the wider county. **thisisdurham.com/lumiere**

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's a look at what's been going on.

Careers Handbook

Visit County Durham has been part of a regional group developing a new online careers handbook, to support the ongoing skills work of Destination North East England. It focuses on inclusivity and strategies for engaging with underrepresented groups. Discussions have taken place with education suppliers and members of the visitor economy looking at the effectiveness of courses and apprenticeships to support the industry. For more information go to: Destinationnortheastengland.co.uk/skills

Product Knowledge Day

Our annual Product Knowledge Day provides an insight into tourism developments taking place across the county, as well as introducing businesses to local suppliers. This year's event took place in March at Bishop Auckland Town Hall, attracting over 70 attendees, networking with 23 attraction and supplier partners who were on hand to talk about their products, developments and events.

Welcome to Durham

Following the relaunch of our popular customer service course, Welcome to Durham, attendance continues to grow. The one-day course 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 provides an overview of the county's tourism offer so that businesses can share this knowledge with customers.

Marketing opportunities

A new page on www.visitcountydurham.org has recently launched featuring all of our marketing opportunities which partners can take advantage of.

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. [visitcountydurham.org/seasonal-marketing-opportunities](https://www.visitcountydurham.org/seasonal-marketing-opportunities)



Seaham gets Silver

Following their success at the regional North East England Tourism awards Seaham Hall Hotel went on to represent the county as a finalist in the national tourism awards – congratulations to Seaham Hall on their Silver award in the Small Hotel of The Year category at the VisitEngland Awards for Excellence 2025. The prestigious awards have been running for more than 30 years and showcase the quality of England's tourism businesses.

Media Library

Visit County Durham's online media centre enables partners and the media to access a range of images and footage of the county for use in their own activities.

Register at: [visitcountydurham.org/images](https://www.visitcountydurham.org/images)

Free business support

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

New Advisory Board

In March we appointed new members to our Advisory Board. The VCD Advisory Board provides strategic oversight and strong local leadership for the county's visitor economy. With the organisation recognised nationally and internationally as an example of good practise in destination management, the VCD Advisory Board will play a crucial role in shaping the future of the visitor economy in County Durham, a thriving sector recognised as a key driver of economic growth.



Advisory Board left to right: Ross Grieve, managing director, Seaham Hall and Luxury Lodges, Anna Warnecke – chief executive officer, 11Arches, Michelle Gorman, managing director, Visit County Durham, Alison Maynard – deputy principal, New College Durham, – Duncan Peake (chair), chief executive officer, Raby Estates, Hannah Fox – executive director, The Bowes Museum, Rhiannon Hiles – chief executive, Beamish Museum, Stephen King – New College Durham, Sarah Price – head of Locomotion.

International partnerships

We are delighted to welcome Faye Dufferwiel in her new role as International Partnership Executive. Faye will be working to identify and maximise international links and will be in contact with partners to discuss opportunities.



The new appointment comes as Visit County Durham continues to have a strong focus on international activity as we work to develop and manage international partnerships and connections that contribute to and increase the regional, national, and international profile of the county and visitor economy, culture and creative sectors.

Well done Wendy!

Huge congratulations to Wendy Wilshire for coming second in VisitEngland's annual Tourism Superstar Award. The head of volunteer casting and engagement at Kynren was the only person from the North East shortlisted in the prestigious national competition, after winning Durham Tourism Superstar in 2024.



And the winners are...

Hundreds of people from the region's tourism and hospitality businesses gathered at the North East Tourism Awards in March, and it was a great night for Durham businesses as they picked up a whole host of accolades.

Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Award:

Durham Cricket – Highly Commended

Business Events Venue of the Year:

Event Durham, Durham University – Bronze

Experience of the Year:

Triple A Food Tours – Highly Commended

Large Visitor Attraction of the Year:

Hall Hill Farm – Gold

Ushaw Historic House, Chapels & Gardens – Highly Commended

Pub of the Year:

South Causey Inn – Gold

Small Hotel of the Year:

Seaham Hall – Gold

Lord Crewe Arms, Blanchland – Silver

Small Visitor attraction of the year:

Diggerland Durham – Silver

Auckland Palace and the Faith Museum – Bronze

Tanfield Railway – Highly Commended

Tourism Festival or Event:

Kynren

Volunteer of the Year:

Kynren Cast and Crew – Gold

Six months in numbers

8 in-person training and networking events attended by **181** people

563,255 visits to our consumer website thisisdurham.com

£46.9 million (equivalent advertisement value) in destination media coverage

16 media and influencer trips to the county

1,894 new followers across This is Durham social media channels, taking our total number to **97,922**

3,079 businesses listed on thisisdurham.com

89 regional businesses offering Northern Saints Trails passport stamps

Figures for November 2024–April 2025.

Looking ahead

Summer 2025 and beyond is set to see even more developments, events and activities take place to support the county's visitor economy:

Great Yorkshire Show

In early July members of the Visit County Durham team will be heading to Harrogate to attend the Great Yorkshire Show, with The Bowes Museum, Durham Cathedral, Kynren, Lumley Castle and Raby Castle joining us on our Durham stand.

The annual four-day event is a highlight in the agricultural diary attracting 140,000 visitors, and with Yorkshire representing a target market for the county, the show is an excellent opportunity to promote Durham.



Upcoming training: Visit County Durham offer a host of training events through the year designed to support you to grow and develop your business, visit our website for more information: visitcountydurham.org/industry-training-calendar

Awareness days

Awareness days provide great promotional platforms that you can use in your marketing activity. From Small Business Saturday (29 November) to Purple Tuesday (4 November), view a range of events relevant to our industry at visitcountydurham.org/social-media-for-business

Redhills Durham Miners Hall: Redhills Durham Miners Hall: The Grade II-listed building, home of the Pitman's Parliament, is set to open in 2025 following significant redevelopment. Dating back to 1915 when it reopens, visitors can learn about its fascinating history through tours, and enjoy events, conferences and weddings.

For more information on openings and developments taking place across the county, visit: visitcountydurham.org/visitcountydurham/vcd-blog-whats-new-for-2025

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 VCDBusiness on Facebook and X and Visit County Durham on LinkedIn. 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

Supported by:



VCDBusiness



VCDBusiness



Visit County Durham

