



**ARGYLL & THE ISLES STRATEGIC TOURISM PARTNERSHIP  
VISITOR ECONOMY RECOVERY AND GROWTH STRATEGY  
2022 – 2025**



**Argyll & Isles Strategic Tourism Partnership  
Visitor Economy Recovery and Growth Strategy 2022-25**

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# Argyll & Isles Strategic Tourism Partnership

## Visitor Economy Recovery and Growth Strategy 2022-25

### Introduction

This document is intended as strategic guidance for the second of three annual Action Plans and has been devised to respond to changes in strategic or operational priorities. The Year 2 Action Plan (Appendix 1) outcomes have been agreed to complement projects supported by the Argyll & Bute Council Rural Growth Deal but are not dependent on significant infrastructure investment. Accordingly, emphasis on regional marketing and industry development activity will support the partnership's ambitions for a competitive and sustainable visitor economy.

The region and the industry have faced significant challenges in recent years, but national strategic objectives and changing global visitor trends have combined to present significant opportunities for Argyll & the Islands. Recovering international and domestic markets have increased pressure on travel, transport, and accommodation in some destinations; supply chain deficits and high energy costs are affecting the business community's ability to deliver quality experiences; and a rapidly changing and uncertain regulatory framework will inevitably lead to further reduced availability of service providers across the region.

However, Argyll & the Isles is enviably placed to take advantage of certain assets and systems in response to consumer habits and emerging holiday trends; and make important contributions to Scotland's ambitions for leading practice in key areas:

- Responsible Tourism.
- Sustainable Tourism.
- Fair Work.

New tourism product opportunities are developing through diversification as businesses look to improve and further monetise their visitor offering. Examples are businesses collaborating to produce new products, business owners offering new Aires spaces for motorcaravans and farms and crofts producing food & fibre creating working farm visits & experiences.

### The Post-Pandemic Landscape: Global, National and Regional Influences

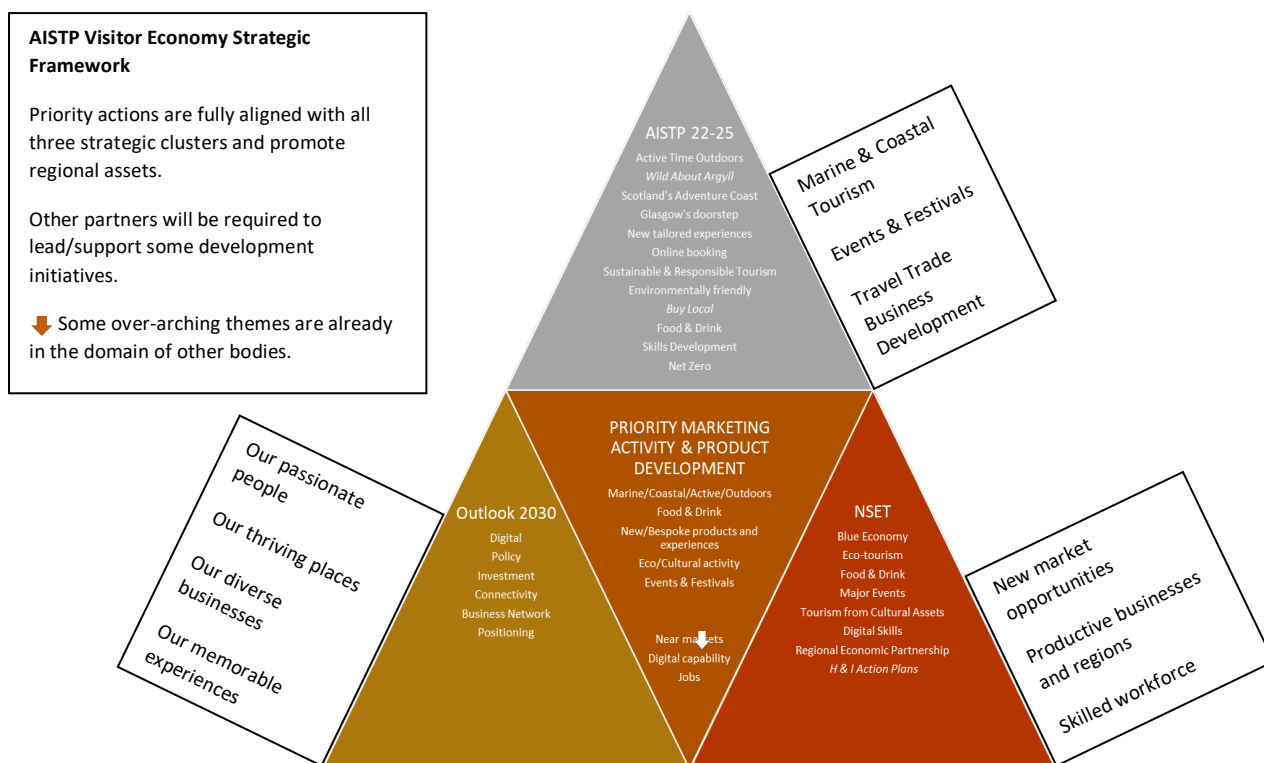
Recovery has faced obstacles and delays with changing restrictions and regulations since 2020 and there have been inevitable business adaptations and casualties, but the tourism industry is resilient and there is an appetite to re-establish and re-set destination appeal and sustainability. Adherence to the triple-bottom line (economic, social, and environmental) will redefine quality in pursuit of increasingly demanding and influential visitors, and encourage local collaborations in primary production, supply, energy, waste management and customer focus. Improved tourism products and experiences will be increasingly responsive to communities' aspirations and sensitive to an outstanding environment. Targeted and sustained marketing efforts will be necessary to raise and maintain the profile of the destination's offers effectively; and attract visitors to enjoy Argyll & the Isles while treating the area and communities with respect.

The Argyll & Isles Strategic Tourism Partnership (AISTP) continues to develop this strategy to align activities around recovery priorities and to ensure the most appropriate use of partner resources. The strategy is now aligned to national strategic imperatives: Scotland Outlook 2030 National Tourism Strategy (SO2030), and the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET); and headline priority actions have been identified where all three overlap. Some of the areas for action are particularly appropriate for the region as a whole and can be expertly delivered by business communities across local destinations.



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The areas for action focus on creating and maintaining conditions for deliverable products, services and experiences that contribute to business and community sustainability and meet or exceed the expectations of our visitors.



Recovery planning will address existing and emerging pressures and the need to inform visitors on what to expect, encouraging socially and environmentally responsible behaviour. Recovery planning will also influence and be ready to respond to changes in market requirements, particularly at short notice. Each workstream will be influenced by, focus on and/or acknowledge the critical importance of near markets, digital capability and the recruitment and retention of high-quality jobs; and meet place-based commitment to Destination Net Zero.

### Partnership Background and Record of Achievement 2021-2022

The AISTP was set up in 2009 to provide industry direction immediately after the dissolution of the Argyll, the Isles, Loch Lomond, Stirling & Trossachs Tourist Board. Following a summit event in Oban in 2011, AITC was established as the delivery vehicle for regional strategic marketing campaign activity, product development and industry communications. AITC was established as a cooperative with membership drawn from 12 local marketing groups operating across Argyll & Isles, plus sectoral associates Food from Argyll (FFA) Culture, Heritage & Arts Argyll (CHArts) and the Business Improvement Districts (BIDSS) from Oban, Dunoon and the Isle of Bute. The Destination Organisation is entirely industry based and represents approximately 1200 business interests at regional and national forums.

Argyll and Bute Council, working in partnership with local communities and funding bodies, has successfully completed several large place-based projects with the aim of enhancing the local built environment. These projects involve securing many millions of pounds worth of funding from a variety of sources and often delivering to very tight timelines. A few of these projects are listed below.

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- Kilmartin Museum upgrade – completed 2023 and funded by Regeneration Capital Grant Fund & ABC.
- Helensburgh Waterfront Development – Phases 1 and 2 completed 2023 and funded by ABC, SportScotland and Crown Estate Scotland.
- Campbeltown Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) – completed 2021 and funded by Historic Environment Scotland and ABC.
- Rothesay TH/CARS - completed 2023 and funded by Historic Environment Scotland, HLF and ABC.
- Dunoon CARS – completed 2023 and funded by Historic Environment Scotland and ABC.
- Gigha Community Campsite – completed 2023 and funded by Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF), HIE and ABC.
- Glen Orchy Car parking upgrade design works – completed 2023 and funded by RTIF, Forestry and Land Scotland and ABC.
- Hermitage Park upgrade and new Pavilion building – completed 2020
- Oban Transient Visitor Pontoons – completed 2018 and funded by ABC.
- Rothesay Pontoons – completed 2023 and funded by ABC and Crown Estate Scotland.
- Lochgilphead Front Green/ Ardrishaig Public Realm – completed 2023

Strategic programmes have delivered demonstrable growth and outcomes since 2012, and the successes of campaign activities, commercial partnerships and market positioning are a matter of public record. Each has helped create a strong foundation on which to build recovery of the visitor economy across Argyll & the Isles. Industry standard Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) data models from 2009 to 2019 show a clear pattern of growth, notably well above the Scottish average.

[https://www.wildaboutargyll.co.uk/media/5177/waa\\_wildabouttourism\\_2020.pdf](https://www.wildaboutargyll.co.uk/media/5177/waa_wildabouttourism_2020.pdf)

Since then, industry-changing global and domestic events conspired to present dramatic challenges to sustainability and growth:

- Full implications of UK withdrawal from the EU.
- Covid-19 global pandemic.
- Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- Scarcity of raw materials.
- Energy price rises.
- Cost of Living crisis.
- Global environmental crisis.

The partnership will support businesses as they navigate routes to recovery and growth, including signposting them to partners who can assist with improvement of green credentials, understand new regulatory schemes affecting tourism and hospitality sectors, skills; and how to overcome critical staff shortages.

During the pandemic in 2020 the overall economic impact of tourism dropped by 79.9% to £41.95m. This was a devastating period for the industry but notably STEAM data for the first half of 2022 suggest continued significant recovery with economic impact more than doubling from £49.36m in 2020 to £130.77, Jan-Jun 2022 - a recovery rate of 164.9%. Visitor days have also increased by 162.7%; 2.291m visitors compared to 1.060m visitors in 2021.

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### Sector & Market Focus

In 2021 and 2022 AITC also received Scottish Government business support grants administered by ABC and VS. AISTP believes the industry has utilised this support to good effect. Even in the face of significant losses there have been clear signs of innovation and entrepreneurialism by existing and new businesses, and investments in new infrastructure and improved products.

Major changes to the marketplace and consumer trends necessitate significant action at individual business and destination levels. Accordingly, there is an immediate and significant opportunity to invest in new and meaningful marketing activity to build on the success of time-limited partnership-funded campaigns delivered over the last two years:

- 2021-22      The Pantry and The Drinks Cabinet** – promoting product development collaborations uniting Argyll & Isles' food and drink providers and venue operators.
- 2021-22      Pedaddling** – Inspiration for people-powered adventures and active travel around Scotland's Adventure Coast.
- 2021-22      GCN Destination Partnership** – showcasing Argyll & Isles' outstanding gravel biking credentials.
- 2021-22      Above and Below** – showcasing the exceptional marine and celestial experiences focusing on sustainability.

Some of these campaigns has had associated product development funded by HIE, Argyll & Bute Council and NatureScot and delivered by AITC. ABC has secured a Rural Growth Deal which includes a portfolio of investment in marine and coastal tourism infrastructure and product development.

Argyll & the Isles' credentials as an outdoor adventure and food-lovers' destination have been substantially enhanced through this campaign activity. New assets have been created, including trails that appeal to consumers and encourage new business collaborations. Examples include the Kintyre 66 holiday route; and a collaboration across Cowal to launch a local produce hamper, bookable in advance by guests intent on authentic self-catering options.

AISTP will devote significant effort in 2023-24 to promote regional adventure and food and drink products and use trails and itinerary ideas as the principal methods of business engagement and consumer activity. Inter-connected active travel experiences should be integral and the partnership will aspire to have options available to book online via business operators' own digital channels and [www.wildaboutargyll.co.uk](http://www.wildaboutargyll.co.uk), Visit Oban | Love Oban | Oban Tourism Group and [www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com).

### Strategic Priorities Delivery

Argyll & the Isles must compete as a destination to continue to recover its loyal customer base and attract new visitors. AISTP, through its delivery partners AITC and VS, has developed a tactical and agile marketing plan aimed at positioning Argyll & the Isles as Scotland's Adventure Coast and broadening that positioning to celebrate all the destination has to offer. Combined industry and consumer research suggests:

- the primary motivation for taking a trip was to go somewhere to get away from it all although connecting with friends/relatives, enjoying the outdoors, going back to a previous favourite place, and wanting to stay close to home were all important motivations for a Scottish break.

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- a home holiday will also deliver benefits – 75% of potential visitors felt it would aid mental health and wellbeing and two-thirds would visit places not visited for a long time.
- 2022 booking.com survey: 71% of those surveyed wanted to make more of an effort to travel sustainably, 78% want to stay in more sustainable accommodation.

The partnership anticipates continued emphasis on the destination's hero products:

- the natural environment and iconic wildlife.
- water and coast-based activities.
- unique cycling territory.
- dark skies & ancient forests.
- excellence in food and drink (especially seafood, local whisky and gin, craft beer).
- authentic cultural & heritage experiences.
- health and wellbeing opportunities.
- accommodation range.

The region's additional advantages of proximity to Scotland's central belt and improving, accessible inbound transport options render it ideally placed to appeal to domestic holidaymakers with reduced budgets and those travellers reluctant to holiday far from home.

To make practical contributions to the recovery and growth of the regional visitor economy, AISTP has established four immediate strategic priorities.

### **1. STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Extending the season and spreading visitors across the destination.**

Argyll & Bute Council has invested over £800,000 in staycation activities since 2020 to encourage responsible tourism: examples include a new Staycation Project Officer to engage with communities, businesses and partners on a range of visitor management issues; information in all public toilets signposting to a waste water disposal facilities map, preventing irresponsible disposal and creating safe black water waste points; recruitment of four new wardens to help raise awareness of responsible camping and littering across 120 car parks and other key visitor sites in each of the administrative areas for 2021 and 2022. Eleven temporary toilets were established at five locations (Westport, Bridge of Orchy, Glen Orchy, Kilchurn Castle and Victoria Bridge) during the summer periods of 2021 and 2022. These will be recommissioned for 2023. Funding has been provided to Friends of Loch Lomond to provide temporary toilets at Arrochar and Luss to help ease visitor pressure while work continues on long-term solutions.

In 2023 additional interventions have been put in place to sustain responsible tourism including car park upgrades, new signage and business support for motorcaravan overnight parking. These measures will help protect Argyll and Bute's environment and scenery and promote responsible tourism.

Extending the season will only be possible for communities that can, or have the potential to, offer appropriate visitor facilities and experiences that are available from January-March and September-November (in addition to the traditional holiday periods in the Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Christmas/New Year). The partnership will focus on those destinations which present those opportunities and can demonstrate viable levels of commitment from local businesses. The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund has supported – and continues to support – projects across the region to address particular issues. The council is also exploring investment

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in marine gateways through the Rural Growth Deal. Public consultation on this is currently underway.

Improving visitor circulation around the region will also have a positive, long-term impact on pressure points; and introduce business opportunities for “alternative” destination choices. Moving off the beaten track has enormous consumer appeal and AITC will lead on creating and sustaining compelling local products for existing and emerging markets.

Over the last twelve months, AITC and VS have been working in partnership and independently to recover the Travel Trade market. AITC utilises HIE funding to secure a Travel Trade expert who is building and maintaining new travel trade product directory and relationships. This work has yielded strong early results with a number of Travel Trade operators now considering Argyll & the Isles as a new destination offering to their clients.

### **Areas for Action:**

- Accommodate evident consumer desire for active and well-being time in the great outdoors, build on the success of Wild About Argyll campaign activity and product development: and position Argyll & Isles as Scotland’s Adventure Coast on Glasgow’s doorstep. This will maximise appeal to a younger, more adventurous, and experience-driven demographic.
- Encourage new tailored experiences for individuals and small groups that celebrate Argyll & the Isles’ key points of differentiation, and that can be booked online. Large group, coach and cruise audiences are not being ignored, but rather managed within appropriate destination and resource clusters.
- Respond to and accelerate the objectives of Scotland Outlook 2030, with a clear focus on sustainable and responsible tourism practices. Communities must be better integrated into local tourism decision-making and delivery of area-specific tourism offers.
- Demonstrate an environmentally friendly approach to tourism business development, including industry-wide carbon footprint reduction and the promotion of active travel and “buy local” consumer behaviour.

## **2. STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Reaching new audiences.**

### **Marine & Coastal Tourism**

The West of Scotland, with Argyll & Isles at its heart, has long been established as one of the world’s best sailing and boating locations. ABC and HIE have recognised maritime infrastructure and access improvements as investment priorities; including the UK and Scottish Government-backed Rural Growth Deal projects which are set to build and focus on the region’s enviable marine and coastal assets.

Scotland’s Adventure Coast perfectly encapsulates the wealth and diversity of the region’s marine and coastal tourism products and experiences; and opportunities exist to cement the region’s reputation as the most vibrant and customer-focused marine tourism destination in Europe.

Maintaining industry and public sector partner focus on immediate and future visitor requirements will deliver visitors to Argyll & Isles who are enthusiastic about being on or near the water, and responsible about how they interact with maritime, terrestrial and community environments.

The emphasis on maritime and coastal tourism development has been informed by years of research commissioned by Scottish Enterprise, HIE, British Marine Scotland and VS Insights.

<https://scottishtourismalliance.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Awakening-the-Giant-final.pdf>



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[https://scottishtourismalliance.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FINAL-Strategy-Document\\_Giant-Strides-2020-2025.pdf](https://scottishtourismalliance.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FINAL-Strategy-Document_Giant-Strides-2020-2025.pdf)

<https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/about-our-visitors/interests-activities/coastal-tourism>

### Positioning of Argyll & Isles Hero Products

Hero products and consumer-facing campaigns will entice and educate visitors to consume experiences without creating social or environmental problems by emphasising the links between travel, accommodation, activities, food and drink and the triple bottom-line sustainability of the communities that deliver them. The visitor-facing strategic marketing focus will be delivered around the following key propositions:

- **Argyll & Isles as Scotland's Adventure Coast;** people-powered adventures (cycling, walking, sailing and other water activities). Responsible tourism-focused activities to be discovered across the destination's varied locations. A range of activities for first time triers to specialists and everything in between.
- **Argyll & Isles excels in local provenance;** from foraging to food production, to Michelin listed restaurants, and an abundance of high-quality hand made goods. Argyll & Isles excels in the provision of local provenance and its characterful makers and producers are a key element of the visitor experience.
- **Argyll & Isles is an ideal destination for responsible tourism;** the destination offers many ways in which to enjoy the beautiful landscape responsibly. Businesses can demonstrate ideas for reducing their environmental impact and increase opportunities for visitors to create lasting memories without leaving a trace. This message will have resonance with informal and wild campers, camper van and motorhome users.

### Attracting new visitor types through partnerships

As travellers of today and tomorrow make destination choices not just on value for money but on sustainable and ethical tourism businesses and ways in which to enjoy leisure time responsibly, AITC will continue to foster partnerships which focus on the development of visitor products which enable this. For example, SCOTO – the organisation leading community-led tourism; and Agritourism – the organisation leading the development of new farm and croft-based tourism products.

### Events and Festivals

Argyll & the Isles based events have slowly begun to return over 2021 and 2022 with larger events such as ButeFest and the Cowal Highland Gathering being well attended and economically successful.

AITC has continued to invest in a relationship with The LIST and have further developed technology to enable all events to be listed on AITC, VS and The LIST programmes with a link to ticket booking.

### Travel Trade Business Development

Argyll & the Isles is an attractive destination to the Travel Trade market, particularly as operators move away from large coach tours to small groups with tailored itineraries. Of particular interest is the region's ability to deliver experiences focusing on:

- Activity and adventure; on water and land, people-powered adventures.
- Local food and drink; trails and UK's first Vegan Trail.
- Luxury breaks; wellness, spa and off the beaten track.

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- Wildlife, nature, and sustainable tourism.
- Walking, heritage, and cultural experiences.

The Travel Trade is interested in ready-made itineraries and ideas for immersive experiences. The region presents many options for travel, accommodation, attraction, and activity packages based on the above experiences and combinations of local destinations. AITC and VS will work closely together to develop relationships with the travel trade and encourage industry to build appropriate products across the destination. The primary driver will be quality of experience, rather than discounted rates.

### **3. STRATEGIC PRIORITY: Improving the Offer**

For Argyll & the Isles to compete with other destinations, the partnership should continue to build on the improvements achieved in the last ten years. Argyll & Bute Council has made significant investment in our places, and essential visitor infrastructure at numerous sites, creating benefits for both visitors and residents.

The customer journey can be a long chain with potential weak links that need to be addressed by individual businesses and collectively.

- The journey starts with destination marketing activity that presents clear and compelling reasons to visit (and/or move around) Argyll & Isles. AITC has an established history of producing first-class content for web and social media platforms; and understands the efficacy of multiple edits for use in different formats across a variety of campaigns. The global reach of VS will be a particularly useful partnership asset and AITC will work on compatibility of content for sharing on VS platforms and imagery to share on the Digital Media Library.
- Direct booking capability is expected by customers because it saves time and money. The regional tourism offer will be improved in terms of economic returns and destination reputation if most businesses can conclude a transaction online. AITC will work with industry on affordable and manageable system adoption to deliver that objective.
- Private car travel remains the default position for many visitors. The trunk road network is subject to permanent disruption on the A83, and delays are common. Disruptions to the ferry network continue to frustrate passengers and the partnership is committed to ensuring accurate and up-to-date travel information is available across all channels.
- Most visitors interpret the offer as the direct encounters and experiences associated with their valuable leisure time. Customer service and value for money rank very highly in traditional satisfaction surveys, as do authenticity, choice, quality, cleanliness, and personal safety.

Research has shown that employee wellbeing plays a key role in creating a productive and efficient workforce and reduces workplace attrition. To achieve the first-class customer service aspirations across the sector it will be key to embed fair work practices. Fair work is defined as work that offers an effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment, and respect and these need not involve a cost, and indeed may themselves realise a financial benefit to employers.

HIE's support for businesses and communities includes investment in quality, efficiencies and competitiveness. The HIE team based in Argyll & Bute support place-based projects that deliver economic and social impact for the region and HIE welcomes enquiries from the tourism sector which support this aim. Building community capacity to develop and deliver tourism activity is a priority. HIE has supported the development of a number of community-led tourism projects recently including Tobermory Harbour Association's Aros Park development of an outdoor access

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hub, the Gigha Camp and Motorhome site and visitor moorings on Colonsay. Many of these projects have been made possible thanks for a partnership approach including with key partners Argyll and Bute Council and VisitScotland and the vision and ambition within community organisations.

Highlands & Islands Enterprise remain committed to the development of tourism in rural areas. Their tourism priorities for 2023-2024 are integrated into the Argyll & Isles Tourism delivery strategy:

- Invest in quality, efficiencies and competitiveness using **HIE's client facing activity** and place-based /discretionary decision making to support tourism businesses and communities.
- Accelerate the tourism sector's progress toward **net zero and responsible climate action** and collaborate with partners towards the priorities identified in the Destination Net Zero Action Plan.
- Work with partners and industry to address the complex **workforce challenge** (short-term and longer-term actions). Continue to roll-out the fair work tourism activity and look for innovative ways to increase the attractiveness of the sector as a career of choice
- Work with **communities to build their capabilities and capacity**, enabling them to influence and drive tourism opportunities within their destination and maximise the retention of benefits locally and across the supply chain.
- Contribute to national **Visitor Management** priorities and activities to protect our region's natural assets and invest in strategic tourism infrastructure.
- **Influence national tourism policy and investment** engaging effectively with the Scottish Government and key groups such as the new formed Tourism Industry Leadership Group on wider issues including transport, population and housing.

HIE's innovation service can help get new ideas off the ground. At its core, innovation means making changes that will improve business. Examples include process changes to improve productivity, adaptations to business models to reach customers, waste reduction and operational efficiencies to achieve sustainability or business diversification to open new markets. The HIE team is on hand to support businesses to identify or implement the changes necessary for growth:

- Research and development.
- Developing new products or services.
- Improving productivity.
- Identifying new opportunities for your business to explore.
- Developing a new strategy for future innovation.
- Protecting your intellectual assets.
- Funding between £25,000 and £100,000, with potential for smaller projects to be supported.

Examples of innovation support include helping a business to reduce its carbon footprint and operate more sustainably; and supporting a business to make packaging improvements to increase shelf life so that a product could be shipped further. Details are available here: <https://www.hie.co.uk/support/browse-all-support-services/innovation/hies-innovation-service/>

### Skills Development

Another key driver of improving the offer for visitors is the continuing education and inspiration of tourism operators to support their understanding of the advantages of continued investment in

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their own businesses to sustain visitor growth and commercial rewards. This includes improving the skills of existing staff and attracting new entrants into the industry.

AISTP will offer a programme of events, either directly or through partners, focusing on practical ways in which businesses can develop.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise has developed a support programme for businesses to understand how to implement fair work practices. For tourism employers, HIE has extensive help available to make sure working practices inspire and support the workforce. Tourism businesses in the region are often the lifeblood of their communities, providing many of the jobs that help to keep young people and families in the area. Owners and managers are often working with or employing people they know and families they have known for years, so reputation is critical. The concept of fair work is especially applicable and HIE has published a guide relevant to your organisation and employees. Further details and a link to register for the guide are here:

<https://www.hie.co.uk/support/browse-all-support-services/fair-work-in-tourism-businesses/>.

HIE supports skills development in the sector through initiatives such as the graduate placement scheme and through management and leadership training, creating a career path within the industry and helping to improve standards.

Priority skill development areas for 2023 and 2024 are defined as.

- Improving digital marketing skills.
- Product creation & innovation.
- Reducing carbon & improving sustainable practices.
- Attraction & retention of staff.

### **4. STRATEGIC PRIORITY: The journey towards net zero**

Argyll & Bute Council has declared a climate emergency and is taking forward a number of different initiatives to help reduce the regions carbon footprint which is already one of the lowest in the UK. This includes the installation of EV charging points across Argyll and Bute and supporting reforestation projects and the installation of renewables and insulation programmes for buildings.

Visit Scotland leads the national tourism industry initiative. The Scottish tourism sector is being asked to prioritise responsible, low carbon growth and join the journey to Destination Net Zero. By acting, operators will reduce costs, build resilience, and meet increasing consumer demand for sustainable businesses focused on delivering responsible tourism. AITC will utilise and share the resources for region-wide destination and sector development projects; and emphasise Argyll & Isles' environmental credentials and consumer responsibilities in marketing and promotional material.

<https://www.visitscotland.org/supporting-your-business/responsible-tourism/sustainability/climate-change#advice>

The journey to net zero will be achieved through changed business practices and exploiting Argyll & the Isles' enviable location on the doorstep of the central belt. This has given the area a competitive edge: initially through the Heart & Soul campaign prior to Covid-19 and enhanced by the surge in staycation activity. The Scotrail investment in the Highland Explorer carriage operating twice daily on the Glasgow-Oban line in 2021 – the first in the UK – is a measure of confidence in this market.



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Better understanding of emissions and actions to reduce them are business priorities. HIE provides a Net Zero Toolkit , which covers funding and loans, understanding carbon footprints, reducing carbon impact of operations, utilities, products and services: environmental impact and waste management.

<https://www.hie.co.uk/support/browse-all-support-services/net-zero-scotland/>

Investment in AITC's digital capacity and capability in the last three years has ensured the destination is visible and bookable online through [www.wildaboutargyll.co.uk](http://www.wildaboutargyll.co.uk) and its digital footprint continues to grow with impressive web user performance delivering 77,000 outbound links to Argyll & Isles tourism businesses. Focused marketing activity to profile these credentials is proposed.

By adhering to these principles, the strategy will also deliver against the National Strategic Priorities on behalf of the partnership:

- Our thriving places.
- Our passionate people.
- Our memorable experiences.
- Our diverse businesses.

- END -



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March 2023

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**Appendix 1 - Year 2 Action Plan**

The year 2 action plan builds on the momentum achieved throughout the last two years. The plan has been built to be agile and respond to the emerging needs of the visitor and make the most of Argyll & the Isles’ natural assets and new product offers.

**Marketing Target Audience**

The target visitor audience for 2023/24 is based on VisitScotland segmentation. The following groups have been identified as priority target markets. The domestic marketing activity will be focused on central belt, NE & NW England, and some London groups. AITCs travel trade marketing will focus on UK and German markets.

**Marketing Focus**

The following marketing activity is planned for delivery. We will work closely with relevant partners to ensure cohesive and effective delivery.

<b>Strategic Priority</b>	<b>Marketing Key Focus</b>	<b>Delivery Period</b>
<b>Extending the season and spreading visitors across the destination</b>	<b>1. Experience Scotland’s Adventure Coast your way</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Walk</li> <li>▪ Cycle in the home of UCI</li> <li>▪ Paddle / swim</li> <li>▪ Sail</li> <li>▪ Retreat</li> </ul>	Launch of New Wild About Argyll website March '23, followed by Love Oban refresh
	<b>2. Argyll’s Natural Environment:</b> come and enjoy our rich and diverse terrestrial and marine wildlife and leave nothing but footprints	Feb - October
	<b>3. Treats &amp; Retreats / Winter Festivals:</b> indulge your senses and while away the winter hours in our spas, cabins, and hotels. Immerse yourself in our culture through our local provenance and winter festivals	Dec '23 – March '24
	<b>4. Plan your wedding in beautiful Argyll &amp; the Isles</b>	Jan '24 – March '25
<b>Reaching new audiences</b>	<b>5. Find Your Cowal:</b> enjoy the diversity of the Cowal peninsular & find your Cowal	April '23 – Sept '23
	<b>6. Focus on Mid Argyll:</b> Showcase the natural landscape, wildlife & green credentials	May '23 – Aug '23
	<b>7. Argyll’s Makers, Culture &amp; Heritage;</b> Be introduced to our local creators and immerse yourself in our cultural events	Year-Round

**Organic Marketing Development**

Whilst the campaigns are being delivered, we will continue developing our organic marketing activity, growing our audiences, and understanding what type of content they respond to. These activities will include:

- Continued development of Food & Drink Trails and promotion.

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- New easy walking routes to improve inclusivity of visitors.
- Showcasing our culture and heritage across the destination and ways in which visitors can take part.
- Ensuring that active travel options are included in every campaign; and creating a new Active Travel section on Wild About Argyll website.
- Promotion of Argyll's events through our partnership with The List (reach of 9m across the UK).
- Upweighting and cleansing of destination information to ensure the visitor can plan their trips effectively.

#### Budget

The budget to support the overall delivery of the marketing plan for 22/23 comes from several different sources and will be delivered by the AITC team and specialist partners as required. Funds will be drawn from; membership fees paid to AITC, £75,000 fund from Argyll & Bute Council and may include grants from VisitScotland if they become available. AITC has been granted £200,000 UK SPF Funding over two years which will be used as follows:

- Employment of full time Marketing Manager to upweight the capacity of the AITC delivery team.
- Purchasing of analytical tools & support for more detailed analysis of which campaigns and organic marketing is performing best, enabling agile adaption of plans for best return on investment.
- Further improvement of discoverability enabling improved ranking of Argyll & the Isles destination in search engines.
- Delivery of specified campaigns.
- Promotion of Argyll & the Isles destination to the UK and German markets,

It is anticipated that the £75,000 Argyll & Bute Council Grant will be apportioned as follows.

ACTIVITY	BUDGET	OUTCOMES
PR & media – Destination positioning	15,000	• Reach new audiences.
Bloggers, Influencers	5,000	• Reach new audiences; food trails, wellness and extend the season; winter retreats
Paid social promotion	5,000	• Boost marketing reach across all campaigns
New format, license free photography	10,000	• Assets which can be shared with VisitScotland, ABC & AITC Members
SEO Copywriting & new content development for new websites	10,000	• Insight based new content across all areas of Wild About Argyll
Campaign delivery	30,000	• Positioning Argyll as perfect get away from it all & wellness experiences.

## Argyll & Isles Strategic Tourism Partnership Visitor Economy Recovery and Growth Strategy 2022-25

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family friendly</li><li>• Great place for wildlife &amp; nature</li></ul>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>75,000</b>	

### Supporting evidence for marketing approach

In terms of domestic holidays, there may be deep-rooted beliefs around accommodation choice and travel options. However, there is some willingness to change around some areas of responsible tourism, notably around food and drink choices, energy consumption and car-free days.

<https://www.visitscotland.org/binaries/content/assets/dot-org/pdf/research-papers/about-our-visitors/external-vs.org-slides-summary-rt-scots-study-2021.pdf>

Visit Scotland continues to develop its data on current visitor trends and market demands. The current visitor insights fit well with Argyll & the Isles and have formed the basis of this marketing plan.

- Localism and authentic experiences.
- Adaptable adventure.
- Workcations.
- Artisanal retail and food and drink.
- Voluntourism.
- Wellness.

<https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/trends/trends-for-tomorrow>

<https://foodanddrink.scot/the-knowledge-bank/trends-foresighting/>