



ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

Year 3 saw the first full year where there were no UK travel restrictions due to Covid, the domestic market started travelling abroad in force and international markets were slow to return. Businesses were impacted further due to the cost-of-living crisis and a turbulent year of uncertainty, but the dedication and determination of South of Scotland businesses prevailed to show hope and enthusiasm for the future.

SSDA Conference March 2023 was to be the largest attended regional tourism conference in Scotland in that year.

The South of Scotland Tourism Conference was held at Peebles Hydro and formed part of Scottish Tourism Month & the very first South of Scotland Visitor Economy Week. The conference theme focused on celebrating, shaping & developing the South of Scotland's Visitor Economy through collaborative and partnership working with stakeholders across industry.

It was a huge success with **over 200 day-delegates**, an industry dinner for 52 people and a Scottish Borders FAM Trip.

3 Major announcements were made at the conference:

- Inaugural South of Scotland Thistle Awards to take place in Sept 2023
- The launch of the name of the Kirkpatrick Coast to Coast Cycling Route (KC2C)
- The start of the consultation for A Tourism Strategy for the South of Scotland



INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

Industry Webinars and Events

Short-Term-Let Licensing (August, September and October)

SSDA hosted 3 Regulations Roadshow events in partnership with ASSC, SB Council and D&G Council. One virtual and two in-person events took place across the region.

Marketing Trends and Insights (November) - Presentations by Vicki Millar, VisitScotland and Robert Kennedy, Super Control and Scotland Starts Here marketing by SSDA

Astro and Dark Sky Tourism (December) – Presentations by Dark Sky Ranger, Elisabeth Tindell and an introduction to SSDA's Dark Sky campaign to help businesses attract visitors, increase tourism spend in the region over the Winter Season.

Tales from the South of Scotland: Experience Workshops (December & January) – in-person sessions working with Kathleen Cronie of Mostly Ghostly, VisitScotland and SSDA, creating unique bookable experiences, developing stories.

Tales from the South of Scotland: Biosphere Experience Workshop Pilot (February) – working in partnership with GSA Biosphere & featuring Kathleen Cronie of Mostly Ghostly and Sarah Redman of Swim the Lochs to develop Green Stories for the UNESCO Trail.

SCOTO Roadshows (February). SSDA supported SCOTO on a series of roadshows across the South of Scotland.



INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Visit South West Scotland – Transition & Transfer of Assets

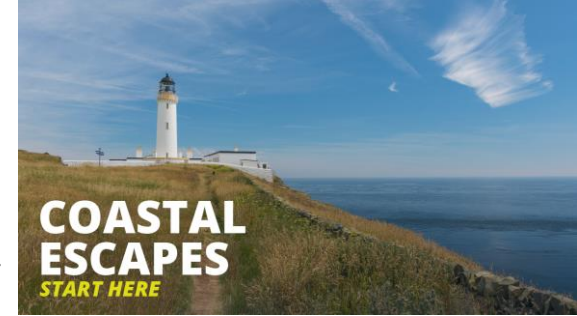
Following a meeting with the VSWS Board in August 21, a project plan was put in place for the transfer of the VSWS membership to SSDA and digital assets onto Scotland Starts Here.

Delivery of work completed:

- VSWS Membership conversions to SSDA
- Migration of listings from the VSWS website onto the SSH website
- Enhancement of SWC300 & Dark Sky Content
- Social Media - Priority Focus: retaining followers and engagement through merger of VSWS social media channels to SSH. *Facebook 11.2k followers. Twitter 4.37 k followers. You Tube 137 followers. SWC300 page on Facebook remains maintained as an independent page.*
- The transition was managed by the VSWS Marketing Consultant who has been retained and is now supporting SSH marketing function, ensuring continuity in promoting the VSWS assets.

Operational Transition – CEO. The SSDA CEO role became vacant in August 2022. An interim CEO position was created and filled by Board Director, Melanie Allen. This position ran until the arrival of a new CEO, David Hope-Jones in February 2023, allowing also for a handover transition period until mid-April 2023.

Staff Residential Workshop – SSDA Strategy. A two-day workshop was held in September 2022. The session was conducted with the interim CEO and Carron Tobin from Rural Dimensions, (SSDA's original interim Chair), who was brought in to provide a meaningful insight into discussions from the perspective of SSDA's origins.



Destination Development

Community Engagement

The SSDA team organised a roadshow to engage with and listen to local community groups in the Scottish Borders: Ale Water Valley Group, Hawick Tourism Group, Langholm – Let's Talk Tourism, Visit Kelso, Destination Tweed Valley, Selkirk.

Raiders Gravel. SSDA supported Raiders Gravel event with a funding package in Year 2, to deliver marketing and PR assets for SSH, which was achieved in Year 3 leading up to the event in August 2022.

- Over 125 riders from 11 countries took part in the event in Gatehouse of Fleet
- 700 visitors to the event estimated £100k boost to local economy (Raiders & D&G Council estimated)
- Interim CEO, Melanie Allen, started the first race on behalf of SSDA
- Photography and video content and assets collated for Scotland Starts Here media library and future promotion of Gravel cycling in the South of Scotland

UCI 2023 Destination Development and Promotion Short Life Working Group (SLWG). SSDA took on the role of 'led' for this group with priorities and workstreams identified.

Kirkpatrick C2C Route Branding and Interpretation Plan. SSDA worked closely with SoSE and project stakeholders on the branding of the new KC2C route advising best practice for marketing and building on the existing relationship with the brand designers, the Union. Key deliverables includes communications plan, route integration with Scotland Starts Here map.

Electrek – Explorer Recharge in Nature – Launch. SSDA supported this scheme via Southern Uplands Partnership - Year 2 £10,000 investment. The app was rolled out in Autumn 2022 [Electrek Explorer \(electrek-explorer.web.app\)](https://electrek-explorer.web.app).

Partnership with NatureScot and regional development agencies, stimulating, low-carbon travel in under-visited regions, rewilding sites and nature reserves.



**KIRKPATRICK
COAST 2 COAST**
SOUTH OF SCOTLAND'S COAST TO COAST

Place Brand and Marketing

Marketing and Campaigns

Year of Stories (Phase 2)

Scotland Starts Here, and so do our nation's greatest stories! Let's engage and inspire our target audience through local storytelling to visit the South of Scotland.

- Landing Page
- Paid Social Campaign
- Itineraries
- Blog posts
- Targeted Press and PR
- Influencer Trips
- Video and Photography

Outcomes

Scotland Starts Here

Website visits: 7,000+
Social Channels (increase): 2,809

Influencer reach: 314,413

Paid Social Media and Digital Display

Total reach: 600,000+
Total impressions: 1.8M
Video views: 80.2k



Dark Skies

The South of Scotland is home to incredible dark skies. Promote the off-season by raising awareness among audiences of the incredible opportunities to stargaze.

- Landing Page
- Paid Social Campaign
- Itineraries
- Blog posts
- Targeted Press and PR
- Video and photography
- Webinar

Outcomes

Scotland Starts Here

Website visits: 16,860
Social Channels (increase): 1,670

Paid Social Media and Digital Display

Total reach all channels: 970,000+
Total impressions: 3.7M
Video views: 1.3M plays



Place Brand and Marketing

Marketing and Campaigns

Curiosity Starts Here

Raise awareness of the incredible experiences on offer in the South of Scotland with our very own roving explorer, TA-M.

- Landing Page
- Paid Social Campaign
- Targeted Press and PR
- Video and Photography



Outcomes

Scotland Starts Here

Website visits:	23,603
Social Channels (increase):	2,500

Paid Social Media and Digital Display

Total reach: June to July 2022:	273k
Total ad impressions:	3.6M
Video views:	322k



Winter Starts Here – Winter Escapes

Enjoy a cosy winter escape and reconnect in the South of Scotland. Inspire visits by showcasing members' seasonal experiences from food and drink to incredible stays.

- Landing Page
- Paid Social Campaign
- Blog posts
- Targeted Press and PR

Outcomes

Scotland Starts Here

Website visits:	9,160
Social Channels (increase):	835

Paid Social Media and Digital Display

Total reach all channels:	384,000+
Total impressions:	1.7M



SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIENCES 60% ↑

- Growing awareness of the South of Scotland
- Building a dedicated fan base

NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBERS 80% ↑

- Engaged readers, ready to plan a trip
- Building the funnel with seasonal, monthly updates

WEBSITE SESSIONS 82% ↑

- 50k monthly website sessions
- Delivering over 260k external link clicks



Place Brand and Marketing

Travel Trade. Events, workshops and FAM trips.

- VisitScotland Connect22 – April 2022 - virtual
- Coach Tourism Association - July 2022 - Glasgow
- UKInbound Convention – Sept 2022 - Aberdeen
- VisitScotland FAM Trip - Sept 2022 – South of Scotland
- BETA (British Educational Travel Association) - Oct 2022 - virtual
- ETOA, Global European Marketplace - Nov 2022 - London
- Cruise Scotland – Nov 2022 - Edinburgh
- VisitScotland North American BDM – Nov 2022 - London
- VisitBritain Explore GB - Feb 2023 - virtual
- BTTS (British Tourism and Travel Show) – Mar 2023 – Birmingham

The SSDA Team engaged with over 220 Travel Trade representatives throughout the year. The enthusiasm to work with businesses in the South of Scotland and plans for visits/tours for 2024/25 to the region was extremely encouraging making the South of Scotland a **GO TO PLACE** on their agenda.

Two Travel Trade Training workshops and 5 One to One sessions with businesses from the South of Scotland.





Literary Travel In The South Of Scotland

READ



Scran season 6: South of Scotland, historic hostelries, pies, gin and gelato



Within minutes of leaving Edinburgh's Waverley station, we're shaken off the urban sprawl and entered a world of emerald hills, meandering rivers, and tiny blink-and-you'll-miss-them...



5 PRESS TRIPS

- Features in The Guardian, Metro, Daily Telegraph, Reader's Digest, Scotsman Scran Podcast and more

370 PIECES OF MEDIA COVERAGE

- Combined reach of over 1.8 billion across campaigns

6 INFLUENCER VISITS

- Combined audience of >1 million
- Estimated activity reach of 1.45 million

lonely  planet

BEST IN TRAVEL 2023
THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND

