



**Which data insights
visitor economy
businesses want:
SSDA Member Survey**

September 2024

Executive summary:

Context: In August/September 2024 the SSDA put a survey out to its members asking what data they needed and would actually use to make different/better decisions. This is in the context of the latest STEAM data being published and decisions about potentially sourcing different types of visitor economy data. The SSDA and partners are keen any such decisions are informed by what businesses would actually use.

Participation: 55 businesses completed the survey, of which 27% were visitor attractions, 24% were self-catering, 11% were food and drink, 9% were hotels, 4% each were tour operators, retail, tour guides, and event organisers and 2% each were holiday parks, B&Bs, community charities, marketing agencies and consultancies.

Data businesses already using: 25% of respondents say they are not currently actively using data to inform business decisions. In total, 24 different sources of data were named by businesses as currently being used. 19% are using VisitScotland; 6% each are using their in-house data and SSDA; 5% each are using data from their holiday letting agent, google and the Moffat Centre; 3% each are using Scottish Enterprise and ASVA data; 2% each are using: Scottish Borders Council, D&G Business Gate, ASSC, Local Business Assoc, Facebook page, VisitBritain, SG, Supercontrol, own surveys, Key Data, visitor info centres, Mintel, Scottish Accom survey, Strathclyde and word of mouth.

What data businesses want: 5 of the 6 different possible data types suggested had the majority of respondents describing them as useful. An Annual Customer report was seen as the most useful (71% deemed 'very useful' or 'quite useful'), then an Annual Trend report (69%), local Monthly Occupancy data (57%), Annual visitor feedback report (57%), and Annual STEAM data (53%). Average Daily Rates were deemed slightly less useful (43%).

Businesses are most interested in having: data from customers/visitors (73%); trend analysis (68%), business barometers (57%); data scraped from booking platforms (55%), local comparisons (63%). They are: more interested in annual reports (68% useful), than monthly reports (62%) or live dashboards (36%); more interested in future forecasts (64%) than backward-looking data (42%); and marginally more interested in regional comparisons (54%) than historical comparisons (52%)

Why businesses want data: Businesses want the data to: inform marketing; tailor product/offering; inform planning/business decisions; understand trends; benchmark against other businesses; help forecast future years; inform when to schedule activities and events; inform funding applications; decide on visitor information given to guests; decide what to stock; understand how the region is performing; and to help ensure their business remains relevant.

How businesses want to be supported to use data: Businesses are keen to have clear, simple and easy to use information and advice about: what data is available; how to use/interpret the data; and how to target marketing, set price points and budget based on this data. Webinars, short videos and simple written summaries were deemed most useful, along with hands-on workshops which show how practical decisions could come from data analysis. It shouldn't be long, complicated or theoretical.

Conclusions and interpretation: Many businesses in the South of Scotland Visitor economy recognise the importance of data for informed and successful decision-making. Most seem to already be using data in some way but there is a frustration that data can be hard to find and hard to interpret. Businesses want clear, simple, concise data and they want to be supported to be able to easily interpret this data to make real-world decisions, especially around marketing, price-setting, product development, benchmarking, planning and business development.

How the SSDA will use the findings of this survey:

The SSDA will share the results of this survey with its core strategic partners (SOSE, VisitScotland, DGC and SBC), proposing that:

- 1) Together, we purchase live, **real-world data insights from Key Data** and look to make this available to members of the SSDA, prioritising the forms of data deemed most useful in this survey.
- 2) The SSDA runs a regular **Data Insights webinar** for its members, which will share all the latest data, offering interpretation and analysis, as well as providing a space for private discussion between members.
- 3) The SSDA regularly shares data insights, with succinct interpretation and recommendations, on its **B2B Facebook page** and encourages comments, feedback and questions through Facebook, so it becomes a **community of sharing and learning**.
- 4) The SSDA develops a **Beginners Guide to Data-led Decision-making** which has simple, jargon free, recommendations as to how businesses starting out in this area can use data to develop their business, with clear guidance and real-world case studies.
- 5) The SSDA uses AI to **collate large data sets of visitor feedback** and give tangible, simple recommendations for businesses informed by this.
- 6) DGC and SBC are recommended to **continue to fund STEAM data**, largely for longitudinal comparisons, but that this data is made publicly available much earlier in the year, so businesses can more easily use it.
- 7) **VisitScotland continues to publish** its research and insights and visitor sentiment trackers.
- 8) **SSDA continues to collate and share information** about all relevant data it knows about on its [Data Insights webpage](#).

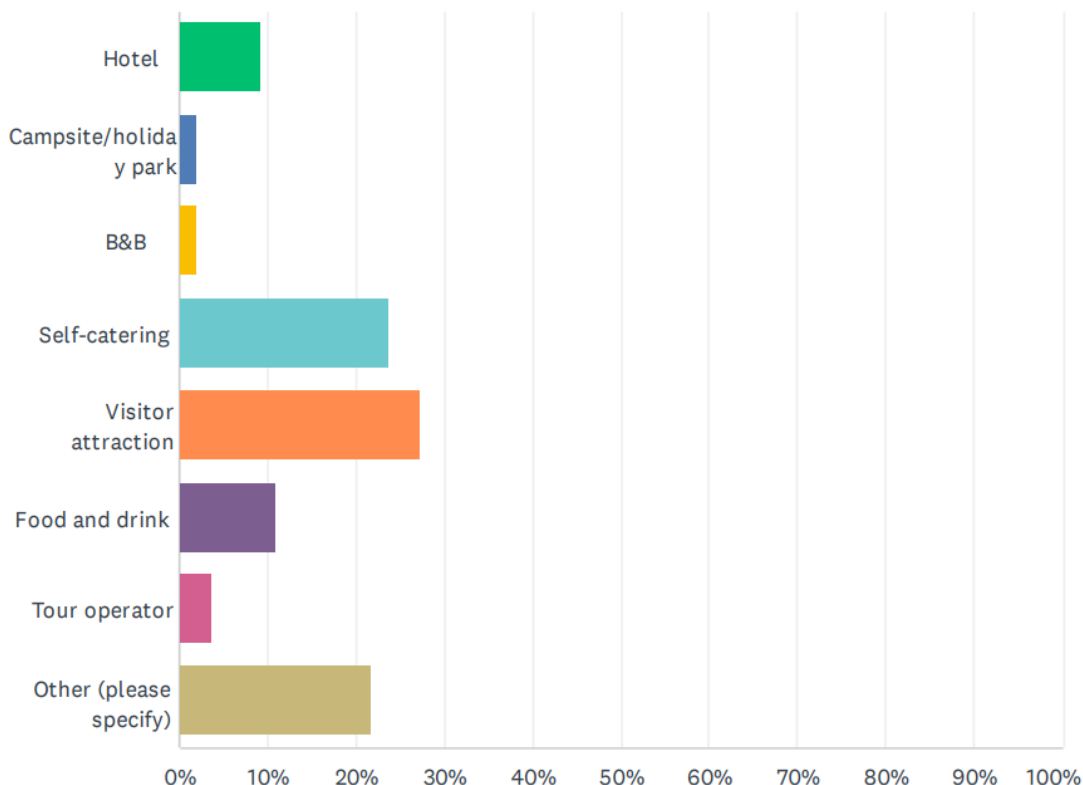
We are keen to listen to members' views about these recommendations, and also to discuss with our strategic partners.

To share your views, please contact David Hope-Jones (SSDA, CEO) at: davidhj@ssdalliance.com

FULL DATA

Participation:

55 businesses completed the survey, of which 27% were visitor attractions, 24% were self-catering, 11% were food and drink, and 9% were hotels:



Of the 22% that said they were 'other', this included:

- Both self-catering and visitor attraction (gardens)
- Community Charity non-profit
- Driver Guide
- event and community space
- Event centre
- Events organising charity
- Marketing Agency
- Retail
- Retail - bookshop
- Self Catering cottage plus Caravan CL
- Tour Guide
- Tourism Consultancy

The following businesses took part in the survey:

- Abbotsford
- Aird Donald Caravan Park
- Airhouses
- Allanton Inn
- Arbigland House and Gardens
- Arden Holiday Cottage
- Bangtidy House
- Bengairn Country Lodges Ltd
- Bird Gardens Scotland CIC
- Border Union Agricultural Society
- Borrowmoss Bothy and Farm CL
- Bright Light Marketing
- Broadmeadows House
- Craigmount Bed and Breakfast
- Creetown Gem & Rock Museum
- Crofthead Rentals Ltd
- Cruck Cottage Heritage
- Eat sleep ride cic
- Eyemouth Hippodrome
- Faldonside Eco
- Feast Cafe
- Fiona Drane Marketing
- Friars Carse Country House Hotel
- Galloway Cycling Holidays
- Gilnockie Tower
- Go Wild Scotland CIC
- Gorrenberry House
- Gretna Green Ltd
- Henry's Bay House Restaurant
- Johnstons Of Elgin
- Keepers Cottage
- Kirkcudbright Summer Festivities
- Kirkcudbright Dark Space Ltd
- Kirkennan Estate Holiday Cottages
- Knockinaam Lodge Hotel
- Legion Club
- Live Borders Museums, Galleries and Archives
- Lochcarron of Scotland
- Lowlander Bespoke Tours
- New Chapter Books
- Newton Stewart Initiative
- OakHill Cafe & Deli
- One Basket, Kelso
- Port Logan Holiday Cottages
- September Cottage
- Shambellie House
- Simply Scottish
- The Blue Cabin by the Sea
- The Ethical Dairy
- The Green House
- The Kings Arms Hotel
- The Ship Inn
- The Whithorn Trust
- Tweed Valley Blogger - TVB Tours
- Yellow Door Holidays

Data currently using:

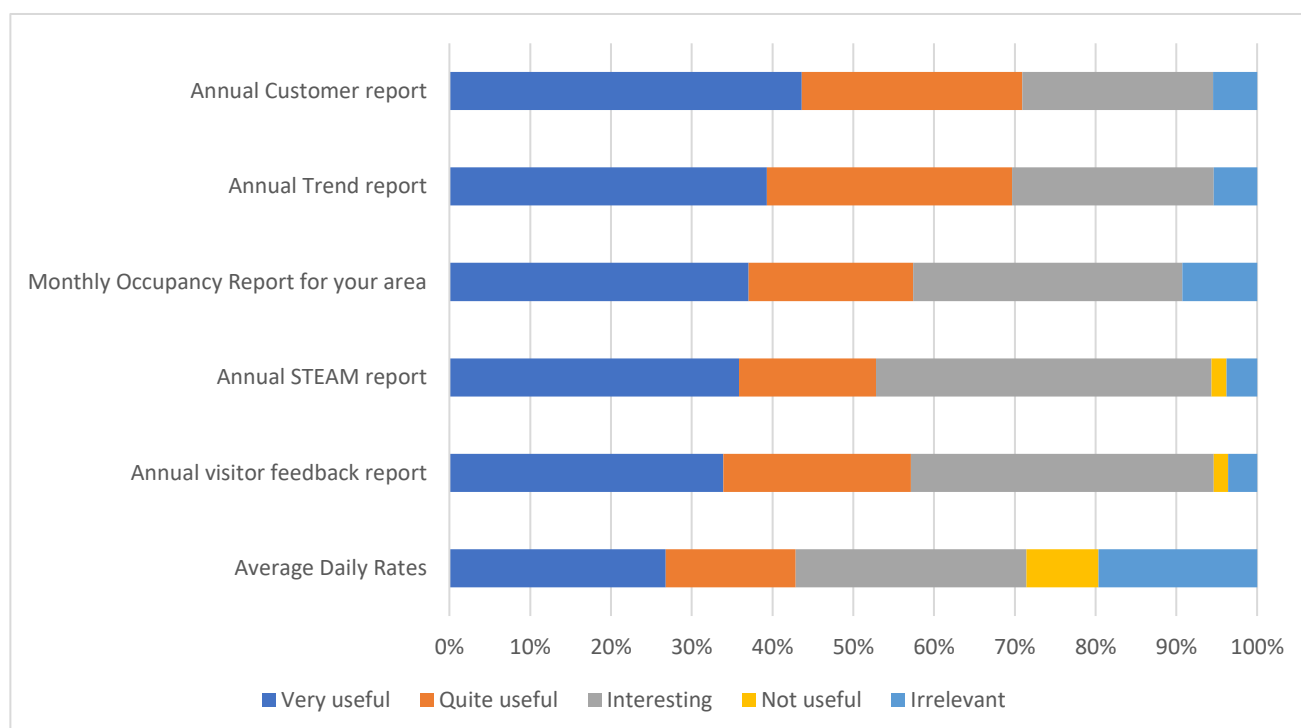
Of those who answered the question “**What visitor economy data do you currently use, where do you access it and how useful is this?**”, the following responses were given:

- [25%] 16 x None
- [19%] 12 x VisitScotland
- [6%] 4 x Own in-house booking data
- [6%] 4 x SSDA
- [5%] 3 x Letting agent (holiday cottages.co.uk & Discover Scotland)
- [5%] 3 x Google
- [5%] 3 x Moffat Centre
- [3%] 2 x Scottish Enterprise
- [3%] 2 x ASVA
- [2%] 1 x Scottish Borders Council
- [2%] 1 x D&G Business Gateway
- [2%] 1 x ASSC
- [2%] 1 x Local Business Association
- [2%] 1 x B&B Facebook page for Scotland
- [2%] 1 x Visit Britain
- [2%] 1 x Scottish Government
- [2%] 1 x Super Control
- [2%] 1 x Own surveys
- [2%] 1 x Key Data
- [2%] 1 x locally run visitor information centre
- [2%] 1 x Mintel
- [2%] 1 x Scottish Accommodation Survey
- [2%] 1 x Strathclyde
- [2%] 1 x word of mouth

What data would be useful?

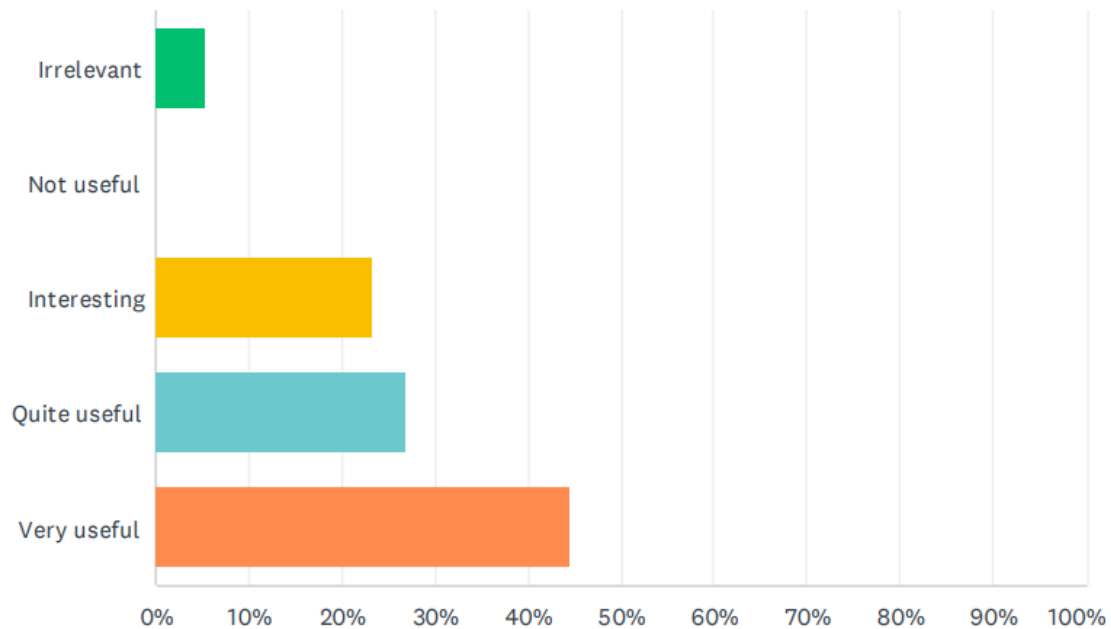
Businesses were asked how useful six different types of data would be. In order of usefulness (most useful first) the results were:

	Very useful	Quite useful	Interesting	Not useful	Irrelevant
Annual Customer report? [i.e. A breakdown of the different customer segments coming to your area. Where they come from, why they come, how much they spend, what they like to do, how they are changing.]	44%	27%	24%	0%	5%
Annual Trend report? [i.e. A report explaining trends in tourism that are relevant to the South of Scotland explaining what forms of accommodation, visitor attractions and experiences are growing and what is driving this change.]	39%	30%	25%	0%	5%
Monthly Occupancy Report for your area? [Occupancy rates from hotels, campsites, B&Bs and self-catering properties in the South of Scotland from the last 3 months and bookings for the next 3 months]	37%	20%	33%	0%	9%
Annual STEAM report? [i.e. An annual report showing the growth of tourism in the region in terms of visitor numbers and days, economic impact and employment - see example]	36%	17%	42%	2%	4%
Annual visitor feedback report? [i.e. An annual report for the area showing aggregated data on visitor feedback]	34%	23%	38%	2%	4%
Average Daily Rates? [i.e. average rental income per paid occupied room - how much others are charging]	27%	16%	29%	9%	20%



Annual Customer report:

[i.e. A breakdown of the different customer segments coming to your area. Where they come from, why they come, how much they spend, what they like to do, how they are changing.]

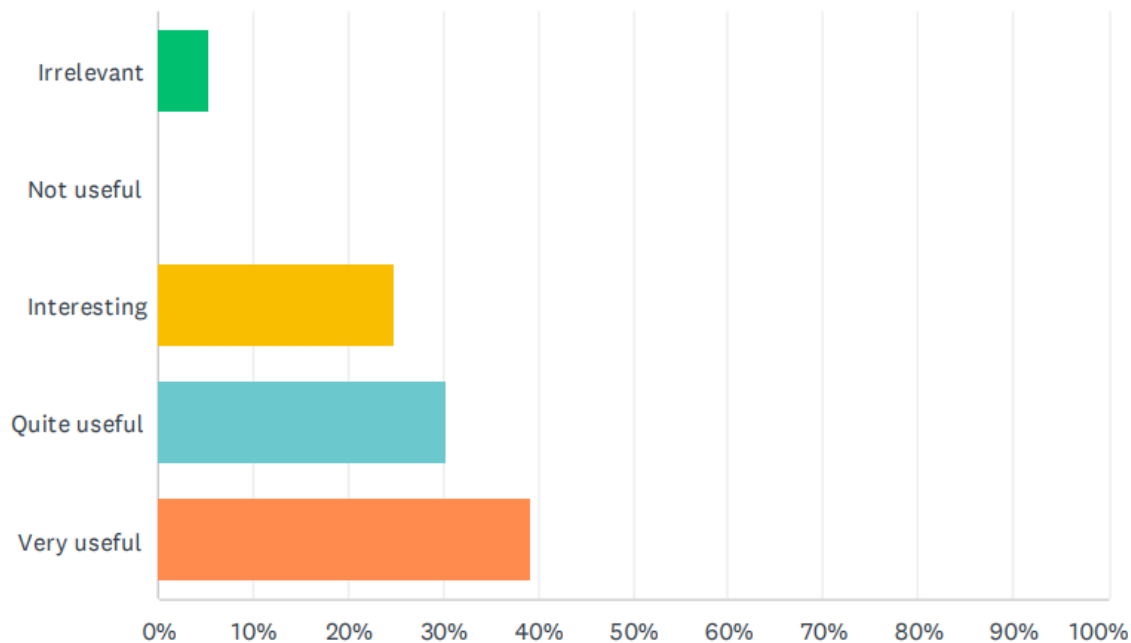


Those who said an Annual Customer Report would be useful, were asked how they would actually use this data. The following responses were given:

- 18 x To inform targeted marketing/social media decisions
- 12 x To tailor product/offering/engagement
- 5 x To inform planning/business decisions
- 3 x To understand trends
- 1 x To help forecast future years
- 2 x To compare against own business performance
- 1 x To inform funding applications
- 1 x To understand reasons for visiting the area
- 1 x To support our own data
- 1 x To decide on visitor information given to guests
- 1 x To evolve the business
- 1 x To grow tourism in the local area
- 1 x To help local groups to plan
- 1 x To ensure the business remains relevant

Annual Trend report:

[i.e. A report explaining trends in tourism that are relevant to the South of Scotland explaining what forms of accommodation, visitor attractions and experiences are growing and what is driving this change.]

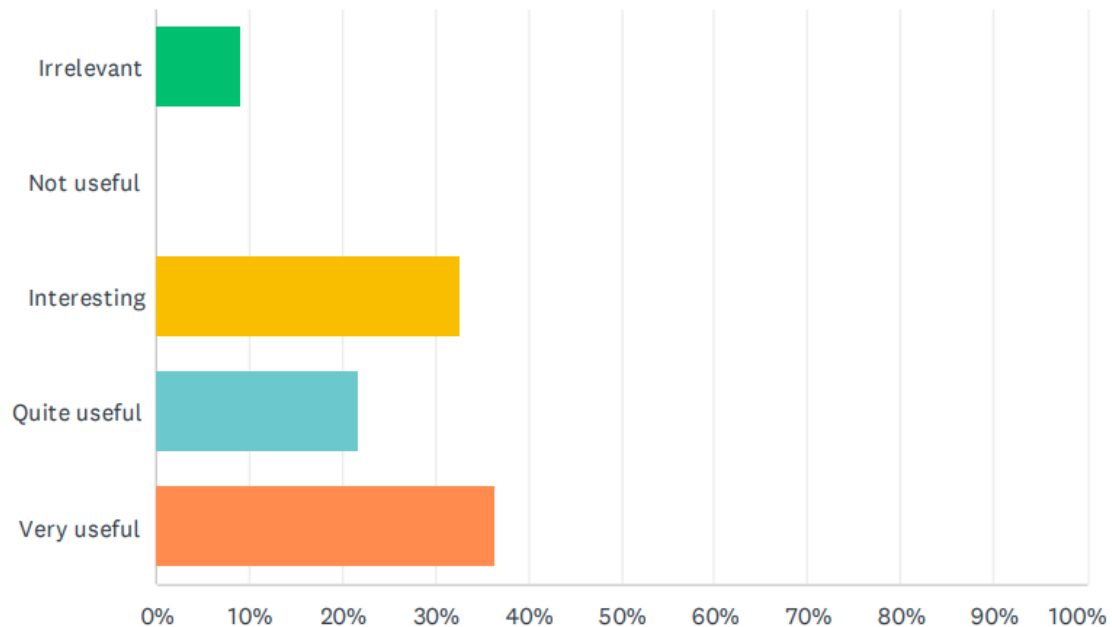


Those who said an Annual Trend data would be useful, were asked how they would actually use this data. The following responses were given:

- 9 x To assist with forward planning and activities
- 5 x To assist with development/strategy
- 4 x To inform marketing
- 4 x To understand customers and booking patterns
- 3 x To inform product development
- 2 x To benchmark against other businesses
- 1 x To inform when to schedule activities and events
- 1 x To understand how the region is performing
- 1 x To help forecast whether business is still economically viable
- 1 x To generate new ideas
- 1 x To see if customers are aware of activities on offer
- 1 x To assist with promotional campaigns
- 1 x To decide what items to stock

Monthly Occupancy Report for your area:

[Occupancy rates from hotels, campsites, B&Bs and self catering properties in the South of Scotland from the last 3 months and bookings for the next 3 months]

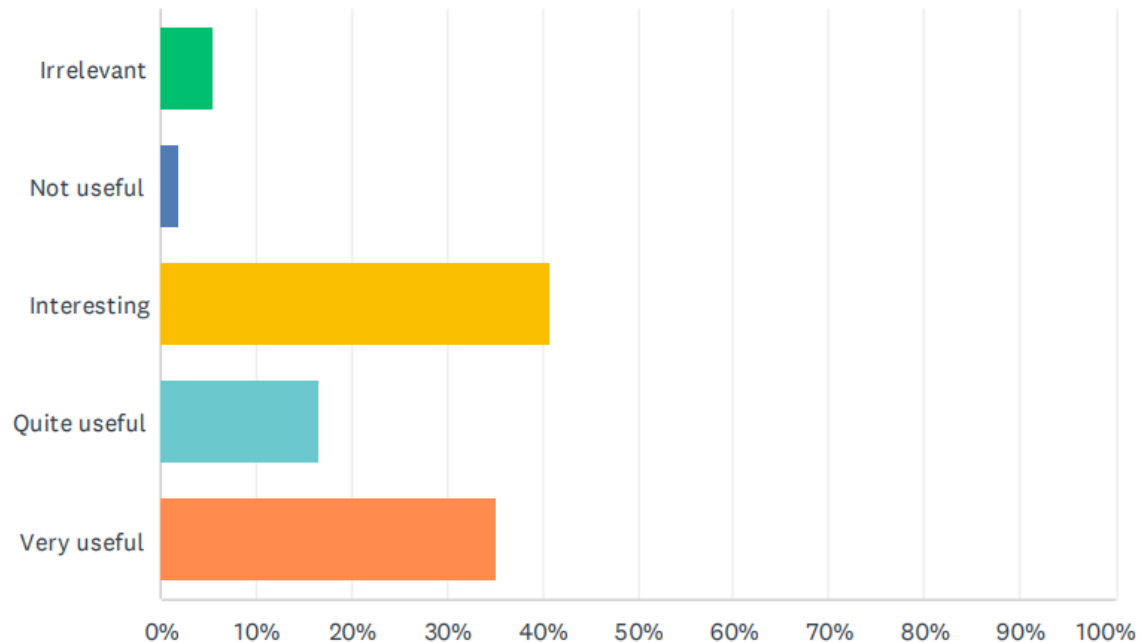


Those who said an Occupancy Report would be useful, were asked how they would actually use this data. The following responses were given:

- 8 x To benchmark against own bookings
- 7 x To assist with price setting/discounts
- 4 x To inform marketing
- 4 x To inform future development/planning
- 2 x To understand trends
- 2 x To assist forecasting and budgeting
- 2 x to inform funding applications
- 2 x To inform when to open/hold events
- 1 x To check offering what people want
- 1 x To inform evaluation of marketing performance
- 1 x To inform feasibility studies
- 1 x To understand local tourism levels
- 1 x To see if occupancy is linked to events
- 1 x To explore making connections with other businesses
- 1 x To inform orders of books and maps
- 1 x to inform feasibility studies
- 1 x To geographically target marketing
- 1 x To know when there will be peak occupancy
- 1 x To inform local event planning
- 1 x To understand who is visiting area

Annual STEAM report:

[i.e. An annual report showing the growth of tourism in the region in terms of visitor numbers and days, economic impact and employment - see example]



Those who said the Annual STEAM report would be useful, were asked how they would actually use this data. The following responses were given:

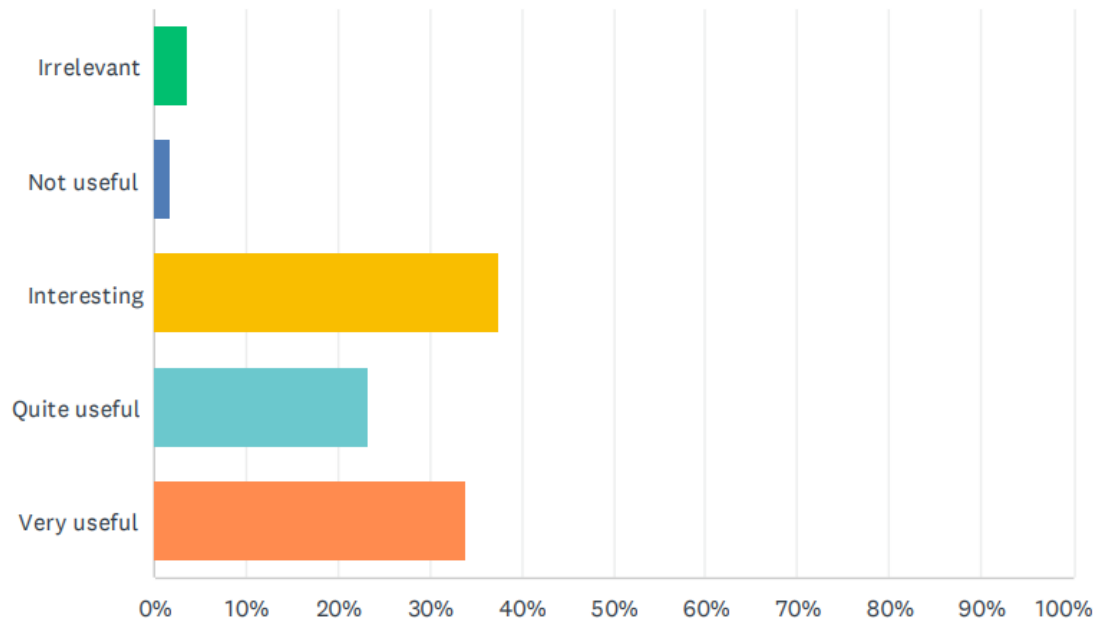
- 4 x To understand trends/patterns
- 5 x To inform business planning
- 1 x To inform price setting and ROI
- 1 x To inform marketing
- 1 x To align activities to customers
- 1 x To improve performance
- 2 x To benchmark against others
- 1 x To decide whether to grow business
- 1 x To support own data
- 3 x To give an overview of the region's economic performance
- 1 x To inform ordering
- 2 x To feed into funding applications
- 1 x To show governments the value of tourism

Other comments:

- STEAM data could be simplified as far as presentation
- Less useful than other reports – more for policy makers
- Too many reports could be overwhelming
- Need to be able to filter by areas, as Gretna is an outlier

Annual visitor feedback report:

[i.e. An annual report for the area showing aggregated data on visitor feedback]



Those who said Annual Visitor Feedback would be useful, were asked how they would actually use this data. The following responses were given:

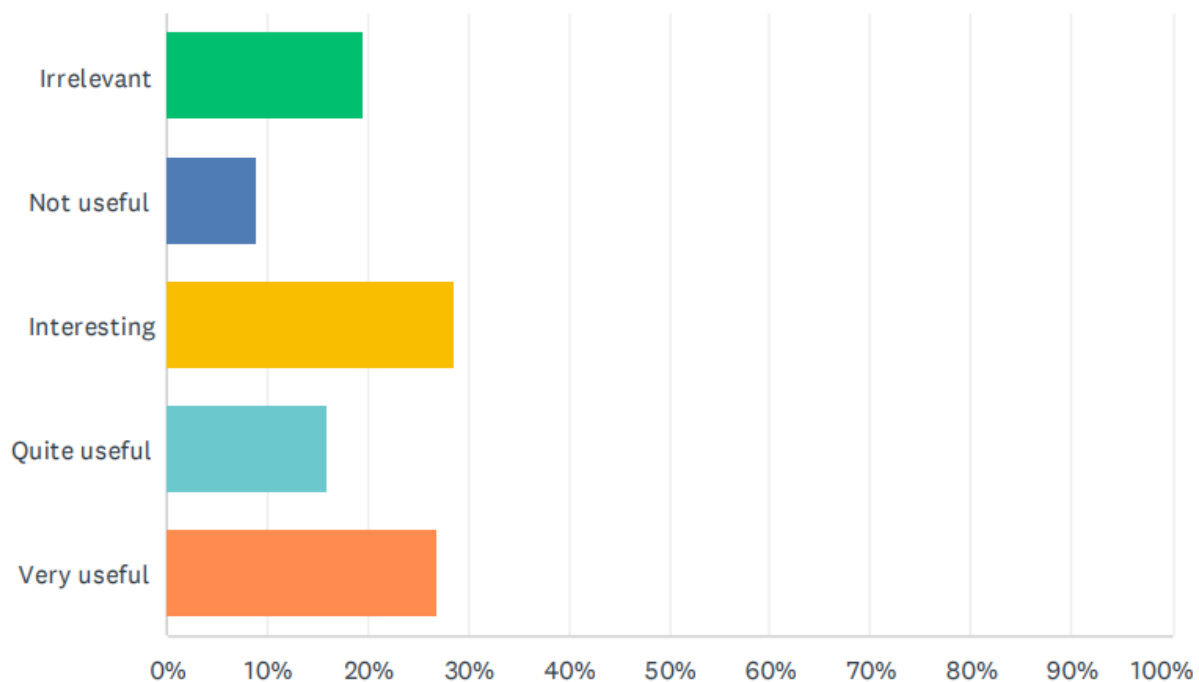
- 5 x To inform strategy/planning
- 4 x To align activities to user groups/visitor expectations
- 4 x To see how can improve to increase guest satisfaction
- 2 x To understand trends
- 2 x To inform marketing/social media
- 2 x To understand what visitors want
- 1 x To check are offering relevant experiences
- 1 x To direct guests to where others have recommended
- 1 x To inform staff training
- 1 x To use in funding applications
- 1 x To lobby Council, MPs and MSPs about lack of facilities
- 1 x For networking and partnerships
- 1 x To inform what issues need to be addressed locally
- 1 x To help town to grow
- 1 x To get key words to use in SEO

Other comments:

- 2 x Already collect my own data on my guests which is more relevant to improve my offering.
- It would need to be reflective of the various regions in the SOS and not a blanket report for all.
- Harder to see what presumably anecdotal information could be used for

Average Daily Rates:

[i.e. average rental income per paid occupied room - how much others are charging]



Those who said Annual Daily Rates would be useful, were asked how they would actually use this data. The following responses were given:

- 8 x To inform price-setting
- 2 x To inform benchmarking
- 1 x To decide whether to offer accommodation
- 1 x To understand trends/patterns
- 1 x To see when to offer experiences
- 1 x To inform funding applications (visitor spend)
- 1 x To assist with planning
- 1 x To compare with other regions
- 1 x To see relationship between quality and price

Other comments:

- This would be useful only if a high percentage of businesses participated, also it is subjective based on the business classification and type. Hard to compare like with like.
- We set prices per cottage so data showing average rate per x bedroom cottage would be more useful.

Support interpreting and using data:

To the question 'What training, information and support would help you better use data to inform your decision-making?', 30 respondents answered the question and 26 skipped in. Replies included:

- 5 x How to target online marketing, informed by data
- 4 x Simple training on how to interpret the data
- 3 x Informing what data is available
- 2 x Don't need any support
- 2 x Online webinars/videos to go through each report
- 1 x How to price correctly, informed by data
- 1 x How to budget, informed by data
- 1 x Encouraging more businesses to feed into data so the quality of the data increases
- 1 x Any
- 1 x Explanatory presentation
- 1 x How to increase bookings, informed by data
- 1 x clear information on: (a) contextual information about the data sources, (b) a summary of findings, (c) comparisons on previous period and (d) what steps if any are being taken by the SSDA.
- 1 x Support on how to use the data
- 1 x clear examples of how data can be used to inform decision making
- 1 x Clear, concise, simple information – must not be overwhelming
- 1 x "Hands-on workshop on how to use google analytics where we actually do the analysis and take it through to decision-making within the workshop. I have done numerous theoretical ones and am left little the wiser."
- 1 x easy to read fact sheet on key new trends Eg- Quick changes for future trends. Cost analysis across sectors Travel trade data
- 1 x Understanding of where tourist arrive from

Other training needs shared:

- 1 x Training for housekeepers on hospitality, standards, presentation etc
- 1 x Training on what we need legally, to run the business: we need to be sure we are fully covered HSE, First aid, food preparation, etc

Other comments:

- "What we don't need, in my view, is the gobbledy gook churned out from short staffed tourism organisations, who produce reams of electronic 'paper' with wording that takes a PHD to understand. The SSDA is doing well, very well, a user friendly organisation, and the above and below is the way forward for the South of Scotland now, get the nose to the grindstone and do the things you are asking questions about. Having said all that, I suspect this exercise will end up in the 'cupboard' at the back of the office!"

What types of data would be most useful?:

Respondents were asked “Generally, when looking at data, are you interested in?”, and were able to score 13 different types of data based on how useful they would find them. They are listed below in order (most useful first).

	Very useful	Quite useful	Interesting	Not useful	Irrelevant
Data from customers/visitors	50%	23%	21%	4%	2%
Trend analysis (help identifying trends to date)	43%	25%	23%	5%	4%
Forecasts for the future	39%	25%	29%	4%	4%
Annual reports	38%	30%	29%	2%	2%
Future looking data (what bookings are like for next few months)	38%	28%	29%	3%	3%
Business barometers - small number of local businesses sharing their data	35%	22%	22%	15%	7%
Data scraped from booking platforms, review sites and social media (i.e. big data)	35%	20%	27%	9%	9%
Local comparisons (i.e. how do I compare with other local businesses)	34%	29%	23%	5%	9%
Monthly reports	32%	20%	36%	9%	4%
Regional comparisons (i.e. how is my area faring compared to other areas)	29%	25%	34%	5%	7%
Backward-looking data (how we've performed)	20%	22%	35%	13%	11%
Historical comparisons (i.e. how does this compare with last three years)	20%	32%	34%	7%	7%
Live dashboards	18%	18%	40%	15%	9%

