BLUE SAIL

The Suffolk Coast Conference

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20 May 2026

Image - ettphotography

BLUE SAIL

VISITORS PLACES DESTINATIONS

We know East Suffolk well

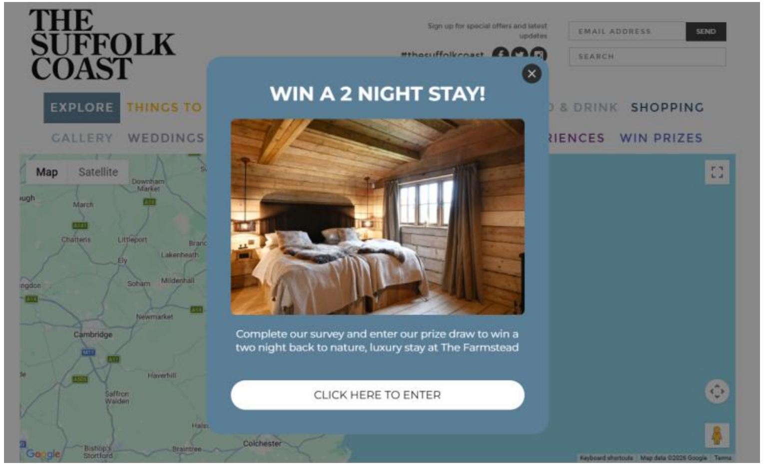
- SZC Tourism Mitigation Fund Development
- Food & Drink Tourism Development
- Public Transport & the Visitor Economy

Sizewell C
Tourism
Fund

TRANSPORTEAST

There's lots of data to draw on

- T-Stats (live data)
- The Suffolk Coast Visitor Survey (ongoing)
- 2025 Perceptions Study



Our Visitors

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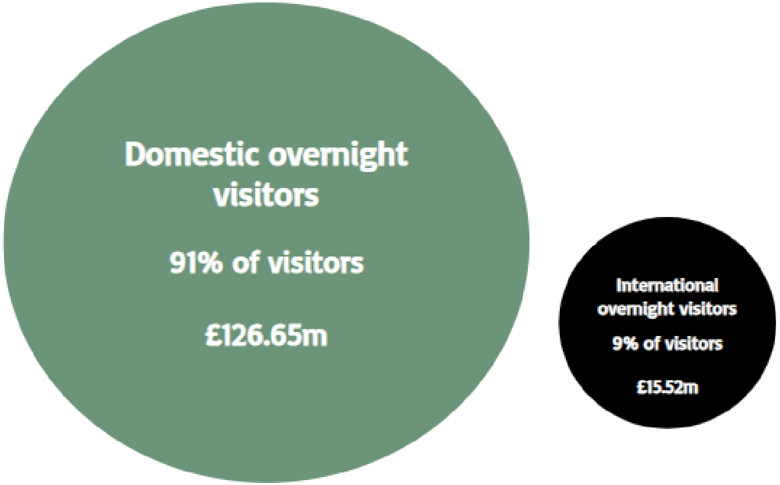
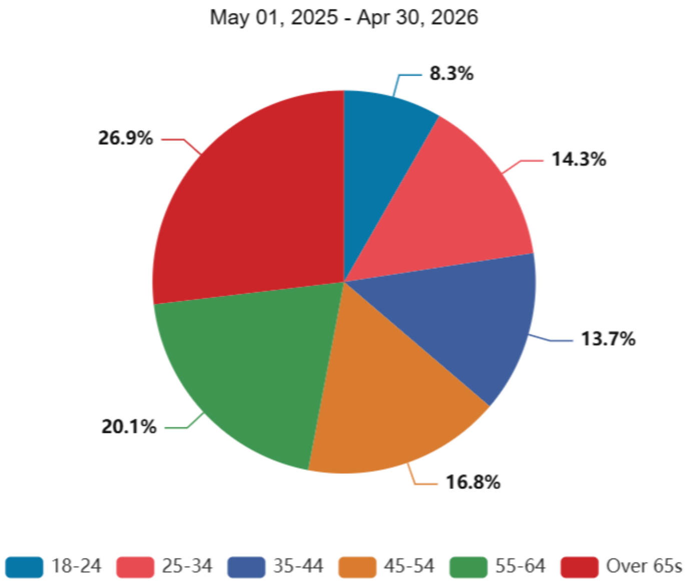
East Suffolk's current visitors tend to be older and from the UK

- 55+, often retired
- Travelling in couples or small family groups
- Empty-nesters
- Strong repeats

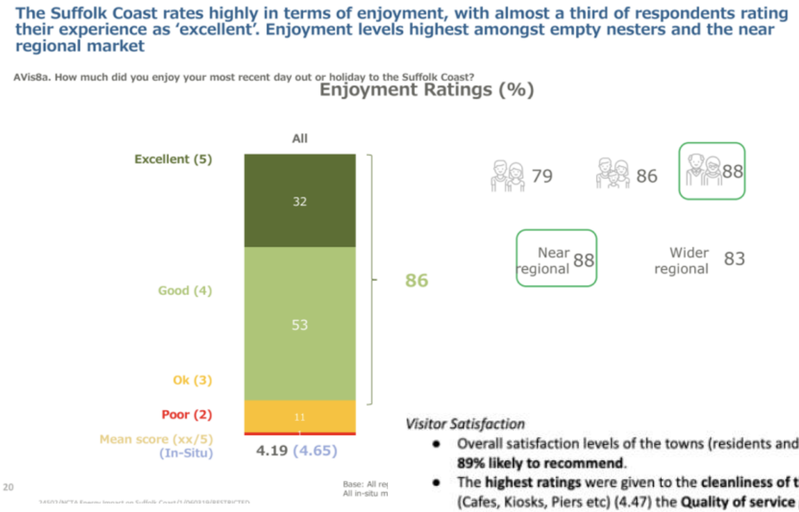




They are very positive about the destination

It’s a quality offer & visitor satisfaction is high

The offer is high quality and mature, with strong visitor ratings on review sites and supporting visitor experience elements like food and drink, walking trails, visitor information in place.



Visitor Satisfaction

- Overall satisfaction levels of the towns (residents and visitors) were high at **4.4/5, with 89% likely to recommend**.
- The **highest ratings** were given to the **cleanliness of the beach** (4.50), **Beach Facilities** (Cafes, Kiosks, Piers etc) (4.47) the **Quality of service given at places to eat & drink** (4.45) and the **general feeling of welcome** (4.45).
- The **range of shops** (3.97), **car parking** (3.66) and the **cleanliness and availability of public toilets** (3.61 and 3.35 respectively) achieved scores below 4 out or 5.
- The **best** things about East Suffolk according to residents and visitors: **beach and seafront**, the **independent shop offer** and the **general friendliness of people**.
- For visitors, **the lack of parking**, the **limited variety of shops and empty outlets** and **being overcrowded in summer** were the worst aspects of the area.

The Suffolk Coast already has what many destinations are chasing: a quality offer with loyal, emotionally connected visitors and strong word-of-mouth recommendations.

So, what’s the problem?

Image - JamesCrisp

The Challenges we face

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Challenge #1 - Diversifying our audience

Are our current visitors driving real value?

Despite being a core audience, new insights reveal that many of our older visitors only come for the day and are unlikely to convert to staying visitors

Staying guests are worth

5-6 times

the value of a day visitor

So we should be targeting those who are more likely to stay

- Short stayers (1-2 nights) are typically younger (64% under 45) and more affluent, working full time and in high or intermediate managerial positions
- The vast majority plan to come back and will consider staying longer
- They are the demographic most likely to stay outside of the peak season
- They crave relaxation, escapism and new experiences

22-44 pre-nesters
Engine of domestic tourism

Most likely to travel outside school holidays

Highly influenced by social search

34% seeking quieter destinations

Over 60% use AI for travel research & planning

Take most short breaks & spend more

78% prefer to spend on experiences over things

Book earlier than other nationalities

Desire sustainability but not at a premium

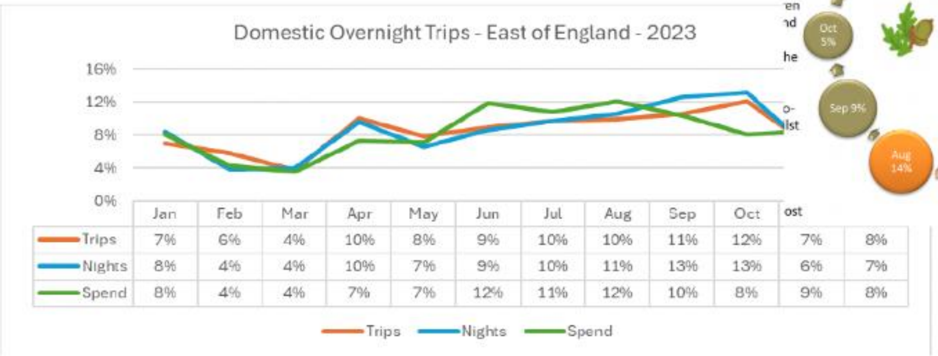
Preference for authentic, story-rich, personalisation

Visit England, Visit Britain Skyscanner, Condor Ferries, Harris Poll Eventbrite, Marriott Bon Voy, Simon Kucher, Airbnb, Booking.com, Expedia,Amex

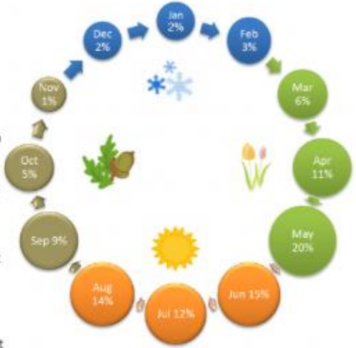

Challenge #2 - Extending the season

Visitor activity is concentrated around peak holiday periods. Which means…

- Places are very busy for short periods
- Operationally stretched in summer
- Underutilised for large parts of the year
- Quiet midweek outside peak periods



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct		
Trips	7%	6%	4%	10%	8%	9%	10%	10%	11%	12%	7%	8%
Nights	8%	4%	4%	10%	7%	9%	10%	11%	13%	13%	6%	7%
Spend	8%	4%	4%	7%	7%	12%	11%	12%	10%	8%	9%	8%



Challenge #3 - Being visible & discoverable

Image - JamesCrisp

The region is hard to identify

- Most (83% don't know where East Suffolk is on a map - even those who have visited (60%)
- 13% of those who have visited Suffolk have not heard of East Suffolk

The destination is now discovered and validated digitally

The strongest planning influences were

- Online research
- Recommendations & reviews
- Previous visits

You can be an excellent business but if your digital presence isn't up to scratch, you can still remain commercially invisible.

The Opportunities

The opportunities for the destination

- Increasing staying visits
- Generating higher spend per visitor
- Smoother demand across the year

What can you do?

Image - JamesCrisp

Lean into slow tourism messages

- Promote quality and authenticity
- Focus on premium experiences rather than discounting
- Tell local stories instead of generic marketing
- Promote convenience and ease

Make shoulder season stays feel special

- Actively market seasonal experiences
- Celebrate what is better off season - don’t apologise!
- Package weatherproof experiences

What would persuade someone to come in November instead of August?

Work collaboratively to package and promote the destination

- Try not to view each other as competition
- Build simple cross-business packages
- Actively recommend each other

Improve digital presence and visibility

- Reduce booking friction - make it feel safe and easy
- Actively encourage reviews
- Improve mobile booking journeys
- Use strong imagery and storytelling (use Snapsea)

The future opportunity for the Suffolk Coast is not becoming busier everywhere all the time. It is becoming more **visible**, more **collaborative** and attracting the **right type of visitors** - who **stay, spend, connect and return.**

Image - Mary Doggett

Look out for SZC funding & support opportunities launching soon

Small Grants Scheme

- £1,000 - £10,000
- Small-scale practical improvements for businesses
- No match funding required
- Priorities include:
  - upgrading existing offer
  - small scale digital enhancements

Development Grants Scheme

- £10,001 - £25,000
- Larger-scale improvements and new developments that deliver measurable economic returns
- Minimum 25% (cash or in-kind)
- Priorities include:
  - all-season infrastructure
  - conversion from day to stay
  - quality of offering

Strategic Growth Grants Scheme

- £25,001 - £100,000
- High-impact, transformational projects that benefit the destination at a structural level
- Minimum 50% (cash or in-kind)
- Priorities include:
  - collaborative projects
  - destination digital infrastructure
  - large-scale sustainability projects

Visit the East Suffolk Means Business webpage to keep up to date
eastsuffolkmeansbusiness.co.uk

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