



# East Lothian Visitor Statistics & Insights

Prepared for East Lothian Council by JRS  
Research Consortium  
February 2025

visit  
**east lothian**  
Edinburgh's Coast & Countryside

  
**East Lothian**  
Council

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# Welcome

Tourism is vital to East Lothian's economy, supporting over 4,300 jobs and generating almost £350 million into the local economy per year (Source: STEAM 2023).

The destination has a diverse tourism product which includes traditional seaside towns, pristine coastline as well as inland historic villages and towns and countryside locations.

The results of the 2024 visitor survey and STEAM data show that the tourism sector has recovered strongly following the Covid-19 pandemic with visitor volumes and levels of visitor satisfaction at higher levels than before the pandemic.

East Lothian Council commissioned JRS to undertake a survey among visitors to East Lothian in 2024.

This document presents the main findings from the East Lothian Visitor Survey 2024 including details of visitor profiles, visit patterns, perceptions about the area, and expenditure habits.

# Market overview

According to the latest STEAM data, visitors to East Lothian contributed around £348 million to the East Lothian economy in 2023 which supported over 4,300 FTE jobs.

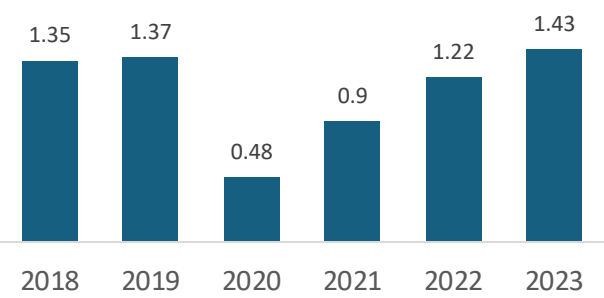
Around 1.43 million tourism visits were made to the area in 2023 during a total of 2.82 million visitor days.

All of these levels are higher than recorded in the years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

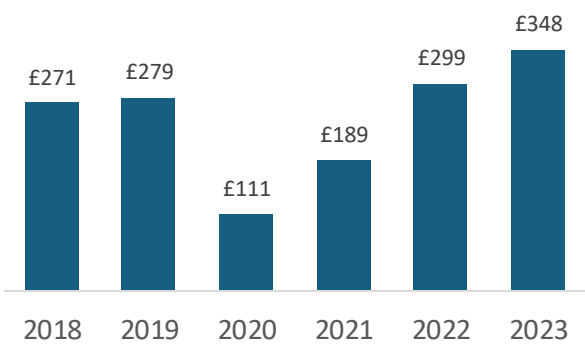
The benefits of tourism are distributed across a number of sectors with accommodation, food and drink and transport representing the largest share of employment and economic impact.



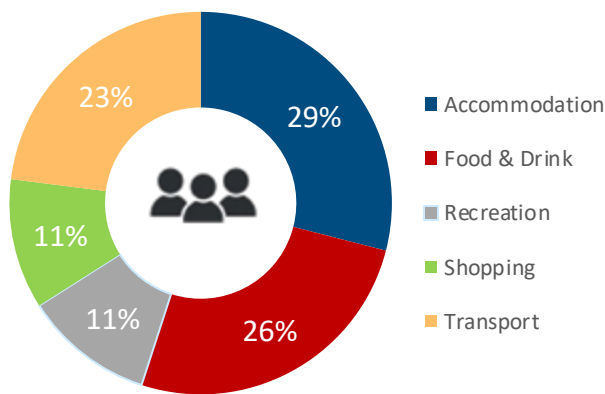
Visitor numbers (millions):



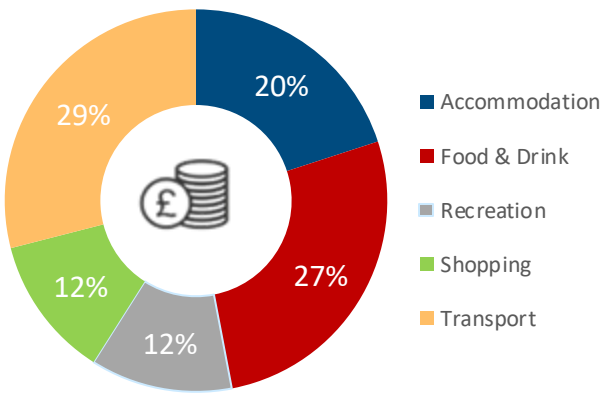
Total economic impact (millions):



Employment by sector:



Economic Impact by sector:



# Who are East Lothian’s visitors?

While domestic markets are largest (57% from Scotland, 32% other UK), East Lothian also attracts visitors from much further afield with 11% from overseas. The largest proportion of overseas visitors in 2024 were from the USA.

The area continues to attract an older age profile with almost half of visitors (46%) aged 55 or over. However, about a third (35%) of visitors were in a group accompanied by children.

Most visitors were in the most affluent AB social grades (77% of UK residents), a much higher percentage than in the general UK population (23%).

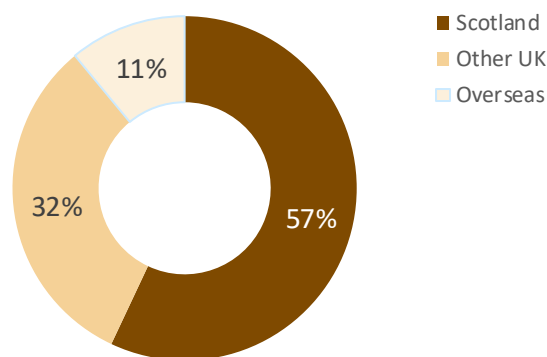
During 2024 71% of visitors were on a leisure trip or holiday while visiting friends and relatives was the second most common reason for visits (17%), followed by attending an event (6%).

19% of visitors were on their first ever visit to East Lothian compared to 13% in 2018 and 17% in 2021.

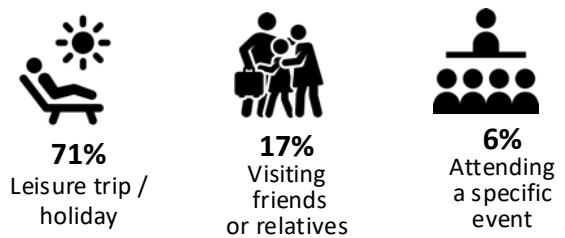
Almost half of visitors (47%) stayed overnight in East Lothian, a higher percentage than in 2018 (37%) or 2021 (44%).

Around 3 in 5 (59%) stated that East Lothian was their only destination, also a higher percentage than in 2018 (51%) or 2021 (46%).

## Place of origin

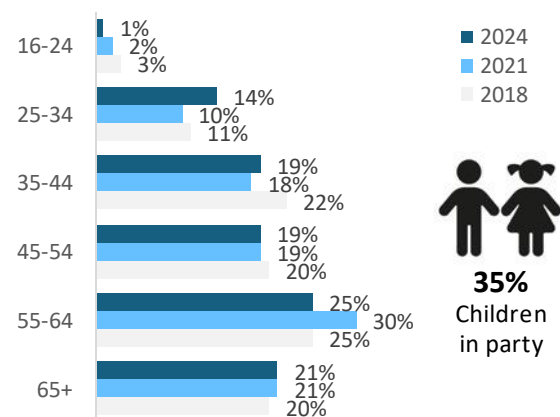


## Top 3 trip purposes:

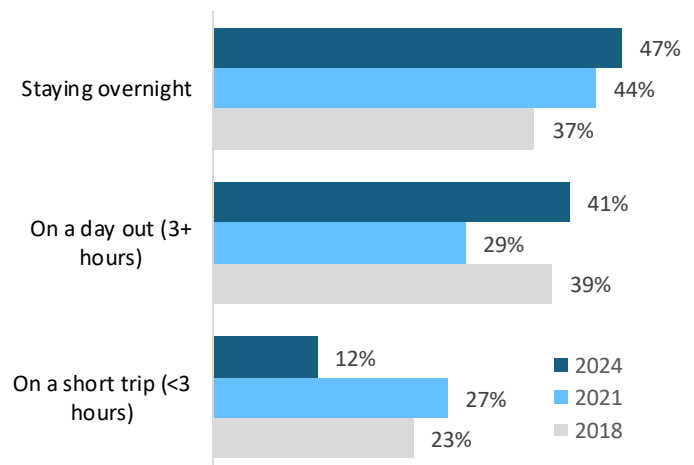


- ✓ 19% were on their first ever visit to area
- ✓ 59% only included East Lothian in their visit

## Age profile



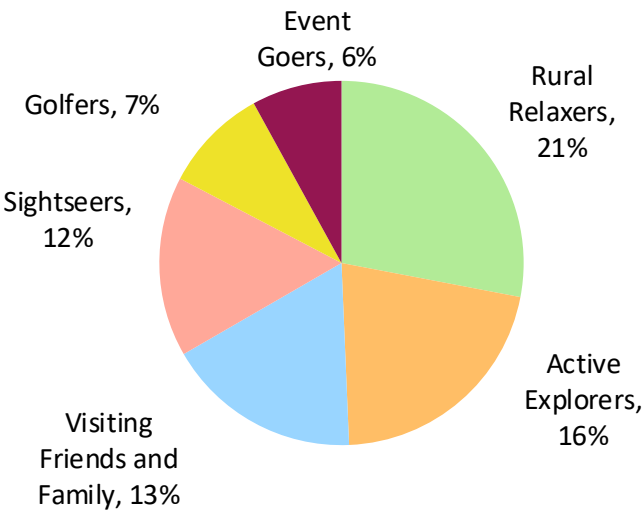
## Type of trip 2018, 2021 and 2024




# East Lothian’s key visitor segments

Visitors to East Lothian can be allocated into six distinct market segments which overall represented around three quarters of all visitors during 2024.

Key details on each of these segments is provided below.




**Rural Relaxers (21%):**  
seeking relaxation whilst enjoying nature and wildlife



More likely than the norm to:

- Be aged 45-64 and / or to have kids in their party
- Visit on a day trip lasting over 3 hours
- Visit the beach, gardens and/or countryside
- Use the Visit East Lothian website to plan visit


**Active Explorers (16%):**  
keen to immerse themselves in everything the area has to offer



More likely than the norm to:

- Be a younger independent or in family lifestage
- Visit on a day trip lasting over 3 hours
- Live in the UK outside of Scotland and
- Stay overnight
- Take part in walking and watersports
- Provide high satisfaction ratings


**Visiting Friends and Family (13%):**  
motivated to visit by the opportunity to visit friends or family in the area



More likely than the norm to:

- Be aged over 55
- Live in the UK outside of Scotland
- Be on a repeat visit to the area and stay overnight
- Use recommendations and social media
- Provide lower than average satisfaction ratings


**Sightseers (12%):**  
keen to explore and experience the area



More likely than the norm to:

- Live outside of the UK
- Be on first visit to the area and stay overnight
- Take part in sightseeing, visiting beaches, attractions
- Use social media, TICs and guidebooks
- Provide high satisfaction ratings

**Golfers (7%):**  
motivated by the chance to play golf in the area



More likely than the norm to:

- Not have children in party
- Live in Scotland
- Be on a repeat visit to the area
- Stay overnight
- Play golf and go to pubs
- Use social media, [visiteastlothian.com](https://www.visiteastlothian.com), TripAdvisor and TV programmes

**Event goers (6%):**  
motivated to visit by events in the area



More likely than the norm to:

- Be aged 55+ and Empty Nesters
- Be on their first visit to the area
- Stay overnight
- Visit historic buildings, gardens, countryside
- Use [visiteastlothian.com](https://www.visiteastlothian.com), other websites and leaflets and brochures other than Visit East Lothian ones in trip planning



# What do East Lothian's visitors do?

The most visited places in East Lothian were North Berwick (68%), Dunbar (52%) and Gullane (23%).

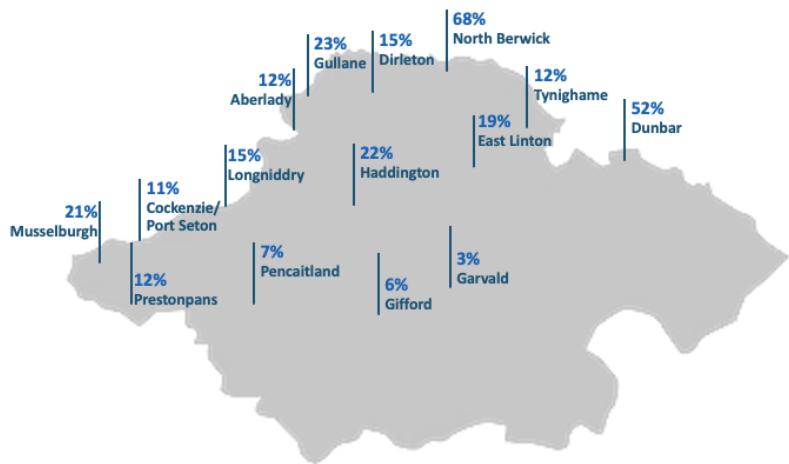
The most frequently undertaken activities were general sightseeing (62%), visiting beaches (59%) and going to restaurants, cafes and farm shops (41%, 39% and 33% respectively).

Also, half of visitors took part in any outdoor pursuits (50%) - the most popular activities were walking (24%), birdwatching (14%) and outdoor watersports / swimming (14%).

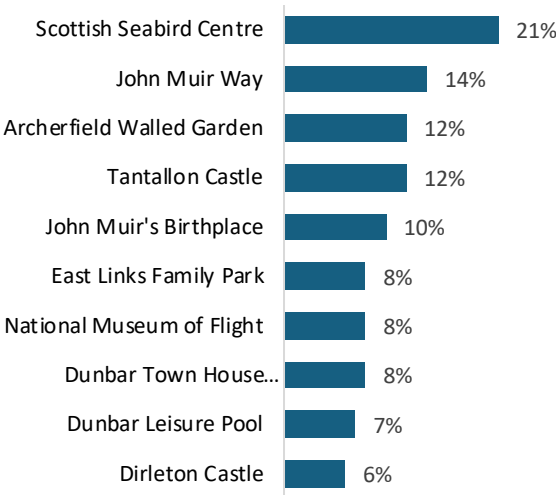
The most visited attractions during the trip were the Scottish Seabird Centre (21%), John Muir Way (14%), Archerfield Walled Garden (12%) and Tantallon Castle (12%).

Possibly reflecting the increased proportion of staying visitors and increased length of stay in East Lothian, the percentages of visitors including key attractions in their trips increased in 2024 compared to 2018 and 2021.

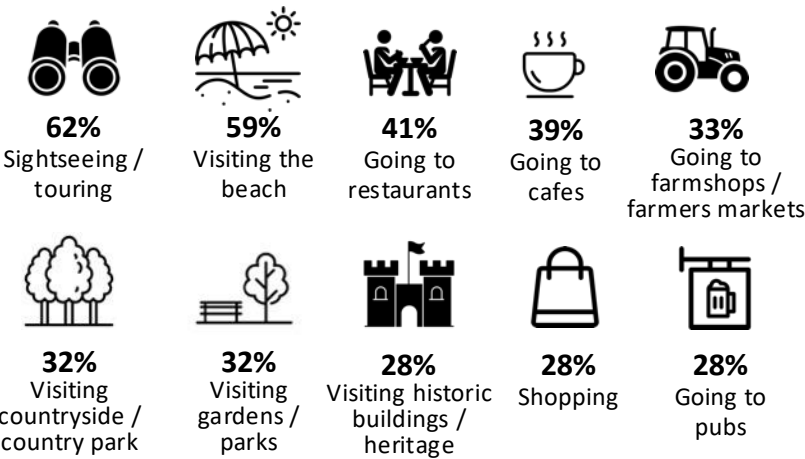
## Places visited



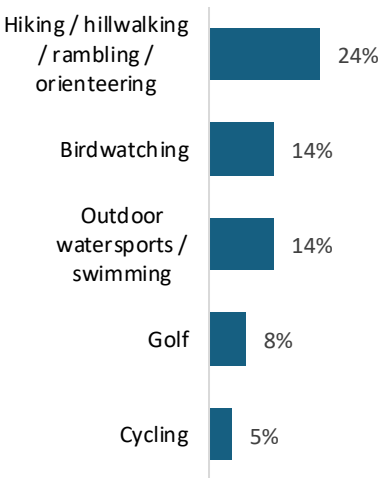
## Top 10 attractions visited



## Top 10 activities undertaken



## Outdoor pursuits



# Planning and information sources

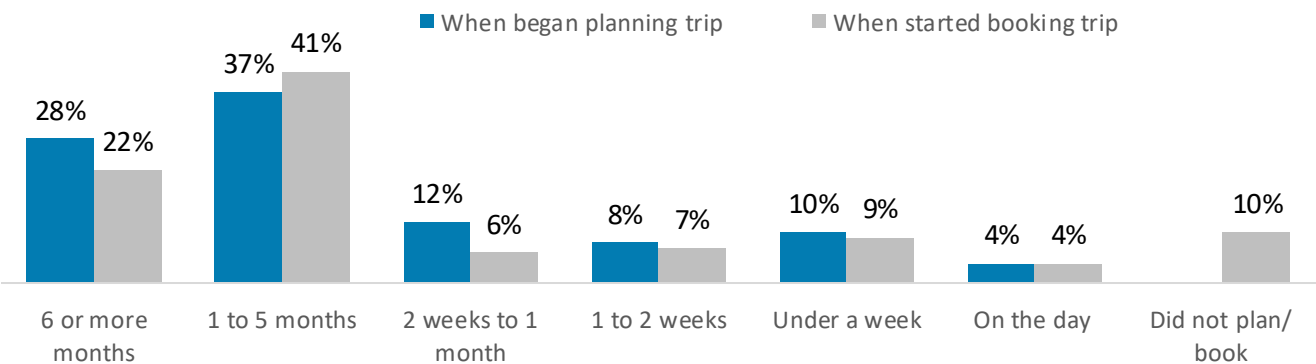
When planning a visit to East Lothian, the most common information sources were personal recommendations (32%), social media (24%), search engines (17%) and [visiteastlothian.org](#) (17%).

During visits personal recommendations were also the most common information source (21%) followed by online search engines (15%) and social media (13%).

Possibly reflecting the larger share of international visitors during 2024, lead times for planning and booking overnight trips were on average longer than in 2018 or 2021 with 63% booking at least a month in advance compared to 53% in 2018 and 56% in 2021.






However, decisions to take day visits to East Lothian tended to be made less than a week in advance (70%), a similar lead time to 2021.

## Lead time for planning and booking overnight visits



## Most commonly used information sources:

### When planning trip to East Lothian:

-  **32%** Personal recommendations
-  **24%** Social media
-  **17%** Online search engine
-  **17%** [visiteastlothian.org](#)
-  **16%** tripadvisor or other online review sites
-  **17%** other websites

### During trip to East Lothian:

-  **21%** Personal recommendations
-  **15%** Online search engine
-  **13%** Social media
-  **10%** leaflets/ flyers/ brochures
-  **10%** Visitor Information Centres
-  **10%** [visiteastlothian.org](#)



# What do East Lothian’s visitors enjoy?

Overall ratings of visits to East Lothian were higher than in 2021 and 2018 with 69% providing the top rating of ‘very good’, and an increased percentage stated that their visit to East Lothian exceeded expectations (43% vs 38% in 2021 and 40% in 2018).

The aspects of visits to East Lothian receiving the highest ratings were the welcome provided by locals (4.64) and the variety of attractions (4.56).

However, the lowest ratings related to the ease of parking (3.95), cost of parking (3.91) and availability of showering / changing facilities (3.88)

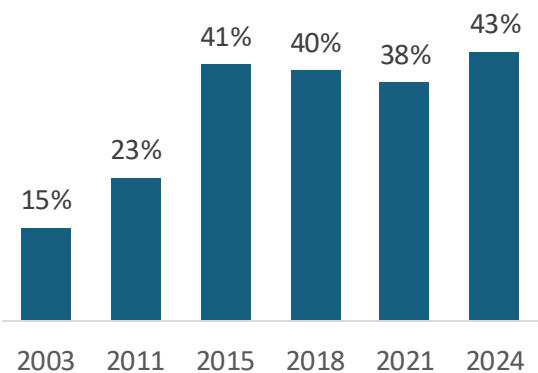
Visitors were asked what they liked most about the area. The most common strengths mentioned included the beaches, scenery, nature and opportunities for outdoor activities such as walks.

Asked to suggest improvements, the most common areas raised related to parking, facilities such as toilets, and roads and paths.

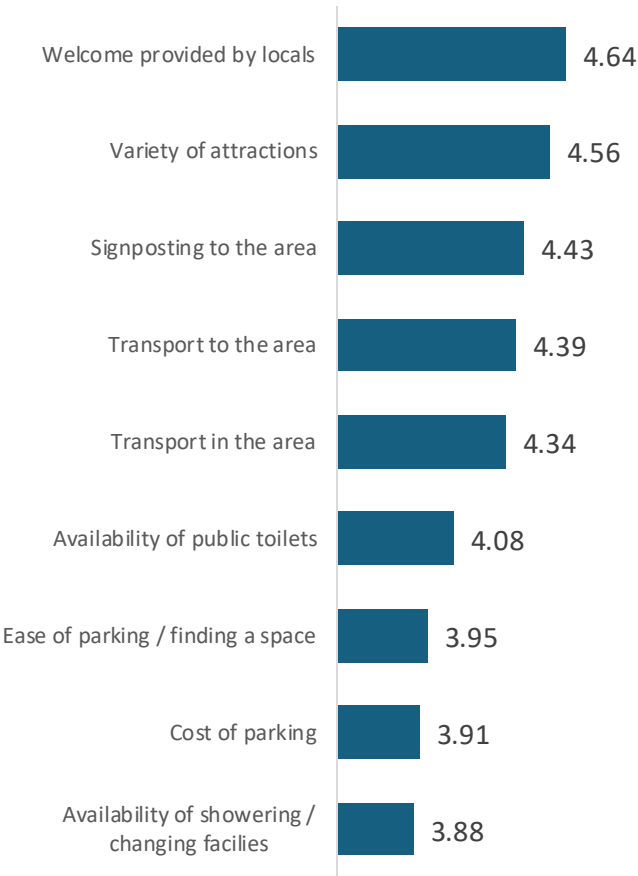
Percentage very likely to recommend East Lothian (9 or 10 out of 10)



Percentage stating visit was “better than expected” (2003 – 2024)



Average ratings for elements of visit experience (score out of 5)



# How much do East Lothian’s visitors spend?

At £79 per person per day, average visitor spend was similar to that recorded in 2021 (£79) and 2018 (£76).

This consistency in spend reflects other research undertaken which has shown that while some tourists in Scotland have had to reduce their holiday spend due to the pressures of other household expenses, others have been able to bear cost increases and therefore spent more during holidays.

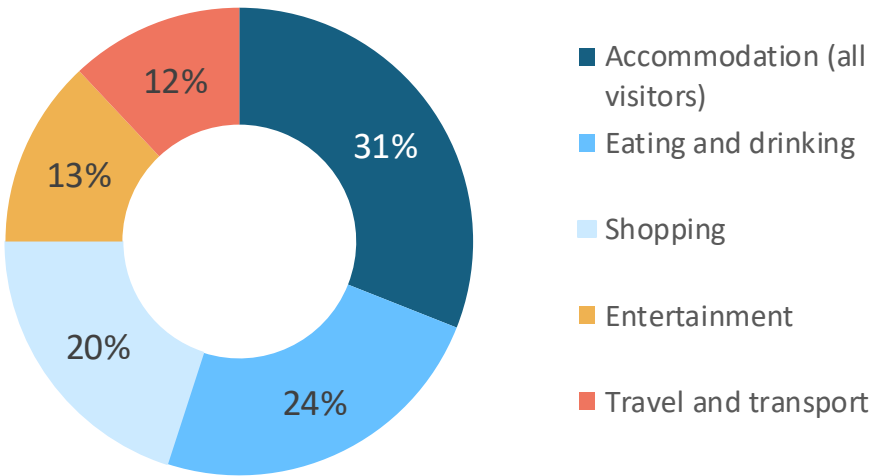
Daily spend was highest amongst those visitors staying overnight (£114).

Overall, the largest percentages of expenditure were on accommodation (31%), eating and drinking (24%) and shopping (20%).

Average spend per person per day - TOTAL



Breakdown of total visitor spend by category



# East Lothian tourism in numbers

**£348m**

Visitor contribution to East Lothian economy in 2023

**57%**

Proportion of Scottish visitors

**11%**

Proportion of international visitors

**35%**

Proportion of visitors with children

**69%**

Proportion visiting the beach

**41%**

Proportion eating out in local restaurants

**43%**

Proportion that said their trip was better than expected

**76%**

Proportion very likely to recommend East Lothian

**17%**

Proportion using [www.visiteaslothian.com](http://www.visiteaslothian.com) in trip planning

**5.6 nights**

Average length of stay in East Lothian amongst overnight visitors

**£114**

Average expenditure per person per day by overnight visitors

**£41**

Average expenditure per person per day by day visitors