



# Press Release

## **Summertime View from the Chamber:** Scarborough's Town Independents see brisk trading in 2023

Following Scarborough's description by Time Out's experts as No.5 on their list of UK Best Places to Visit in 2023, businesses and residents will recall the town centre and its independent and quirky shops being well-trafficked from April to September.

Official visit rates aren't due until early 2024, but last year, the Council recorded 2.24m visits to Scarborough Town Centre. And whilst it is the case numbers were significantly distorted in 2021 and earlier year visits as the country recovered from the Coronavirus pandemic, plenty of anecdotes are pointing to a good year. (The statistic doesn't identify whether it was one person visiting once, or a family spending several days and visiting more than once.)

Time Out made their selections based on the towns' current thriving food, drink and arts scene. And Scarborough meets the bill perfectly.

For example, in 2023, visitors were drawn to events such as the Dark Skies Festival, many pubs, Naval Warfare at Peaseholm Park, our famous Armed Forces Day, the Open Air Theatre and more. Scarborough Spa runs hundreds of events each year, one per three days, often promoted in weekend packages alongside local hotels by holiday booking sites. And we have the festivals, such as the April Scooter Rally, often with a Northern Soul theme, the July Scarborough Seafest September Goldwing Light Parade. Anecdotes speak of long queues to get fish and chips, booking only at restaurants, and queues for buses with the £2 special transport rate, due to rise to a still-inexpensive £2.50 in November 2023. (The £2 rate may be extended after today's PM Statement at the Conservative Party conference.)

So we would expect 2023 to compare well with 2022, though certainly there may be an uplift from the current staycation trend connected with cost-of-living concerns. Travel Trade said in December 2022 'a survey of 1,000 of Verdants' customers found that more than four in five (84%) say they are likely to go on a staycation in 2023 with over half (56%) of those saying that the cost-of-living crisis would steer them towards a staycation over a holiday abroad.'

However, it is the case that midtown Scarborough has seen several store closures, often high street brands affected too by a cost of living and changes in retail buying to online/home delivery. The British Retail Consortium found 6-thousand shops across the UK have shut over the past five years because of rising business rates and the Covid pandemic.

This led to a somewhat dystopian video in August 2023 by GENERation Xplorers, which when added to the departure of the big brands, creates an impression of terminal decline. Not so fast.

Jo Thompson of Scarborough Business Ambassadors said: 'Personally I think Scarborough needs to bring independent traders into the town so it's more 'boutiquey'. There are several towns and cities that have had really good impacts with this.'

Jo has a point. It is true that boutique or quirky shops seem to come and go, but there is a tendency for new ones to move in to take advantage of the visitor traffic relatively quickly. Recent arrivals include Japanese-styled coffee shop Tokyo Star ("we had regular customers after only 6 weeks!"), and the approval of a new brewery and micro-pub on Victoria Road. Scarborough Market Hall is slowly getting busier with an 88% unit let rate (source, Scarborough Borough Council Dec 2022) after its refit, St Catherines is going into the boutique business, and who can forget the new cinema at Brunswick opening in 2025, an indisputable anchor attraction that will make re-letting Brunswick units an easier task.

Whilst it isn't yet clear if the staycation trend will continue into 2024/5, it remains the case that our independent boutique and unusual shops are having a reasonable year in 2023.

If the Chamber and our members help support the Council in promoting frequent and extended visits by tourists, then our future prospects are bright, despite the challenges of cost of living and an increased preference for foreign holidays.

Chris Clark, Make Public/Scarborough & District Chamber of Trade

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