

ABOVE BELOW

Argyll and the Isles Tourism Co-operative & Nature Scot Partnership

Business Toolkit

Welcome

Above & Below is a green recovery partnership between Nature Scot and Argyll & the Isles Tourism Co-operative (AITC). We have developed a map, directory and guidance that identifies to visitors and residents sites within five themes;



Sunsets



Dark Skies



Snorkelling



Wild Swimming



Beach Hunts

This pilot phase of Above & Below is focused on the shores between Loch Linnhe, the Firth of Lorn and the Sound of Jura. The project is aimed primarily at those who are already visiting or living in Argyll, and asks them to consider engaging with these sites in a new way that will help them to learn or appreciate something new about Argyll. This might be a wild swimmer who puts on a mask and looks down at what is below them for the first time. It could be someone who has visited these sites during the day, but has never thought to visit them at night and enjoy light-pollution-free stargazing.

Scenery is often the top reason people travel to and around Scotland. This usually refers to the terrestrial scenery – the hills, lochs and glens. But Scotland – and Argyll – also has amazing marine environments below and outstanding sunsets and dark skies above, which locals and visitors can enjoy. This pilot project seeks to encourage more and more people to experience and better understand these amazing places and in so doing contribute to recovery following the pandemic – socially, economically and environmentally.

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The five themes



Sunsets

There's a good chance that just by looking west at the right time of day and in the right weather conditions, you'll catch a fantastic sunset in Argyll. But some locations can elevate the spectacle to the next level. Our Sunset sites offer silhouetted islands and headlands, reflective waters and perhaps a nearby pub to warm up in afterwards!

Pay attention to the season to catch the best sunsets. In mid-summer the sun doesn't set in Argyll until after 10pm, whereas in mid-winter it sets before 4pm.



Dark skies

Argyll is known for its beautiful views, but did you know that it has some of the **darkest skies in Europe?** It's a great place to see the stars without light pollution. If you are lucky, you might even see the **Northern Lights.**

The site at Gigha's north pier has been granted the status of **Dark Sky Discovery Site** - recognising its superb location for viewing our galaxy.



Snorkelling

Did you know that Argyll's marine wildlife is more diverse than almost anywhere else in Scotland? Even close to shore you can see an incredible array of species and habitats just by popping on a snorkel mask.

Our snorkel sites can also be found as part of **Scottish Wildlife Trust's North Argyll Snorkel Trail.**



Wild swimming

More and more people are discovering the benefits and joys of wild swimming in Scotland. Whether you are a regular selkie, or you are just dipping your toe in for the first time, these sites will leave you feeling refreshed and rejuvenated! We are highlighting some of Argyll's best swimming spots that are used and rated by local swimmers and industry experts alike.







Beach hunts

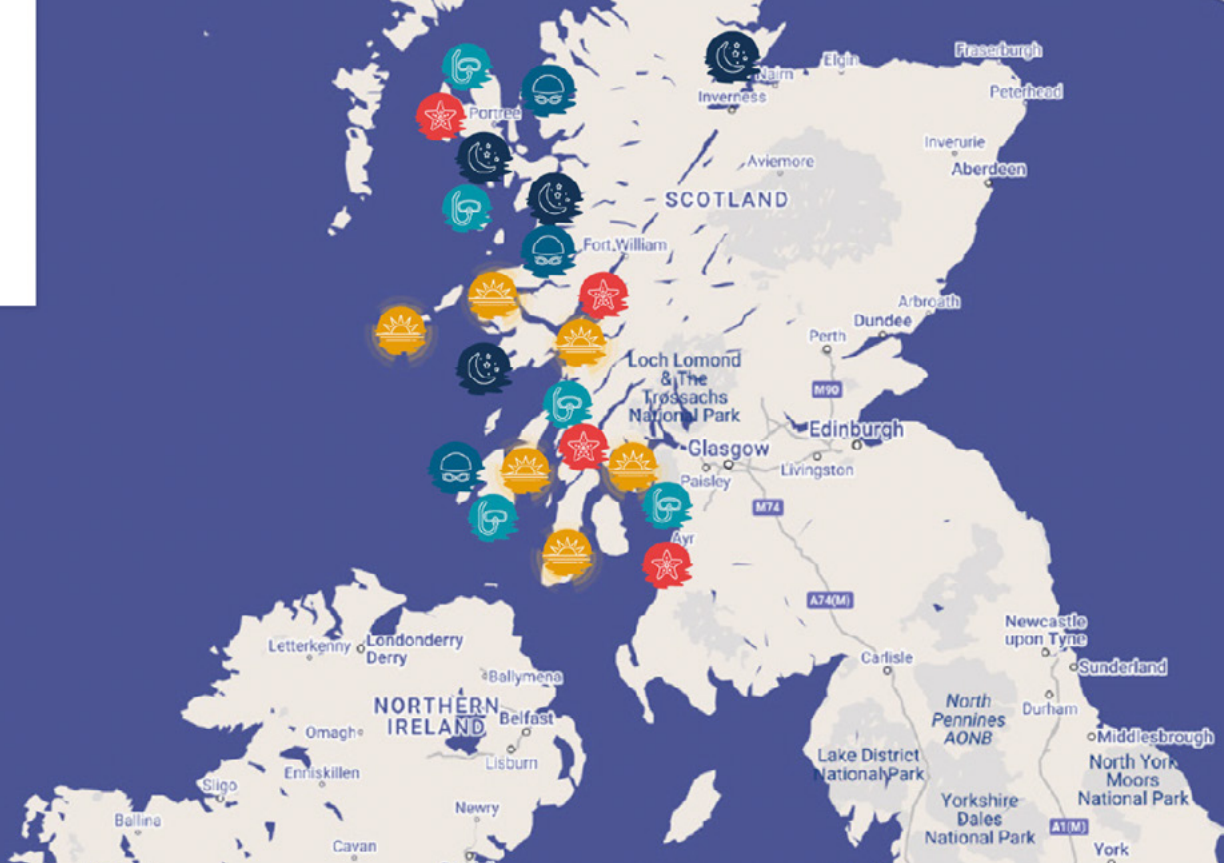
Pebbly shores, sandy bays, interesting shells and rock pools are the order of the day at our Beach Hunts sites. Organisations such as Heart of Argyll Wildlife offer sessions to help you identify the things that can be found on the beach and learn more about their place in our ecosystem.

Have fun and enjoy using all of your senses to appreciate these amazing spaces. Taste the salt in the air, look closely at the patterns on a shell, smell some seaweed, close your eyes and enjoy the sound of shingle crunching under your feet, the sound of the waves or seabirds, and the feel of the wind on your face or sand between your toes!

ABOVE & BELOW TRAILS

- ☐  Dark Skies
- ☐  Wild Swimming
- ☐  Snorkelling
- ☐  Sunsets
- ☐  Beach Hunt

SEARCH



SAMS BACK BEACH

(Camas Rubha na Liathaig)

DUNBEG

SNORKELING TRAIL

The horseshoe bay which lies adjacent to the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) in Dunbeg is called Camas Rubha na Liathaig but many locals like to call it the SAMS beach. The bay is sheltered by a stretch of rock formations at either side.

Access

Access the beach straight from the car park. Suitable for wheelchair access to the beach gate but not down onto beach.

Parking

Follow tourist signs for Ocean Explorer Centre and Dunstaffnage Castle at Dunbeg. The Ocean Explorer Centre (OEC) at SAMS has a big 24 hour car park.

Transport

30 minute cycle from Oban at first on a quiet road, then traffic free from Ganavan. Regular buses run from Oban to Dunbeg Mon-Fri and take 25 minutes.

Facilities

The OEC is currently open Mon-Fri 10am to 4pm and has male, female and disabled toilets for its centre visitors.

Hospitality

The Beach Cafe is open Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm.

Also on-site

The Ocean Explorer Centre (OEC) at SAMS gives visitors an insight in to the marine science that the team of scientist do at SAMS.

ALSO PART OF



Staying safe, looking after nature, respecting our communities

We've developed the following guidance for businesses and visitors in partnership with industry experts and residents. Familiarise yourself with it and help your customers to follow it too.

When you are enjoying the outdoors, you must follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code is based on three key principles:

- Respect the interests of others.
- Care for the environment.
- Take responsibility for your own actions.

The Code provides more detailed guidance on a [range of different activities](#).

Sunsets

Please be mindful of local residents, livestock and wildlife when visiting a site at sunset or after dark by staying quiet and respecting local guidance.

Always bring a camera or smart phone and look for reflections and different cloud formations. Time lapse photography can be fascinating especially when there are some clouds that change as the sun sets. Do hang around after the sun dips below the horizon as the afterglow can be something special. Don't forget to bring a torch, suitable footwear and warm clothing. Know the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) before you go.



Dark skies

Please be mindful of local residents, livestock and wildlife when visiting a site at sunset or after dark by staying quiet and respecting local guidance.

Keep An eye on the Aurora forecasts as this incredible phenomenon is often visible on the west coast. Similarly keep an eye out for predictions of shooting stars and be aware of the timing of each full moon. The full moon cycle and tides are interlinked and the full moon can be a magical time to visit historical sites. Did you know you can also track the Space Station from some locations. Stay on marked paths and roads. Don't forget to bring a torch, suitable footwear and warm clothing. Know the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) before you go.



Snorkelling

Before you go:

- Check the conditions: be aware of tides, water temperatures, currents and weather forecasts before you leave.
- Take a friend: never snorkel alone and always tell people where you are going.
- Know who to contact: find out where the nearest medical and/or coastguard facility is and note down who to contact in an emergency.

At the beach:

- Know your surroundings: check what the weather and tides are doing, and identify a landmark for reference.
- Use the right equipment: only use good quality and well-fitting equipment – mask, snorkel and fins.
- Wear the right protection: a wetsuit will keep you warm and protect you against jellyfish stings. If it's sunny, remember to cream up!

Follow the Snorkeller's Code:

- Do not remove seaweed or animals from rocks or from their homes.
- Take care not to kick sealife with fins or stand on delicate animals.
- Observe animals where they live and don't take anything away with you.

WARNING:

- Do not snorkel in rough weather
- Do not touch jellyfish and other wildlife
- Never snorkel alone

Snorkelling can be dangerous and these self-guided sites are used entirely at your own risk. It is your responsibility to check the conditions present on the day and assess whether it is safe to snorkel.



Wild swimming

While care has been taken when identifying wild swim locations to ensure they are as safe as possible, none of them are officially RLSS or RNLI lifeguard covered. All sites are accessed at individual risk.

The sea temperature around Argyll can drop as low as 5 degrees in the winter and not peak much higher than 15 degrees in the summer. In open water terms, 15 degrees and below is considered “cold water”. Cold water incapacitation, hypothermia and “after drop” are all associated risks that must be taken seriously. Always respect the water - check the wind speed/direction, swell height and tides specific to the wild swimming location. If conditions change when you are in the water, adjust your plan accordingly. If in doubt, always seek the guidance of a local professional open water swim coach/wild swim guide or experienced local wild swimmers.

- Do not swim in cold open water if you are not feeling well or have been advised by your doctor not to.
- Check the wind direction/speed, swell height and tides in advance and again when at the site.
- Always make yourself visible to other water users by using a bright tow float and bright swim cap.
- Take care of your feet and wear protective footwear as surfaces can vary

- Swim your own swim. Swim to YOUR ability and experience.
- Wear appropriate kit according to your ability, experience and intentions i.e. a wetsuit
- At these sites, you may encounter a range of wildlife. Respect the habitat and in the case of marine mammals, do not approach and keep your distance.
- Always plan your entry/exit point with care thoroughly
- Prepare plenty of warm layers for after.
- Always inform someone of where you are and keep a fully charged/ waterproof covered mobile phone close to hand.

This advice has been provided by local open water swim coach Dan Coyle (STA open water swim coach, RLSS open water safety management, lifesaving & rescue.)



Beach hunts

Our shores are some of the best places to get close to wildlife; whether anemones in rock pools, limpets on rocks or crabs scuttling along the sandy bottom. It's best to observe these wonderful species in their natural habitats. If you pick anything up, please return them quickly to the spot that you found them in.

Coastal habitats can be fragile and are easily damaged. When exploring Argyll's beaches please consider your potential impact on the environment and respect local guidance. It is against the law to remove pebbles and sand from beaches in the UK. Whilst it is not unlawful to remove shells and driftwood, these can provide habitats for many sea creatures, so it's best to leave them behind. Please pick up after your dogs, and please don't allow them to harass any wildlife. While it might be fun for them to chase flocks of birds up and down the beach, this is actually making the birds use up stores of energy they need to search for food and raise their young. As well as taking your own litter home, why not help our environment by picking up and responsibly disposing of any other litter you find on the beach?

Before travelling to the beach, check the weather and tide times. Tides can rise quickly and in unexpected ways. Be aware of rising water and make your way up the beach to avoid getting cut off.

Know the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) before you go. Please follow any local guidance aimed at reducing dune or machair erosion or avoiding disturbance of nesting birds.



Something for everyone

Within the Above & Below themes, there's something to appeal to a variety of interests. Central to the project is the idea of inspiring people to visit sites at different times of day, different seasons and to try different activities. We've outlined this in the table below and hope it helps you to develop new experiences for customers.

We have a few suggestions noted, what more could you add?

Variables		Sunsets	Dark Skies	Snorkelling	Wild Swimming	Beach Hunt
Time of Day	Daytime			Yes	Yes	Yes
	Evening	Yes	Yes		Swimming under moonlight, in bioluminescence can be magical, if you take the right precautions	
Season	Summer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Winter	Shorter days and earlier sunsets	Longer nights, earlier evenings		Winter swims are invigorating, if you take the right precautions	
Weather	Good weather	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Bad Weather	Clouds can help produce more spectacular sunsets			Rainy or stormy swimming can be fun, if you take the right precautions	Wrapped up in waterproofs and wellies, beach hunts are the perfect wet weather activity (stay away from beaches in storms)
Interest	Adventure	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Nature	Birdsong, weather patterns, silhouettes	Nocturnal wildlife, astral phenomenon, stargazing	Marine species and habitats	Emersed in nature	Close up encounters with beach wildlife in rock pools and on the shore
	Heritage	Silhouetted castles, churches etc.	Astral photography over ancient monuments; standing stones, cairns etc.	Submerged history	Swim at the sites of crannogs, beside duns etc	Coastal historic sites
	Food & Drink	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Enhancing the customer experience with Above & Below

There is a lot individual businesses can do to help their customers enjoy the new themed trails and also devise new products. We've put together some tips and tools below to help you get the most from the Above & Below initiative.

Adventure ready



Sunsets

- Familiarise yourself with the sites included in Above and Below and also have your own insider tips for your immediate location
- Consider offering flasks and snacks (eg baking) for guests to take to enjoy with the sunset (and for sunrise)
- Post and share local sunset images on your own social media and website giving a very real sense of how regular and spectacular they are
- Keep an eye on the daily forecast and do let your customers know when a good sunset looks promising and suggest where they go to catch the best light. This article gives some [helpful tips on predicting good sunsets](#)



Dark skies

- Have a torch with rechargeable batteries fully charged available to borrow
- Provide reclining seats on patio and paved areas and optional folding chairs guests can take to enjoy dark skies. Perhaps include blankets too
- Provide binoculars that guests can borrow
- Sign up for the [Aurora Watch](#) alerts to know when there could be [northern lights visible](#)
- Have a dark sky diary and encourage guests to add entries for what they have seen



Snorkelling

- Have the SWT Snorkel trail leaflet for North Argyll available to show your guests the sites that have been assessed by SWT and deemed to be safe
- Know where they can go to hire wetsuits and/or buy snorkel masks
- Let your guests know where they can readily hang their wetsuits and swim wear to dry and also towels and other kit
- Provide local information on tides and weather. [View tides on an online service](#)



Wild swimming

- Know where they can go to hire wetsuits
- Check your local Facebook and other pages to know if there is a local group that meets at specific times and if they welcome visitors
- Use the Above and `Below guide to familiarise yourself with the recommended locations to go wild swimming. These have been assessed as suitable sites by local open water swim coach by local open water swim coach Dan Coyle (STA open water swim coach, RLSS open water safety management, lifesaving & rescue.)
- Let your guests know where they can readily hang their wetsuits and swim wear to dry and also towels and other kit



Beach hunts

- Have a tide chart available and know when low tide is likely especially any extreme tides which can expose new and interesting creatures
- Have a tray with some shells and other beach finds to strike up conversations with
- Keep an eye on local events like beach hunt (eg Heart of Argyll Wildlife Organisation) and let your guests know – especially those with young children

Tool

What else could you do? Use the tool below to help you think of different ways to give your customers an enhanced experience;

			Sunsets	Dark Skies	Snorkelling	Wild Swimming	Beach Hunt
Takes more time or investment	A treasured memory	10					
		9					
	Above and beyond	8					
		7		Provide a telescope	Somewhere to wash out and hang wetsuits up to dry		
	Enhanced experience	6					
Quick, low cost, easy		5					
	Made my day	4			A post swim warm drink	A post swim warm drink	
		3					
	Thoughtful extras	2	Provide binoculars in accommodation	Provide binoculars in accommodation			Provide a bucket and net
		1			Provide local tide tables	Provide local tide tables	Provide a field guide
	Little touches	0					
Aviod	A negative experience	-1					

Activity

Are there local sites within the themes below that you know well, have visited yourself and would recommend directly to your customers? Note them down here;

Sunsets

-
-
-

Dark Skies

-
-
-

Beach Hunts

-
-
-

Please keep people safe by directing them to the swimming and snorkelling sites included in Above & Below only.



Product Development

Have you considered developing a new offering for your guests this summer, using one or more of the Above & Below themes? Below are some tools and activities to get you started.

Please see Argyll and Isles Tourism Cooperative (AITC) Collaborait toolkit for activities and tools to help you develop and implement your ideas.
[Download here >](#)

Activity - 5x5

Can you think of 5 new products for your business under each of the 5 themes?

		Sunsets	Dark Skies	Snorkelling	Wild Swimming	Beach Hunt
Quick, low cost, easy	1					
	2					
	3					
	4					
Takes more time or investment	5					

Activity - a + b, a x b

A + B: Red boxes; Using the ideas listed in the previous exercise, can you combine two or more ideas from each theme? E.g 1 dark sky idea + 1 sunset idea = ?

A x B: Blue boxes; Can you think of new ideas that combine two or more themes in your business? E.g sunsets x beach hunts x your business = ?

	Sunsets	Dark Skies	Snorkelling	Wild Swimming	Beach Hunt
Sunsets					
Dark Skies					
Snorkelling					
Wild Swimming					
Beach Hunt					

Creative Downloads

Be part of the Above & Below project. Discover more through the creative assets below.



[Download our logo >](#)



[View our interactive map >](#)



[Download our icons >](#)

For information relating to these Project Identity Guidelines and to request assets, please contact:

Carron Tobin

Rural Dimensions

07715 773 660

carron.tobin@ruraldimensions.com

