

ILLUMINATIONS UPDATE

December 2021

The 2021 Display



This year's Illuminations display was launched on Friday 2 September at the end of a live concert in The Blackpool Tower Ballroom which was streamed to a global audience.

The free-to-access show saw Shirley Ballas, head judge of BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing*, pull the switch to trigger four months of Illuminations in the resort, only the second time in history the lights season has been extended into the Christmas and New Year holidays.

The Switch-On celebration was watched by a worldwide audience with more than 160,000 views from as far afield as Australia, Canada and the United States.

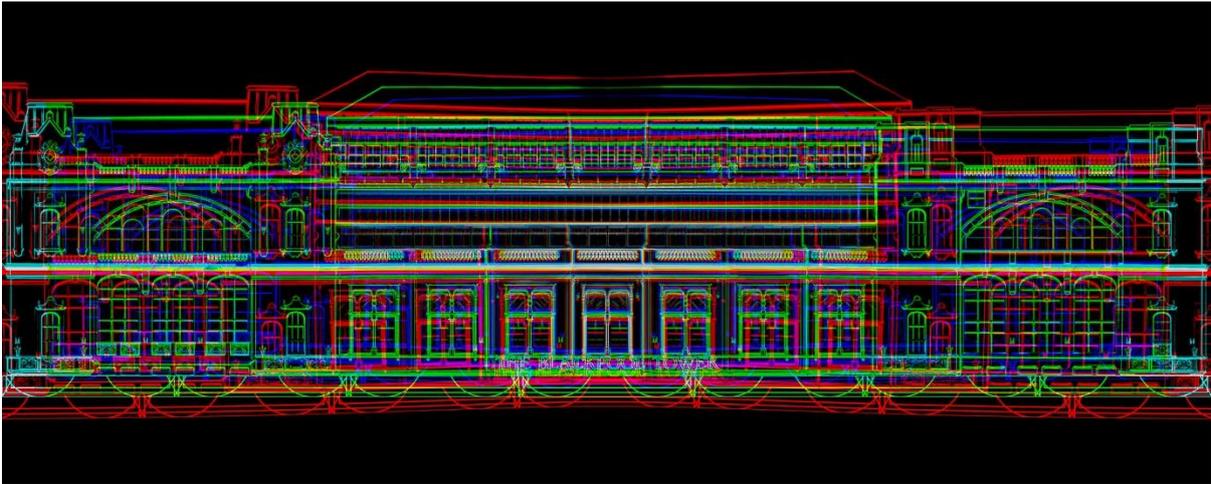


On the promenade headland outside the ballroom, tens of thousands of people gathered to watch the lights come on along with a celebratory burst of fireworks at the top of The Tower.

Our partners, MTV also produced two more shows from the Switch-On celebrations: An individual artist special, *MTV Live: KSI* and a compilation show, *MTV Live From Blackpool Switch-On: The Best Bits*. Both shows were broadcast on MTV MUSIC in October and repeated in November.

This year's display, saw two of Britain's leading designers bring a unique twist to the display.

Blackpool-born Jack Irving, best known for creating wildly-theatrical outfits for Lady Gaga, created *Astral Dreams*, a laser-mapped show that is being projected nightly on to the front of The Blackpool Tower building.



The Astral Dreams laser show (above) utilises five high-powered lasers beamed on to the historic frontage. The light show is accompanied by a new soundtrack composed by local music composer and producer, George Cornes.

Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen, the Illuminations' creative curator and star of Channel 4's new remake of Changing Rooms, has re-imagined a spectacular water feature at South Beach, turning it into a drag-themed sound and light show, Venus Remixed.

The Venus Reborn tableau at South Beach was originally created by Laurence in 2008 with Greek gods, a gigantic water tank and LED lighting. For 2021, it has been given a glamorous makeover as Venus Remixed, drawing inspiration from local drag talent and featuring three giant digital screens. It incorporates a brand new sound and light show, which is played every 10 minutes.



These are just two of the features in the 2021 display that are aimed at encouraging visitors to view the Illuminations on foot. Other light-based installations on the Tower Festival Headland include:

Spiro Light Tunnel: An immersive walk-through tunnel of light spanning more than 25 metres created with individually-mapped LEDs that create an extraordinary lighting effect. First unveiled at the resort's Lightpool Festival two years ago, it returns to the seafront for the full Illuminations season.

Sandcastle and Beach Balls: Two giant pixelated beach balls were located on the headland alongside an illuminated sandcastle and giant deckchair for the main Illuminations season. For the Christmas season they have been transformed into giant baubles, one remaining on the headland, the other sited at Houndshell Shopping Centre.



I Heart BPL Installation: A specially-commissioned installation deliberated designed to create social media photo opportunities. It stands eight feet tall and was manufactured at Lightworks using traditional manufacturing methods and lamps.

Other new and reimagined features in the 2021 display include:

Princess Parade: The closest to our modern-day Illumination displays first appeared in May 1912 to commemorate Blackpool's first royal visit as Princess Louise opened the new section of promenade named after her - Princess Parade. Nearly 110 years later, Princess Parade still holds its original place in the Illuminations. The revamped section has been completely relit using traditional tungsten lamps to show it looked during that special royal visit all those decades ago.



Spitfire Island: Back by public demand, a replica Spitfire has returned to Gynn roundabout courtesy of Blackpool's aviation museum, Hangar 42. For this year's display, the fighter plane has once again be tastefully illuminated with sweeping search lights.

The Extended Illuminations Season

The two-month extension to the Illuminations season is part of our post-pandemic recovery plan to kick-start tourism and hospitality across the resort.

The plan also includes a significant investment in marketing and events over the four-month period to help drive footfall and additional business.

On the back of the announcement of our plans, a number of accommodation businesses and attractions have extended their season into December.

By using the Illuminations as a backdrop, we have been able to create three new events, Christmas By The Sea (covered in more detail within this report), Ride The Christmas Lights (Sunday 5 December), and New Year's Eve Family Fireworks.

That all means Blackpool has an exceptionally strong tourism product at a time when many resorts have closed down for the year.

Lightpool Festival

October half-term saw the staging of our biggest ever Lightpool Festival. Spanning 15 nights, it included an illuminated art trail, live performance and community-based events.

The art trail, which was free to access and staged across a range of indoor and outdoor venues, showcased 16 new illuminated artworks including nine world premieres.



The most spectacular installation was the House Of Cards (above), which has previously appeared in Amsterdam, Milan and Berlin, but was showing in the UK for the first time.

Situated on the seafront close to The Blackpool Tower, it was made up of 128 light boxes in the form of playing cards. It has been created through a collaboration of 35 internationally-acclaimed street and visual artists from all over the world.

Other festival highlights included:

Aqualux, Tower Festival Headland
(pictured right)

An eco-friendly light feature to highlight the importance of water. On selected days, an impressive illuminated Peterbilt truck toured the streets of Blackpool with Aqualux on-board.



The Nature Take Over 3D projection show which saw the outside of St John's Church reclaimed by nature as large vines, flowers, fruit, fungus and creatures took over the church exterior.

Close by on Abingdon Street and new for 2021 was **Big Bird**, a 3.5 metre high pigeon sculpture made out of the parts of 10 London taxis and illuminated by the Blackpool Illuminations team.

100 Local Lanterns, created in a series of workshops and put on display in The Old Electric on Springfield Road, forming an immersive community exhibition.

A series of installations and events at the Winter Gardens included **Luma**, an eight-metre long, robotic inflatable snail; **And Then I Slipped**, a unique installation creating the effect of a waterfall; **500**, a specially-commissioned film showcasing four of the resort's entertainment venues that have each been entertaining visitors for 125 years; and, for one night only, **Symphony of Light**, a live experience with music, lasers, artwork and immersive lighting effects within Olympia.

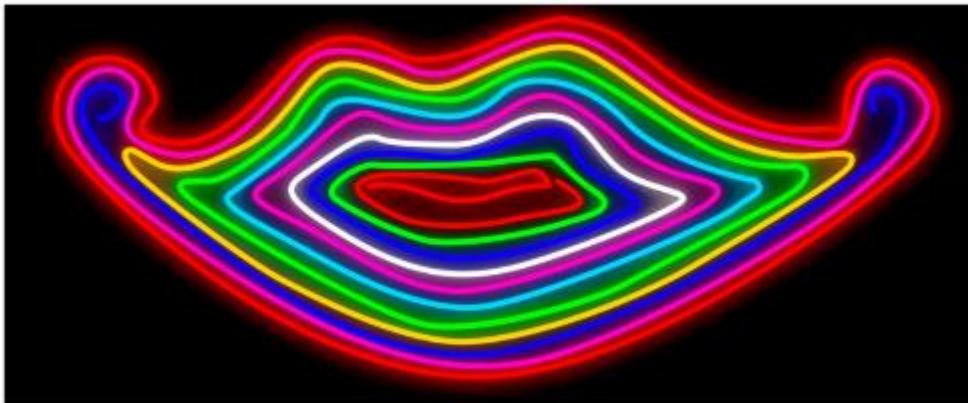
Across the road at the Houndshell Shopping Centre, the light trail included in a vacant shop unit the **White Tiger** (pictured right), courtesy of internationally-renowned artist, Chila Kumari Singh Burman.

The car was originally created to celebrate the launch of the critically-acclaimed film *The White Tiger*, which is based on the New York Times bestseller and 2008 Man Booker Prize-winning novel of the same name. Netflix partnered with Burman to bring the car to life.



Chila was also commissioned to produce a new light installation on the exterior of the Grundy Art Gallery (see picture below).

Brought together under the title, **Blackpool Light Of My Life**, the exhibition is the artist's love letter to the town which she visited regularly as a child, with Blackpool Illuminations being an abiding memory. It is on display until January 3. It has been co-commissioned by the Grundy, Blackpool Illuminations and Lightpool Festival, made possible by funding from an Arts Council England National Lottery Project Grant.



Although the highly-popular Illuminated Tram Parade was cancelled due to bad weather, the festival staged a number of other live shows including the **Global Grooves Carnival** in The Blackpool Tower Ballroom and a **Silent Disco** in The Blackpool Tower Fifth Floor venue.

Community Engagement

Although the Lightpool Festival is an integral part of our tourism events programme, it also creates significant potential to engage with the local community. These are some of the community-based activities in the 2021 festival:

Aqualux Tour: Three nights of artwork tours with local company, Fox Brothers, and their unique illuminated Peterbilt vehicle, visiting/stopping at Mereside, Marton, Layton, Grange Park, Revoe, Anchorsholme Park. Engagement with approximately 1500 local families who came out to see Aqualux.

Lumidogs: Twelve community workshops across Blackpool with more than 80 local participants creating illuminated designs for their dogs. Also created 16 days of work for local artists.

Lantern Making: Nine community workshops across Blackpool, with 212 local participants. Delivered in partnership with Electric Sunshine project

Fit2Glow Children's Football Tournament: One heat at Blackpool Sports Centre with 12 schools and 94 participants; a second heat at Blackpool Sports Centre with nine community football groups and 80 participants delivered in association with Blackpool Football Club Community Trust.

Primary Futures: Schools engagement programme on careers and further education involving 2,500 schoolchildren

Illuminate: 32 children took part in a community engagement project, in partnership with Grand Theatre

The extension of the Illuminations display into the winter season also created some community activities. Via schools and libraries, around 120 schoolchildren created drawings for inclusion in the new Frost Fairies light projection show which is part of our Christmas By The Sea event on the Tower Festival Headland.

Children from the Magic Club at Claremont also created Christmas card designs which are being displayed on the digital screens within the Illuminations display.

Commercial Opportunities

The 2021 display has attracted a number of new sponsors in addition to existing ones. The full list of sponsors includes Access Fylde Coast; Affinity Lancashire; Barclaycard; Beaverbrooks; Better Start; City Fibre; Comedy Station; Coral Island; Fox Brothers; Fylde Coast Women's Aid; Hangar 42 Visitor Centre; Hikvision; Houndshill Shopping Centre; Nickelodeon; Northern Rail; Partington's Holiday Parks; Sooty; White Ribbon.

We are also focusing on hiring our services and features to other towns. So far this year, we have achieved the following:

- ❖ Delivery of a new light festival in Crewe
- ❖ Hire of light art to Knowsley Council
- ❖ Working with the Duchy of Lancaster to light the Christmas tree in Lancaster Castle
- ❖ Delivery of Christmas displays for Chorley, Lytham, Lancaster and Morecambe
- ❖ Hire of equipment to other light festivals

The Illuminations team is continuing to explore the potential for introducing behind-the-scenes tours of Lightworks.

Environmental Improvements

The Illuminations service continues to invest in LED lighting and other low-power consumption technology.

Town Deal funding has been allocated to improve electrical infrastructure on the promenade and in the town centre to help reduce generator hire.

We continue to investigate new manufacturing techniques and that will increase the lifespan of features and help minimise maintenance.

Town Deal (including education and skills)

The Illuminations has been allocated a total of £4.5m to revitalise the display and attract additional visitors through new features and installations. The business case has been approved at local level and we are now awaiting the go-ahead to start spending the funds.

As part of the business plan, we are looking to introduce an apprenticeship scheme and have already created new, more specialised positions within the Illuminations team, which are currently advertised

We are also in discussions with Lancaster University regarding the development of new technology.

The Illuminations business case is among seven project plans submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and a response is anticipated in December. Towns have until the end of the 2025/26 financial year to spend the money.

Improvements To Town Centre/Night-Time Economy

As referenced earlier in the report, we are using the extension of the Illuminations as the backdrop to our biggest ever Christmas campaign. The campaign, which launched in mid-November, is intended to drive footfall to the town centre and Promenade over several weeks.

The centrepiece of the campaign is our Christmas By The Sea village on the Tower Festival Headland. It is supported by a substantial marketing campaign including TV, radio, digital and out-of-home advertising across the region.

The promenade village, supported by Northern, officially opened on November 19 and will remain in place until Monday 3 January to complement the two-month extension to the Illuminations season.

It includes a skating rink, simulated snowfalls, log cabins, a forest of Christmas trees, larger-than-life light installations, and festive light projection shows including the specially-commissioned Frost Fairies show, based on a children's book.



Standing in the shadow of The Blackpool Tower, the synthetic skating rink is free to use and includes skate hire. There are 40-minute sessions from Thursday to Sunday from November 19 until December 17, and then daily until January 3. No advance bookings are required, people can simply turn up to book a session.

Blackpool Transport has added to the festive feel with Magical Express Tours on a Christmas-themed heritage tram.

All tours will depart from the North Pole, a specially renamed tram stop located next to the Tourist Information Centre and otherwise known as the North Pier and Tower Heritage Tram Stop!



The Winter Gardens is complementing the Christmas By The Sea village with its own indoor and outdoor Wonderland which features traditional stalls, funfair rides and virtual reality experiences.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Whilst we have no formal research on visitor numbers due to our traditional household research being suspended during pandemic restrictions, key indicators such as car parking, inbound rail, and mobile phone monitoring data indicate that Blackpool's tourism industry has enjoyed a remarkably strong recovery to date.

Businesses across most tourism and hospitality sectors in the resort are reporting exceptional results compared to 2019 (the last full year of tourism activity pre-pandemic) and strong bookings over the remainder of this year and into next.

Over the first two weeks of November (when the Illuminations would normally be switched off), parking patronage was almost double the level seen in the same period in 2019.

The anecdotal evidence from accommodation businesses (both in the self-catering and serviced sectors) is that the high level of bookings over the remainder of this year has been fuelled by the extension of the Illuminations and greatly-enhanced Christmas offer.

During those first two weeks of the extended Illuminations season, there was a significant increase in public donations at the collection points at the southern and northern gateways on the promenade. As a result, by mid-November, the total public donations had reached more than £105k, ahead of the previous four years.

We are still awaiting updated figures on footfall (which is now based on mobile phone data) but, as of the start of November, Centre For Cities research revealed that year-to-date, Blackpool is showing the highest level of recovery in the UK at 114% of pre-pandemic levels.