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PRESS RELEASE

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RESEARCH REVEALS NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR KENT BUSINESSES

Kent and Medway's hotels and B&Bs could be missing out on business opportunities in the growing visitor, friends and relatives (VFR) tourism market, according to the latest research by Visit Kent.

According to existing national data *, the VFR market in Kent generates just short of 2.3 million trips each year – 88 per cent from the UK and 12 per cent from overseas. And it accounts for more than half of all trips to the county – a far more significant proportion of the tourism market than found in many other areas of the UK.

Traditional research into this market focused exclusively on the spending by visitors during their stay, calculating its value in Kent at approximately £202 million annually*. But this approach only took into consideration the spending of visitors and not their hosts during their day trip, overnight stay or longer holiday.

Visit Kent's new research, reviewing national data and conducting extensive Kent-based online surveys and focus groups, has revealed that the spending by

hosts on entertaining their guests at pubs and restaurants, visiting attractions and other forms of entertainment may well equal or even exceed visitor spending.

“It has been incredibly illuminating and suggests that there are many marketing opportunities that businesses may be missing by not promoting themselves directly to local residents,” said Tracey Parker, Research Manager for Visit Kent.

“For example, our online surveys and focus groups have shown that many people would actually prefer to stay in serviced accommodation while visiting and not be a burden on their hosts or because space is limited.

“This could open the door for more hotels and B&Bs to link up with local people to raise awareness of where guests could stay in their area.

“But they would also have to take into account that perceived value, discounts and special offers are key in this market.

“On our VFR satisfaction surveys, Kent scored highly for the overall experience, scenery and hospitality venues but was not perceived as offering value for money.

“Drilling down into the responses and statistics suggests that accommodation providers and attractions presenting special deals for local people entertaining guests could do really well.”

The new VFR research, which is available as part of Visit Kent’s business support service at www.visitkentbusiness.co.uk, also reveals that hosts prefer to take their guests to attractions and places that they already know to avoid any disappointments.

Sandra Matthews-Marsh, Chief Executive at Visit Kent, said: “We are totally focused on building Kent’s visitor economy sustainably and based on the best research available.

“This is a significant piece of work and we will be working with the county’s 3,000 tourism, leisure and hospitality businesses to help them develop new marketing approaches and campaigns.

“We will also be liaising closely with business and our investors to identify aspects of this market which would repay further research to help grow the Kent visitor economy.

“Our research really confirms Visit Kent’s belief that word of mouth is the most powerful form of marketing. Success in the VFR market is highly dependent on ensuring local residents know about the accommodation, hospitality providers and attractions in their area. Furthermore, local people need to feel that they, and their guests, are valued potential customers.”

** Sources: IPS 2006- 2009, UKTS 2006- 2009. Note: domestic figures include both holiday and non-holiday VFR trips. Inbound figures only include non-holiday VFR trips.*

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For further media information, please contact Delphine Houlton or Andrew Metcalf, at Maxim, tel: 01892 513033, email: Delphine@maxim-pr.co.uk; or Julie Edwards, at Visit Kent, tel: 01227 812900, email: Julie.edwards@visitkent.co.uk. For images of Kent, go to <http://www.flickr.com/photos/visitkent/>

Notes to Editors

- Visit Kent Limited is a public/private sector partnership supported by Kent County Council, Medway Council, the district and borough councils, Tourism South East and the leading sector tourism businesses in Kent. Visit Kent champions Kent’s £3.2 billion tourism industry by targeting UK and overseas

markets, improving quality and skills, and growing investment in the tourism product. For further information, go to www.visitkent.co.uk or www.visitkentbusiness.co.uk.

- Interreg IVA is an EU funding programme which aims to promote joint working and cross-border co-operation between partner organisations on either side of a European land or maritime border. Interreg is part of the European Regional Development Fund.

The '2 Seas' Interreg IVA programme is one of two programmes involving Kent. European partners in this programme are France, Flanders and The Netherlands.

For further information, go to www.interreg4a-2mers.eu

