Photos courtesy of Hever Castle

Visit Kent's Business Barometer
November 2008

Welcome to the November Business Barometer produced by Visit Kent's research team. If you still want to take part but have not yet submitted your data, whether you are an accommodation provider, attraction, or carrier, please contact Tracey Parker on 01227 862792. The information contained in this month's report relates to a smaller sample of 27 attractions, as a number of our contributors are closed during this month.

Kent Headlines – Comparison November 2007/2008

Kent Attraction Visitor Numbers – Down 7%
Kent Serviced Accommodation Occupancy - Down 1.6%
Kent Self Catering Unit Occupancy - Down 3.4%
TIC Visitor Numbers - Down 15%
Cross Channel Passengers Port of Dover - Up 4%
Cross Channel Passengers Eurotunnel* - Down 32%
(Please be aware that this is due to the fire in September)

Weather November2008 (Source www.bbc.co.uk)

The weather is cited as a concern for all businesses in all our surveys, and so is included in each of our monthly Business Barometers. According to the BBC, in November the weather was mostly mild at first, but turned much colder later in the month with some snowfall, especially in the east, and sharp frosts. Rainfall was close to average, and sunshine just below average.

England Mean Temperature Series	0.7 degrees above average
England Rainfall Series	99% of average
England Sunshine Series	94% of average

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Attractions

Kent Visitor numbers

This month is out of season for a number of our contributing attractions, and the sample size will be smaller during the winter months as some close until the Spring. This should be taken into account when examining the data below. For November, the visitor numbers for the attractions submitting were:

Visitor numbers	November 2007	November 2008	% Change
	135,569	125,956	Down 7%

Range of performance amongst attractions overall

The performance of attractions ranged from 68% down, to 61% up. 10 attractions reported a fall in visitor numbers, 1 attraction reported no change, and the largest proportion (13) reported a rise in visitor numbers. A further 3 attractions did not have figures for last year due to either no recordings, not being open, or problems with their recording systems

Performance according to attraction type

Only the tour and transport attractions across the board experienced a rise in visitor numbers. 'Other' attractions (which mainly include indoor or covered attractions) did well, but the remaining attraction types in general had a poor month for visitors. The fall in the day visit market by domestic visitors seems to have been a problem during November as people save their money for the main longer holidays.

Gardens	Historic Building Heritage Attraction	Museum	Tour/Transport attraction	Zoo/ Animal Attraction	Outdoor Activity water sports	Other
No data	Down 13%	Down 4%	Up 10%	Down 19%	Down 13%	Up 25%

Performance according to attraction location

Coastal attractions have done surprisingly well in comparison to rural and urban attractions this month. In fact all coastal attractions that submitted this month reported either static or rising visitor numbers. Average weather may have meant that the relatively cost free day trip to the coast continued at the expense of the rural and urban visit. Often urban day visitors combine shopping with visiting other attractions and with the decline in retail sales over this period, and hesitancy to purchase, urban attractions suffered.

Coastal	Rural	Urban
Up 16%	Down 13%	Down 11%

Performance according to attraction cost

The attractions that are free have fared better than the charging attractions during this month. In the lead up to Christmas, many residents may have been trying to cut costs

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elsewhere and if visiting, choosing free rather than charging attractions for their leisure time.

Charging	Free
Down 12%	Down 6%

Reasons cited for increase in visitor numbers

These are the actual reasons quoted by the businesses that submit (sic) and show that continued investment in events and product development are still helping to support visitor numbers. The strength of the Euro is also featuring regularly, as many are experiencing near European visitors in greater numbers in spite of a decline in domestic day visitors.

Improvements to cafe - more indoor seating
Five week month
New exhibition.
Special Events
Xmas craft fair in November
Weather
Strong shop sales, good groups market, closure of other attractions for the winter
More volunteers to open museum
Better promotion of Weddings and Functions
Strength of Euro against pound
New products and a firework event at the beginning of the month
Restaurant Christmas lunches & buildings dressed for Christmas
Exhibitions & events
Good weather & weak £ against the Euro
Strong coach visits
Better weather, more tourists
Not open last year
New products

Reasons cited for decrease in visitor numbers

The reasons given for the decrease in visitors are not surprising, and as can be seen, one attraction feels that their numbers would have been less strong if there had not been the Euro exchange rate benefit for incoming visitors.

Economic Climate
Weather
Free attractions more attractive in current climate
Potentially that most locals had visited in the last 2 months due to popular events and now not visiting.
Bad weather at the weekends
Costs
Coach groups to this attraction in particular were slightly down, but was a bit of a surprise to be down this month
No, but numbers this year I feel would not have been as good had it not been for influx of European visitors due to the strength of the Euro.
Work on site

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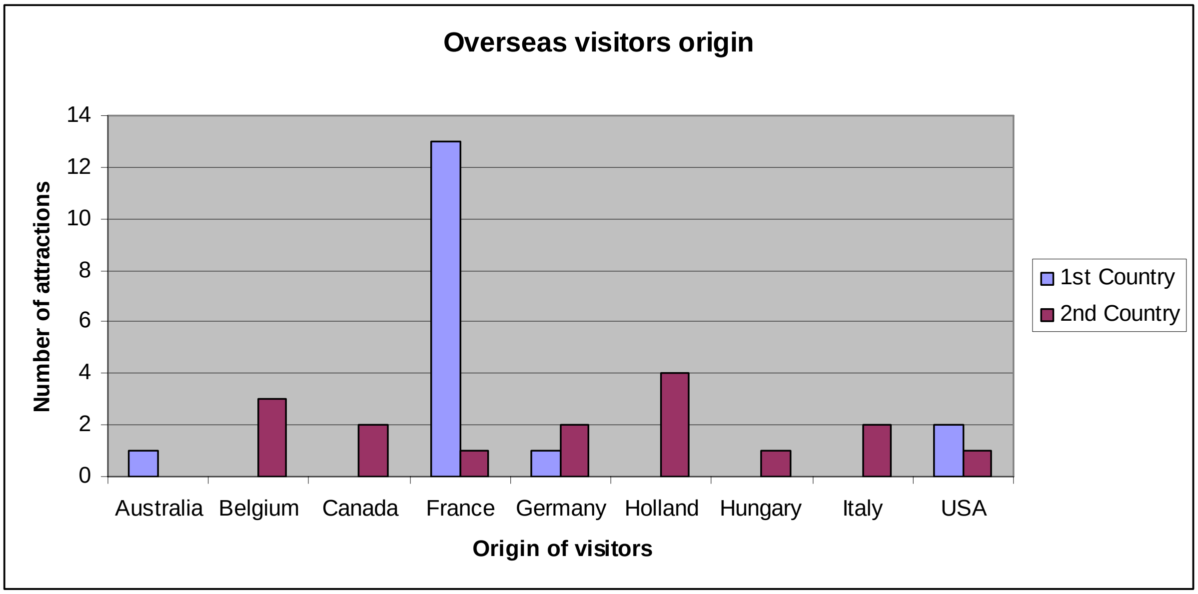
Industry concerns – attractions

Top three concerns for attractions overall
1. Economic Climate
2. Weather
3. Costs

Overseas visitors to attractions in November

November continues to be a popular month for our French visitors, with less from Germany and Holland. This is the traditional month for French school children to come on trips to Kent.



National Data on attractions (Source: Visit Britain)

The Quarterly Attractions Monitor for October, November and December has not yet been released by Visit Britain. However, Visit Britain has conducted some research into the Credit Crunch and how it is affecting UK visitors. The research was a 2-stage Qualitative and Quantitative Project, conducted by Olive Insight. The qualitative phase began in September 2008 with 5 group discussions, 4 paired depth interviews, and an online forum, interviewing a cross-section of region, life stage and social grade.

The quantitative phase commenced in late October/early November 2008 with 1000 online interviews, and a 15 minute questionnaire to the GB population.

The results can be found on the following website by clicking on the link below, but some of its conclusions are detailed underneath.
(*http://www.tourismtrade.org.uk/Businessadvice/economy.asp*)

There are very different mind sets to the downturn

Nervous and drastically changing behaviours	Concerned & refining behaviours	Concerned but wait and see	'Sod its'
15% of population	47% of population	28% of population	10% of population
Most (9 in10) of these: • Very concerned about credit crunch •Started to feel pinch •Worried about making ends meet •Think it will get worse before it gets better	Most (8 in10) of these: • Very concerned about the credit crunch • Think it will get worse before it gets better	These have a lower level of concern over: •The credit crunch (58% concerned) •Making ends meet (28% worried)	Cynical/Unconcerned: •Tend to feel well-off (46% do so) •Unconcerned about credit crunch (just 27% are) •Fed up with hearing about it & think media are stirring it up (60%) •Expect economy to start recovering quicker than others

← Sense population moving this way currently

Q3. Which of the following best describes your feelings about the economic downturn or credit crunch? Base: All (1030)

Some differences in profile within these groups...

Nervous and drastically changing behaviours	Concerned & refining behaviours	Concerned but wait and see	'Sod its'
15% of population	47% of population	28% of population	10% of population
Higher % (c 20%) of these among: • 35–54 yr olds •Families •C2DEs •South West & East	Higher % (53%) of these among: • Midlands & Wales	Higher % (33-35%) among: • 55+yr olds •ABC1s •Empty Nesters & Pre families •Scotland	Higher % (14-17%) of these among: •North East

... but not *strongly* differentiated by demographic/ regional characteristics; more by personal circumstances which can cut across these, eg home ownership/ mortgage commitments, specific industries

. Which of the following best describes your feelings about the economic downturn or credit crunch? Base: All (1030)

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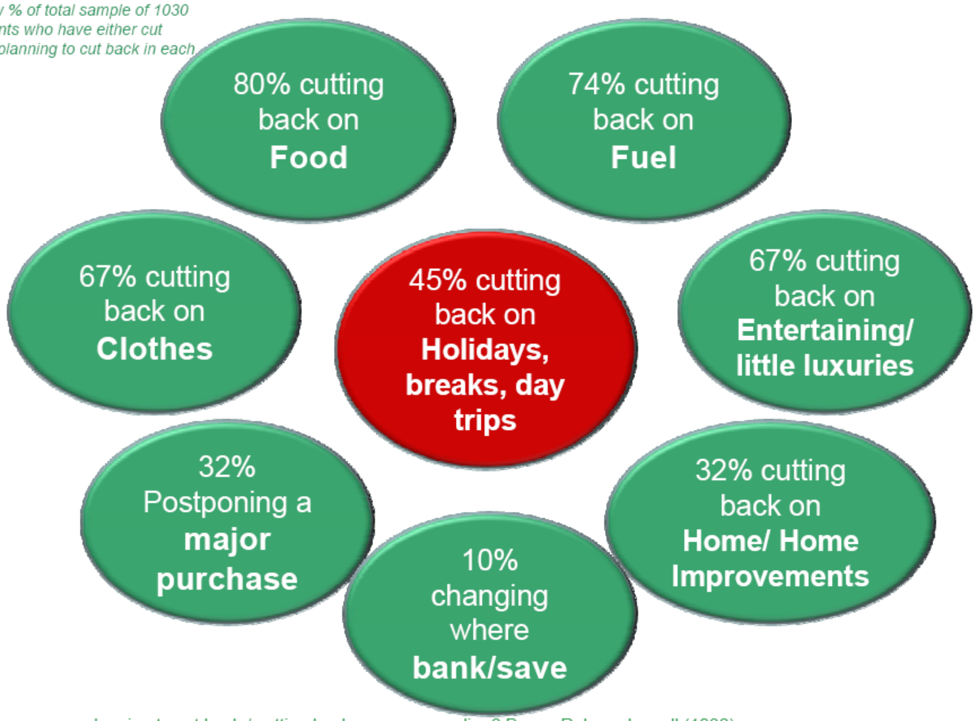
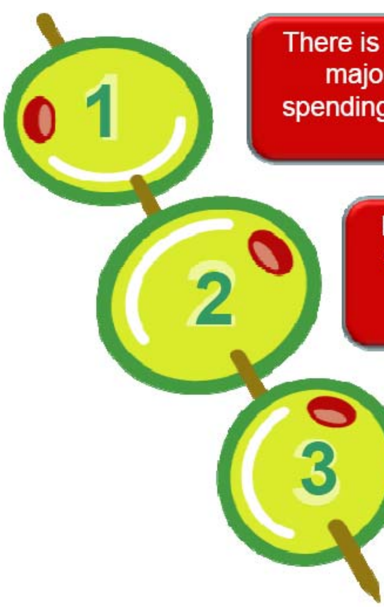
Most affected are frequent, low value purchases; more opportunity to cut, and savings made less ‘missed’

Figs show % of total sample of 1030 respondents who have either cut back/are planning to cut back in each area



Q5a/b. How are you planning to cut back / cutting back on your spending? Base: Rebased on all (1030)



1. There is widespread concern about the credit crunch. For the majority, this has already translated into making some spending cuts – and those who haven’t done so yet expect to start looking for savings soon

2. Holidays are seen as a necessity rather than a luxury, and so are less likely to be targeted than other more everyday purchases. Even so, just under half the population have made or plan to make cuts in this area

3. While cost savings are important, consumers do not want to sacrifice the quality of their holiday, and offers that create value by enhancing their experience and/or inspiring them to do something different also play a vital role.

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The most recent International Passenger Survey from Visit Britain (November) shows that although many other visitor groups were down, European visitors to Britain were still marginally up and spend also up significantly at 11%. Kent still performs well in comparison, as far as European visitors are concerned, due to its geographic proximity to Europe.

	NOVEMBER	
	Visits	% change
	(000)	08/07
North America	200	-30
EU15	1,330	-14
A12	220	-27
Rest of Europe	200	1
Rest of World	250	-7
Total Visits	2,200	-15
	Spend	% change
	(£m)	08/07
Total Spend	1,195	11

Accommodation

Kent serviced accommodation occupancy data

Some Districts do not have sufficient accommodation businesses contributing to the Tourism South East survey to enable comparison to take place, or benchmarking data to be identified and these are marked below. In Canterbury there has been a positive upturn in occupancy for their serviced accommodation, whereas all other districts have experienced a decline in occupancy.

This rise in Canterbury seems to be, following consultation with the tourism team in Canterbury and the Universities, partially down to an increase in student numbers and students graduating during November. The University of Kent held three ceremonies instead of two in 2008. The November ceremonies tend to be for postgraduate ‘Masters’ type qualifications, and the students will have left their accommodation earlier in the year, thereby needing accommodation on their return. With these additional students come additional families needing accommodation which would account for at least some of the rise.

The table below shows that length of stay is down across the board, except for Ashford which rose by 0.3 days, and Thanet where there was no change.

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District serviced accommodation	% room occupancy November 2007	% room occupancy November 2008	% change for month November		Length of stay Nov 2007	Length of stay Nov 2008	Change for month Nov
Ashford	Insufficient sample	39.8	Insufficient sample		1.2	1.5	0.3 up
Canterbury	51.0	60.8	Up 9.8%		1.9	1.6	0.3 down
Dover	50.6	43.9	Down 6.7%		1.7	1.3	0.4 down
Maidstone	Insufficient sample	43.5	Insufficient sample		2.9	2.3	0.6 down
Medway	Insufficient sample	56.3	Insufficient sample		2.1	1.9	0.2 down
Sevenoaks	Insufficient sample	Insufficient sample	Insufficient sample		Insuff. sample	Insuff sample	Insuff sample
Shepway	36.8	30.1	Down 6.7%		2.0	1.8	0.2down
Swale	64.3	63.4	Down 0.9%		3.3	2.5	0.8down
Thanet	47.4	39.1	Down 8.3%		2.0	2.0	No change
Tonbridge & Malling	Insufficient sample	Insufficient sample	Insufficient sample		Insuff. sample	Insuff Sample	Insuff sample
Tunbridge Wells	38.8	51.9	Up 13.1%		2.4	2.3	
Kent occupancy average overall	47.3	45.7	Down 1.6%		2.1	1.8	0.3down

Kent self catering occupancy data

The results for the self catering occupancy (checked with Tourism South East) clearly demonstrate that overseas occupancy has surged during November for our contributing businesses. Although occupancy generally is down, the proportion of each visitor type changed in November dramatically.

Self-Catering occupancy comparison data November 2007/8

	Average Stay	Net unit occupancy	Average Party size	% UK residents	% Overseas residents
Average November 2007	7.6	60.9	2.4	63	37
Average November 2008	6.9	57.5	2.3	37	63
Change from 07/08	0.7days down	3.4% down	0.1 persons down	26% down	26% up

National accommodation data
Source: Visit Britain

Due to the more prompt feedback now available from Kent businesses through our system and liaison with Tourism South East, national data will be reported retrospectively as the UK occupancy survey is not available as frequently as our local data. At this point in time (January 2009), no further data since the September occupancy data given in October's Barometer has been made available by Visit Britain.

Carrier News

Port of Dover Figures

NOVEMBER	2008	2007	% CHANGE
Passengers	426,031	409,604	Up 4%
Car	83,188	79,055	Up 5.2%
Coaches	2,817	2,619	Up 7.6%

The Port of Dover has continued to benefit from the closure of one of the tunnels at Eurotunnel following the fire in September. However, there may also be an increase in all areas, including coaches, due to the interest in the UK from European visitors as a good value destination and the benefit to them of the current Euro exchange rate.

Eurotunnel Figures

Due to the incident of fire in September, the Eurotunnel figures continue to be down. The passenger numbers in November were down 32% and Eurotunnel estimates that the percentage of overseas passengers was about 20% of the total. The overseas passengers for Eurotunnel came mainly from France (including those regular school trips) and Belgium.

Tourist Information Centres

Visitor numbers at Kent TICs - November 2008

Please note that not all TICs have contributed to the Business Barometer this month and there has been some restructuring in Canterbury District, and so this only represents a partial picture.

Visitor Numbers to

TICs	% change 2007-8
Coastal	-7.4%
Urban	-17%
Rural	No rural TICs submitted
Kent overall	-15%

Telephone Enquiries to

TICs	% change 2007-8
Coastal	-4%
Urban	+3%
Rural	No rural TICs submitted
Kent	-1%

Postal and Email Enquiries to

TICs	% change 2007-8
Coastal	+1%
Urban	-14%
Rural	No rural TICs submitted
Kent	-8%

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Figures for individual TIC's November 07/08

Name	Footfall November 2008	Footfall November 2007	Phone calls Nov 2008	Phone calls for Nov 2007	Postal/email enquiries Nov 2008	Postal/email enquiries Nov 2007
Ashford	792	1016	399	292	221	169
Broadstairs	127	421	14	8	0	6
Deal	1073	1152	125	119	362	434
DOVER	4109	4181	599	672	450	440
Faversham	943	1036	n/r	n/r	n/r	n/r
Folkestone, Hythe & Romney	No longer face to face contact	65	543	524	170	119
Gravesend	1984	3440	355	445	153	232
Maidstone	5299	6999	438	396	69	29
Margate	2285	2789	132	146	37	12
Medway	16821	19427	1504	1624	503	823
Ramsgate	1909	1639	41	52	4	1
Royal Tunbridge Wells	4976	5257	488	322	228	116
Sevenoaks	No figures	No figures	No figs	No figs	No figs	No figs
Tonbridge and Malling	No figures	No figures	No figs	No figs	No figs	No figs

Nationality of TIC visitors

November 2008	% Domestic Visitors	% Long Haul Visitors	% European Visitors
Ashford	91	1	8
Canterbury	Restructure	Restructure	Restructure
Deal	93	2	5
Dover	70	10	20
Faversham	96	3	1
Folkestone	98	0	2
Gravesend	95	3	2
Herne Bay	Restructure	Restructure	Restructure
Maidstone	98	1	1
Medway VIC	80	5	15
Royal Tunbridge Wells	85	10	5
Sevenoaks	No figures	No figures	No figures
Tonbridge & Malling	No figures	No figures	No figures
Whitstable	Restructure	Restructure	Restructure

Other News

Domestic Industry Panel (Source: Visit Britain)

Visit Britain consults with leading industry leaders on a regular basis and obtains qualitative information on the state of the industry from their opinions. The full document is available on http://www.tourismtrade.org.uk/Images/DIPWave%207%20Final%20Release%20-%20short%20version_tcm12-44312.pdf .

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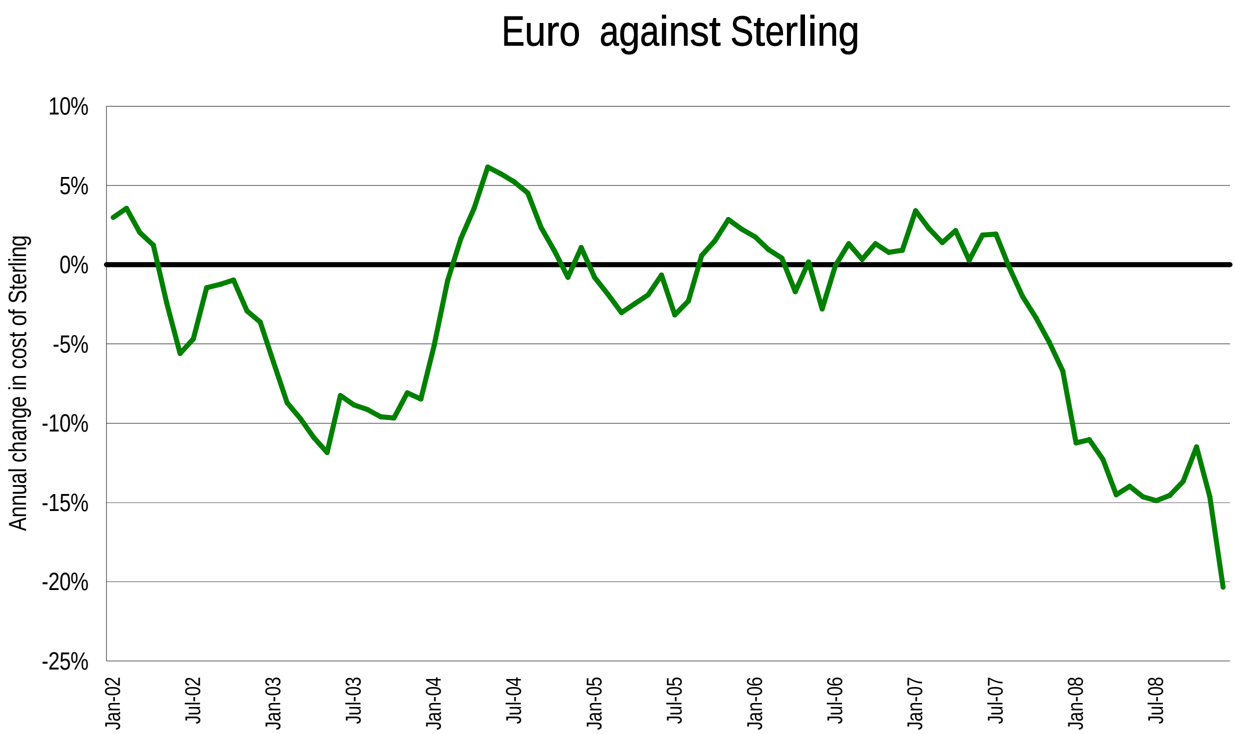
Some of the main conclusions from this panel were that:

- Leisure travellers are becoming increasingly cautious about the amount they are spending and linked to this is a desire to postpone decision-making and wait for 'last minute deals'.
- In terms of business travel, panellists have commented that there has been a reduction and postponement of bookings.
- On the one hand business clients are also seeking to be more economical but they are also expecting to get more for the money they are willing to spend – both putting pressure on the sector.
- While some panellists are trying to tackle the economic slowdown by economising others are marketing themselves aggressively.
- Panellists are calling for leadership through the economic crisis. Some would also like to see greater promotion of Britain to help buoy the industry through the slowdown.

Exchange Rates

The Euro Exchange rate seems to be particularly affecting Kent and its incoming visitors. . The first table and chart below give a clear picture of what this exchange rate means to UK outbound visitors to Europe. The reverse is therefore true for the incoming European neighbours and their spending power in Kent. The final chart shows the actual exchange rate and its changes up until July 08**. (Source Visit Britain Trends Forecasts)**

month ends	**Euro**	yr-on-yr %
31-Dec-08	1.10	-20%
30-Nov-08	1.20	-15%
31-Oct-08	1.27	-11%
30-Sep-08	1.25	-14%
31-Aug-08	1.26	-15%
31-Jul-08	1.26	-15%
30-Jun-08	1.26	-15%
31-May-08	1.26	-14%
30-Apr-08	1.26	-15%
31-Mar-08	1.29	-12%
29-Feb-08	1.33	-11%
31-Jan-08	1.34	-11%



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The effect of this dramatic change in the strength of the Euro compared to Sterling is in a considerable number of press articles currently too. For instance, the Independent on Sunday (11th January 2009) in an article headed ***'Plummeting pound sparks invasion of UK'*** reported the following:

> ***"Eurostar, Sea France and Hotels.com are all reporting dramatic increases in the number of holidaymakers heading to the UK from the Eurozone, a trend that looks likely to continue throughout 2009. It should provide a welcome boost to the economy."***
>
> ***"Despite a Europe-wide downturn, sales of Eurostar tickets to Britain were 15 percent higher in December 2008 than in December 2007."***
>
> ***"Belgian and French people are finding things almost 30 percent cheaper in Britain and that is going to make them choose the UK over more expensive destinations this year."***
>
> ***" One of the reasons for this is a number of French people coming to Canterbury and other UK locations to take advantage of the British sales and advantageous prices in fuel and other goods." A spokeswoman for Seafrance said.***

Visit Britain in the same article confirmed this trend, but added that more needed to be done by the press, especially the international media, to highlight the affordability of Britain as a destination.

Visit Kent represented Kent at the Vakantiebeurs Trade Show in Utrecht, Holland this month (January). The stand was extremely busy throughout with Dutch visitors who commented on their recent trip, or recent booking, or intended booking to Kent. It would seem that certainly for the near future, the United Kingdom is looking very attractive to incoming Dutch visitors and other near European neighbours and we should be prepared for increased numbers.

A word of warning to accommodation providers, apparently the signs that say 'Vacancies' outside many smaller accommodation establishments are too similar to the French and Dutch words for holidays. These impact upon your trade as when touring visitors pass a B&B or other type of accommodation and see these signs up, they assume the owners are away on holiday rather than keen for their business. Perhaps a sign saying 'rooms available' would be more suitable?

Business to Business Website – www.visitkentbusiness.co.uk

Have you had a look at our new website yet? It was designed for you. All of our research and plans are posted onto the site for your use so please give us your feedback on how useful you find the site and what you would like to see. Contact Nina Dietrich on 01227 862787 or nina.dietrich@visitkent.co.uk .

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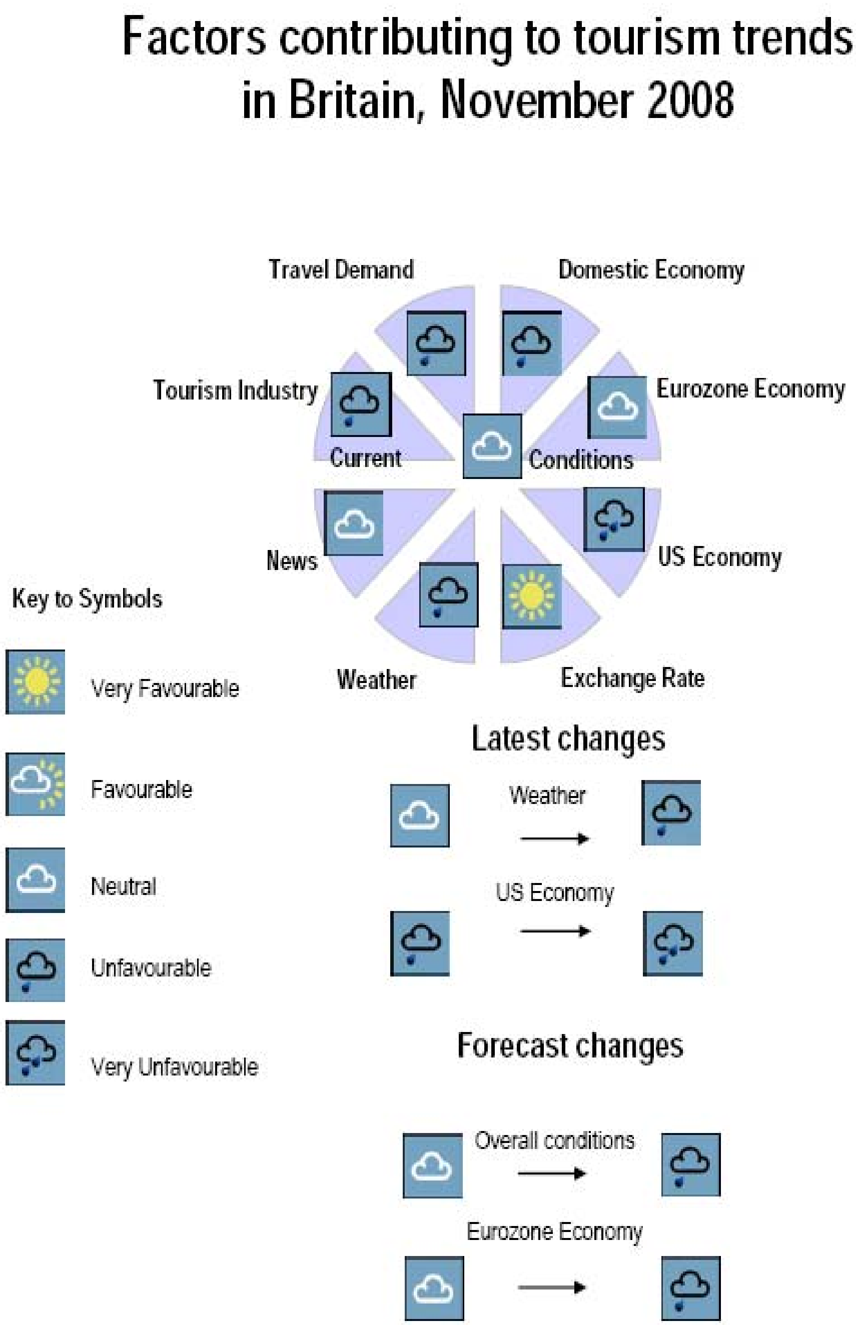

Please feedback to Tracey Parker, Research Manager at Visit Kent, tracey.parker@visitkent.co.uk (01227) 862792 if you have any suggested improvements for the style or content

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