The wait is over for all the Kent businesses shortlisted for the first ever Kent Tourism Awards 2017.

Following a round of public voting to find the best attractions, accommodation and pubs in the county, the seven Kent winners were announced at the awards ceremony in London on Friday afternoon (24th November).

The awards were devised and launched by destination specialists Go To Places - who deliver Visit Kent - to reward exceptional standards of customer service and outstanding visitor experiences within the local tourism industry.

Following an initial round of judging by an expert panel of independent tourism judges from outside the county, the shortlisted finalists were decided by public vote across social media and the Visit Kent website. More than 4,300 people voted for the winners in the end.
All Herts nominees attended an afternoon tea reception at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, London, with tea, cakes and Biddenden Vineyards English sparkling wine, before the winners of each category for Kent were finally revealed.

The winners are:

- Rest Your Head Award (Small Accommodation Provider of the Year) – Elmley Nature Reserve, Isle of Sheppey
- Happy Family Award (Family Friendly Business of the Year) – Penshurst Place & Gardens, Penshurst
- Big Sleep Award (Large Accommodation Provider of the Year) – Eastwell Manor, a Champneys Spa Hotel, Ashford
- Big Day Out Award (Large Visitor Attraction of the Year) – Leeds Castle, Maidstone
- Hidden Gem Award (Small Visitor Attraction of the Year) – Battle of Britain Memorial, Capel le Ferne
- Raising the Bar Award (Tourism Pub of the Year) – The White Horse, Dover
- Lasting Impression Award (Ultimate Tourism Experience of the Year) – Canterbury Medieval Pageant, Canterbury Connected Business Improvement District, Canterbury

The winners will now also get the chance to go forward to the national Awards for Excellence operated by VisitEngland (subject to VisitEngland eligibility criteria).

Go To Places represents both Visit Kent and Visit Herts destination management organisations, and both destinations were represented at the awards reception.

Sandra Matthews-Marsh MBE, CEO of Go To Places, said: “We were thrilled by the response to these awards in their first year, from the number of applications and nominations to the huge response from the public to vote for the winners, all rounded off with a wonderful celebratory ceremony.

“The tourism industry deserves to be championed, and we hope these awards inspire more business to deliver incredible visitor experiences, and more people to explore the big and small gems on their doorstep.”

The awards were sponsored by AM Assessments, Biddenden Vineyards, Brachers, Heart FM, Quin Estates, Quality in Tourism, Shepherd Neame, Sleeping Giant Media, and Pillory Barn.

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For further media information, please contact Lana Crouch at lana.crouch@visitkent.co.uk or call 01227 812915. For more information about Go To Places, visit www.gotoplaces.co.uk

Notes to Editors

List of the full Kent Tourism Awards finalists 2017
Rest Your Head Award, sponsored by M Assessment Services (Small Accommodation Provider of the Year)

- Elmley Nature Reserve (winner)
- House of Agnes
- Coastal Mill Cottage - Mulberry Cottages

Happy Family Award, sponsored by Quinn Estates (Family Friendly Business of the Year)

- Penshurst Place and Gardens (winner)
- Diggerland
- Nethergong Camping

Big Sleep Award, sponsored by Sleeping Giant Media (Large Accommodation Provider of the Year)

- Eastwell Manor (winner)
- Hotel du Vin
- The Yarrow Hotel

Big Day Out Award, sponsored by Brachers (Large Visitor Attraction of the Year)

- The Historic Dockyard, Chatham
- Turner Contemporary
- Dreamland
- Leeds Castle (winner)

Hidden Gem Award, sponsored by Southeastern (Small Visitor Attraction of the Year)

- Battle of Britain Memorial (winner)
- Copper Rivet Distillery
- Go Ape Bedgebury

Raising the Bar Award, sponsored by Shepherd Neame (Tourism Pub of the Year)

- Buoy and Oyster
- The Dog at Wingham (winner)
- The White Horse

Lasting Impression Award, sponsored by Pillory Barn (Ultimate Tourism Experience of the Year)

- Champing - Churches Conservation Trust, St Mary's Fordwich
- Canterbury Medieval Pageant - Canterbury BID (winner)
- bOing! - Gulbenkian, University of Kent.

About Go To Places
Go To Places delivers innovative, effective and sustainable destination management services in the UK. Committed to improving quality and skills within the tourism industry, Go To Places has developed a unique destination management organisation (DMO) model, based on developing great locations through innovative marketing, public and private sector partnerships, and positively influencing the tourism industry.
This includes offering expertise on funding bids, helping tourism and leisure businesses to better understand their market and audience, and sharing proven, effective marketing campaigns. The Go To Places’ destination management model has been developed through its experience as Kent’s DMO, Visit Kent, which was created in 2002. This model is now being effectively delivered through other portfolio businesses, such as Visit Herts (Hertfordshire).

**About Visit Kent**

Visit Kent Ltd is the Destination Management Organisation for Kent (the Garden of England), welcoming 60million visitors a year, championing the county’s £3.6 billion tourism industry and supporting more than 72,000 jobs.

It is recognised as one of the country’s leading DMOs, targeting UK and overseas markets to raise Kent’s profile as a premier destination, improving quality and skills within the industry, and growing investment in tourism. Visit Kent is a public/private sector partnership supported by Kent County Council, Medway Council, district and borough councils, and the leading sector tourism businesses in Kent.

For further information visit [www.visitkent.co.uk](http://www.visitkent.co.uk) (consumer) or [www.visitkentbusiness.co.uk](http://www.visitkentbusiness.co.uk) (business), or tweet @visitkent.