

KENT GARDEN *of* ENGLAND

visitkent.co.uk

Press release

Wednesday 9th January

Kent's tourism economy flourishes as visitor numbers rise to 65 million

Kent's visitor economy has increased 7% and topped **£3.8 billion** for the first time ever, after welcoming a record 65 million visitors in 2017.

Independent research commissioned by Visit Kent has revealed that 64,970,000 visitors came to The Garden of England in 2017, and the county remains the third most visited destination outside of London for foreign visitors.

Overseas overnight visits to the county increased by 4% with an 8% increase in the number of nights stayed, and a 10% increase in the resulting value.

Across the county, visitor spending figures in Kent continue to rise compared to 2015, with the highest ever numbers reported for spending in the county from both day and overnight visits.

Tourism jobs have also increased by 6.8% to 76,828, and now account for 11% of total employment across the county.

Chief executive of Visit Kent, Deirdre Wells OBE said: "Tourism is the UK's fastest growing service sector and these figures demonstrate the contribution which our vital industry makes to the economy of Kent. With our stunning countryside, world-class heritage, and delicious locally sourced food and drink, it is no surprise that visitors' numbers are increasing. The collective efforts of tourism businesses across the county have paid dividends and this partnership will be critical in ensuring that this growth continues during a challenging year ahead."

Using the industry-respected Cambridge Economic Impact Model, this new research measured the volume and value of tourism in the county in 2017, and the impact of visits and visitor expenditure on the local economy.

Canterbury had the highest number of trips (7.8 million) and the highest visitor spend (£392 million) in the county. Canterbury's tourism employment now accounts for 16% of the district's total employment.

Thanet saw the highest increase in day visitor numbers in the county, rising by 9.9% to 3.7 million. Over £319 million was spent in the area as a result of tourism, an increase of 9.2% on 2015. Thanet's tourism employment now accounts for an impressive 19% of the district's total employment.

Other district highlights included a 10.1% increase in the value of day trips in Tonbridge and Malling, a 9% rise in the number of day trips to Sevenoaks, and a 4.2% rise in tourism employment in Dover meaning that tourism jobs now account for 17% of the district's overall employment.

There was a leap in the value of day trips for Ashford (5.6%), Medway (6.7%) and Maidstone (11.2%), while Folkestone & Hythe and Tunbridge Wells saw increases in the average length of stay for overnight trips (2.4% and 3.1% respectively). The total value of tourism for Swale enjoyed a 3.9% increase, rising to £237 million.

Since 2006, the value of Kent's tourism industry has risen by 33%.

Leader of Kent County Council, Paul Carter, said "The results from the 2017 survey commissioned by Visit Kent clearly show that the visitor economy is increasingly important to the county's future prosperity".

Deirdre added: "These figures demonstrate that, wherever you are based in Kent, tourism can bring growth, prosperity and jobs to your community. Our challenge going forward will be to turn more of our day visits into overnight stays and short breaks, bringing even further growth to the county."

For more information about Kent, please visit www.visitkent.co.uk

ENDS

For further media information on Visit Kent, please contact In-house PR Consultant Katy Towse on katy.towse@visitkent.co.uk or Brand Manager Lana Crouch on lane.crouch@visitkent.co.uk or call 01227 812914.

For images of Kent, go to <http://www.flickr.com/photos/visitkent/>

Notes to Editors

About Visit Kent

Visit Kent Ltd is the Destination Management Organisation for Kent (the Garden of England), welcoming 65million visitors a year, championing the county's £3.8 billion tourism industry and supporting more than 77,000 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 (consumer) or www.visitkentbusiness.co.uk (business), or tweet @visitkent.

About The Cambridge Economic Impact Model

The figures were derived using the Cambridge Economic Impact Model undertaken by Sergi Jarques at Destination Research on behalf of Visit Kent. The Cambridge Economic Impact Model is an industry respected tool for measuring the economic impact of tourism in a given area. It utilises information from national tourism surveys and regional/local data (e.g. accommodation stock, inbound trips) of the level of tourism activity within a given local area.

Please note that all figures in the research reports have been rounded, therefore there might be marginal discrepancies in subtotals and totals.

Is it estimated that 6,023 actual jobs are supported by Bluewater, raising the total employment in that area to 9,765, or 16% of all employment in Dartford. Whilst it contributes to Kent's visitor economy, the shopping and retail nature of the destination must be taken into consideration.