Press release
Monday 28th November 2016

Kent’s visitor economy drives jobs and growth as visitor numbers soar to 60 million a year

Kent’s visitor economy has topped £3.6billion for the first time ever, after welcoming a record 60 million visitors in 2015.

Independent research commissioned by Visit Kent has revealed that 60.6 million visitors came to The Garden of England last year, and the county remains the third most visited destination outside of London for foreign visitors.

Across the county, visitor numbers in Kent continue to rise compared to 2013, with the highest volume of day trips, overnight trips, and holidays ever.

Tourism jobs increased by 5.9% to 71,920, and the overall value of Kent’s visitor economy rose 5% to hit £3.6billion.

Chief executive of Visit Kent Sandra Matthews-Marsh MBE said: “Kent’s reputation as a great short break destination continues to grow, and we are proud to remain one of the UK’s most popular destinations.

“2015 was undoubtedly a challenging year for the industry, with poor weather and the impact of Operation Stack during the summer. But these new figures show a rise in visitor numbers, jobs, and in the value of our industry, indicating that a lot of hard work has paid off.

“We put this picture of consistent growth down to two things – billions of investment by the public and private sector in hotels, attractions, footpaths, ferries and more, to ensure that Kent’s visitor offer is world class.

“Secondly, an unceasing commitment of both the public and private sector to work together on a single vision and strategy for tourism, led by Visit Kent.

“Our approach to the visitor economy is held up as a national example, and Kent’s performance is outstripping other destinations’ national growth figures. With Kent councils continuing to prioritise our sector, we have succeeded in supporting a great spread of jobs across the county at all skills levels, have seen
a significant improvement in hotel occupancy across the year, and boosted the overall image of Kent which benefits other industrial sectors and inward investment.”

But she warned: “This is not time to be complacent. We must continue to invest in this successful strategy if Kent is to stay on top. The public sector in particular faces hard choices about resources, and the autumn statement painted a difficult picture for the years ahead.

“Although some currency fluctuations will benefit inbound tourism and staycations, if we let up our concerted joint effort for a moment there is a real threat to the continued success of thousands of businesses.”

Using the industry-respected Cambridge Economic Impact Model, the research measured the volume and value of tourism in the county in 2015, and the impact of visits and visitors expenditure on the local economy.

Thanet saw one of the highest increases in visitor numbers and spend. The district saw 16.8% more day trips to the area and £293million was spent in the area as a result of tourism, an increase of 19.4% on 2013.

Canterbury had the highest number of trips in the county (7.2million) and overseas trips shot up 6%. Other district highlights included a 6% increase in attraction spend in Ashford, a rise in the overall value of tourism in Sevenoaks, while Tonbridge and Malling saw a large increase in the number of staying visitors.

There was a leap in the number of overnight visits from international visitors for Dover (12%) and Tunbridge Wells (7%), while Shepway had a 7% rise in overnight visits from domestic visitors. Visits also increased in Gravesham and Swale, and Medway witnessed a 5% increase in jobs supported by tourism.

Since Visit Kent’s launch in 2002, the value of Kent’s tourism industry has risen by 49%.

Kent County Council Cabinet Member for Economic Development Mark Dance said: “I’m very happy to see that the visitor economy is flourishing in Kent and these figures show that our investment in supporting businesses across the sector over the last decade has worked.

“The partnerships across the visitor economy are going from strength to strength and Kent remains the third most popular destination in the UK outside of London.

“We certainly won’t be resting on our laurels when it comes to increasing growth but we have a great deal to be proud of as a county.”

Sandra added: “With so many exciting projects ahead, such as our new Gardens & Gourmet project, the 350th Anniversary of the Battle of Medway, the
Folkestone Triennial, and new developments at award-winning winning producer Chapel Down, Kent is in an enviable position for 2017.”

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

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For further media information on Visit Kent, please contact Marketing and PR Manager Sinead Hanna at Sinead.Hanna@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), championing the county’s £3.6 billion tourism industry and supporting more than 71,000 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 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.