

VISIT KENT

Garden of England

Kent enjoys strong tourism momentum with major boost in overseas visitors

Visit Kent, part of Kent County Council's Economic Development Team, supported by Medway Council, has today released economic impact data showing an impressive **11% growth in overseas visits to the county in 2024**.

The **1.3 million international trips** generated more than **£374 million** for the local economy, an increase of **9% compared to 2023**, far exceeding pre-pandemic levels. This rise demonstrates the recovery of international tourism to Kent, which is of strategic importance for many of the visitor economy businesses.

A combined **66 million domestic and international trips** were made to the county in 2024, **generating £4.1 billion** in revenue, reaching 2019 spend levels for the first time since the pandemic.

Visit Kent commissioned the study which uses the industry-respected Cambridge Economic Impact Model to measure the volume and value of tourism within a destination and the effect of visits and visitor expenditure on the local economy.

Tourism remains a significant employer

Tourism continues to be a key sector for the county, accounting for **11%** of all employment. In total, there are now **82,265 jobs** supported by the visitor economy, a **6%** increase on the previous year. This impressive year-on-year growth demonstrates the significant role tourism continues to play in the local economy.

Overseas visits outperform national levels

Kent's surge in inbound visitor numbers is even more remarkable when set against a national context. Whilst VisitBritain data for 2024 indicates a strong growth of **9%** in international trips, and **1%** growth in spend (in nominal terms), Kent's excellent, tourism product, transport links and easy access to Europe have seen it outpace the UK, with **11%** and **9%** growth, respectively.

Joss Croft OBE, CEO, UKinbound said: "It is fantastic to see such positive growth in international visits to Kent, and these results highlight the valuable role that the inbound visitor economy continues to play in supporting local businesses and jobs.

"This improvement reflects the strength of the county's visitor offer and the hard work of tourism businesses across Kent. UKinbound is pleased to support destinations

across the UK, and we remain committed to working with partners to help drive international demand and ensure that the benefits of inbound tourism are felt widely in communities nationwide.”

UK staycationers seek quality

In 2024 domestic tourism plateaued at both national and local levels, with choices around holidays and short breaks set against a backdrop of economic uncertainty, increasing energy costs and concerns around the rising cost-of-living. In December 2024, **27%** of adults indicated they were intending to reduce the number of overnight trips, according to VisitBritain’s Domestic Sentiment Tracker.

In Kent, while the total number of domestic overnight trips decreased by 2%, overall spend for domestic overnights **increased by 17% to over £631 million, and the length of stay increased by 8%**. This demonstrates while UK consumers may have reduced the number of trips taken, swapping spontaneous visits for more considered holiday plans, they are prepared to pay more for quality products. Once again, Kent outpaced national results with average UK domestic overnight spend increasing by 5% and overnight trip volume decreasing by 10%.

David Wimble, KCC Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Special Projects said: “Kent stands as one of the UK’s leading tourism destinations, with our coastline, natural landscapes and fantastic tourism attractions continuing to drive short breaks to the county.

“I have no doubt the remarkable increase in international visits and spend will be welcome news to Kent’s many tourism businesses. The fact Kent’s inbound visits data has surpassed national levels is a clear reminder of the importance of our transport providers and international connectivity. These figures are not only testament to Kent’s strong visitor offer but also highlight the importance of investing in quality accommodation stock.

“The latest figures show the significance of tourism for the Kent economy, generating £4.1 billion. Not only that, but as a sector that supports more than 1 in 10 jobs in the county, it is a cornerstone of Kent employment.”

Councillor Harinder Mahil, Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment, said: “It’s great to see an upturn in international visits to Kent and Medway – but it’s no surprise.

“From the ancient streets, castles and cathedrals of Rochester and Canterbury, to the fields and villages of the Garden of England, our corner of the country is a beautiful holiday destination, perfectly located as gateway to and from Europe.

“Tourism is a vital part of our economy, and I’d like to thank everyone in the leisure, hospitality and travel industries who work so hard to improve the offer in Kent and Medway for our thousands of visitors.”

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Notes to editors

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, domestic and 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.

It is estimated that 4,574 actual jobs are supported by Bluewater Shopping Centre, raising the total employment in that area to 11,669, or 17% 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.

About Visit Kent

Visit Kent is the Destination Management Service for Kent. The service is responsible for supporting and growing the tourism industry in Kent, building a resilient and sustainable visitor economy.

Visit Kent is part of Kent County Council's Economic Development Team, and is supported by Medway Council.

For further information visit www.visitkent.co.uk (consumer) or www.visitkentbusiness.co.uk (business).