

Leisure and Tourism Performance

The most recent Cambridge Economic Impact Model analysis showed that in 2017 the county welcomed a record 65m visitors, an increase of 5m visitors on 2015 which included over one million international visitors for the first time. The visitor economy is worth £3.8bn to Kent annually and accounts for around 77,000 jobs or 11% of total Kent employment. In turn, this growth has stimulated significant new investment in Kent's wider economy.

Visit Kent's monthly Business Barometer tracks tourism trading performance and allows businesses to benchmark occupancy and footfall figures within their peer group. This data supports developers and those planning investments to make informed decisions based on demand. The Visit Kent strategy focusses on:

- increasing the value of the visitor economy by driving overnight visits
- proactively targeting investment in new accommodation stock
- targeting high spending international visitors
- the high value business events market

These priorities are aligned to the new Tourism Sector Deal with the government which sets out plans to support the growth of the visitor economy nationally and deliver an additional 130,000 bedrooms and create 30,000 apprenticeships by 2025.

Attractions

Visit Kent's Business Barometer 2019 Q1 report shows footfall to visitor attractions in Kent was up by 9.9% compared to Q1 2018. Despite the uncertainty around Brexit and a fall in visitors from key international markets, Kent's attractions have continued to see an increase in footfall demonstrating the resilience of the sector locally in times of uncertainty.

The last year saw further development across Kent to strengthen the visitor offer. The following examples show continued confidence in Kent's visitor economy and creation of new job opportunities in the sector:

- Chapel Down Winery opened its new state-of-the-art brewery and visitor centre, Curious Brewery in Ashford town centre in May 2019. The brewery includes a shop, tasting area, bar and restaurant.
- Elwick Place in Ashford, which includes a new Picturehouse boutique cinema, was officially opened in December 2018.
- Macknade Fine Foods will also open their new food and drink hub at Elwick Place in late 2019.
- English Heritage invested £2.3m in reviving the lost pleasure grounds at Walmer Castle, with the historic glen accessible for the first time in 100 years. English Heritage also opened a new cold war themed escape room at Dover Castle and

plan substantial investment in new experiences over the forthcoming years.

- The National Trust completed their £7.75m conservation project at Knole opening 15 showrooms, the house attics, Gatehouse Tower and the exceptional range of furniture, textiles and paintings on display inside. Sissinghurst Castle will also complete a garden conservation project in late summer 2019.
- Canterbury Cathedral is undergoing a major 5-year development project including a new Welcome Centre to open in autumn 2019.
- Margate Caves opened this summer following investment from the Big Lottery Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund, boosted by a crowdfunding initiative. This provided a visitor centre, shop, cafe and community hub.



Lion Lodge at Port Lympne Hotel & Reserve, near Hythe.

- Hush Heath Estate opened a new £4m Winery, a 200-seat tasting room and visitor centre opened in late 2018 allowing them to more than triple production over the next 5 years.
- Maidstone Borough Council has committed to investing £4.3m in the redevelopment and improvement of Mote Park over the next few years. The initial improvements to the car parks, play area and creation of the new Adventure Zone were completed in early 2019.
- Biggin Hill Memorial Museum opened in February 2019 following an investment of £5.3m.
- The Tunbridge Wells Museum is currently undergoing redevelopment into a Cultural Learning Hub and is due to open in 2021.
- The Historic Dockyard Chatham completed the £8.2m restoration of the Grade 1 listed Fitted Rigging House in autumn 2018 and will begin work on a project to restore the machinery in the Victorian Ropery.
- A new Urban Sports Park including a climbing and skate park is due to open in Folkestone early 2020.
- Prison Island, a new 929m² (10,000ft²) escape room opened in Maidstone High Street.
- Chimera Climbing will open a new climbing centre in Canterbury in November.
- Lydden Hill Race Track have submitted an application to redevelop the offices into a VIP Centre and additional use of the circuit for non-race activities.
- Restoration of Charles Dickens' Swiss Chalet which sits in the grounds of Eastgate House in Rochester is planned to coincide with the anniversary of the author's death next year.
- Wildwood near Canterbury opened a new walk through red squirrel experience in May.
- Dreamland opened a new European restaurant, Café Barletta, to increase their food and drink offer.
- Reuthes Lost Gardens has opened at Reuthes Nursery, Sevenoaks
- The London Resort development planned for the Swanscombe Peninsula confirmed partnerships with ITV Studios, BBC Studios and Paramount Pictures.

Accommodation

In Visit Kent's Business Barometer 2019 Q1 report, serviced accommodation supply increased by 3.6% and demand was up by 4.2% compared to the same period in 2018. Across Kent's larger hotels and chains (based on data supplied through STR Global for 82 properties and just over 6400 rooms), occupancy was 65.3% an increase of 0.6% compared to Q1 2018.

£3.8bn

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Visit Kent Business Barometer

To support the Visit Kent strategy of increasing overnight stays in the county it is essential to increase investment in quality accommodation across all price points. The last year has seen the following developments:

- A 28 bedroom boutique hotel and restaurant, The Pig at Bridge Place, opened in May.
- The luxury Cave Hotel and Golf Resort opened in June 2019 at Boughton near Canterbury, providing two restaurants and conferencing facilities.
- Hampton By Hilton are set to take the hotel on the Slatters site in Canterbury, planned for completion in 2020. The international hotel brand has also confirmed a £10m development in Folkestone on the former Silver Springs site alongside an Ibis hotel.
- Artgame in Margate opened four luxury apartments above an art gallery in July 2019.
- The Rochester Riverside development includes plans for a hotel including conference and meeting room facilities.
- Elmley Nature Reserve in Sheppey opened the newly renovated 18th century Kingshill Farmhouse which sleeps up to 14.
- The University of Kent plans a hotel and conference centre as part of the Canterbury Campus Framework Masterplan.
- Port Lympne Reserve opened new accommodation including their latest luxury experience, Lion Lodge and is due to open Giraffe Hall, a luxury 10-bedroom hotel and 6 cabins, in 2020.
- Travelodge opened a 58 bedroom hotel at Elwick Place in Ashford in January 2019, a 108-bedroom hotel in the St James development in Dover and two more will open in Sittingbourne and the Rochester Riverside development later this year. The company has approval for a 75 bedroom development at Discovery Park and is actively targeting sites in Ebbsfleet/Bluewater, Canterbury, Deal/Sandwich, Folkestone, Herne Bay/Whitstable, Maidstone, Sevenoaks and Tonbridge.

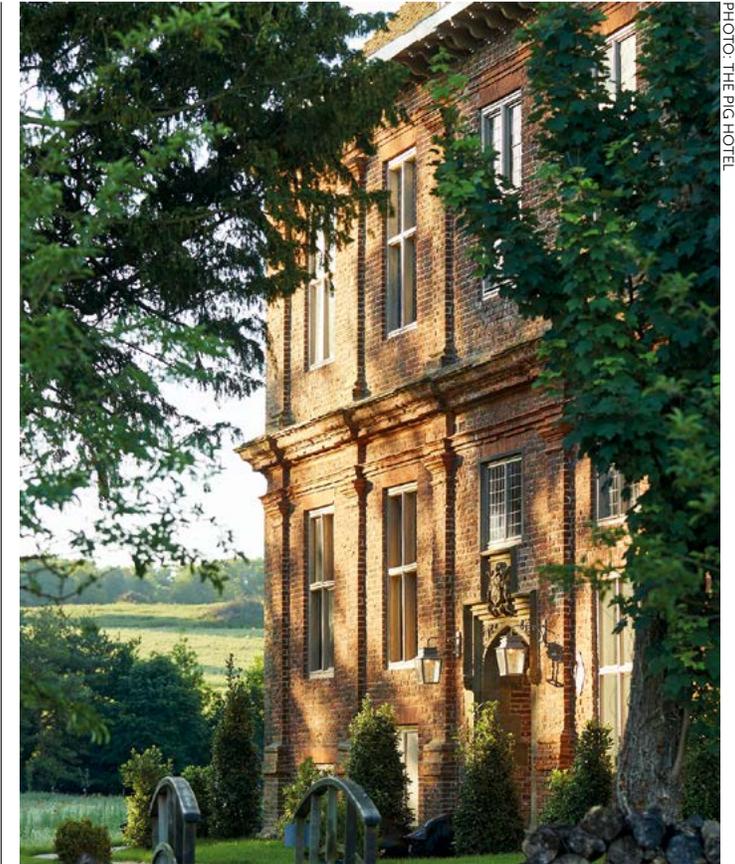


PHOTO: THE PIG HOTEL

The Pig at Bridge Place, near Canterbury.

- A new 115 bedroom Premier Inn will be opening on the Merevale House site in Tunbridge Wells in December.
- Shepherd Neame invested a total of £10.2m to improve their managed estate in 2018. A £500,000 refurbishment at the Marine Hotel in Tankerton and a £100,000 refurbishment of The Ship Hotel in New Romney were completed in July 2019.
- A new Spa upgrade was unveiled at Dover Marina Hotel as part of a £1m investment in the property.

With several major events and anniversaries taking place in Kent over the next year, including The Open golf tournament in Sandwich and the Turner Prize in Margate, Visit Kent will be working with partners to capitalise on these opportunities to attract new visitors and to utilise this platform to raise the profile of Kent as a national and international destination.