

Leisure and Tourism Performance

Prior to the pandemic, Kent attracted 65 million visitors a year, contributing £3.8bn to the county's economy and supporting more than 77,000 jobs. This is equivalent to 11% of all employment in the county. (2017, Kent Economic Impact of Tourism). Kent had 5,345 tourism enterprises as of 2019. This grew by 14.6% over the last five years with significant investment into the county. Seven Kent districts have a higher proportion of tourism enterprises than the national average of 8.5%, with the highest in coastal areas. (Tourism industries in Kent, March 2020) Kent is also the third most visited destination for international visitors outside London reaching a record 1.1 million in 2017. These visits were worth £361m to the local economy. (2017, Kent Economic Impact of Tourism). As the gateway to Europe, Kent welcomed 22,024,033 cross-channel passengers, 4,775,858 tourist cars and 130,867 coaches through the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel in 2018.

Globally the visitor economy has been one of the sectors hardest hit by COVID-19 with VisitBritain forecasting a drop of 49% in the value of domestic tourism equating to a loss of £44.9bn. Inbound tourism for 2020 is expected to decline by 59% in visits to 16.8m and 63% in spend to £10.6bn, representing a drop of £19.7bn (VisitBritain 2020 Tourism Forecast). As a destination with a strong visitor economy, a large number of businesses in Kent have been hit hard by the pandemic with businesses experiencing a 72% reduction in revenue in March and a 98% loss in April compared to 2019. (Visit Kent, COVID-19 Business Impact Survey) Businesses that rely heavily on international visitors, the events industry, cruise industry, groups and educational visits will be slower to recover but as the sector begins to re-open, many businesses have shown extreme resilience by quickly adapting and using new technologies to enable them to continue to trade, as well as diversifying their offer to create new revenue streams.

There are opportunities emerging on which Kent is well placed to capitalise. Coastal and rural areas are likely to recover quicker than city destinations and a number of trends have been accelerated by the pandemic such as a growing interest in the outdoors, local produce and authentic experiences. Kent's visitor economy benefits from a diverse product range, with a rich offer in heritage, culture, local produce, and countryside which is being developed further through Visit Kent projects such as Gourmet Garden Trails which is facilitating the growth of strong and varied experiences.

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CREDIT: BLUEWATER

Proposal for the Hangloose Adventure at Bluewater.



CREDIT: THE CAVE HOTEL & GOLF RESORT/VISIT KENT



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Left and above: The Cave Hotel & Golf Resort, Canterbury.

The building of Hangloose Adventure at Bluewater will see the creation of England’s longest and fastest zip line. The adventure park will be situated amongst the 50 acres of stunning parkland at Bluewater, which has recently been awarded Green Flag status for the fifth year in a row. Designed to make the most of the beautiful outdoor spaces that Bluewater has to offer, the zip line is due to open for February half-term 2021.

Recent investments in the visitor economy include Canterbury Cathedral which is undergoing a major 5-year development project with a new Welcome Centre and the Slatters Hotel development, a new 129 bed city-centre hotel is due for completion in early 2021. Canterbury also saw the opening of The Cave Hotel & Golf Resort near Boughton. In addition to this, the London Resort development planned for the Swanscombe Peninsula moved to consultation stage and English Heritage announced £26m of investment in the visitor experience at Dover Castle over the next ten years.

Collaboration between Visit Kent, Locate in Kent and Produced in Kent with other stakeholders in the ‘Promoting Kent’ partnership supports a joined-up approach to the promotion of Kent as a great place to visit, study, live, invest and work. This strong leadership will be important to make a success of place-making initiatives needed to rethink our high streets and adapt our places to new opportunities arising from a reduction in commuting and trends for local work-space hubs and periodic meetings and events to bring together scattered workforces. The great connectivity into London and Europe, as well as the quality of life that the county offers puts Kent in a strong position to capitalise on these changing work behaviours.

In October 2020, Visit Kent and Locate in Kent launched the second phase of an in-depth accommodation study delivered by Canterbury Christ Church University. The first phase conducted in 2019 looked at the supply and demand, mapping the gaps and opportunities for investment across

the county. The second phase provided detailed local context through online interviews with key personnel within each district responsible for strategic planning, economic development and/or the visitor economy. This report provides investors and developers with valuable insights into how the visitor economy and accommodation provision fits within each of the districts across Kent, and into current and future strategic planning and development.

To access this report, please contact:
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