

**GROWING KENT'S VISITOR ECONOMY
TOGETHER**

**Local Visitor
Economy
Partnership**

Recognised by



VisitEngland

KENT GARDEN *of* ENGLAND
Destination Management Plan

2024 - 2029

Images

Cover: Simpsons Wine Estate
Bloom Stays ,Waters Edge
The White Cliffs of Dover National Trust
Curious Brewery
Maidstone Distillery
The Amelia Scott, Tunbridge Wells
Folkestone Harbour Arm
Joe's Bows at Belmont House
The Old Neptune, Whitstable
Ramsgate
Folkestone Harbour Arm
Dreamland Margate
Rochester Castle
The Historic Dockyard, Chatham
Castle Farm
Canterbury Cathedral
Penshurst Place and Gardens
Coco and Bloom Florist, West Malling
Gusbourne Estate
Canoe Wild
Whitstable
Minster Leas, Isle of Sheppey



Executive Summary

Kent and Medway welcomes over **60 million visitors** to the county each year. The visitor economy contributes **£3.8 billion to the local economy** annually and supports almost **75,000 jobs** which is 10% of all employment in the county.*

However, the sector has still not recovered fully from the impact of the pandemic and the Destination Management Plan sets out some key challenges for the county including:

- Perceptions of Kent being impacted by negative media coverage
- Challenges around low productivity in the sector due to seasonality and a lack of accommodation stock
- The need to create new and exciting reasons to visit and stay longer in the county

This Destination Management Plan is shaped around four overarching objectives to address these challenges and **grow Kent's visitor economy together**.



Under each of these objectives there are a set of clear and measurable priority actions which will ensure that the sector is in a strong position to build on our unique destination strengths, capitalise on emerging travel trends and build resilience to future threats. Underpinning this is our responsibility to grow our visitor economy in a sustainable way, enabling our communities and natural environment to thrive.

The plan is flexible and scalable helping us to steer collective resource and funding towards activity which will have the greatest impact over the next five years. It will also enable Visit Kent and our partners to more effectively apply sector intelligence to decision making, resulting in a greater return for our efforts.

Welcome to Kent

This Destination Management Plan reflects the strength of the partnerships and collaboration which we are so lucky to have within the visitor economy in Kent. The ability to innovate together isn't something that happens naturally in every destination and is a result of having strong sector leadership providing the glue. It is also the reason why this Destination Management Plan will be a success.

I'm sure we all wish that we had a crystal ball when setting out our strategies for the next five years, but while we don't have all the answers, it's absolutely critical that we have a clear roadmap based on the most up to date intelligence available. This Destination Management Plan is a living document which has the flexibility to adapt when the situation changes or new information emerges, ensuring that we all pull together to address the top priorities for the destination which will, in turn, benefit us all.

While there will be challenges for the sector to navigate over the coming years, it's also important to remind ourselves how lucky we are to be able to live and work in a fantastic county that is world-leading in so many ways and has so much potential.

Doug Bannister

Chair

Visit Kent



**GROWING KENT'S VISITOR ECONOMY
TOGETHER**



As the national tourism board for England, we are pleased to endorse this Destination Management Plan for Kent.

Great destinations are great places to live and work as well as to visit and strong governance can drive place-shaping and shift local and wider perceptions of the place which can contribute to local pride. Well run destinations can also attract new investment, increase income and create new jobs.

We were delighted to award Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) status to Visit Kent as one of the first round of accredited LVEPs in 2023. Since then, the LVEP has worked closely with partners and consulted widely to create this updated Destination Management Plan, setting out a shared vision for a thriving, inclusive and sustainable visitor economy. The strategy builds on the fantastic work already underway in the county and they are now in a great position to continue forward with this strategic approach to destination management.

A key recommendation of the Government response to the de Bois Review of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) in England was the creation of Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs) programme. The LVEPs work closely with us at VisitEngland and are at the heart of transforming the visitor economy landscape supporting its cohesion and growth in a more inclusive, accessible and sustainable way. The programme is going from strength to strength as the number of LVEPs increases, representing more of England

At VisitEngland, we look forward to working with the Visit Kent LVEP and their partners to help realise the ambitions set out in this strategy.



Andrew Stokes
England Director
VisitEngland

What is a Destination Management Plan?

A Destination Management Plan (DMP) helps stakeholders to agree on a set of priorities and actions to grow and benefit from the local visitor economy. This plan sets out the current opportunities and challenges for Kent and Medway and sets out a shared vision for the destination over the next five years. It is a living document which has been designed to be flexible and position the county positively to capitalise on emerging opportunities.

As the accredited Local Visitor Economy partnership (LVEP) for Kent and Medway, Visit Kent is the lead organisation for the delivery and monitoring of the DMP but it requires the support of a wide range of partners who are responsible for different aspects of the visitor experience or promotion of the destination.

The plan has been developed over six months drawing on in-depth insights and consultation with a wide range of local and industry partners.

1. Evidence Base

The plan is built on a strong foundation of sector insights drawing on visitor, resident, product, business and performance data. It also considers national data, external factors and emerging trends which will drive change.

2. Stakeholder Engagement

We have developed the plan in collaboration with public and private sector partners from across the destination through a series of workshops and 1:1 consultations to help shape strategic direction and priorities.

3. SMART Actions

Each priority has a set of clear actions linked to measures which will enable us to monitor progress. The actions are flexible and scalable enabling the destination to be agile to capitalise on opportunities and available resource.

4. Collaborative Delivery

This is a shared strategy which will only be successful with the support of a wide range of partners. We have identified the delivery partners who will be key to the success of each objective and our approach to collaborative working.

Our Values

Our Visit Kent core values – that we are Collaborative, Innovative, Perceptive and Inclusive – act as a golden thread to our Destination Management Plan, and will inform all activity and engagement with stakeholders.



Collaborative

The Kent brand is strongest when our voices and objectives are united. This destination management plan therefore is based on shared ownership and responsibility. Success is dependent on us working together, utilising the many skills and expert knowledge of Kent's businesses and stakeholders.



Innovative

The action plan is flexible, with the ability to adapt to new trends, data and external influences. Most importantly, the plan is scalable, allowing us to take advantage of new opportunities.



Perceptive

Research and data is at the heart of the plan. Every objective and action has been informed by regional, national and international insights, in addition to a series of stakeholder consultations. All of the actions are measurable.



Inclusive

From our businesses and our workforce to our visitors and residents, it is important that everyone be made to feel welcome, included and considered. People are therefore at the heart of our core objectives – People and Planet.

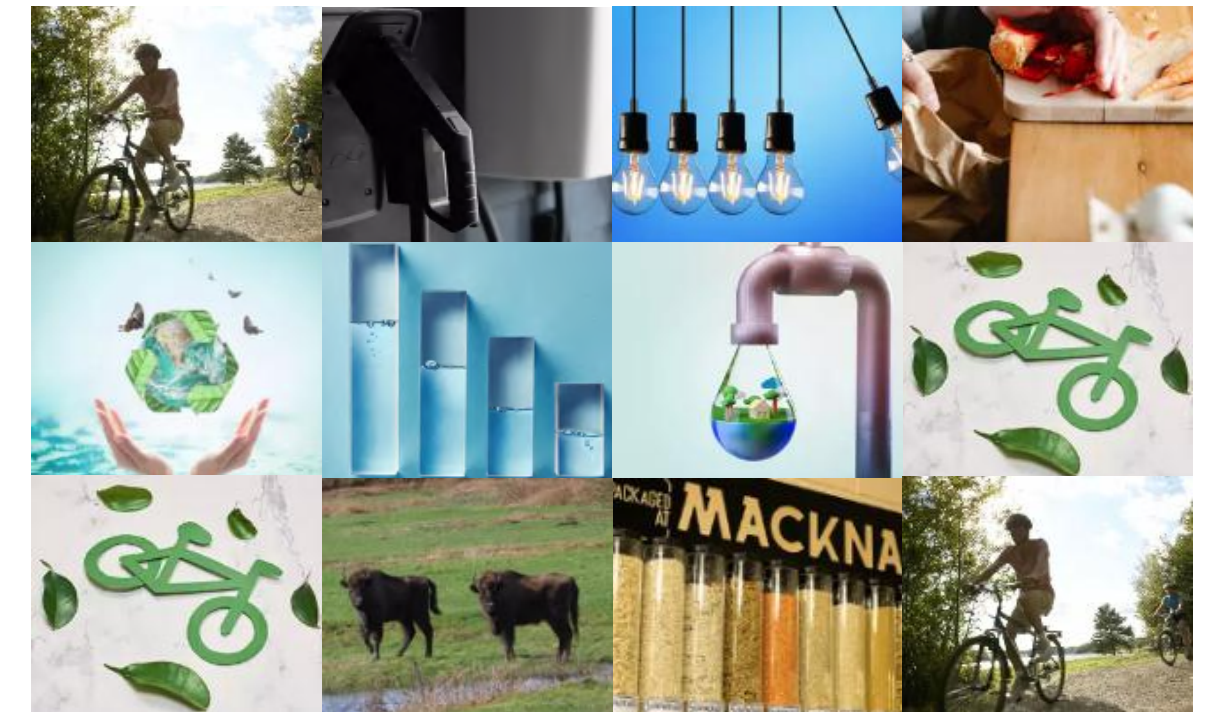
Social and Environmental Impact

Visit Kent launched the Kent Sustainable Tourism Action Plan in 2023. It is structured around three themes of community, nature and climate with a series of 14 detailed actions, tracked through an ongoing monitoring programme. The overarching aim is to bring together businesses, the community and visitors ...

"...TO POSITIVELY IMPACT COMMUNITY, CLIMATE AND NATURE."

The Destination Management Plan and Sustainable Tourism Action Plan sit together to ensure that active management of the visitor economy balances economic impact with positive social and environmental impact through stewardship of the destination and cross-sector collaboration.

The principle of regenerative tourism runs throughout the Destination Management Plan. The People and Planet objective also directly reflects the ambitions of the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan with the three priority action areas - Food for good (Priority 3.3), Go Nature Positive (Priority 4.1) and Modal Shift (Priority 4.2) - all featuring as dedicated priorities in the Destination Management Plan.



#PactsForImpact



Alignment to Local and National Strategy

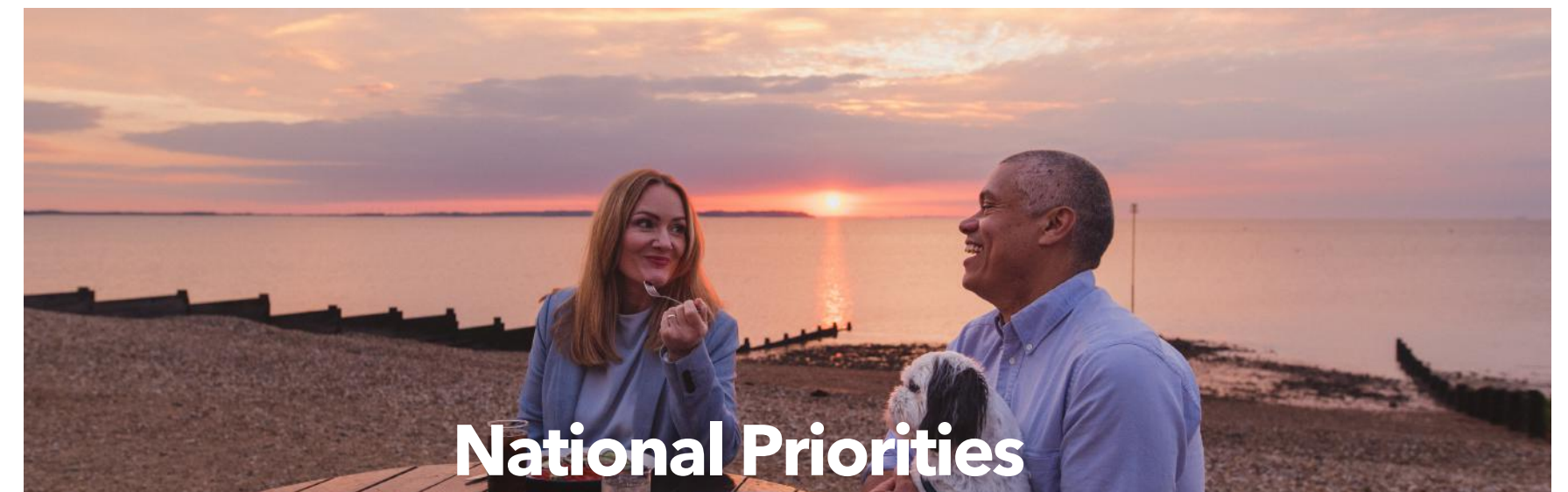
The visitor economy, when managed strategically, acts as a catalyst to wider growth. Close alignment with economic, placemaking, environmental and cultural strategies will help to deliver vibrant places which offer people a good quality of life and attract people to live, work, study, invest and visit. The visitor economy can also have positive impacts for local communities helping to build pride in place and encourage participation in activities which improve wellbeing and community cohesion when sector priorities and data are fed into strategy development. It can also support the revival of highstreets and help to establish recognition through a distinctive place brand. The Destination Management Plan is designed to nest within wider local and national strategies to deliver greater impact.



Local Priorities

Visit Kent works closely with Kent County Council, Medway Council and District Councils to ensure local priorities and strategies are supported through partnership working. The Destination Management Plan has been designed to provide strong alignment to the Kent and Medway Economic Framework which sets out five interconnected ambitions to:

- Enable innovative, productive and creative businesses
- Widen opportunities and unlock talent
- Secure resilient infrastructure for planned, sustainable growth
- Place economic opportunity at the centre of community wellbeing
- Create diverse, distinctive and vibrant places



National Priorities

Following an independent review of Destination Management Organisations in 2021, VisitEngland launched the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) programme. Visit Kent is part of the nationally accredited portfolio of strategic and high-performing DMOs who work locally, regionally and nationally on shared priorities through VisitEngland Growth Plans.

As an accredited LVEP, Visit Kent is actively involved in shaping the new England strategy and national approach to regenerative tourism. We will work with national policy makers to ensure that our strategy aligns with Government plans for economic growth and improved productivity.

Performance

The 2022 Kent Economic Impact Study demonstrates that Kent's tourism industry continues to recover strongly from the impact of the COVID19 pandemic, with a total value of £3.776 billion, an increase of 46% vs 2021.

The data shows a significant uplift in jobs and visits in 2022, demonstrating the importance of the sector. Whilst volume and value of visits, and number of jobs are 9% below 2019 levels, this gap has significantly reduced since 2021.

In addition to this, length of stay and spend per head have all increased, in part due to the return of international visitors. In 2022 we saw the average length of stay increase by 5% to 3.56 nights on average and the average spend (after adjustment for inflation) per trip increase by 8.2% to £191.08. Serviced accommodation occupancy data indicates that overnight stays were strong for 2023 with an average occupancy of 77.1% with a peak of 87.2% in July 2023.

However, the accommodation sector in Kent is highly fragmented with independent SMEs and micro-organisations forming a significant part of the accommodation offer. In terms of county accommodation stock and star rating, the provision of 3*/budget and 4* accommodation is very patchy across the county, with 4* accommodation in particular being completely absent in some districts. There is no 5* rated hotel provision in the county. Only 30 properties in Kent have over 100 bedrooms, reflecting a low number of hotels with a clear ability to accommodate larger group sizes.

Findings from the latest Kent visitor perception research published in 2022 demonstrate the importance of accommodation in driving destination decisions, particularly among younger people. It is often the primary decision influencer and is a core part of the short break/holiday for just under 50% of travelers. Findings also show an increase in the importance of accommodation type for future visits, with 64% stating that accommodation is the main reason for the holiday or that it has significant influence on the holiday. Findings also show that for just under 20% of respondents, more choice of accommodation would encourage them to stay longer. To ensure the continued growth of the Kent visitor economy, accommodation stock, overnight stays and off-season visits will need to be prioritised.

29% of businesses currently cite travel disruptions as a key concern for their business. This increases to around 40% in times of significant travel disruption in Kent. The proposed Entry Exit system set to be implemented at Kent's juxtaposed borders later this year is likely to disrupt travel around the county. Key attractions in the Dover, Folkestone, Ashford and Maidstone area have previously reported a reduction in visitor numbers by up to 50%.

Visit Kent are also proactively involved in Kent County Council research which suggests that if international services were not reinstated in the county until 2040, the cost to the Kent economy could be as much as £75 million, 30,000 jobs would be affected and an estimated £16.5 million per year spent on unnecessary travel by residents and visitors. Overcoming these travel disruption, and continuing to represent Kent's interests on a national level will therefore need to be a key priority within this action plan.



VALUE
UP 46% VS 2021
DOWN 9% VS
2019

£3.776B



60.8M

TRIPS
UP 18% VS 2021
DOWN 9% VS 2019



181%
INCREASE IN
INTERNATIONAL
VISITS VS 2021



74,462
JOBS - 10% OF ALL
EMPLOYMENT
UP 27% VS 2021
DOWN 9% VS 2019



29%
OF BUSINESSES
CONCERNED BY
TRAVEL
DISRUPTION



78.3%
OCCUPANCY UP 3.4%
VS 2022



SEE KENT AS A DESTINATION FOR LEISURE TRIPS / HOLIDAYS

Top 5 places with highest awareness

- 1. DOVER
- 2. CANTERBURY
- 3. MARGATE
- 4. FOLKESTONE
- 5. TUNBRIDGE WELLS

31%

RATE THEIR SHORT BREAK EXPERIENCE OF KENT AS

EXCELLENT

Perceptions

Looking at Kent's Perception research study from 2022, Kent is quite well known as a leisure destination, with descriptors of Kent from those who have visited our region before, including words like "countryside", "relaxing", "beautiful", "scenic" and "seaside". A third of people rate their experience of Kent very positively and a quarter would definitely recommend Kent. The report also shows that the longer visitors stay, the more positive they are about their experience, with 41% of those staying longer rating as excellent.

The core perceived strengths of Kent include history and heritage, the range of attractions and things to do, and the natural environment which are all well-known by visitors and non-visitors. Kent's growing strengths are around the quality of food and drink and having a good range of outdoor activities.

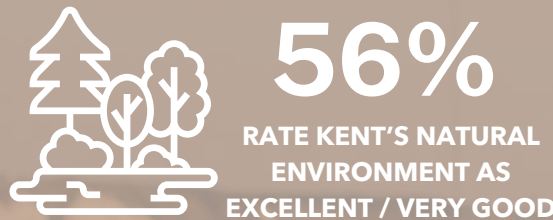
Given the range of things that Kent is positively perceived for, the main barrier to visiting is a lack of strong motivation to travel to Kent. Those that live a long distance away believe it 'not worth the journey' however, this equally demonstrates the value in strong messaging of the Kent offer, its uniqueness and compelling reasons to visit.

There are also negative perceptions of Brand Kent seen in recent Kent Resident research, with issues highlighted around ongoing traffic issues and highlighted media coverage of issues like water pollution, traffic delays and migrant crossings. We also see that there is less awareness of Kent's contemporary and cultural activities including events, shopping, vibrant towns and local, distinctive experiences.

The biggest gaps between perception and reality are in the ease of getting to Kent, and that visitors are actually surprised once they get here about the experiences we can offer, particularly in the outdoor landscapes and how they can protect the environment.



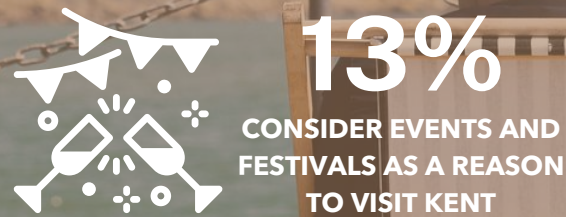
60% RATE HISTORY AND HERITAGE AS EXCELLENT / VERY GOOD



56% RATE KENT'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AS EXCELLENT / VERY GOOD



51% CONSIDER FOOD & DRINK EXCELLENT / VERY GOOD



13% CONSIDER EVENTS AND FESTIVALS AS A REASON TO VISIT KENT



44% WOULD RATE KENT GOOD FOR SHOPPING OPPORTUNITIES



71% HAVE NO COMPELLING REASON TO VISIT KENT

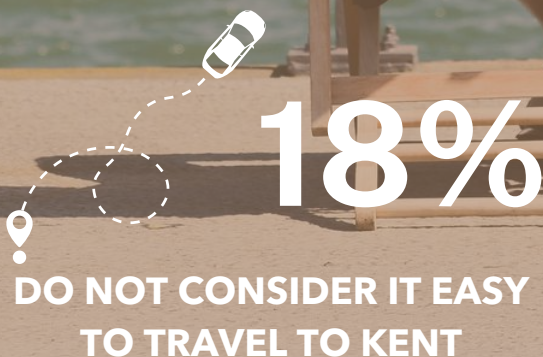
Top negative impacts of tourism

- 1. TRAFFIC AND CONGESTION
- 2. IMPACT ON NATURAL ENVIRONMENT & WILDLIFE
- 3. LITTER AND POLLUTION
- 4. LACK OF PARKING

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

RATED VERY GOOD OR EXCELLENT BY ONLY

41%



DO NOT CONSIDER IT EASY TO TRAVEL TO KENT

Audience

Visit Kent's marketing is targeted at four key audiences - social contemporary seekers, families, green spacers and hyper local. These audiences have been developed from national and local data, taking into consideration each audience's demographics, interests, decision making points and preferred media sources. The full Kent audience breakdown can be found separately in the appendix.

Kent residents are a key focus within our strategy and require a different approach to help encourage participation and connection with their local area. They are also our greatest ambassadors and support the crucial visiting friends and relatives market which accounted for 40% of visits in 2022. Our resident research also shows that 19% of Kent residents had stayed overnight elsewhere in the county for leisure in the last year. Furthermore, a strong connection to place is central to developing strong communities and pride in place.

With a growing and aging population, 1/7 of the UK population will be over 75 by 2040. Experiences appealing to older visitors will therefore need to be a consideration in the next five years. The aging UK population and the estimated £14.7 billion value of the Purple Pound in England mean visitors with accessibility needs continue to be a priority in our destination.

Kent's top inbound markets are visitors from France, Germany, and the USA, with VisitBritain growth market, Spain, another market to consider. Strong Kent product themes have all been cited as reasons to visit among these audiences. Active and outdoors resonated most with visitors from France followed by those from Spain. Heritage also inspired those from Spain, while the US tended to be more interested in unique and unexpected experiences like events and festivals. For Germans the countryside was an important reason to visit.

In addition to our primary markets, we will continue to target key secondary markets. This includes inbound cruise visitors, with the Port of Dover as one of the busiest cruise ports in Britain and Northern Europe, welcoming over 20 individual cruise lines and 200,000 cruise passengers every year. We will also continue to work closely with both domestic and international tour operators and agents to position Kent as a leading tour destination, in addition to supporting meetings, incentive, corporate, events agents (MICE) and destination management companies to host and welcome delegates and business travel into the county.

We will need to monitor and respond to these and further emerging visitor trends, markets and product to ensure activity is both targeted and effective.

Domestic visitors



Social contemporary seekers

PREDOMINANTLY THE MILLENNIAL MARKET COMPRISING OF COUPLES AND SMALL GROUPS OF FRIENDS PRE-CHILDREN OR COUPLES WITH VERY YOUNG CHILDREN



Changing family dynamic

FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES, INCLUDING MORE INTERGENERATIONAL MEMBERS AND SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

**Green spacers
Older couples**



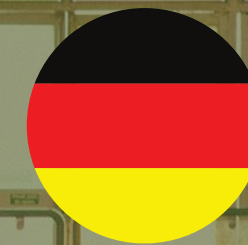
OLDER COUPLES OF DIFFERENT AGES, INTERESTED IN THE OUTDOORS, WITH EITHER MORE TRADITIONAL OR CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Hyper local Families (VFR)

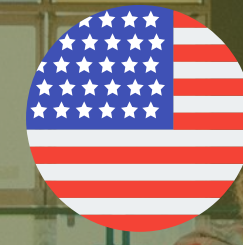


THIS INCLUDES LOCAL KENT RESIDENTS, ENCOURAGING THEM TO EXPLORE THEIR LOCAL AREA FOR A DAY TRIP OR SHORT BREAK

International visitors



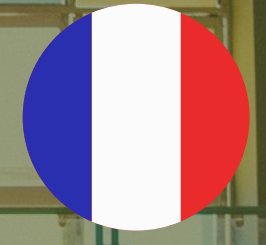
Motivated by countryside offer



Driven by unique experiences



63%
Inspired by history and heritage



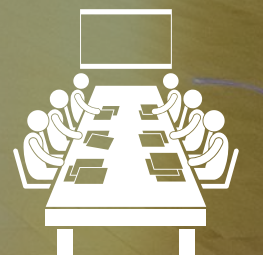
68%
Inspired by active and outdoors



200k cruise passengers into Kent



Established relationships with travel trade



Support for MICE agents and event buyers



NORTH

UNDISCOVERED
DIVERSE
MARITIME HERITAGE
HIDDEN GEM
MULTICULTURAL

EAST

COAST
FUN
SEAFOOD
NOSTALGIC
EVENTS AND CREATIVITY

WEST

COUNTRYSIDE
LUXURY
VINEYARDS
HERITAGE
PICTURESQUE



41%

"REALLY INSPIRED" BY
ACTIVE AND
OUTDOORS



36%

"REALLY INSPIRED" BY
FOOD AND DRINK



34%

"REALLY INSPIRED" BY
HISTORY AND
HERITAGE



40%

MOTIVATED BY
COUNTRYSIDE



35%

MOTIVATED BY
BEACHES



29%

MOTIVATED BY
ICONIC
ATTRACTIONS

49%

CONSIDER OFF-SEASON
A CHEAPER TIME TO VISIT



60%

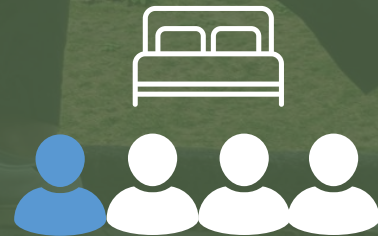
WOULD PLAN A LONGER
STAY IN KENT WITH A GOOD
HOLIDAY DEAL



30%

RANK ACCOMMODATION AS MOST
IMPORTANT FACTOR WHEN
DECIDING TO TAKE A BREAK IN KENT

1 in 4



VISITORS FROM LONDON SEE
ACCOMMODATION AS DRIVING FORCE

Product themes

Kent is a huge county with many different products, themes and identities.

Through our research, we identified three distinct regions that each have their own geography and products and potential audiences...

- East Kent's product and identity strengths were in its coast, landscapes, seafood, creativity, events, outdoor activities.
- West Kent had strengths in food drink, with many of the vineyards located here, walking, historic villages, countryside, heritage and wellbeing.
- North Kent was found to be strong in areas like maritime links, literature, culture, multiculturalism, and again heritage.

However, there are core strands across county that can be built on like heritage, food and drink, family offering etc which helps to cross-promote and package together different areas of Kent to target audiences.

Kent's domestic visitors cite countryside, beaches, history and culture as reasons to visit. When asked about key themes that interest them, active and outdoors, food and drink and heritage are the most inspiring reasons to visit. As stand-out themes for Kent, these will all need to be capitalised on when marketing to and engaging our audiences.

When looking at seasonality, visiting in summer dominates, but a third would visit in spring or autumn, with price and quietness driving reasons for visit in term time. Interestingly, summer visitors are a little more positive in the way they describe Kent than those who visited in the shoulder seasons.

And of course, as mentioned earlier, accommodation weaves across this and is a key focus for us. Suitable accommodation is the most important item impacting the decision to take a holiday in Kent, with 30% ranking it first and almost half ranking it 1st or 2nd.

External Factors and Key Trends

As part of the DMP development process a full PESTLE analysis and review of key global consumer travel trends was conducted. These external trends will influence consumer behaviour and the sector both positively and negatively over the timeframe of this plan. We have taken these factors into account when setting priorities and have built in continuous monitoring of emerging trends and the flexibility to respond to the changing political or economic landscape.

Some of the other factors identified in the PESTLE are captured elsewhere in the document but we have summarised the most relevant themes below.

Relaxation and wellness

The top reason for travel in 2024 is to rest and recharge. This focus on physical and mental wellbeing means that people are seeking out activities and experiences that offer wellness benefits and relaxation.

Experiences over things

People increasingly place more emphasis on the purchase of experiences over things. They seek out authentic local experiences and take microcations to spend quality time together.

Conscious consumer

As awareness of environmental impact grows, consumer demand will drive more sustainable options but price remains a big barrier. Rising global temperatures will also see travel patterns change.

The Pursuit of Value

Pressure on disposable income has made consumers cautious. They have a savvier mindset, actively looking to find ways to get better quality at a lower cost. They also value unique or exclusive experiences.

Rising business costs

The economic climate has also hit businesses hard with rising supplier, staff and energy costs contributing to squeezed profit margins. The uncertain economic climate has also delayed investment decisions.

Aging population

The purple pound is already worth £14.6 billion and set to grow. By 2040 nearly 1 in 7 people will be aged over 75 meaning far more visitors with accessibility needs. Multi generational travel is also a growing trend.

Working patterns

Flexible working is set to stay with people valuing a work-life balance and leisure travel now driving growth in transport use. Business travel is becoming blended with leisure and a need to reconnect with teams.

AI and media consumption

Consumers expect convenience in all aspects of their lives and technology will drive new ways to embed this into the customer journey. New media platforms present opportunities to influence decisions but we need to adapt.

WHAT DOES THE KENT BRAND MEAN TO YOU?

Food and drink - wine tourism, favourable weather and microclimate
East and West - two separate counties

Proximity to London and gateway to EU/UK
Variety of landscapes - urban and rural

Multiple leading historical attractions
Abundance of stories
Oast houses

Creativity, arts and culture
Strong coastline
Quality of life
Independent

History of Kent is important across the ages
Garden of England recognised
Kent Ambassadors - local pride

Green tourism - walking, cycling, hiking
Coming home - White Cliffs welcome

WHAT ARE KENT'S CHALLENGES?

Does "Garden of England" brand represent all that we offer?
Disparate voices and representation of Kent

Negative transport and connectivity - traffic and Eurostar, roads are too busy
Diverse product and size of county

Competition from other destinations
Proximity to London and France

Differing images of the coast (coastline vs maritime) and pollution
Perception of welcome
Cost of living

Lack of knowledge of lesser known areas and product
Last mile challenges due to lack of connectivity

Value perception - are we too expensive?
Accommodation - lack of and cost of
A need to disperse visitors

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE?

Pre and post stay for those travelling to London or on cruise ships

Diversity
Wine production
Free and low cost events

Migration of people out of London
Introduce new experiences

B2B collaboration
The Kent lifestyle - visit, live, work
Drive off-season stays

Proximity to London and the EU
Package deals to encourage longer stays

Weather and climate
Growth of sustainable tourism products

WHERE DOES YOUR BUSINESS NEED SUPPORT?

Skills and volunteers
Lobbying

Collaboration and networking
Research

Collective marketing
Sharing expertise

Industry consultation

Destination SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Garden of England brand recognition
- High quality coastline and quintessential English landscapes
- World-class history and heritage
- Well-known and “fashionable” destinations
- Proximity to London and Europe, with UK’s only High Speed rail service from the capital
- Outstanding food, drink and local produce
- Variety of well-known events and festivals
- Diverse experiences attracting a range of visitors
- Supportive, engaged local residents providing a strong VFR market
- Good collaboration in destination

Opportunities

- Utilise residents as ambassadors to visiting friends and relatives
- Year-round destination
- Experiences to help drive footfall
- Use different product to attract younger audiences
- Multi-cultural communities and cultural offer
- New Bleisure trend to drive visits
- Staycations in light of rising costs
- Leading wine destination
- Improve on existing transport links
- Pre and post cruise trips
- Size of county can drive longer stays
- Filming locations and screen tourism
- Strengthen awareness of local produce among residents and businesses
- National landscapes and Geopark
- Proximity to Europe and US interest
- Generate higher spend opportunities
- Milder and drier climate
- Unique accommodation
- Independent businesses

Weaknesses

- Last mile challenges across the county
- Garden of England perceived as posh or traditional
- Lack of accommodation stock
- Perception of Dartford Crossing and M25
- Internet and phone signal
- Diversity of the offer and size of county make it challenging to navigate for visitors
- Lack of urgency to visit
- High value product
- Deprived areas
- Lack of suitable MICE and group facilities
- Seen as more for older audiences
- Visitors pass through the destination
- No international rail services via Ashford or Ebbsfleet

Threats

- Rail strikes and cost
- Cost of living
- Cuts to public funding
- Negative media coverage
- New EES protocols
- Declining high streets
- Climate change
- Competitor coastal destinations
- Lack of rural bus services
- Operation Brock and traffic perceptions
- Increasing business operating costs
- Water pollution
- Brexit creating perceived and physical barriers
- Over tourism in peak season
- Under-investment in the road network

Objectives

1. Place

Improve external perceptions of Kent

2. Prosperity

Increase the productivity of the Kent visitor economy to deliver job opportunities and prosperity to our places

3. Product

Create new reasons to visit and a welcoming visitor experience by driving even greater collaboration

4. People and Planet

Bring together businesses, residents, and visitors to positively impact community, climate and nature

Action Plan

Following stakeholder engagement, we have identified the strengths, challenges and opportunities for Kent. Our action plan contains four key objectives for the destination, which will guide us and wider stakeholders for future support and delivery. Within these four objectives there are two to three priorities, which each have their own actions and measures.

Sustainability and accessibility remain vital to the destination and are therefore woven through all four objectives.

Place

Prosperity

Product

People and Planet

Sustainability & accessibility



Place

Priorities	Action	Measures
<p>Priority 1.1: Showcase Kent’s assets, stories, and accolades to influence positive coverage of the county.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage research, award wins and other newsworthy stories to generate positive coverage about the county. • Continue to engage with traditional press and influencer partnerships to generate authentic lifestyle editorial and inspirational content about Kent’s people and places. • Work with local partners to ensure that there is a proactive and joined up approach to crisis communications. • Continue to build rights free place assets to market the diversity and welcome of the destination positively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PR reach, coverage, and sentiment • Improved visitor perception of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ease of getting to destination (43%) 2. Welcoming and friendly (50%) 3. Food and drink (51%) 4. Quality of natural environment (56%)
<p>Priority 1.2: Represent the county and elevate the voice of the sector at national level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather intelligence from the sector to understand challenges and demonstrate thought leadership. • Be the voice of the sector and represent the destination on key issues for the county. • Influence the national agenda through industry networks in partnership with other LVEPs and the Tourism Alliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcast interviews • National forums attended • Industry consultations fed into

Key partnerships

VisitBritain / VisitEngland

Tourism Alliance

Kent Resillience Forum

District Councils

Private Sector Partners

Kent County Council

Port of Dover & LeShuttle

Medway Council

Kent and Medway Economic Partnership

Objective one:
Improve external perceptions of Kent



Prosperity

Priorities	Action	Measures
<p>Priority 2.1: Increase overnight stays and drive footfall through collaborative marketing and improving the accommodation offer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract investment to increase the supply and quality of hotel stock and conferencing facilities in the county. • Strengthen engagement and profile of the accommodation offer in content to help influence destination decision making. • Support accommodation partners to better sell the destination through image assets, inspirational content, and collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of accommodation supply nights. • Increased number of overnight stays and average length of stay. • Maintain average serviced accommodation occupancy in line with national average.
<p>Priority 2.2: Balance visitation across the year by promoting off-season experiences and breaks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shape itineraries around existing motivations to visit Kent, such as award-winning restaurants and theatre, in order to drive more off-season breaks. • Create more must-visit moments throughout the year by influencing the development of a year-round calendar of events, festivals, and experiences. • Encourage and support businesses to develop and promote off season deals and offers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of visits in off-season in business barometer. • Visitor study - increased proportion of off-season consideration to visit.
<p>Priority 2.3: Unlock new markets by monitoring and responding to trends.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work collaboratively to develop the incentive offer across the county, to capitalise on the growing trends of bleisure visits. • Identify and respond to emerging visitor trends to present timely, relevant, and inspirational product such as dog-friendly, screen tourism, wellness, and sustainable travel. • Monitor domestic and inbound visitor audiences/markets to identify areas in which we can be more targeted and effective with activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambridge model - Increased length of stay for business visits • Increase in partners reporting visitations from priority inbound markets in barometer • Proportion of page views on content features



Objective two:
 Increase the productivity
 of the Kent visitor
 economy to deliver job
 opportunities and
 prosperity to our places

Prosperity cont.

Priorities	Action	Measures
<p>Priority 2.4: Attract local people to work in the sector by addressing skill gaps and removing barriers to work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the needs of the tourism and hospitality sector are integrated into local skills initiatives by working closely with local authorities and colleges. • Support businesses to engage in skills initiatives and improve the attractiveness of their offer to the workforce. • Change the perceptions of a career in tourism and hospitality by showcasing the range of opportunities working with industry and LVEP colleagues to promote opportunities for all. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of jobs supported by the visitor economy - Economic Impact Study • Number of businesses reporting workforce challenges decreases

Key partnerships

VisitBritain / VisitEngland

Locate In Kent

Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Canterbury Christ Church University

UK Inbound

Travel Trade and Distribution Partners

District Councils

Private Sector Partners

Accommodation Partners

FE Colleges

Objective two:
 Increase the productivity of the Kent visitor economy to deliver job opportunities and prosperity to our places



Product

Priorities	Action	Measures
<p>Priority 3.1: Facilitate regional networking to foster new product development and cross-sellable, bookable experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host informal networking events as an opportunity to better understand business challenges and encourage partnerships covering key themes, such as digitalisation and book-ability. • Expand the range of local and distinctive product partners, creating new investor packages to drive engagement including food producers, event organisers and experience providers. • Strengthen our reputation as professional “dot-joiners”, providing more business introductions and fostering business collaboration through our network. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of new businesses and organisations engaged each year for the first time • Increased partner satisfaction of events programme
<p>Priority 3.2: Improve the quality, inclusivity and accessibility of Kent’s visitor offer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise the new VisitEngland LVEP accessibility resources and toolkits, along with other local initiatives, to support partners to improve accessibility and access guides within the destination. • Better integrate inclusive content and accessible information across Visit Kent channels. • Encourage participation and disseminate information about the new free VisitEngland quality scheme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of businesses signed up to quality scheme • Number of businesses with access guides • Engagement with inclusive and accessible content

Objective three:

Create new reasons to visit and a welcoming visitor experience by driving even greater collaboration.

Product cont.

Priorities	Action	Measures
<p>Priority 3.3: Capitalise on the growing awareness of Kent’s food, drink and wine offer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take ownership of Kent’s wealth of local produce, and work with Produced in Kent to tell the story of our world-renowned food and drink, and the people and unique landscapes that create it. • Help businesses to strengthen connections with local producers, improve supply chains and reduce food miles. • Position Kent as England’s leading wine region and support the development of the visitor offer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press coverage on food, drink and wine • Perceptions / awareness of food and drink increase • Engagement with local food, drink and wine content



Objective three:
 Create new reasons to visit and a welcoming visitor experience by driving even greater collaboration.

Key partnerships

- Kent Film Office
- Produced in Kent
- BIDs
- Wine Garden of England Partnership
- AccessAble
- Experience Providers
- VisitBritain / VisitEngland
- District Councils
- Private Sector Partners
- Accommodation Partners
- Event Organisers

People & Planet

Priorities	Action	Measures
<p>Priority 4.1: Educate and inspire visitors to protect nature and improve wellbeing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share stories of Kent's landscapes and nature, driving visitors and residents to engage with nature to benefit personal wellbeing. • Emphasise the protection and regeneration of Kent's distinctive natural spaces, to educate visitors to access these in a mindful way and support visitor dispersal and responsible behaviour. • Support businesses to improve biodiversity within the environments they manage and effectively communicate these initiatives with visitors. • Ensure that local nature strategies are aligned to the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan reflecting the fact that many visitor economy businesses manage natural spaces and the importance of protecting these natural assets to the visitor economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of businesses reporting that they are engaged in nature-positive initiatives • Residents research - accessing green spaces • Quality of Kent's natural landscape to remain in the top 5 (rated excellent or very good) attributes for domestic visitors.
<p>Priority 4.2: Drive modal shift and overcome last mile barriers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivise, inspire, and reward visitors to choose low carbon and car free options when travelling to and around the destination. • Bring local partners together to find solutions to close last mile gaps and ensure that the visitor economy is reflected within local transport strategies. • Work collectively with national partners to address national issues and to move towards a more integrated transport system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion that choose low carbon and car free options to travel to and around the destination - annual visitor survey

Objective four:

Bring together businesses, residents, and visitors to positively impact community, climate and nature through the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan and resources.



People & Planet cont.

Priorities	Action	Measures
<p>Priority 4.3: Transform our residents into ambassadors by instilling local pride and showcasing the positive Kent lifestyle.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on our engagement with the Hyper Local audience through targeted resident campaigns to strengthen pride in place. • Utilise resident research and insights to deliver segmented communications and ultimately develop a loyal and passionate Hyper Local audience. • Engage with local micro influencers to deliver aspirational “live like a local” content to reach new resident audiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to local area - % of respondents agreeing that they feel strongly connected to their local area - Annual Residents research. • Pride in place - Big Weekend participant responses remain stable or increase when asked are you, or would you be proud to show your friends and family around Kent • Increase engagement with hyper local segment through communications

Key partnerships

Medway Council

Kent County Council

Act For Impact Working Group

Transport Partners

Kent Wildlife Trust

Universities

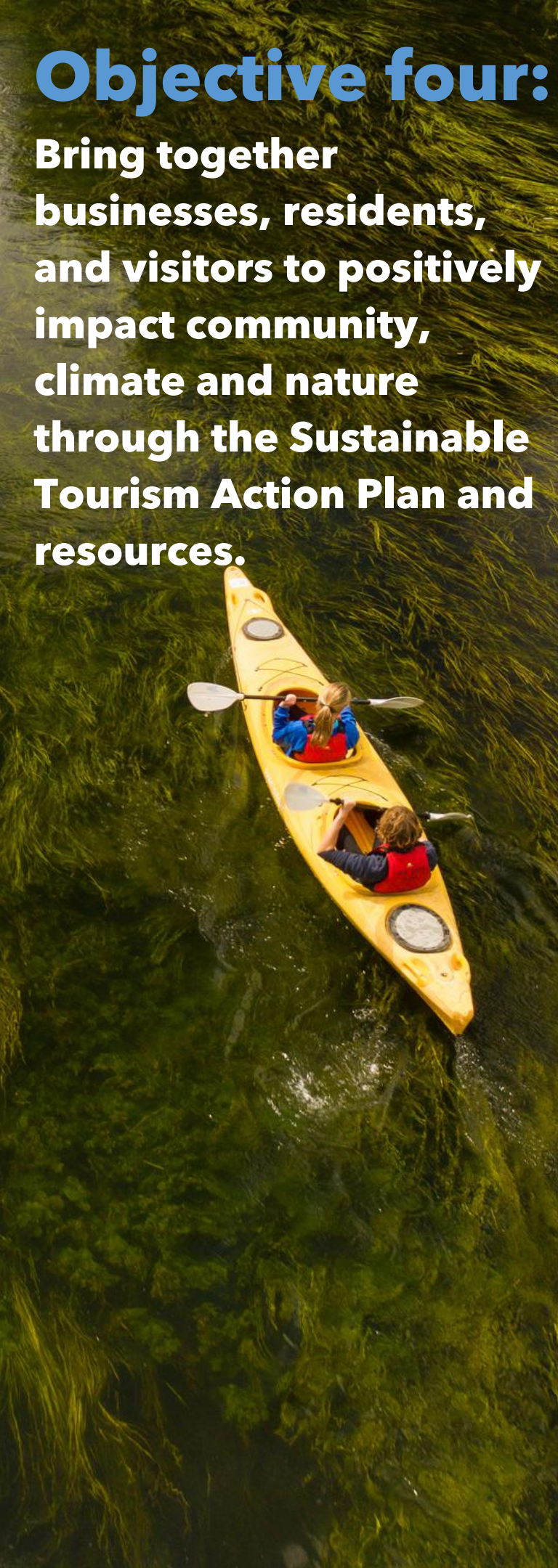
VisitBritain / VisitEngland

District Councils

Private Sector Partners

Kent Downs National Landscape

Good Journey



Objective four:
Bring together businesses, residents, and visitors to positively impact community, climate and nature through the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan and resources.

Partnership delivery

The Destination Management Plan will require collaboration between a wide range of public and private sector partners from across the county to maximise the opportunities. Key partners that have a role to play have been identified in each priority area of the action plan.

As the Local Visitor Economy Partnership, Visit Kent will take overall responsibility for delivery, supporting collaboration and product development, county-wide marketing, travel trade engagement and monitoring progress. Visit Kent will also act as the link to VisitEngland, VisitBritain and other national organisations, ensuring alignment with national initiatives and representation for Kent. The Visit Kent Board will have oversight of the Destination Management Plan with representation from local authorities, a range of private sector businesses and strategic delivery partners.

The Destination Management Plan has been designed to be flexible and scalable. This means that we are ready to capitalise on opportunities aligned to priorities as they emerge but also to ramp up activity around a specific priority where resource and funding allows.

By working collaboratively we can ensure that new local initiatives and support programmes work for the visitor economy and that the sector is built into strategies. This approach will also help to unlock additional funding to increase delivery around specific priorities through targeted projects.

Measures have been identified to track progress against each of the actions and these will be reviewed annually. Ongoing sector performance and long-term impacts are monitored through an

in depth research programme which includes:

- Economic Impact studies
- Accommodation occupancy and attraction performance
- Social impact resident research
- Visitor and perception research

Other metrics which are captured through output monitoring and digital metrics on an ongoing basis. The level of impact on these measures will be dependant on resource and funding.

VisitEngland

Local Authorities & KMPEP

Strategic Partners

Tourism Businesses

Visit Kent

**Local Visitor
Economy
Partnership**

Recognised by



VisitEngland

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Visit Kent: Annual Business Barometer 2023

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Port of Dover: Dover Cruise The premier port for international cruise lines in the South East

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RoamRealm: The Future of Travel: Trends and Predictions for 2024

VisitEngland Business Advice Hub: Make your business accessible and inclusive

2023-2024 Kent County Council Business Survey - Bring Back Eurostar services to Kent

MIDAS: Motivations, influences, decisions and sustainability research 2022

VisitBritain Nations Brands Index 2023

Visit Kent Experience Options Analysis - Mapping Experiential Product in Kent 2020

VisitEngland Domestic Sentiment Tracker

Stakeholder engagement workshops held in 2023-2024 with Visit Kent investor partners and local authority partners



Get in touch

The work to create this Plan has been coordinated and overseen by Visit Kent in collaboration with the tourism industry across the county. This plan represents the county, reflects its vibrancy and ambition to grow.

We would like to thank all those who have taken part and supported this process. If you have any questions about this Destination Management Plan, please get in touch. enquires@visitkent.co.uk

Local Visitor
Economy
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