



# ANNUAL REVIEW

2019

## A MESSAGE FROM JONATHAN NEAME, CHAIRMAN VISIT KENT

After a turbulent political year in 2019, our industry now faces an even greater challenge. The outbreak of Covid-19 is the biggest threat to our industry and our county in peace-time. The disruption to business and our daily lives will be considerable with long-lasting implications for our county and economy.

Our vibrant visitor economy brings much needed revenue to our county – delivering 65 million visitors and £3.8 billion to Kent. We provide 1 in 10 of all jobs in the county and are proud to be the fastest growing service sector in the UK. Supporting this important industry is critical to our economy, our communities and our people. That is why we, and colleagues across the industry, pressed the Government to do all it can to support businesses during this difficult time. As a result, the Chancellor has announced a £300 billion package of support to support the UK economy. We at Visit Kent will continue to do all we can to ensure that our businesses have all the advice and information they need to access this important lifeline.

Although these are extremely challenging times, we must remember that we have faced adversity in the past. The industry has battled Foot and Mouth, SARS, Ash-cloud, to name but a few. Covid-19 may be the greatest of these challenges, but I am confident that our destination is strong enough to survive these difficult months and to rebuild, stronger than ever.

Over the past year, we have been working hard to develop a strong and compelling tourism product for our visitors. It is this investment which will ensure that we can rebuild demand quickly. Our success in securing large-scale funding from the Government's Discover England Fund, supporting two key projects: Gourmet Garden Trails and England's Creative Coast, are testament to our ability to develop innovative and creative product for the consumer and travel trade. Building on this success we were delighted to secure a brand-new European-funded project which will support tourism business in Kent until 2023. Interreg Experience aims to deliver 24 million visitors and €147 million of additional visitor spend by extending the tourism season through the development of off-season bookable experiences with an emphasis on overnight stays and sustainability.

The recognition of the county as a destination which delivers for tourism businesses, customers and travel trade was highlighted at UKInbound's Awards for Excellence. Visit Kent were thrilled to receive the prestigious 'Destination Management Organisation of the Year' award - a huge testament to the years of hard work our Travel Trade team has dedicated to this important area of activity. This award now sits proudly in the office alongside several further accolades the team were presented over the course of the last year, including: 2019 Group Travel Award for "Best Group Travel Destination", the Silver Award in the BETA'S 2019 Youth Travel Awards for the Best Youth Destination and two 2019 Canterbury Christ Church University Partner Impact awards.

There is no doubt that 2020 will be one of the most challenging years our industry has ever faced. As a strong and thriving destination, we are fortunate to have a seat at key local, national and international discussions, working hard to ensure that the voice of the Kent visitor economy is heard. We are also fortunate to have a strong and supportive group of investors who recognise that whether it's facing challenges, or maximising opportunities – collaboration is the key to success.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank all our partners for your support over the past year. Whether it's through your attendance at our quarterly networking events, regular event and content submissions, investment in our seasonal campaigns or feeding into our monthly Business Barometer, we greatly value your on-going engagement and collaboration.

I would also like to thank you for your personal support of me over the last four years as I have served in my role as Chairman of Visit Kent. As I pass the baton on, I hope you will all join me in extending a warm welcome to our new Chair, Bill Ferris. We are absolutely delighted that Bill has agreed to become Chairman of Visit Kent, and I know that his expertise will ensure the organisation goes from strength to strength. Later in the year we will be seeking nominations for Non-Executive Directors for the Visit Kent Board, and will be in touch about this in due course.

Throughout the next few difficult months, rest assured that the Board Directors and all the staff of Visit Kent will continue to work tirelessly to help your business, and the wider Kent economy, rebuild and re-energise, ready for the brighter future ahead.



**JONATHAN NEAME**  
CHAIRMAN



## A MESSAGE FROM DEIRDRE WELLS OBE CHIEF EXECUTIVE VISIT KENT

At a time when our industry faces its greatest challenge yet, our support for and collaboration with partners is more important than ever. Ensuring that the interests of our businesses are represented at the highest level remains our key priority. We are privileged to have a seat at the key national meetings with Government and will work tirelessly to ensure that your views are represented. This direct link to Government and our strong relationship with the new Tourism Minister, Nigel Huddleston, means that we are able to provide you with up to the minute information on business support. Our industry is strong and a major contributor to the Kent and UK economy. Getting the industry back on its feet as quickly as possible is critical to protect our vibrant sector.



We will therefore continue to work hard to support our businesses in developing new and exciting product through the legacy of our Discover England Projects – Gourmet Garden Trails and England's Creative Coast – as well as our exciting new Interreg Experience project. It is clear that our businesses will need more support than ever in the coming months and the opportunity which these projects will give our industry to create, innovate and grow will be vital.

We had great plans for 2020 – a year so packed full of anniversaries and celebrations that we had decided to rename it #KentyTwenty! From the 149th Open to the 150th anniversary of Dickens death, the 850th anniversary of Becket's infamous "murder in the cathedral" to the 100th anniversary of Dreamland's Scenic Railway – 2020 is a big year. The impact of Covid-19 means that many of the events planned will have to be rescheduled or postponed. But the spirit of #KentyTwenty, which has been so enthusiastically embraced by partners across the county, will survive. Whether it is having the most action packed Autumn ever seen, embracing online activity or extending our Big Weekend to a year round event, we will do all we can to keep the vibrant visitor economy alive, ready to bounce back when the crisis has passed.

2020, or should I say #KentyTwenty, will be a challenging year for all of us. Sadly, this is the year that our Chairman, Jonathan Neame, stands down after 4 years of dedicated service. I would like to express my huge personal thanks for all his support, and I look forward to working with Bill Ferris OBE who has been a long-standing supporter of Visit Kent.

Our thanks too to all our investors for your continuing support. Our industry will face huge challenges this year. But we are not the fastest growing service industry for nothing. Our beautiful countryside, stunning coastline, world renowned heritage, fantastic food and drink and most importantly, the amazing people who work in our industry, will ensure that, when the crisis is passed, we can rebuild, stronger than ever.

**DEIRDRE WELLS OBE**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**



## PLACEMAKING AND LOBBYING

*Our involvement in the Promoting Kent Group working alongside organisations including Locate in Kent and Produced in Kent, are helping to shape the county as the place to live, work, study and invest.*

*With a seat at the table on many national, international and local industry forums, our lobbying efforts are having greater influence than ever before.*

VISIT KENT

**73** meetings with senior industry figures

**112** letters to government and MPs

**23** presentations at high profile events

Hosted Officials from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and the Tourism Minister in Kent

**14** hotel developer meetings

Attendance at **3** hotel developer events, and **1** panel presentation





# BUILDING VALUE THROUGH MARKETING

*Our engaging content and partnership campaigns are designed to inspire visits to Kent and drive demand to our businesses.*

*We help our partners to reach new audiences and align them with complementary products to create cross-sell opportunities.*

Delivering the destination message across our digital content, social media channels, press and campaign activity sits at the heart of our marketing

**93%** of investor partners were satisfied with the work Visit Kent delivers and this represents good value for money



## CAMPAIGNS

*Through 2019 and into 2020 we have delivered a range of campaigns.*

*This year saw us take a bold change of direction with our headline summer campaign. We built on the success of our seasonal winter campaign to create our most entered competition to date. We worked hard to ensure that the Kent Big Weekend remains a firm favourite with residents. And we strengthened our relationship with transport providers to increase sustainability messaging.*

VISIT KENT

### **Summer in Kent**

**3,724,354** impressions of programmatic adverts

**131,735** paid search impressions

**97%** publication pick up rate

### **Winter in Kent**

**16,584** competition entries

**140,000** impressions across social media and **44,000** page views.

### **Kent Big Weekend**

**18,048** pairs of tickets

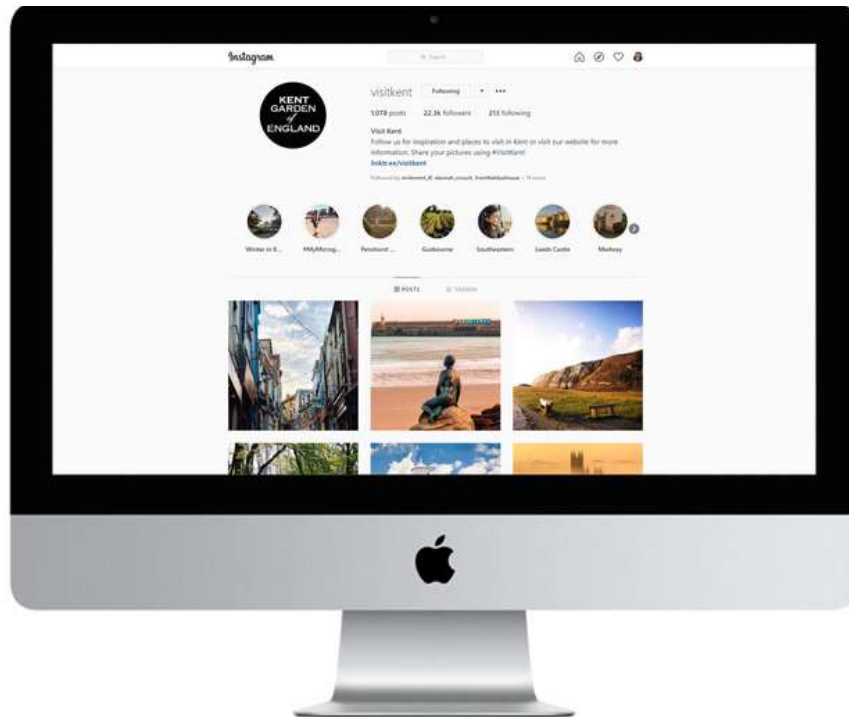
**296,238** applications

### **2 for 1**

**12,615** voucher downloads and

**9,927** opt-ins





## WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

*The right content, to the right people, on the right channel at the right time.*

*Our comprehensive content schedule continues to deliver engaging features and posts across all our channels; showcasing the amazing experiences provided by our partners and across the destination.*

*Drawing from our Visitor First strategy we place the visitor firmly at the heart of everything we create.*

### **Website**

Users spent over **26,000 hours** viewing our content

Our features accounted for **15.2%** of all page views (an increase of 217% on 2018)

**50+** features published

### **Social channels**

**77,981** Facebook engagements

**186,790** Instagram engagements (+91%) and 22.4k followers

**48,077** Twitter followers



## PRESS AND NEWSLETTERS

*Proactive PR and communications remains a key strength at Visit Kent.*

*This year saw us invite more influencers and journalists than ever before to experience Kent's incredible visitor offer.*

*Our newsletters continue to delight our audience and drive them to our website to discover more.*

VISIT KENT

### **Press and PR**

**100+** journalists and influencers hosted

Average monthly ad value of over **£55,000**

**50** PR feature assists. **27** press releases sent. **398,000** average monthly reach

**10+** broadcast interviews

### **Newsletters**

**503,586** emails delivered

**44** individual consumer newsletters

Our newsletters achieved an average open rate of **37%** and a click through rate of **6.8%** (Industry standard is 20.4% and 2.25%)





## BUILDING VALUE THROUGH OUR NETWORKS

*Visit Kent brings together businesses to create collaborative opportunities for our partners. We support businesses to develop new products, promote and distribute them under a strong destination brand.*

*Everything we do is lead by insights and intelligence to ensure we are tapping into emerging industry trends and delivering activity that will have a positive impact on your business.*

VISIT KENT

**95%** of investor partners felt their involvement with Visit Kent was a key part of their business strategy

**81%** indicated that Visit Kent's lobbying and advocacy has been 'effective' or 'very effective'



## BUSINESS SUPPORT

*Supporting businesses to grow, collaborate, and develop quality tourism product offerings has been central to our work this year.*

*With support from the Interreg 2 seas Profit Project, we have delivered a range of new B2B resources and training sessions to support business growth and innovation.*

**112** businesses attended training sessions

**15** innovation plans created to support developing businesses

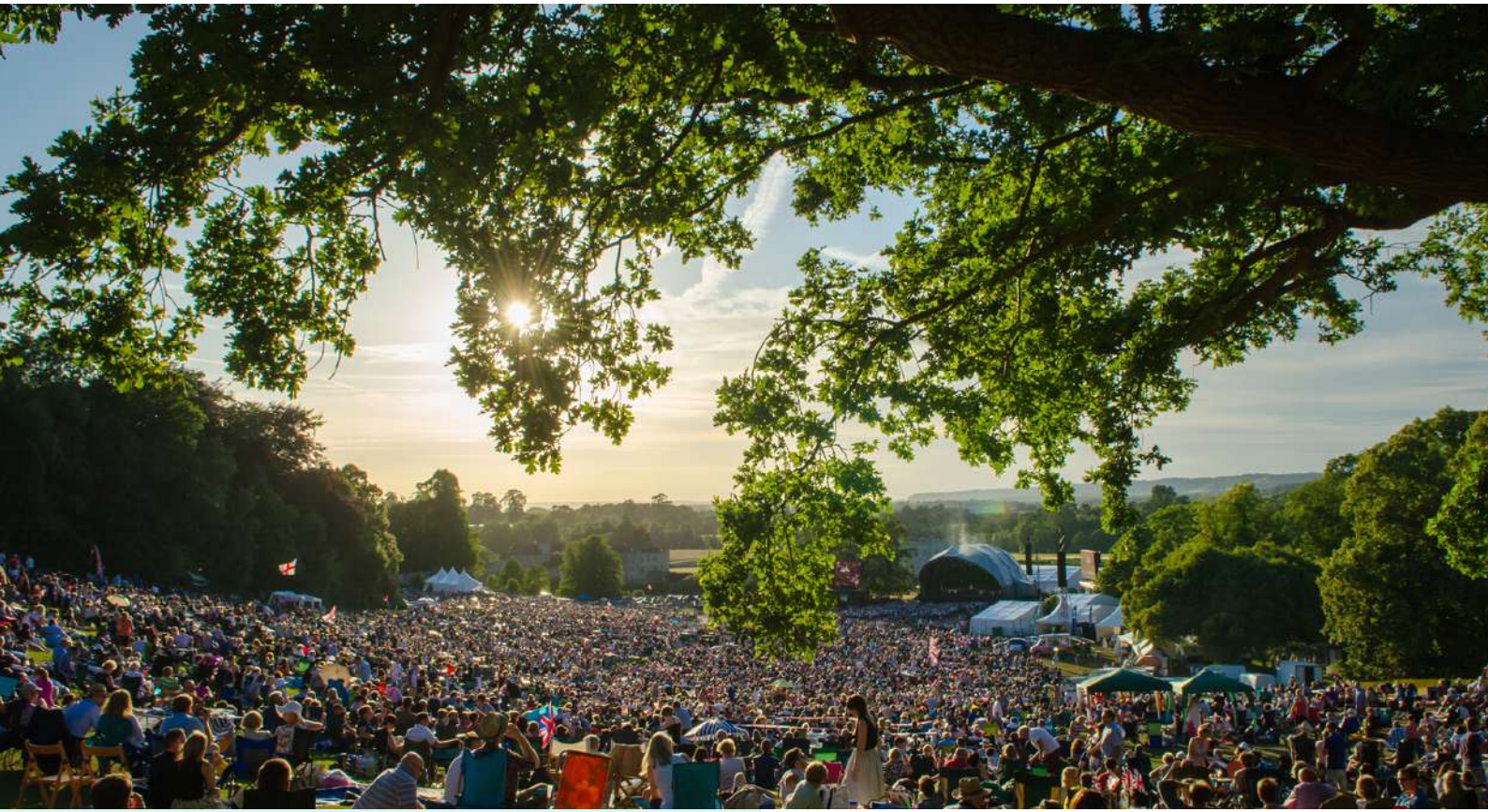
**4** organisations benefitted from cross border inspiration trips

**10** letters of support to provide business growth

**4** business toolkits produced

**1** online marketing resource hub developed





## BUSINESS NETWORKING AND COMMUNICATIONS

*Over the last year, our online B2B channels continued to deliver key business and industry updates from the sector to our partners across the county.*

*Our networking events are firmly established as the leading opportunity for businesses to network across the sector.*

VISIT KENT

**410** attendees across our quarterly networking events

**60+** business to business communications sent to a database of **1,909 contacts**

**605** new followers on our LinkedIn channel

**10,000** B2B Twitter impressions per month

**180** entries for the 2019 Kent Tourism Awards and **36** mystery shopper visits

Visit Kent welcomed **13** new investor partners

**20+** cross border meetings





## TRAVEL TRADE

*2019 saw the launch of our new online travel trade hub, numerous fam trips, new relationships with operators looking for local bespoke experiences and successful inclusion of Kent product with domestic and international tour operators.*

*All of this was rounded off by winning the Silver Award for Best Youth Destination at the 2019 British Youth Travel Awards, winning the Group Travel Award for Best UK Destination for Groups at the 2019 Group Travel Awards, and being crowned Destination Marketing Organisation of the Year at the UKinbound Awards for Excellence 2019*

VISIT KENT

**Over 75** recommendations of Kent businesses made to the travel trade

**4** dedicated in-house sales presentations to tour operators covering over **100** source markets

**8,500** copies of the 2020 Kent Group Travel Guide distributed

**5** dedicated fam trips

Over **4500** miles travelled to meet with over **170** trade contacts at **14** trade events





## RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS

*Our research has developed the learnings that emerged from the Visitor First strategy, working closely with the marketing team to identify the best ways of integrating these in our wider activity, becoming a pivotal component of our delivery.*

*Improvements to the business barometer continued, in line with national trends and industry feedback. We are working closely with regional and national bodies to access the latest reports and trends, cascading timely and useful information to our stakeholders.*

VISIT KENT

**164** businesses contributing to the Business Barometer

Contribution to **4** research forums with national bodies

**15** research reports written to support core delivery

**5** research reports produced to support funding and commercial projects

**1** accommodation supply and demand study



## DISCOVER ENGLAND FUND PROJECTS

*Visit Kent continued to develop new inspirational product through VisitEngland's Discover England fund. Over the last year these have been promoted in key European markets through strong partnerships with our network of tour operators.*

*Consumer facing websites launched for both the Gourmet Garden Trail and England's Creative Coast, along with increased PR activity.*

VISIT KENT

### ***Gourmet Garden Trails***

**7** travel trade partnerships

**60** businesses featured

Training delivered to **115** travel agents

**10** educational trips delivered

**300,000+** reach across our in market campaign activity

### ***England's Creative Coast***

**2** travel trade resellers

**49** businesses involved

**55,000** reach achieved by Verkeerbureaus.info article





## PARTNERSHIPS

*We continue to work with partners on thematic and market specific activity.*

*The new Business Events Partnership was launched to target new conference and incentive business from outside the county. We attended our first MICE buyer event as a destination.*

**50+** connections made with business events buyers

**115** golf media clippings for the Golf in Kent Partnership

**11** press releases and **9** press visits achieving a reach of **22** million for the Wine Garden of England

Relationship developed with **4** cruise ground handlers

**1** lead feature in cruise industry magazine reaching **5000** key decision makers



## LOOKING FORWARD

*Download the  
#KentyTwenty  
toolkit from  
[hub.visitkent.co.uk](http://hub.visitkent.co.uk)  
and be part of the  
celebrations later in  
the year*

VISIT KENT

The more you get involved in the opportunities we provide for you, the more benefit you will receive.

Download the 2020-21 Investor Benefits and Opportunities pack from our hub to plan your activity with us for the coming year.

Speak to your account manager about how to make the most of your partnership with Visit Kent.

**Hollie Coffey**

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# EUROPEAN UNION

## European Regional Development Fund

**Interreg**



EUROPEAN UNION

France ( Channel  
Manche ) England

**EXPERIENCE**

European Regional Development Fund