

KENT GARDEN *of* ENGLAND

[visitkent.co.uk](https://www.visitkent.co.uk)



ANNUAL REVIEW

2022

A MESSAGE FROM BILL FERRIS OBE CHAIRMAN VISIT KENT



It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Visit Kent's Annual Review for 2022.

Once again, the last 12 months have not been easy for the tourism and hospitality industry in Kent and across the UK. Although normal life has resumed in terms of COVID-19, the financial hangover from the pandemic coupled with the cost-of-living crisis and its immediate impact on consumer behaviour across our sector has unfortunately seen a challenging recovery period for many businesses in the county and these economic conditions look set to continue for some time.

We have also seen the problems with long queues and heavy traffic at our borders which have had a major impact on crossing times during peak holiday periods particularly for those travelling by coach. And we have also seen the devastating impact on many of our top attractions, destinations, and language schools as a result of the substantial loss of youth business from our closest European markets.

I am therefore very grateful to the Visit Kent team for the work they have done with national industry partners to lobby on behalf of the sector in terms of support with energy costs, business rates, reintroducing group passports for international schools and improving the situation at our borders. The ongoing monitoring of the sector and their research programmes into visitor and resident sentiment have proved invaluable, and I know that businesses are grateful for the help and resources they have provided to help them reduce costs whilst continuing to attract visitors, particularly when consumers are more selective about where and how they spend their money.

On a more positive note, I am very encouraged by the strong return of domestic visitors and the performance of the staycation market in Kent. In terms of our overseas visitors, VisitBritain forecast that international spend and visitation will almost be back to pre-pandemic levels by the end of this year, and it is fantastic to see the rapid return of our US visitors and the re-opening of the Chinese market.

It is also important to remind ourselves that we are very lucky to be able to live and work in a fantastic county that is world leading in so many ways and has so much potential. Adaptation, innovation, and resilience continue to be major strengths of our industry and there is no better example of this than the exciting and varied experiences developed for our visitors during the course of the EU-funded Experience programme which had its final year last year and has now drawn to a close.

So many valuable lessons have been learnt and new ways of working have come from being involved in the Experience project – most notably the renewed and vigorous focus on accessibility and sustainability. I am excited about the upcoming launch at the end of May of our new strategy and resources to help Kent's tourism and hospitality industry meet the challenges of running their businesses and delivering profit whilst not negatively impacting people or the planet.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank the Visit Kent team who, as always, are committed to supporting and assisting Kent's visitor economy to ensure it recovers fully, and of course our partners for your unwavering support and constructive engagement over the last 12 months. Your support has been critical in helping us continue to deliver an exciting and ambitious programme of activity to drive footfall throughout our county. We are also very grateful to our long term strategic and funding partner, Kent County Council and the South East Local Enterprise Partnership both of whom have helped us to ensure that being a part of Visit Kent is affordable for investors.

Finally, my thanks to my fellow board members for their professionalism, experience, and their support to me. It is to their credit that Visit Kent has made it through another unsettled year which is due in part to our close working relationships with key stakeholders at national, regional, and local level.

On behalf of my fellow Board Directors, and all the team at Visit Kent, I would like to wish you and your colleagues a successful year ahead.

A MESSAGE FROM DEIRDRE WELLS OBE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE VISIT KENT



2022 was certainly a year to celebrate in Kent. The award of the Lonely Planet Best in Travel accolade was testament not only to our stunning landscape but the exceptional partnerships which have brought sustainable economic benefits to the whole county. We were pleased that so many partners took part in our Must Visit Kent campaign to celebrate the award, which saw our first ever Sky TV advert. The opportunity to deliver a high-profile campaign was such a gift after the extraordinarily challenging period which our sector has endured.

This year has also seen the culmination of the Interreg Experience programme which has delivered over 300 new experiences for our visitors to explore. Supporting businesses to innovate and attract new audiences is at the heart of what Visit Kent is about and it has been truly inspirational to see our businesses' creativity turn into engaging new products. Leveraging our strong partnership with the travel trade and our growing expertise in working with influencers, our key priority is to get these amazing experiences to market and to continue to drive footfall long after the project concludes.

As Experience draws to an end, our ambition is to deliver a lasting legacy, in collaboration with key partners, to ensure that Kent becomes a leading destination for sustainable and accessible travel. Supporting our businesses and our visitors to make the right choices will deliver not only sustainable economic growth but strong communities and vibrant places too. Encouraging our visitors to engage with our landscape, explore our delicious local produce and experience our amazing heritage but to do so in a way which supports our delicate environmental and societal ecosystem is critical to our future success as a destination.

As demand returns post-Covid, we face new challenges – not least the ability of our infrastructure to cope and to deliver the world-class welcome which our visitors and residents deserve. Our county hosts a vital gateway and needs the right resource to deliver a service which works not only for Kent but for the UK as a whole. Last year we hosted our first ever Parliamentary Reception to celebrate Kent Day, which gave us a vital platform to bang the drum for Kent at the highest level. The focus for this year's event will be on our ambitions to be a world-leading sustainable destination and, working with the Port of Dover and Eurotunnel le Shuttle, to ensure that, all traffic – both freight and leisure – has a smooth and welcoming journey through our beautiful county.

Finally, I am delighted that Visit Kent has been approved by Visit England to be a Local Visitor Economy Partnership, as part of the DMO review. This would not have been possible without the support of our partners and is a testament to the strong collaboration across the county. We look forward to working with you all to deliver a long-term strategy which will deliver strong and sustainable growth across our vibrant places.

My thanks to our Chairman, Bill Ferris, CBE and all our Board Directors for their dedication and wise counsel. Huge thanks also go to my amazing team, whose creativity, dedication and sheer passion for our vital industry is inspiring. Lastly, my thanks to you, for your ongoing support, your commitment to our vital industry, your enthusiasm and resilience.

We look forward to working with you in the exciting months ahead.

DEIRDRE WELLS OBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE



VISITOR ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY

The latest Economic Impact Model findings based on 2021 figures show promising signs of early recovery for Kent's tourism industry. While the tourism and hospitality picture remained challenging throughout 2021, findings show that the county's visitor economy performed above the national average across several areas, demonstrating why our industry continues to need long-term investment and support to enable a sustainable destination recovery.

The value of Kent's visitor economy increased to **£2.6 billion**, a **60%** increase from 2020, with **51.5 million** combined day and overnight trips undertaken in the county in 2021, compared to **33.4 million** in 2020.

The number of tourism jobs across the Garden of England also increased by **18%** on 2020 data to **58,791** jobs, accounting for **8%** of total employment in Kent last year, despite the Government furlough scheme ending in September 2021.



LOBBYING

With a seat at the table on many national and international industry forums, our lobbying efforts continue to be critical.

Our CEO Deirdre Wells OBE has championed the Kent tourism and hospitality industry at high-level, industry-leading groups including national Tourism Alliance meetings and at our first parliamentary reception at the House of Commons.

Deirdre's media appearances across TV, radio and print provided a valuable platform for raising awareness of the important recovery of our sector, alongside championing key businesses and initiatives in the county.

5 external board meetings

7 working groups

4 MP ministerial visits

4 meetings with the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport

6 meetings with local authority leaders

4 national conventions attended

27 broadcast interviews

90+ attendees at Visit Kent Parliamentary reception on 'Kent Day' at House of Commons

Representation on the **Kent Resilience Forum** ensuring joined up, county-wide communications during the travel disruptions last summer



BUILDING VALUE THROUGH OUR NETWORKS

Visit Kent brings together businesses to create collaborative opportunities for our partners in addition to providing a strong sector voice. We support businesses to develop, promote and distribute new products under a strong destination brand.

This level of collaboration continues to be critical in delivering a strong recovery for the sector. Everything we do is led by insights and intelligence to ensure we are tapping into emerging industry trends and delivering activity that will have a positive impact on businesses.

3 Kent Leader's group meetings facilitated

5 dedicated / thematic partnership groups facilitated regularly, covering travel trade, digital, lobbying and district officers.

Representation on **5** separate external board meetings

12 local authority members

74 renewed members

8 new members joined

Key panelist and attendance at 2022 Kent Business Summit

Attendance at Annual Hotel Conference securing Kent site visits for two potential developers

89 new royalty free images available on new place marketing asset hub



BUSINESS SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Our strong B2B communications strategy is constantly evolving, as a vital channel to continue to update our partners and wider industry with news, opportunities and business support.

In 2022, a new dedicated area was added and signposted to on our B2B website, covering the rise in the cost of living and ensuring that critical information on funding and guidance is available for businesses to use.

B2B website:

- Over **22,644** page views

Visit Kent Business Twitter:

- **5,052** followers
- **5k** impressions average a month

Industry Newsletters:

- **94** newsletters sent
- **2,363** contacts

Visit Kent LinkedIn:

- **425** new followers in 2021
- **94,961** impressions

New innovative partnership with AccessAble saw **71** access guides created across **29** Kent businesses.



BUSINESS TRAINING AND EVENTS

Through our network we facilitate peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and collaboration by bringing partners together at our quarterly networking, webinars, and peer networking events.

To ensure our events are accessible for all, in 2022 we have hosted both in person and virtual events delivering on a range of topics based on the needs identified by our businesses.

256 attendees attended **4 in-person** networking events

4 Kent EXPERIENCE peer networking events (2 in-person and 2 virtual) with a total of **105 attendees**

23 attendees to dedicated accessibility webinar

60 attendees across **4** place marketing workshops

KENT
WELCOMES THE
BIRMINGHAM 2022
**QUEEN'S BATON
RELAY**



BIRMINGHAM 2022 QUEEN'S BATON RELAY

In July, Kent hosted part of Birmingham 2022 Queen's Baton Relay, an epic 294-day journey across 72 nations ahead of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

After months of touring the Commonwealth and throughout the UK, The Queen's Baton touched down in Kent and journeyed through the county, taking in some of our most iconic sights, and some pretty exciting events along the way.

Baton events in **Tonbridge, Canterbury, Folkestone, Deal, Dover** and **Gravesend**

9 partners included in Baton visits and activities including Abbey School, Faversham

89,000+ impressions from press coverage secured on BBC, ITV, BBC South East, BBC Radio Kent, Kent Online podcast and online coverage

1 business toolkit created



TRAVEL TRADE

Throughout 2022, our team has continued to maintain contact and provide support for leisure operators and trade partners.

Our ongoing delivery of the Interreg Experience project has ensured contact and Kent messaging was maintained with major operators and ground handlers throughout the year through a series of activities including events, 1:1 appointments, trade newsletters and more.

Looking ahead, the team are planning how best to maintain and maximise exposure though proactive engagement with key domestic and inbound operators, in addition to supporting businesses access this market.

Over 140 1:1 engagements with travel trade contacts including cruise ground handlers, coach operators, youth travel organisers and international DMCs

Visit Kent attended **8 trade events, with 2 virtual and 6 in-person**, including a dedicated VisitBritain event targeted to the inbound French market

6 French tour operators hosted on a familiarisation trip to Kent, visiting **8** Kent businesses

7 virtual market webinars attended

Key-note presentation at **Cruise Britain** conference

70 US agents attending Kent webinar for leading US operator Avanti Destinations

7 dedicated travel trade newsletters sent to over **400 trade contacts**, with an **average open rate of 28%**



RESEARCH

Access to timely insights and research is vital to support our businesses and a key requirement for our lobbying efforts.

Regular surveys and studies have captured the performance and challenges that our visitor economy has faced as well as opportunities which will shape our destination including monitoring the economic social and environmental impacts.

Overall **106** reports were produced:
12 were core reports which were Business Barometer and Audience Documents.
94 were funded or commercial reports which were Residents Research, Cambridge Model, Airdna reports and Medway research.

70 attractions and **100** Experiences registered to participate in the Business Barometer Reports.

2 waves of Kent Resident research with **2,441 responses total**

2 Visitor Perception Studies, looking at both domestic and international audiences research with **over 4,500 responses**

2021 data examined in **Cambridge Economic Impact Model** study for benchmarking.



BUILDING VALUE THROUGH MARKETING

Throughout 2022, we continued delivering destination-focused messaging, inspiring our audience and encouraging them to travel to and around Kent.

Our major destination campaign maximised the impact of the Lonely Planet Kent's Heritage Coast award offering partners opportunities to participate in target activity providing increased reach, buy-in power and access to new audiences.

Both project funding and our own organic channels provided us with a broad platform from which to share our creative and targeted content, focusing on driving overnight visits from priority segments, supported by influencer activity and tactical campaigns to secure data capture.



MUST VISIT KENT

During 2022, capitalising on the Lonely Planet accolade for Kent's Heritage Coast, we delivered one of our biggest ever campaigns. Must Visit Kent included a large-scale digital campaign, travel trade promotion, PR activity, new publication, a partnership with Tripadvisor, and our first-ever TV advert through Sky - all drawing people to the wide variety of attractions and landscapes that Kent has to offer.

Working with a number of partners across the county, our collective effort produced an incredibly successful campaign - all under the message that Kent is a Must Visit destination, reinforcing that we all work better together.

26,249,275 impressions (excluding OOH) to Kent content including paid social reach of **2,144,291**

121,000 online page views of partner-focused content

46,399 households shown new Kent Sky Ad an average of **9** times

989,080 impressions across outdoor digital advertising screens at WTM trade show and roadside advertising across London

10,000 copies of brand-new Must Visit Kent publication, with **5000+** distributed in public outlets across Kent

3 influencer trips took place with content going to a combined **72,000** Instagram followers

National Geographic Traveller article had a print circulation of **58,242** and an ad value of **£95,184**.

Sponsored ads across TripAdvisor UK, DE, and FR sites which gave us **2,144,567** impressions and an ROI of **4.1** to bookings at attractions, hotels and more

5 new branded travel guides on TripAdvisor with over **5,000** page views



COMPETITIONS

Competitions continue to be a great way to work with and support our partners, in addition to being an excellent source of opt-in data.

Our 2022 Christmas competition was Visit Kent's best performing competition of the year, with just over 19,000 entries.

For 2023, competitions will form a key part of all campaign activity, focusing on high-quality accommodation prizes to drive overnight stays.

3 competitions during 2022

English Tourism Week:

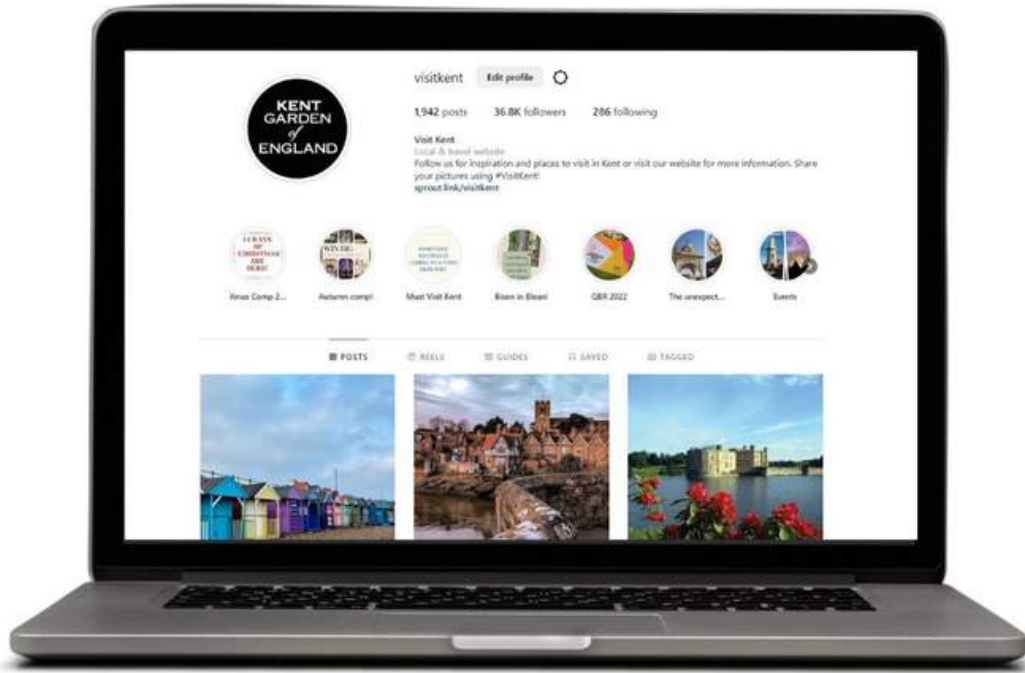
- **9,450** entries

Autumn Competition:

- **6,850** entries
- **5,400** page views
- **41%** e-newsletter opt in rate

12 Days of Christmas Competition:

- **19,008** entries
- **35,000** page views
- **44%** e-newsletter opt in rate



WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

2022 saw good follower growth across the Visit Kent social media channels, in addition to a particularly impressive average engagement rate on the Visit Kent Instagram of 4.3%, which has been driven by a shift towards sharing more video-led content.

Our consumer website saw continued growth in sessions and page views from the previous year, with the number of sessions rising to pre-Covid levels.

Feature content continues to be key, accounting for around 23% of all traffic, and achieving an average dwell time of 2:44 minutes, demonstrating that consumers are not only driven by the content, but are genuinely engaging with it.

868,703 website users
120 inspirational features created
36,300 organic social media posts

Instagram:

36.5K followers
3.5M impressions
4.3% engagement rate



Twitter:

Total of **580** posts
1M impressions
29,575 engagements



Facebook:

26.6K followers
11.5M impressions
330,461 engagements





PRESS

Reactive and proactive PR activity remains a key strength at Visit Kent. Nurturing both new and existing media relations throughout 2022 remained of particular importance.

The Visit Kent PR team also optimised the opportunity afforded to them to host press and influencer contacts.

In 2022, press coverage generated by Visit Kent **reached 100.5 million people**

Our coverage saw a monthly average advertising value of over £287,756.60 and a total annual value of £3,453,072.

Visit Kent participated in **27 broadcast interviews**

4 influencer trips took place, covering a range of destinations and attractions

22 press releases were created in 2022, along with **30** PR assists helping media contacts **with suggestions, images and general assistance.**



INTERREG EXPERIENCE

Visit Kent has continued to deliver as part of Interreg EXPERIENCE, a €23.3 million European funded project which aims to extend the tourism season through the development of off-season bookable experiences with an emphasis on overnight stays and sustainability.

With 2022 as the final full year of project delivery, Visit Kent ran several campaigns promoting new bookable immersive experiences that tell the county's natural and cultural stories.

380 new experiences created

125 businesses on the Experience Development programme

5 SGM events, with Kent hosting all project partners in May

71 access guides created across **29** Kent businesses through partnership with AccessAble

8 new Kent travel trade itineraries produced through paid partnerships with **2** inbound DMCs

104 themed inspirational itineraries created alongside **50** Interactive itineraries of which **17** are fully accessible





PROJECTS

RECONNECT KENT

In 2022, Visit Kent secured funding from Kent County Council's reconnect Kent fund to launch 'Lesson in a box', aiming to bring Kent attractions together to aid teachers and school children with engaging, curriculum-rich content to reconnect them with their local area and fill gaps in learning.

Working with six flagship Kent attractions, we developed lesson plans and resources under the 'Secret Treasures of Kent' concept.

We look forward to delivering an extension of the project in 2023!

125 applications from KS2 Kent teachers in just **15** days from opening registrations

125 boxes sent to Kent schools

8815 children from across Kent took part in the activities, with **3556** children from Year 4, **1908** children from Year 5, and **2401** children from Year 6

There were **107** class entries to win a paid for trip to one of the attractions

Attractions that took part included:

- National Trust Chartwell
- Canterbury Cathedral
- The Historic Dockyard Chatham
- Leeds Castle
- Hever Castle
- Dover Castle

KENT BIG DAY OUT

17th September to 14th October 2022



KENT BIG DAY OUT

In 2022, we hosted our Kent Big Day Out campaign from 17th September - 14th October 2022, exclusively inviting Kent residents to visit Kent businesses for an extended period.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Big Day Out was adapted to reinstall customer confidence and support the tourism sector's recovery.

In 2023 we aim to do this campaign again but instead of a month we will be doing it as a weekend again and to do this earlier in the year to boost footfall.

67 attractions participated in this year's Big Day Out

3,985 pairs of tickets for Kent residents

5,375 participants took part in the draw submitting **64,808** applications

59% of participants opted in to receive news from Kent businesses

97% of participants would be proud to show their family and friends around Kent

100% of businesses think that Kent Big Day Out should continue in the future



RHYTHM OF KENT

Funded by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) Covid-19 recovery programme, Revi-VE, the Rhythm of Kent campaign was devised to target four key audiences; Kent residents, visitors, students and businesses.

Running from mid-August to end of October, the campaign was informed by business workshops that had taken place in the spring, seeing brand-new photography and videography which featured Kentish ambassadors for the four key audiences.

The project also saw the launch of a brand new place marketing hub for any Kent business to use.

8,012,436 impressions from digital activity

68,729,004 impressions from out of home posters situated across London, such as City Thameslink and Charing Cross Underground station for two weeks

66,297 clicks to website landing page

1,652,486 overall paid social reach

492,828 reach on new Spotify audio ads

Facebook/Instagram campaign achieved **21,871** link clicks and **35,703** overall clicks with **1.75 million** impressions delivered and an overall **2.04%** CTR

1 new campaign website developed

89 new royalty free images available on new asset hub



LOOKING FORWARD

Following our hugely successful Must Visit Kent campaign activity, we're keen to continue to raise awareness of our incredible county, attracting new markets and encouraging our new and returning visitors to explore further.

As people make trade-offs on discretionary leisure spend, we'll need to work harder to demonstrate the value of the experience we can offer collectively. We're excited to deliver a year-long programme of activity that will maximise exposure for our investor partners across the county, address challenges together, communicating a strong destination message in a joined-up way.

Your support will help us leverage external funding, create engaging campaigns that drive footfall to Kent and rebuild back better, together.

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