

MARCH 2023 UPDATE

Sussex Visitor Economy



INTRODUCTION

The Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative (SVEI) was established in September 2020 by East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council, initially in response to the pandemic. The strategic partnership is working with public and private sector partners to harness the opportunities that cross-county collaboration brings. We aim to support sector recovery, resilience and growth, and to raise the profile of Sussex as a national and international visitor destination.

In Spring 2022, the [Sussex proposition and opportunity](#) were set out. A summary of progress is provided in this update.



Context

The impact of COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis continues to be experienced across the Sussex industry. Visitor numbers have still not recovered to pre-pandemic levels, when Sussex saw 62 million visits a year, creating £5bn of impact and supporting 74,000 FTE jobs.

VisitBritain is forecasting 35.1 million visits in 2023 (86% of the 2019 level and 18% high than 2022) and £29.5 billion spend (104% of the 2019 level and 14% higher than in 2022). This follows an increase in overseas visitor spending in the UK with higher

spend per visit and longer stays. There is still a lot of uncertainty about 2023 prospects due to the changeable context.

Business visits accounted for 21% of all inbound UK visits in 2019, with meetings, incentives, conferences and events (MICE) representing nearly a third of business visit spend. This sub-sector has been impacted by the pandemic with shorter lead times, the growth of hybrid events and a growing leisure market.

Building a collaborative approach

The Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative Industry Group (SVEIG) was launched in 2022 following an initial meeting with industry representatives who collectively agreed to join this strategic group, working alongside the local authorities and meeting three times a year to oversee and advise on the agreed priorities.

The Chief Executives of the three Councils jointly invited Hedley Swain, Chief Executive of the Royal Pavilion & Museums Trust, to chair the group. Mardi Roberts, Director of Communications at Ridgeview Estate Winery has recently become Vice Chair.



Hedley Swain, SVEIG Chair:

“It has been a great honour to be asked to chair the SVEIG. Sussex has such a high quality, varied offer. This is exactly the right moment for all in the industry to be working together with our local authority partners to

maximise the offer to visitors. There is a great team of industry leaders already on the group and we look forward to working with as many people as possible in the future. We invite everyone with a stake in our visitor economy to register interest or send feedback to info@sussexvisitoreconomy.org.uk.”

The SVEIG established subgroups to support our priorities:

- MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conference & Events) proposition
- Sussex Story development
- Sustainable Sussex Wine Tourism development



Photo: © Simon Anderson

Progress

In Spring 2022 we set out our initial priorities:

- 1 Define the key market segments that Sussex should target
- 2 Craft a bold and ambitious Sussex Visitor Story proposition and brand position
- 3 Establish the Sussex meeting, incentive, conference and events proposition
- 4 Advocate for Sussex within the sector and with national bodies

1 Define the key market segments that Sussex should target

- > **International Segmentation for Sussex** – using UK Community Renewal Funding (UKCRF) secured by a partnership led by Sussex Modern, we worked with the South Downs National Park Authority to identify short and long haul target markets and visitor segments with the greatest potential to deliver high-value visitors to Sussex. The **report** looks at how Sussex tourism organisations working together can target best prospect domestic and international markets.

2 Craft a bold and ambitious Sussex Visitor Story proposition and brand position

Campaigns and activities to raise the profile of Sussex as a national and international visitor destination include:

- > **Escape the Everyday** - the partnership, led by VisitBrighton, successfully secured £100k 'Escape the Everyday' Recovery Marketing Fund towards the digital marketing of bookable products during May/June 2022. Working with 20 providers across Sussex, the campaign was commended by VisitBritain and generated 20m impressions, and 90,000 page views with an uplift of 156% in products sold.
- > **Taking Sussex to the World** - a US booster campaign delivered via Expedia promoting travel and bookings to Sussex for 2023 working in partnership with Gatwick airport, taking advantage of the coronation and the royal links of Sussex, our award-winning vineyards, recovery of the US market and exchange rates, and our proximity to London and Gatwick. The campaign to date is showing a great return of nearly 9:1 on advertising spend, which is very high for the US audience.



- > **Sussex Wine Tourism** - the SVEIG Wine Tourism subgroup is collaborating with UKCRF delivery partners Sussex Modern, to develop an ambitious vision for Sussex wine tourism. The emerging Prospectus sets out the steps to develop the offer to see the sector's value grow from £25m to £168m by 2040 generating 1750 new jobs, and securing Sussex's place as the UK's leading wine destination with a global reputation.
- > **Sussex Visitor Story** - the SVEIG Sussex Story subgroup is commissioning an aspirational, ambitious and bold Sussex proposition and brand positioning, that will be the compelling foundation for collateral and campaigns, establishing Sussex as a globally recognised destination.



3 Establish the Sussex meeting, incentive, conference and events proposition

We have taken the first steps to raise our profile as a business visitor destination, firstly researching the Sussex conference offer, identifying key properties and developing a Sussex-wide sales presentation to use at sales missions and trade shows under the 'Meet Sussex' banner.

During 2022, we represented Sussex at:

- > **Visit Britain sales mission** - VisitEngland's '**Meet England**' business events trade mission to Paris and Brussels showcasing Sussex to international associations and event buyers in Europe. We presented the Sussex MICE proposition to 35 MICE buyers and follow up is ongoing.
- > **IBTM Barcelona**, The leading global tourism exhibition for the MICE industry. Taking a 'Meet Sussex' booth on the VisitEngland stand, we had stand appointments with 50 MICE buyers plus ad hoc meetings with over 100 other exhibition attendees. Follow up is ongoing.

Highlights for 2023 include:



EMEC in Brighton

- co-hosting the European Meeting and Events Conference for Meeting Professionals International attracting 300 meeting planners, with the IMEX Group.

Sussex Incentives - Co-ordinating a familiarization trip in March with Spectra DMC, a leading UK Destination Management Company, and developing a Sussex incentive brochure.



4 Advocate for Sussex within the sector and with national bodies

One of the key drivers for the SVEI is to strengthen the position of Sussex with VisitBritain/VisitEngland and key influencers, and to raise our profile as a national and international visitor destination.

- > **Escape the Everyday** - We collaboratively bid for £100k from VisitBritain to amplify 'Escape the Everyday' messaging, digitally promoting bookable Sussex products and experiences under the #nevernormalsussex banner.
- > **DMO Review and VE/VB forward direction** - In July 2022, the government published its response to the review of destination management organisations (DMOs) in England. We are in discussion with VisitEngland, who are administering a new Local Visitor Economy Partnerships accreditation scheme, to help define the Sussex response and our next steps.
- > **Gatwick Airport Economic Summit** - At the summit in November 2022, Hedley Swain, SVEIG Chair, represented SVEIG on a panel. He spoke about the SVEIG's aims as part of a discussion on how local tourism partners are collaborating to promote the region and grow the international inbound market, as well as exploring the importance of regional identity. Mardi Roberts, SVEIG Vice Chair and Wine Tourism Subgroup Chair, discussed the growth of the Sussex wine industry and the opportunities for wine tourism to add value to the economy on a panel debating how regional sectoral strengths can attract global attention, trade and talent.



Mardi Roberts, Vice Chair (centre)



WHO IS MAKING THIS HAPPEN?

Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council have been driving this work, in collaboration with a wide range of public and private sector partners.

The strategic framework for the Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative has been informed by a commission which produced an evidence baseline, a vision and medium-term actions. The reports are available to [download](#).

The partnership thanks the following organisations for their representation on the Sussex Visitor Economy Initiative Industry Group and contribution to the progress undertaken:

Bluebell Railway
Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club
Brighton Dome & Festival
Charleston
Coast to Capital LEP
De La Warr Pavilion
Experience West Sussex
Gatwick Airport
Goodwood
Hilton Brighton Metropole
Historic Sussex Hotels
IMEX Group
Ridgeview Estate Winery
Royal Pavilion & Museums Trust
South East LEP
So Sussex

South Downs National Park Authority
Sussex Modern
Sussex Past
Visit 1066 Country
VisitBrighton
Visit Eastbourne
Woodfire

And to Bolney Wine Estate, Great British Wine Tours, Oxney Organic Estate, and Plumpton College for their contribution as sub-group co-optees.

CONTACT

For further information on the Sussex Visitor Economy initiative, please email info@sussexvisitoreconomy.org

