

Visitor numbers skyrocket at Churnet Valley Railway

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Churnet Valley Railway staff says they are over the moon with the turn-out for their steam train rides and dining experiences since the re-opening earlier this month. After nine long months, Staffordshire's much-loved heritage attraction is now back on track with rail fans, families and folk from afar all aboard.

On the opening weekend the railway recorded one of their highest daily visitor numbers in 25 years.

Greg Wilson, general manager at the Churnet Valley Railway, said: "We have been blessed with great weather which always helps. It was quite a special moment when the whistle blew on that very first 2021 departure."

It was not been just the sun shining that made the inaugural a success, the newly renovated station and polished loco's were also gleaming.

The railway puts the success of the re-start down to careful planning – opening at a time they considered safer for the public – as well as the railway being ready and able to operate in the times we now live. The introduction of a new expanded dining train experiences schedule has enabled the railway to offer visitors

a special day out for friends or family to enjoy one of the things people have missed most, sharing a meal and making an occasion of it.

Aidan Croft, one of the volunteers who assisted guests on the first service, and a familiar face at the railway, said: "I've really missed being at the railway and it is a real treat to welcome people back on board. We are a community of volunteers here and aside from our obvious love of the railway, we are like a big family and we too have been separated from people we care about."

Aiden has worked as a volunteer for 18 years and is relieved that he, not just the trains, is finally back in service. Over the years he has worked in most areas of the railway on a voluntary basis, from Station Master to workshop assistant.

He added: "We are looking forward to a superb summer and sharing the joy of steam train travel and the magnificent scenery of the Churnet Valley with as many people as we can. We have already welcomed back many of our regular visitors and our own volunteers have already been on for a ride. We are seeing more people coming from further afield too. It's always nice to welcome first-time travellers on board."

Greg said: "Proving most popular is the enhanced dining train experiences collection. All meals are prepared and cooked onboard the train and served by a waiting team of volunteers and while we are not quite the Orient Express, we have certainly done our utmost to improve our offering for 2021 and consider our services one of the best steam heritage experiences in the country."

Greg and the team says they are looking forward to the rest of the year with the hope these early indications give promise to the Churnet Valley Railway being back on track once more.

The recovery journey is expected to be long one, given the impact suffered due to the crisis, but the team are enthusiastic 2021 will be a great success.

[Click here for more details about the railway.](#)

Photo credit: Churnet Valley Railway