**James Martin joins Virgin Trains as Executive Chef**

Virgin Trains is set to partner with British chef and TV presenter, James Martin, as part of the train operator’s continued transformation of the East Coast services. From May, a new range of specially created seasonal menus will be served to First Class customers, before exciting changes are rolled out to standard class customers in autumn.

The new seasonal menus will showcase fresh, local flavours and champion producers on the train operator’s route. Breakfast, casual dining and, on selected services, evening meals are all set to be reinvigorated by James’ distinctive flair. For breakfast, James has created an exclusive range of jams produced by Yorkshire based The Fruity Kitchen. In addition, he has introduced a premium Black Pudding which will be served alongside sausages, bacon and eggs, while casual dining features the chef’s signature golden sultana sauce as an accompaniment to sausage rolls.  Evening diners will be able to feast on sumptuous lemon and herb roasted chicken, as well as a new chicken curry dish created in the chef’s development kitchen.

James, whose roots hail back to Virgin Trains’ York managed station, said: “Virgin Trains came to me with a genuine vision and passion for improving the experience they deliver to their customers and – as a frequent Virgin Trains’ traveller – I shared their belief that the food on offer could have a real impact on customers’ experience as a whole.

“I see this partnership as a real opportunity to open people’s eyes to the great food they could enjoy as they speed up the iconic East Coast line – and I feel the new menus we’re cooking up together will make it a truly enjoyable experience.”

Alison Watson, Customer Experience Director at Virgin Trains on the East Coast, added: “This is another step in Virgin Trains’ journey of improving every element of our customers’ experience when they travel with us. Our new First Class carriages are rolling out on a weekly basis now, we are upgrading our First Class lounges for customers, and we have a totally new fleet of trains in the pipeline, too.

“However, we are also focusing on getting the experience right for our customers today, and a revitalised menu is another important element of that. We’re confident the menu James is designing with our team will be the finest dining any UK train operator can boast and will be another step in making our customers’ journeys even better.”

ENDS

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**About Virgin Trains**

Stagecoach and Virgin are working in partnership to operate the East Coast and West Coast inter-city routes under the Virgin Trains brand. Together, they are on track to revolutionise rail travel across the UK.

The combined network connects some of the nation’s most iconic destinations including Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Leeds, York and London.

Virgin Trains is committed to delivering a high speed, high frequency service, offering shorter journey times, more comfortable travel and excellent customer service. Customers consistently rate Virgin Trains as one of the top long-distance rail franchise operators in the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) commissioned by industry watchdog, Transport Focus.

On the East Coast route, £140m is being invested to create a more personalised travel experience. This includes a major fleet revamp, smarter stations and exciting new routes. From May 2016, there will be 42 additional services (22,000 extra seats) per week between Edinburgh and London. 2018 will see the introduction of completely new Azuma trains being built in the UK by Hitachi.

The West Coast route has a proud record of challenging the status quo - from introducing tilting Pendolino trains, to a pioneering automated delay repay scheme and becoming the first franchised rail operator to offer m-Tickets for all ticket types.

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