**Saturday 14 October 2017**

**Virgin Trains Ticket to Write**

* ***Virgin Trains, in partnership with the Birmingham Literature Festival hosts a flash fiction event with a difference***
* ***Guests treated to a First Class experience, travelling in style to Birmingham International before tucking into Virgin Trains popular First Class food and drink***
* ***Broadcaster and acclaimed author Stuart Maconie delivers a 1,000 word short story inspired by a recent journey from Scotland to the West Midlands***

Virgin Trains played host to a story telling with a difference in Birmingham last night as part of their 20th birthday celebrations.

Forty expectant guests, who were told nothing more than to turn up at Birmingham New Street station were whisked down to Birmingham International in First Class, enjoying a selection of Virgin Trains’ popular menu in the First Class Lounge, before being entertained by Stuart Maconie.

As one of the UK’s foremost travel writers – Maconie has published nine books about various aspects of the UK, including frequent travel on trains – Stuart is a regular traveller with Virgin Trains and used his journey down for Scotland this week as inspiration for a 1,000 word short story.

“Finding the time and quiet space to write is so hard when there are constant demands of work, family, not to mention distractions at the end of my fingers on my phone,” explained Stuart.

“Spending a few hours on a Virgin Train between Edinburgh and Birmingham New Street allowed me to enjoy the view – tweeting a few photos from the beautiful Lake District and Scottish Borders on the way – whilst also writing about what I was seeing. We’ve got such a fantastic variety of landscapes in the UK – train travel, at speed, but in comfort and without having to concentrate on anything but yourself, allows you to really appreciate it in all its glory.”

Stuart was also joined by the winners of the Flash Fiction competition held in partnership with the Birmingham Mail much to the delight of the eager audience.

*“I’ve got to say it’s absolute genius to get a group of people on a Virgin Trains on a Friday evening and treat them to a creative, inspiring and most importantly really fun night,” enthused Rabiyah K Latif from Birmingham.*

“Birmingham is our home and we wanted to do something different to help celebrate twenty years of serving the city and its people,” explained Natasha Grice, General Manager for Virgin Trains in the West Midlands.  “People choose to relax in different ways when they’re onboard our trains; some like to unwind watching films or reading magazines using our onboard entertainment system Beam; for others it’s a great opportunity to read a good book, and for some people it can even provide the inspiration to write one.”

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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. We have already invested £21m to completely revamp our existing fleet and customers can now benefit from 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.

Visit the Virgin Trains Media Room - [http://mediaroom.virgintrains.co.uk](http://mediaroom.virgintrains.co.uk/) - for the latest news, images and videos. Subscribe [here](http://www.mynewsdesk.com/follow/47939) for regular news from Virgin Trains.

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**About Birmingham Literature Festival**

Writing West Midlands is the literature development agency for the West Midlands, supporting creative writers and creative writing. It offers support to help writers establish their writing careers. It supports young writers as they develop their interest in creative writing. It runs festivals and events, including the Birmingham Literature Festival, which this year turns 20, and the annual National Writers’ Conference. It exists to champion the West Midlands region as a great place to be a writer.