National Museum of Scotland celebrates reaching a million

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The landmark figure has been achieved eight months ahead of predictions, and outstrips the previous record figure for a full year. The museum's highest attendance then was 833,324 visits in 2007/08, the year before it partially closed for redevelopment.

Visitors from across the world have poured through the museum's impressive new street-level entrance and into the spectacular Grand Gallery, from where they have been able to enjoy 16 new galleries. The beautifully-restored Victorian building only last week won the Andrew Doolan Award for the Best Building in Scotland for 2011.

Over 8,000 treasures are on show, 80% of them for the first time. The Natural World Galleries with their life-sized T.rex, and the Museum's re-positioned Millennium Clock, are among the objects proving the biggest hit with visitors. Another firm favourite is the Window on the World, the UK's biggest single museum installation, which features an array of nearly 900 objects representing the diversity of the museum's collections.

A spectacular opening ceremony on Chambers Street in July saw nearly 6,000 people pass through the doors in the first hour. In all, 22,000 visitors packed the museum on opening day, and the 100,000 mark was reached in just six days. Now the entire first year target has been reached in under four months.

National Museums Scotland is building on this success with a programme of blockbuster exhibitions in its new, larger, purpose-built space for special exhibitions. The first major new shows will feature Ancient Egypt and a Russian Empress when Fascinating Mummies and Catherine the Great open in 2012.

The millionth visitor to the National Museum of Scotland was among the party from Stockbridge Primary School, who visited on Thursday 24 November.

Gordon Rintoul, Director, National Museums Scotland, said: "To reach this monumental visitor figure so far ahead of our predictions is an incredible achievement. Years of planning, fundraising and hard work have gone into realising our vision of creating a world-class museum that sits firmly at the heart of Scotland's cultural landscape. To receive such a positive response from the public is truly amazing.

"People really are voting with their feet and giving a massive endorsement to all of the dedication, knowledge and creativity of our staff and supporters. We are delighted."

Culture Secretary Fiona Hyslop said: "Since its magnificent transformation, the National Museum of Scotland has become a magnet for local, national and international visitors - but to reach a million in such a short space of time is a remarkable achievement. Its extraordinary collections displayed in such spectacular, award-winning surroundings have firmly established it as a world-class must-see attraction."

Colin McLean, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, said: "When we took the decision to invest in this imaginative project, we knew we were backing a winner. But no one imagined the new museum would reach this milestone quite so soon. It is a real testimony to the thirst people have for exploring and celebrating their heritage and a fitting reward for all

who have contributed to the project's success. One million visitors cannot be wrong.'

The transformation of the Victorian building is part of a 15-year, £70million masterplan for the museum. Further new galleries are under development and a new pedestrian frontage on Chambers Street is also being planned. Preparation for this next stage of development is already underway.

Notes to editors

About the Museum
The £47.4million redevelopment, jointly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (£17.8million), and the Scottish Government (£16million), with a further £13. million from private sources, incorporates:

• Over 8,000 objects, 80% of which are on display for the first time
• A new entrance hall at street level
• 16 new galleries
• A spacious gallery for international touring exhibitions
• 2 discovery galleries for children and families
• A new 3-storey learning centre
• The reinstated Grand Gallery, and a new addition: the Window on the World
• 50% more public space

National Museums Scotland is the largest multi-disciplinary museum group in Scotland, with four million items in its collections and the largest body of curatorial and conservation expertise in the country. Today, the group includes:
- National Museum of Scotland (formerly the Royal Museum and the Museum of Scotland)
- National Museum of Flight
- National War Museum
- National Museum of Rural Life
- National Museum of Costume.

For further information

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