

why everyone is talking about...

Wyvernwood

The independent story-led family attraction in Essex has seen a record start to 2024

Wyvernwood, an immersive, story-led outdoor adventure park located near Colchester, has announced a record start to

the 2024 season, with visitor numbers jumping 60% since the end of March, compared to the same period last year.

The park first opened its doors in July 2022 after being awarded an EU grant and raising its own funds with the help of their independent finance and mortgage advisory firm, Ashbridge Partners.

Wyvernwood, the brainchild of husband-and-wife team – Will, a technology leader in a global engineering company, and Susie Marsden, who formerly worked as Group Company Secretary for a FTSE100 company in St James's London – occupies 27 acres of Alesford Hall Farm, a 200-acre estate with ancient woodland dating back to the 1700s.

On the park's record start, Susie says: "We couldn't have imagined a better start to our 2024 season, particularly as this is only Wyvernwood's second full season of trading. Our visitor numbers peaked at 60,000 last year; however, we're already on course to surpass this record by 25%, despite some unpleasant wet and windy weather during May and June. Not only are we seeing numbers up as a whole, but we're also seeing a significant increase in birthday party bookings and school outings, as well as a large percentage of return visits.

"Our mission has always been to create a fun-filled and magical experience with elements of surprise and delight for all our guests; encouraging children to enjoy the great outdoors, escape from their screens and connect with nature," she adds. "We



want to do this in the best way we can while having a positive impact on our guests' wellbeing. We believe that it is important to have fun and at the same time engage with nature in a beautiful setting which is good for mental health and reducing stress, for adults and children alike."

The £4.5m attraction features a series of story-based themed play zones with aesthetically pleasing wooden play structures and unique wood carvings, where visitors can meet the Wyvernwood characters such as fairies, goblins and a heroic captain, engage in quests, puzzles and riddles, explore a maize maze, sand play and toddler areas, jumping pillows and pedal karts as well as experience the Dragon Trail, which crosses a wild flower meadow leading to the cool and inviting Wellbeing Woods. The park now employs four full-time members of staff and up to 50 seasonal staff, from actors to park



rangers and experience co-ordinators, and a full support team during the open season.

The idea of the attraction first came to mind in 2016 when the Marsden family wanted to explore new ways to diversify their farmland. Previous to the park's opening two years ago, part of the site on which it now sits was formerly a wholesale plant nursery. The Marsdens planted over 3,500 native trees and installed multiple bird, owl and bat boxes and have a strong eco thread running through the Wyvernwood experience. Wyvernwood employs locally-based staff, uses locally-sourced produce and avoids the use of plastic wherever possible.

Susie adds: "Wyvernwood is truly a labour of love. Our relentless focus is on creating the best possible guest experience and achieving operational excellence." **1**

wyvernwood.co.uk