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End the Summer With a Daytrip to the Danbury Railway Museum

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Looking for a summer day trip to find some fun that will teach your kids about transportation? Just hop a Metro-North train (or drive, if you must) to the Danbury Railway Museum.

I usually find railway museums a bit depressing as they tend to be dusty monuments to the past. But not this one. In addition to a beautifully curated collection of memorabilia, it also still has a working railroad.

Housed in a beautifully restored 1903 railroad station — listed on the National Register of Historic Places — the museum opened in the 1990s after the building was abandoned by the state Department of Transportation in favor of a newer Metro-North station a few hundred yards away serving the Danbury branch.

At its peak, the station saw 125 trains a day. It now serves about a dozen Metro-North trains to South Norwalk and Grand Central, all of them push-pull diesel cars. Fun fact: Did you know the Danbury branch

was once electrified, just like the main line?

Danbury is also served by the old Maybrook/Beacon Line running west to the city of the same name on the Hudson River. The line is still occasionally used by Metro-North to transfer locomotives to its Croton-Harmon yards to be serviced.

Danbury's major industry, hat making, drew thousands of migrant workers and is celebrated by a Metro-North passenger car emblazoned with the name "The Danbury Hatter."

Inside the air conditioned station, the museum offers a great orientation video showing the mighty New Haven & Hartford Railroad at its peak, carrying both passengers and freight.

There are also several model train layouts (in five different scales) that children can operate at the push of a button. You'll also find a wonderful collection of railroad flatware and china from the New Haven's glory days of posh dining cars.

In a tip o' the conductor's hat to more recent railroading, the museum has acquired parts of the old Solari departure board from Grand Central, though it has yet to be returned to full functionality. Still, it's nice someone preserved it.

But the highlight of the museum's collection will be found outside in its rail yard. There you'll find more than 70 railcars and locomotives you can tour (in the summertime) on a half-hour train ride. Tickets are \$3 for a ride in a coach or the caboose. For \$10, you can even ride in the diesel engine's cab.

The train ride around the yard takes 20 minutes and shows you the museum's 14 locomotives, 12 passenger and 26 freight cars.

The highlight of the ride is a visit to one of the last working turntables in New England. Built in 1911, the 95-foot turntable allowed all but the largest in the New Haven's locomotive fleet to enter one of nine stalls in an old engine house.

The museum also hosts children's birthday parties, allowing hands-on inspection of the truly largest "boys' toys" ever built. Adults can also join the fun as the museum is run by dedicated volunteers.

Connecticut is lucky to have a number of great railroad and trolley museums, but this is my favorite — and the only one accessible by taking a train to get there.

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Cameron on railroad history and fun:

- [Bring the Kids and See Railroad History Come Alive at Several CT Rail Museums](#) (Sept. 10, **2017**)
 - [If You've Never Taken a Long Distance Train, You're Missing Out: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Sept. 24, 2017)
 - [To Vermont by Train: Slow, But Relaxing and Weatherproof](#) (Oct. 29, 2017)
 - [The Bygone New Canaan Club Car on the Railroad: R.I.P., 1976](#) (Nov. 26, 2017)
 - [Take a Day Trip and Ride Connecticut's Rail History](#) (Aug. 15, 2016)
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