
Advice for group leaders visiting the British Museum with older adults

This guide was devised by the Community Partnerships team at the British Museum in collaboration with local community partners and resource centres for older adults. It offers information and advice to group leaders working with older adults who may need additional support to make their way around the Museum and enjoy the collection.



Planning ahead: before you visit

Choose the date

It can help to choose a date when the Museum is less busy (see advice on visiting times below). To add interest to a visit, group leaders could choose a date that is special to the group, or that links with the area of the collection you hope to visit.

Use the Museum's website

Explore the Museum's galleries, maps, highlights, cultures and themes online to help choose an area of the collection to visit with your group. For more information, visit britishmuseum.org/visiting

Choose what you want to see

During the visit we would suggest quality over quantity. Group leaders only need to plan to see a couple of galleries to make an enjoyable and worthwhile visit.

Explore the map

You can either do this online or we will send you a paper copy on request. The map gives ideas of what you can see, where the galleries are located and the opening hours. You can then work out your easiest route. This will help your visit go smoothly and your group feel safe and comfortable in a new and busy environment. Large print maps are also available from the Information Desk. The map has several uses:

- it indicates where some of the most popular objects are located
- it gives a schedule of free talks and tours
- it provides details of the Hands on desks in galleries (an opportunity to handle and discuss objects from the collection)

Try a 'pre-visit' visit on foot

Plan your route and explore the galleries. Check the location of lifts, toilets, accessible toilets, seating, refreshments and other facilities. If group leaders feel their group may be sensitive to particular subject matter (such as human remains, nudity etc.), this is an opportunity to plan a route that will avoid any potential issues. It is worth talking to your group about this in advance.

Visiting times

The Museum is very busy on weekday mornings with a large number of school groups arriving between 10.00 and 11.00. The noise levels in the Great Court may be uncomfortable and disorientating for vulnerable older adults. Some of the most popular galleries can get very crowded making them difficult to navigate, particularly for wheelchair users. We would recommend the best visiting time with a group of older adults is from 14.00 onwards. Half-term weeks and public holidays are especially busy too. The Museum is open late until 20.30 on Fridays and this is often a quieter time.

Looking at objects

The British Museum is full of interesting objects which can stimulate questions and discussion. The following questions can be used as conversation openers with your group when looking at objects in the Museum. Group leaders can try some of these in advance by looking at familiar or personal objects in their centres (for example discussing group members' wristwatches).

Questions to explore objects:

- What is it? Describe what you see.
- Does it remind you of anything?
- What material is it made from?
- How has it been made?
- How has it been decorated (colours, patterns, inlays, markings)?
- Who might have made it and why?
- Who would have used it?
- What part of the world might it be from? Why do you think that?
- How old might it be?
- Would we use this object today?
- Has it been an everyday object or is it precious, for a special occasion?
- What significance do you think it has (personal, social, cultural, religious, material)?
- Do you like this object?
- If you could ask the object a question, what would it be?

During your visit

Galleries

Group leaders are encouraged to let older adults take their time to look at and talk about objects. The less rushed the visit, the more relaxed and pleasing the visit is for the whole group.

- Some of the **busiest** galleries include:
 - Room 4 – Egyptian sculpture
 - Room 18 – Greece: Parthenon
 - Rooms 62 & 63 – Egyptian death and afterlife: mummies
- Some galleries that are relatively **quiet** include:
 - Room 1 – Enlightenment
 - Room 67 – Korea
 - Rooms 92–94 – Japan

Please ask a member of Visitor Services for other suggestions on the day.

The Museum tries to open all galleries each day but some may be subject to closure at short notice due to security or maintenance issues. Check the Visiting section of the website before your visit for the latest information.

Meeting points

There are two meeting points indicated by tall steel columns in the Great Court – one behind the Information Desk, the other adjacent to the Multimedia Guide Desk. Group leaders can choose one of these or decide on an alternative to point out to their group as a meeting point in case the group becomes separated during the visit.

Visitor Services

If you are looking for assistance when you first arrive, please ask the Visitor Services staff at the Information Desk. Visitor Services staff are recognisable by their blue shirts around the whole Museum and are there for your security and to assist you. If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to approach them.

Seating

Cafés and other seating areas are available to provide a welcome break for your group. Seating can be found in many of the galleries and portable folding stools are also available around the Museum (Rooms 24, 36, 53 and beside the Information Desk). Please ask one of the Visitor Services staff to direct you to the portable folding stools if you cannot find them. If you want some fresh air, seating is available on the colonnade (the area at the top of the steps of the Museum).

Wheelchairs

You can book wheelchairs in advance by calling 020 7323 8299. Please call with at least 24 hours' notice. There may be some available on the day at the entrances. If not, please ask the Security Warders at the entrances or a member of Visitor Services.

Cloakroom

The cloakroom is along the corridor to your left on coming through the Main entrance. There is a £1.50 fee to deposit a coat or small bag, and 50p for an umbrella. For security reasons, bags of a size greater than 40x40x50cm or a weight greater than 8kg are not allowed into the Museum.

Temperature within Museum

This can vary from room to room in the Museum. Group leaders should advise their group to bring a light jacket or cardigan.

Reading labels

Please advise group members to bring their glasses. A limited number of magnifying glasses are available from the Information Desk upon request. Some galleries and exhibitions have large print guides available – please ask at the Information Desk for availability of these on the day.

Multimedia guides

An audio description guide for visually impaired people and a British Sign Language (BSL) Multimedia guide are both available free on request at the Multimedia Guide Desk in the Great Court. Guides in English and other

languages are also available at a cost of £5 each.

Feeling unwell

If anyone in the group becomes unwell please alert a member of Security or Visitor Services staff who will contact one of the Museum's registered First Aiders to assist you.

Languages spoken

Ask at the Information Desk if you need help as our Visitor Services staff speak several languages.

Lost property

Please contact the Information Desk in the Great Court.

Exhibition visits

There is a discount on Monday afternoons for people aged 60 years and over who wish to visit the Museum's special exhibitions. Please book in advance to avoid delays or disappointment on the day.

Quiet spaces

These can be difficult to find but the foyers of the Clore Education Centre downstairs from the Great Court (on Level -2) are sometimes free for use. Ask a member of Visitor Services staff mentioning that your group needs to find a quiet space.

Refreshments

We know how important a cup of tea can be. There are several cafés across the Museum:

- two in the Great Court
- the Gallery Café past the cloakroom and through Room 12
- the Court Restaurant at the top of the stairs in the Great Court

A cup of tea costs around £2.25, coffee £2.50, cake from £3.95 and sandwiches from £4 in the café areas. If you prefer, please feel free to bring your own sandwiches or biscuits and use the tables and seating in the Great Court café areas only. At busy periods please understand that café customers have priority for seating. Eating and drinking are not permitted in the galleries.

Photography

Photography is permitted in nearly all the Museum apart from the special exhibitions.

Parking

Limited accessible parking is available for disabled visitors on the Museum's forecourt. To book, please call 020 7323 8299 at least 24 hours in advance with your vehicle details.

Checklist for group leaders to give to group members

On the day of your British Museum visit check that you have:

- your group leader's phone number and your own form of identity
- comfortable shoes
- details of the travel arrangements and travel pass
- the right clothing – within the Museum temperatures vary from room to room so allow for this by bringing a light jacket or cardigan
- reading glasses
- spending money for refreshments, postcards, books and novelties
- camera (with batteries) – photography is permitted in most of the Museum
- light refreshments
- bottle of water
- any medication needed
- keys – for home

Our support

We are happy to talk with group leaders in advance of their visit and offer additional advice. Please call the Community Partnerships team on 020 7323 8398.

Group leaders can also email us at communities@britishmuseum.org with questions or to arrange a meeting to talk through your visit. Please contact us in advance so we know someone will be available to meet you.

We welcome any feedback and would be keen to know how your visit went, so please get in touch and share your experiences.

We hope you have an enjoyable visit to the British Museum.

Useful links

Map of the British Museum

www.britishmuseum.org/visiting

Access information

www.britishmuseum.org/access