

Culture Kids in Museums



Quote from a judging family

"We had a great time when we were judges for the Family Friendly Museum Award," says Sarah Yeneralski from Romford, Essex. "We loved being undercover and exploring the museum. We want to be a secret judge in every museum we go to now!" James, aged eight, agrees. "My favourite bit was getting inside the helicopter and following the trail around the museum," he says.

London's poor and elderly in the 1780s and 1880s – an educational and grounding experience for all. 136 Kingsland Rd, London E2 8EA geffrye-museum.org.uk

National Coal Mining Museum for England, Wakefield, West Yorkshire
At the National Coal Mining Museum, you can take an underground tour and meet a miner, complete with hard hat and battery lamp. The museum offers plenty of activities for children over the summer, too, from craft fairs to writing workshops. Caphouse Colliery, New Rd, Overton, West Yorkshire WF4 4RH ncm.org.uk

Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, Exeter, Devon
This museum is packed full of things to do and see, from exhibitions of fine art to a programme to commemorate the centenary of the First World War. About 5,000 items relating to the history of the area are also on display. There are activities for under-5s every Tuesday. Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, Queen Street, Exeter, Devon EX4 3RX rammuseum.org.uk

Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle, Cumbria
Tullie House is the meeting point for history, nature and art, and has been attracting visitors for more than a century. There are exhibitions from zoology to world cultures. The gallery has a display of Pre-Raphaelite art, and there's a viewing platform for a panorama of Carlisle, overlooking the castle in all its glory. Castle Street, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA3 8TP tulliehouse.co.uk

The Winding House, Caerphilly, Wales
This new building provides a brilliant hands-on opportunity to embrace local history and explore world events from a new perspective. Visitors can research their family history or go around one of the current exhibitions – from a commemoration of the Caerphilly's involvement in the First World War to displays looking at the history of the area. The museum also boasts a stunning Grade II-listed winding engine that was used to take miners up and down the lift shafts – a real glimpse of history. Cross St, Elliotts Town, New Tredegar, Caerphilly NP24 6EG windinghouse.co.uk

Shining a light on the best family museums

Choosing the shortlist for the Family Friendly Museum Award wasn't easy, says *Helen Castor*

How hard could it be? The difficult task, surely, had already been done by the panel of volunteers who chose a longlist of 20 out of more than 800 nominations for the 2015 Telegraph Family Friendly Museum Award.

It wasn't even as though we judges had to pick a winner. Our job, in a glass-walled room overlooking the *Telegraph's* busy news floor, was simply to whittle those 20 down to a shortlist of six. To guide us, we had the Kids in Museums manifesto, a masterpiece of concision and good sense. ("Don't say ssshhush! If kids are being noisy, ask yourself 'Why?' Is it because they're excited? Great! Then capture that excitement. Is it because they're bored? Then give them something meaningful to do.")

To inform us, we had submissions from the longlisted museums themselves: heaped piles of brightly coloured leaflets, enthusiastically-filled-in visitor questionnaires ("It was a grate experdishun!") and, in the case of the River & Rowing Museum at Henley-on-Thames, our very own miniature pyramid. (They have an interactive exhibit on "Epic Egypt", just in case you were wondering.) To sustain us, we had sandwiches.

What more could we need? The answer, it turned out, was "time to argue," because none of the museums offered themselves up for easy whittling.

The imagination, commitment and willingness to engage with the needs of families of every shape and size displayed by all of these remarkable places is inspiring. Nowhere on the list will you find eyebrows disapprovingly knitted at an outburst of toddling exuberance

Going underground: digging deep at the National Coal Mining Museum

or raised in alarm at the sight of a hoodie-wearing teen. Can do, not can't, is the guiding principle in the attempt to engage all generations in the wonders of the past.

Teamwork extends from conservators to cleaners to cafés – crucial, this last, since both the young and the young at heart are likely to need a welcoming sit-down and a restorative snack to feed their historical interests.

High standards, then, constituted one of our problems. Another was the fact that we were comparing apples not just with oranges but quinces and kumquats.

The wholly volunteer-run Diving Museum told us proudly of its status as one of Gosport's top four visitor attractions; London's Science Museum, meanwhile, attracted more than three million visitors last year. So which one of those two unarguably brilliant institutions, after much discussion and the disappearance of all the sandwiches, made it onto the shortlist? You'll have to read on to find out...



How to be a judge

Kids in Museums are on the lookout for the next group of judges for the Family Friendly Museum Award, so if you fancy a go, then get in touch. Now the shortlist of museums has been drawn up, they will be road-tested anonymously using the Kids in Museums manifesto, and you can have your say as to who wins. All you have to do to apply is email award@kidsinmuseums.org.uk and explain a little bit about yourself, and why you want to be a judge. Find out more about the award at kidsinmuseums.org.uk

The shortlisted museums

The Diving Museum, Gosport, Hampshire
The Diving Museum opened in 2011. Manned by volunteers, current exhibitions include displays of early helmets, wacky vintage diving suits, equipment used by James Bond and a collection of marvellous Royal Navy memorabilia, with plenty of activities for children. 2 Stokes Bay Road, Gosport, Hampshire PO12 2QU divingmuseum.co.uk

The Geffrye, Museum of the Home, London
The Geffrye museum goes inside the living spaces of families between 1600 and today. There's also an impressive garden. Inside the restored almshouse, visitors can peek into the lives of

MATT AUSTIN, SIMON DEWHURST