Museum explorers
fantastic creatures

The Hamlyn family trails are supported by

Families
Ages 6+
Welcome

This trail guides you on a journey of exploration and discovery around the Museum. On the way you’ll track down some amazing treasures and learn tales of human history. Whichever way you go, and whatever you discover, enjoy yourself! If you ever feel lost, just ask a member of staff for help.

Useful information for families

- Accessible toilets and baby changing facilities are available. You can breastfeed and bottle feed anywhere on the Museum’s grounds but if you would like more privacy, please use the feeding room in the Ford Centre for Young Visitors in the Clore Centre for Education on the Lower floor, Level -1, or one of our baby changing spaces. For details, ask at the Families Desk or Information Desk in the Great Court, or pick up a map of the whole Museum.

- You can leave fold-up pushchairs in the cloakroom free of charge.

- You can find child-friendly food at the cafés. High chairs are available.

- You can use the Ford Centre for Young Visitors to picnic with your family at weekends and during school holidays.

Ancient peoples used fantastic creatures like camels for transport. What is your favourite way to get around?
Take a trip around the world to discover how people have painted, carved, hunted and farmed animals throughout history. You’ll need the sharp eyes and quick wits of an animal to find every object!

Your journey starts in Room 1, Ground floor, Level 0

Case numbers can be hard to find – don’t be afraid to ask a member of staff for help finding an object

1. Curious creatures
   Room 1

2. Mexican menagerie
   Room 27

3. Animals from animals
   Room 26

4. Bewildering beasts
   Room 24

5. Creatures and cultures
   Room 33

6. Strike a pose!
   Room 33
If you enter in the middle of the gallery and turn right, you'll soon find yourself surrounded by cases of amazing creatures. Among the curious animals are some of the first specimens to be placed in the Museum over 250 years ago. When explorers brought these creatures back to the Museum, it was the first time many people in London had ever seen them.

The Museum's objects used to be called ‘rarities’

Find an animal you have never seen before. Invent a name for it. Tell your group what's special about it. Act out how you think it might move. What noise might it have made?

Walk back to the opposite end of the gallery. How many creatures can you count on the way?
Mexican menagerie

Go to Room 27

For thousands of years the cultures of Central America have used fantastic creatures as powerful symbols. They have made sculptures of real animals, like rabbits or monkeys, as well as imaginary ones, like fire serpents.

Find the large carved sculpture of a coiled rattlesnake near the middle of the room. Can you see the detail underneath? What do you think the rattle on the end of its tail is for? Make the sound the rattle might make.

Explore the rest of this room and find these incredible creatures. Keep your eyes peeled, as some of these animals are smaller than others!

- A blue serpent with two heads
- A monkey scratching its head
- A ceramic vase that looks like a dog
- An object in the shape of an ocelot
Animals from animals

Go to Room 26 and find Case 19

The peoples and cultures of North America placed great importance on the value of animals. They used animals for food and made tools, clothing and decorative objects from them too. This case contains many fantastic creatures in the form of tools carved from ivory.

Look at the bow drills and snow beaters. They're long, thin and decorated with different scenes. Choose the object nearest to your eye level and describe the scene to the rest of your group. What animals can you see? What are the people doing?

The relationship between humans and animals has existed for thousands of years. Explore the gallery. Can you find any other objects made from animals? What are they? What's the most unusual object you can find?
Animals often take on different meanings in different cultures. For example, among the Haida people of Canada, the raven is thought to be a trickster and the bear a protector.

Haida Gwaii is a large group of islands off the coast of Canada.

Look up. Can you see the raven head? This formed the top of a totem pole (a symbolic sculpture carved from a large tree). If you could build a totem pole, what animals would you carve into it? What do they mean to you?

Haida people carved this amazing wooden doorway. It stood as an entrance in front of a house. The symbols represent the achievements and rights of the family who lived there.

There are three special creatures carved into the wood. Can you spot them all?

- Eagle
- Whale
- Owl

What do these carvings tell us about the area where the Haida people lived?
Creatures and cultures

Go to Room 33, turn right and find the jar shown below.

Animals are very important to the customs, cultures and lives of Chinese people. Dragons are symbols of power and good luck. They are also believed to control the rain.

This beautiful covered jar was made for the imperial palace in China over 500 years ago. Any dragon with five claws is a symbol of the emperor. How many dragons can you see flying through the clouds on the vase? How many claws do they have?

Find the nearby tomb figures. These figures were found in a tomb and may have been used to ward off evil spirits and to go with the deceased in the afterlife.

Although camels did not originally come from China, they were very important vehicles for trading. If you were to travel a long distance, what animal would you choose to accompany you?
Turn around and walk back through the gallery until you find the golden sculpture of Garuda.

Garuda (meaning ‘devourer’) is a mythical bird-like creature popular in both Hindu and Buddhist beliefs. He is often represented with the body of a male warrior.

Garuda acts as a guardian and is sometimes referred to as the enemy of all snakes.

Garuda is often shown holding a snake in each of his claws. Sadly this Garuda lost his before coming to the British Museum. What do you think might have happened to the snakes? Can you find the snakes around his neck?

Curious combinations.
If you could be half human and half animal, what animal would you choose and why? What special power would you have?

Copy his pose! Whose pose was the best?
You have completed the fantastic creatures trail!

You can find even more fantastic creatures in other parts of the Museum:

- Find the two-headed dog in Room 25
- Track down some wolves decorating an Anglo-Saxon purse in Room 41
- Uncover the dangerous sport of bull-leaping in Room 12

Head back to the Families Desk to receive a stamp!
What an adventure you've been on. You've travelled around the world and explored the relationship between people and animals in different cultures. Of all the things you discovered, what was your favourite?

Names

Ages

Date

Favourite objects

At home

Finish the design for this two-headed serpent by adding the head of your favourite creature from the trail.

Other things you could do when you get home:

- Take a picture of fantastic creatures in your own home and make your own exhibition.
- Learn about other fantastic creatures and why they are so important.
- Design your own fantastic creature formed of six different animals.
Trails in the Museum
explorers series

Ages 6+
• Africa around the world
• Ancient Britain
• Ancient Egypt
• Ancient Greeks
• Fantastic creatures
• Journey across Japan

Ages 3+
• Colour and shape
• Time to count

You can find out more about our family activities at britishmuseum.org

See you at the British Museum again soon!

Cover: ‘Sancai’ (three-colour) ceramic tomb figure of a camel, said to be from the tomb of General Liu Tingxun, Luoyang, Henan. China, Asia, Tang Dynasty. AD 728.

1 Stuffed bird on loan from the Natural History Museum.

2 Coiled rattlesnake (Crotalus horridus) figure made of granite. Mexico, North America, Aztec, about 1325–1521.

Pectoral piece in the form of a double-headed serpent from the Turquoise Mosaics. Mexico, North America, Mixtec/Aztec, 1400–1521.

A green onyx vessel in the form of a crouching monkey. Mexico (Gulf Coast). North America, AD 900–1521.

Hollow pottery figure representing a dog from Colima. Mexico, North America, Colima, 300 BC–AD 300.

Offering vessel, made of onyx, in the form of an ocelot. Mexico, North America, Teotihuacan, about AD 400–600.


Ivory snow knife with baleen binding at handle made by Arctic Peoples. North America, before 1849.


Totemic doorway, a wooden totem pole with a doorway carved at the bottom, made by Haida, from Tanu, Haida Gwaii, British Columbia. Canada, North America, before 1897.

Large cloisonne enamel jar with a domed cover. China, Asia, Xuanzang, Ming Dynasty. Xuanzang mark and period, 1426–1435.

‘Sancai’ (three-colour) ceramic tomb figure of a camel, said to be from the tomb of General Liu Tingxun, Luoyang, Henan. China, Asia, Tang Dynasty. AD 728.

Figure of Garuda made of gilt bronze from Tibet. China, Asia, 19th century.

At home activity: Pectoral piece in the form of a double-headed serpent from the Turquoise Mosaics. Mexico, North America, Mixtec/Aztec, 1400–1521.