

Large print guide



Visitor Journey

This book contains the introductory texts for each of the rooms you will pass through on the one-way route.

This large print guide contains the introductory texts for each of the rooms you will pass through on the one-way route through the British Museum.

Great Court

Introduction

Your journey starts here

Please follow the one-way route as you walk through two million years of human history. To download a map and for more information about highlight objects visit britishmuseum.org

Look out for QR codes to access free audio commentaries.

Great Court

Egypt 2700 BC – AD 200

Explore ancient Egyptian history through monumental sculpture from temples and tombs. Come face to face with the colossal statue of

Ramesses II. Bust of Ramesses II, Egypt, about 1250 BC.

For more information about these displays – including activities for families – please visit: britishmuseum.org/egyptiansculpture

Image caption: Bust of Ramesses II, Egypt, about 1250 BC.

Room 4

Ancient Egypt – The Rosetta Stone

The Rosetta Stone provided the key to deciphering hieroglyphs in 1822. It is inscribed with three copies of a royal decree in two Egyptian scripts and in Greek. The words of ancient Egyptians could be read for the first time in almost 2,000 years.

Image caption: The Rosetta Stone, Egypt, 196 BC.

Room 4

Egyptian Sculpture 2700–1350 BC

Explore sculpture and architecture from pharaonic temples and cemeteries. The journey starts with objects from the time of Tutankhamun and moves back in time to the era of the Giza Pyramids.

Image caption: Head of Amenhotep III, from Karnak, Egypt, about 1370 BC.

Room 6

Middle East Assyria 1100–800 BC

Large stone sculptures and reliefs were a striking

feature of the palaces and temples of ancient Assyria (modern northern Iraq). Some are carved with cuneiform script, used to write a range of ancient languages.

Image caption: Colossal statue of a winged lion from the North West Palace of Ashurnasirpal II, Assyrian.

Rooms 12-23

The ancient Mediterranean 2000 BC – AD 200

Explore the interconnections across the ancient Mediterranean, from Crete and Cyprus, to Turkey, Greece, Italy and North Africa. These galleries take you from the origins of the Greek city-states to the Parthenon, and on to the conquest of Greece and beyond by the Roman Empire.

Image caption: Crouching Venus, Roman, AD 1–200

Room 12

Ancient Greece: Minoans and Mycenaeans, 3200 – 1100 BC

The Greek Bronze Age lasted from about 3200 to 1100 BC. During this time the Cycladic islands, Crete and the Greek mainland were home to distinct but interconnecting cultures, from which rich material survives. Bronze came into use at the start of this period for the manufacture of tools, weapons and other objects.

This gallery contains objects from Minoan Crete and from the Greek mainland and islands in the Mycenaean period (1600 – 1100 BC).

Room 13

Ancient Greece 1050 – 520 BC

The period following the collapse of the Mycenaean kingdoms saw profound changes in Greek culture. After an initial decline in living standards, powerful independent city states emerged such as Athens, Corinth, Sparta and Miletos. Renewed contact and trade across the Mediterranean region brought new wealth and cultural influences. Contact and competition stimulated developments in art and architecture, technology, writing and philosophy. Despite frequent conflict, a common language and religion bound city-states together in a shared Greek identity.

Room 14

Greek Vases

Greek pottery had many different functions. It was used at banquets, in religious celebrations, for cooking and storage and was offered to the gods and the dead. Athens was the leading producer of decorated pottery in Greece from around 580 until 300 BC. Athenian pottery was popular all over the Mediterranean, especially among the Etruscans of central Italy. Though not regarded as artists in any modern sense, some potters and painters were gifted and innovative, and some gained a degree of wealth and social status.

Room 15

Ancient Greece and Rome Athens and Lycia 520–430 BC

The Athenians and the Lycians lived on opposite sides of the Aegean Sea. Athens was a powerful democratic city-state with an empire, while Lycia (modern south-west Turkey) was ruled by kings allied with Persia, though with periods of Athenian political influence.

Image caption: Relief panel from the Harpy Tomb, Turkey, 470–460 BC.

Room 17

Ancient Greece and Rome Nereid Monument 390–380 BC

The ancient sculpture displayed here was part

of a monumental tomb known as the Nereid Monument. It was built for a ruler of the Lycian city of Xanthos in modern-day south-west Turkey.

Image caption: A statue from the Nereid Monument, Turkey, 390–380 BC.

Room 18

Ancient Greece Parthenon 447–432 BC

The Parthenon was built as a temple to contain a colossal statue of the goddess Athena, now lost. The temple's exterior was richly decorated with marble sculpture representing figures from Greek myth and Athenian religious life.

Scan the QR code for a free audio introduction.

For large print text, other resources and more

information about how the Parthenon sculptures came to the British Museum visit: britishmuseum.org/parthenon

Image caption: A scene from the Parthenon frieze, Greece, 447–432 BC.

Room 18

The Parthenon Athens, 450–430 BC

The Acropolis dominates the skyline of Athens today as it did in ancient times. This sacred rock and its buildings include the Parthenon, a temple that once contained a colossal gold and ivory statue of the goddess Athena. The outside of the temple was richly decorated with marble sculpture carved with figures from Greek myth and idealised Athenian life.

The statue of Athena is lost but much of the external sculpture has survived. Largely divided between London and Athens, these remarkable portrayals of human form have transcended their ancient past to become a representation of humanity itself.

The Frieze

The Parthenon frieze ran for 160 metres around all four sides of the temple. It captures the spirit of ancient Athens at its best.

Traditionally Greek temple sculpture draws its stories from myth, but the Parthenon frieze breaks with tradition by taking its subject from Athenian daily life. Men and women, young and old, soldier and citizen take part in an annual festival in honour of Athena. Dressed in their festival best, they parade before the gods. This is the image of Athens that statesman Perikles and his master sculptor, Pheidias, set out to immortalise. The

frieze is a masterful achievement. Its shallow relief conveys an illusion of depth and motion.

Room 23

Greek and Roman sculpture, 30 BC – AD 200

During the second and first centuries BC the Romans expanded their empire across the Mediterranean, conquering the Hellenistic kingdoms. Admiring the Greek sculpture they encountered, they shipped many statues back to Rome and commissioned copies to decorate their villas, public buildings and sanctuaries.

Some of the Roman sculptures here are faithful copies of marble or bronze Greek originals, few of which have survived. Others are looser interpretations.

Greek and Roman sculpture became popular among art collectors, particularly in Europe, from the 1400s.

Room 8

Middle East Assyria: Nimrud 883–859 BC

King Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria (883–859 BC) built the magnificent North West Palace at Nimrud, in modern-day Iraq. The palace was decorated with stone sculptures and reliefs.

Scan the QR code for a free audio introduction.

Image caption: King Tiglath-Pileser III, Assyrian, about 728 BC.

Room 4

Egypt: Temple sculpture 1350 BC – AD 200

Egypt preserves evidence of the earliest major state in Africa. Pharaohs commissioned temples, furnished with statues, to ensure Egypt's prosperity. These temples also flourished during periods of non-Egyptian rule, whether Nubian, Persian, Greek or Roman. Most Egyptians were Christian by about AD 350, and the old temples were abandoned or converted.

Scan the QR code for a free audio introduction.

Image caption: Bust of Ramesses II, Egypt, about 1250 BC

Room 25

Africa - The Sainsbury Galleries

Learn about the diverse societies of Africa, past and present. The galleries include objects from various historical periods and from across the continent including works by leading contemporary artists.

For more information about these displays – including activities for families – please visit: britishmuseum.org/africa

Image caption: Brass head of an Ooni (king) of Ife, Nigeria, 1400–1500.

Room 25

Africa - The Sainsbury Galleries

These galleries approach the rich history of Africa and its diverse cultures, past and present. From sculpture to textiles, ceramics to metalwork, the displays explore the themes of identity, power, faith and exchange.

The objects shown here came to the British Museum by many different routes over time. Some were purchased, donated, or commissioned. Others arrived as a direct result of British military expeditions. Significant portions of the collection were acquired in the context of the colonisation of large parts of Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries, by Britain and other European countries.

Recent and contemporary art is featured throughout the displays, both by artists living on

the continent and those of African heritage in the diaspora. Some of these works respond to contemporary events and global issues and many are informed by earlier creative traditions.

Visit britishmuseum.org/africa for the latest information about research collaborations and partnerships with institutions in Africa, other displays at the Museum with African objects, and work to redisplay the collection.

Rooms 26-27

Americas North America and Mexico

Explore the different, varied cultures of Native North America and Mexico.

Image caption: Double-headed serpent mosaic, Mexico, 1400–1500s.

Room 26

North America

Discover the diversity of the indigenous cultures of Canada and the United States through ancient and historic artefacts, together with contemporary art.

Image caption: Otter pipe from Mound City, Ohio, USA, 200 BC – AD 100.

Scan the QR code for a free audio introduction.

Room 26

North America

This gallery explores the different cultural identities of Native North American peoples from ancient times to the present, while illustrating the effect

of European contact and colonisation on their communities.

The ancient and historic artefacts shown here, together with contemporary art, illustrate the diversity of the indigenous cultures of Canada and the United States.

Room 27

Mexico

Explore the distinctive regional cultures that flourished in Mexico from about 2000 BC up to the time of European contact in the 1500s.

Scan the QR code for a free audio introduction.

Image caption: Double-headed serpent mosaic, Mexico, 1400–1500s.

Room 27

Mexico

The gallery is organised geographically to reflect the distinctive regional cultures that flourished in Mexico from about 2000 BC up to the time of European contact in the sixteenth century.

The beginnings of Mexican civilization can be traced to early Olmec ceremonial centres of the Gulf Coast of Mexico, followed later by Classical Veracruz and Huastec cultures. During the first millennium AD. Maya city states, among them Yaxchilan, rose to prominence and developed writing, astronomy and a sophisticated calendar. At the same time the urban centre of Teotihuacan dominated the Mexican highlands, while neighbouring Zapotec and Mixtec peoples ruled Oaxaca.

When Europeans arrived the Aztec empire held

sway over much of non-Maya Mesoamerica. The Spanish conquest brought irrevocable change and destruction, but many aspects of indigenous culture survive in Mexico to this day.

Rooms 1-2

Enlightenment, collecting and empire

The British Museum was founded in 1753, and its history and collection are intimately linked to that of the British Empire. This section of your visit explores that era and the collectors who have shaped the Museum's collection.

For more information about these displays – including activities for families – please visit: britishmuseum.org/enlightenment

Image caption: Bust of Sir Hans Sloane

(1660–1753) by M Rysbrack, about 1737.

Room 1

Enlightenment: discovery, learning and imperialism 1680–1820

The eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment was a period of discovery and learning that transformed how Europeans viewed the world. It was also a period when substantial wealth was accumulated by Europeans through the conquest and exploitation of peoples and places worldwide, histories that still shape the world today.

Image caption: The Sloane Astrolabe, England, 1290–1300

Room 1

Enlightenment: exploration, knowledge and imperialism 1680–1820

[Left column]

This room explores the era in which the British Museum was founded, through the objects that came into the Museum during this time and the people who collected them.

The Enlightenment is the name given to a period of discovery and learning that flourished among Europeans and Americans from about 1680 to 1820, changing the way they viewed the world. This was also a time when Britain became a global power and grew wealthy. A significant part of that wealth came from Britain's colonial empire and its active involvement in the transatlantic slave trade.

[Middle column]

Seven important Enlightenment themes are presented in the displays. The objects are arranged to reflect British collectors' understanding of the ancient world, non-European cultures and histories, and the development of Western sciences and disciplines. They highlight investigations into the age of the earth, living and fossil nature and the origins of art history, archaeology and ethnography. The wall cases are filled with objects grouped by type. These convey a sense of how objects were organised and displayed during the eighteenth century.

[Right column]

The gallery shows how Europeans and Americans during the Age of Enlightenment tried to organise their knowledge to form a universal and interconnecting whole, shaped by encounters between peoples across the world. It showcases the intentions and achievements of British scholars and collectors. While Enlightenment

thinking and collections provided the foundations for much of our present understanding of the history of human cultural achievement, they also tended to tell that story from a predominantly European perspective. This period, and its legacies, are now increasingly being reassessed from a range of critical perspectives.

Room 2

Collecting the world

The British Museum is a collection of collections. This room highlights some of the collectors who have shaped the Museum over four centuries, along with some of those who continue to shape its future.

Image caption: Vishnu standing on a lotus, India, AD 1000s.

Scan this QR code for a free audio introduction.

Edmund du Waal library of exile

This porcelain pavilion contains over 2,000 books written by people who have experienced exile – either forced to leave their own country or displaced within it. The library forms both a record of repression and a celebration of the writing of the dispossessed. Its walls of porcelain painted over gold leaf are inscribed with the names of libraries lost or destroyed, from the ancient Library of Alexandria to the Mosul University Library in Iraq, burned in 2015.

Eighty-eight countries are represented with most works appearing in translation. The books are accompanied by psalm, a quartet of new ceramic works by de Waal. Their arrangement reflects the composition of Daniel Bomberg's 1519-23 edition of the Talmud, a central text of Judaism, printed in Renaissance Venice.

You are invited to enter this space of contemplation, to read and to reflect.

Biography – Edmund de Waal (b.1964)

Edmund de Waal is an internationally acclaimed artist and writer. He is best known for his large-scale installations of porcelain vessels, often created in response to collections, archives or the history of a particular place. His interventions have been exhibited worldwide, including The Frick Collection, New York; Ateneo Veneto, Venice; Schindler House, Los Angeles; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna and Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire.

De Waal is also renowned for his bestselling family memoir, *The Hare with Amber Eyes* (2010), and *The White Road* (2015). He lives and works in London.

'You leave your country and you take your words with you. Please come in and sit and read. Find a book that means something to you - a book in your language, a book from your country - and write your name on the Ex Libris page alongside those who have come before you.'

Remember those who have been exiled and those who are still in exile. Celebrate their writing.'

Edmund de Waal

Libraries at the British Museum

The room in which you stand once housed priceless manuscripts, including works from King George III's library which was given to the public in 1823. The British Museum was home to the British Library from 1759 until 1997 when it moved to new premises. Thousands of thinkers studied in the Reading Room in the Great Court including Karl Marx, Mahatma Gandhi and Virginia Woolf.

The library of exile also speaks to objects in the Museum's collection from the world's historic libraries, including ancient cuneiform tablets from Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh in Iraq, Buddhist silk paintings from Dunhuang in China, and seals from the monastery of Nalanda in India.

Following its display at the British Museum the library of exile's books will be donated by the artist to the University of Mosul Library with the kind participation of Book Aid International.

Find out more

Events

The installation is accompanied by a thought-provoking programme of events. For more details, see britishmuseum.org/edmunddewaal

Featured books

Explore the full list of titles in the library of exile at libraryofexile.com

Join in online

Share your experience using #libraryofexile
Scan the QR code for more information about
library of exile

A Room 2 large print guide is available to
download as a PDF from the relevant Gallery page
on the British Museum website.

Room 24

Living and Dying

The gallery explores how people everywhere deal
with the tough realities of life and death. These
challenges are shared by all, but strategies to
deal with them vary from place to place, people to
people.

The central installation by Pharmacopoeia entitled
Cradle to Grave, looks at an approach to health

and well-being, describing the medical histories
of a typical man and woman in Britain today.
The surrounding displays investigate people's
reliance on relationships – with each other, the
animal world, ancestors, and the land and sea –
to maintain well-being. The wall displays look at
how people try to avert life's ordinary dangers,
and respond to sickness and trouble when they
happen. These different approaches arise from the
diverse ways people understand the world.

Please note: Aboriginal people and Torres Strait
Islanders are advised that this display contains
the names and images of deceased Indigenous
Australians.

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download as a PDF from the relevant Gallery page
on the British Museum website.