

The Missouri History Museum

5700 Lindell Boulevard

Forest Park

St. Louis, MO 63112

(314) 746-4599

<http://www.mohistory.org>

Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)

Overall Rating: 4.25 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 5 stars
- Docent-led tours upon request: 5 stars (untested)
- On-site docents and staff: 4 stars
- Quality of experience if visiting unaccompanied: 4 stars
- Tactile or auditory components: 4 stars

This evaluation was last updated on May 8, 2012 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Margaret Koch, Director of Exhibitions and Research for the Missouri History Museum.

Our nation possesses a rich history, and the Missouri History Museum offers a wonderful selection of permanent and visiting exhibitions pertaining to our global, national, and local heritage. This encompasses a wide range of topics, including, but not limited to culture, wildlife, social movements, entertainment, technology, prominent individuals, music, wars, and even plant life. Due to the very visual nature of several of the Museum's exhibits, the facility does present some rather significant challenges to the blind community, but the services which the museum provides, including docent-led tours, hand-held audio tours, and close proximity to public transportation routes, make it possible for someone who is blind or visually impaired to have an enjoyable and enriching experience.

Visitors taking advantage of public transportation will find the Missouri History Museum very accessible. There is a Metro Link station about two blocks away, and the Number 90 bus has a stop by the main entrance (southern entrance) of the museum. As usual, Metro's Call-A-Ride service, Metro's Forest Park Summer Trolley, local cab companies, and other sighted drivers will be able to drop off and pick up passengers directly in front of either the north-side Lindell entrance or the south-side park entrance. Because the northern Lindell Street entrance is

closest to the Metro Link Station, and because it is situated off of a semi-enclosed circle drive, it is deemed safer for dropping off passengers.

Upon entering, visitors will find a help desk situated just to their right with an additional ticket desk for fee-based exhibits located straight ahead. This layout is the same, regardless of whether the individual enters through the northern or southern entrance, and, because of their central location, the desks serve as a very convenient point at which to rendezvous with one's group or docent tour guide. The rooms and hallways are simple enough to easily navigate, and spacious enough to allow an easy flow of traffic. The bathrooms are also easy to locate from the main lobby after soliciting verbal directions, and they are clearly identified with braille and large-print signs. However, due to the vastness of the facility, there is currently no easy way for a blind individual to quickly grasp the overall layout of the building and its many galleries. Therefore, it is advisable for sight impaired visitors to solicit the assistance of a docent or sighted companion when exploring the museum. Printed maps are available at the help desk which low-vision visitors may wish to examine under a magnifying glass (not provided). Low-vision visitors may also find a magnifying glass helpful in reading the name plates within the exhibits. Although touring exhibits cost extra to view, they are well worth the price of admission. General admission to the Missouri History Museum remains free.

The Missouri History Museum offers two services which greatly help to enhance the accessibility of both the museum and the exhibits. First, the help desks and ticket desks maintain a small supply of hand-held audio tour listening devices, a complimentary service to any visitor. Audio tours are often available for visiting exhibitions, and a small variety of permanent exhibitions are also equipped with this auditory service. The descriptions are very detailed, both in relaying the informative text which accompanies the item on display and usually in providing a physical description of the item itself. Audio files for available audio tours of permanent exhibits may also be accessed on the museum's web site under the "Exhibitions" link, found on the homepage. These tours by no means provide a description for every item in the display, and they do not equal the quality of the first-hand experience of exploring the exhibit in person with a docent or sighted guide, but there is a sufficient amount to give the listener a well-rounded immersion in the content of the exhibition. These audio tours are also careful to point out any tactile or interactive components of the exhibit that the visitor may encounter. Visiting exhibitions continue to offer an especially impressive array of auditory and tactile components that add a whole new dimension to exploring our past. Most recently, Braille name plates have been added to the "Language of Portraits" exhibit, a visiting exhibition that will remain at the Missouri History Museum until 2013. Braille name plates are also being considered as a long-term goal for all MHM exhibits, in addition to the already-existing docent and auditory services. More information on upcoming accommodations will be made available as plans progress.

Museum docents can also contribute quite a bit of insight to a blind or visually impaired individual's visit. If a sight-impaired individual were to notify the museum in advance of his or her forthcoming visit, a docent can be found to serve as a sighted companion. Their rich and enthusiastic knowledge of the exhibits complement the information from the audio tour very nicely. Anyone who is willing to serve as the "eyes" of the blind or visually impaired visitor will help the sight-impaired visitor to explore the exhibit as fully as possible.

If stomachs start to rumble while visiting the Missouri History Museum, the facility offers two options for the hungry patron. Bixby's Restaurant serves a somewhat pricey selection of

“sophisticated” cuisines while Bixby’s Express serves lighter menu options in a café-style restaurant. Neither of these venues have Braille or large-print menus, but the staff is very helpful in assisting with the timely selection of a tasty order. Before leaving, be sure to check out the museum’s gift shop where store employees are eager to help a visitor select from an impressive array of books, music, accessories, and other souvenirs. At your visit’s end, museum staff at either help desk will be happy to call a ride service on your behalf if necessary.

Further information about exhibits, museum hours, services and amenities, and nearly 700 special events may be found on the Missouri History Museum’s website. This site is very user-friendly for both screen reading and screen enlarging software. The pages are well organized under headings and contain both clearly labeled links and detailed, informative text. History buffs, students, and scholars will also wish to check out the links to “History Happens Here,” the museum’s weekly online magazine, as well as the site’s developing cross-collection search engine, an excellent resource for conducting research.

For any questions about any of the services offered at the museum, please contact:

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