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THE  TIMES**The world's 50 best museums**

An Aztec mosaic mask from Mexico, held by the British Museum

Rachel Campbell-Johnston

Last updated at 12:01AM, May 11 2013

Chinese armies, Viking ships, Egyptian jewels — and Elvis's gold Cadillac: our expert guide to the wonders of the world

[Click here for The Times 50 best art galleries in the world](#)

Museums are not musty repositories of outmoded relics. They are vivid compendiums of our cultural life.

To step into these often architecturally spectacular structures is to find yourself plunged into the story of human life.

So, if you want to take time out on your travels, to stop and listen to a few gripping chapters, *The Times* has commissioned a panel of inveterate museum-goers to compile a list of top spots. Whether you would like to see Ancient Greek gods or the Chinese terracotta army, read the letters of the English Romantics or imagine yourself aboard a Viking ship, meet Dippy the Diplodocus, or admire the ruby slippers in which Dorothy skipped down the Yellow Brick Road, there is something in a museum somewhere for everyone.

In this list we have included institutions that have an emphasis on historical, cultural and scientific artefacts. Museums primarily concerned with visual art, such as the Louvre, the Rijksmuseum or New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, are included on our list of [the 50 best art galleries in the world](#)

1 Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC

Nineteen museums and galleries, nine research centres and a zoo: that's just for starters. The Smithsonian was founded in 1846 with funds bequeathed by James Smithson — a British scientist who believed there should be, in the new United States, an "establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge". From the art of the Hudson River School at the American Art Museum, to the 4,000-year-old Ancient Egyptian glass on view at the Sackler Gallery, or the ruby slippers from *The Wizard of Oz* at the American History Museum, the Smithsonian, fondly known as "America's attic", could devour a lifetime of viewing. **Don't miss** Charles Lindbergh's plane, *The Spirit of St Louis*, hanging in the National Air and Space Museum

2 British Museum, London

Thanks to its brilliant director, Neil MacGregor, the good old BM is finally getting the love it has long deserved. Even if you haven't got tickets for *Pompeii and Herculaneum* — the exhibition currently wowing visitors and critics — a stroll

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galleries never disappoints. Will you try the argument that the Parthenon marbles should have stayed in Greece? It's doubtful, if they had, they'd be in the shape they are now. These days the museum works closely with other countries' institutions. Last year's show, *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World*, was a particularly fine example.

Don't miss the Great Dish from the Mildenhall hoard, a remarkable find of late Roman silver

3 Acropolis Museum, Athens

On the ancient road leading to the "sacred rock" upon which the magnificent Parthenon presides over Athens, lies the Acropolis Museum, a gleaming new home for a host of the most famous legacies of classical civilisation. Hundreds of thousands of visitors now turn up annually to see the cultural wonders of a glorious past, which stand amid floods of natural light with amazing views of the original temple as an evocative backdrop.

Don't miss the pediments of the Hekatompedon

4 Sir John Soane's Museum, London

My favourite ... by Lucy Worsley

Luckily for me, I live only a short walk from one of the world's best museums. Sir John Soane's Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields isn't just the home of an architectural conjurer (his hidden mirrors brilliantly trick you into thinking that all the rooms are bigger than they are). It also contains a zany collection of classical antiquities displayed as you've never seen before, and it's an immersive trip back to domestic life in Regency London.

Don't miss the Picture Room with its secret panels and hidden paintings

5 American Museum of Natural History, New York

The Star of India: at 563 carats, the world's largest gem-quality blue star sapphire; more dinosaurs than you could shake a stick at (and even a dinosaur mummy); a life-size model of a great blue whale; the 63ft Great Canoe, made by the people of the Northwest Coast and the Willemette Meteorite, discovered in Oregon and weighing almost 16 tonnes can all be found here. Famously, it's a kids' delight, but there's plenty of serious scientific interest in this museum founded in 1869 by the father of President Theodore Roosevelt.

Don't miss the Rose Centre for Earth and Space, a gorgeous glass installation hung round the old Hayden Planetarium

6 Imperial War Museum

Beginning with a museum in London to commemorate the sacrifices of the First World War, the IWM now has five branches across the UK. IWM London is closed until July 29 for major refurbishment — but don't let that put you off. Head to Manchester where until September you can see *Remembering 9/11*, an exhibition that includes a 7m section of twisted steel taken from the wreckage of the towers. On the Thames, climb aboard *HMS Belfast* and learn what life was like on a cruiser during the Second World War. Or try the Churchill War Rooms below Whitehall to see where Churchill and his Cabinet saw out the war.

Don't miss the permanent Holocaust Exhibition at IWM London

7 Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

This extensive complex of courtyards surrounded by a maze-like sprawl was once the home of the magnificent Ottoman sultans along with the members of their enormous households. Built by Sultan Mehmed II, the conqueror of Byzantine Constantinople, on the banks of the Bosphorus, it was designed as a palace that included everything from a hospital to a bakery, a mosque to a mint. History comes alive as you pass the fountain where the official executioner would wash his hands and sword after finishing his grisly job or peruse one of the world's finest collections of Islamic artefacts.

Don't miss the prophet Muhammad's cloak and sword

8 Palace of Versailles, France

It began as Louis XIII's humble hunting lodge on the outskirts of Paris. But in 1682, his son Louis XIV, the Sun King, transformed it into a supremely opulent palace, a symbol of royal absolutism and an embodiment of classical French art. Now it stands as a treasure-crammed museum, a monument to France's ancien régime, when Marie Antoinette and her coterie would pursue their sybaritic pleasures amid immaculately planned gardens. But this is also the French "cradle of liberty" where the long-suffering people of Paris made their final stand against their king.

Don't miss the hall of mirrors

9 Victoria & Albert Museum, London

A magnificent Victorian confection that covers more than 12 acres of Central London, the V&A is the largest museum of fine and decorative arts in the world. Visitors can lose themselves for hours amid the maze of galleries which became what the museum's first director, Sir Henry Cole, described as a "refuge for destitute collections". (At the very least, he hoped, it would "furnish a powerful antidote to the gin palace.") With more than 10,000 paintings as well as furniture, textiles and ceramics, it crams the story of world culture into what one director called its "extremely capacious handbag".

Don't miss *Tipu's Tiger*, an 18th-century Indian automaton showing a tiger savaging a European man

10 National Museum of China, Beijing

The stern stone façade that flanks almost the entire Eastern side of Tiananmen Square may not look particularly enticing. But the collection of more than one million objects that it houses spans Chinese history from Yuanmou Man of 1.7 mi

ago to the end of the last imperial dynasty. Here are rare Chinese treasures that cannot be matched by any other museum in the world.

Don't miss the Simuwu Ding cooking vessel, more than 3,000 years old

11 Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford

A fantastical cabinet of curiosities, this ethnographical collection tucked away at the back of the natural history museum in Oxford feels a bit like the attic of some mad Victorian collector. The longer you stay, the less it feels like some weird heterogeneous clutter and the more it seems like a holistic monument to the wonders of the human imagination.

Don't miss the shrunken heads

12 Science Museum, London

What makes the modern world the place it is? The Science Museum goes a long way to providing the answer — or at least making you think awfully hard about the question. Enter through the great gallery which takes you on a chronological tour of intellectual and industrial development: wonder at Robert Stephenson's original *Rocket* locomotive, HumphryDavy's safety lamps and Crick and Watson's DNA model, as well as the Command Module from Apollo 10.

Don't miss Charles Babbage's Difference Engine No 1, a forerunner to the computer

13 Israel Museum, Jerusalem

A flagship for its nation, this campus-style museum, spreading across the high crown of the Valley of the Cross, houses art and antiquities from a carved female figurine which is commonly considered the oldest known artwork in the world through the elaborate interior of an 18th-century Suriname synagogue to a nail which attests to the practice of crucifixion in Christ's time.

Don't miss the Dead Sea Scrolls

14 Emperor Qin Shi Huang's Mausoleum Site museum, Xian, China

Erected on the site of a vast underground necropolis, this newly built Chinese museum, following recent archaeological discoveries, has been placed firmly on the cultural world's "must see" map. This is the home of the terracotta army of more than 8,000 life-sized warriors, all individual, their moulded expressions distinct, their uniforms, hairstyles, weapons and armour varied according to rank. They have stood sentinel over Qin's burial site for more than two millennia, an incredible testimony to the skill of their sculptors as well as to the martial power of a mighty emperor who managed to unify China by sheer force.

Don't miss the kneeling archers: lifelike and poised for action

15 Hunterian Museum, Royal College of Surgeons, London

My favourite ... by Lisa Jardine

My favourite exhibit is the four varnished wooden "tables" brought to England from Italy by diarist John Evelyn in 1646, on which are laid out, as they were in the body, the dissected nervous system, veins and arteries of a human cadaver. They are a fine example of the museum's attractive blend of beauty, medical science and idiosyncrasy. The displays — all glass, light and airiness — and the particularly clear explanations on the captions for the thousands of medical specimens ranged on the museum's banks of shelves, capture the sheer exuberance of this 18th-century surgeon's brilliant collection.

Don't miss the exquisite, tiny ivory figurine of a woman, which opens up to reveal her internal organs

16 Jewish Museum, Berlin

Daniel Libeskind's striking, jarring structure opened in Berlin in 2001. Through its zinc façades run five "voids", concrete spaces which represent "that which can never be exhibited ... Humanity reduced to ashes", according to the architect. But much can be exhibited, and the Jewish Museum does a thorough and serious job. Addressing German history through the lens of Jewish life, it shows how Jews were increasingly integrated into German society from medieval times until the terrible fracture brought about by the rise of National Socialism.

Don't miss *Fallen Leaves*: an installation of 10,000 faces punched out of steel

17 Canadian Museum of Civilisation, Ottawa

Opened in 1989 and designed by Douglas Cardinal — an architect of Blackfoot ancestry who is also responsible for the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC — its curving limestone walls and wide copper roof are in themselves ornaments to the banks of the Ottawa River. Inside, exhibitions chart 20,000 years of Canada's cultural history, from the First Nations people whose works are beautifully displayed, to the arrival of the Norse in Newfoundland, right up through to the genius of Glenn Gould.

Don't miss the six-beam Haida house in the Grand Hall

18 Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

The world's oldest university museum and home to Oxford's outstanding collection of art and archaeology, this beautiful Neoclassical building houses objects that amount to a vast jigsaw puzzle picture of civilisation. Thanks to a major redevelopment, civilisations which, in their era, spoke to one another — 13th-century Africa and China for instance — keep up their conversations in a way that no other museum can offer.

Don't miss the collection of Raphael drawings

19 Neues Museum, Berlin

Once the jewel in the crown of Museum Island, the Neues Museum opened in 1855 to house Egyptian and prehistoric art, although its lavishly decorated interiors — designed by Friedrich August Stiller — were almost as dazzling as the exhibits. In the Second World War, Allied bombs reduced the building to a ruin. Now recreated by British architect David Chipperfield, the museum reopened in 2009 and its returned exhibits include the 3,300-year-old bust of Queen Nefertiti. Chipperfield's work is an extraordinary shell which reveals Stiller's original intentions without whitewashing the scars of war.

Don't miss the bust of Nefertiti

20 Centrale Montemartini Museum, Rome

My favourite ... by Mary Beard

The combination of Roman sculpture and a disused power station may seem an odd one. But the industrial fittings of Centrale Montemartini, which provided Rome with electricity until the 1960s, are a brilliant backdrop for the gleaming marble of some of ancient Rome's best sculpture: from the extraordinary black basalt statue of Nero's mother, Agrippina, to the elaborate tombstone of an 11-year-old prodigy who died of exhaustion after entering a grown-up poetry competition. If only it had a café, it would be perfect.

Don't miss the Roman ivory doll, perfectly preserved in the tomb of her young owner

21 Natural History Museum, London

From Dippy the 26m-long diplodocus to Archie, the 8m squid, there are many familiar faces behind the spectacular Romanesque façade of the Natural History Museum. It would take a lifetime to explore the vast, ever-changing collections and another lifetime to comprehend the backstage operation where boffins have been naming new beetles and making biological breakthroughs for more than a century.

Don't miss the Broken Hill skull — one of the most important relics of evolution

22 Museum of the Moving Image, New York

Before they made films in Hollywood, they made them in Queens: this museum, which has recently been extensively renovated, is housed in the former Astoria Studios complex. Here you'll find one of the largest and most comprehensive collection of artefacts relating to the art, history, and technology of the moving image. And it's loads of fun: you don't have to be a geek to be fascinated by what you'll find here — dub your voice into The Wizard of Oz, or alter the soundtrack of a film so a chance sequence goes from sinister to jolly. Brilliant.

Don't miss the fantastic collection of early arcade games

23 Musée national du Moyen Âge, Paris

This is a museum of many identities. Also known as Musée de Cluny, it was built on the ruins of a Roman baths and became the Abbot of Cluny's mansion in the 15th century and housed a surgical amphitheatre in the 19th century. In 1843, Alexandre Du Sommerard's collection of relics of France's Gothic past went on show. Go for the collection of tapestries, medieval sculptures and manuscripts.

Don't miss the Lady and the Unicorn tapestry cycle

24 Museum of Jurassic Technology, LA

My favourite ... by Marina Warner

It has every feature of an old-style museum, a Pitt Rivers or a Smithsonian, complete with Acoustiguide and an exit through a shop selling replicas. But it feels like Through the Looking Glass territory, skewed, eerie and scaled down. Some rooms tell of weird scientific experiments (flying through lead walls, improbable insects' lifecycles), others unfold singular histories (heroines of stage and screen; cat's cradles of the world). What is real, what is invented? Nothing is as it seems.

Don't miss the haunting memorial to the soprano Madelena Delani

25 Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai

Formerly the Prince of Wales Museum, this extraordinarily beautiful building commemorates a visit by the Prince (later King George V) in 1905. A splendid example of the Indo-Saracenic style, the building itself is worth a visit alone, but the collection is a gorgeous introduction to Indian history and culture. Head for the stunning collection of 2,000 miniature paintings, the sculptures of Hindu deities or the Buddhist thangkas.

Don't miss the miniature portrait of Shah Jahan, grief-stricken creator of the Taj Mahal

26 Die Neue Sammlung, Munich

Established 100 years ago with the aim of housing only modern work, the New Collection is considered one of the first design museums. Among its 80,000 objects are bicycle prototypes, furniture and graphics. It has another collection in Nuremberg, which opened in 2000.

Don't miss Munich's two floors on vehicle design

27 Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

Built ten years after an atomic bomb obliterated the city, the museum examines the lead-up to and effect of the explosion through objects and survivors' testimonies. It also tracks the current stores of nuclear weapons across the world. Moving,

shocking and still profoundly relevant.

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Don't miss the wristwatch, stopped at 8.15am, the time of the bombing

28 Pergamon Museum, Berlin

This matryoshka doll of a museum is a shrine to classical antiquities. You'll find colossal reconstructions of buildings such as the Market Gate of Miletus, transported from Turkey, and the Great Altar of Pergamon (2nd century BC). At the Pergamon, you get three museums in one: the Collection of Classical Antiquities, the Museum of the Ancient Near East and the Museum of Islamic Art.

Don't miss the Great Altar of Pergamon

29 Museum of Natural History, Vienna

Everything that leaps, flies or scuttles, everything that pounces, swims or creeps, finds a home in the ornate rooms of this palace, dedicated to the marvels of the natural world. From dinosaur skeletons to displays of glittering insects, from cases stacked with stuffed crocodiles to one of the largest meteorite collections in the world, this museum has something to fascinate everyone. Research projects under way here probe the origins of the solar system and the evolution of prehistoric culture.

Don't miss the Venus of Willendorf

30 Egyptian Museum, Turin

If you want a really cared for and well explained Egyptian Museum (the collections are as good as Cairo — with the one exception of King Tut!) then this should be first on your list.

Don't miss the exquisite painted model boat, from the tomb of Shemes

31 Portsmouth Historic Dockyard

My favourite ... by Dan Snow

It has *HMS Victory*. I never tire of seeing her chequered paintwork or smelling her unmistakable cocktail of pitch, paint and hemp. Victory was the British flagship in five fleet actions, including Nelson's victory at Trafalgar. The ship is a giant embodiment of the centuries of British naval supremacy, an easy-to-understand distillation of how our strange little islands once dominated the world as we spread our genes, politics, language and vices to every corner of the planet. And Victory is just the start, Portsmouth has much more: HMS Warrior 1860, the Tudor Mary Rose and galleries crammed with treasures, any one of which would catapult it onto a world's best list.

Don't miss the objects raised from *Mary Rose*. The cooking utensils in particular are perfectly preserved and look like they're from a fashionable interiors shop

32 Vasa Museum, Stockholm

More than 29 million people have visited the wreck of Vasa, a 64-gun warship that sank in 1628, less than a mile into her maiden voyage. The 69m-long ship is a symbol of Sweden's "great power period". While the cannons were salvaged soon after the sinking, it wasn't until April 24, 1961 — 333 years on — that Vasa returned to the surface. Just seven months later, the dockyard opened as a museum. For the next 17 years, Vasa was sprayed with chemicals to preserve the wood. The current Vasa Museum opened in 1990.

Don't miss the exhibition on how the wreck of the ship was discovered

33 Bob Marley Museum, Kingston, Jamaica

Most tourists don't do much in Jamaica except lounge on beaches and idle in bars, but the island's most-visited tourist attraction is the Bob Marley Museum. Decked out in red, yellow and green, this was where Marley lived and worked until his death in 1981. Fans can see a recreation of the Wailers' Wail'n Soul'm Trenchtown record store.

Don't miss the bulletholes on the walls from his attempted assassination in 1976

34 Australian Museum, Sydney

Though its core is a fascinating animal, mineral and fossil collection — including taxidermied specimens of all the creatures peculiar to this continent — the museum prides itself on its research into Australia's indigenous cultures. Displays cover not just the art of the aboriginal people but of the Pacific islands too.

Don't miss the chalk head from the Solomon Islands

35 Museo dell' Automobile, Turin

My favourite ... by Stephen Bayley

Paolo Conte sang that a sports car should smell of "girls, paint and speed". There is nowhere better to test this stirring proposition than this museum. Sited on the banks of the Po, this spectacular building with a crazily banked test-track on its roof has more than 200 cars on display. Silently and elegiacally they demonstrate that great power that cars have to move us — if not on the road, then in the imagination.

Don't miss the 1956 Fiat Multipla: proof that Italians do not separate life from art

36 Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, India

The largest one-man collection of antiques in the world finds a home here. If nothing else, Salar Jung bears testimony to an obsession that took up most of the life of Mir Yousuf Ali Khan, an Indian bachelor fascinated by everything from priceless jewel-embossed tiffin boxes to gold-threaded turbans.

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Don't miss the collection of clocks from all over the world is virtually unparalleled

37 Boerhaave Museum, Netherlands

Named after the Leiden physician Herman Boerhaave, who received, among others, Peter the Great, Linnaeus and Voltaire as students, this is one of the most important scientific and medical history collections in the world. It includes a reconstructed anatomical theatre as well as the planetarium and telescope belonging to Christiaan Huygens.

Don't miss the Albinus brothers' gruesome collection of anatomical samples and medical instruments

38 Luxor Museum, Egypt

On a cornice overlooking the Nile stands the purpose-built fortress of Luxor Museum. The range of artefacts is small compared with the principal collection in Cairo — but this is deliberate. Luxor prides itself on the importance of its pieces and the uncluttered way they are displayed. This museum carries the spectator on a journey down the waters of the Nile.

Don't miss the gilded cow's head, from Tutankhamun's tomb

39 Zeugma Mosaic Museum, Turkey

This is the largest mosaic museum in the world and it opened only three years ago. The ancient city of Zeugma, thought to have been founded by one of Alexander the Great's generals, was not only a military centre but a crossroads for international commerce. Citizens decorated their villas with elaborate mosaics, commissioning art that not only bears testimony to taste but also informs us about the relationships between cultures over the centuries. This will surely become one of Turkey's must-see sites.

Don't miss the haunting Gypsy Girl

40 Coleridge Cottage, Somerset

My favourite ... by Richard Holmes

Lovingly restored by local subscription and the National Trust, this tiny but intensely atmospheric writer's museum is one of England's hidden gems. Here Coleridge wrote many of his masterpieces, including *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. You can inspect manuscripts and letters, learn about his walks with Wordsworth and Dorothy in the Quantock hills, and see the fireside where he sat with his baby Hartley and drafted *Frost at Midnight*.

Don't miss the enchanting garden, where you can retreat to Coleridge's arbour and listen to a recording of the poem he wrote in its shade, *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison*

41 Museum of Wellington City & Sea, New Zealand

New Zealand's capital city has a tiny population (smaller than Bristol) but a great heritage, as this museum proves. Set on three floors, it takes in social and cultural history from early Maori and European settlement through to its maritime past, including a memorial to the 1968 Wahine ferry disaster.

Don't miss A Millennium Ago, a show about Maori creation legends

42 Robben Island Museum, South Africa

Nelson Mandela spent 18 of his 27 imprisoned years on the 3.3km-long island in Table Bay, 7km off Cape Town. Between the 17th and 20th centuries, the island was a jail for political prisoners, a centre for "insane females" and a leper colony. The museum was established in 1997. Two years later the island was named a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Don't miss the island tour

43 Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City

The most visited museum in the country contains some of the greatest artefacts of pre-Hispanic Mexico, from Mayan treasures to the Aztec Stone of the Sun, a 22-tonne carved disc that functioned as a calendar. The museum's 20th-century buildings are tucked away in Chapultepec park, once sacred land to the Aztecs.

Don't miss the colossal stone heads of the Olmecs — the first major civilisation in Mexico, the people of which were building cities 500 years before the foundation of Rome

44 Viking Ship Museum, Oslo

If you are still in doubt as to the artistry of the Vikings, this austere yet stunning installation will convince you. Here are the remains of three great wooden ships, two of which — the Oseberg ship and the Gokstad ship — look ready to set sail. These were burial ships and their grandeur makes it easy to imagine the importance of the people who had been entombed within them.

Don't miss the Buddha bucket, a pail with decoration, including two figures of men in the lotus position

45 Grande Galerie d'évolution, Paris

Inside an imposing 19th-century building in the Jardin des Plantes is an awe-inspiring Darwinian version of Noah's Ark — elephants marching across the savannah, a giant squid waving its tentacles and birds suspended from the ceiling. Opened in 1889 and renovated in 1994, the grand spectacle is backed up with displays on evolution, biodiversity and endangered species.

Don't miss the tiger trying to bring down an elephant: an Attenborough moment in freeze-frame

46 Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum, New York

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How big is an aircraft carrier? Really big — as you'll discover when you visit Intrepid, a Second World War ship moored in the Hudson River. You can discover what life was like aboard and see a collection of aircraft, including an A-12 Blackbird spy plane, a Concorde and now the Space Shuttle Enterprise.

Don't miss Enterprise; the space shuttle pavilion reopens on July 10 after being damaged by Hurricane Sandy

47 National Museum of Ireland

This museum — on three sites in Dublin and one in Co Mayo — is full of history, natural history and the legacy of Ireland's difficult politics. There is prehistoric gold, Viking relics and medieval ecclesiastical metalwork as well as artefacts and documents relating to the Easter Rising of 1916. A rich and complex hoard.

Don't miss the Tara Brooch, one of the finest examples of medieval metalwork

48 River and Rowing Museum, Henley on Thames

A long hall of oak and glass — designed by David Chipperfield — houses a modern history of the Thames, the town of Henley and the sport of rowing, as well as a Wind in the Willows exhibition. A celebration of the British enthusiasm for "messing about in boats".

Don't miss the interactive "in the cox's seat" racing experience

49 Ghibli Museum, Tokyo

This Gaudi-esque building in a leafy suburb of Tokyo is a showcase for Studio Ghibli — the Japanese animators, led by Hayao Miyazaki, responsible for cinematic masterpieces such as the Oscar-winning Spirited Away. This is the antidote to Disney World, captivating for adults and children alike.

Don't miss the giant nekobus — half cat, half, erm . . . bus

50 Country Music Hall of Fame, Nashville

Home to Johnny Cash, Townes van Zandt, Hank Williams and Dolly Parton, the country music capital boasts a giant, piano-shaped museum dedicated to America's finest guitar twangers and lonesome crooners. Hundreds of costumes and instruments make this a high-watermark for music museums.

Don't miss Elvis Presley's gold Cadillac, featuring a 45rpm record player, refrigerator, cocktail dispenser, electric shoe buffer and six gold-plated records

Entries written by Nancy Durrant, Neil Fisher, Tom Gatti, Fiona Wilson, Rachel Campbell-Johnston and Erica Wagner. The Times list of the 50 best museums was compiled with nominations from: Stephen Bayley, cultural critic; Mary Beard, classicist; Rachel Campbell-Johnston, chief art critic, The Times; Richard Holmes, biographer; Lisa Jardine, historian; Dan Snow, historian; Erica Wagner, literary editor, The Times; Marina Warner, author; Lucy Worsley, historian

Map icon: Inner coffin of Shepenmehyt. From Qurna, Thebes, Egypt. 26th Dynasty, about 600 BC. © The Trustees of the British Museum

23 comments



Amy McDonald

6 people listening

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EFE AYKUTA 22 hours ago
Well done Britain

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

mikec 1 day ago
You appear to have missed out the National Railway Museum at York. This is one of Britain's finest.

1 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

Mary Elizabeth Delaney 1 day ago
The National Museum of Ireland's branch in Co.Mayo is known as the Museum Of Country Life. It is excellent and

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was so glad to see it on the list. I've been there twice. It's well worth the visit. I would put V&A closer to the top. (Love that museum! It is awe inspiring! But, I was stunned to see NYC's Met. Museum of Art off the list. What's that about? Rename the list top 51 museums and stick The Met on your list!

Recommend Reply



Tom Gatti

8 hours ago

@Mary Elizabeth Delaney Thanks for commenting - the Met was actually No 6 in our 50 best galleries list last week: <http://thetim.es/12zWsTi>

Technically it's a "museum" but we made a distinction between an emphasis on visual art (for our purposes, a gallery) and an emphasis on cultural or historical artefacts (for our purposes a museum)

Recommend Reply

Margaret Tunney

1 day ago

Love the picture of the Lewis chessmen. Thanks.

Recommend Reply

Peter Evans

1 day ago

It is quite futile to prepare a list of favourites of anything - towns, foods, or museums. It all depends on personal taste and mood. Too much to see is overwhelming. Single theme museums are best, like the Churchill war rooms, or most shocking and moving, like Auschwitz, or just a single exhibit - the 2,400 year old head of Tollund man which sleeps in Silkeborg Museum, Denmark. A sacrifice older than Christ's. But bringing both alive.

Recommend Reply

Alex Honeker

1 day ago

The "Country Music Hall of Fame" before Cairo or The Louvre?! WTF? Who made this list?

1 Recommend Reply



Mary Elizabeth Delaney

1 day ago

I know , scary right?!

Recommend Reply



Tom Gatti

8 hours ago

@Alex Honeker The Louvre was actually No 8 in our 50 best art galleries list last week: <http://thetim.es/12zWsTi> Technically of course it's a "museum" but we made a distinction between an emphasis on visual art (for our purposes, a gallery) and an emphasis on cultural or historical artefacts (for our purposes a museum).

As for Cairo, our panellists all felt that despite King Tut it was dusty and outdated - we felt the Egyptian museums in Turin and Luxor have surpassed it.

Recommend Reply

Claire Sharp

2 days ago

Er, Cairo ? King Tut, plus the general early 20th century feel to the way the exhibits are presented. Indiana Jones would have been at home here.

1 Recommend Reply

Marije Gould

2 days ago

Hmmm. Seems to be slightly in favour of UK museums (I agree they are great) but what about the Uffizi (or some of the other splendid museums in Firenze), the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam? The Getti in LA? Or if we are favouring London, the Tate Modern?

Recommend Reply



David O'Gorman

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@Marije Gould

If you go to the search box at the top of the page and enter "50 greatest galleries", you will access an article published a few days ago in which the Uffizi, the Rijksmuseum and 48 other outstanding galleries are mentioned. The article is very good, but it does not mention the Thyssen-Bornemisza Gallery in Madrid - a lamentable omission.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

Tom Gatti

8 hours ago

@Marije Gould Good point - the Uffizi, the Rijksmuseum and Tate Modern were all in our 50 best art galleries list last week - <http://thetim.es/12zWsTi>

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

Diane Purkiss

2 days ago

Maybe a bit short on the quirky? All big attics look alike; each madness-driven assemblage is beautiful in its own way.

So how about the Musee de la Poupee and the Musee de la Magie in Paris, and the Undertakers' Museum in Vienna? And the La Brea Tar pits Museum in Los Angeles?

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

andy allison

2 days ago

The list, like any top X of anything, cannot satisfy us all but RCJ is surely pulling our legs if she misses The Hermitage but includes a boat museum in Henley! What happened to [Musée du Louvre](#)? I also believe that Versailles is NOT a museum.! Come on Rachel, answer your critics please.

2 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



Tom Gatti

8 hours ago

@andy allison The Louvre was No 8 in our best art galleries list last week - <http://thetim.es/12zWsTi>

As for Versailles, it's a borderline case. But it was designated as a museum of French history in the 19th century and it still frames itself in those terms: <http://bit.ly/10HhUtZ>

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

John Hatch

2 days ago

The Curator of the Museum of Ancient Jokes writes:

Sir,

I say, I say, I say.

Humbug.

Yours etc

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

C.B.

2 days ago

Ed.: Lucy Worsley's name has dropped off the list of nominators at the end.

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

Stu Whisson

2 days ago

One huge one missing off the list is the amazing Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia.

4 [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)



Tom Gatti

8 hours ago

@Stu Whisson Good point - the Hermitage was No 3 in our best art galleries list last week - <http://thetim.es/12zWsTi>

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[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Richard Iestyn Hughes**

2 days ago

Hmm. I usually put up and shut up, but the lack of any of the National Museums of Wales in this list is disappointing. As a group of thematic museums, they are worthy of a mention (everything from slate industry to shipping to rural life, from archaeology to contemporary art). The St Fagans National History Museum on its own deserves a listing. An absolute gem.

3  [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Birgit Sanders**

2 days ago

Perhaps I missed if but I would have included the "Deutsches Museum" in München.

Looks like me and my family have a few places to visit now!!! Great list!

2  [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)**Ian Anthony Archibald**

2 days ago

How about the other hidden gem in London -The Wallace Collection, one families taste over three generations excellent and just behind Oxford Street.

1  [Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

Livelyre

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