

Reasons why I hate museums

You only go because you've been told to

Travel guides are filled to the brim with listings for museums and art galleries, each less enticing than the last. After all, it's what sensible, sophisticated travellers do. The DK Eyewitness guide to Budapest happens to be on my desk. In its opening "at a glance" chapter, the very first section is dedicated to the city's "best" museums and galleries. Forget beautiful parks, trendy bars and historic baths, what tourists really want to do - the author believes - is spend an unforgettable hour inside the city's thrill-a-minute Ethnographical Museum. Delve deeper into the guide and you'll find more **obscure** but unmissable "sights", such as the Golden Eagle Pharmacy Museum and the Gizi Bajor Memorial Museum. Who in their right mind wants to spend their precious time off learning about the life and times of a Hungarian actress?

Before stepping inside, ask yourself - and answer honestly - whether this is *really* what you want to do. I had an **epiphany** on a recent day trip to Florence. A colleague told me that on no account should I leave the city without visiting the Uffizi. But when my friend and I arrived at the gallery, post-lunch, queueing times were estimated at up to 45 minutes. I was torn, but she simply asked: "What do you *really* feel like doing?" We left the gallery, bought a bottle of red from a nearby deli, pinched a couple of cardboard cups from a cafe, and spent the next few hours slumped by the Arno, enjoying idle conversation while staring wistfully at the Ponte Vecchio. It was wonderful.

There are some decent museums. I enjoyed a trip to the Old Operating Theatre and Museum in London Bridge; while the Pitts Rivers Museum in Oxford is an undisputed gem. But perhaps that's because I find human organs in pickling jars, trophy scalps and amputation equipment endlessly compelling. Ceramics, on the other hand, are just dull. As is - though this is an opinion that will no doubt upset many, including the colleague who urged me to visit the Uffizi - religious art. On a recent trip to Bruges, I visited the city's Groeningemuseum. Its collection consisted almost entirely of biblical scenes by Renaissance and Baroque artists. Yes, I have a **very** limited grounding in art history, but to my eye - and to those of many others, I venture - they all looked the same. With each new room I grew more disinterested, and my stride lengthened.

The atmosphere is funereal

If you want to see tourists shuffling in silence down hospital-like corridors, bored security guards, and jobsworths waiting to pounce on



anyone who dares to laugh, send a text message or eat a biscuit, then museums are for you.

You've no idea what you're looking at

Barring a learned few, museum visitors are pretty clueless when it comes to, say, Oriental tapestry, or ancient Egyptian earthenware. Yet museums - even the best funded - assume a worrying degree of knowledge, offering painfully little information about the items on display. How many people will be enlightened by an **inscription** that reads "clay pot, 1200-1300, Russia"?

Even the staff don't really have a clue. Back in 2005, the street artist Banksy managed to hang a piece of fake prehistoric rock art, **depicting** a cave man with a shopping trolley, on the walls of the British Museum. Three days passed before anyone noticed.

The interactive displays are useless, and often out of order

Typically bunged in to justify a renewal of grant funding, they are also, suggests Telegraph Travel's Joanna Symons, usually "dominated by a cabal of large intimidating children - so yours don't get a look in and get fed up. If you do get a go [the interactive displays] are shallow and irrelevant - so no one learns anything - and the controls are grubby and sticky from too many Coca-Cola fingers."

There's nothing fun for adults

Why is innovation solely employed for younger visitors? Do they really believe adults are sufficiently entertained by a neatly arranged collection of pewter spoons?

They're too crowded

In no small part because most people make a beeline to the only painting they've heard of, resulting in scenes like this:

They cost a fortune in public money

Major UK institutions, such as the British Museum and the Natural History Museum, typically each receive around £40m of taxpayers' money every year. Yes, they provide wider economic benefits, but it makes those boasts about "free" entry ring somewhat hollow.

Entry fees are pricey, even then

Visitors to the 9/11 Museum in New York are expected to pay \$24 (£14.40) for the privilege, the Vatican Museums in Rome costs €16.00 (£12.80) to enter, while tickets for the Hermitage in Amsterdam are €15 (£12).



The **extortionate** entry fees for the special exhibitions in London's "free" museums also deserves a mention. Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs, for example, currently at the Tate Modern, costs an eye-watering £18 (or a bargain £16 for concessions).

Most of the objects are kept out of sight

For example, just one per cent of the British Museum's collection of eight million items is on show. There would be more room if they returned those pesky marbles...

It's all on the internet, anyway

The wonderful **Google Art** project means you can view thousands of masterpieces from galleries around the world in stunningly high resolution, without encountering the aforementioned selfie-takers.

The gift shops and cafes are a rip-off

No trip is complete without being asked to exit through the gift shop, where you'll be given the option of purchasing overpriced postcards and novelty mugs. Even the 9/11 Memorial Museum couldn't resist, offering tasteless souvenirs such as a cuddly "Search and Rescue Plush Dog", a USA-shaped cheese platter (with heart symbols marking the spots where the hijacked planes crashed), and a 9/11 Memorial umbrella ("Show your support for the 9/11 Memorial with this **collapsible** umbrella...") when it first opened.

Sometimes the works are fake (in China, anyway)

Earlier this year the Lucheng Museum, in the Chinese province of Liaoning, was investigated by police who found thousands of counterfeits among its collection of 8,000 items. And last year the 60 million yuan (£6.4 million) Jibaozhai Museum, located in Jizhou, a city in the northern province of Hebei, shut its doors amid claims that many of its cultural treasures were in fact forgeries. Among the most striking errors were artefacts engraved with writing purportedly showing that they dated back more than 4,000 years to the times of China's Yellow Emperor. However, according to a report in the Shanghai Daily, the writing appeared in simplified Chinese characters, which only came into widespread use in the 20th century. The collection also contained a "Tang Dynasty" five-colour porcelain vase despite the fact that this technique was only invented hundreds of years later, during the Ming Dynasty. The museum's owner later reportedly died of "an anger-induced heart-attack".



Essential words for speaking and writing

1. **Obscure** – not well known
We went to see one of Shakespeare's more obscure plays.
2. **Epiphany** – a sudden and surprising moment of understanding
She had an epiphany and realized it was time to leave her job and become a full-time artist.
3. **Inscription** – words written in the front of a book or cut in stone or metal
There was an inscription carved over the doorway.
4. **Depict** – to show an image of somebody/something in a picture
A painting depicting the Virgin and Child
5. **Extortionate** – (of prices, etc.) much too high
They are offering loans at extortionate rates of interest.
6. **Collapsible** – that can be folded flat or made into a smaller shape that uses less space
A collapsible chair

