



EXPLORING ST. LOUIS

FROM A BLIND PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 2009, Lighthouse for the Blind's See the Future Program began a project to stimulate awareness and creativity among local museums and cultural venues in reference to making their exhibits and attractions accessible and engaging for patrons who are blind or visually impaired. These efforts not only resulted in a re-assessment and appraisal of present accommodations, but they also led to many new partnerships between Lighthouse and local venues to develop new opportunities for blind and visually impaired individuals to experience history, theatre, science, astronomy, wildlife, recreation, and the arts. It was soon realized that our investigations yielded a plethora of information and insights that visually impaired individuals would likely find invaluable when exploring St. Louis and its many attractions, information that surpasses what is typically provided online. As a result, to benefit the blind and visually impaired residents and visitors to the St. Louis region, we have compiled our findings into one comprehensive St. Louis Arts and Entertainment Guide, written from the perspective of a blind individual.

For questions on this guide or to request an evaluation for your organization, please get in touch with Seyoon Choi, Blind Community Enrichment Program Associate at artsandentertainment@lhindustries.com or call 314.423.4333.



GETTING AROUND



GETTING AROUND

METRO TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

Ready to explore St. Louis? Below is the list of all the available means of transportation options in the region, ranging from fixed-route mass transit to door-to-door services and more. Remember to have exact change, to tip drivers if applicable, and to check how late these services run when planning a trip.

Metro Call-A-Ride paratransit service:

A door-to-door service for residents with a proven disability. Interested residents may sign up and book rides by calling one of the following numbers. Note that advanced reservation, up to three days in advance is required for this service, along with exact address and arrival times. You may cancel your scheduled trip up to four hours prior to the scheduled pick-up window to avoid a no-show record.

Toll Free: (888) 652-3617 | (314) 652-3617

Metro Bus and Metro Link: St. Louis' City and County bus and light rail Transit System.

<http://www.metrostlouis.org>

Missouri Phone: (314) 231-2345

Text: (314) 207-9786

Transit SECURITY: ((314) 300-0188

Illinois Phone: (618) 271-2345

E-mail: transitinformation@metrostlouis.org

A fixed-route bus and light rail public transportation system are available across the St. Louis region.

NEW to Metro is its official Transit mobile app found on both iOS and Android devices. Plan a trip, purchase electronic tickets, check scheduled and real-time departures, and get audio guidance when it is time to disembark.

Download Transit On the App Store & Google Play

GETTING AROUND

RIDE SHARE & TAXI SERVICES

Ride Share Services (Uber & Lyft)

New to the transportation industries are rideshare platforms, which are low-cost, on-demand door-to-door services. Drivers are found based on your current location, and all drivers must pass necessary screenings and vehicle checks to partner with Uber and Lyft, two major rideshare platforms in the St. Louis region. No need to carry cash tips or exact fare, as requesting a ride, payment transactions, and tipping are handled through Uber and Lyft apps on your smartphone respectively, complete with email receipts at the end of your trip for a fully accessible experience.

PRO TIP: compare prices by entering the same destination on both Uber & Lyft for the most affordable rides as they provide nearly identical experiences.

Download Uber on the App Store & Google Play

Download Lyft on the App Store & Google Play

Popular Local Taxi services:

Laclede Cab Company

(314) 652-3456

St. Louis County Cab/Yellow Cab Company

(314) 991-5300



THEATRICAL VENUES



THEATRICAL VENUES

AUDIO DESCRIBED FILMS

Audio Described Films

Cinemas providing audio descriptions Service for the blind and visually impaired are available at the following theaters in the St. Louis area. Audio description, also referred to as a described video, is a form of narration used to provide information surrounding visual elements in a media, such as a film, television program, or at a theatrical performance to benefit blind and visually impaired consumers. Narrations are typically placed during natural pauses in the media audio and sometimes during dialog if necessary. Guests will be provided with a pair of wireless headsets which will seamlessly sync up with a film once the presentation begins. Headsets can be checked out for use from the guest services desk.

AMC Chesterfield 14 Cinema
291 Chesterfield Mall, Chesterfield, MO 63017
(636) 532-7326

AMC Creve Coeur 12 Cinema
10465 Olive Blvd, Creve Coeur, MO 63141
(314) 994-0946

Galleria 6 Cinemas at St. Louis Galleria
30 Saint Louis Galleria, St. Louis, MO 63117
(314) 725-0808

Marcus Des Peres Cinema
12701 Manchester Rd, Des Peres, Mo 63131
(314) 471-2239

Ronnie's cinema + IMAX Marcus Theatres
5320 S Lindbergh Blvd, St. Louis MO 63126
(314) 756-9352

THEATRICAL VENUES

POWELL HALL

Powell Hall

St. Louis Symphony
718 North Grand Blvd, St. Louis, MO 63103
(314) 533-2500

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 5 out of 5 stars

Transportation Accessibility: 5 out of 5 stars

Usher Staff: 5 out of 5 stars

Audio Description Availability: Not Applicable

Unaccompanied Visiting Experience: 4.5 out of 5 stars

Non-visual experience of group tours: 5 out of 5 stars.

Last evaluated on August 18, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate, assisted by Mrs. Cynthia Schon, Facilities Manager - Powell Hall

Attending a performance at Powell Hall is most certainly a one-of-a-kind experience. The building's acoustics complement the high degree of musical talent within the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, and seasonal concerts exhibit a diverse array of works by a variety of composers, ranging from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to George Gershwin to film composer John Williams. Blind and visually impaired visitors will find the Powell Hall staff extremely accommodating, the facility relatively easy to navigate, and the musical performance immensely impressive. The readily available usher staff enables a blind or visually impaired visitor to navigate the facility confidently and with minimal difficulty. Additional accommodations such as Braille signage and downloadable program notes provide visitors with easily accessible information about the facility's performances, services, and amenities. However, the auditory splendor of the orchestral performances, without a doubt, remains the Symphony's most enticing quality for both sighted and non-sighted patrons.

THEATRICAL VENUES

POWELL HALL

The first major advantage to visiting Powell Hall is its proximity to public transportation. Cabs, rideshare services, and other sighted drivers can drop off passengers directly in front of the main entrance. In addition, bus 70 has a stop immediately outside Powell Hall, as well as at the connecting Grand Metro Link Station, located one and a half miles south, which serves as a transfer point between Grand boulevard and Metro Link trains just beneath it.

Upon arriving at the hall, ushers stationed at several major points inside and out of the building make it easy to solicit assistance to find one's way into, around, and out of the facility. The ushers are often waiting on the sidewalk as patrons disembark from their vehicles and are prompt to check on patrons during intermission and after the performance if requested.

The ticket window is also conveniently located straight inside the main entrance. Although sighted assistance is likely necessary to locate one's designated seat, the logical and straightforward layout of the facility allows a blind or visually impaired individual to navigate the facility independently when given clear directions. Braille signage on restrooms and in the elevator further increases the potential for independent travel. Like most large crowd gatherings, however, the hallways can become especially crowded after the performance as everyone funnels in a mass movement towards the exits. As a result, it is recommended that blind or visually impaired individuals solicit sighted assistance when exiting the theatre.

Due to moderate to low lighting in the auditorium, the use of a white cane is strongly recommended for all low vision guests to navigate Powell Hall, minimizing any potential safety problems in navigating large, congested crowds.

THEATRICAL VENUES

POWELL HALL

If a visually impaired individual is interested in attending a performance at Powell Hall but cannot afford the regularly priced tickets, many available discount options make attending a symphony at Powell Hall very affordable for everyone. Individual student tickets are available for \$10.00 (Premium Orchestral Series) and \$25.00 (Live at Powell Hall Series) with proof of a valid student ID. Thanks to the generosity of the St. Louis Symphony, a limited number of complimentary ticket vouchers are available annually through the St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These are also on a first-come, first-serve basis. Interested individuals may reserve up to two complimentary tickets by calling the St. Louis Society for the Blind at 314-968-9000.

During certain performances, the Symphony may show a film on a cinema-like screen to both complement and enhance the musical performance. While audio descriptions are not available during the portion of the performance, the auditory presentation, however, surpasses anything heard in a modern cinema. Hearing the film score performed live really gives the listener a deeper appreciation for the talent and coordination that is involved in recording music for a motion picture. Blind patrons will enjoy this auditory sensation just as much as any sighted patron.

As one will quickly discover, there are no bad seats in the house from an auditory perspective, though the top-most balcony seats could easily be considered prime auditory seats. Dog guide handlers will need to take extra precautions when selecting a seat when purchasing tickets. Most rows of seats are not spacious enough to accommodate service animals but requesting accessible seating or an area with the least amount of foot traffic tends to work well for both the handler and their four-legged companion.

THEATRICAL VENUES

POWELL HALL

Be sure to check out the St. Louis Symphony's accessible and well-organized website prior to your visit. Here, patrons will find an event calendar for the current season, sound clips of signature pieces, and other available online amenities. Concert programs, for example, may easily be obtained in advance in an accessible format through the Symphony's website to be read with a screen reader or magnifier application of your choice. It is possible that there may be a limited number of large print programs available at the venue for low-vision guests.

Before the performance or during intermission, visitors may wish to purchase refreshments at one of two bars: one located on the ground floor, just off the main lobby, and another located on the lower terrace. Both bars offer large-print menus upon request, and visitors will find the staff extremely accommodating, willing to assist a patron by whatever means are necessary to make the individual's experience positive and enjoyable.

Originally conceived as a movie house, Powell Hall is adorned with elegant architecture, design, and history. Group tours of ten or more people are available free of charge upon request, allowing both sighted and visually impaired visitors to take in the building's rich history, grand décor, and typical backstage activity. The facility's flexibility on group sizes allows tour guides to adjust their presentation to suit the needs and interests of a particular individual or small group.

Overall, the hall's friendly and accommodating service, coupled with the impeccable performance by the professional orchestra, will be sure to make a visit to Powell Hall a truly memorable experience.

For specific details regarding performance times and ticket prices, please call the Powell Hall box office at (314) 534-1700.

THEATRICAL VENUES

THE FABULOUS FOX

The Fabulous Fox Theater

527 N Grand Blvd,
St. Louis, MO 63103
(314) 534-1678

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 4.9 out of 5 stars

Transportation Accessibility: 5 out of 5 stars

Usher Staff: 4.75 out of 5 stars

Quality & Availability of Live Audio Descriptions: 5 out of 5 stars

Unaccompanied Visiting Experience: 5 out of 5 stars

Non-visual experience of group tours: 5 out of 5 stars

Last updated on October 10, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate.

The Fabulous Fox Theatre is one of the city's great cultural and theatrical treasures. Originally conceived in the 1920s as a movie house, the Fox now serves as a professional theatre and concert venue that sponsors performances of touring Broadway musicals, acclaimed entertainers, and top-rated concerts. Bustling in the midtown neighborhood, the facility is well within the city's arts and entertainment district along Grand boulevard just to the north of Saint Louis University's main campus. Furthermore, a well-trained team of usher's staff, additional accommodations such as the regular offering of live audio descriptions and the increased accessibility of the Fox's website further elevates blind and visually impaired guest experience and enjoyment, thereby appreciating the performances on stage.

THEATRICAL VENUES

THE FABULOUS FOX

There are multiple options for reaching the Fox Theatre. Cabs, rideshare, Metro Call-A-Ride service, and other drivers can make stops directly in front of the theatre's main entrance. Bus #70 Grand also has a stop on the east side of Grand Boulevard, just outside Powell Hall, which is a short distance away from the theatre, though it is necessary to cross to the west side to reach the destination. In all other aspects, however, the route is very straightforward.

Navigating the theatre is relatively simple, thanks to audio cues and the ability to easily solicit sighted assistance. Upon entering the theatre, the sound of the beeping ticket scanners aid in guiding visually impaired guests towards the correct direction, and the bustle of activity in the main lobby enables guests to quickly inquire about locating an usher. Ushers are stationed at key locations throughout the facility, and they are eager to offer whatever assistance may be necessary. Upon request, ushers will return to the individual's seat if further human guide assistance is needed during intermission or after the conclusion of the performance. This can be especially helpful after the final curtain call when everyone funnels in a mass movement towards the exit.

It is highly recommended that blind and visually impaired guests solicit a human guide or their sighted companion when exiting the theatre to safely navigate through the crowd. Given the fact that an auditorium is moderately lit, low-vision guests are highly encouraged to bring their white cane to navigate the facility safely and efficiently.

The elevator on stage left (the right side as one faces the stage) provides the easiest way to access the upper and lower balconies, as it is situated just off the north end of the main lobby. The hallways are logically laid out, therefore, blind, or visually impaired guests should be able to navigate them reasonably well when given clear instructions by an usher or sighted person. Most rows of the seats do not have enough space to comfortably accommodate a guide dog. Therefore, it is highly encouraged for guide dog handlers to choose an accessible seating area when purchasing their tickets.

THEATRICAL VENUES

THE FABULOUS FOX

As of this evaluation, the Fox offers programs in a downloadable format, available through the theatre's website. In addition, live audio describers will read out the program for the performance that is being described, thereby allowing visitors to accessibly obtain the information contained within the program. Otherwise, guests can still obtain the printed copy of the program for on-demand access with the use of optical character recognition apps on their smartphone or tablet to both enlarge or scan the program to access the contents. Use of headphones or refreshable Braille display is highly encouraged for improved listening or reading experience should you choose to access your program using this method.

The Fox's seasons offer a wide selection of shows that should appeal to all age groups. Broadway favorites, including *Wicked*, *The Lion King*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Book of Mormon*, *Hamilton*, and more all appeared on the Fox stage, many of which have returned multiple times by popular demand. Renowned musicians and entertainers, including Celtic Woman, Radio City Music Hall's Rockettes, and storyteller Garrison Keillor, have also toured at the Fabulous Fox Theatre to great acclaim. The music, the singing, and even the tap dancing are incredible to witness from an auditory perspective.

To take in the equally impressive visual aspects of the performance, blind and visually impaired visitors have two options. If a visitor still has an adequate degree of usable vision, binoculars or monoculars will likely assist in a slightly better view of the stage, but this may vary, depending on the location of one's seat. For all other visitors with lessor vision, the Fabulous Fox Theatre maintains the continued seasonal offering of live audio descriptions for the blind. The described performances can accommodate up to thirty blind or visually impaired patrons per show. This is like other audio-described performances offered at various other theatrical venues, bringing high-quality descriptions, ensuring that blind patrons are equally informed of the variety of elements happening on stage, in addition to the narration of the program as mentioned above.

THEATRICAL VENUES

THE FABULOUS FOX

The descriptions offer a new level of enjoyment and appreciation to the performances by assisting the listener to visualize the impressive and meticulously coordinated array of sets and costumes, lighting and special effects, and choreography of professional Broadway Theatre. They also alert the listener to key non-verbal actions, movements, and expressions that allow the blind patron to follow the story's chain of events more easily. Further details on the specific show titles, dates, and times of described Fox performances may be found under the theatre's website and by selecting the "Accessibility" link from the home page. Blind or visually impaired individuals interested in attending a described Fox performance have the option to purchase up to two half-price tickets for all described shows through the Arts & Entertainment Program through Lighthouse for the Blind St. Louis. This offer applies to any seating section. Tickets reserved through the Lighthouse will be available for pick-up at the theatre's indoor box office window on the day of the performance.

As the Fabulous Fox Theatre used to serve as an old movie palace, the facility itself is equally as impressive as the shows that perform there. Weekly group tours are offered, and these tours provide an excellent opportunity for blind and visually impaired individuals to explore the building's elaborate decor and fascinating history. All tours depart from the box office and explore many of the key locations inside the theatre, including the main lobby, amphitheater, on stage and backstage areas, the old screening room, and a hallway commemorating the many stars and shows that have appeared on the theatre's stage. Access to the on-stage and backstage areas depends on whether the stage is in use by a visiting show, but the rest of the tour remains the same throughout the year. The guides are both informative and descriptive, therefore visitors are at liberty to ask to carefully touch anything within arm's reach, allowing blind and visually impaired individuals to comprehend and appreciate the ornate design of the theatre more fully. Saturday tours feature an extra treat that will be enjoyed by both blind and sighted visitors.

THEATRICAL VENUES

THE FABULOUS FOX

The tour includes a live performance on one of the theatre's original Wurlitzer organs. Once again, keep in mind that this is under the assumption that the stage and orchestra pit is not being used by a visiting show. All around, the tour is an amazing experience, regardless of a visitor's visual acuity, and the price of admission is rather affordable.

In recent years, the Fox theatre's webmasters made significant improvements to their website's accessibility with screen reading and magnification software. Furthermore, most pop-up videos, particularly those found on the home landing page have been either adjusted or eliminated altogether. To summarize, the website is very easy to navigate on both desktop and mobile browsers.

St. Louis is very fortunate to have such a terrific theatrical venue, and individuals with an interest and appreciation for theatrical and musical performances will find their visit to the Fabulous Fox Theatre a truly unique and phenomenal experience.

For any questions regarding the services listed above, please contact Aleece Vogt, Director of Visitor Services at the Fox Theatre.

Phone: (314) 657-5049

E-mail: aleecev@foxstl.com

To reserve a pair of half-price tickets through the Arts & Entertainment Program, please contact Angie Yorke, BCE Programs Manager at

Phone: (314) 423-4333, extension 132

E-mail: ayorke@lhbindustries.com

THEATRICAL VENUES

THE MUNY

The Muny

Municipal Theater Association of St. Louis

#1 Theatre Dr. Saint Louis, MO 63112

(314) 361-1900

<http://www.muny.org>

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 4.7 out of 5 stars

Transportation Accessibility: 4.8 out of 5 stars

Usher staff: 5 out of 5 stars

Quality & Availability of Live Audio Descriptions: 5 out of 5 stars

Unaccompanied Visiting Experience: 4 out of 5 stars

Non-visual Experience of Group Tours: 5 out of 5 stars

Last evaluated on June 20, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate, assisted by Sean Smith, Director of Operations and Facilities, with Diane Church, the Muny's Director of Group Sales and Special Events.

For over ninety years, the staff, and performers at the Muny have provided the residents of the St. Louis region with a lively and professional summer season of Broadway musicals which have been thoroughly enjoyed by both blind and sighted audiences. This outdoor theater, located in Forest Park, boasts an impressive array of accommodating services, including a well-trained and personable team of ushers, Braille and large-print concession stand menus, affordable seating, intriguing and interactive backstage tours, along with an assertive and detailed live audio descriptions service. These amenities make the Muny a perfect summer night outing for a blind or visually impaired individual with a love of musicals.

THEATRICAL VENUES

THE MUNY

The Muny's transportation access with the use of Metro transit routes has greatly improved over the last few years. While the nearest public transit stop to the Muny is a Forest Park DeBaliviere Metro Link station, bus #90 Hampton southbound from the metro link station goes right through the major attractions within Forest Park, which helps to minimize walking to the Muny. Other options for reaching the Muny include Metro Call-A-Ride service, rideshares such as Uber and Lyft, local cab companies, and other drivers. All modes of transportation will be able to let passengers off within a reasonable walking distance of the main entrance and ticket window.

After reaching the Muny, there are ushers waiting at the entrance area who may assist the person in locating the ticket window, as well as escort the individual to their designated seat. Sean Smith, the Muny's Director of Operations and Facilities, expects a high caliber from the performance of his ushers, and it shows when an individual witnesses the service first-hand. Not only are the Muny's ushers extremely friendly and considerate, but they will go the extra mile to ensure that visitors have a pleasant experience. One will have no trouble soliciting sighted guide assistance in finding one's seat, and, if requested, ushers will return to check on visitors during intermission and after the final curtain call.

The Muny also has a highly qualified team of volunteers that provides live audio descriptions during the performance. For 2022, Muny is describing their performances on Monday and Saturday evenings at 8:15 PM. Descriptions are extremely informative, giving the listener a thorough explanation of the sets, costumes, choreography, and other actions visible on stage. In addition, the listener is also given a pre-show description which relates basic information found in the individual's program and describes some of the major set pieces used in the performance. By relaying such key pieces of information ahead of time, the describers provide accurate and thorough descriptions that enhance rather than detract from the actual performance.

THEATRICAL VENUES

THE MUNY

Descriptions are received through a wireless headphone which may be checked out at stand 1 just outside of the gate. Thanks to the purchase in 2013 of a new FM transmitter, these receivers should be able to pick up a clear signal throughout roughly half of the amphitheater, and individuals may request seating within these closer sections of seats when purchasing tickets. The closer you are sited to the right-most sections (as you face the stage), the clearer the reception will be. These precautions should minimize or eliminate any potential problems with the listening devices.

The Muny has been very generous each season in donating a set number of tickets for most performances to the St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These complimentary tickets are available in pairs (to accommodate a sighted companion) on a first-come, first-serve basis, and may be obtained by calling the St. Louis Society for the Blind at 314-968-9000. This section of seats not only sits well within the desired range of the audio transmitter, but it also sits very close to the station where the listening devices are obtained, adding to the convenience of the service. Additionally, the Muny continues to reserve the top-most 1500 seats as free and open to the public. Most seating sections are spacious enough to accommodate patrons with a guide dog.

As in previous years, the Muny's concession stand is filled with a variety of friendly and accommodating vendors, which also provides Braille and large-print menus, allowing blind or visually impaired individuals to place an informed and timely order without presenting an inconvenience to other hungry guests. If you are not able to locate the concession stand, vendors make regular rounds through the various seating sections before the performance and during intermission, and they do an adequate job of making themselves heard, so they are very easy to locate.

THEATRICAL VENUES

THE MUNY

For groups of twenty or more ticket holders, the Muny offers backstage tours before every performance. Thanks to recent efforts by the Group Tours and Special Events department, these tours have been given a complete make-over to make the content and format more accommodating and engaging for blind or visually impaired group members. The script itself is more descriptive, and the guides utilize an expanding array of tactile-visual components to allow both blind and visitors a closer look at the amazing sets and costumes created for Muny productions. These tours provide a fascinating opportunity to go behind the scenes and to discover what it takes to design, rehearse, and execute a professional theatrical production. The guides possess a wealth of intriguing facts about Muny performances and history, and they are eager to answer any questions. Although the tour is only fifteen or twenty minutes long, the guides work hard to ensure that the experience is enjoyable and memorable for all in attendance. The tour concludes on the very stage of the Muny itself, an experience not to be missed.

A full description of all services and amenities may be found on the Muny's website. While browsing, visitors could also view programs from current and previous seasons in a pdf format. These program notes are typically posted by opening night, allowing both blind and sighted attendees to explore basic information about the upcoming shows, actors, and musical selections. Overall, the site remains very accessible to screen reading and screen magnification software's on desktop and mobile web browsers, making it very easy for a blind or visually impaired person to plan their visit and to obtain information about upcoming performances.

THEATRICAL VENUES

THE MUNY

The Muny St. Louis remains America's largest outdoor theater, and its sizable group of committed actors, crew members and other staff work hard to provide visitors with exceptional productions. Furthermore, the available services such as a rich collection of online programs, a thorough live audio descriptions service, and a collection of very accessible staff and crew make the Muny a prime resource for any blind or visually impaired individual who may be interested in attending, learning about, or becoming involved in theatrical productions in the St. Louis region. Whatever one's reason may be for visiting the Muny, it is bound to be a memorable experience and should be strongly recommended to anyone with an interest in theatrical and musical performances.

For specific accommodations and questions regarding Muny's venue access contact:

Lindsey Gradish - Director of Audience Experience
(314) 595-5714

OUTDOOR VENUES



OUTDOOR VENUES

THE ST. LOUIS ZOO

The St. Louis Zoo

One Government Drive
St. Louis, MO 63110
(314) 781-0900

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 3.5 out of 5 stars

Transportation Accessibility: 5 out of 5 stars

Availability of docent-led tours upon request: 5 out of 5 stars

On-site docents and staff: 5 out of 5 stars

Featured Attractions Experience: 3 out of 5 stars

Tactile and auditory components: 3.5 out of 5 stars (Requires further evaluation)

Last evaluated on September 18, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate for Lighthouse for The Blind St. Louis.

A visit to the zoo can be a rather visual experience. But the St. Louis Zoo should not immediately be discarded by blind or visually impaired animal lovers when selecting a day trip. Remaining one of only three large-scale zoos in the nation to offer free general admission to the public, the St. Louis Zoo houses a wide variety of wild and exotic animals and offers an entertaining selection of exhibits, shows, and attractions. The wide availability of the docents and a small selection of tactile and auditory components help to improve a blind or visually impaired visitor's experience, but visiting with sighted companions if able, remains vital within this spacious and very visual tourist attraction in the region.

OUTDOOR VENUES

THE ST. LOUIS ZOO

When traveling via public transportation, blind and visually impaired visitors will find the zoo very accessible. The #90 Hampton Metro bus stops at Government and Fine Arts Drive, which is about 10 minutes west of the Living World entrance. In addition, the Forest Park shuttle service during the summer months will further reduce the walk from the stop as the visitors will be dropped off right at the entrance to the zoo. The use of adaptive navigation apps on a smartphone should properly guide you towards the entrance. In addition, Metro Call-A-Ride service, rideshare services, cabs, and other drivers will be able to bring passengers right up to the north and south entrances.

Due to the extensiveness of the zoo's grounds and lack of access to way-finding tools, visitors will likely encounter several orientation and mobility obstacles. Therefore, blind, and visually impaired individuals are encouraged to solicit a sighted companion and even other visually impaired visitors who may feel more experienced and comfortable navigating the zoo's ground independently. It is possible to arrange in advance for a docent to aid in the individual's exploration of the Zoo if you are wanting to visit independently. At least two weeks' notice in advance of your visit is encouraged to allow the docent to properly prepare a tour that will be as interesting and meaningful for the blind or visually impaired visitor as possible.

As many of the animals are featured in a recreation of their natural habitats, it can often be difficult for low-vision guests to spot them. Binoculars, monoculars, or an electronic handheld low vision aid may occasionally improve the chances of low-vision guests being able to catch glimpses of the wildlife, but this varies greatly, depending on the proximity and the animal's ability to camouflage itself with its surroundings and weather conditions. Although most signages contain large print and high-contrast colors, I still recommend low vision guests bring their own magnification or reading devices to properly read the animal's nameplate and their unique facts.

OUTDOOR VENUES

THE ST. LOUIS ZOO

Availability of the Braille signages at essential amenities has greatly improved, while accessible nameplates on wayfinding signs have yet to receive those updates.

Despite the remoteness of some of the featured animals and the informational text, the Zoo does offer a small selection of features that can enhance a blind or visually impaired visitor's experience if assisted by a sighted companion. For individuals or small groups exploring the grounds independently, docents can be found mingling with tourists throughout the Zoo. These experienced, well-trained volunteer staff members possess a wealth of fascinating information about the animals. They are very easy to engage in casual conversation, and the information gained by talking to them far exceeds the basic information found on the animal's nameplates.

One popular attraction at the zoo is a narrated train tour. For any visitor, regardless of their visual impairment status, this serves as an excellent way to observe the wide variety of animals that inhabit the St. Louis Zoo. The tour guides adequately inform passengers about the facility's diverse animal population, and they are very quick to point out any visible wildlife.

The petting zoo offers an opportunity to interact with several miniature animals, and Caribbean Cove allows visitors to get a close look at, touch, and feed a small variety of sea creatures, including stingrays and sharks in a safe and supervised environment. Furthermore, a front row seat at any of the animal shows, such as the sea lion show, will give visually impaired visitors a close-up and personal look at some of the featured inhabitants of the St. Louis Zoo, as well as a plethora of fascinating tidbits on their unique abilities and behaviors.

OUTDOOR VENUES

THE ST. LOUIS ZOO

Tactile representations of featured animals have improved thanks to the Zoo's partnerships with various nonprofit agencies that specialize in sensory inclusion and accessibility. As a result, there are a few that blind visitors will find very appealing. For example, locations such as the entrances to the Penguin House, Insectarium, and Children's Zoo feature large metal sculptures of a signature creature. Unfortunately, these are not always within easy reach. The hippo's habitat has a rather unique display. In addition to listing several fun facts about the features of the hippo's head, the display is also adorned with a life-sized cast of the hippo's head. Visitors are also encouraged to explore the Culture City app, the Zoo's all-inclusive app that continues to evolve and one that could be useful during your visit to the zoo.

Although a blind visitor will require assistance in reading the text, the cast adds a fascinating tactile component that adds a whole new level of dimension to the information on display. Exhibits like this one are rare, so blind or visually impaired visitors are recommended to visit the gift shop where they can explore additional figurines, masks, and plush toys of many featured animals.

The Zoo's Education Building contains countless animal relics (skulls, feathers, and dried droppings to name a few) which are used for educational programs. These are at the disposal of docents who may be giving private or group tours, and during favorable weather conditions, carts of animal artifacts can be found traveling through the Zoo.

The staff at the Zoo's Education Department has been revising its school programs to present a more interactive and more universally accessible experience for young kids and school groups to learn about animals and their habitats. These new approaches offer a goldmine of opportunities for blind and visually impaired individuals to explore and examine a wide variety of wild and exotic animals. While you might not be able to feel a live crocodile or bear safely, you would easily be able to handle a preserved skull or piece of hide.

OUTDOOR VENUES

THE ST. LOUIS ZOO

Animal artifacts, weights and measuring tools, miniature models and landscapes, and more descriptive presentations now create a universally immersive experience, opening new doors of exploration for teachers of the visually impaired for their students, and group leaders should be sure to ask about these additional accommodations when scheduling a field trip or educational session. If the Zoo knows in advance that a particular student or group member is blind, they can pool the necessary resources to create a program that is universally accessible and enjoyable.

There is so much to see and do at the St. Louis Zoo that a person could easily spend an entire day there. For such occasions, the Living World contains a cafeteria-style restaurant, and several hamburger and hot dog stands are located throughout the grounds. None of these places have Braille or large print menus, but the workers are very helpful in accommodating blind individuals, making it easy to place an order in a timely manner.

Due to the recent success of implementing a more universal design in the Zoo's educational programs, discussions have continued to raise on how to make the Zoo's grounds, animals, and exhibits more accessible. Through these efforts, the staff at the St. Louis Zoo hopes to find new ways to utilize many senses in ways that would make its presentation of the shows, exhibits, and animals more appealing, engaging, and meaningful for all visitors. More information will be made available as developments progress, and I am hopeful these conversations will lead to significant improvement that will make visiting St. Louis Zoo worthwhile.

Be sure to check out the Zoo's website prior to your visit. It contains a great deal of valuable and unique information about the St. Louis Zoo, its animals, shows, attractions, schedules, and much more. As of 2021, the zoo's website will allow you to schedule a visit ahead of your arrival, which is required for COVID-19 contact tracing. Otherwise, the site is well organized and functions extremely well with screen reading and magnification software.

OUTDOOR VENUES

GRANT'S FARM

Grant's Farm

10501 Gravois Rd, St. Louis, MO 63123

(314) 843-1700

<http://www.grantsfarm.com>

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 3 out of 5 stars

Transportation Accessibility: 3 out of 5 stars

Availability of docent-led guides upon request: 4 out of 5 stars

On-site docents and staff: 4.5 out of 5 stars

Visibility of featured attractions: 4 out of 5 stars

Tactile & auditory components: 3.5 out of 5 stars

Last evaluated on October 3, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate.

Like the St. Louis Zoo, Grant's Farm is a local outdoor facility that showcases a small variety of animals, wildlife and is known for its signature Anheuser-Busch products and memorabilia. Due to the spacious grounds, lack of Braille, and large print maps and signages, it is not the most accessible facility for a blind or visually impaired individual to visit unaccompanied. However, since the facility is geared more towards a younger-aged visitor, it is unlikely that a blind or visually impaired person would be visiting Grant's Farm alone. This is not to say that blind or visually impaired visitors cannot enjoy themselves at Grant's Farm, as many of the animal attractions are either very interactive or in very close proximity to the visitor. Nevertheless, a visit with a sighted companion will allow you to take full advantage of the features and attractions.

OUTDOOR VENUES

GRANT'S FARM

Grant's Farm is not particularly close to any metro bus stops. The closest transit station is located just a few miles north of Gravois Road in Shrewsbury, the Shrewsbury Lansdowne i-44 station. This is a terminating stop and the far most south-western point on Metro's light rail service, but new to Metro in 2021 is Via, a free or low-cost minibus service. Passengers transferring from Metro link could request a ride from the light rail station, and be dropped off at some chosen destination, or individuals within the designated zones could request a ride to get to either a Metro link station or to another destination. Passengers using Via will likely need to request to be dropped off along Gravois and Grants intersection, which is about a 2.5 to 4-mile walk along the trail to the main entrance. Additionally, Metro Call-A-Ride service, rideshare services such as Uber and Lyft, local cab companies, or other sighted drivers should get passengers to Grants Farm as well. It is important to note that guest drop-offs are prohibited, and all vehicles entering the parking lot must pay. Therefore, I strongly encourage all visitors to plan a trip to Grant's Farm as part of a group or with a sighted companion. Admission to the farm is free, though parking and some additional programs and activities are not.

The grounds present a few significant navigational obstacles, but most of these could easily be overcome through requesting the proper sighted assistance as needed. Only three out of four restrooms are identified with Braille signage (the restroom by the General Store being the one without). It is unclear if Grants Farm plans to update these signs to add braille currently. Consequently, the grounds lack braille signage for even the most basic amenities, solidifying the need for a sighted companion during the visit. Upon arrival, all visitors receive a map and a list of the day's scheduled shows. Visually impaired visitors who may need to reference this material (such as parents) should be able to utilize either low vision aids, such as a portable video magnifier, or a smartphone app that could quickly convert print to text. Showtimes can also be obtained by visiting the Grant's Farm website, which is likely the most accessible method. Otherwise, visitors will find navigating the grounds relatively straightforward if given clear verbal directions.

OUTDOOR VENUES

GRANT'S FARM

I particularly found traveling with a guide dog serves a major advantage here, as they can navigate around various obstacles such as other visitors and ensure that you are in a proper pathway, with a downside being other guests, particularly children, who may distract your guide. Still, I encourage requesting extra assistance, particularly within the more open and spacious areas such as the outdoor eating facilities.

When first entering the farm, one of the first noticeable attractions is the tram tour. This is an excellent way to explore the sights and wide variety of wildlife at Grant's Farm. The drivers operating the trams are not only very descriptive but narrate various elements on the scene and animals passing by, which is very informative for the visually impaired visitors. Low vision guests may often see some animals roaming by rather close to the tram as well.

The tram ride concludes at the tiered garden, a very centrally located position within Grant's Farm. At this point, the visitor can access various hands-on and interactive activities such as riding a carousel, feeding, and petting small animals in a petting zoo, getting one's picture taken with one of the world-famous Budweiser Clydesdales, and exploring the facility's collection of various Anheuser-Busch carriages (which may not be touched). Additional paid programs that include a parakeet feeding experience, a Clydesdale VIP tour, and camel rides offer even more opportunities for interacting directly with the resident wildlife. There are always staff members on duty at these key points of interest, providing adequate supervision for the children, and making it very easy to solicit sighted assistance when necessary. There are several more animals not included in the petting zoo that may be petted if the animal chooses to wander close enough to the railing of their enclosure (which they often do).

OUTDOOR VENUES

GRANT'S FARM

During times when the park is less crowded, it is common to find staff walking around with snakes and other animals for the public to examine on an up-close and personal level. A plethora of birds inhabit Grant's Farm, and even if the person cannot see them, they can frequently be heard throughout the park, adding a pleasant auditory aspect to the atmosphere.

The farm also offers two thirty-minute shows at regular intervals throughout the day: the small animal show and the elephant show. These are all great opportunities for kids to see some of the many inhabitants of Grant's Farm showing off their unique talents. Often, especially in the Small Animal Show, the "hosts" look for kids to participate in certain tricks, stunts, or activities, adding another potential layer of participation and public interaction. Requesting a front-row seat by an on-duty staff member at the amphitheater will allow a low vision visitor to receive the best possible view of the animals, although it may be best to still utilize a device such as binoculars or monocular if the individual must sit further back. The seating rows are spacious, but guide dog users will likely need to locate an accessible seating area or a spot with low foot traffic to make sure your dog does not get stepped on.

There are multiple locations around the grounds where the individual may purchase snacks and drinks. Meals are also served at the Brat Haus, an outdoor picnic area that offers a variety of barbecue items, drinks, German music, and complimentary alcoholic beverages for visitors 21 years of age or older. There are no Braille nor large print menus available, but the staff is very friendly and willing to help a visually impaired individual place an order in a timely manner.

OUTDOOR VENUES

GRANT'S FARM

The wide variety of animals that may be seen at Grant's Farm often overshadows its historic background. While the grounds are now the ancestral home of the Busch family, this location was once the home of the United States eighteenth President, Ulysses S. Grant, after whom the farm and the road that travels along is named. His cabin still sits on the grounds, about a mile from its original location. Interested visitors and groups may book a private tour of the house online or upon arrival. It is a unique opportunity that should not be overlooked when deciding to visit.

General information about animals, shows, special events, and directions can be found on the Grant's Farm website. The site lacks alternative text image descriptions but is rather well laid out with clear indications for headings and links. I do not anticipate any web accessibility concerns navigating Grants Farm's website on both desktop and mobile web browsers using a screen reading or magnification software. It should be consulted before visiting, as it will greatly prepare you for all scheduled attractions and events.

For further inquiries and questions about your visit, contact:

Steve Bogard, Supervisor, Guest Operations at Grant's Farm

Phone: (314) 525-0812

Email: steve.bogard@anheuser-busch.com

OUTDOOR VENUES

MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

Missouri Botanical Garden

4344 Shaw Blvd, St. Louis, MO 63110

(314) 577-9400

<http://www.mobot.org>

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 4.8 out of 5 stars

Transportation Accessibility: 5 out of 5 stars

Availability of docent-led tours: 5 out of 5 stars

Access to on-site docents and staff: 4 out of 5 stars

Visibility of featured attractions: 5 out of 5 stars

Tactile and auditory interpretation: 4.5 out of 5 stars

Last updated on August 5, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate, assisted by Jennifer Smith-Simms, HTR Manager, Public Programs Education Division.

The Missouri Botanical Garden defies the misconception that flowers, herbs, shrubs, and other plants are only for visual appeal. The Garden's Therapeutic Horticulture programs continue to find new ways that plants can be appreciated using multiple sensory inputs. The continuously evolving Zimmerman Sensory Garden, accommodating docents and volunteers, and plans for future enhancements heighten the degree to which blind and visually impaired visitors can learn about and explore our world's diverse plant life.

Getting to the Missouri Botanical Garden is very accessible with the use of public transportation. Due to routes and scheduled adjustments, the #8 bus will most likely be the most reliable option, as the bus stops at the intersection of Shaw and Tower Grove, followed by a brisk 8-minute walk to get to the garden.

OUTDOOR VENUES

MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

Otherwise, the usual Metro Call-A-Ride service, rideshare apps, local cab companies, and other sighted drivers will be able to easily drop off passengers directly in front of the Visitor Center's main entrance. Once inside, the help desk is located directly ahead, making it a convenient location at which to rendezvous with one's group or at which to solicit assistance in locating the departing station for daily tours.

The tram ride and the complimentary daily tours are both terrific ways to observe and enjoy the key points of interest at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Be sure to inform that you have a visual impairment, as that will allow the volunteers to add an additional descriptive component to the already informative tours. Customized group tours may also be arranged for a small fee. Information on the most up-to-date schedules on both regularly scheduled and specialized group tours can be found on the Botanical garden's website. On-site staff members are always eager to help make your visit as enjoyable and illuminating as possible. Visitors will find the Garden's staff extremely helpful and vastly knowledgeable about the peak bloom periods, distinct qualities, and proper method of caring for the wide variety of plant species found at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Furthermore, visually impaired visitors will find the paths within the gardens easy to follow, while audio cues, such as fountains, provide additional cues for generic orientation.

What sets Botanical Garden apart, particularly for blind and visually impaired visitors is the Zimmerman Sensory Garden, a specialized garden close to the visitors' center in which all the plants are meant to be felt for their unique texture or smelt for their distinct fragrance. Fountains and the Solari Bell Tree Sculpture also add a pleasant auditory feature to the atmosphere of the garden. Many horticultural displays are arranged in raised planter beds for easy access and are marked with Braille, raised letter, and large-print nameplates, with updates in the future pipeline. Group tours of this garden are available upon request, but a self-guided exploration of the garden, with or without the assistance is most certainly worthy of the visitor's time.

OUTDOOR VENUES

MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

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OUTDOOR VENUES

MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

Committed to enhancing the universal accessibility of the grounds, the Garden's Therapeutic Horticulture Programs continue to explore new avenues for heightening a visitor's multi-sensory experience. For instance, a tactile map and new entry sign are under current active development to improve the means of self-orientation and exploration for both sighted and visually impaired visitors within the Sensory Garden. From a long-term perspective, the Sensory Garden is also being used as a testing ground for making the entire Missouri Botanical Garden more accessible for blind and visually impaired visitors. I am hopeful that similar adaptive approaches in the Sensory Garden may gradually be applied and effectively implemented in other areas of the gardens. Garden staff is also considering the creation of a Sensory Tour, a regularly scheduled, more extensive walking tour of the grounds. This would be very similar to the current daily tour, but the guides would rely on the same sensory tactics utilized in the Sensory Garden in how they would engage group members in their horticultural exploration and immersion. Details on further enhancements will be made available as plans develop.

Throughout the remainder of the Garden's extensive grounds, blind and visually impaired visitors can access a growing selection of multi-sensory activities. The Children's Garden offers many multi-sensory experiences from April through October (fees apply for ages 3 to 12). Staffed Germination Stations occur daily on various nature-related topics from 10 a.m. to noon. The Edible Garden offers seasonal tastings on select days of the week. Plan to get wet at the ever-popular splash pad. The Nature Explore Classroom offers a nature art table with natural tactile items and a raised and ground-level sandbox. Adjacent to the Children's Garden is the Brookings Interpretive Center which offers many multi-sensory interactive and hands-on activities, with annually changing themes and variations

OUTDOOR VENUES

MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

For a light meal, visitors can drop into the Sassafras Café, located in the Ridgway Visitors Center. As of this evaluation, this is undergoing renovation. Therefore, I am unable to detail the process for ordering and dining experience currently. The newly renovated dining spot will feature enhanced accommodations, such as Braille, digital, and large print menus which are currently being developed.

For information about the specific gardens within the Missouri Botanical Garden, hours of operation, directions, and special events and exhibits, please visit the Missouri Botanical Garden's website. The information offered on the site is very thorough and informative. The home landing page lacks headings and alternative labels on images, but necessary links on locating major sections of the page are fully accessible. Overall, the website is a great resource to plan your visit and remains relatively accessible on both desktop and mobile web browsers using screen reading and magnification software.

For any other questions regarding the Missouri Botanical Garden's accessibility, please send inquiries to: accessiblegarden@mobot.org
Phone: (314) 577-9473, extension 6526

OUTDOOR VENUES

LAUMEIER SCULPTURE PARK

Laumeier Sculpture Park

12580 Rott Road, St. Louis, MO 63127

(314) 615-5278

<http://www.laumeier.org>

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 4 out of 5 stars

Transportation Accessibility: 2 out of 5 stars

Docent-led tour Availability: 5 out of 5 stars

On-site docents and staff: 1 out of 5 stars

Featured attractions Visibility: 5 out of 5 stars

Tactile and auditory interpretation: 5 out of 5 stars (Ongoing Development)

Last updated on July 10, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate.

Laumeier Sculpture Park is a perfect place to visit for anyone interested in three-dimensional art and the great outdoors. While traveling the many walking paths at Laumeier, visitors will encounter many massive artistic creations and sculptures, set amidst an aesthetically pleasing natural environment. The Park itself presents a moderate number of navigational challenges if visiting unaccompanied for the first time, however, the park's well-developed docent-led tours and the park's increasing utilization of maquettes and other tactile components provide new and immersive ways of exploring three-dimensional art.

OUTDOOR VENUES

LAUMEIER SCULPTURE PARK

Due to ongoing routes and schedule adjustments, visitors will most likely need to use the #49 Lindbergh to get to the stop, located at the intersection of Rott road and Lindbergh, just under half a mile away. However, this route involves cutting through parking lots, which is not the most ideal travel environment, although, with modern GPS and navigation apps, it is most certainly doable. Otherwise, the usual methods of available transportation options such as rideshare, local cab services, Metro Call-A-Ride service, and other sighted drivers will ease the stress when getting to Laumeier Sculpture Park.

One's initial arrival at the park presents the second major navigational challenge. A modest sign currently identifies the main entrance to the Estates House for sighted individuals, but the path may not be clear for blind or visually impaired visitors. With the assistance of three six-foot gallery signs, two kiosks, and an array of strategically placed signs and interpretive labels, there are high hopes that more identifying markings will be on their way too for totally blind visitors at Laumeier.

Most of the paths through the park, though well-kept, are numerous and winding, which may be disorienting when navigating such a spacious ground. Having a human guide to assist in exploring Laumeier Sculpture Park, particularly if visiting for the first time should be greatly and highly encouraged.

OUTDOOR VENUES

LAUMEIER SCULPTURE PARK

Laumeier Sculpture Park offers individual and group docent-led tours upon request. This is extremely advantageous for both sighted and visually impaired visitors, as the docents offer a wealth of insightful information about the meaning and composition of the various works of art. When giving tours to visually impaired individuals, docents incorporate additional verbal descriptions of the sculptures to showcase the park's growing collection of tactile representations of the various works of art. Additional individual and group tours can be arranged two weeks in advance. The Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired, as well as the Missouri School for the Blind, both make regular visits to the park.

Upon gaining some orientation familiarity around Laumeier Sculpture Park, blind and visually impaired visitors will be able to take full advantage of the park's growing collection of maquettes. These are miniature bronze replicas of featured works of art. The replicas are placed on a concrete pedestal along with both Braille and print nameplates that relay interesting information about the size and meaning of the sculpture, as well as the name of the artist responsible for its creation. Laumeier Sculpture Park engaged to make their displayed creations accessible in November of 2010, reviving new enthusiasm in the maquette project that includes a tactile map of the park. In partnership with the Lighthouse for the Blind, the park continues to expand its growing collection of tactile replicas, to repair and improve the older existing maquettes, and to address larger way-finding initiatives to aid both blind and sighted visitors. The most recent batch of maquettes has been steadily increasing to this day, with more on the way. There is 67 total in counting. This evolving collection has received praise and positive reviews from the blind and visually impaired visitors in the area, placing three-dimensional art literally at a person's fingertips. The descriptions on the Braille and large-print nameplates further add to the accessible experience. Furthermore, being able to walk directly up to the original work of art completes the experience by placing the size comparison between the original masterpiece and the tactile miniature into proper perspective.

OUTDOOR VENUES

LAUMEIER SCULPTURE PARK

The Park also offers audio tours, available to all visitors. These tours are very informative about the meaning and history of the individual sculptures, but some lack a basic visual description which would be extremely beneficial to blind visitors, especially when dealing with sculptures that currently do not have an accompanying maquette. The staff at Laumeier are currently in the process of developing a new way to deliver audio tours, wayfinding, and more through a smartphone app “Culture Connect” which is currently under development. More information on the Culture Connect app, new enhancements, and accommodations will be available soon as they develop.

Interested individuals may visit the Laumeier Sculpture Park website prior to the visit. The website overall remains very accessible, with no navigational difficulties with screen reading software on both desktop and mobile web browsers. Here, visitors could learn about the various creations displayed at the park, the park’s history, plan for an upcoming visit, and more.

OUTDOOR VENUES

THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

Sophia M. Sachs Butterfly House at Faust Park

15193 Olive Blvd, Chesterfield MO 63017

(314) 577-0888

www.butterflyhouse.org

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 3 out of 5 stars

Transportation accessibility: 2 out of 5 stars

Availability of docent-led tours: 4 out of 5 stars

Access to on-site docents and staff: 3.5 out of 5 stars

Visibility of featured attractions: 3 out of 5 stars

Tactile and auditory interpretation: 2 out of 5 stars

Unaccompanied visiting experience: 3 out of 5 stars

Last evaluated on June 29, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Associate, assisted by Fred Gauna, Senior Manager, Collections, Education, and Facilities.

The Missouri Botanical Garden stretches beyond the main facility at Shaw, the Nature reserve, and Sophia M. Sachs Butterfly House. Located at Faust Park in the west of St. Louis County, the facility defies the stereotypical butterfly museums by allowing visitors to be in the same space as the real butterflies themselves. Given the location of the facility however and lack of auditory and tactile interpretations, visually impaired visitors will likely benefit from a sighted companion when planning a visit here.

OUTDOOR VENUES

THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

Getting to the Butterfly House presents several transportation challenges, especially if visiting unaccompanied or if the visitor is unfamiliar with the layout of the Faust Park. The closest bus stop from the Butterfly House is located at the intersection of Olive and Appalachian trail, which still leaves passengers with close to 20 minutes of walk to reach the destination. Therefore, the use of rideshare apps, Metro Call-a-ride service, or another sighted driver to reach the Butterfly House is advised.

Entrance to the attractions begins with a large model of the butterfly located diagonally from the front of the building in the spacious courtyard. It is anticipated that this area will be utilized to further showcase seasonal events and a sneak peek of what is to come ahead of the upcoming visit. These quarterly changing themes encompass beyond the courtyard, however, as the entrance to the Butterfly House is designed to fully immerse guests into the diverse world of plant life. Blind and visually impaired individuals will be quick to notice the music and some sound effects when entering the main entrance. Here, the ticket counter and guest services desk are located directly to the left, where you can purchase admission tickets and request an individual tour guide.

Ticket prices range from \$8 for adults and \$5 for children ages 5-12 and seniors over the age of 65. Be sure to inform them that you have a visual impairment, as that will allow the staff to add an additional descriptive component. Information on the group tour rates and schedules are available on the Butterfly House's website. Low vision visitors may be able to make out some detail of the wall canvas showcasing diverse plants which correspond with the quarterly changing themes throughout the year. Tactile interpretations are not available now.

OUTDOOR VENUES

THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

The admission to the Butterfly House will grant visitors to both the greenhouse and outside garden. The prime spot to experience the live butterflies is of course located inside of the greenhouse, close to the outdoor garden exit. This apparatus is designed with diverse plant life and butterflies in mind, with careful attention to its climate. Guests will notice a noticeably humid, tropical-like environment, thus an appropriate outfit as you plan your visit is advised. Visually impaired visitors will find the paths within the greenhouse easy to follow, while audio cues such as fountains and streams provide generic cues for orientation. Various plants and flowers in all shapes and sizes can be smelled, touched, and felt within the facility, while you may also be able to feel the butterflies making their way on top of your head, on your clothing, or other parts of your body. Due to their constant motion, low vision guests will likely have difficulty seeing these majestic creatures even with low vision devices, but nevertheless, it is certainly a worthy experience for both blind and sighted visitors alike.

The outside garden further scales down some of the more prominent plants, flowers, and the beauty of wildlife in a way that is far more manageable compared to the other two locations operated by the Botanical Garden's trio of locations. The garden currently lacks any sort of multi-sensory experience like the main facility, but pathways are easy to follow with basic clear verbal directions.

The Butterfly House is not, by all means, the most ideal attraction for blind patrons now. But given numerous enhancement projects under continuous development at the main location, I am hopeful that many of the existing adaptation techniques can be transferred over to their other two locations for a more seamless, inclusive experience for visually impaired visitors.

OUTDOOR VENUES

THE BUTTERFLY HOUSE

For specific information on the details and to reserve electronic tickets for general admission to the Sophia M. Sachs Butterfly House, please visit the website using the link provided at the beginning of this report. The lack of headings and staggered links throughout the pages however presents navigational difficulties for screen reader users, with fewer difficulties for screen magnification software. Overall, the site contains helpful resources that a visitor may wish to refer to prior to the visit. I am eager to work with Butterfly House in discovering ways to improve ways they too can follow the footsteps of their main location, thereby improving consistency and accessibility.

For specific questions regarding the Sophia M. Sachs Butterfly House, please contact:

Fred Gauna, Senior Manager, Collections, Education, and Facilities

Email: fgauna@mobot.org

Phone: (314) 577-0893

MUSEUMS & HISTORIC SITES



MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

ST. LOUIS ART MUSEUM

St. Louis Art Museum at Forest Park

One Fine Arts Dr, St. Louis, MO 63110

(314) 721-0072

<http://www.slam.org>

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 4 out of 5 stars

Transportation accessibility: 4 out of 5 stars

Availability of docent-led tours upon request: 4 out of 5 stars

On-site docents and staff: 4 out of 5 stars

Unaccompanied visiting experience: 4 out of 5 stars

Tactile and auditory interpretation: 3.5 out of 5 stars

Last updated on July 5, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate.

Founded in 1879 and showcased at the 1904 World's Fair, the St. Louis Art Museum remains committed to making "one of the finest comprehensive art collections in the country" accessible and meaningful to all its visitors, regardless of physical or mental abilities. Docent-led tours provide plenty of insights into the composition and meaning behind the numerous works of art, and developments continue within the Education Department to utilize multiple senses when exploring art with the visitors. These factors reflect a welcoming and accommodating atmosphere at the St. Louis Art Museum towards visitors who are blind or visually impaired.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

ST. LOUIS ART MUSEUM

Overall, visually impaired travelers will find it relatively easy to get to the Art Museum with the use of Metro transit. Like most First Park attractions, the bus #90 Hampton southbound from Forest Park Metro link station stops right at Fine Arts drive, directly in front of the Art Museum. Automated stop announcements on the bus further improve the accessibility by announcing these stops and, alerting passengers on when to disembark. As usual, rideshare services, cabs, sighted drivers, and Metro Call-A-Ride service can drop off passengers directly in front of the main entrance to the museum.

The museum is very accustomed to receiving visitors with disabilities, and with the current services, a blind or visually impaired visitor should be able to experience the displays in a way that is both captivating and culturally enriching. The guest services desk is located off to the side of the main entrance and can be easily located upon arrival. From this point, a blind or visually impaired visitor will find it easy to solicit assistance. It is a convenient spot to rendezvous with a tour guide, and low-vision visitors also could pick up large-print maps, magnifying glasses, and large-print copies of nameplates for key displays. The hallways are for the most part, relatively easy to navigate, with spacious rooms and exhibit areas, though a first-time visitor exploring the museum will most likely benefit from a sighted guide to be able to navigate restrooms and other amenities.

Further accessibility enhancement projects are on the way, including new indoor wayfinding solutions that will someday allow visually impaired visitors to fully navigate the museum independently. Most hallways are wide enough to allow for an easy flow of traffic but suggest that visitors avoid shore lining with canes as a way of maintaining personal orientation since many of the works of art are safeguarded by motion sensors.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

ST. LOUIS ART MUSEUM

The museum staff makes every effort to accommodate visitors with varying needs and will often provide special tours upon request for visitors with disabilities. To best cater to the needs and interests of the visitor, the staff prefers to be given two to four weeks advanced notice if such a tour is desired. This way, the staff has ample time to line up docents within the visitor's specific areas of interest. Advanced notice also allows docents to gather any extra relevant material or tactile objects that may enhance the visitor's experience.

At present, verbal imaging serves as the primary tool of the docents in making art accessible to visitors who are blind or visually impaired. Verbal imaging consists of a spoken detailed description of the pieces of art, highlighting the layers, content, colors, and style. Docents are also quick to expand upon the overall meaning and history behind the creation of a particular piece of art, deepening the visitor's understanding and appreciation. Unfortunately, even amid the three-dimensional displays such as sculptures, Egyptian sarcophagi, and medieval suits of armor, there is nothing in the museum that may be touched or felt. This is to preserve the artifacts on display, and many of the galleries are equipped with motion sensors to prevent visitors from straying too close to the priceless works of art.

The museum's Education Department, however, does maintain a modest assortment of materials that may be explored tactually. These include Native American beadwork, unique fabrics, and a miniature covered wagon, among others. Such tactile components do not provide scale replicas of any piece of art found in the museum. Rather, they are meant to reflect the different cultures represented by the various artistic displays. If the museum is given ample advanced notice about visitors with visual impairments, these tactile components may be incorporated into tours and educational programs where applicable. The above accommodations for blind and visually impaired visitors may be obtained by filling out the online Tour Request Form or by calling the museum two to four weeks in advance of your visit.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

ST. LOUIS ART MUSEUM

The Education Department at the Art Museum is currently in the process of conducting a series of docent workshops that focus on interacting with visually impaired visitors and on multi-sensory methods of exploring two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of art. The goal of these workshops is to help docents better anticipate and understand both simple and creative ways in which a visually impaired visitor's experience can be made just as meaningful as that of a fully sighted visitor, while the workshops serve to break the conception that art can only be understood and explored visually.

Verbal imaging will continue to serve as the docent's foundation for making art accessible to blind and visually impaired patrons, but it is also hoped that additional tactile and auditory components may be eventually incorporated into the existing displays, offering even more dynamic methods for art exploration and education. Current proposals include installing tactile representations of selective two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of art, as well as utilizing music, temperature, sounds, and literature to create a "living" representation of various styles of art. These additional enhancements are still in the early phases of the development stages and have not been finalized. Lighthouse for the Blind St. Louis Arts & Entertainment program is actively engaged in these enhancement efforts, and updates will be shared on the next edition of this evaluation.

While visiting the Art Museum, guests may want to purchase a drink or light meal at the museum's cafe, located on the Main Level within Gallery 213. Panorama, a new full-service restaurant is located at the upper level at the museum, is scheduled to open later. The café is set up in a typical cafeteria lunch line style, and the staff is very helpful in making a quick and orderly selection from the menu.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

ST. LOUIS ART MUSEUM

Blind and visually impaired visitors will also find the museum's website both useful and insightful when planning a visit. The clear alternative text within the links and the use of headings to organize the material maximizes website accessibility with screen reading and screen magnification software on both desktop and mobile web browsers. Each page contains a detailed description and (when applicable) a phone number or E-mail through which the individual may make further inquiries. Altogether, blind, and visually impaired individuals with an interest in art and art history will enjoy their visit to the St. Louis Art Museum, and with the potential for further accommodations, there will continue to be new ways for both blind and sighted visitors to experience artistic displays new dimensions.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM

Missouri History Museum at Forest Park

5700 Lindell Blvd, St. Louis, MO 63112

(314) 746-4599

<http://www.mohistory.org>

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 4 out of 5 stars

Transportation accessibility: 5 out of 5 stars

Docent-led tours upon request: 5 out of 5 stars)

On-site docents and staff: 4 out of 5 stars

Unaccompanied visiting experience: 4 out of 5 stars

Tactile and auditory interpretation: 4 out of 5 stars

Last evaluated on July 12, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate.

The United States certainly 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 rather visual nature of several museum's exhibits, the facility presents some challenges to the visually impaired visitors, but the services which the museum provides, including docent-led tours, hand-held audio tours, and proximity to public transportation routes, make it possible for blind visitors to have an enjoyable and enriching experience.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM

Travelers using public transportation will find the Missouri History Museum very accessible. The Forest Park Metro link station is located about two blocks away and connecting bus #90 Hampton southbound has a stop by the main southern entrance of the museum. Per usual, Metro Call-A-Ride, rideshare apps, 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.

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 at 12 o'clock. This layout remains consistent, regardless of whether you enter through the northern or southern entrance, and, due to their central location, the desks serve as a convenient point of reference or you can request a group or docent tour guide. The rooms and hallways are rather simple enough for easy navigation and orientation, and spacious enough to allow an easy flow of traffic for either a cane or a guide dog user. The restrooms are also easy to locate from the main lobby after soliciting verbal directions, and they are clearly identified with Braille and large-print signs.

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. To take full advantage of the museum's attractions, I highly recommend requesting the assistance of a docent or sighted companion, especially when exploring the museum unaccompanied or for the first time.

Printed maps are available at the help desk, while a tactile map is not yet an option. Low visitors may also find the use of low vision devices helpful in reading the nameplates 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.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM

The Missouri History Museum offers two services that 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 anyone. 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. These prerecorded audio files of permanent exhibits may also be accessed on the museum's website under the "Exhibitions" link. 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 enough to give the listener a well-rounded immersion in the content of the exhibition even prior to your visit. These audio tours also mention any tactile or interactive components of the exhibit that the visitor may encounter.

Although these hands-on features are rare in permanently existing museum exhibits, visiting exhibitions continue to offer an especially impressive array of auditory and tactile components that add a whole new dimension to exploring our past. Braille nameplates are also being considered as a long-term goal for all MHM exhibits, in addition to the already-existing docent and auditory services. Information on further accessibility enhancement projects will be evaluated on the future editions of this guide as they develop.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM

Museum docents could also contribute quite a bit of insight to a blind or visually impaired person's experience, and by notifying the museum in advance of your upcoming visit, a docent can be found to serve as a sighted companion. Given their rich and enthusiastic knowledge of the exhibits, these combinations 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 assist in exploring the exhibit as fully as possible.

The facility offers two options for hungry guests during the visit. 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. 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.

Further information about exhibits, museum hours, services, amenities, and nearly 700 special events may be found on the Missouri History Museum's website. The website is overall very accessible for both screen reading and magnification software on desktop and mobile web browsers. 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.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

THE MUSEUM OF WESTWARD EXPANSION

Jefferson National Expansion Memorial at Gateway Arch

Part 1: The Museum of Westward Expansion

11 North 4th St, St. Louis, MO 63102

(314) 655-1700

<http://www.nps.gov/jeff.htm>

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 3 out of 5 stars

Transportation accessibility: 3 out of 5 stars

Docent-led tours upon request: currently unavailable)

On-site docents and staff: 3.5 out of 5 stars

Unaccompanied visiting experience: 2 out of 5 stars

Tactile and auditory interpretation: 4 out of 5 stars

Last evaluated on July 29, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate.

Commuters crossing the Mississippi River on the regular basis towards St. Louis passes the Arch regularly. It is the tallest and the most iconic feature of the St. Louis skyline. The Gateway Arch, and all around, beneath, and within this famous monument rests the history of St. Louis and of westward expansion. From the 1803 Lewis and Clark Expedition to the age of the steamboat to the 1965 completion of the Arch itself, the grounds possess many intriguing stories, tributes, and exhibitions that are meant to provide a gateway from the past to the present.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

THE MUSEUM OF WESTWARD EXPANSION

While the museum ground beneath the Arch includes some of the most fascinating history pertaining to the westward expansion and Arch's development, the spacious layout and lack of wayfinding solutions make it challenging for visually impaired visitors to explore the museum fully independently. As of 2021, all major renovation projects and constructions of the Arch ground, including the underground museum had been completed, a significant departure from the prior aging facility. Featuring modern upgrades to the attractions while preserving all the exhibits and artifacts greatly enhances both indoor visibility as well as worthy updates to the accessibility of the museum.

The Gateway Arch and the Museum of Westward Expansion are not the easiest destinations to reach with the use of public transportation. Due to the nature of the museum's location, travelers could exit at either Eighth and Pine Metro link station or at the Laclede's Landing station. Both options will not certainly be ideal as they involve one or more street crossings and identifying your surroundings within an extensive, open area of the national park. Therefore, the use of rideshare apps, Metro Call-a-ride service, or other sighted drivers is encouraged. Otherwise, the park itself is highly maintained, with paved sidewalks and pathways, if you feel comfortable navigating in these types of environments.

The City Arch Riverfront has recently broken ground on a Park Over the Highway, an elevated landscaped park that will span the distance between the Old Courthouse and the Museum of Westward Expansion. When completed, this new component to the park's grounds will significantly improve accessibility, navigation, orientation, and pedestrian safety for both blind and sighted visitors. Details on these enhancement projects will be available in the future edition of this guide.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

THE MUSEUM OF WESTWARD EXPANSION

Be sure to feel and walk around one of the massive legs of the Gateway Arch and to walk the 630 ft span of the two legs prior to entering the museum. As the span is equal to the Arch's height, this will help blind and visually impaired visitors to take in the composition, size, and grandeur of the monument. After passing through security, security personnel may be able to either provide an escort or offer verbal directions towards the main desk for you to request additional assistance in getting around the museum. Furthermore, visitors can be briefed on the many attractions and regularly scheduled group tours within the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, and blind and visually impaired visitors could request audio descriptions devices for the two documentary films and the featured elements in the exhibit. For security reasons, devices may be obtained by presenting a valid government-issued photo ID.

Due to an ongoing nationwide labor shortage, it is not currently possible to arrange a park ranger to serve as a human guide. However, the newly renovated museum offers plenty of added tactile models of exhibits, along with Braille nameplates and signs where applicable. Therefore, visually impaired visitors will be able to take in the extensive and rich historical significance of the Arch and its development, and even finer details such as the miniature of downtown St. Louis from the 1900s with a tactile geographical map illustrating the country's westward expansion. This is also complemented with an audio button that a visitor could push to hear detailed explanations of the exhibit nearby, greatly improving the multi-sensory experience. A couple of animatronic figures within the main exhibition also deliver short monologues at the touch of a button which often pertain to a specific item or small collection of items on display. These features represent the few auditory and tactile components of the main museum exhibits, for, as in most museums, the artifacts on display are not meant to be touched, even though many lie within easy reach of the visitor.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

THE MUSEUM OF WESTWARD EXPANSION

For a more guided tour experience, visitors may partake in one of the museum's regularly scheduled group tours of the various exhibits. This offers a more interactive experience for both blind and sighted visitors to learn more about a specific exhibit or theme of the museum. The rangers excel at weaving the collections of artifacts and murals together into a larger and fascinating narrative that seeks to immerse the group members in the human experience and diverse landscapes of such historic ordeals as the 1803 Lewis and Clark Expedition. There are plenty of opportunities during and after the tour for asking further questions, and, if given proper advanced notice of a visitor's visual limitations, the rangers can ensure that additional verbal imaging and tactile components are integrated into the tour. Visitors should check with the museum prior to their visit to confirm which group tours (if any) will be offered on a given day of the week.

The Monument to the Dream documentary on the construction of the Gateway Arch, the IMAX film on Lewis and Clark, and the Lewis and Clark featurette in the main exhibit room are all well worth the visitor's time. Be sure to specify that you are requesting an audio description or descriptive video headset, not an amplified audio variation.

The museum is rich and unique, but the trip to the top of the Arch is something not to be missed, even for a blind or visually impaired person. Be sure to let a park ranger or ground staff know of your visual impairment as someone at the top will be able to meet you upon departing an elevator. The staff at the Arch provides plenty of descriptions of the sights and scenes from the top, which offers an impressive panoramic view within the historically unique architecture. As for the tram ride, buckle up! The line forms vertically in front of each tram. Be sure to assess if it will provide ample space for you and your guide dog, as well as to see if there is enough space for any other guests in your group as the tram is rather tight.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

THE MUSEUM OF WESTWARD EXPANSION

While you wait, there may be a couple of hands-on objects such as the rope to a steamboat's whistle and a replica of a set of levy scales that were used to weigh cargo. Similarly, the passageway leading to the north leg also contains a life-sized replica of the monument's keystone, the top-most section of the Arch which visitors may feel and examine, allowing them to grasp the size of the Arch and the way in which it was constructed.

Overall, the all-new Museum of Westward expansion is a huge improvement from the prior facility, with greater attention to detail on universal accessibility with a strong emphasis on tactile and auditory components. It is great to witness these improvements that directly benefit visually impaired visitors at the region's most historical sight. Details on further developments will be shared in future editions of this guide.

The National Park Service's website for the Museum of Westward Expansion provides a good summary of the attractions and basic visitor information that can be referenced when planning a visit to the Arch's grounds. Aside from minor layout issues, the website remains very accessible with screen reading and magnification software for both desktop and mobile web browsers.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

THE OLD COURTHOUSE

Jefferson National Expansion Memorial

Part 2: The Old Courthouse

11 N 4th St, St. Louis, MO 63102

(314) 655-1700

<http://www.nps.gov/jeff.htm>

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 4 out of 5 stars

Transportation accessibility: 3 out of 5 stars

Docent-led tours upon request: 4.5 out of 5 stars

On-site docents and staff: 3.5 out of 5 stars

Unaccompanied visiting experience: 4 out of 5 stars

Tactile and auditory components: 4.5 out of 5 stars

Last evaluated on August 15, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate.

This is a sequel to the above evaluation of the Museum of Westward Expansion, and it is something that is not to be overlooked when planning a visit to the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. Like the newly renovated Museum of Westward Expansion, the Old Courthouse remains very accessible for visitors who are blind or visually impaired. Its closer proximity to public transportation, its informative and descriptive ranger tours, and its well-narrated film on the Dred Scott Case will make a blind or visually impaired individual's visit both enjoyable and enriching. Numerous new project proposals and renovations are currently in progress or under consideration which are designed to make the exhibitions and regional history more engaging, enjoyable, and enriching for both blind and sighted visitors.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

THE OLD COURTHOUSE

Like getting to the museum, the Eighth and Pine Metro-Link station is located about four blocks away which is far more walkable with the use of adaptive GPS apps on a smartphone or with the use of assistive GPS devices. There are parking meters outside the courthouse that sighted companions may utilize for their convenience. Per usual, rideshare apps, cabs, and Metro Call-A-Ride service will be able to drop off passengers directly in front of the main entrance or within easy walking distance from the Old Courthouse.

Tours are typically offered hourly throughout the day, and they are a terrific way for blind and visually impaired visitors to take in the rich history and architecture of the courthouse. Due to an ongoing nationwide labor shortage and COVID-19 protocol, hourly tours may not be available. The staff's ability to offer hourly tours also depends on the daily availability of rangers, so calling ahead prior to your visit is highly encouraged for the most up-to-date information and schedules.

The information provided by the tour guides really helps visitors to step back in time and view the wide array of activities that took place at this historic landmark, and if the guides are aware of any group members with visual impairments, they can provide adequate physical descriptions of the architecture and surroundings. Blind and visually impaired patrons can ask to touch the architecture of the building and other structural features that are accessible and within easy reach. Many of the tours conclude in a restored nineteenth-century courtroom where the visitors are free to examine replicas of the judge's bench, the witness box, and other key furnishings of a typical nineteenth-century courtroom. If this final aspect of the tour is omitted due to time constraints, visitors may ask to be shown the room personally, providing that an available ranger can be found.

MUSEUMS & HISTORICAL SITES

THE OLD COURTHOUSE

The Old Courthouse also has an excellent short film on the Dred Scott Case which is shown at regular intervals throughout the day. According to the Courthouse staff, the movie used to have an audio description version, but the disc which contained the descriptions deteriorated and was never replaced. However, I do not believe a description track will be necessary for a visually impaired viewer due to the film's own outstanding narration throughout.

There are a couple of aspects of the Old Courthouse which could give the blind or visually impaired visitor some challenge. There are a couple of small exhibits on the Dred Scott case, an exhibit on the history of St. Louis, and a collection of paintings and engravings in the main rotunda that commemorate the construction and history of the Old Courthouse. As with most standard museum displays, these exhibits consist of nameplates, photographs, and items behind glass with no additional auditory or tactile formats. The Old Courthouse also houses several beautiful, scaled dioramas of the building, steam-powered riverboats, and other related items. For the sake of preserving these three-dimensional works of art, the dioramas are enclosed in glass cases. Blind and visually impaired guests will benefit from sighted assistance in visualizing these smaller exhibits.

Thanks to the same outstanding enhancement projects as the Jefferson Expansion Memorial Museum, the Courthouse also received worthy updates that greatly enhanced exhibit accessibility as of 2018. Combined with transportation accessibility and free admission to the courthouse makes this attraction a historic landmark worth visiting for both blind and sighted persons alike.



INTERACTIVE VENUES

INTERACTIVE VENUES

THE CITY MUSEUM

St. Louis City Museum

701 North 15th St, St. Louis, MO 63103

(314) 231-2489

<http://www.citymuseum.org>

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 3 out of 5 stars

Transportation accessibility: 2 out of 5 stars

Docent guides upon request: 3.5 out of 5 stars

Adequate staff and supervision: 3 out of 5 stars

Tactile and auditory components: 4 out of 5 stars

Unaccompanied visiting experience: 1 out of 5 stars

Last evaluated on June 18, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate.

Although it is called a “museum,” St. Louis’ City Museum is a truly unique facility that has compiled a vast collection of artifacts, art, architecture, and other random pieces of history into one large interactive playground. Unlike the most typical museums filled with displays of glass-enclosed artifacts accompanied by informative nameplates, the visitors to the City Museum will be able to touch, climb through, crawl over, slide down, and interactively explore its many attractions. This puts the items on “display” in a completely accessible manner for someone with little to no eyesight. Even though the museum is geared towards a younger visitor, adults will equally be fascinated by the history and origins of the items which comprise the building’s attractions and décor. Furthermore, the accommodating nature of the museum staff makes the St. Louis City Museum a terrific destination for any family or group looking for a day trip or night-time activity.

INTERACTIVE VENUES

THE CITY MUSEUM

The City Museum is not a facility that blind or visually impaired individuals (parent or child) should consider visiting unaccompanied. While eastbound bus routes that intersect 14th street, #97 and #32 will leave passengers with a short walk to the museum, Metro Call-A-Ride service, rideshare services, and other sighted drivers will be able to drop off passengers by the main entrance to the museum which is far more ideal. However, there is no real logical layout to the museum. The sheer magnitude of the facility and its exhibits could easily overwhelm an unassisted blind visitor when visiting for the first time. There are countless tunnels, jungle gyms, nooks, and crannies into which children are free to explore, so it is necessary to keep a close eye on them, regardless of whether they have a visual impairment. Furthermore, the existing hallways and passages are often full of energetic children and teens, so sighted guide assistance is highly encouraged to safely navigate the facility.

If the blind or visually impaired person happened to be visiting the museum on a less crowded day, the staff may even be able to accommodate the individual on the spot, but advanced notice is still recommended. If you are wanting to avoid the most crowded times of the year, it may be best to avoid visiting during periods close to holidays, the end of the school semesters, and the end of the summer break.

The museum's staff has taken great care to make the facility very safe for children, regardless of physical or mental abilities. All children who are under seventeen are required to be accompanied by an adult. All the tunnels are safely enclosed, and they will generally all end at central points throughout the museum. In addition, the tunnels and passages all have adjacent walking paths, making it easier for parents, guardians, and group members to keep an eye on the children and the other adventurous young-at-heart who are exploring the enclosed passages.

INTERACTIVE VENUES

THE CITY MUSEUM

The museum has also set aside dedicated sections of the facility that are intended for kids who are six years old or younger. These areas contain slides, smaller ball pits, and activities that are more appropriate for that age group. There is also a very popular arts and crafts area where young visitors can make their own museum souvenirs. Even so, it is recommended that there be at least one if not two sighted people to each blind or visually impaired child.

As mentioned earlier, the St. Louis City Museum is not a conventional museum, nor is it a typical playground. The museum is home to a collection of various artifacts ranging from a boat's propeller to gargoyles to the world's largest pencil. All these items are out where the public can examine and feel them. In some cases, the artifacts have been turned into playground material. For instance, the old shoe shoot, which is leftover from when the building served as a shoe factory, has been transformed into a ten-story spiral slide. An old metal cooling coil from the Anheuser Busch brewery has also been turned into one of the many elevated tunnel passages. The walls are equally unique. They are all covered from floor to ceiling with items such as gears, steamer pans, ramparts, and safety deposit boxes. Yet, the blind or visually impaired individual would need a sighted guide to fully understand and explore the museum's many attractions, since there are no nameplates nor accessible descriptions of the items which comprise the building's displays and decor.

Not only is the City Museum a fun place for energetic and adventurous youth to visit, but blind and visually impaired students who are studying art, engineering, or architecture will find this facility to be a gold mine of hands-on learning resources. The entire building, including its entrance, is full of building facades, sculptures, and reliefs from various styles and periods of architecture, and there are equally as many displays that could be considered engineering feats as well as elaborate works of art. These include a jungle gym with a plane perched atop and a stone sea serpent stair railing whose fin is comprised of old kid-painted conveyer belt rollers.

INTERACTIVE VENUES

THE CITY MUSEUM

Even the cave, though it is meant to resemble a realistic cave (complete with trickling streams of water), contains rock formations and tunnels that resemble dinosaur heads and other creatures. All these displays, items, and structural designs are completely accessible for blind or visually impaired students to touch and feel.

A full day at the City Museum can work up quite an appetite. So unsurprisingly, the museum is home to a small café called Samwitches. This is set up in a standard cafeteria-style, and although no Braille or large-print menus are available, the staff is prepared to help sight-impaired visitors place an order in a timely manner. The menu for this café may also be found on the museum's website in a pdf document, making it easy for blind or visually impaired people to access with the use of screen reading and magnification tools. The café staff is very accommodating and will also prepare pre-ordered lunches which can be ordered over the phone. This is especially helpful for large groups or anyone with special dietary needs.

Remember to consult the “Plan” (your visit) link on the museum’s website. It contains valuable visitor information, including what to wear, driving directions, hours, admission fees, and visitor amenities. The site is well organized with headings and clearly labeled links. While images lack alternative descriptions on the images that can be read by screen readers, the website overall remains accessible for most screen reading and magnification software’s to be able to access on a desktop or mobile web browsers.

INTERACTIVE VENUES

THE MAGIC HOUSE

The Magic House, St. Louis' Children's Museum

516 South Kirkwood Road

St. Louis, MO 63122

(314) 822-8900

<http://www.magichouse.org>

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 4 out of 5 stars

Transportation accessibility: 2 out of 5 stars

Docent guides upon request: 2 out of 5 stars

Adequate staff and supervision: 4 out of 5 stars

Tactile and auditory components: 4.5 out of 5 stars

Unaccompanied visiting experience: 2 out of 5 stars

Last evaluated on June 24, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate.

Magic is too often associated with optical illusions and sleight-of-hand tricks, but the exhibits and activities at the Magic House explore the magic that can be observed using all sorts of sensory inputs, not just sight. The facility itself presents some significant navigational obstacles to visually impaired visitors, but with the assistance of a sighted companion, most if not all blind and visually impaired children can experience a wide array of fun and engaging activities.

The closest bus stop located near the Magic House is the #49 Lindbergh at Kirkwood and Woodbine, about 4 minutes away from the facility. But catching #49 is not the most ideal option as the two ends of the bus route, at North Hanley or at south county mall are on the complete opposite ends of St. Louis County.

INTERACTIVE VENUES

THE MAGIC HOUSE

Instead, the use of rideshare services, local cabs, Metro Call-a-ride service will save you time and mass transit hassle. Bringing a sighted driver will likely be a viable option as well, since parking is free, and admission is very reasonable: \$9.50 for an individual and \$5.75 a person for groups of at least fifteen people.

There is no clearly defined path through the Magic House, and existing paths are often full of energetic children and teens, so the use of a human Guide when navigating the Magic House is highly recommended for the safety of yourself and other visitors around you. It is not currently possible to arrange for a personal docent guide, but the building is well staffed and well supervised, making the facility relatively safe for children, and allowing visitors to easily request assistance when necessary.

As mentioned previously, all exhibits at the Magic House rely on the use of many different senses, not just sight. As a result, a blind or visually impaired visitor is not at a complete disadvantage while exploring the Magic House. The sense of touch allows young visitors to experience the magic of gravity, static electricity, vibrations, and both magnetic and mechanical forces. The sense of hearing allows visitors to experience the magic of musical sounds, harmony, and melody. Finally, all these senses are combined into the sense of imagination by allowing visitors to step into the role of a construction worker, bank clerk, early American explorer, detective, Jack (of Jack and the Beanstalk fame), and the President of the United States.

Some featured attractions such as the Hall of Mirrors, the Bubble Room, and the Garden Kaleidoscope rely heavily on the sense of sight, but most can still be enjoyed with the assistance of a sighted companion to describe the visuals. Furthermore, there are sufficient tactile, auditory exhibits and activities, such as the Children's Village, the Water Works Room, and the facility's iconic ball of static electricity, to allow for a totally fun and enriching experience for blind and visually impaired children.

INTERACTIVE VENUES

THE MAGIC HOUSE

If the stomach begins to rumble during the exploration and all the fun, the Magic House's Picnic Basket Café boasts a healthy selection of soups, sandwiches, and other basic cafeteria-style foods. As with most cafeterias, there is no Braille or large-print menu, but the menu is basic enough that staff members should be able to assist a blind or visually impaired individual in making an informed decision in a timely manner. The menu may also be downloaded from the Magic House's website in a pdf format, making the information very accessible to blind or visually impaired individuals using screen reading and magnification tools. Thanks to the use of headings and the clear alternative text on the page's links, navigating Magic House's website does not present any barriers on both desktop and mobile web browsers. The only exception to this is the "Exhibitions" page since the information on the various rooms and attractions is presented in the form of graphics or in the form of cycling still images of kids enjoying the many attractions.

INTERACTIVE VENUES

SCIENCE CENTER & PLANETARIUM

Saint Louis Science Center and Planetarium

5050 Oakland Ave, St. Louis, MO 63110

(314) 289-4400

<http://www.slsc.org>

Accessibility Rating:

Overall: 4 out of 5 stars

Transportation accessibility: 3 out of 5 stars

Docent Guides Upon Request: 4 out of 5 stars

Adequate staff and supervision: 4 out of 5 stars

Tactile and Auditory Components: 4 out of 5 stars (under development)

Last evaluated on June 29, 2021, by Seyoon Choi, BCE Arts & Entertainment Program Associate.

As with the City Museum and the Magic House, the Saint Louis Science Center and Planetarium are full of hands-on activities, and although the facility is mostly geared towards young kids, older teens and adults will equally also find interest in many of the featured attractions. From the Earth's geological layers to the distant stars and planets, this dual museum explores the various realms of science and astronomy in a wide array of interactive and immersive activities. Many of these activities are already accessible for visitors who are blind or visually impaired, and developments continue to present new interactive features that will enhance a visually impaired individual's overall experience at the Science Center and Planetarium. yet this popular tourist attraction remains one at which a sighted companion will serve significant assistance to the visually impaired visitor.

INTERACTIVE VENUES

SCIENCE CENTER & PLANETARIUM

Numerous bus routes stop relatively close to the Science Center, with the closest being the #59 Oakland which stops right at the facility. But given the frequencies of this bus, be sure to check #95 Kings Highway, #90 Hampton, and #31 Chouteau prior to your departure. As usual, rideshare apps, local cabs, Metro Call-A-Ride service, and other sighted drivers will be able to easily drop off passengers within easy walking distance of the main entrance on Oakland. Admission to the Science Center is free, but visitors wishing to explore special touring exhibits, attend a film at the Omni-MAX Theater, or visit the Planetarium should anticipate additional costs for admission into these areas.

Upon first entering, the visitor will instantly encounter an overwhelming bustle of auditory activities in the main lobby. This is completely normal. You have just entered a spacious lobby with several entrances to featured galleries, multiple ticket booths, a handful of young children full of energy, and an elaborate elevated ball track. Fortunately, greeters are typically stationed directly inside the front entrance, and they are more than happy to point visitors in the right direction. In addition, the help desk is located directly inside the main entrance, which serves as a convenient location at which to inquire about special exhibits and amenities or to request a group or tour guide. Given the lack of indoor wayfinding solutions in this extremely spacious facility, the use of human Guide assistance is highly recommended for all blind or visually impaired visitors. Although most hallways are easy to navigate, the passages are very wide, with rarely a single, obvious path through the museum or its galleries. They are often crowded, and a blind or visually impaired visitor could very easily feel overwhelmed at the number of possible activities and exhibitions.

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Basic amenities such as Braille signages at the restrooms are difficult to locate or not present at all. Therefore, visually impaired individuals and groups may call in advance to arrange for SLSC staff members to serve as human guides throughout the facility's many exhibits, shows, and attractions. Overall, visitors will find the site's staff extremely friendly and helpful in making your visit as enjoyable as possible. As the facility strives to constantly improve its accessibility to all visitors, individual feedback is always appreciated, and the staff works hard to make each visit to the Science Center a truly unique experience.

The Science Center has numerous exhibits which range in topics from dinosaurs to the Earth's layers to the human body, and many of these exhibitions contain tactile and auditory components that greatly enhance a blind or visually impaired guest experience. This is achieved by allowing visitors to explore certain exhibits in ways that require the use of multiple senses. For example, in the dinosaur exhibition, visitors will find tactile components such as a life-sized cast of a brontosaurus' toenail, a rubber imitation of a Tyrannosaurus rex's scales, and small dinosaur toys. The large robotic T-rex (a signature trademark of the St. Louis Science Center) moves and roars throughout the day. The exhibition on the planet Earth also has an earthquake simulator and a machine-made cyclone that can be felt. These are features that are fun for kids to experience, and the inclusion of such tactile and auditory components greatly helps blind and visually impaired individuals to comprehend, explore, and appreciate the many displays and attractions more fully.

The Discovery Room and the Life Sciences Lab, among other galleries, contain even more hands-on experiments and puzzles that, with some sighted guidance for instruction, are fun for blind and low-vision youth to explore. These interactive galleries deal with topics ranging from architecture to the human body to microscopic organisms.

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Whether it's creating a foam model of the Gateway Arch, examining the human skeleton, or being tested for fingerprints, blind and visually impaired individuals will thoroughly enjoy exploring these galleries.

Most blind visitors will still need additional assistance in reading the instructions and fun facts on the signs or large touch screens at each station, but most of the activities are extremely blind-friendly. Visitors will encounter similar issues within the human body exhibition, the planet Earth exhibition, and the Syberville Gallery. As in the Discovery Room, most of these issues involve brightly colored pictures on the wall or information displayed on computer monitors. While some low-vision guests may be able to make out some of the main features and basic information, guests with less usable vision or who are totally blind visitors will need sighted assistance to provide physical descriptions of the displays and to walk through the steps of the activity.

Numerous enhancements have already been implemented over the past several years in both the Discovery Room and the Life Sciences Lab to further enhance their universal accessibility. The Discovery Room's tactile fossil display is now equipped with new Braille labels to identify each skeleton cast, and tinted windows now cut down on excessive amounts of both glare and heat, making the gallery more comfortable for everyone. Low-vision guests will also notice and appreciate new yellow tape on the Science Center's main stairwell as a means of clearly identifying the edge of each step, greatly improving contrast. In addition, most galleries are now also equipped with iPads, allowing visually impaired visitors easier access to additional information and activities in the Science Center. Low-vision guests will be able to use these iPads to gain a closer look at the text with the use of Zoom and invert colors option to meet their needs, and with the use of VoiceOver screen reader to browse the presented information, placing vast amounts of information at the visitor's fingertips.

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Additional proposals for accessibility enhancements to the Science Center galleries have been drafted and will be implemented over the coming years as resources and funding become available.

The Science Center hosts a variety of special traveling exhibitions throughout the year, apart from 2020 during the midst of the pandemic. These have included exhibits on the Titanic, Marvel Comics, candy, the circus, pirates, and a Dinosaur Named Sue. Generally, these exhibits feature plenty of tech and multimedia, such as audio tours), tactile components, and other hands-on activities that help make the exhibit very accessible to all visitors. These special exhibits require an additional admission fee, but it is well worth it for enjoyment and enrichment that can be obtained by blind youth and adults.

A unique trademark of the Saint Louis Science Center is the Omni-MAX Theater, an IMAX movie screen in the shape of a dome for an incredibly immersive experience. Featured films are typically documentary-styled films that explore a wide variety of topics, including global landscapes, outer space, flight, sea creatures, and even roller coasters. Low-vision individuals should have little trouble taking in the captivating and breath-taking visuals and scenery, but visitors with less functional vision are at somewhat of a disadvantage. I inquired about the audio descriptions services at this cinema and have been informed that such accessibility upgrade is in their pipeline. Yet the breathtaking narrations throughout the films and an incredible sound system create an extremely immersive atmosphere for blind and sighted viewers alike.

A covered walkway over the highway connects the Saint Louis Science Center with the adjacent James S. McDonald Planetarium. Currently, the Planetarium is not nearly as accessible as the rest of the facility's attractions. However, major enhancements are being developed and implemented that are gradually improving the Planetarium's universal accessibility.

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To coincide with the Planetarium's 50th anniversary in 2013, the staff unveiled a brand-new version of the facility's signature star show, "The Little Star that Could." Through a combination of synchronized iPads, tactile models, and Braille star charts, blind and visually impaired visitors can now explore the night sky and its countless celestial bodies in new dimensions. Visitors first encounter a tactile model of the auditorium to help explain the structure of the theater, the appearance of the night sky, and the concept of constellations prior to entering the facility. Once inside, activities involving temperature and texture teach visitors about the lifespan and key characteristics of different types of stars. During the actual star show, totally blind visitors can follow along with their own tactile star chart booklet while low-vision visitors can obtain a closer look at the projected images through synchronized iPads.

These new approaches to exploring astronomy bring the heavens down to a level newly accessible for both blind and sighted visitors alike. Due to the overwhelming success of the newly refurbished Little Star That Could program, the staff at the James S. McDonald Planetarium is hard at work drafting new proposals for implementing these same methods of astronomical accessibility throughout the entire planetarium. I am hopeful that these updates will allow blind visitors to soon reach for the stars and push beyond the stereotype that planetarium is strictly visual. I look forward to working with this talented team of individuals to assist in ways this experience could constantly evolve.

The Science Center's website may not appear to be fully accessible by looking at the main page. However, clearly labeled headings assist in breaking down the major sections of the page and its subpages, with links lacking detailed descriptions. Images on the site also lack alternative image descriptions now. Overall, the website is mostly accessible with screen reading and magnification software's on desktop and mobile web browser



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