

American Museum of Natural History

For 125 years, the American Museum of Natural History has been one of the world's pre-eminent science and research institutions. It is famous for its collections and exhibitions that illuminate millions of years of the earth's evolution, from the birth of the planet right through to the present day.

But, it is not only famous for science. The Natural History Museum is one of the most famous tourist attractions in New York City. The architecture alone makes the museum stand out from the crowd: it's a huge, sprawling stone building that reflects an unusual mix of design styles. The Central Park West entrance has towering white columns and a bronze statue of President Theodore Roosevelt. Other parts of the building look mediaeval, with towers like those seen on castles in fairy tales. By contrast, the Rose Centre is as modern as a building can get, a glass box with the new Hayden sphere floating in the centre.

The most important thing to remember when planning a visit is that the museum is huge, so bear in mind that you will have to do a lot of walking and stair climbing. There are four floors of gallery space, and the building is spread over an area of several city blocks. Inside there are 42 permanent exhibits as well as several temporary ones. They cover everything in creation from the beginning of time to the present, and represent every discipline of human science: biology, ecology, zoology, geology, astronomy and anthropology. The museum presents each item in its collection of millions of artefacts with detailed information about the cultural, scientific or historical importance of the pieces. It's quite possible, for example, to spend hours just in the Halls for Asian, African and South American peoples.

The Rose Centre for Earth and Space is an ultra-modern building that looks as if it could have come from a science fiction story. It's a clear glass cube, dominated by the sphere of the new-Planetarium Theatre. A spiral walkway winds down from the sphere, through scaled models of galaxies, stars and planets that hang from the ceiling to the gallery's floor. Beside the theatre, the Rose Centre also exhibits a history of the universe from the "Big Bang" until now. This exhibit is narrated by Jodie Foster, and contains models of the various stars that are in the universe.

The Natural History Museum is a must-see, especially if you are in New York with children or students, as many of the exhibits appeal to a sense of wonder and curiosity. There is no fixed admission price to the main galleries, just a recommended donation (although this does not include admission to the Sky Show, the Imax Cinema, or special temporary exhibits). The museum is an extremely popular place to visit, so food and drinks will cost tourist prices. Also, it can get quite crowded sometimes, so getting to look closely at a display can be hard at weekends. However, it is most definitely worth a visit!