

Museum Day is back with free entry at museums around the US

Keira Wingate
USA TODAY

Museums may offer enriching, interesting and exciting history, art and science to visitors, but they can be a bit pricey.

But on Saturday, Sept. 18, more than 1,000 museums, zoos and cultural centers across the United States will welcome visitors for free as part of the 17th Museum Day, put on by the Smithsonian magazine.

The company wants to celebrate the reopening of museums after museum closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the event being canceled last year. This year's theme, "Experience America," represents the return and resurgence of the country's diverse cultural experiences.

"Museum Day represents a national commitment to access, equity and inclusion and after a rough year and a half, we're excited for museums to open their doors and offer these educational and cultural experiences to the public for free this Museum Day," Amy Wilkins, chief revenue officer at Smithsonian Media, told USA TODAY.

In 2019, 324,922 tickets for the event were downloaded, resulting in over 900,000 museum visitors because participants attend with paying visitors, too.

How to get a ticket for free Museum Day entry

In order to snag a ticket, people have to select a museum and download one from Smithsonian magazine. Tickets will be available starting Aug. 18. You can only download one ticket per email address, but each one allows entry for two people.

Tickets may be free, but take note that many participating museums will have varying COVID-19 safety precautions in place this year. Check the museum website before you go.

What museums can I visit for free on Museum Day?

With over 1,000 museums expected to participate, visitors are bound to find one they will enjoy. Topics and themes range from air and space, art, children, general history, science and natural history museums – all ready for a flood of eager visitors. The full list of museums



Learn firsthand about World War II by stepping aboard decommissioned navy vessels active during the war at the USS Alabama Battleship Memorial in Mobile, Alabama. USS ALABAMA BATTLESHIP MEMORIAL PARK

can be viewed on the Smithsonian magazine website, with new ones signing up every day.

The Smithsonian already has museums open to the public for free every day, such as The National Museum of Natural History, National Air and Space Museum and National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Museum Day brings possibilities to visit other unique finds and hidden gems that aren't normally free.

Check out the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in New York and walk the entire length of an aircraft carrier. Or enrich your mind with art at the Museum of Arts and Sciences in Daytona Beach, Florida, the largest in the area. In Alabama you can go to USS Alabama

Battleship Memorial Park and step right onto the QOII battleship USS Alabama and submarine USS Drum, both national historical landmarks.

In California, visitors can soak up the sun and explore the California African American Museum. Visitors will learn about Black art, history and culture with a focus on California and the West.

Visitors to the Museum of Russian Icons in Massachusetts can walk up and down three floors of galleries, collected icons and related objects that give visitors a deep dive into Russian culture.

And the list goes on. "Most museums rely on public funds and donations, and those are not generally forthcoming in years in which people can't actually experience all the

amazing things they have to offer, so we're really looking forward to being able to draw attention to and support, these cultural institutions," Wilkins told USA TODAY.

Quaker Oats giveaway: Science kits, virtual Smithsonian tour

This year's event is sponsored by The Quaker Oats Co., which is giving away 100 Smithsonian science kits a day between now and Sept. 15.

Virtual museum field trips and other prizes will be available, too. Participants can enter for a chance to win at QuakerBacktoSchool.com.

Our public health departments are unsung heroes for community health



BLUE ZONES PROJECT

Here's how you can give back

by *Sebastien Saitta*

When we imagine public health infrastructure and the factors that drive it, we tend to look more on the surface toward our medical providers and healthcare institutions. While equally important, there is also an underlying influence in which the public may not always see. This comes from our public health departments, and communities are safer and healthier because of them.

The unsung heroes of the pandemic, local health departments at the city and county level including right here in SWFL played an extraordinary role in identifying COVID cases and tracing contacts, operating testing sites and call centers, as well as distribution of vaccines and keeping us informed along the way.

While the pandemic shined a greater light on the important role that health departments play in community health and safety, their efforts go much further. This includes taking the lead on communicable disease control, nutrition support for at-risk women and children, environmental health concerns such as septic system monitoring, swimming pool safety, tobacco control, free childhood immunizations, and school-age health screenings.

To help carry out public health initiatives like these and guide other priorities, public health departments play a role in facilitating implementation of a Community Health Assessment (CHA) which ultimately informs a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) for the community. In Collier County, the Department of Health, in partnership with NCH Healthcare System,

is in the process of collecting community input for the 2021 CHA. One way they do this is by asking community members to complete a survey. Participation in the survey helps to determine the public health priorities for Collier County, and leads to the formation of community workgroups that focus on those priorities to improve public health outcomes.

"The CHIP workgroups really demonstrate how listening to the community through a survey can be translated into meaningful community collaborations.", said Kimberly Kossler, Administrator of the Florida Department of Health in Collier County.

A similar survey was conducted in 2018 and the results showed that the top four public health priorities were mental health and substance abuse, chronic diseases, access to care, and the health of older adults. Healthy Collier CHIP focuses on those four priorities with workgroups made up of community experts combining their knowledge and resources to implement 10 strategies. Some of these strategies include offering Mental Health First Aid classes, introducing worksites to the CDC Worksite Wellness Scorecard, providing nutrition education to youth and adults, offering free blood pressure screenings, developing the Collier County Age-Friendly Action Plan, and providing education about dementia.

In 2020 the Healthy Collier CHIP workgroups accomplished the following measures:

- Identified 14 primary care providers in Collier County with integrated behavioral health care
- Taught the Mental Health First Aid class to 524 individuals
- Approved four additional Blue Zones Project worksites for a total of 66
- Facilitated the addition of tobacco cessation policies at two new worksites
- Provided free blood pressure screenings to 13,403 uninsured individuals
- Made Collier County a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities
- Established a Dementia Care and Cure Taskforce in Collier County

To help continue with these efforts and more like these, community members are invited to help by taking the 2021 Collier County Community Health Survey, and offer their perspective on the most important public health issues to focus on in the coming years. To take the survey, visit surveymonkey.com/r/dohcollierhealth2021.

Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc., Blue Zones Project is part of Southwest Florida's well-being improvement initiative that encourages changes in the community that lead to healthier options. For more information, visit southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com.