Get the Facts: Touch Tours

For people who are blind or have low vision, Touch Tours are an important way to experience a work of art by allowing them to form a strong impression of an artwork.

Providing access services like Touch Tours, means developing untapped audiences and instigating creative solutions, which enable full and equal participation.

Download the Get the Facts: Touch Tours factsheet and find out how you can open up a rich world of tactile experiences to your patrons and customers who are blind or have low vision.

# Touch Tours

Like the rest of the community, people who are blind or have low vision enjoy a range of arts and cultural events, including theatre, museums and art galleries.

They have often been excluded from full enjoyment of these experiences by lack of appropriate access. This may deter them from seeking arts experiences and lead them to feel unwelcome in Arts spaces and institutions.

“Touch is how I see and without it, museums can be very dull and boring places to visit.”

– ‘Many voices making choices: Museum audiences with disabilities’

Providing access services like Touch Tours, means compliance with discrimination and human rights obligations, developing untapped audiences and instigating creative solutions, which enable full and equal participation.

For people who are blind or low vision, touch is a major way to access the world at large and also to experience works of art. It allows the visitor to form a strong impression of an artwork or performance.

Touch tours are quite common in theatres that provide audio-described performances. Access services such as this are still not common enough, but they have grown and are increasing. Galleries and Museums have also become more interested in providing access through audio-description.

The purpose of galleries and museums to preserve and show, often priceless historical objects and artworks, sometimes works against allowing people to touch these items.

Some solutions have been found. It could be contemporary art that is made to be touched. It could be a sample of fabric similar to a costume. They could also be replicas of antique furniture, models and props, or specially created handling objects, such as fur or texture samples.

“I wanted to let you know how absolutely terrific the Tactile Tour was…a lovely range of costumes and props which very much added to the students’ experience of the opera; an inclusive feel and opportunity for our kids.”

– Dew Lewis, Statewide Vision Resource Centre

# Practical tips for guided Touch Tours in theatres, art galleries or museums.

* When welcoming a group, give a verbal description of the space, noting scale, lighting, activity and main features
* Guide people as they move through the space, if needed.
* As you move through spaces describe the surroundings to enable people to find their way and to get a sense of the space.
* Limit guided touch tours to 3–5 objects.
* Keep the tour group small, 3–6 people at most.
* While people are exploring by touch, describe the piece and its history.
* Give visitors time to discuss, to ask questions and to process the experience.
* In theatre productions, Touch Tours usually take place before a performance
* In a theatre, it is generally a guided tour of the stage, where people can touch the sets, props and costumes. Sometimes performers take part in costume.
* They are usually held in conjunction with an audio-described show or exhibition tour.
* They are generally offered at least once in a season.
* Make sure the person who is leading the tour is able to answer any questions about the performance or exhibits.
* Promote the show through your usual networks as well as disability arts networks, for example, Radio Vision Australia, Choose Art (Arts Access Victoria).

# Useful links

Venues and companies offering regular touch tours.

[Art Gallery of NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/visit-us/access/access-programs/)

[National Gallery of Australia](https://nga.gov.au/whatson/programs/access/visionimpaired.cfm)

[The Melbourne Theatre Company](https://www.mtc.com.au/your-visit/access)

[Victorian Opera](https://www.victorianopera.com.au/accessibility)

## Other useful links

Australian Museum and the National Museum: [Many Voices Making Choices: Museum audiences with disabilities](http://australianmuseum.net.au/Uploads/Documents/2595/many-voices.pdf)

Online Accessibility Training Learning Tool: [Touch Tours and Other Tactile Experiences](http://www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-touchtools.shtml)

Film clips from the USA about Touch Tours

[ABS: How Museums Use Touch](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YLPnltOiQo)

[ABS: Training Teen Docents for Blind Tours [CC]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TEUlmdp_Ak)

[Museum Hosts Touch Tour for the Blind](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrvMfEUKGwI)

[Radio Vision Australia](https://radio.visionaustralia.org/our-networks/melbourne)— Promote events on their arts programs to the blind and low vision community

[Choose Art](https://chooseart.com.au/become-a-promoter) — You can advertise captioned events on this accessible arts directory