Sensory Friendly Visitor Guide

Welcome to the Montana Heritage Center!

The Montana Heritage Center aims to make visits educational and enjoyable for guests of all ages and abilities. We recognize that some visitors have different sensory processing needs than others. With this in mind, we have created this guide to help parents, caregivers, and guests plan their day.

Getting Here

The Heritage Center is located across from the Capitol Building at 225 North Roberts Street in Helena.

Where do I park?

Free parking is available in nearby lots or on the street wherever spaces are available and not marked as reserved. Accessible parking is available in the north lot (near the prominent building overhang) and the east lot (near the Sovereign Nations Arbor). Street parking is also available near the west entrance.

What door should I use?

The north entrance has stairs or an elevator up to the main floor. The east and west entrances open directly to the main floor. To avoid the stairs or elevator, use the east or west entrance.

Can I drop someone off?

Yes! Drop off guests at the east entrance where there is a large turn-around area.

How long does a visit take?

There is no standard time for a visit. Admission is free so guests are encouraged to come and go as their energy and interest allows.

Our Exhibits

The Montana Heritage Center is committed to making our exhibits, programs, and services accessible and enjoyable to people of all ages. We have assigned a loudness rating based on the ambient noise of our spaces to help guests plan their visit. (1 is quiet and 5 is loud.)

Central Commons

Loudness Rating: 2

Welcome to the Heritage Center! In the Central Commons area you can store your items, explore the gift shop, and get a treat at Norm's Café.

- The Security Desk is located near the entrance of the Homeland Gallery. Staff are available to answer any questions you may have.
- The Tour Desk is located in front of the Security Desk and marked with a large blue flag. Tours of the galleries meet here, and tour guides can also assist if you have questions.
- Sensory kits with noise-dampening headphones and fidget toys are available to borrow at the Security Desk.
- The Gift Shop is located near the east entrance. During low-sensory hours, the music in the gift shop will be turned off.

The Montana Homeland Gallery

Loudness Rating: 3-4. Ambient noise includes sounds of thunder, people clapping, bird and animal sounds, audio stories, songs, horses galloping, a bell ringing, a train horn, and wind blowing. During low-sensory hours, many of these sounds will be turned off.

Explore the history of Montana, from 14,000 years ago to the present.

- This gallery features interactive audio stories that visitors can choose to engage with. These kiosks have earpieces for visitors to hold and listen.
- There are many videos, some of which you can choose to watch and others of which run on a loop. During low-sensory hours, the videos that run on a loop will be turned off.
- This gallery contains items that visitors are allowed to touch, including reproduction animal bones, animal pelts, diaries, and an old car. These items are marked with green 'please touch carefully' signs.
- This exhibit contains a simulation of going down a mineshaft elevator. There is a large video screen and sounds of a dynamite explosion. There is a countdown to the explosion. The mineshaft is behind a wall and visitors can choose to avoid this area. There is a sensory warning sign at the entrance of the mineshaft.

The Charles M. Russell Gallery

Loudness Rating: 1. There is ambient noise that accompanies the animated paintings in the gallery entrance.

Learn about the life and see the art of Montana's 'Cowboy Artist'.

- There is a scavenger hunt activity in this exhibit that can be completed for a free sticker. Clipboards and pencils are available to borrow. Pens are not allowed in the gallery.

Changing Gallery: Poindexter Collection

Loudness Rating: 1. Ambient noise in this gallery includes fan/ventilation sounds near the entrance.

This gallery features the abstract art collection of Montana native George Poindexter and his wife Elinor. They began to donate art to the Montana Historical Society in 1960.

- There is a scavenger hunt activity in this exhibit that can be completed for a free sticker. Clipboards and pencils are available to borrow. Pens are not allowed in the gallery.

<u>During Your Visit:</u>

Are there quiet areas available?

During low-sensory hours, the Mountain Bluebird Room will be turned into a decompression area. Outside of those hours, visitors are welcome to utilize the Family Care Room in the historic lobby. The historic lobby itself is also a quieter area, with available seating for guests. The historic lobby is located past the Gift Shop, near the Russell Gallery.

When are low-sensory hours?

The Heritage Center offers low-sensory hours on the first Tuesday of every month from 3:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. During these times, quiet decompression areas will be available to guests, and from 4:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. some ambient noise and videos will be turned off in the Central Commons and Montana Homeland Galleries. The Charles M. Russell Gallery and the Poindexter Gallery are designed as low-sensory spaces. Visitors are encouraged to view them from 3:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m.

What if I have a question or need assistance?

MTHS staff members are available to help with your questions. They usually wear blue lanyards, MTHS vests, or nametags. You can also ask at the security desk in the Central Commons near the Homeland Gallery.

What if I need mobility assistance?

MTHS offers wheelchairs, walkers, and portable seats for visitors to borrow. They are available near the entrances. Visitors are encouraged to contact staff members if they need assistance locating the mobility aids.

Where can I store my items?

Coat racks are available in the Central Commons, near the West entrance. Free storage lockers are available both in the Central Commons near Norm's Café, and in the Historic Lobby.

Is the Heritage Center ADA accessible?

Yes, the building is fully ADA accessible with elevators and ramps throughout. Accessible restrooms are available, and wheelchairs are available to borrow.

Can we bring a stroller?

Yes, strollers are allowed in all gallery spaces. We also have strollers that you can borrow in the Central Commons.

What are the restrooms like?

All restrooms are equipped with automatic flush toilets, faucets, and soap dispensers. There are both paper towels and automatic hand dryers available. The noise from the hand dryers can be challenging for those with sensory processing differences. There is an infant changing area in the family bathroom, which is located by Norm's Café.

Do you offer noise-dampening headphones?

Yes. They are available to borrow at the security desk in the Central Commons, along with fidget toys.

Is there a place for breastfeeding?

Yes. The Family Care Room is in the historic lobby, near the Changing Gallery.

Where can we eat?

Norm's Café is located near the Homeland Galley. They offer sandwiches, baked goods, coffee, and other items. Seating is available inside or on the patio. Food and drink are not allowed in the galleries.

Are there less busy times of day?

Sundays 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., Mondays through Fridays 3:00 p.m-5:00 p.m., and (when the museum is not hosting a special event) Thursdays 5:00 p.m-6:30 p.m. are less busy times.

Is photography permitted?

Yes, photography for personal use is allowed. However, flash photography and tripods are not permitted.