

The good, bad and ugly of virtual museum tours

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Museums stand testament to the vast history of this world. Spectacles housed in these establishments are the raw materials for the research and studies we now find in books and on the internet. And they communicate to the viewers in ways not possible through other media. Yet today, it is the internet that has brought the museums of the world to our screens. To commemorate the International Museum Day, let us look into how we can visit museums from our homes.

Google Arts and Culture is a platform that has documented over 2000 museums and places of cultural and historical significance from around the world. The webpage for each museum in this platform consists of a section with a slideshow of stories about the histories and other important facts relevant to the museum. There is also a catalogue of all the existing artefacts and exhibits, but these only provide the photos and the details. They cannot replicate the experience of walking through a museum. Perhaps for that very reason, Google incorporated the functionalities of their Street View application to allow the viewers to take a 360-degree virtual walk through the different hallways of the museums.

Google Street View will allow you to view museums' exhibits as if you were standing in front of them but at a price. The entire gimmick is not user friendly at all and often renders blurry portions. Chances are, you will become either dizzy or fed-up while clicking the arrow icons that appear on the floor to advance forward. The smartphone app of Google Arts and Culture allegedly provides you with a better experience, but we were



unable to access it because currently, a bug is preventing users around the world from even viewing the front page.

Moreover, you will find yourself missing the crowd inside the museum. There is something about the nuance of experiencing decades worth of history among a crowd that will let you focus all your attention on what is in front of you. It simply can't be replicated at home, and the fact that most of the virtual tours in Google's platform don't have an audio guide does not help. An exception would be the original YouTube video footage of Israel's Holocaust Museum *Yad Vashem*, which users can access through the

museum's Google Arts & Culture exhibits.

There are a number of museums that have released virtual tours on YouTube. Japan's *Ghibli Museum, Mitaka* is the latest addition to that list. But the videos are painfully short, offer brief looks, and are just too much of a tease.

The British Museum, the Louvre, and the Vatican Museum have their own, dedicated virtual tours. The British Museum's one is more of a fancy way of looking at the artefacts rather than actually touring a museum. The Louvre and Vatican Museum virtual tours have a 360-degree functionality that is much more improved than Google's one. The Vatican Museum

is an incredible sight to behold, but you'll need to have a fast and stable internet connection for a seamless experience. Perhaps the most complete experience is provided by the tour of the Louvre. You can not only easily navigate, but the details about the exhibits will pop-up right beside them at your command.

Although virtual museum tours won't give you the perfect experience, it is wonderful to see how technology today is allowing us to access such marvellous sights from the comfort of our homes. These tours give us something to appreciate in these troubled times and bring a bit more colour into our lives.

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