

# Natural History Museum in London

When it comes to gathering knowledge on the thousands of years old earth and its resourceful history of nonliving things, visiting museums could be the best approach. And one of the oldest museums of natural history in the world is the Natural History Museum in London. Originally founded in 1754, it was moved to its present facility in 1881 on an expansive 5.7 hectare piece of land. The present building's intricate architectural design and structure are stunningly eye-catching and picturesque. It is a palatial, Romanesque building that was the parent museum of the British Museum that separated from it in 1963.

Visiting on a holiday, I had to wait in queue for more than half an hour to enter the premises. The queue was so long that it stretched out across the grounds onto the main street.

Visitors to this popular museum mostly included school going children along with their parents. While waiting in queue, I

noticed a tree trunk that was 330 million years old. The trunk was planted in the garden area, tagged with a conspicuous notice board saying 'older than the dinosaurs'. Though forbidden to touch, children were seen leaning on it and taking pictures.

As the line inched forward, I entered the museum and encountered a massive dinosaur skeleton cast. The skeleton cast is sometimes dubbed as Dippy and is almost 85 feet long and 22 feet tall.

The landing panel of the main stairs leading to the upper floors has a big, white marble stone statue of naturalist Charles Darwin, commonly known as the father of evolutionary biology.

As a whole, the entire museum contains almost 80 million objects and is divided into four colour zones -- blue, red, green and orange. Each zone has a unique and specific collection of specimens of animals and other natural objects.

In the blue zone, specimens of dinosaurs,

fish, reptiles and mammoth mammals are on display. An 82-metre long colossal blue whale skeleton is the main attraction here.

The red zone mostly consists of sculptures of earth and the planets. Visitors are given the feeling of enjoying the galaxy as there is a giant video screen in a pitch-dark gallery.

With specific hiatus, documentaries on the earth's evolution, restless space, earthquakes and volcanoes explosion, and continental-drift are shown.

The green zone tries to discover the symbiotic relationship between life and the environment. There are mostly pictures of animals, specimens of birds, fossil from marine reptiles and minerals on display here.

Meanwhile, the orange zone consists of two sections -- the Darwin centre and wildlife garden. The first is an education and research centre for the museum, while the garden is home to thousands of British flora and fauna and more than 2,600 species located outside of the Darwin centre.

Furthermore, there are several galleries in the different zones. But the must-see ones are -- Volcanoes and Earthquakes gallery, Treasures in the Cadogan Gallery, Dinosaurs, Mammals (blue whale) Hintze Hall, formerly known as the Central Hall, Images of Nature, Creepy Crawlies, The Vault and the Earth Hall.

There is a souvenir shop on the ground floor as well, close to the exit gate. Visitors can get miniature dinosaurs; frameless photos of landscape, flowers and animals; jewellery made of natural stone, bone and skull; clothes and crockery printed with natural elements; and famous books written by different naturalists.

Situated on Cromwell Road in Central London, it is easy to access as there are a number of tube-stations nearby. The museum does not have a car parking facility and thus discourages people from using their personal cars when visiting.

**By Samiul Raijul**  
**Photo: Collected**

## Rubies uncut

The king of all gemstones — red, rare and regal. It's a stone, which has been a favourite of the kings and the queens, and above all of gods. With its magnificent colour and lustre, it is one of the hardest gemstone known to man. In Indian mythology, ruby ranks high as it was used as the central stone for creating crowns of gods and goddesses, and also emperors and empress.

The ruby is the red variety of the mineral corundum, one of the hardest minerals on earth, of which the sapphire is also a variety. Pure corundum is colourless. Slight traces of elements such as chrome, iron, titanium or vanadium are responsible for the colour. So only red corundum qualifies as a ruby, while all other colours are classified as sapphires.

There is close relationship between the ruby and the sapphire and the two jewels of the British Crown were named 'Black Ruby' and the 'Timur Ruby'.

The two magical elements associated with the symbolism of this colour are fire and blood, implying warmth and life. "Rubies go very well with diamonds as they enhance the glitter and radiance of the diamonds. Rubies will be the fashion trend for 2016 and women will buy a lot of ruby-studded jewellery," predicts New York based Indian jewellery designer Piu Jain.

The Burmese ruby that is found in Myanmar has a rich full-bodied red tone with a slight bluish tinge often referred to by jewellers as pigeon-blood-red. The colour of



a Burmese ruby is regarded as exceptionally vivid. It is said to display its unique brilliance in any light, be it natural or artificial. Rubies of Vietnamese origin generally display a slightly purplish hue. Rubies from Thailand, another classical supplier, however, often have a darker red with a brown tone. Sri Lankan rubies, which have now become very rare, are mainly light red, like ripe raspberries.

The Thai ruby still has plenty of detractors in the world gem community. "To many old guard dealers, the Burmese are still the best," said Padam Pungalia, who processes ruby in Jaipur, India.

Often, Thailand surpasses even the best ruby from Myanmar, as it can be remarkably clean and lively. The Burmese ruby often has a hazy, cloudy quality that softens its appear-

ance and makes it less brilliant but the Thai ruby often can be cut in spectacular fancy shapes.

Maria Doulton, a gem and jewellery analyst explained why rubies from Myanmar are considered most precious. "Higher in value than sapphires or emeralds, and often more valuable than diamonds, the most coveted rubies have traditionally emerged from the mines in Upper Burma (Myanmar). Today, these mines are virtually depleted, sending the price of the prized Burmese rubies sky high".

One of the world's most famous rubies is the Chhatrapati Manik — an oval Burmese cabochon of the very finest colour, weighing around 20 carats, and is believed to date back 2,000 years. Signifying the sun sur-

rounded by nine other gemstones representing the planets, a ruby was set into the crown of King Vikramaditya of Ujjain in Central India, who ruled the northern Indian kingdom from 380-415 AD. The famous ruby was last seen in London in 1934 as the centrepiece of a diamond tiara, but its current whereabouts are unknown.

Rubies are found in Pakistan in the Hunza Valley; other than that they are found in Laos, Cambodia, Nepal and lately in Afghanistan as well as several African countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and Madagascar.

Cut and carat (weight) are also an important factor in determining the price, and the world's most expensive ruby is the Sunrise Ruby. "The price of ruby is primarily based on its colour. The brightest and most valuable 'red' called blood-red or 'pigeon blood', commands a large premium over other rubies of similar quality. Clarity like diamonds is the second important quality so a clear stone will command a premium. Diamonds are graded using criteria that have become known as the four Cs, namely colour, cut, clarity and carat. Similarly, natural rubies can be evaluated using the four Cs together with their size and geographic origin. The ruby should either be set in gold or bronze for best enhancement. Some rubies show a three-point or six-point asterism or 'star'.

**By Prakash Bhandari**  
**Photo: Collected**