

Museum Guide interview questions

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What to expect

Museum Guide interviews test how you engage people, handle the unexpected and care for collections. Expect a mix of practical tour scenarios, behavioural questions about visitor service and at least one question on collection safety or emergency response.

- **Process and tour delivery:** Questions about how you plan, time and adapt a guided tour for different audiences.
- **Behavioural and visitor service:** Questions asking for real examples of handling difficult visitors, teamwork or education programs.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Hypothetical situations involving touching, damage, lost children or emergencies where you must prioritise safety and preservation.
- **Technical and subject knowledge:** Questions that ask you to explain an artefact or exhibition concept clearly to a mixed group.
- **Collection care and safety:** Questions about monitoring gallery spaces, reporting conservation concerns and following emergency procedures.

A typical interview starts with a phone or video screen with a people and culture officer, then a panel with the public programs manager and a senior guide. You may be asked to deliver a short trial tour or presentation to the panel. Reference checks and a Working with Children Check usually follow before an offer.

1. Walk me through how you would prepare and deliver a 45-minute guided tour for a mixed group of tourists, local visitors and a few school children.

Why they ask

This tests your planning, audience awareness and ability to keep a tour on time without rushing.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through: research, equipment check, greeting, route plan, timing markers, adaptation points, closing summary.

Example answer

"First I would confirm the booking details and any access needs. I would visit the galleries beforehand to check the route, test the audio guide system and note any displays that are temporarily closed. On the day I would arrive early, greet the group warmly and set expectations about duration and questions. I would start with a short overview of the exhibition's main idea, then move through three or four key objects. For each stop I would give a clear explanation, invite questions and connect the object to something familiar. If I noticed the school children losing interest I would switch to a quick observation question or a story about the maker. I would keep an eye on the clock and leave five minutes at the end for a summary and directions to other galleries."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a visitor who was upset or disruptive during a tour.

Why they ask

Behavioural question to see how you stay calm, protect the group experience and follow workplace policies.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"At a museum where I volunteered, a visitor became upset because a gallery she wanted to see was closed for conservation work. She raised her voice in front of a tour group. I asked my colleague to continue the tour while I stepped aside with her. I listened without interrupting, apologised for the disappointment and explained the reason for the closure. I offered her a printed guide to the objects that were still on display and suggested a time later that week when the gallery would reopen. She calmed down and thanked me before leaving. I reported the incident to my supervisor so the front desk could prepare better signage."

3. A child in your tour group reaches out to touch a delicate object on display. What do you do?

Why they ask

Scenario question to test your immediate judgement, collection care and ability to redirect without shaming a visitor.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: immediate action, verbal redirection, preserving dignity, reporting.

Example answer

"I would calmly move closer and say something like, 'Please keep your hands by your sides, this object is very old and fragile.' I would not raise my voice or single the child out. Then I would invite the whole group to look at the object from a safe distance and point out a detail they can see without touching. If the child had already made contact, I would note the object and report it to the conservation team at the end of the tour. I would also remind the group at the start of future tours that some objects are behind glass for their protection."

4. How would you explain the significance of an artefact to a group that includes both a school class and a group of adults?

Why they ask

Technical and communication question to see if you can pitch content at multiple levels without losing anyone.

How to structure your answer

Explain your approach: start with a shared idea, layer detail, use questions and analogies, check for understanding.

Example answer

"I would start with one clear idea that works for everyone, such as what the object was used for and why it mattered. Then I would layer in more detail for the adults, for example about the trade routes or materials, while giving the school children a concrete comparison like 'this is about the size of a lunchbox'. I would ask an open question to both groups, such as 'what do you notice first?' and use their answers to guide the next part. If I saw blank faces I would simplify. If I saw interest I would add another layer. I would finish by linking the object back to the exhibition's main theme so everyone leaves with a takeaway."

5. What would you do if you noticed a small crack in a display case or a change in humidity near a collection item?

Why they ask

Safety and collection care question to check you know when to act and who to tell.

How to structure your answer

Process: observe, do not touch, secure the area if needed, report immediately, document.

Example answer

"I would not touch the case or the object. I would check whether visitors were safe and whether the crack posed an immediate risk to the collection. If the case was in a public area I would stay nearby to discourage anyone from leaning on it. I would contact my supervisor or the conservation team straight away, giving the exact location and a description of what I saw. If the humidity reading looked unusual I would note the time and the reading. After the issue was handled I would write a short incident report so the conservation team had a record."

6. Give an example of how you have worked with a colleague or volunteer to deliver an education program.

Why they ask

Behavioural question about teamwork and coordination, which matters for school bookings and public programs.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"I worked with a fellow guide to run a holiday program about local history for families. We split the planning: I wrote the tour script and activity sheets, and she organised the craft materials and room setup. On the day we took turns leading groups and managing the hands-on table. When one activity ran long we adjusted the schedule together so the next group was not kept waiting. The program ran twice that week and we received positive feedback from parents about how well organised it felt. We later shared our notes with the education team so they could reuse the format."