



INFORMATION FOR GROUP VISITS

If you would like to book a group visit to the Museum of English Rural Life (The MERL) please read the following guidelines before submitting the online enquiry form. If you have any questions please contact us at merlevents@reading.ac.uk

OPENING TIMES

Museum & Garden

- Monday: closed
- Tuesday-Friday: 9am-5pm
- Last Thursday of the month*: 9am-9pm
- Saturday & Sunday: 10am-4pm

Please be aware that we host a busy toddler group on Friday mornings until approximately 12pm.

Groups that require an evening visit can attend during a scheduled, late opening. These are offered on the last Thursday of the month and on selected weeks during the year.

*Dates may vary, please always check our website before booking.

For full details of our opening times, please visit: <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/visit-us/opening-times/>

WELCOME HOSTS

We can arrange a volunteer Welcome Host to greet you and give you an introduction to the Museum. This introduction lasts approximately 15 minutes and includes:

- Welcome to the Museum
- Brief history of the MERL
- Brief summary of the recent redevelopment
- A short guide to the new galleries with signposting to collection and gallery highlights
- Health and safety, and building information.

The Welcome Hosts are happy to remain in the galleries to answer questions for approximately 1 hour during your self-guided visit.

The Welcome Host is free of charge and subject to availability. Maximum 25 people per welcome host.

We do not offer full guided tours of the Museum.

OBJECT HANDLING

Subject to availability, we can arrange volunteer-led object handling within the galleries during your visit. Depending on the size of your group, you may need to be split into smaller groups of 5 or so for these sessions, to allow careful handling of the objects.

We may be able to tailor the objects used for this session if your group has a specific interest. Please make note of this on the enquiry form.

PARKING

Parking is always limited and we ask for lift-sharing/alternative modes of transport to be considered wherever possible.

Subject to availability, we can reserve space for a small minibus and two cars in our car park.

If we are told in advance, we can reserve spaces for buses and coaches on the University's Whiteknights campus. This allows the group to be dropped off and collected (if the driver is not part of the group).

For full details on how to get to The MERL, please visit: <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/visit-us/getting-here/>

REFRESHMENTS

The MERL café offers hot and cold drinks, snacks, and a small selection of sandwiches.

We can organise refreshments for larger groups (15+).

- Tea/Coffee (self-serve): £1.25 per person.
- Lunch Platters (sandwiches, crisps, fruit & cakes): £7.50 per person.

If your group does require refreshments, we can provide a room (subject to availability) for your group to eat in. There are also picnic tables in the garden for when the weather is good!

Eating and drinking is not permitted in the galleries (the spaces beyond the Welcome space, café and shop). Please ask a member of staff if you are not sure where this is. We ask that the group leader takes responsibility for ensuring that their group do not take food or drink into the galleries.

If you would like a more substantial meal, there is a University café/bar called 'The Dairy' in the adjacent building, which offers hot and cold food. We would recommend that you contact them in advance to let them know of your group size and arrival time. Please note, The Dairy operates a cashless system.

Opening times

- Monday – Friday (term time): 8.30am-1am
- Monday – Friday (vacation): 10am-11pm
- Saturday: 12pm-1am
- Sunday: 12pm-11pm
- Closed during the University Christmas and Easter closure periods.

For full details of their up-to-date opening hours, and what they offer, please visit:

https://www.reading.ac.uk/catering/BarsandLateNight/Cater_Eat_Drink_London_Road_Bars.aspx

MUSEUM FACILITIES AND ACCESS

The MERL is accessible to a wide range of visitors and we always strive to meet the access needs of everyone who visits us. Full information is available on our website <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/visit-us/facilities-access/>

We can offer the following for visitors with impairments:

- Disabled access throughout the Museum, including a step free entrance with automatic door and wheelchair lifts for all stairs
- Disabled visitor parking
- We do not currently offer large-type booklets of our gallery interpretation or audio guides, but we are working to make these available soon
- Fully accessible toilets
- Assistance dogs welcome
- Hearing loop facilities for use by our Welcome Host with your group, subject to availability. Please contact us for more details about this.

FAQs

How much is a visit?

- It is free to visit the Museum but our suggested donation for all visitors is £5.
- If your group would like to make a donation you can write a cheque (payable to 'The University of Reading') or add cash to our collection boxes at the Museum.

How long does a visit take?

- We would suggest allowing 2 hours for a visit but obviously, some visitors will take less time and some much more.

Can our group have a guided tour?

- We don't offer guided tours of the MERL but can provide a Welcome Host. The details of this are on the previous page.

What are the minimum/maximum group sizes?

- Bookings are essential for groups of 10+.
- Our ideal maximum group size is 40. We are able to accommodate groups of 50 but this does make the gallery space more crowded.

Is there a cloakroom or meeting room that we can use?

- Subject to availability you can reserve a room (our Learning Studio or Visitor Room).
 - Coats and bags can be left here and the room can be locked during your visit
 - The rooms can be used as a meeting or discussion space.
 - You are permitted to eat and drink in these rooms.
- We have a small locker room for individual use. If your group is larger and needs a lot of storage space, we recommend that book a room.

Can we wear backpacks or carry large bags in the museum?

- If your group plan to bring large bags, we recommend that you reserve a room to leave these in.

Do you have any information on the galleries at MERL?

- Please visit our website for further information on our galleries:
<https://merl.reading.ac.uk/visit-us/interactive-maps-and-galleries/>

Can we take photographs in the galleries?

- Photography is permitted throughout the galleries unless there is signage to say otherwise. Some of our collections are subject to copyright legislation, and this is indicated clearly.

Can we draw in the galleries?

- Drawing is permitted in the galleries, using non-permanent materials (pencils) only. Please take care not to block walking routes for other visitors or leave bags and other items in the way.