

Indian Museum Kolkata - Oldest and Largest Museum of India

The **Indian Museum Kolkata**, standing as the oldest and largest museum in India, beckons visitors on an unparalleled journey through the rich tapestry of the country's history and culture. Established in 1814, this iconic institution boasts a vast collection spanning diverse disciplines, including archaeology, anthropology, art, and natural history. Nestled in the heart of Kolkata, the museum's majestic halls house an array of artifacts, from ancient sculptures to rare manuscripts, providing a panoramic view of India's storied past.

Its architectural grandeur and extensive exhibits make it a cultural haven, offering an immersive experience that transcends time. As you traverse its hallowed halls, the Indian Museum unfolds as a custodian of India's heritage, inviting enthusiasts, scholars, and curious minds alike to delve into the depth of the nation's artistic and historical evolution.

So before visiting the history of **Indian Museum**, let's look at this architecture at a glance.

Indian Museum	
Formally Known as	Imperial Museum of Calcutta
Location	Jawaharlal Nehru Road, Park Street, Kolkata
Established in	2 February 1814
Founded by	Asiatic Society of Bengal
Founder Curator	Nathaniel Wallich
Current Director	Shri Arijit Dutta Choudhury



[Source: indianmuseumkolkata.org]

Now, let's try to understand the history of the making of Indian Museum.

History of Indian Museum

The Indian Museum was founded in **1814** by the **Asiatic Society of Bengal**. The society was founded in 1784 by a group of British scholars and intellectuals, including **William Jones**, who is considered the father of Indology. The society's goal was to promote the study of Asian culture and history.

The museum's first collection was donated by the society's members. The collection included antiquities, fossils, and natural history specimens. The museum's collection grew rapidly over the years, and it soon became one of the largest museums in the world.

In 1876, the museum was moved to its current location on Chowringhee Road. The new building was designed by William Emerson, a British architect. The building is a beautiful example of Victorian Gothic architecture.



[Source: indianmuseumkolkata.org]

The Indian Museum has played a significant role in the study of Indian culture and history. The museum's collection has helped to preserve and promote India's rich heritage.

Highlights of Indian Museum

Some of the highlights of the Indian Museum include:

The Ashokan Pillar

The Ashokan Pillar, also known as the Ashoka Column, is a 2,300-year-old pillar erected by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka. It is made of polished sandstone and stands at a height of 10.5 meters. The pillar is inscribed with edicts of Ashoka, which promote peace, non-violence, and tolerance. The Ashokan Pillar is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is considered one of the most important archaeological artifacts in India.

The Dancing Girl of Mohenjo-daro

The Dancing Girl of Mohenjo-daro is a 4,500-year-old terracotta figurine from the Indus Valley Civilization. It is made of a fine reddish clay and is 10.2 centimeters tall. The figurine depicts a young woman standing on one leg with her arms raised above her head. The figurine is considered to be one of the most beautiful and iconic pieces of art from the Indus Valley Civilization.

The Diamond Throne of Tipu Sultan

The Diamond Throne of Tipu Sultan, also known as the Simhasana, is a jewel-encrusted throne that belonged to the 18th-century Mysore sultan. It is made of wood and is decorated with over 60,000 diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and pearls. The throne is considered to be one of the most valuable pieces of furniture in the world.

The Indo-Saracenic Hall

The Indo-Saracenic Hall is a beautiful hall in the Indian Museum that houses a collection of Indo-Saracenic art and architecture. The hall was built in the 19th century and is a masterpiece of Indo-Saracenic architecture. The hall is decorated with intricate carvings, colorful tiles, and stained glass windows.

Buddhist Stupa from Bharhut

The Buddhist Stupa from Bharhut is a 2nd-century BCE stupa that was excavated in the 19th century. It is made of sandstone and is decorated with reliefs depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha. The stupa is considered to be one of the most important Buddhist monuments in India.

Egyptian Mummy

The Egyptian Mummy is a 2,000-year-old mummy that was brought to India from Egypt in the 19th century. It is the only Egyptian mummy in India and is housed in the Indian Museum. The mummy is the body of a young woman who was mummified using a complex process that involved removing the internal organs and preserving the body with chemicals.



[Source: Wikipedia]

Collections in Indian Museum

The Indian Museum in Kolkata, India, houses a vast and diverse collection of artifacts and specimens that span millennia and encompass a wide range of disciplines. Here's an overview of the museum's notable collections:

Archaeology Department

- **Ancient Indian Antiquities:** This collection showcases artifacts from various periods of Indian history, including the Indus Valley Civilization, the Mauryan Empire, the Gupta Empire, and the Pala Empire. Highlights include the Ashokan Pillar, the Dancing Girl of Mohenjo-daro, and sculptures from the Gandhara and Amaravati schools.
- **South Asian Antiquities:** This collection comprises artifacts from countries across South Asia, including Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. It features sculptures, bronzes, terracotta figurines, and manuscripts representing diverse artistic and religious traditions.

Geology Department

- **Fossils and Minerals:** This collection showcases a comprehensive range of fossils representing various geological periods and ecosystems, providing insights into India's prehistoric past. It also includes a vast collection of minerals, both common and rare, illustrating the geological diversity of the country.
- **Rocks and Meteorites:** This collection comprises a wide variety of rock samples representing different geological formations and processes. It also includes a collection of meteorites, providing a glimpse into extraterrestrial materials.

Zoology Department

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- **Mammals, Birds, and Reptiles:** This collection houses a vast array of preserved specimens representing India's rich biodiversity. It includes mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish, providing insights into the country's diverse fauna.
- **Insects and Marine Life:** This collection showcases a comprehensive range of insects, both common and rare, highlighting the diversity of India's insect fauna. It also includes a collection of marine life, including corals, shells, and crustaceans.



[Source: Wikipedia]

Anthropology Department

- **Ethnographic Artifacts:** This collection comprises artifacts representing the cultural traditions of various tribal and ethnic groups from across India. It includes clothing, ornaments, household utensils, tools, and musical instruments, providing insights into their lifestyles and customs.
- **Anthropological Specimens:** This collection includes anthropological specimens, such as skeletal remains and artifacts related to human evolution and prehistory. It provides valuable insights into the biological and cultural heritage of India's people.

Art Department

- **Paintings:** This collection showcases a diverse range of paintings from various schools and periods of Indian art history. It includes Mughal miniatures, Company paintings, Bengal School paintings, and modern and contemporary art.
- **Sculptures:** This collection comprises sculptures from various periods and regions of India, representing different artistic traditions and religious iconography. It includes stone sculptures, bronze sculptures, and terracotta figurines.

Other Collections

- **Manuscripts:** This collection houses a vast collection of manuscripts, both handwritten and printed, representing various literary genres and languages. It provides insights into India's rich literary heritage.
- **Coins and Medals:** This collection comprises coins and medals from various periods of Indian history, showcasing the evolution of coinage systems and numismatic art.
- **Textiles:** This collection features a wide range of textiles from different regions of India, representing diverse weaving and embroidery techniques. It provides insights into India's rich textile heritage.



[Source: Wikipedia]

The Indian Museum's diverse collections offer a comprehensive and captivating journey through India's rich cultural and natural heritage. It is a treasure trove of knowledge and inspiration for scholars, students, and the general public.

In conclusion, the Indian Museum Kolkata stands as an invaluable repository of India's legacy, encapsulating the essence of its ancient roots and cultural diversity. As the oldest and largest museum in the country, it not only preserves artifacts but also fosters a sense of connection to the rich tapestry of India's history. Visitors leave with a profound appreciation for the artistic achievements, archaeological wonders, and anthropological insights housed within its walls.



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The Indian Museum Kolkata is not merely a collection of exhibits; it is a living testament to the vibrant heritage that has shaped the nation. Its enduring significance lies not only in the antiquities it safeguards but in the stories it tells, making it an essential destination for those seeking to unravel the layers of India's past and celebrate the cultural mosaic that defines its identity.

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