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The New Burke Museum: Your Family Guide

Dinosaurs, real-life scientists in action and amazing artifacts await

BY GEMMA ALEXANDER (/AUTHOR/GEMMA-ALEXANDER)

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PHOTO: Dennis Wise/University of Washington

Seattleites were fond of the old Burke Museum: that dim, dusty, fossil- and taxidermy-filled antique of a natural history museum. But anyone could see that "The Burke," along with its visitors and collections, would be better off with more space, more light – and, oh yes, air conditioning.

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The incredible [new Burke Museum \(https://newburke.org/\)](https://newburke.org/), holding its grand opening celebrations (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/new-burke-grand-opening>) Saturday-Monday, Oct. 12-14, includes those improvements, to be sure. But there is so much more: This Burke turns the very idea of a museum inside out – and you and your family are going to love it.



Credit: Dennis Wise/University of Washington

A history of innovation

The Burke Museum wasn't always stodgy. In 1885, a group of teenagers noticed that the city's rapid growth was chasing away the wildlife and destroying the native landscape that attracted people to the area in the first place (sound familiar?).

Calling themselves the Young Naturalists, the group started collecting specimens of the plants and animals in our region. The Territorial University (now the [University of Washington \(https://www.washington.edu/\)](https://www.washington.edu/)) housed their collections and hired a teacher for them. Fast-forward to present day: The university and the Burke Museum remain permanent research partners today.

Research on view

The Burke Museum's collections contain 16 million objects. Visitors have been able to view only a small portion of these collections – at the old museum, about a third of the facility was open to the public. The remaining two-thirds of the space were hidden behind closed doors, where scientists used the bulk of the collections to study natural and cultural history.

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Museum work includes vacuuming baskets and cataloging chopstick rests. Credit: Nancy Chaney

The new Burke reverses that proportion: 60 percent of the museum is visible to the public. It's not just the objects from the collections on exhibit. The work of the museum is also on display – in 12 labs, open workrooms and an artist studio – where visitors of all ages can see the collections up close and actively being used for research.

On a preview tour, we saw staff carefully vacuuming baskets, scientists stuffing a

turkey (not in the Thanksgiving way) and an undergraduate student studying a preserved fish specimen.

From now on, kids won't think of a museum as just a place where you go to see stuff in cases. They will know that a museum is also a place where scientists work. Perhaps they'll even imagine themselves doing that work one day, as a student or as a professional.

Pro tip: Besides peeking in on the humans at work in the museum, kids will also want to keep an eye out for the Dermestid beetles. These little worker bugs, also known as flesh-eating beetles, are there to clean bones.

Six galleries

Divided into six galleries, the new Burke is 66 percent larger than the old Burke, which gives the displays some much needed breathing room, from the whale skeleton suspended above the lobby to the stained-glass Tiffany window. Not that little kids are likely to stop and ponder most of the carefully curated exhibits. They will probably race straight to the third floor [Fossils Uncovered \(https://www.burkemuseum.org/exhibits/fossils-uncovered\)](https://www.burkemuseum.org/exhibits/fossils-uncovered) gallery to look at the dinosaurs. Not only are all the favorite old fossils there, but you can see archaeologists study one of the world's best specimens of a [T. rex skull \(https://www.burkemuseum.org/news/burke-museum-team-discovers-t-rex\)](https://www.burkemuseum.org/news/burke-museum-team-discovers-t-rex).

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A skeleton in the *Fossils Uncovered* gallery. Credit: Nancy Chaney

The second floor contains the biology exhibits, called [Amazing Life](https://www.burkemuseum.org/exhibits/amazing-life) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/exhibits/amazing-life>), and the special exhibit gallery (the first exhibition will be the ocean-themed “Tidal Breaks”). Kids will enjoy watching biologists work in the labs (whiteboards in the window explain what they’re up to each day). The giant tree of life, displaying specimens in evolutionary relation to each other, might cause even the most rambunctious child to slow down and look carefully.

Back on the first floor, the museum explores culture with the [Northwest Native Art Gallery](https://www.burkemuseum.org/exhibits/northwest-native-art) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/exhibits/northwest-native-art>), the Culture Is Living gallery and the [Our Material World](https://www.burkemuseum.org/exhibits/our-material-world) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/exhibits/our-material-world>) gallery. In contrast to the old panorama-type displays, which tended to exoticize cultures and focus on differences, these three exhibits emphasize the expertise, knowledge and input of the cultures represented.



The boat wall at the new Burke Museum. Credit: Nancy Chaney

“Museums in the past have been rather violent places of misrepresentation,” says Holly Barker, the museum's Curator for Oceanic and Asian Culture. For these new exhibits, the Burke collaborated with members of over 100 communities, building reciprocal relationships and learning how to display and explain the objects from the point of view of the people who created them.

Family and kids' spaces

Reinforcing the living culture of the indigenous peoples highlighted on the ground floor, the new Burke houses the first brick-and-mortar location of Off the Rez (<https://www.offthereztruck.com/>), the popular food truck with a menu inspired by contemporary Native food culture. The café will have wild rice bowls and kale salad, but the main attraction is the ultimate kid-friendly food – fry bread.



A log to play on in the third floor kids' play area at the new Burke. Credit: Nancy Chaney

Kids can already enjoy two interactive play spaces inside the museum. With a climbable log, a breaching orca, a tide pool and a canoe as props, the Field Camp is designed to let kids be scientists collecting data. Find the Field Camp on the third floor.

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In the Camouflage Corner on the second floor, kids and adults can dress up like animals and test their disguises against a variety of habitat backdrops. The play areas are ideal for preschoolers but are open-ended enough that visitors of different ages and abilities will enjoy them.

On afternoons and during weekends, activity alcoves throughout the museum will host hands-on activities, crafts and touchable collections (new themes featured each month).

Outside the museum, the landscape is still under construction, but next summer,

seating steps and a native camas flower meadow (grown by [Oxbow Farm](#) (<http://www.oxbow.org/>) of pumpkin patch fame (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/places-to-get-your-fill-of-harvest-fun>)) will give kids plenty of room to run around and play.

Grand opening

The museum celebrates its public grand opening (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/new-burke-grand-opening>) with three days of activities, Saturday–Monday, Oct. 12–14, 2019. A couple of preview events take place beforehand:

Thursday, Oct. 10, 4–7 p.m.: [The Burke invites all indigenous peoples](#) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/calendar/indigenous-preview>) to preview the museum for free, in honor of the museum's collaboration with Native communities.

Friday, Oct. 11, 8:30–10 a.m.: All are welcome to join the free, outdoor ribbon-cutting ceremony with a presentation by the Yakama Warriors Association and remarks by Gov. Jay Inslee and UW president Dr. Ana Mari Cauce, among others. (Note: The museum is open to members and donors only Friday.)

Opening weekend

Saturday, Oct. 12, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.: [Grand Opening Day](#) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/calendar/grand-opening-day>) will feature singers, dancers, poets and DJs. Outdoor festivities in the Burke Yard are free; [book timed-entry tickets](#) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/tickets?date=2019-10-12>) to enter the museum and be among the first to see the galleries. The Off the Rez café opens today.

Sunday, Oct. 13, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.: [Kids' Day](#) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/calendar/kids-day>) will be full of special programs for youngsters, including touch tables, take-home crafts, story time, Baby Shark dance parties and more. Outdoor activities are free; [book timed-entry tickets](#) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/tickets?date=2019-10-13>) to enter the museum.

Monday, Oct. 14, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.: On [Indigenous People's Day](#)

(<https://www.parentmap.com/article/celebrate-indigenous-peoples-day-new-exhibits-and-special-events-seattle-childrens-museum>), the Burke will celebrate with performances by indigenous arts groups. Outdoor activities are free; [book timed-entry tickets \(https://www.burkemuseum.org/tickets?date=2019-10-14\)](https://www.burkemuseum.org/tickets?date=2019-10-14) to enter the museum.

If you go...

Where: The new Burke Museum (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/>) is located adjacent to the old Burke was, at the northwest corner of the University of Washington campus, near the intersection of N.E. 45th St. and 15th Ave. N.E. The address is [4300 15th Ave. N.E., Seattle](https://www.google.com/maps/place/4300+15th+Ave+NE,+Seattle,+WA+98105/@47.6122,3127801,17z) (<https://www.google.com/maps/place/4300+15th+Ave+NE,+Seattle,+WA+98105/@47.6122,3127801,17z> /[/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x5490148b0aded45:0x895dc81a4e0f5578!8m2!3d47.66122,3105914](https://www.google.com/maps/place/4300+15th+Ave+NE,+Seattle,+WA+98105/@47.6122,3105914)).

Open hours: The Burke is open daily, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; free first Thursday hours are 10 a.m.–5 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month.

Admission: \$22 for adults; \$14 for youth ages 4–17 and students; ages 3 and under free. Students, staff and faculty admitted free. [Membership](https://www.burkemuseum.org/support/membership) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/support/membership>) can pay for itself in as few as three visits; additional [discounts](https://www.burkemuseum.org/visit/discounts) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/visit/discounts>) are available.

Getting there: The Burke website [lists parking options](https://www.burkemuseum.org/directions-and-parking) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/directions-and-parking>) but there is no free parking in the area. The UW campus is walkable by public transit; [consider taking the bus](https://tripplanner.kingcounty.gov/) (<https://tripplanner.kingcounty.gov/>), or enjoy a scenic one-mile walk across campus if you arrive by light rail at the [UW station](https://www.soundtransit.org/ride-with-us/stations/link-light-rail-stations/university-washington-station) (<https://www.soundtransit.org/ride-with-us/stations/link-light-rail-stations/university-washington-station>).

Field trips and Burke Boxes: Parents, tip off your kids' teachers now. The new Burke is currently booking [field trips](https://www.burkemuseum.org/education/educators-and-schools/field-trips) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/education/educators-and-schools/field-trips>) for the 2019–2020 school year. [Burke Boxes](https://www.burkemuseum.org/education/educators-and-schools/burke-boxes) (<https://www.burkemuseum.org/education/educators-and-schools/burke-boxes>) are

teaching kits filled with different objects and lessons. These serve as a portable way for the Burke, and teachers who can't get their classes to the museum for a field trip, to teach using the Burke's research and collections.

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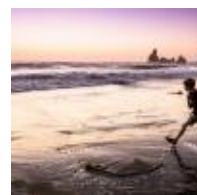
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