



Toolkit for Developing a Sensory Trail



The British
Museum

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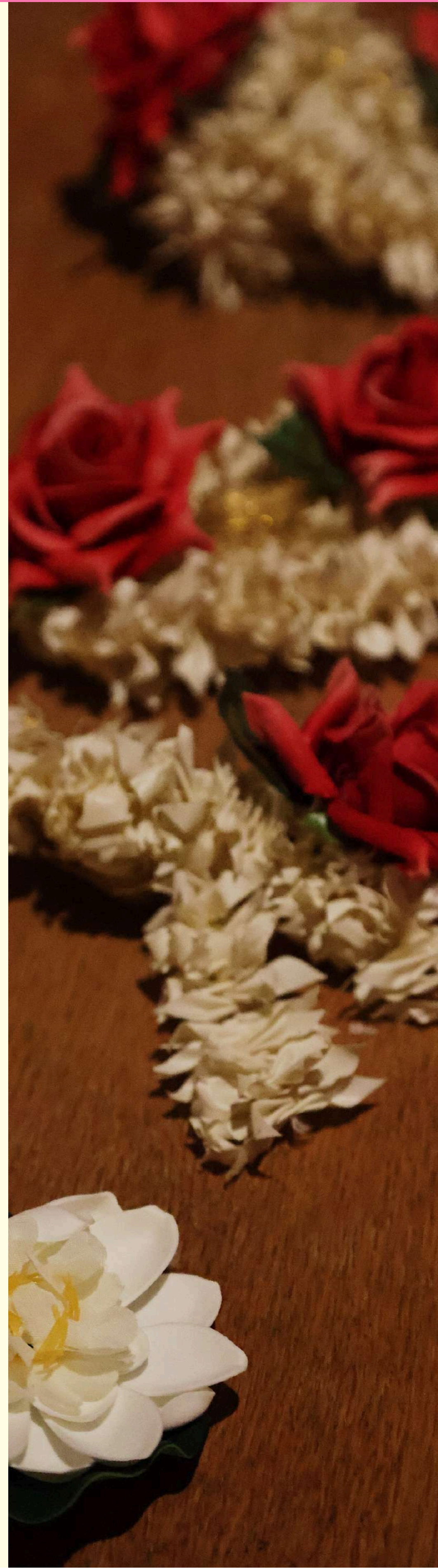
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Introduction

Context

Since 2006, the British Museum delivers an International Training Programme (ITP) annual programme which gives museum and heritage professionals from around the world the opportunity to come to the UK as 'ITP Fellows' and share skills, knowledge and experiences during placements at the British Museum and UK based museums and heritage institutions.

Further engagement projects are essential to the core objectives of the ITP. Finding ways to give our fellows the widest possible opportunities for training and development is fundamental. Legacy projects inspire a lifelong commitment to our network from ITP partners and fellows, supported by the British Museum.

As part of the ITP legacy projects, the British Museum coordinates co-production projects to support collaborative work between ITP Fellows and the Museum departments, creating further opportunities for knowledge exchange.

Purpose

This toolkit has been developed and presented by Siddhant Shah, founder of *Access for ALL* and ITP Fellow 2021, drawing on his co-production project with colleagues in the British Museum's Learning and Programmes and Asia Department. As part of this work, Siddhant created a sensory trail for autistic adults visiting the exhibition *Ancient India: living traditions*.

This toolkit is designed as an introductory resource to support colleagues across the sector in developing autism-inclusive visitor experiences. It offers practical suggestions and considerations for creating sensory trails, alongside broader guidance on fostering an autism-inclusive environment within museum spaces.

Rather than proving a prescriptive model, this toolkit is intended as a flexible and adaptable checklist that museum professionals can tailor to their own contexts as they strengthen their approach to autism inclusion.





Ancient India: living traditions

Ancient India: living traditions (May – October 2025) explored the origins of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain sacred art, tracing their development back more than 2,000 years. As one of the first major exhibitions to examine the devotional art of India through a multi-faith, contemporary and global lens, it highlighted the inspiration behind now-familiar depictions of the deities and enlightened teachers. The exhibition also demonstrated how these artistic traditions travelled across the Indian Ocean to Southeast Asia and along the Silk Roads to East Asia.

Working with colleagues in the Learning and Programmes and Asia Departments, the ITP supported Siddhant Shah's co-production project to develop a sensory trail for autistic adults visiting the exhibition. The project was grounded in community engagement, created in partnership with the *Asian People's Disability Alliance (APDA)* to curate both a sensory trail and an accompanying resource kit.

The sensory trail featured five stops within the exhibition, each offering a multi-sensory experience that combined visual, tactile, olfactory and auditory elements that extended opportunities for visitors to engage with the exhibition content beyond just looking.

During his time at the British Museum, Siddhant facilitated the sensory trail as part of a *Relaxed Opening* of the exhibition. Relaxed Openings welcome people with disabilities, neurodivergent visitors and anyone with sensory needs seeking a calmer environment in which to view the Museum's exhibitions. Siddhant delivered the trail in both English and Gujarati to 36 attendees, enhancing accessibility and inclusivity through linguistic choice and culturally responsive engagement.





Siddhant Shah



"Accessibility needs to be a habit, and not a virtue!"

**- Siddhant Shah,
Founder, Access For
ALL**

Siddhant is a museum accessibility and outreach consultant, and founder of Access For ALL, a national level award winning organisation aiming to bridge the gap between art, cultural heritage, museums and disabilities. Currently, Siddhant is the Access Consultant to The Prime Ministers of India Museum, New Delhi.

Siddhant's core responsibilities include access audits, providing universal design solutions and developing inclusive outreach and capacity building and training.

Siddhant also works on accessible content development and digital access projects, alongside consulting on how to make museum spaces more gender neutral, safer and approachable.

Siddhant is a regular TedX speaker and UNESCO consultant alongside teaching inclusive and universal exhibition design. A professional ambition is to develop a global network of museum access experts with the goal being to make museum access a mainstream element of museology.



Toolkit Components

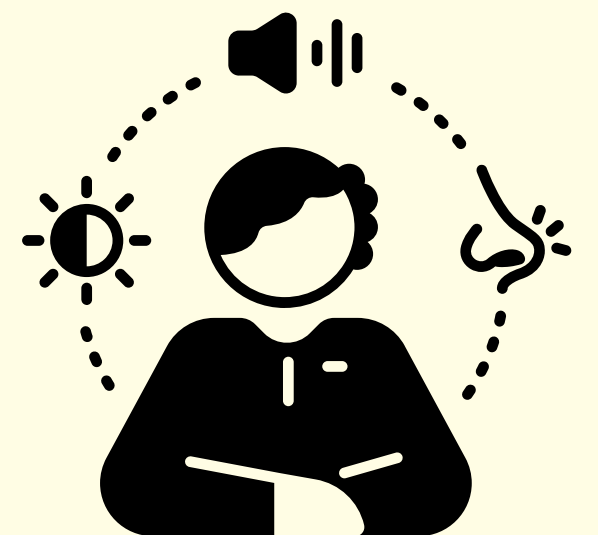
1. Pre-Visit Planning Materials

When planning an exhibition, consider the following practical suggestions to help improve accessibility....

A. Visual Story Guide

Create a simple, illustrated guide that walks visitors through:

- What to expect on arrival
- Key stops on the trail
- Sensory experiences (touch, sound, lighting)
- Use clear photos, icons & easy-to-read text



B. Sensory Map

Provide a museum floorplan that clearly marks:

- Trail route & stops
- Quiet zones
- High-stimulus areas (e.g., crowds, audio elements)



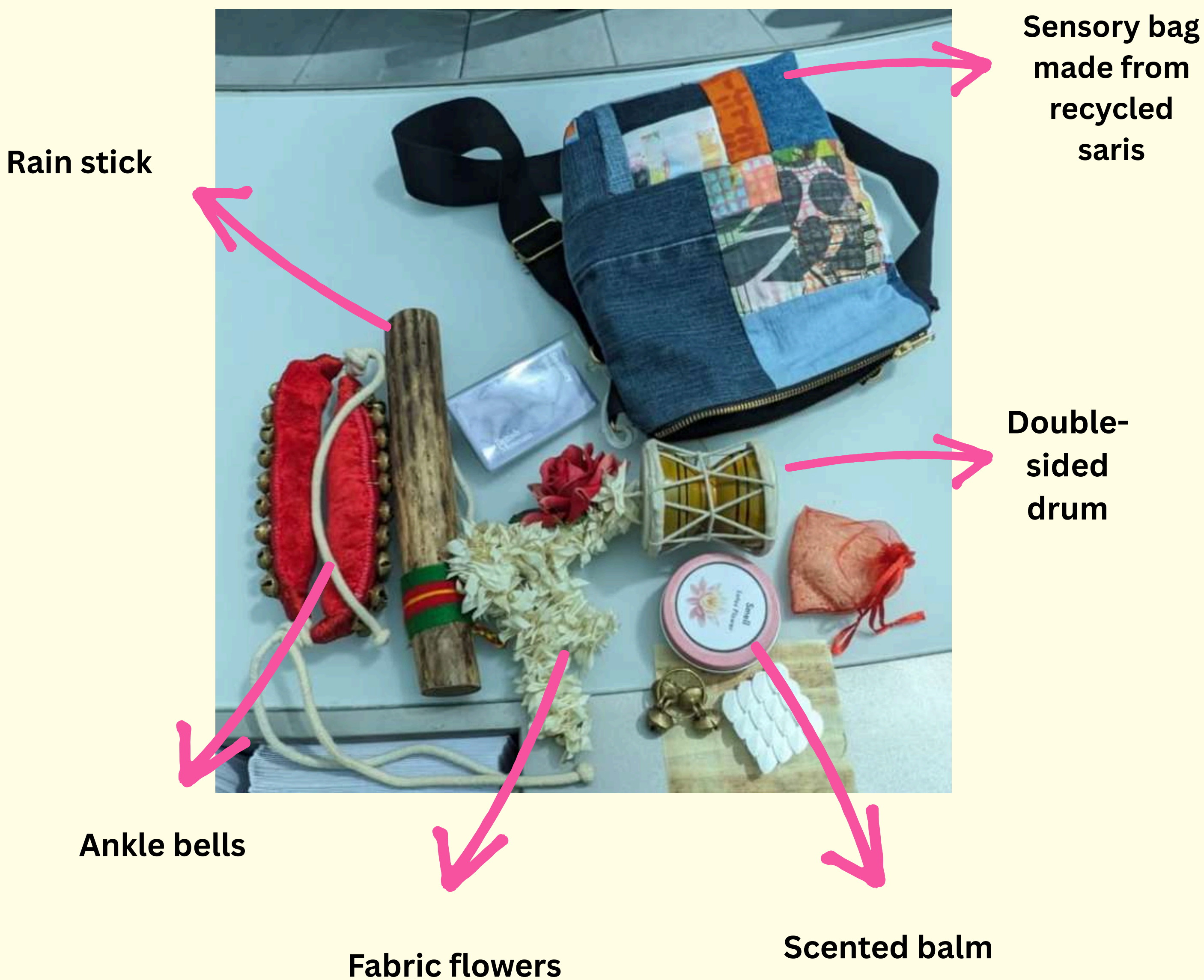
This helps reduce surprises and supports visitor planning.



Toolkit Components

2. Sensory Trail Kit / Bag

To encourage sensory engagement, a bag made from recycled saris was filled with co-selected items, including...



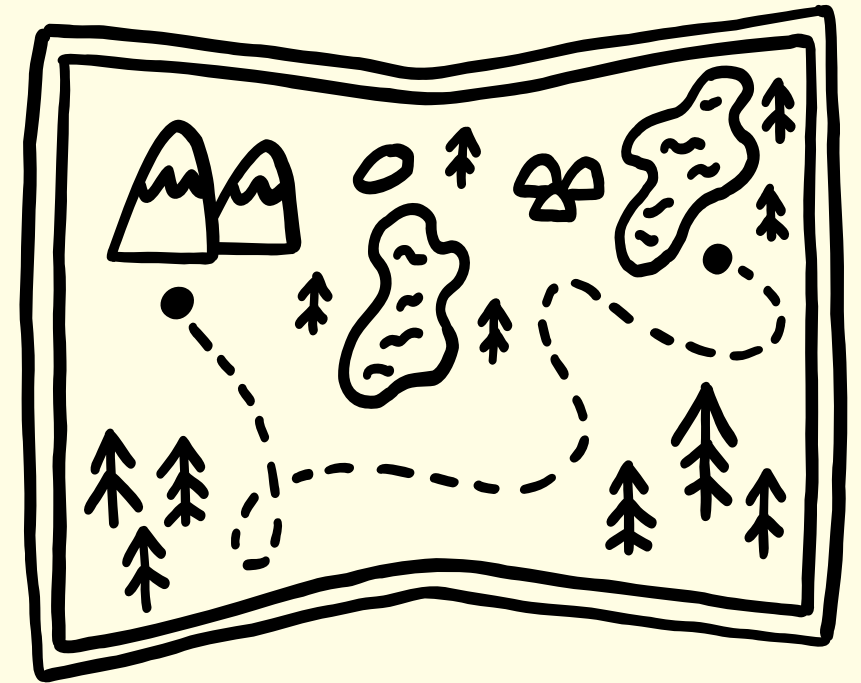
The bag itself was also a sensory tool, made with recycled saris by the *Asian People's Disability Alliance (APDA)*, including different textures such as denim and sequins. This bag was freely available to everyone for the duration of the exhibition.



To help reduce anxiety through predictability and enable independent navigation.

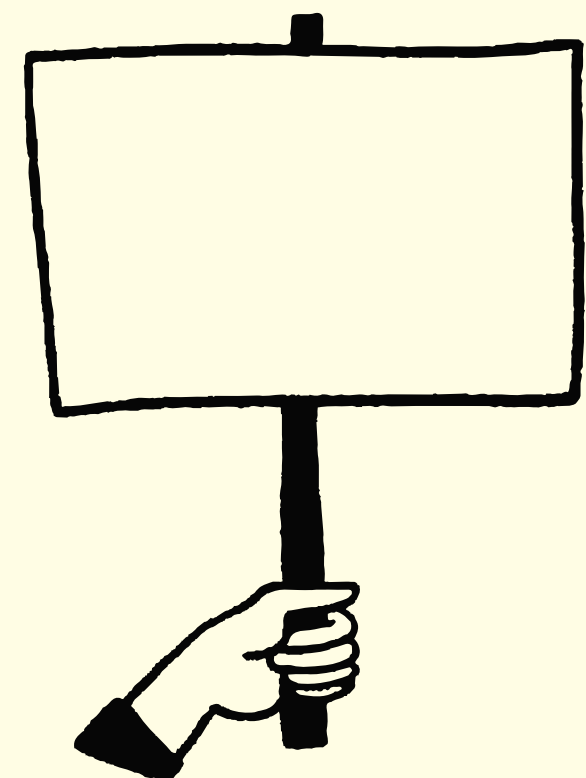
Design Features

- Clear, uncluttered layout
- High-contrast colours
- Numbered stops with matching gallery markers



What to Include

- A fold-out sensory trail map showing:
 - Start and end points
 - Quiet zones and toilets
 - Exit routes
- **Stop cards (1 per object or zone) with:**
 - Object image or icon
 - One-line description (easy-read language)
 - Sensory prompt (e.g., “Run your fingers over the texture sample”)



Access For ALL tip:

The Ancient India trail used object-linked stop cards that allowed families to follow a flexible route rather than a rigid tour, empowering visitors to skip or pause as needed.





To offer tactile and sensory engagement without touching original artefacts.

Examples

- Texture swatches inspired by objects:
 - Stone (sculpture surfaces)
 - Metal (coins, tools)
 - Fabric (textiles, robes)
- 3D printed or moulded replicas
- Raised-line drawings or tactile diagrams
- Natural materials (wood, paper, clay – where relevant)

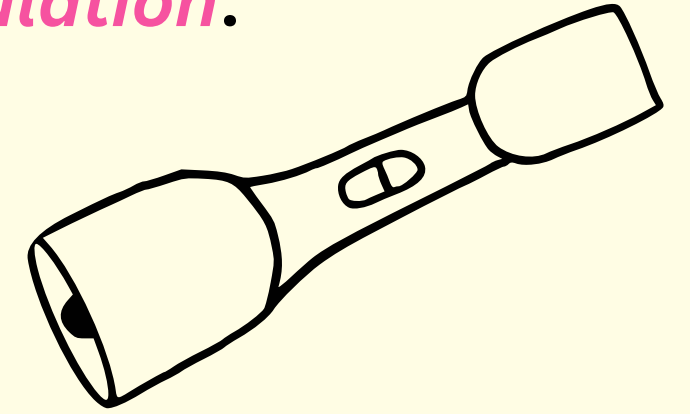


Access For ALL tip:

Handling materials helped visitors connect with form, weight, and texture, reinforcing learning through sensory memory rather than visual overload.



To support focused looking and visual regulation.



Finger Torches

- Help isolate one object in a visually busy gallery
- Encourage slow, intentional observation
- Useful for children who get overwhelmed by large spaces



Access for ALL tip:

Offer clear guidance: “Use the torch only on the object shown on your card.”

Ear Defenders / Noise-Reduction Headphones



To reduce auditory overload and support comfort.

Features

- Adjustable sizing (child & adult)
- Soft padding
- Easy-clean materials



Toolkit Components

Sensory Trail Kit / Bag

Tactile Regulation Aids
Based on the Collection



To support self-regulation, focus, and emotional grounding.

Examples

- Textured 3D prints
- Smooth stones or worry beads
- Textured & scented flowers



Why This Matters:
Fidget tools help visitors remain engaged with content without being asked to “sit still” or suppress sensory needs.

Instruction Card for Caregivers & Educators



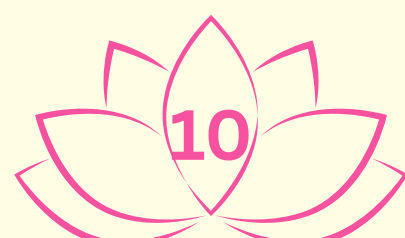
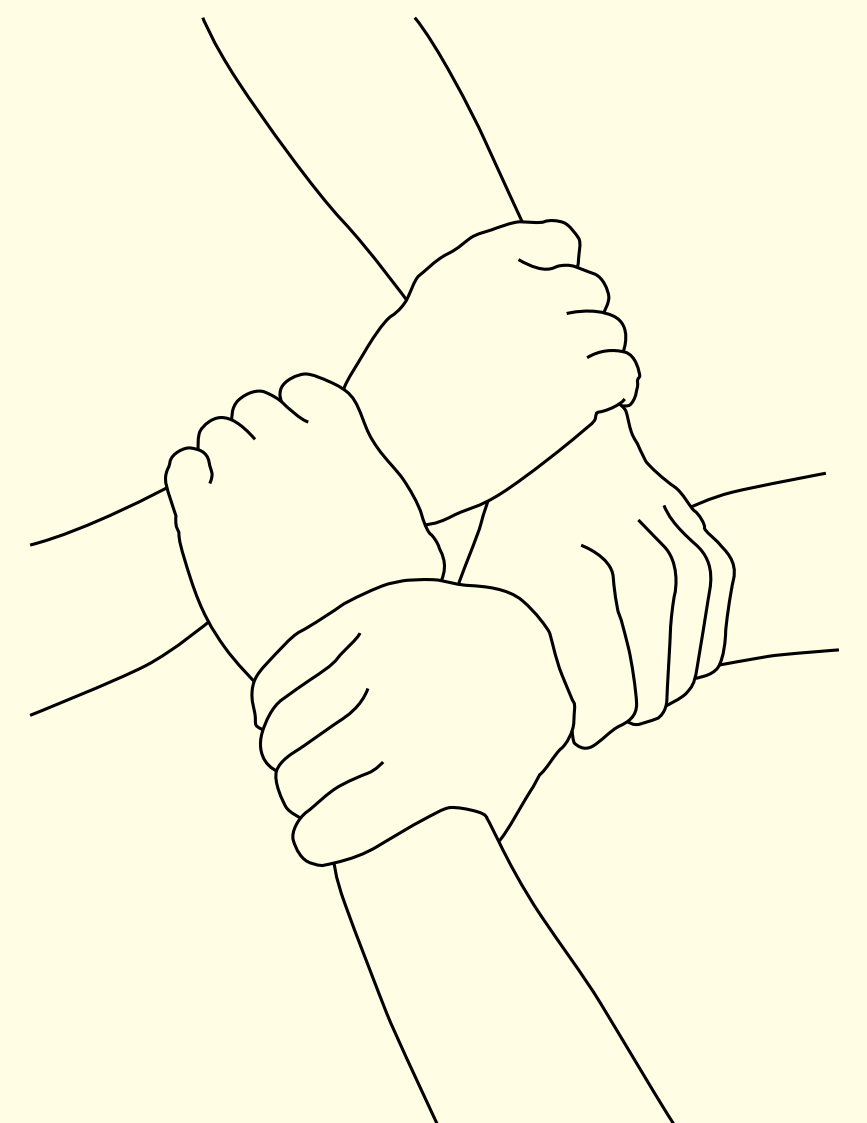
To empower adults to support the experience confidently

What the Card Includes:

- How to use the sensory trail kit
- Suggested visit duration

Tone:

Warm, reassuring, non-clinical, and strengths-based.



3. Accessible Content at Each Stop

At each sensory stop along your trail:

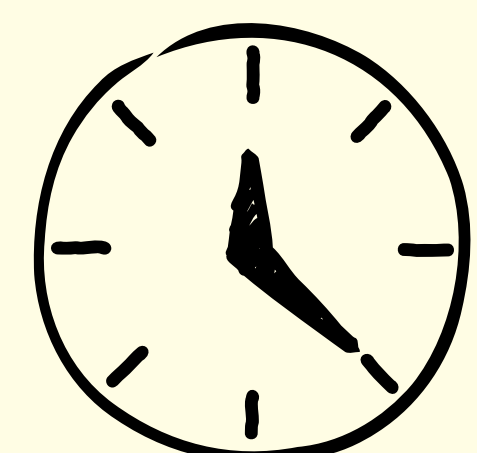
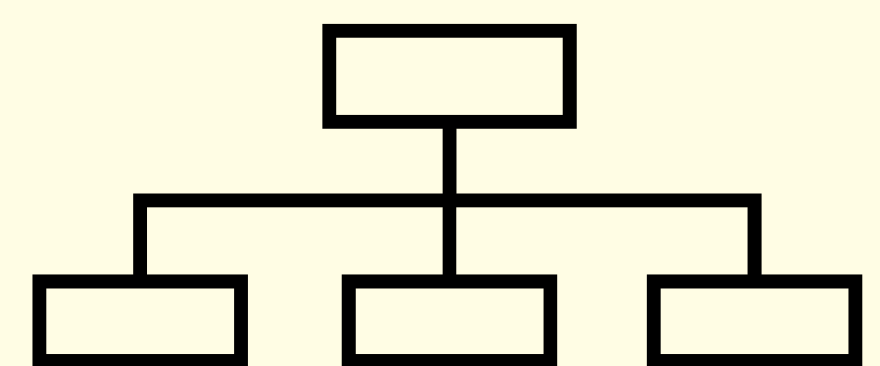
- **Simple prompts** (What do you notice?)
- **Sensory engagement cues** (touch, listen, smell if safe)
- **Choice-based interaction** (pick a texture, shine light here)
- **Optional audio descriptions** or QR code to audio/child-friendly narration



4. Predictability & Structure

Create consistent signage and trail cues:

- Numbered markers on walls/floors
- Clear narrative flow (“Start here → Next stop → Quiet area”)
- Time estimates per station (helps with pacing)

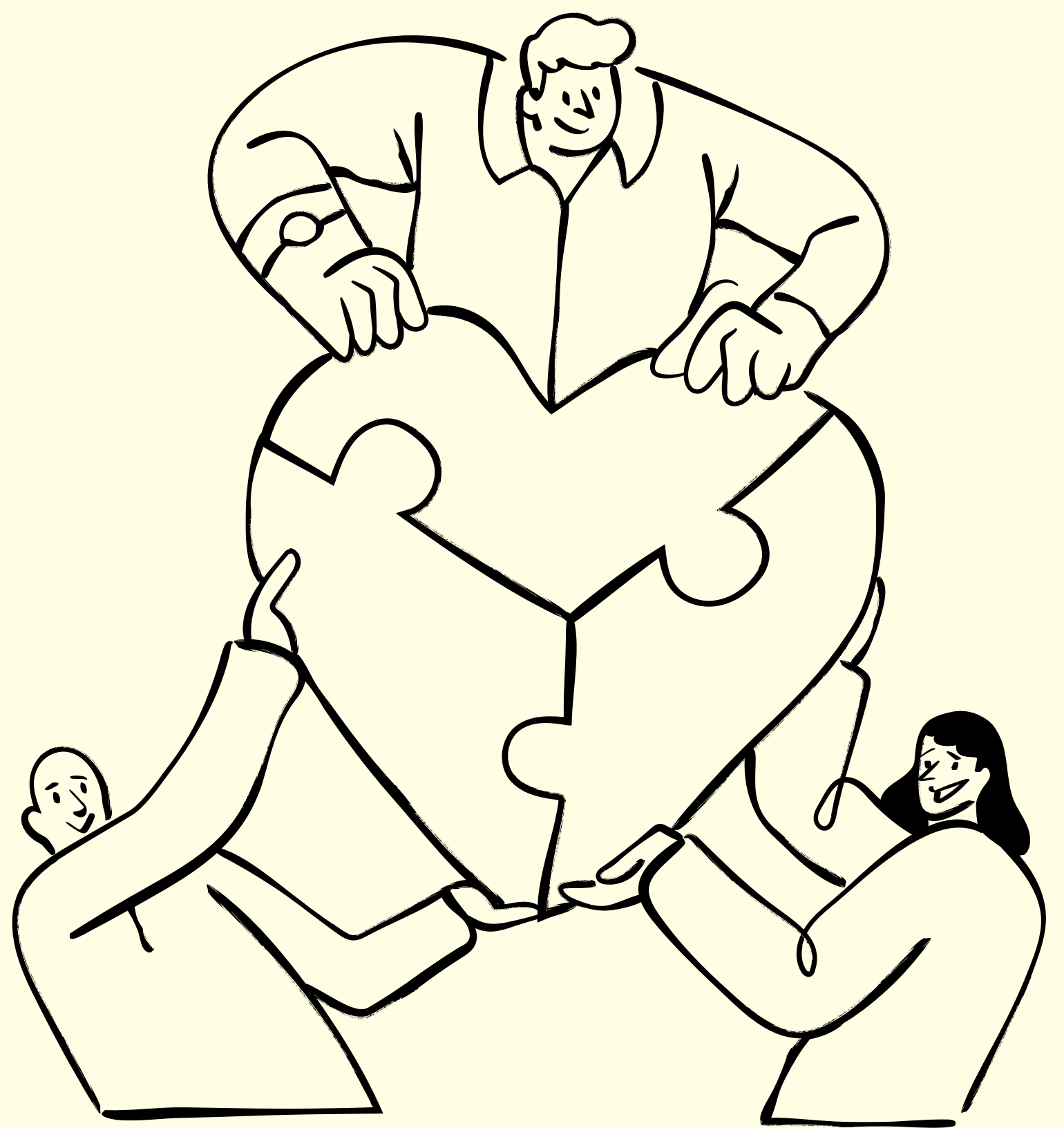


5. Staff & Volunteer Preparation

Consider training your staff and volunteers to help create more sensory-friendly and accessible spaces within your exhibitions...

Train your team on:

- Autism & sensory processing basics
- Clear, gentle communication styles
- Supporting without overwhelming
- Using the sensory trail materials



Consider having ‘Sensory Trail Ambassadors’ who specialize in supporting this experience!

A close-up photograph of several hands holding a long string of small, round, light-colored beads. The hands are positioned at the top of the page, with some wearing colorful bangles. The background is dark and out of focus.

Further Information

For more information, visit Access For All's website, at: <https://www.accessforall.co/> or contact reachaccessforall@gmail.com for enquiries.

About Access For ALL

Access for ALL is a national level award winning organisation aiming to bridge the gap between art, cultural heritage, museums and disabilities.

As Asia's leading DEI consultants, Access For ALL aims to push the boundaries of physical, intellectual, and social access through innovative, indigenous design and advocacy while fostering an inclusive experiential culture.

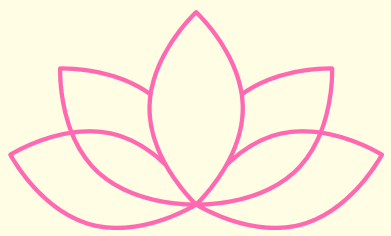
Acknowledgements

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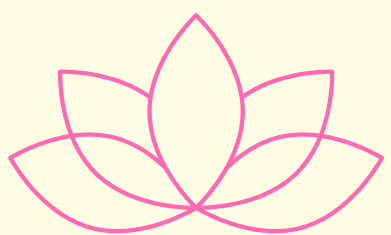
The International Training Programme would also like to thank the following for their invaluable contributions: Siddhant Shah, Heritage Architect and Accessibility Consultant, Access for ALL; Sushma Jansari, Lead Curator for *Ancient India: living traditions*; Kajal Meghani, Project Curator for *Ancient India: living traditions*; Jaime Prada, Public Engagement (EDI) Manager; *Asian People's Disability Alliance (APDA)* for their invaluable support; Caitlin Noble, ITP Assistant, for the design and layout of this toolkit.



Useful Links:

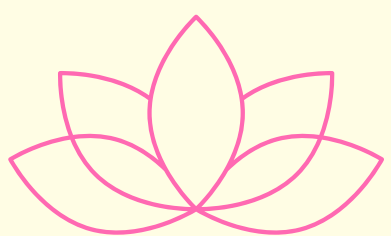


Access For All Website - <https://www.accessforall.co/>



SEND in Museums - SEND in Museums provides clear guidance for museum, heritage or other arts and cultural professionals, on supporting the inclusion of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Website - <https://sendinmuseums.org/>



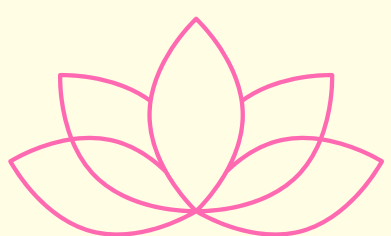
GEM - GEM's VISION is of a connected and equipped community of people enabling learning across museum, heritage and cultural settings, creating inspiring experiences, relevant for everyone; that promote equality – transform and enrich lives.

Website - <https://gem.org.uk/>



Autism in Museums - promotes and advocated for accessible culture for all.

Website - <https://autisminmuseums.com/>



Dimensions UK - a not-for-profit support provider and housing association, who support people with learning disabilities and autistic people across half the country to have a louder voice, choice and control in their lives.

Website - <https://www.autismfriendly.uk/resource/free-resources-for-museums/>

