

The World Interfaith Harmony Week Event Report Ashmolean Museum: One World Family Festival Saturday 22 & Sunday 23 February 2025

The Ashmolean Museum's One World Family Festival 2025 offered a shining example of how cultural, religious, and community harmony can be fostered through creative collaboration. It serves as a powerful testament to the objectives which established the World Interfaith Harmony Week. The festival's diverse array of activities, performances, workshops, and crafts successfully celebrated the spirit of interfaith and intercultural harmony, achieving both impact and excellence in its execution. Gina Koutsika, Director of Audiences & Content at the Ashmolean reflects:

'The One World Festival is a truly special weekend—one that brings together Oxfordshire's diverse communities and faiths in a joyous celebration of shared heritage and understanding. It has grown year on year, becoming bigger, better, and even more vibrant. Every performance and activity reflected the depth of cultural exchange and creativity. This festival is a testament to the power of community, culture, and shared humanity, and I'm so proud to be part of it.'



The Whole World Is One Family. Oxford Hindu Temple celebrate with spiritual chanting. Photo 2025

Highlights

12,607 visitors to the Museum over the weekend, a 34.5% increase from last year's event. 137 survey respondents evidence that:

- 96% rated the event Excellent or Good
- 71% visited specifically for the Festival
- 91% agreed or strongly agreed that the event made them feel welcome and included
- 91% agreed or strongly agreed that it gave them a greater appreciation of different people and cultures

Excellence of Efforts

The One World Festival has been running since 2017, instigated by Imam Monawar Hussain, MBE DL FRSA MCCT, Founder, The Oxford Foundation. Its particular success this year underscores the commitment to promoting interfaith and cultural understanding. The festival's program was carefully curated to represent a wide range of communities, faiths, and traditions. Strong relationships have been established through the volunteers from faith and community groups who make up the One World Committee. The festival provided a platform for cultural exchange through traditional Chinese dance, Polish cuisine, Hindu chants, and Arabic calligraphy, among others. The theme for 2025, 'In Unity – Exploring the Past, Our Planet and Community', provided a cohesive framework to celebrate the interconnectedness of all people regardless of faith or background. Activities took place within the Museum that displays a range of faith objects across cultures and times. A visitor commented that it provided:

'Essential to have an international and multicultural outlook in a world of growing intolerance. Well set up for the whole family.'



Unity in Diversity, A performance celebrating Bengali culture with music, dance, and poetry. Photo 2025

Collaboration and Impact of Events

The collaboration between the Ashmolean Museum staff, volunteers, and various cultural and faith-based organisations was central to the festival's impact, each of them bringing their expertise and passion to the event. This year the One World Festival Committee and Partners included: Asylum Welcome, Dialogue Society, MUZIM-Art4Connect, Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford Civic Society, Oxford Council of Faiths, Oxford Hindu Temple and Community Centre Project, Oxford Interfaith Forum, Oxford Jewish Congregation and The Oxford Foundation.



Collaborative Rangoli workshop. Photo 2025

Examples of activities included families coming together to create their own dal Rangoli designs, working together to explore new cultures. Other participatory activities included *Scribal Art* activity; set amongst breath-taking artefacts, this multiscriptal and multilingual event, organised by the Oxford Interfaith Forum, explored the past through the ancient art of calligraphy and languages. After introducing scripts of the Eastern and Western civilisations, visitors were invited to write their chosen words in beautiful calligraphies.

Another particularly impactful activity was the *Time Capsule Workshop*, where attendees decorated capsules with Arabic calligraphy. Similarly, performances such as *Unity in Diversity* celebrated the richness of Bengali culture through a vibrant medley of songs, Indian classical dance, sitar recital, and poetry. During *Crafting in Celebration of Trees*, visitors used varied tactile materials to illustrate trees through the seasons, while learning about the respect given to trees in the Jewish faith and tradition.

Not only did our participants get creative, but active! During Afro-fitness they enjoyed music, dance, and cultural storytelling to honour African traditions through songs of unity, resilience, and pride. It was a joyful, inclusive experience of togetherness and appreciation for African heritage. The panel discussion on *Healing our Planet and Ourselves* explored how faith and cultural leaders are working together to heal the planet, was another high point. It offered an opportunity to reflect

on the interconnection of spiritual practices and environmental sustainability, a pressing issue facing us today.

The *Youth Forum: Young Eyes on Museum Treasures* event saw young Chinese researchers transform the Ashmolean Museum into a hub of history and creativity. They shared fascinating findings and stunning artworks that engaged with the Museum's collection; offering fresh perspectives on historical narratives through art and imagination. The organiser for the Chinese community events reflected on the event as a whole:

'I want to express our profound gratitude for providing such a fantastic platform for our community to share its cultural heritage through the Youth Forum, Fashion Show, Traditional Dancing, and Classics session. The Chinese community greatly appreciated the opportunity to perform at the Ashmolean.'



Turkish water marbling returned for the event this year. Photo 2024

The host of the Turkish Water Marbling activity, one of the most highly anticipated activities, shared their reflections:

'We had an immense amount of interest in our Ney and Marbling Art sessions, which was fantastic to see. The enthusiasm from visitors was truly heart-warming. I also want to express my appreciation for the Museum staff and volunteers, who were incredibly friendly and supportive throughout the event. Their help made the experience even more enjoyable.'

Not only do the contributors enjoy the festival, but Museum staff as well. For some staff members it provides an opportunity to showcase new skill sets away from their core role. One staff member shared:

'One World Festival is an Oxford jewel, and leading a session is a highlight of my year.'



Open Africa. Celebrating African identity and heritage with AFIUK. Photo 2025

Efforts Despite Limited Resources

One of the most commendable aspects of the One World Family Festival is the ability to create a large-scale event with a very small team. With the logistical and programming challenges presented by the need for coordination across multiple stakeholders, the team displayed exceptional resourcefulness. The museum staff and volunteers, who were already juggling their daily responsibilities, came together to make this festival a reality. This collaborative spirit was particularly evident in the way they worked together to manage the diverse activities that were happening across multiple Museum galleries, ensuring that visitors had a welcoming and accessible environment.

Despite limited resources, the team managed to create a rich, immersive experience for all attendees. Two key festival coordinators were supported by a key administrative role, all playing a pivotal role in ensuring the smooth operation of the event. They demonstrated outstanding leadership by supporting staff, volunteers and contributors. One contributor shared:

'She was totally at the heart of the whole event. Her care of all volunteers including the committee was outstanding and went far beyond the call of duty. As a performer, I felt so supported by her. All our requests were conscientiously and thoughtfully responded to, and there were quite a few!'

Their thoughtful approach ensured that all participants felt valued and supported. The heartfelt feedback from performers and volunteers highlighted the festival's ability to foster an inclusive and supportive atmosphere.

Consistent Efforts Over the Years

The One World Family Festival is not a one-off event but rather part of a consistent effort by the Ashmolean Museum to promote intercultural dialogue and religious harmony. The festival began in 2017 and, aside from 2021-22 when it took place online, has been held annually at the Ashmolean. Each year, the festival has expanded its scope and impact, bringing in new communities and faiths while maintaining a core focus on the values of mutual respect and understanding.

Over the weekend, we were thrilled to welcome 12,607 visitors to the Museum. On Saturday, we welcomed 7,939 visitors and on Sunday, 4,668. This marks a 34.5% increase from last year's event. It was truly joyful to see so many families enjoying and engaging in the One World activities. Each year has seen key religions take pride of place to conduct bell ringing, Jewish melodic prayers, Hindu Invocations and Adhan, Islamic Call to Prayer.



Adhan, Islamic Call to Prayer captures audience in a prominent space in the Museum. Photo 2024

Alignment with the UNGA Resolution

The One World Family Festival aligns closely with the spirit and objectives outlined in UNGA Resolution A/65/PV.34. The event directly addresses the resolution's goal of promoting harmony between people of all faiths by showcasing the beauty of cultural and religious diversity. Through the festival's focus on cultural exchange, artistic expressions, and shared values, it creates an inclusive space where people of different faiths and backgrounds can learn from each other, celebrate their differences, and find common ground. One visitor commented:

'Fully immersive experiences that enabled us to not only enjoy multiple different cultures but to get a taste of those cultures.'



Families watch activities as part of a Taste of Poland. Photo 2025

Additional Links

- Programme webpage: <https://www.ashmolean.org/event/one-world-family-festival-2025>
- Promotion event by partners: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DGWQi1uC9sM/>
- Partners detailing & recording their contributions: <https://oxfordinterfaithforum.org/blog/sacred-sounds-from-the-past/>
- Contributors sharing successes: <https://www.instagram.com/afiuk.oxford/reel/DGziC0NtkFo/>
- Families sharing their experience: https://www.instagram.com/p/DGYRBZdMPEX/?img_index=1
- Staff sharing their experience: https://www.instagram.com/p/DGaJEo_lczl/?img_index=1
- Press following the festival: <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24963264.oxford-one-world-festival-2025-diverse-culture-celebrated/>
- Press photography: https://www.instagram.com/p/DG4Go3mo73a/?hl=en-gb&img_index=5

7 March 2025

Report co-written by Gianna French, Public Programmes, Interpretation & Digital Content Assistant and Lucy Shipp, Head of Informal Learning & Public Programmes, on behalf of the Ashmolean Museum and One World committee. With thanks to colleagues and One World committee members for supporting the collection of feedback.