

## **Virtual Tour Experience: Key Takeaways and Tips/Techniques for engagement (updated 11.14.20)**

This document will continue to be updated and re-posted on the IPE virtual tour resource page. Please email any reflections, tips or techniques to Kara ([kzumbahlen@artsmia.org](mailto:kzumbahlen@artsmia.org)).

## **Tours**

From Brenda Wyley:

My tour was for a U of M (Morris campus) History of Photography course group. A very specialized tour for 15 students and their professor. Only four students turned on their video function so I asked the others to give me a virtual wave so I knew they were out there! As a soft opener, I had a slide with general information on Mia as an institution, the Department of Photography & Media, and the current photography exhibition, Just Kids! By the time I had gone through that slide and asked how many had ever been to Mia, I felt more comfortable starting the presentation.

Now to the nuts and bolts! This tour took over my life for three weeks with a minimum of 20 hours researching, learning Google slides, lots of anxiety attacks (no kidding!) and three separate zoom meetings with Kara who was invaluable during this process. I agree with all the tips and tricks other docents have already posted on this site and would really like to add just one major idea that worked very well for me. Initially I had made a google doc of my presentation and printed it off and had it at eye-level, propped on a stand, adjacent to my computer screen with highlighted information. In practice, I found this to be distracting and also too close to the microphone so that every paper movement could be heard louder than anticipated. Instead I came up with the idea of having the google doc on an iPad right in front of my desktop computer screen, which allowed me to scroll to the next page very discreetly and also meant that I never had to look off to one side for more information. This worked like a charm!

I learned so much from this experience. It stretched my brain and technology skills to the limit but I feel like it was worth it all. The professor on the tour took the time to write to me after in appreciation, saying that the tour theme and works presented were wonderful and how it gave them the opportunity to see images that are rarely on view at the museum - a huge bonus for virtual tours. Thanks to the team at Mia for having the confidence in me that I could do this. You are the real stars of the show!

From Fran Megarry:

1. It would seem important to use works of art that one really likes, have good stories and fit the theme. Just in case the conversation lags a good story may be helpful. Additionally, people can tell if you are enthusiastic about the art you have selected. If it is important to you they may also find the art fascinating.

2. Be comfortable if your guests do not have their video on. It is wonderful to see your guests but keep in mind students may not want you to see their uncle walking in the background in his underwear. Some students are not comfortable with their locations.
3. Along that line when touring younger students one does not know who might also be viewing the tour that you don't see on your screen. Other people in the home may not totally appreciate the art without hearing the conversation.
4. It is really important to keep to the time limits.

From Emily Shapiro:

#### My "top five" benefits of leading virtual tours

1. Transitions between art objects can be used with greater certainty and effectiveness. There is no need to worry that your next art object or gallery will be occupied by another tour group.
2. It is easier to examine artworks in greater detail. You can use the Google slide technology to focus in closely on certain details and to look at different parts of the artwork simultaneously.
3. You have greater ability to compare different art works and artists to one another by showing two (or more) artworks on a single slide and by "borrowing" artworks from all over the world.
4. You can return easily to earlier art objects on your tour to make deeper connections and/or foster additional conversation in the context of the later artworks on your tour.
5. Your participant base is likely to be more expansive and to include first-time visitors to Mia.

#### My "top five" challenges of leading virtual tours

1. Time management can be more difficult. When time is running short, it's harder to edit the tour while in "midstream." You can't just skip over an artwork or gallery without your participants knowing you've done so.

2. It is harder to gauge your participants' reactions to and engagement with the artwork/discussions on your tour if they have chosen not to share their videos and/or you don't have room on your screen to see their videos. You may need to rely more than usual on asking "check-in" questions, like "Any comments or questions?"
3. The dimensions of your artworks – large or small – will not be readily apparent to your participants unless you explicitly point them out. Sculptures and other objects with three-dimensions are also more difficult to illustrate unless you incorporate multiple views of them into your presentation.
4. Because virtual tours usually inhibit natural interaction among the tour participants, your patience with/tolerance for silence is at a higher premium than usual. Have additional questions ready for those times when participation is low. You probably will find that your visitors are more comfortable with participating as the tour progresses, so think about factoring that into the pacing of your tour.
5. Unexpected technical glitches can – and probably will - happen during one of your tours. Have a "plan B" in hand, just in case, like ready access to a pdf copy of your slide presentation or instructions for the participants on what to do if the virtual connection is unexpectedly broken. Above all, try to keep your sense of humor and to not blame yourself too much if something goes wrong.

#### From Lynn Dunlap:

1. After I wrote my tour, I made time to learn how to use Google Slides.
  - I wanted to include enlarged portions of an object and followed Kara's instructions so that the quality of the image was crisp, not fuzzy.
  - I felt music added to this tour, so I learned how to add a video of the song with lyrics. For my private tour I sent my contact a link to the lyrics and music. The group had all listened to the song and were able to think about how it related to the book.
  - I used images of objects Mia doesn't have, so I included an image of a Mia object by the same artist, with gallery number, and encouraged visitors to see it at Mia and look for similarities.
2. My first tour, a private tour, went well but I decided I needed to streamline my transitions, eliminate a few questions, and remove slides of quoted passages from the book to improve spontaneity. I decided to introduce the quotes conversationally when they could add to our discussion.

3. My next tour was a morning public tour. This time the group was larger and only about three or four people contributed to the discussion. Even when I allowed extra wait time, not as many people participated.

- Though most said they'd read the book, some maybe hadn't read it recently, some possibly were new to Zoom, and maybe I hadn't done enough to break the ice as we chatted for a few minutes before the tour.

4. For my next tour, I decided to carve out about three minutes at the beginning of the tour to ask each person to give a short comment about a character, an episode, or a question they had about the book, under the guise of practicing unmuting and muting our microphones.

- I was hoping to encourage people to feel more comfortable taking turns responding to my questions and to each other's comments.
- This also jogged memories, re-familiarizing each with character names, episodes, etc.

5. My next tour, a Thursday evening public tour, went exceptionally well. Even though it took about four minutes at the beginning, about 90% of the participants shared a comment about the book, thus priming the well of their knowledge. With every object there was an insightful discussion. I glossed over one or two of my object questions because our discussion made them unnecessary. We ended with time for sharing reactions to the tour.

6. Five takeaways:

***Include time (4-5 minutes) to create a conversational tone with an open-ended question*** about the topic/book at the beginning of the tour.

- Encourage everyone to participate, maybe asking them to practice the mute/unmute/mute function as they each respond.
- And don't forget the lag time between speaking and hearing with Zoom. Count to 3!

***Include the text of a short introduction and conclusion on the slides.***

- Then conversationally add transitions. (I write, edit and practice these to take less time.)
- Add any pertinent quotes from the text conversationally during discussion of questions.

***Use only one question per image slide.***

- I ended up copying the image slide for each question for that image. I reduced the amount of text (one question per slide) so that people weren't trying to read 3 questions when I wanted them to respond to just one question at a time.
- I also wanted to prevent the image and text from jumping around with each new slide. After duplicating the slide, I just deleted the text and typed in my new question in the original text box.

***Transfer your Mia image or enlargements to your Photos program to crop and/or edit them.***

- An image that appears too dark can be brightened.

- Cropping the full image or the enlargement can focus your audience’s attention on details that bring the art to life.

*Use our fabulous resources!*

From Kay Miller:

**Type of group toured, level of interaction with visitors, key takeaways**

**Kay: OLLI members. High level of interaction. High level of satisfaction on their part/mine/our team**

- **Virtual tours have been an incredibly powerful new undertaking for me.**
- **Filled with ups and downs. Times I wondered if I could do it.**
- **Overall: Hugely rewarding.**
- **Mental & emotional salvation in times of Covid.**

1. **Steep learning curve**

- As steep as learning to become a docent
- Lessons from our two years of training still apply – only more so
- Challenges – two fronts
  - **Goggle slides**
    - First big challenge: Learning to compose on Apple.
    - Break-through: Could compose on my desk-top.
    - **Training, technical support, templates = key**
    - Kara – Indispensable teacher/guide. Calm, available. Hugely skilled, experienced. Great advice. Flexible.
    - Debbi – Backbone of Zoom tour program. Intentional step-by-step planning with other Mia departments to get it right before launching tour program. Deliberate, steady roll-out. Unswerving, calm, backup.
  - **Zoom**
    - Learning the quirks
    - Training essential – Both from OLLI/U of M & Mia
    - Slow roll-out proved crucial.

2. **Technical Snafus experienced**

- **First Tuesday fiasco** - OLLI programmers thought they had figured out invitation system for our complicated “**Close to the Heart**” five-week course structure.
  - OLLI tech - Vivien & Ivan. Tested whether Zoom would permit the three of us as co-presenters at the same time. With two people and it worked.
  - **But we had THREE course leaders.** Every time one of us started our simultaneous Zoom meeting, one of the others got KICKED off. Happened at

least **10 times. Terrifying for these first tours.** Each time, participants were all kicked off when we were. Many tried many times to get into new meeting. Some never could.

- **Salvation** – Vivien and Ian were back-stops. They emailed new invitations.
- **Participants** – Determined not to miss out on class. Kept trying to join class
- **OLLI invited those who missed out to join identical tours on other days.** Virtue of our team having agreed to add a second session.
- **Second Tuesday fiasco – Kay only**
  - Apple mouse went crazy – personal fiasco
  - Limitations of home system
  - Fix: Bought a new **Logitech** mouse.
- Learning quirks of Zoom
  - Work in progress

### Creating and giving tours

#### 1. Tour themes are more essential than ever

- Virtual tours are much **more planned**. Less on the fly
- Tours are more direct. More on point. Fewer digressions
- My theme: **Thunderstruck: Art that Stops you in Your Tracks**
  - Requires more advance thought:
    - What am I really saying here?
    - Does this image/idea really support my theme?
    - Kara and Emily kept bringing me back to this in planning session. These discussions = essential. Absolutely strengthened tour.
    - **Colleague/educator support = essential**
- Tour planning requires more discipline
  - Killing your babies.
- Less flexibility in permitting participants to join tours.
  - Must have invitation.
  - Less spontaneous

#### 2. Fun, creative, exciting, indispensable for me

- Crucial: Mental stimulation in pandemic. Sense of direction & purpose.
- TEAM – Emily & Jim – hugely important. Shared goals. Personal support. Inspiration for new ideas. Helps keep on track.
- Division of duties.
- Teachers/support absolutely essential: Debbi & Kara at Mia. Vivien, Ian, Greg at OLLI & U.

#### 3. HUGE APPETITE FOR TOURS

- **People are HUNGRY for tours.**

- **Participants are more eager, more patient, more grateful** than in “normal” times where Mia had lots of tours going all the time and it was easy to pop into one.
- **Tons of kudos from tour participants**
  - **Great example: Hans Dekker, OLLI member** – Was present for my second Tuesday fiasco where my mouse went crazy and kept minimizing my presentation screen – this happened at least 100 times. Hideously difficult. Hans stuck around afterward to chat more about Hokusai ***Great Wave*** comparison with Lee Bontecou’s ***Untitled*** (blue waves). At the end Hans said something to the effect that he knew the technical problem made the tour more difficult, but that for two hours, he had been totally absorbed in the world of art and ideas, and had for that time had been able to forget his worries and the tedium about life in a pandemic. He expressed genuine happiness and gratitude.
  - **Emily, Jim and I have heard that same sentiment over and over.**

**4. Determination to make it work = essential.**

- Work. Takes at **least twice as much time** to put a virtual tour together. **Maybe three times.**
- Time it takes to create a virtual tour lessens as you figure it out.
- Reminds me of our prep for **CHECK-OUT tours**: Most of us thought, “If it took me weeks to prepare this ONE tour, how will I possibly do it when I am facing multiple tours?”
- You learn. You get good at it. It happens.

**5. WRITTEN SLIDE SHOW PRESENTATION PLAN = ESSENTIAL to GOOD TOUR:**

- 14-point type
- Printed on single sheet
- Put in translucent recipe holder to my left. Drop pages onto footstool/table as I go through pages.
- Plan has slide images in order they appear. Tour text between them.
- Major points (**some in red**).
- Transitions
- **DIMENSIONS** of objects. Most are available on object online: **VIEW DETAILS**

**6. Advantages of Zoom tours**

- Can use any of 90,000 objects in Mia collection. Plus images from all over the world.
- **Front-row seat for every participant.**
- Better view for everyone than when we would pan iPad images to everyone in the gallery and each got only a quick glimpse.
- **Easier to show/see small art objects.**
- Many images show up better:
  - Example: **Brangwyn’s *Illustration for Canto XI of the 'Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám'***. Luminous on the computer screen. Drew gasps.

- Showed picture in Mia gallery. People said they had never noticed picture before.
- **Better side-by-side comparison** of images
- Better showing **object details** – **But can you get them?**
- **Names of tour participants show up** when they speak. Allows tour guide to call them by name. Can address directly. Makes it more personal.

## 7. Zoom's role at Mia

- **Now: Greater tour outreach**
  - **Ex: West Virginia University tour next week.** Debbi indispensable.
- **Future: Promising outreach for the future.**
  - Schools, outstate, nursing homes. Sky is the limit
- **Labor intensive.**
  - Severe restrictions on numbers of tours & numbers of patrons we can reach.
  - Huge load on two educators. More help needed.
- **To make that happen:**
  - Docents will be needed than ever. But have to be trained
  - Staff fatigue. Wearing out Debbi & Kara. Need backstop.
  - Side-by-side tech training program of docents/others to provide tech support on tours.

## 8. Disadvantages of Zoom tours

- Less flexibility
  - In galleries – had iPad loaded with images for those questions that I might encounter.
  - Don't have that luxury with set Goggle Slides presentation
- Can't see all the faces in Presentation mode. Disconnect.
- **Labor intensive.** Right now, severe restrictions on numbers of tours and numbers of patrons we can reach.

## Action Items:

1. **Needed: A 1,2,3 Guide**
  - When you start a Zoom meeting: Do this first, then that, then that.
  - Follow same sequence every time.
  - What to ignore – prompt that says LAUNCH MEETING AFTER YOU ALREADY DID
2. **Needed: What to do WHEN**
  - List of most common SNAFUS and what to do about them.
3. **Essential for docents/guides: Goggle Slides slop file**
  - Slides you threw away and regretted. Have to reconstruct. Time sink.
4. **Essential: Creating team of docents trained to do tech support**
  - Staff fatigue



- **Needed as parallel secondary system – as important as training docents to prepare/give tours.**