

# The New RAF Museum Has Landed: And It's Victorious



BYM@



For lovers of old planes, the RAF Museum in Colindale couldn't really get any better. For everyone else... well, it was starting to feel a little creaky in the undercarriage.

A major refit has seen to that. This is now one of the best museums in the capital. We'd go as far as to say that it's *the* best museum in London north of the centre. For its 100th birthday, the RAF has given us a present.



Visitors are first coaxed into a large hangar. All the exhibits in this cavernous space are new, or at least presented in a new way. The space serves as a sort of arena of highlights, with a quirky but engaging mix of artifacts, uniforms, interactives and a giant sea plane that makes for the ultimate conversation piece in the cafe. Everything is done with clear, compelling labels that aren't too self-indulgent and invite more questions.



control of an X-plane test simulator (hit the sea) and marshalled Britain's WW2 air defences (let's not go there), all of which were genuinely fun and occasionally informative. Kids will love it. Younger kids, meanwhile, can clamber all over the toy aircraft.



That was one of our main criticisms of the old-style RAF Museum. Its offering for children was headlined by an outdated explore-and-play area that had the smell of a hospital wing. It's still there, incidentally, and still reeks of bleach. Now, there's more than enough to keep the little ones happy, especially with a new playground thrown in.

After you've spent the best part of a day exploring the first gallery, you can get stuck into another massive exhibition space filled with aircraft from the early days of the RAF (largely unchanged by the refit). A third gallery offers insights into the modern role of the air force. It has marginally less stuff, but could still outshine many smaller museums in its own right.



Finally, we made it to the largest gallery of all, which contains dozens of aircraft, the immense Vulcan bomber and numerous displays on different units of the RAF. There's an impossible amount of stuff to see here, and mental fatigue will already be taking its toll. Our tip is to try and see the museum in several trips – like you might the British Museum or Science Museum.



freshly landscaped lawns, a new restaurant, fresh exhibitions and a rolling events programme, the improvement in the RAF Museum is akin to the move from propellers to jets.

*The RAF Museum is on Grahame Park Way, Colindale NW9 5QW. Open 10am-6pm. Entrance is free, though there's a £2-£3 charge for the newly embiggened car park. Images courtesy of the RAF Museum, except the photo of our toddler (Holly) in the toy spitfire, and the shot of the Vulcan bombs, by the author.*

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*Continued below.*

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