National Postal Museum Launches Free iPhone/iPad App

App Brings Exhibit Objects to Life

The Smithsonian’s National Postal Museum launched a new app that brings exhibit objects to life. MagnifiAR is an augmented reality app for the iPhone and iPad that allows museum visitors to unlock additional layers of interpretive content for select artifacts in two of the museum’s exhibitions—“Pacific Exchange: China & U.S. Mail” and “Mail by Rail.”

After downloading the free app from Apple’s iTunes Store, visitors point the camera of their mobile device at select exhibit objects and images. The fun, interactive and family-friendly app highlights stamps, artwork and artifacts that trigger video footage, images, trivia and games to connect visitors to exhibit objects in meaningful ways.

In “Pacific Exchange: China & U.S. Mail,” an exhibit that looks at the relationship of the two countries through the study of stamps and mail, visitors can go on a safari hunt and bring animals to life. Finding seven specific exhibit objects will unlock surprising information and unexpected fun. Locating the Chinese Giant Panda stamps from 1973 connects visitors to the National Zoological Park’s two live panda cams to witness Mei Xiang, Tian Tian and baby cub Bao Bao in their cozy habitat. Discovering the Chinese black-necked crane stamp launches a video of the cranes performing exotic dances. The U.S. Postal Service’s 2012 Year of the Dragon artwork brings to life a Chinese Lunar New Year dragon dance. Visitors can also discover which animal corresponds to their year of birth by locating the 37-cent Year of the Rabbit Chinese New Year artwork from 1999.

“This new app encourages families to engage with exhibit artifacts in a fun new way at the National Postal Museum,” said Allen Kane, director of the museum.

“Mail by Rail,” an exhibit where visitors explore the story of the Railway Post Office, allows visitors to experience life on the rail in the early 20th century. Postal clerks aboard the mail cars could
sort 600 pieces of mail per hour. When visitors point their device at one of the enlarged photos in the railway mail car, a video will launch showing how mail clerks sorted mail aboard a train.

Instead of stopping at every small town to transfer the mail, railway mail trains were fitted with catcher arms that snatched mailbags off of cranes. Visitors can view a 1908 silent black-and-white film demonstrating how “mail-on-the-fly” worked by pointing their device at the train catcher arm on display in the exhibit. Viewed through the app, the exhibit’s “Mail by Rail” sign brings to life Owney the dog, the unofficial mascot of the Railway Post Office in the late 1800s, who invites visitors into the exhibit’s railway mail car.

Visitors without an Apple device or smartphone may check-out an iPod Touch at the museum’s information desk (valid photo identification required) to explore the new app. “The museum is always working to improve the visitor experience, and new technologies allow for new opportunities,” said K. Allison Wickens, museum education director. “Even if you are at home, you can use our new app to bring the animal stamps in our China exhibit to life by pointing your mobile device at our [website](http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu) from your own computer screen!”

The National Postal Museum is devoted to presenting the colorful and engaging history of the nation’s mail service and showcasing one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of stamps and philatelic material in the world. It is located at 2 Massachusetts Avenue N.E., Washington, D.C., across from Union Station. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). For more information about the Smithsonian, call (202) 633-1000 or visit the museum website at [www.postalmuseum.si.edu](http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu).

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