



MANSION DOCENT GUIDELINES

February 2023

These guidelines and resources are provided to help ensure the best possible experience for docents *and* visitors on guided tours.

Looking for help? For questions regarding the volunteer program or docent service, please contact volunteers@hillwoodmuseum.org.

Contents

Mansion Tour Overview	2
PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES	2
ONBOARDING.....	2
TOUR STRUCTURE.....	2
TOUR TIMEFRAME.....	3
VISITOR/DOCENT RATIO	3
DOCENT-LED GARDEN, GARDENER'S FOCUS, PRIVATE, AND CUSTOM TOURS.....	3
SCHEDULING	4
Arrival & Departure for Each Shift	4
ENTERING, DRIVING, & PARKING	4
BACK RAIL PARKING	4
LOWER GATE DRIVE PARKING.....	4
IDENTIFICATION.....	5
COATS & PERSONAL BELONGINGS	5
RECORDING VOLUNTEER HOURS	5
DAILY SCHEDULE & GROUPS REPORT & TOUR ATTENDANCE SHEET	5
Mansion Tour Routes	6
TOUR ROUTES	6
Docent-led Mansion Tour Procedures	7
DOCENT-LED MANSION TOUR GUIDELINES	7
DOCENT LEADER OF THE DAY.....	7
ADDITIONAL DOCENT SHIFT NOTES.....	8
Mansion On-station Procedures.....	8
MANSION ON-STATION OVERVIEW	8
MANSION ON-STATION GUIDELINES.....	9
ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR MANSION ON-STATION	9
Exhibition On-station Procedures	10
EXHIBITION ON-STATION OVERVIEW.....	10
EXHIBITION ON-STATION GUIDELINES	10

Mansion Tour Overview

Primary Responsibilities

A docent's goal, as is Hillwood's, is to provide the best possible visitor experience. Mansion docents are an integral part of the Hillwood community and serve several important roles. They:

- Conduct mansion tours
- Serve on-station in the mansion, dacha and/or Adirondack building, as needed
- Assist with public programming and special events, as needed
- Assure a positive, enjoyable visitor experience

Onboarding

Docents-in-training will transition to active docents once they have successfully completed their qualifying tour. Once qualified, docents will be given access to Volgistics, Hillwood's volunteer database and scheduling software, via an email containing:

- Link to Volgistics
- Temporary password for accessing Volgistics at home along with instructions for creating a permanent password
- Instructions to update their volunteer profile and sign up for docent-led tours via the online schedule
- Pin number to manage volunteer hours via the touch screen sign-in computers on-site at Hillwood

Tour Structure

- Docent-led tours are "highlights" tours, intended to give a general overview of Hillwood and the collection centered on overarching themes and distilled information, rather than on minutiae.
- Docents use frameworks and interpretive messages to craft their tour's structure and content.
- A docent-led tour is but one point of entry for a visitor into a quality Hillwood experience. Depending upon the visitor's learning style and needs, other options, such as a self-guided experience or mobile audio tour, may be more appealing. The mansion is open to all types of visitors, and those self-guiding or listening to a mobile audio tour could potentially tag along on your tour, or already be in the rooms when you arrive with your group.
- Docent-led mansion tours are offered regularly Tuesday-Sunday from 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and 1:30-2:30 p.m., and Friday-Sunday from 3:30-4:30 p.m. The general operating hours of the estate are 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesday-Sunday. Hillwood is closed on Mondays, most national holidays, and several weeks in January.
- Docents serve a 4-hour shift (11 a.m. – 3 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday), which allows for a lunch break between tours. Docents may serve a shorter 2-hour shift (3-5 p.m. Friday-Sunday).
- Docents serve a minimum of two shifts per month equating to at least 100 service hours annually (4 hours x 25 weeks). The majority of docents are assigned to a floating schedule, with some in a fixed schedule, as dictated by Hillwood's scheduling needs. Please note: All new docents are assigned to a floating schedule.
- We encourage docents to serve additional hours and recognize those who exceed the standards. Extra hours are available through group requests (leading private or custom tours) and during programming (serving on-station in the mansion and auxiliary buildings).
- Only Hillwood docents and staff are permitted to lead guided tours of the mansion and gardens. Outside tour guides/operators are not permitted to tour groups on Hillwood property. If you encounter an unauthorized tour, please notify visitor services staff in the visitor center at your convenience.

Tour Timeframe

- Tours last 60 minutes in length. The tour time of 60 minutes strikes a balance between the needs of the visitors for a comfortable and convenient length of time to be on a guided experience, and the museum and docent's desire to provide a quality educational interaction centered on the estate, collection, and collector framework. The allotted time for each room on the tour includes travel time from one room to the next, as well as time for the introduction and conclusion at the beginning and end of each tour.
- Docents should be comfortable telling visitors that if they want to learn more than what is discussed on the tour there are multiple ways to do so, including:
 - taking the mobile audio tour,
 - taking a docent-led garden tour,
 - visiting the special exhibition,
 - joining as a member,
 - attending a public program,
 - or becoming a volunteer.

Instruct visitors to inquire at the visitor center for more information on a specific topic or visit Hillwood's website at www.hillwoodmuseum.org, where they can learn how to deepen their engagement with the museum.

- If you have difficulties with a fellow docent not keeping to the 60-minute timeframe, follow these steps:
 - **In the moment:** Graciously make eye contact and get acknowledgement (i.e.: a head nod or thumbs up) that the docent understands they need to move to their next room. Be flexible and answer visitor questions while waiting to enter the room.
 - **Afterwards:** Graciously discuss the matter directly with the docent. If the concern continues, notify volunteer management staff so they can assist in the conversation.

Visitor/Docent Ratio

- Each docent will generally guide between 1-10 visitors on a tour (max. is 10 visitors per docent). Flexibility will be required of docents to structure their tour according to group size. Groups may expand to as many as 12 visitors per docent, but this is a rare occurrence.
- Groups of 10 or more, as well as Hillwood members, have the privilege of reserving a docent-led tour in advance. The remaining tour tickets are distributed on a first-come, first-served basis at the visitor center tour desk.
- Docents should expect to see a diverse audience on a tour: visitors will vary by age, life experience, culture, interest in Hillwood, physical capability, and in other ways. Docents will have to accommodate and strive to engage each group.
- Additional visitors or, as we sometimes refer to them, "hangers-on," may join a tour once it has started. Unless the tour is a private/custom tour, each docent should aim to be flexible and gracious to additional visitors. Most often these types of visitors may listen in for one or two rooms, and then self-select to continue with their self-guided experience.

Docent-led Garden, Gardener's Focus, Private, and Custom Tours

- Another reason mansion highlights tours should be 60 minutes is because other tours occur before and after the highlight tours.
- Docent-led garden tours are offered Tuesday-Sunday from 10:30-11:30 a.m. and 12:30-1:30 p.m. during the spring (April-June) and fall (September-November). Garden tours begin in the motor court.

- Gardener's focus tours (a type of public program) led by Horticulture staff highlighting seasonal blooms/garden rooms are offered at various times throughout the year. For more information, visit the calendar page on Hillwood's website.
- Private and custom tours happen at various times before and after the highlights tours.
 - Private tours are groups paying an additional cost for a private mansion tour booked outside of the regularly scheduled tours offered for groups and the public.
 - Custom tours are groups paying an additional cost for a private tour where the group has requested a customized experience, such as an altered tour route and/or tour focus. Information regarding the group's request is emailed in advance to the scheduled docents.
 - If you are leading a private or custom tour and general visitors inquire or try to join the tour, please gently explain the tour is private and additional ways to learn in the mansion (brochures, mobile audio tour, etc.) are available in the visitor center.

Scheduling

- Docents submit their monthly availability in the month prior via Volgistics, Hillwood's online scheduling software.
- Please see the Volgistics User Guide document for step-by-step instructions on procedures and policies related to self-scheduling, cancellation, leave of absence, and inclement weather as well as other features offered through Volgistics.

Arrival & Departure for Each Shift

Entering, Driving, & Parking

- All volunteers will enter Hillwood through the upper gate and choose to park either along the back railing behind the café, C.W. Post center, and administration building or along lower gate drive. Please be mindful to observe the 15-mph speed limit while driving on the estate and be aware of pedestrian and vehicular traffic. A [map detailing the volunteer parking plan](#) is available on the volunteer website.

Back Rail Parking

- To access the back railing parking, please drive through the visitor center parking lot and follow the road to the parking area behind the café and administration building.
- At the back rail, volunteers are welcome to park in any **un-numbered spaces** during the week.
- During the weekend, volunteers can park in any numbered spaces behind the café, C.W. Post center, and administration building with the exception of spaces 20-23, which are reserved for the weekend café staff.
- **Please note:** The first spaces on the left are reserved for bus parking.

Lower Gate Drive Parking

- To access parking on lower gate drive, volunteers are encouraged to drive the access road or perform a three-point turn at the lower gate.
- The south access road (a soft left immediately following the rail parking behind the café and administration building) will take you on a scenic drive along the perimeter of the estate and passes behind the Adirondack building and dacha, below the Japanese-style garden, and will eventually terminate at the lower gate. Continue driving uphill on the lower gate drive.
- For volunteers wishing to complete a three-point turn at the lower gate, make a right at the first stop sign after entering the upper gate. Make another immediate right, going downhill and away from the mansion. **Use utmost caution when driving towards the lower gate, staying alert for oncoming traffic and pedestrians.** At the lower gate, safely perform a three-point turn, driving back up the hill.
- Volunteers will park on the lower gate drive on the left side starting at the spot closest to the crossroad (but not blocking the crossroad) and fill in working back from there.

At the end of your shift, please exit along the upper gate drive and out the upper gate. As always, please use extreme caution, especially in those areas where many do not expect to see vehicular traffic.

Identification

- Volunteers will be given a name tag and a volunteer badge to wear during their shifts. These will be distributed once the docents-in-training have passed their qualifying tour.
- Volunteers are welcome to store their name tags on the white board in the hallway leading to the volunteer lounge on the second floor of the mansion.

Coats & Personal Belongings

- Mansion: A closet and cubbies (with locks) are located near the volunteer lounge on the second floor of the mansion for volunteers to store their personal affects while at Hillwood.
- Visitor Center: A coat rack in a closet is available in the theater and the visitor center kitchen.

Recording volunteer hours

- Each volunteer is given a pin number to use to manage their volunteer hours. Using the touch screen computer in the mansion volunteer lounge or visitor center kitchen, enter your personal pin number to record your arrival and departure time at Hillwood.
- If the touch screen computer is **not** working, please:
 - Notify a staff member in visitor services or volunteer management.
 - Record your hours from home/phone using your Volgistics account. See the Volgistics User Guide for detailed instructions for entering volunteer hours in the "Time Sheet" tab.

Daily Schedule & Groups Report & Tour Attendance Sheet

- After logging in on the touch screen computer, volunteers should review the daily schedule, briefing notes, and groups report to learn their volunteer assignment and make note of updates/news for the day. These resources are available at the mansion volunteer lounge, mansion coat check room (off the entry hall), and visitor center tour desk.
- The **daily volunteer schedule** includes:
 - Number of pre-registered visitors for day
 - Tour space availability for mansion and garden tours
 - Groups and/or members pre-booked for a guided tour
 - Volunteers scheduled for the day
- The **volunteer briefing notes** include:
 - Updates and reminders regarding the volunteer and visitor experience
 - Programs and events scheduled for the week
- The **groups report** provides details on any groups pre-booked for the day and includes:
 - Group name
 - Group size
 - Group itinerary (touring method such as guided or self-guided, café reservations, etc.)
 - Special notes regarding a group (accessibility needs, etc.)

Please note: if no groups are scheduled for the day, then the group report will not be printed.
- After each tour, docents **record their tour attendance** on the form provided in the volunteer lounge. These numbers help Hillwood keep track of trends in visitor attendance on guided tours.

Mansion Tour Routes

- Docents follow one of five tour routes (see below for the tour routes).
- The same ten rooms are included on each tour route: each tour visits the same room, but in a different order.
- The maximum number of tours at one time is five, and they are well choreographed, so they move easily around each other.
- To move easily around each other, each room has a specified time allotted, with the total tour lasting sixty minutes.
- The times include travel time from one room to the next, as well as time for the introduction and conclusion at the beginning and end of each tour.
- Docents help their tour visitors understand all that is available to visitors, such as mansion rooms that are self-guided like the Russian sacred arts gallery and staff dining room, exhibitions in the dacha or Adirondack building, gardens, museum shop, and Merriweather café.

Tour Routes

Tour A	Min.	Tour B	Min.	Tour C	Min.
Entry Hall	5	French Drawing	6	Icon Room	10
Pavilion	6	Russian Porcelain	6	Downstairs Library	2
French Drawing	6	Icon Room	10	Dining Room	6
Russian Porcelain	6	Downstairs Library	2	Kitchen/Pantry	5
Icon Room	10	Dining Room	6	French Porcelain	6
Downstairs Library	2	Kitchen/Pantry	5	MMP Bedroom Suite	5
Dining Room	6	French Porcelain	6	Entry Hall	5
Kitchen/Pantry	5	MMP Bedroom Suite	5	Pavilion	6
French Porcelain	6	Entry Hall	5	French Drawing	6
MMP Bedroom Suite	5	Pavilion	6	Russian Porcelain	6
Total	57	Total	57	Total	57

Tour D	Min.	Tour E	Min.
Dining Room	6	Kitchen/Pantry	5
Kitchen/Pantry	5	French Porcelain	6
French Porcelain	6	MMP Bedroom Suite	5
MMP Bedroom Suite	5	Entry Hall	5
Entry Hall	5	Pavilion	6
Pavilion	6	French Drawing	6
French Drawing	6	Russian Porcelain	6
Russian Porcelain	6	Icon Room	10
Icon Room	10	Downstairs Library	2
Downstairs Library	2	Dining Room	6
Total	57	Total	57

Docent-led Mansion Tour Procedures

Docent-led Mansion Tour Guidelines

While stationed in the mansion, please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Once you've signed in using the touch screen computer, refer to the daily volunteer schedule (see page 7 for more details) for your shift assignment and updates regarding the day's activities.
2. Sign out a **panic button** located adjacent to the touch screen computer. Docents are required to wear a panic button while leading tours. When pushed, the panic button silently notifies security that a docent needs assistance. Panic buttons are only to be used during emergencies, such as medical emergencies or potential threats/concerns regarding the visitors and/or collection.
3. Arrive in the mansion entry hall by 11:15 a.m., 1:15 p.m. and 3:15 p.m. ready to greet visitors. The 15 minutes prior to the tour starting is a great opportunity to build a rapport with the visitors signed-up for the tour.
4. Assist security with checking in and out coats, bags, water bottles, etc. in the mansion coat check. While visiting the mansion, check all coats, backpacks, and shopping bags at the coatroom. Umbrellas and strollers may be left outside the mansion entrance. Ask a security officer if you have a question regarding the coat check policy.
5. Help the Visitor Services Volunteers collect the tour tickets and greet guests in the entry hall.
6. The docent leader of the day will provide the overall tour welcome and divide the visitors into smaller groups. Before you start your tour and lead them to your first room, confirm you have the correct number of visitors for your tour. See the next section for the docent leader of the day duties.
7. Using the tour framework, lead an engaging, visitor-friendly tour keeping within the 60-minute timeframe.
8. Once your tour concludes, record your total tour number on the form in the volunteer lounge.

Docent Leader of the Day

- Each day one docent will be designated a "docent leader of the day." The docent scheduled for the "A" tour will serve as the docent leader.
- The responsibilities of the docent leader include:
 1. Ensuring all docents scheduled for service have arrived and are stationed in the mansion entry hall by 11:15 a.m., 1:15 p.m. and 3:15 p.m. ready to greet visitors.
 2. Ensuring all docents assist security with checking in and out coats, bags, water bottles, etc. in the mansion coat check. Refer to a security officer if you have a question regarding the coat check policy.
 3. Using the phone in the mansion coat room, call visitor services (ext. 3929) at 11:25 a.m., 1:25 p.m., 3:25 p.m. to determine the number of visitors signed up for the tour.
 4. Ensuring the tours start at the appropriate time, 11:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. (i.e., not early or late), and starting their tour last to accommodate late arrivals.
 5. Providing additional customer service, as needed, such as accommodating unexpected extra visitors on the tours, graciously welcoming and including latecomers, or assisting visitors with special needs.

6. Welcome the tour visitors, using this script:

Good morning/afternoon. My name is _____ and on behalf of the museum and my fellow docents, welcome to Hillwood!

We are about to embark on an hour-long highlights tour of the mansion. At the conclusion of the guided tour, you are most welcome to stay in the mansion as long as you like. The estate will be open until 5 p.m.

To ensure we all have the best possible experience, I have a few guidelines to review:

- *Enjoy the art with your eyes and minds, but please do not touch the collection or lean on walls, doorjambs, or columns.*
- *You're welcome to take photographs in the mansion, but please refrain from using a flash or videotaping.*
- *Chairs without ropes are available for visitors, such as the ones located by the coat room, in most of the major rooms throughout the mansion.*

We will divide you into X number of smaller groups, each with XX number of people per group. Each group will see the same rooms, just in a slightly different order. May I have XX number of people go with (insert docent's name), (and so on...)

We recommend following the order below when dividing and starting the tours:

1. Tour C (Icon Room)
2. Tour D (Dining Room)
3. Tour E (Kitchen/Pantry)
4. Tour B (French Drawing Room)
5. Tour A (Entry Hall, **Note:** This tour is best for accommodating guests in wheelchairs.)

Additional Docent Shift Notes

- Volunteers are encouraged to keep their cell phones on them in case of emergencies, but we discourage volunteers using their cell phones (calling or texting) while serving a shift at Hillwood.
- If a visitor requests to leave feedback (i.e., suggestion, compliment, or complaint), direct those visitors to the visitor services staff members at the visitor center front desk. Visitor services staff can log those comments or direct them to email info@hillwoodmuseum.org. Guests will also receive a survey regarding their visit within a month after their visit.
- For visitors who would like to share their story or connection to Marjorie Post, direct those visitors to the visitor services staff members at the visitor center front desk. They will provide the visitor with the business card for our archives and special collections department, which runs the oral history program. The visitor can also leave their contact information with the visitor services staff.

Mansion On-station Procedures

Mansion On-station Overview

During high volume days such as festivals or evening events and programs (such as the June gala), guided tours may be suspended, and docents will serve on-station in the mansion in lieu of leading docent-led tours. With a goal to continue the gracious experience offered throughout the estate, a docents on-station in the mansion:

- Engage visitors in short, informal conversations centered around the estate, collection, and collector framework
- Answers specific questions about the mansion and objects in the collection
- Provides directions to visitors
- Explains mobile tour app use

Mansion On-station Guidelines

While stationed in the mansion, please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Once you've signed in using the touch screen computer, refer to the daily volunteer schedule for your shift assignment and updates regarding the day's activities.
2. Docents will rove/circulate from room to room and floor to floor (1st or 2nd floors) every 10-15 minutes unless you are assisting a visitor.
3. Be proactive: make yourself available to visitors by smiling, making eye contact, and offering a simple greeting, such as "Hello. Welcome to the mansion. Please let me know if you have any questions."
4. When responding to visitor questions, feel free to avail yourself of the informational resources available in the mansion coat check, which include the audio tour scripts, mansion resource binder, garden docent resource binder, and Hillwood publications. **Note:** Please do not remove these resources from the coat room as they serve as reference tools for all volunteers and staff stationed in the mansion.
5. Assist security with checking in and out coats, bags, water bottles, etc. in the mansion coat check. While visiting the mansion, check all coats, backpacks, and shopping bags at the coatroom. Umbrellas and strollers may be left outside the mansion entrance. Ask a security officer if you have a question regarding the coat check policy.
6. Help ensure visitors follow the mansion guidelines, such as no flash photography or videotaping, no leaning or touching (including walls, doorjambs, and columns), no eating or drinking, etc.
7. Monitor the rooms to ensure they do not get over-crowded. If they do, encourage visitors to start their visit in another area.
8. Assist guests who need the elevator by walking them to the elevator, pushing the call button, and opening the outer door when the elevator arrives.

Additional Notes for Mansion On-Station

- For a complete list of resources available to volunteers (both on-site and virtual), please refer to the training document "Resources Available to Volunteers" available on the volunteer website.
- An additional mansion resource book is also available on the second floor of the mansion located in the stanchioned-off stairway (can be found on the steps just around the corner).
- Familiarize yourself with Hillwood's estate and mansion guidelines as well as the accessibility guidelines (available in your volunteer handbook and Hillwood's website). **Friendly Reminder:** The security staff is here for you if you have any concerns regarding a visitor or Hillwood in general.
- Clear chairs are available for visitors to sit on in most of the rooms throughout the mansion; they do not have ropes across them. While volunteers are also welcome to utilize the chairs when needed, please continue to move/rove the floors.



A mansion resource binder is available on the second floor located in the stanchioned-off stairway.

- The mansion is wheelchair accessible except for the pavilion, Marjorie Post's bedroom suite, and Russian sacred arts gallery. Photo albums with images of the rooms are available in the **lower cabinet** in the Russian porcelain room and the lower cabinet just outside the bedroom suite. An iPad, located in the mansion coat room, is also available with images of the rooms not accessible by wheelchair.
 - **Please note:** These are the **only** two cabinets volunteers are permitted to open. An iPad with images of all three spaces is also available in the mansion coat check.



Photo album: Pavilion
Location: Russian porcelain room cabinet, to the right of the French drawing room



Photo album: Marjorie Post's Bedroom Suite
Location: Cabinet just outside of Post's bedroom, to the right of the bedroom doorway

Exhibition On-station Procedures

Exhibition On-station Overview

With a goal to continue the gracious welcome and assistance from the other areas on the estate, a docent on-station in an exhibition does the following:

- Answers specific questions about the exhibition and objects on view
- Provides directions to visitors
- Facilitates the movement of visitors throughout the exhibition

Exhibition On-station Guidelines

While stationed in an exhibition, please adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Prepare for the shift by reviewing the exhibition content (i.e.: read the exhibition label text and, when available, watch any volunteer lectures related to the exhibition).
2. Once you've signed in using the touch screen computer, refer to the daily volunteer schedule for your shift assignment and updates regarding the day's activities.
3. Move/circulate in the exhibition space every 10-15 minutes unless you are assisting a visitor.
4. Be proactive: make yourself available to visitors by smiling, making eye contact, and offering a simple greeting, such as "Hello. Welcome to the exhibition. Please let me know if you have any questions."
5. If you have any questions or concerns, please direct them to the security staff on-station in the exhibition.