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A look inside the interactive, inspirational new
United States Olympic & Paralympic Museum



By Amber Gibson

Most of us will never know what it feels like to enter an Olympic Stadium for the opening ceremony, sprint toward the finish line in the 100-meter final, or stick the landing on a triple axel. But with the help of hundreds of former athletes, the new United States Olympic & Paralympic Museum, which opened in Colorado Springs in August, is getting us mere mortals as close as possible.

“From an athlete perspective, we really want to convey to visitors how hard it is—the grind and laser focus you have to have,” explains Michelle Dusserre Farrell, the museum’s vice president of athlete engagement, who won a silver medal in gymnastics at the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles. Dusserre Farrell spent several years consulting with Olympians and Paralympians to help the museum create interactive exhibits in which guests can test their speed, accuracy, focus, reaction time, and endurance against former champions—from track and field legend Jesse Owens to wheelchair racer Tatyana McFadden. At the “Ask the Athlete” exhibit, meanwhile, guests can hear from champions such as cross-country skier Kikkan Randall and wheelchair basketball player Matt Scott.

The museum has endeavored to make the experience as personalized and accessible as possible. When purchasing

tickets, guests can indicate their sport and athlete interests, as well as share information about their ability level. This information is loaded onto an RFID chip in the visitor’s entry badge, which the digital exhibits then access to help customize the experience for those who have a sight, mobility, or sensory impairment.

For those who prefer their museum exhibits a little more old-school, there is plenty of memorabilia on hand, including a collection of Olympic torches and medals, five-time champion Bonnie Blair’s speed skates, and the scoreboard from the U.S. ice hockey team’s 1980 “Miracle on Ice” victory over the U.S.S.R. Even the building’s exterior is meant to inspire: Design

architect Elizabeth Diller, of Diller Scofidio + Renfro—the firm that conceived The Broad in Los Angeles and The Shed in New York—used nearly 9,000 diamond-shaped aluminum panels to evoke the shape of a discus thrower in motion.

“So many of these athletes come from humble beginnings to achieve great things,” Dusserre Farrell says. “Sport is just the vehicle to deliver that message. We hope the museum will spark that dream in everybody to follow their passion.”

Golden Opportunities: Explore all there is to do in Colorado Springs with United flights from Chicago, Denver, and Houston.

