November 2018

Museums Audience Report

What Audience Finder says about audiences for Museums

the audience agency
This report, based on data from the Audience Finder standard national survey of visitors, shows the breadth of people museums are able to engage through their diverse appeal, collections, learning activities and specialist knowledge.

The Museums and Heritage sector is one of Britain’s finest cultural assets, encompassing over 1700 accredited museums. A remarkable 52% of people* visited a museum in 2016/17 and an even greater 74% visited a heritage site.

Many museums have evolved, through sporadic acquisitions and the generous bequests of benefactors, to hold a diverse range of objects, often housed in older heritage buildings. For the contemporary non-museum-going audience, these can seem imposing mausoleums, filled with curious ‘dead stuff’ set in the past and bearing little personal relevance. Museums located beyond the convenience of a city centre face the further challenge of attracting visitors who are less mobile (financially and physically) in a competitive leisure market.

The Audience Finder data, however, shows us that museums are evolving to bridge this gap. There are clear examples of museums reaching and connecting with their local communities and contributing to important political agendas of social cohesion, improving health and well-being and boosting the visitor economy. Successful museums are using this data to build their resilience, influence funders and form collaborative partnerships.

This report is based on a sample of 39,318 visitors from 105 varied museums – those managed by local authorities, independent trusts, universities and national museums – collected in the 2017/18 benchmark year. The museums range in scale from specialist to broad collections, offering uniquely different visitor experiences. The report offers comprehensive insights into the demographic profile and behaviour of visitors, comparing them with patterns for other forms of arts and culture. Individual museums can use this national benchmark as a comparator for their own findings using Audience Finder dashboard analytics, as well as comparing to population data and other cultural organisations by region. More broadly, the report serves to illuminate how England’s amazing range of museums is able to serve such a vast cross-section of its people.

* [www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey)
The Big Picture

What do we know about Museums audiences?

Older audiences are highly represented: 41% of all visitors are over the age of 55.

Museums attract a broad range of visitors of all ages.

Visitors whose primary motivation is to learn something travel further.

Museums attract more female than male visitors - a higher proportion of male visitors attend sporting, science and transport museums.

Museums attract a higher proportion of family visitors than other artforms.

Local audiences: 52% of visitors live within a 30 minute drive of the museum.

Regular museum goers visit the same museum 3 times a year on average.

Museums with free entrance attract a higher proportion of BAME and younger visitors.
Looking at this demographic profiling, if your museum is on a 10 year exhibition cycle – what does this mean for the displays you should be planning for a decade’s time?

**The Core Four**

Four key audience groups, drawn along demographic and behavioural lines, emerge clearly from the dataset. These core four groupings, profiled below, exhibit notable differences in attitude and engagement. We’ll be examining these distinct behaviours throughout the report.

**Young Creatives**

16 -24 year old independent young adults and thinkers who want to learn, create and curate their experiences.

**Families**

Visitors attending museums with children, wanting to be entertained and educated together.

**Older Learners**

Museum visitors aged 55+ who want to be active, social and connected.

**Cultural Tourists**

Predominantly affluent adults, these cultural enthusiasts will frequently invest time and money to travel more than 60 minutes for new experiences and knowledge.

**Men and Women**

10% of museum visitors identify as having some degree of **limiting disability**, compared with 18% of the English population.
What are their cultural habits and preferences?

Using Audience Spectrum helps identify key barriers to and opportunities for engaging different audiences. How can museums engage cash-strapped groups like Facebook Families?

**Audience Spectrum**

Audience Spectrum, which maps both levels of engagement and attitude towards the arts across the UK population, shows how broad and accessible the museums offering is. Museum audiences are more evenly spread than other artforms across High (30%) Medium (45%) and Low (25%) cultural engagers, with almost half of attenders hailing from the middle-engaged segments. These middle groupings are typically regular (though not frequent) attendees, low-risk in their arts engagement habits and constitute the largest section of the population.

Museum audiences are less dominated by high engagers than most forms of culture and are more representative of the population. What we see in museums, then, is a broad array of cultural experiences that meet the needs of a wide range of people, including those who typically face more barriers to engagement.

The majority of museum visitors are medium or high cultural engagers.

**Dormitory Dependables**
Suburban and small towns’ interest in heritage and mainstream arts

**Trips and Treats**
Mainstream arts and popular culture influenced by children, family and friends

**Commuterland Culturebuffs**
Affluent and professional consumers of culture

**Home and Heritage**
Rural and small town daytime activities and historical events

Young Creatives
Other artforms are dominated by highly cultural engaged Experience Seekers, but museums appeal as much to Facebook Families and Trips and Treats millennials.

Families
Dormitory Dependables and Trips and Treats dominate family attendance to museums, making up 38% of all family audiences.

Older Learners
For most art forms, older audiences tend to be Commuterland Culturebuffs. In museum audiences though, the older middle engaged groups of Home and Heritage and Dormitory Dependables are equally significant.

Cultural Tourists
47% of Commuterland Culturebuffs travel substantial distances to visit museums either with specific collections or in areas of interest.
Low culturally engaged audiences are far more local than cultural tourists, who tend to be high cultural engagers. What are the implications of this for pricing strategies?

Where do they come from?

Across all engagement levels, museums audiences are more likely to attend either very locally – within 30 minutes of their homes – or as part of a substantial trip – an hour or more away from home.

Within this pattern though, there are some stark differences between engagement levels, revealing almost as many ‘cultural tourists’ in high engaged groups as ‘home bodies’ in low engaged groups:

- 42% of low culturally engaged visitors live within 15 minutes of the museum they are visiting.
- 39% of highly culturally engaged visitors travelled over 60 minutes, compared to 21% of lower engaged audiences.

Regional Representation
Audience Spectrum profiles differ from region to region and museums generally attract a highly representative local demographic.

North Eastern museum audiences reflect the region’s significant population of low cultural engagers. 39% of museums audiences in this region are usually low engaged.

London museums rely on cultural frequent flyers. Metroculturals alone make up a third of London’s museum goers.

In London, 37% of visitors are from overseas
- 19% of overseas audiences visit from USA
- 40% of overseas audiences visit from Europe

Home and Away
43% of all visitors live within a 30 minute drivetime of the museum they visit.

Travel distance to museums
- 0-10 miles: 43%
- 10-20 miles: 43%
- Over 20 miles: 14%

Families
Family visitors are largely local. 65% of families visit within 30 minutes of their homes.

Drive time x engagement level
- Low: 39%
- Medium: 42%
- High: 27%

Cultural Tourists
Whilst most artforms attract just 7% of their audiences from overseas, museums audiences are 12% non-UK residents.

% of attenders who live within a 30 minute drive of the museum they visit
- North East: 93%
- Yorkshire & the Humber: 85%
- South West: 77%
- North West: 70%
- London: 63%
- East Midlands: 57%
- East: 56%
- South East: 36%
- West Midlands: 36%

Audience Finder data shows that museums in the South East and West Midlands attract more tourists whereas the North East audiences are highly local.

Older Learners
40% of 55+ audiences travel long distances to visit museums, suggesting that these visits form part of a day outing or longer trip.

Young Creatives
At 40% travelling less than 15 minutes to get to a museum, millennials are and Generation Z are the most hyperlocally-minded audiences.

Families and single adults are more likely to visit museums and attractions closer to home, whilst groups of adults will travel further afield.
How do they visit?

On average, museum audiences who have visited within the last year attended 3 times. What implications does this have for programming exhibitions and activities?

Average group size: 3 people

Museums are good at attracting first time visitors. Only about a third of audiences, though, return multiple times a year, as opposed to an average of 57% within the year returns to other artforms.

Almost half of museum audiences attend in adult only groups, rather than alone or as families. This is particularly prominent in the oldest and youngest visitor groups.

Medium Engagers’ attendance is split fairly evenly between Family (44%) and Adult (41%) groups.

According to the Taking Part survey, repeat and regular visits to museums are very much on the rise. What more can museums do to nurture this trend?

Young Creatives
Young adults are more likely to attend with peers than in family groups, suggesting strong social and academic drivers.

Families
35% of audiences attend in family groups, whereas general cultural audiences are made up of just 14% families.

Older Learners
Over half of older learners attend in adult groups. These are active retirees with the means to engage with museums as learners, not just as grandparents.

Cultural Tourists
42% of adult groups travel over 60 minutes to visit museums, with a high proportion of adult groups visiting as part of a cultural break.

Families are the most likely group to return regularly to a museum.

When did you last visit?

First Visit 65% 35%
Last visit more than a year ago 56% 44%
Visited on occasion in the last 12 months 36% 64%

Group type × age

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<th>16-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
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<td>Families</td>
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<td>22%</td>
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Why do they visit?

Social and Learning based motivations are the main drivers for museum attendance.

Whilst Learning increases with cultural engagement level, however, Social decreases.

Motivations for visiting:

- Learning: 24%
- Professional/Academic: 3%
- Social: 28%
- Entertainment: 14%
- Reflection/relaxation: 7%
- Escapism: 6%
- Self Actualisation: 7%
- Other: 11%

% of respondents who expressed Learning as one of their motivations for visiting museums across all age brackets:

- Museums audiences are more motivated by both personal learning and encouraging family and child learning than is typical across other artforms.

- Young Creatives: 55% 16-24
- Families: 57% 25-34
- Older Learners: 59% 35-44
- Cultural Tourists: 56% 45-54
- 57% 55-64
- Older Learners: 55% 65+

Top 3 motivations of single adult visitors:

1. To learn something
2. To be intellectually stimulated
3. Museums are an important part of who I am

Individual specialist enthusiasts make up a distinct and important contingent of museum audiences.

Young Creatives
- Whilst 1 in 5 young people cite academics among their motivations, a third are primarily socially motivated.

Families
- Families visit museums to educate, entertain and socialise with their children.

Older Learners
- Intellectual stimulation, learning and self-actualisation drivers increase with age.

Cultural Tourists
- This group is far more likely than local audiences to be visiting with a focus on learning and self-actualisation.

Regular visitors
- Are more likely to perceive museums as a place of entertainment.

Why do they visit?

Regular visitors are more likely to perceive museums as a place of entertainment.

Individual specialist enthusiasts make up a distinct and important contingent of museum audiences.

of all audiences cite ‘To spend time with friends and family’ as their single greatest motivation, as opposed to just 12% for most artforms.

Whilst museum visitors are significantly more Learning and less Entertainment motivated than audiences of other artforms, they are most often seeking social experiences.

Learning is the most consistent motivation across all age groups.
How do they feel about their visit?

Your Net Promoter Score (NPS) is an average score based on how likely your audiences are to recommend you to other people.

Net promoter scores for free and paid for museums are the same.

At 66, museums’ net promoter scores are below the cultural average of 74.

Museums score similarly to other art forms across ‘The whole experience’ and ‘Value for money’, but lower for ‘Quality of the exhibition’.

Visitors from the middle engaged Audience Spectrum groups are the most likely to recommend the museum to friends and family.

98% of respondents rate their overall experience as Very good or Good

The experience 67% 31% 2%
Value for money 66% 26% 6%
Quality of the exhibition 67% 30% 2%

Very good Good Neither good nor poor Poor Very Poor

Considering that likelihood to recommend increases steadily with age, what more can museums do to create advocacy in younger audiences?

London, dominated by national museums, overseas tourists, Metroculturals and other critically minded high engagers, scores the lowest of all regions at 43.

More contemporary-minded groups, including Experience Seekers and Kaleidoscope Creativity, demonstrate lower satisfaction levels.

There is a challenge here for museums to retain this future-focused audience and create positive word of mouth.

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How would you rate...

Highest

75 NPS

Home and Heritage

Lowest

64 NPS

Experience Seekers

More traditionally-minded visitors, such as Home and Heritage, are the most satisfied with their museums experience, both frequenting and identifying with their local museums.

Young Creatives

With an average NPS of just 51, 16-24 year olds are the least likely age-group to recommend their museum experience.

Families

Families give an average NPS of 68, which is slightly higher than other groups.

Older Learners

Museum advocacy is highest among older audiences, with over 65 year-olds giving an average NPS of 72.

Cultural Tourists

At just 55, overseas visitors score museums more than 10 points lower than UK residents, whose average score is 67. Lower tourist scores contribute to London’s poor NPS performance.
Local Loyalties

Loyal

• Local authority run museums attract the most loyal and regular audiences.
• 40% of local authority museum visitors attend multiple times a year and almost twice as frequently as university museums audiences, only 21% of whom had visited in the preceding 12 months.

Local

• Museums are an important part of these audiences’ cultural and community lives, attracting an extremely local audience to visit and participate in activities.
• Local museums attract the highest proportion of family audiences. 65% of local authority museum visitors live within a 30 minute drive-time, compared to 40% of university museums and 33% of independents.

Learners

• More specialist local authority museums can also attract audiences from further afield. Anecdotal evidence from museums participating in Audience Finder, alongside broader research, shows that single adult enthusiasts travel the furthest to museums with specific collections and to undertake their own research.
• Three top motivations emerge clearly for local authority museum attenders: Social (29%), Learning (22%) and Entertainment (14%).

The Audience Finder sample includes 49 museums that are managed by local authorities, with annual visitor figures spanning from 20,000 to 200,000. These museums share similarities in their broad range of collections and urban placement across England. Distinct from those museums governed as independent trusts, the majority are free admission and have substantially fewer dedicated marketing resources.

Local authority museums often boast an eclectic collection, incorporating social history, art and artefacts specifically relevant to the local area. They may also include a permanent special interest nationally designated exhibition, such as the Metalwork collection at Museums Sheffield.

These museums’ active engagement and exhibition programmes attract a high level of repeat visitors and audiences as participants.
Approximately 2/3 of survey respondents visited free entrance museums, compared to 1/3 with entrance fees. The impact of charging entrance to museums has been an ongoing conversation.

National museums’ ability to offer free entrance represents a challenge to all museums reliant on generating their own income to operate. As museums face the conundrum of sustaining services with restricted funding, the pressure to generate income by any means, including charging admission, is rapidly increasing. Findings from Audience Finder bring additional insights to fuel the debate.

Paying the Price

Free entrance

- Free entrance museums attract a higher proportion of visitors who are less culturally engaged, particularly Up Our Street and Facebook Families.
- Families are more likely to attend free entrance museums.
- A higher proportion of visitors to free museums and heritage attractions are aged under 35.
- Free entry museums attract a higher proportion of BAME visitors.

Paid entrance

- Paid museums attract a higher level of super-engaged Commuterland Culturebuffs and Experience Seekers.
- These museums attract more visitors over the age of 45.
- A higher proportion of visitors from further afield attend museums with paid entrance.
- On average, paid for museums attract a higher proportion of first time visitors (50%) than free museums (43%)

For more information about the impact of charging we recommend AIM’s 2016 study The Impact of Charging or Not for Admissions on Museums.
Barriers and Gateways

Every museum has a different propensity to attract and engage audiences. There are, though, a number of identifiable barriers to engagement that are common to many museums, along with gateway opportunities to pursue.

Timing is everything

The Audience Finder data set reveals patterns of attendance and seasonal trends.

- The rise in family attendance during school holidays is particularly significant in the autumn and spring half terms.
- Weekends are especially popular with families during the winter months.
- Major city museums have less variation in their visitor profile throughout the year, compared with rural locations and tourism destinations.

Thinking practically

Open comments in the Audience Finder surveys reveal that practical barriers vary, but common factors include:

- The availability and cost of public transport
- The cost of involvement (entrance fees etc.)
- Project closures
- Availability and cost of refreshments
- Lack of information on what’s available
- Poor communication and marketing
- Rurality (scattered populations and isolation)
- Time constraints.

Happy families

Given the importance of family audiences, it is key for museums to recognise the needs and motivations of the changing family dynamics revealed by population research. The modern family is complex. A whole range of carers – parents, grandparents, partners etc. – will potentially be making the decision to either bring children to visit museums or choose to spend leisure time in another way.

Families are especially influenced by word of mouth and have a particularly high level of brand awareness. Research indicates that they are the most likely group to look to social media for recommendations. Family Arts Campaign’s Family Arts Standards offer great guidance on how best to communicate with and welcome families.

Changing perceptions

According to Kids in Museums’ study Hurdles to Participation, museum audiences tend to be from better educated and more affluent homes. The Audience Agency’s extensive qualitative research with less engaged families and young people reiterates that the impacts of differences in class and socio-economic backgrounds are critical.

Parental influence can be both positive and negative. If a parent is unwilling to engage, this impacts younger family members’ attitudes. This unwillingness can be caused by a combination of emotional (fear, discomfort) or interest (awareness, perceived relevance) barriers. Children and young people may consequently hold a negative view of museums as remote, inaccessible and not relevant to their everyday lives.

Young people of today, however, have entirely different needs and interests as they age – they are not necessarily their parents in waiting. It is increasingly important to consider lifetime engagement strategies for younger audiences, such as developing:

- User-led experiences
- Informal learning
- Wider family and community engagement
- The role of exploration and play.
What’s Next

Audience Finder supporting Accreditation

The Audience Agency is working with other Sector Support Organisations and Arts Council England to support museums to use data to understand their audiences and to extend their engagement with non-users.

From November 2018 the Museums Accreditation Scheme will be refreshed and museums will be asked to demonstrate a sound knowledge of audiences and their needs in order to achieve the standard. Audience Finder can help your museum bridge the data gaps. It offers a range of resources to support audience development planning and a free research toolkit to undertake your own visitor research.

To subscribe for free visit www.audiencefinder.org

Top tips for museums

Creating an audience development plan

Use our audience development guidance to evaluate your current visitors and their experience, understand barriers to attendance and develop approaches to overcoming them.

Scoping your potential visitors

Within the Audience Finder national data information you can access more detail about audiences in your region as part of an Area Profile Report. This invaluable tool supports tactical marketing, fundraising and programme planning and includes Audience Spectrum, lifestyle, demographic and socio-economic profiles.

Increasing learning and participation

Sign up for our regular digest of research advice and look out for features on different audience groups, such as our new Engaging Older Audiences Snapshot.

Useful sources and references

• Taking Part Survey
• Museums Accreditation Scheme
• Museum Sector Support Organisations
Participating Museums

Abbot Hall
American Museum
Amersham Museum
Andover Museum
Arbeia Roman Fort
Ashmolean Museum
Bassetlaw Museum
Berwick Museum
Blackwell
Botanic Gardens
Bowes Museum
Brighton Museum & Art Gallery
Brighton Royal Pavilion and Museums
Cannon Hall Museum
Captain Cook Birthplace Museum
Castlefield Gallery
Castleford Museum
Centre for Chinese Contemporary Arts
Chezinsford Museum
Christchurch Mansion
Clifton Park
Colchester Castle
Cooper Art Gallery
County Museum at Hartlebury
Coventry Transport Museum
Derby Museum and Art Gallery
Design Museum
Discovery Museum
Dorman Museum
Dorset County Museum
Dr Jenners House Museum
Eastleigh Museum
Elsatic Heritage Centre
Eureka!
Experience Barnsley
Falmouth Art Gallery
Fashion Museum Bath
Fitzwilliam Museum
Graves Art Gallery
Great North Museum
Harris Museum and Art Gallery
Hartlepool Art Gallery
Hatton Gallery
HCT The Gallery
Head of Steam
Henry Moore Institute
Herbert Art Gallery
Hexham Museum
Higgins Bedford
History of Science Oxford
Holbourne Museum
Horniman Museum
Hull & East Riding Museum
Hull Maritime Museum
Ipswich Museum
Ironbridge Gorge Museum
IWM
Jewish Museum
Kettle’s Yard
Kirkleatham Museum
Laing Art Gallery
Lowewood Museum
Maidstone Museum
Manchester Art Gallery
Manchester Museum
Mansfield Museum
Millennium Gallery
MOLLI
MOSI
Museum in the Park
Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology
Museum of East Asian Art
Museum of Hartlepool
Museum of London
Museum of Natural History
Oxford
Museum of Timekeeping
National Football Museum
National Maritime Museum
Cornwall
National Waterways Museum
Glocester
Newstead Abbey
No.1 The Crescent
Normanby Hall
North Lincolnshire Museum
Norwich Castle
Nottingham Castle
Nottingham Industrial Museum
OUM Ashmolean Museum
OUM History of Science Museum
OUM Museum of Natural History
Penlee House
Peoples History Museum
Pickfords House
Pitt Rivers Museum
Plymouth City Museum
Polar Museum
Ponteclaf Castle
Ponfle Baptiste
Pole Museum
Portcurno Telegraph Museum
Preston Park Museum
RAMM
Roman Baths
Royal Cornwall Museum
Royal West of England
Academy
Russell Cotes Art Gallery
Salisbury Museum
Scott Polar Museum
Segedunum Roman Fort
Sewerby Hall
Shipley Art Gallery
Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum
South Shields Museum
Stephenson Railway Museum
Streetlife Museum
The Architecture Centre
The Commandery
The Gelfrye Museum
The Hepworth Wakefield
The Silk Mill
The Story Museum
Tullie House
V&A
Vestry House Museum
Victoria Art Gallery
Wakefield Museum
Westbury Manor Museum
Westgate Museum
Weston Park Museum
Wheat Martyn China Clay Park
Whipple Museum
Wilberforce House
Wiltshire Museum
Wollaton Hall
Woodhorn Museum
Worcester City Art Gallery
Wordsworth Trust
Worsborough Mill
York Art Gallery
York Castle Museum
Yorkshire Museum

% of Audience Finder data-contributing museums 2017/18

% of ACE accredited museums 2017/18

North East
Yorkshire & the Humber
South West
South East
East Midlands
East Midlands
North West
London
North West
East Midlands
Yorkshire & the Humber

North East
Yorkshire & the Humber
South West
South East
East Midlands
East
North West
London

18% 5% 21%
11% 10%
14% 3%
5% 8%
18%
11% 10% 11%
Context and Methodology

Background and Methodology

Over the past three years, The Audience Agency has collaborated with the museums sector using Audience Finder to better understand audiences for museums and support the sector to make the case for the impacts of its work.

The data included in this report was collected in the 2017-18 benchmark year by 105 museums including local authority, independent, national and universities from across England. The sample of 39,318 surveys was collected through face-to-face interviews or e-surveys. Comparisons made in the report are between the stated sample, England population data as per the 2011 census and the Audience Finder dataset of other artforms (Audience Finder benchmark), which represents 800+ organisations and 30% of households in England.

Audience Finder

Audience Finder is a national audience development and data aggregation programme, enabling cultural organisations to share, compare and apply insight. It is developed and managed by The Audience Agency for and with the cultural sector and is funded by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

Audience Finder provides tools for collecting and analysing data in a standardised way which builds a clear picture of audiences locally and nationally. The results help organisations to find new audience opportunities using a range of tools, features and support. These include user-friendly reporting dashboards, online mapping and insight tools and the opportunity to work in collaborative, data-sharing groups.

Audience Spectrum

Audience Spectrum segments the whole UK population by their attitudes towards culture, and by what they like to see and do. There are 10 different Audience Spectrum profiles that you can use to understand who lives in your local area, what your current audiences are like, and what you could do to build new ones.

Audience Spectrum is the most accurate tool the sector has ever had to help target audiences and include a wider public. Analysis and customer tagging with Audience Spectrum work at both household and postcode levels, to help cultural organisations understand audience profile and reach, enabling really accurate targeting of activity and communications.
More about Museum audiences

To discover more about research into audiences for museums, or if you would like to contribute, contact:
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Head of Partnerships, The Audience Agency

Disclaimer

The information contained within this report is not intended to be used as the sole basis for any business decision and is based upon data that is provided by third parties, the accuracy and/or completeness of which it would not be possible and/or economically viable for The Audience Agency to guarantee. The Audience Agency’s services also involve models and techniques based on statistical analysis, probability and predictive behaviour. Accordingly, The Audience Agency is not able to accept any liability for any inaccuracy, incompleteness or other error in this report.

Get in touch to find out more

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