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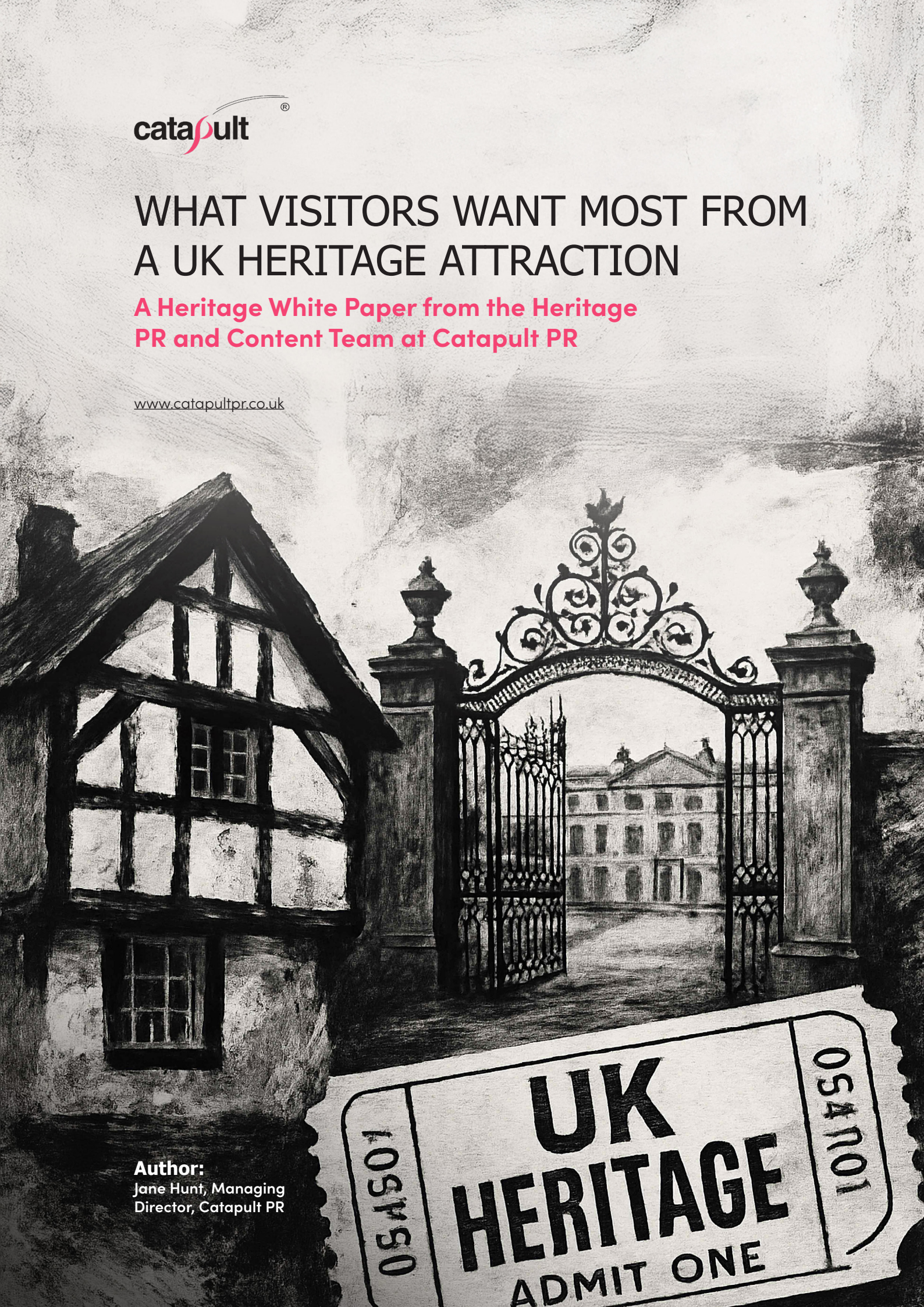
WHAT VISITORS WANT MOST FROM A UK HERITAGE ATTRACTION

A Heritage White Paper from the Heritage PR and Content Team at Catapult PR

www.catapultpr.co.uk



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01
INTRODUCTION

In Autumn 2025, heritage PR and content writing specialist, Catapult PR, commissioned another round of independent research into consumer views of heritage visitor attractions in the UK. This followed its Castles and Historic Homes research survey and report (2019) and its heritage survey of 2023, as published in 'How to Supercharge Your Heritage Marketing'. Both documents are downloads under the 'About Us' tab at https://www.catapultpr.co.uk

Such research assists the heritage-focused public relations and content agency, based in Lancashire but representing clients nationwide, in the planning of its media and online marketing campaigns. It also enables it to offer insight to other organisations who are seeking to attract heritage visitors and deliver high levels of satisfaction.

1.1 The surveys and how to cite

With this most recent research report, insight has been derived from two surveys. The first of these allowed us to elicit responses and rank what is most important to the heritage visitor ahead of the 2026 visitor economy season.

The second survey saw Catapult PR delve deeper into the opinions and reactions that prospective visitors of all ages and demographics have with regard to heritage visitor attractions.

By focusing on both data sets, Catapult PR was able to build a more complete picture with regard to what the heritage visitor most wants from a visit to a heritage attraction.

Please read on, but please note that use of the data from the Catapult PR research is only permitted if the end-user credits Catapult PR as the source.

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WHY IT MATTERS TO KNOW WHAT THE HERITAGE VISITOR ACTUALLY WANTS

2.1 Customer satisfaction in heritage visitor attractions

Heritage visitor attractions are often in competition with each other for a finite amount of spend that a prospective visitor will make on day trips or heritage visits. Influencing where the visitor spends their budget can be crucial to visitor numbers and overall income generation, whether that comes through the 'gate' or ticket office. To secure as much of the potential 'heritage pound' spend as possible, a heritage attraction should strive to align itself with what the prospective visitor wants to see and what they expect from an attraction that they choose to visit.

In this way, a heritage visitor attraction can not only boost its income but also reduce friction points. These friction points arise when customers' expectations are not met. That can lead to dissatisfaction and a loss of the positive referrals that then encourage others to visit. Nowadays, it can also result in poor online reviews and negative commentary on social media.

2.2 Delivering the right added-value content

However, at a deeper level, there is now an all-important need to know what the prospective heritage visitor wants to see and hear from a visitor attraction. This matters greatly, because marketing of a heritage attraction is often not now reliant on appearing in leaflet racks but ensuring that there is sufficient online exposure for the visitor attraction. That is essential, to ensure it can be found in searches carried out on the web.

The old ways of achieving this are fast disappearing. The traditional SEO means of bringing people into a website are fast disappearing. Google and other search engines now want to see a heritage visitor attraction site offering different things and a satisfying user experience. This means the website needs to be extremely easy to navigate and content has to be of the required length, to tick the box of the algorithm.

Furthermore, it needs to be structured in the right way and must provide strong value to the site visitor. A website must have helpful blogs and articles, again structured correctly and of the required length, with a true human voice, not a chatbot-generated one. Added value should be being provided through assets such as content downloads, booklets, guides and materials that visitors can use to derive great value from their visit.

2.2.1 The two-part marketing strategy that heritage visitor attractions require

However, this is only one part of a two-part strategy. The second part is all about not what attractions say about themselves on their website but about what others say about them. Here, heritage visitor attractions need to be generating media articles and citations that demonstrate authority. In other words, a PR campaign is highly useful to a heritage visitor attraction, not just because it generates great exposure for them, and puts them in front of the prospective visitor through a variety of different media channels, but because it also demonstrates that they are deemed a great place to visit, through an element of third-party endorsement. All of the search engines and chat bot search tools pick up on this and this activity can push an attraction into the AI search box that is the first thing a visitor sees when carrying out their online search enquiry. Similarly, generating great customer reviews is highly important.

Without knowing what the prospective visitor thinks, doing any of this is problematic. Heritage visitor attractions cannot know what would constitute added value unless they get inside the head of the prospective visitor. The visitor or customer has to be placed at the centre of all successful marketing. This is not new at all but, in an age of AI search, it is more important than ever. Learning from the data and sentiments expressed in Catapult PR's research surveys can be a way of guiding marketing strategy.

2.3 How to make use of the heritage survey insights

What visitor attractions need in 2026 is a "show up everywhere" strategy, driven by online content and PR, with complementary social media support. The strategy should be focused on customer wants, needs and viewpoints, with initiatives created around these.

This whitepaper should inform a heritage attraction's marketing and avoid the pitfall of irritating the visitor, by not recognising what matters to them. Attractions must not allow themselves to be blindsided by what the visitor actually feels and what they really require of them in 2026. They should not remain in the dark when it comes to what the search engines expect of them either. If they do want to be on the radar of the visitor, they need to pay strong attention to the 'show up everywhere strategy' but also make sure it ticks all the boxes of the heritage visitor in 2026. If they do not have the two-part strategy (talking about themself but also ensuring that authority and opinion-builders are also regularly talking about them externally), they can easily fall from view and become invisible, due to the way AI search works.

In a continuing tough economic climate, they should not allow that to happen to their venue and business.

03
WHO IS THE HERITAGE VISITOR?

The Catapult PR research surveys present the views of the average British consumer and potential heritage visitor. However, some of the devil for the individual heritage visitor attraction may lay in the detail.

Catapult's research showed that there can be significantly elevated viewpoints on some issues, according to both the geographical location of the interviewee and their age. Heritage visitor attractions should, therefore, take account of their region's individual survey results and also take on board the views of consumers within their key demographics.

It is essential to bear in mind, when focusing on heritage research from other sources, that it tends to consider the whole heritage sector. This often includes free-to-enter sites and heritage venues and gardens. So, in effect, research can be skewed, as the paying visitor has a very different profile and distinct needs. Whilst the general picture may seem positive, showing an increase to all heritage sites except places of worship, that may not be the picture for heritage attractions that need to act and think more like a business.

For this reason, the Catapult PR research specifically asked some questions solely eliciting views of historic homes and gardens. Some of the responses to those questions will probably also be relevant to other heritage visitor attractions that charge the customer admission.

04
THE IMPORTANCE OF DEMOGRAPHICS

It is also worth noting that around a quarter of the research respondents 'did not know' or did not have an opinion on some of the questions put to them. This could well be because they are not currently in the frame when it comes to being a heritage user and are not in the 'orbit' of heritage visitor attractions at all.

We can see that responses to questions that touch on diversity and inclusion are stronger in areas such as Greater London, where there is a more diverse multi-cultural community, than in other parts of the country where that is not so much the case.

Knowing the current demographic of your visitor is one thing but it is also essential to consider the future. Can you survive with that one demographic or do you need to be engaging in marketing actions that will broaden the base? Or are you employing marketing tactics that your actual current demographic of visitor and desired demographic of visitor don't actually use? Are you ignoring channels that they do actually use, simply because you think that jumping into one type of marketing is what 'everyone is doing' so it must be right?

These are all key considerations before you examine the results of the Catapult PR survey report. These factors are fundamental to a heritage visitor attraction's marketing success, both now and in future years. Remember the need to not just talk to people on your own channels, but in those that might be influencing your key demographics both directly (because they use them), and indirectly, because AI search (both via Google and chat bots) utilises them as sources of authority.

Do not simply rush towards something because another heritage attraction is doing it. That does not mean they have their strategy right.

Take on board the nuances of the research, as well as the figures and see where trends are potentially going. Above all, use the research wisely, to stay relevant, as relevance is the foundation of your future.

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RESEARCH DEMOGRAPHICS

Catapult PR's research surveys, commissioned with Censuswide, have responses grouped into standard demographic age groups. These can be matched with distinctive and noted 'generations' within our society as follows

Research age group	Societal 'generation'
16-24	Mainly Gen Z
25-34	Gen Z (to age 28) and Millennials
35-44	Millennials
45-54	Gen X
55+	Gen X (to age 60) and Baby Boomers (aged 61-79) and the Silent Generation (79 to 96). Older than that are those remaining from the Greatest Generation.

Each heritage visitor attraction should know which of these 'generations' it currently attracts and which it would wish to attract. That leads directly towards the type of marketing tactics that should be utilised in order to attract the target visitor.

Having a focus on the target audience is essential, for many reasons. One is that it helps maximise the use of a marketing budget, as a heritage attraction is not then using the wrong tactic for the wrong audience. Similarly, it is not trying to be all things to all people, or staging events for an audience not likely to visit anyway, whilst ignoring those who are.

However, it can also help enhance an attraction's customer satisfaction levels, as it provides a clear direction as to what it should be doing to keep its target audience happy.

In order to really reflect on Catapult PR's research surveys, it is important to focus on the age groups of most relevance to an individual attraction and to consider their viewpoints.

Also understanding what makes each generation tick is important and can give meaning to some of the research findings. The behavioural traits, in general, of each generation are the context within which many of the viewpoints discovered by the surveys sit. Here is an overview of each of those typical behaviours.

Gen Z

Gen Z-ers, aged 13 to around 28, were the first to grow up with the Internet and smartphones. Their priorities circle around mental health and financial stability and they are the most accepting of different viewpoints and identities.

Alongside this, they are the generation most susceptible to anxiety and they demand flexibility in their working life, often freelancing or moving jobs frequently, to suit their lifestyle. They shun fad diets and the natural/organic, to take on board protein and nutritious foods.

They are big savers and investors and like to travel. They are socially conscious but not as concerned about the environment as you may think, believing that economic action is for authorities, not them. Importantly, whilst they may be big social media users, they are primarily using social media to message friends, not soak up marketing messages. Although big gamers, gaming is about the connection, rather than the game per se.

For this generation, personalisation of the visitor experience is key.

Millennials

Millennials, aged 29-44, are often thought of as being narcissistic and spoiled, with a 'self-obsessed' label having become this generation's stereotype. They are certainly the most independent generation and are forging journeys built around their own personal milestones rather than traditional ones. The time they take to hit traditional life milestones is almost irrelevant to them. They are also undoubtedly the generation of the selfie and remarkably self-assured and confident in their own skin. They are known for extraversion – getting out and socialising, even as they enter years where one might expect that to cut back. Empathy is not a big thing amongst males in this generation - they score lower on this than every other generation other than Gen Z.

They like the thought of giving back to society and of sustainability and are avid savers and travellers. They also focus on wellness, podcasts, fashion and luxury and are often known to have a side hustle alongside a main job. Nostalgia is a big thing for them too and they are big on new experiences and trying different things. They are not particularly trusting of institutions and authority.

Gen X

This generation, aged 45 to 60, was one subjected to much family social change, as mothers went out to work and traditional family patterns shifted. They are also a generation often bearing a family burden of looking out for both their parents and their children, along with what is often a financial one too, with a fair degree of debt derived from recession, dot.com disasters and low interest rates. However, they also have high earning capacity and good awareness of how to handle cash.

All of these factors make their main motivation one of fair value. Price points matter to them and they want a quality experience that delivers something in return for the spend they commit, alongside great service. Discounts are welcomed, as are loyalty schemes. They draw their inspiration for visits from both traditional and online media and expect brands to show up on both.

Gen Xers are big users of search engines and will typically suss out a heritage attraction via website visits, before taking a decision to visit. This makes it vital for heritage attractions to take note of AI search and its impact on visibility, which means ensuring that there are PR-generated mentions within media sources, as well as strong and correctly structured website content online. Gen Xers are most likely to be found on Facebook, if they are on social media at all, and are not into reels and Tik Tok gimmicks. They are the generation that first had video games and personal computers, hence perhaps their love of smart tech that solves problems and makes life easier.

Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers, aged 61-79 are from the generation known for its stable-minded attitudes to life, being the one that had to navigate the post-War period and the continued uncertainties that brought. They are emotionally resilient, do-ers, big on self-control, trusters of systems and a fairly fearless generation. As post-War pioneers, they have been used to being the generation that drove change and they continue to be drivers of change. They are highly social, known for their warmth and ability to build relationships cross-generation and full of relational intelligence. Often found giving their grandchildren a good time, they are a major target for many types of visitor attraction.

Their decision-making is typically based on what they read in traditional and online media, where they can rely on their trust in journalists to advise them on what to do. They are often having far more fun than their children, even when living on a pension.

The Silent Generation

Those aged from 80 to 97 are the generation that are known for their determination, loyalty and cautiousness with money. They have survived wartime and carry the thriftiness that they learned under rationing with them through life. The fact they are otherwise known as traditionalists says it all. They have witnessed major political and economic change and were taught to be seen and not heard, often carrying this mantra with them in the way they act. They were hardworking and respectful and expect to see these traits in others. They worked with the system, rather than against it, keeping their heads down. They are very much the 'keep calm and carry on' generation.

Anyone older than them is from the Greatest Generation, who have many of the same traits but who saw even more hardship and few of the modern luxuries of life.

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SUMMARY OF GENERATION OVERVIEWS

6.1 Respecting a generation's viewpoints

Taking these generational summaries on board, it is clear that behavioural traits and learned behaviour within these generational age groups will shape some opinions within Catapult PR's heritage research survey.

It is also clear that, if a heritage attraction wishes to serve all generations, it has to be respectful of each generation's opinion and expectations. Therein lies the issue, as there are clear differences with regard to what the visitor wants to see, according to their age group. It can be well worth reminding younger employees, however, that older customers or visitors think differently and should be served in the style that constitutes their idea of good service. Similarly, more mature employees who are providing tours to Millennials or Gen Z visitors perhaps need to remember how their brains are wired and how they may wish to have information framed in slightly different ways.

6.2 Building a heritage attraction visitor avatar

Having a clear idea of what the ideal heritage visitor avatar looks like can be highly beneficial for a visitor attraction, avoiding it trying to be all things to all people. If its creates this avatar, it is essential to then consider how it can attract this type of visitor and what marketing tactics it needs to be deploying, in order to do so, according to their preferences. To attract Baby Boomers, for instance, there is little point focusing all attention on Instagram, the hangout of Millennials. If Gen X is the target, effort must be put into generating coverage in traditional media, through PR activity and having online content articles that will boost online search.

One piece of research into the make-up of the heritage visitor came in 2020, in the Heritage Taking Part Survey, published in September of that year. This survey demonstrated how the bulk of heritage visitors, from 2019/20 were aged between 45 and 74. The third largest age group range to visit heritage sites was aged 25-44 and 75% of those visiting were White, as opposed to just 41% Black. 84% of those visiting were from higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations; 62% from routine and manual occupations.

Those living in rural areas were also more likely to have visited a heritage site than those living in an urban area.

In 2025, the Participation Survey was published by Historic England. Here, 66.2% of adults had visited a heritage site in 2023/4. However, it should be noted that the definition is broad, including parks and gardens with a historic feature, historic landscapes or habitats and cities or towns with a celebrated historic element. As stated earlier, this can be very different from a heritage visitor attraction, at which customers are paying a fee to enter and thus engaging in a monetary transaction for which there is an expectation of derived value.

6.3 Finding ways to make heritage relevant to the currently 'excluded'

It is worth noting that, in this survey, 31.8% of people who had not visited a heritage site had no particular reason for not having done so. With the right marketing and the 'packaging' of the experience to the right audience, there should be optimism here, for those attractions that are able to provide the right reasons and communicate in the right way, for the right visitors. And sometimes, that might mean reaching out to those who feel that heritage is not for people like them, due to their ethnicity or background.

It is worth remembering that such feelings may be contextual i.e. feeling out of place might be a notion that is amplified within a historic house, but not as keenly felt in a garden or in a museum.

All of this requires thought. Simply jumping into one channel, because everyone else is doing it, is not advantageous. Heritage attractions should take some time to review which visitor provides their best return, and their most positive reviews, and aim to attract more of the same. And, once they recognise what age group these visitors are in, appreciate their viewpoints and not just those of the average consumer, when reviewing the Catapult PR, independently commissioned heritage research survey.

07
THE CATAPULT PR 2025 HERITAGE VISITOR ATTRACTION SURVEY

7.1 Assets available to heritage visitor attractions

To assist heritage visitor attractions across the UK with their marketing, whether historic houses with or without a garden, museums, heritage railways, steamboat operators, or heritage-themed experiences, we shall be creating a visual, easy-to-assimilate **content download** relating to our independent consumer research survey, as well as this more in-depth white paper.

The specialist heritage PR and content team at Catapult PR is also supporting the research with:

- A podcast – on the Catapult PR Show channel
- Audiograms from the podcast
- A video – on the Catapult PR YouTube channel
- A series of social media posts
- The offer of a 60-90 minute 1:1 free strategy session for the first 6 heritage visitor attractions to request a meeting to consider how the research has relevance for them and their 2026 marketing.

Please take advantage of these assets and opportunities, to assist your heritage marketing, PR and content in the year ahead.

7.2 What matters most to heritage visitor attraction visitors

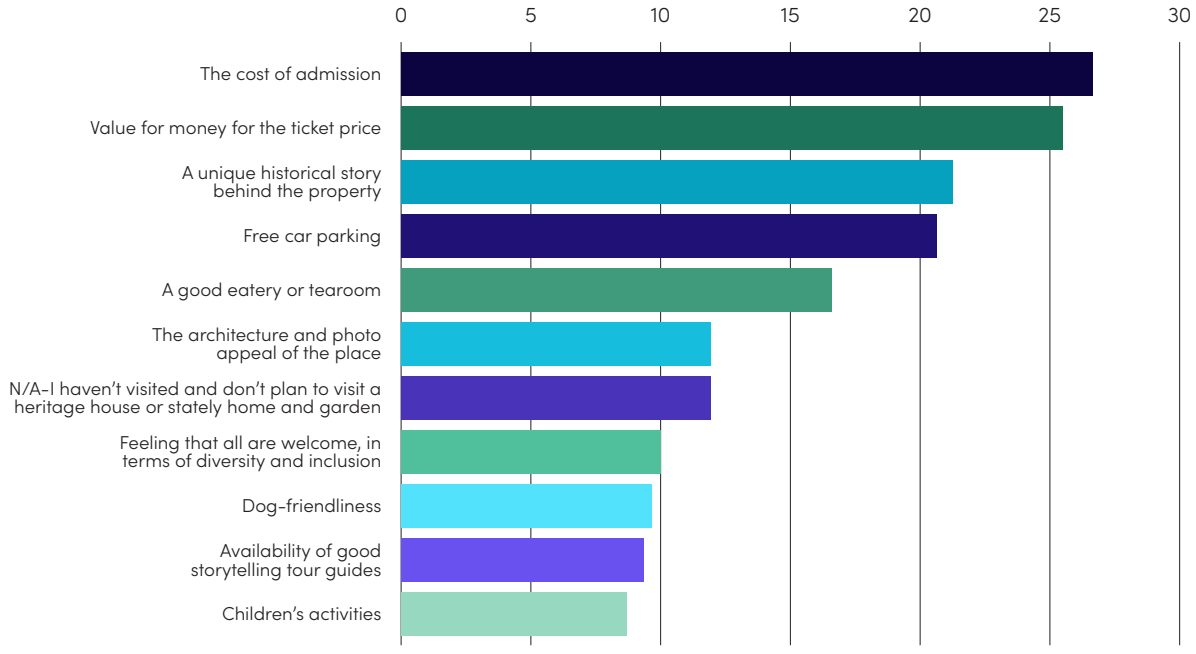
One of the two consumer research surveys that were conducted for this review sought to ascertain what matters most to the heritage visitor attraction visitor who is specifically visiting a stately home and garden, at the point in time when they are considering planning a visit. The survey focused on stately homes and gardens, because Catapult PR wanted to look at paid-for experiences and also those that typically involve factors and facets that may not apply with a museum or free-to-access experience.

The ranking of factors proved as follows:

Cost of admission	26.5%
Value for money for the ticket price	25.5%
A unique historical story	21.2%
Free car parking	20.8%
A good eatery or tearoom	16.7%
The architecture and photo appeal of the place	12.2%
N/A - I haven't visited and do not plan to visit	12.1%
Feeling that all are welcome, in terms of diversity & inclusion	10%
Dog-friendliness	9.7%
Availability of good storytelling tour guides	9.4%
Children's activities	9%
Unique events linked to the individual place itself & its past	8.7%
Must see one-offs/bucket-list experiences	8.7%
Mindfulness and wellbeing experiences	7.7%
Being allowed to picnic in the gardens	7.4%
A link to a TV programme or film shot there	5.7%
Garden tours by the gardeners	5.1%
Audio guides, to guide myself	4.6%
More generic events e.g. Shakespeare in the garden, car rallies	4.4%
No links to a darker past	3.7%
Not sure	3.0%
Other	0.7%

Figure 1

Q1. What, if anything, is most important to you when considering visiting a heritage house or stately home and garden? (Select up to 3)



Other suggestions for what mattered most to visitors were:

01 A good garden

02 A good walk

03 Disabled access

04 Atmosphere

05 Costumed re-enactors and interpreters

06 Dark pasts and hauntings

07 Written guide, rather than audio

7.3 What matters most to certain demographics (rankings per age group)

16-24 year olds			25-34 year olds		
1	Value for money for ticket	19.85%	1	Value for money for ticket	18.90%
2	Cost of admission	16.03%	2	Cost of admission	17.68%
3	Feeling that all are welcome, in terms of diversity & inclusion	15.27%	3	Good eatery/tea room	17.07%
4	A unique historical story	12.21%	4	Feeling that all are welcome, in terms of diversity & inclusion	16.46%
4	Good storytelling tour guides	12.21%	4	Children's activities	16.46%
6	Unique events linked to the individual place itself & its past	11.45%	6	Free parking	14.02%
6	Free car parking	11.45%	7	A unique historical story	13.41%
6	Good eatery/tea room	11.45%	8	Mindfulness & wellbeing experiences	12.8%
6	Must see one-offs/bucket-list experiences	11.45%	9	Unique events linked to the individual place itself & its past	10.98%
10	Mindfulness & wellbeing experiences	10.69%	10	N/A - I haven't visited and do not plan to visit	9.76%
10	N/A - I haven't visited and do not plan to visit	10.69%	11	Being allowed to picnic in the gardens	8.54%
10	Dog-friendliness	10.69%	12	A link to a TV programme or film shot there	7.93%
13	More generic events e.g. Shakespeare in the garden, car rallies	8.4%	12	The architecture and photo appeal of the place	7.93%
13	The architecture and photo appeal of the place	8.4%	12	Must see one-offs/bucket-list experiences	7.93%
13	Children's activities	8.4%	15	Dog-friendliness	7.32%
16	Audio guides, to guide myself	5.34%	16	Garden tours by the gardeners	6.71%
16	A link to a TV programme or film shot there	5.34%	16	Audio guides, to guide myself	6.71%
16	Being allowed to picnic in the gardens	5.345	18	No links to a darker past	6.10%
19	No links to a darker past	4.58%	18	Good storytelling tour guides	6.10%
20	Garden tours by the gardeners	3.82%	20	More generic events e.g. Shakespeare in the garden, car rallies	4.88%

	35-44 year olds			45-54 year olds			55+ year olds	
1	Value for money for ticket	21.88%	1	Value for money for ticket	31.21%	1	Cost of admission	37.63%
2	A unique historical story	20.63%	2	Cost of admission	27.39%	2	Value for money for ticket	29.38%
3	Children's activities	19.38%	3	Free parking	22.93%	3	A unique historical story	28.87%
4	Free parking	16.25%	4	A unique historical story	18.47%	4	Free parking	27.84%
4	Cost of admission	16.25%	4	Good eatery/tea room	17.83%	4	Good eatery/tea room	18.81%
6	Good eatery/tea room	14.38%	6	N/A - I haven't visited and do not plan to visit	15.92%	6	The architecture and photo appeal of the place	14.69%
6	The architecture and photo appeal of the place	14.38%	7	The architecture and photo appeal of the place	11.46%	7	N/A - I haven't visited and do not plan to visit	13.66%
8	Feeling that all are welcome, in terms of diversity & inclusion	12.5%	8	Being allowed to picnic in the gardens	9.55%	8	Dog-friendliness	10.82%
8	Mindfulness & wellbeing experiences	12.5%	9	Dog-friendliness	8.92%	9	Good storytelling tour guides	9.99%
10	Good storytelling tour guides	10.63%	10	Good storytelling tour guides	8.28%	10	Must see one-offs/bucket-list experiences	8.25%
11	Must see one-offs/bucket-list experiences	10%	11	Children's activities	7.64%	11	Unique events linked to the individual place itself & its past	6.96%
12	Being allowed to picnic in the gardens	9.38%	11	Unique events linked to the individual place itself & its past	7.64%	11	Feeling that all are welcome, in terms of diversity & inclusion	6.44%
12	Dog-friendliness	9.38%	11	A link to a TV programme or film shot there	7.64%	11	Being allowed to picnic in the gardens	5.93%
12	Unique events linked to the individual place itself & its past	9.38%	14	Must see one-offs/bucket-list experiences	7%	14	Garden tours by the gardeners	5.41%
15	No links to a darker past	8.13%	15	Feeling that all are welcome, in terms of diversity & inclusion	5.1%	15	Audio guides, to guide myself	4.64%
15	N/A - I haven't visited and do not plan to visit	8.13%	15	Mindfulness & wellbeing experiences	5.1%	15	A link to a TV programme or film shot there	3.87%
17	More generic events e.g. Shakespeare in the garden, car rallies	7.5%	17	Garden tours by the gardeners	3.82%	17	Mindfulness & wellbeing experiences	3.61%
18	A link to a TV programme or film shot there	6.25%	17	More generic events e.g. Shakespeare in the garden, car rallies	3.82%	17	Children's activities	2.32%
19	Garden tours by the gardeners	5%	19	Audio guides, to guide myself	2.55%	19	More generic events e.g. Shakespeare in the garden, car rallies	1.80%
20	Audio guides, to guide myself	3.75%	20	No links to a darker past	1.27%	20	No links to a darker past	1.55%

7.4 Analysis of the demographic differences when it comes to what matters most

When what matters to each demographic of potential visitor is compared and contrasted, some things stand out.

Value for money is the most important factor for every single age group bar over-55s, for whom cost of admission is the number one priority. This is understandable, given that many of this age group will be living on a pension.

The same logic can be seen in the importance of the availability of children's activities – something that influences the decision-making of only 2.32% of over-55s but nearly one-in-five 35-44-year-olds, for whom it is the third most important factor.

A good eatery or tea room is a fairly constant 'desire' in each age group, as is free parking. Dog-friendliness is a mid-ranking factor in each age group.

The architecture and photo appeal of a venue is a factor that only really becomes important over the age of 35. One might think, therefore, that the younger generations are more interested in selfies than in the aesthetics of the venue being visited.

A major difference occurs between age groups with regard to the importance of diversity and inclusion. It ranks highly for 16-24s and 25-34s, being the third and fourth most important factor, respectively. For 45-55s, it is only the 15th ranking factor, important to only one-in-twenty. Slightly more over-55s want to see this, perhaps suggesting that their 'inclusion factor' could related to disability and facilities for the elderly.

Surprisingly, whilst in younger age groups around one-in-ten have not visited and do not intend to visit a heritage home and garden, this rises to nearly 16% of 45-54-year-olds and 13.66% of over-55s. What the lack of appeal amongst these age groups can be is uncertain but there is an untapped audience there.

On the whole, links to a darker past are not a major obstacle for most age groups and very unimportant to over-55s. However, 8% of 35-45-year-olds do not want to see such links and around one-in-twenty of those in younger age groups feel the same.

What does stand out is the overall appeal of a unique story and storytelling through actual guides (contrasted with audio guides which did not rank very well at all). This is backed by a desire to experience unique events linked to a story. It is notable that generic events, such as classic car rallies and Shakespeare in the garden, are less popular than events with some degree of rationale or authenticity because of their link to the venue in which they are staged.

There is also a fairly steady desire of around 8-11.45%, across the different age groups, to sample the one-off bucket-list experiences that could be based around a heritage home's distinct features and unique selling points.

Some of the things that we might expect to be popular reasons to visit a heritage home do not actually rank that well, on the whole, such as links to a TV or film programme and garden tours by the gardener.

Mindfulness and wellbeing are shown to be factors appealing to between one-in-eight and one-in-ten, but only under the age of 45. Interestingly, this is a factor of more interest to men (9.48%).than women (6.0%).

7.5 Regional variations of note

Some notable regional variations in the trends can be seen. Wales is the only region that puts a service-focused factor ahead of a monetary one, with nearly 30% of those surveyed ranking a unique historical story as their number one requirement. There, the desire to see a good tearoom or eatery was also far less important, ranking at only joint 10th.

The wish to see that all are welcome is particularly strong in the North East (17.5%) and Scotland (15.85%).

However, links to a darker past were not a factor concerning anyone surveyed in the North East, nor Yorkshire and Humberside, and were of little concern in Wales and the North West.

When it came to respondents who had never visited a historic house or historic house and garden, and had no intention to do so, Yorkshire and Humberside stood out. There, 25.61% say this is the case, way more than any other region.
The next, Northern Ireland, has 14.29% of respondents stating this. The region in which fewest shared this viewpoint was the East of England, where only 6.38% have not visited such a venue, or have no plans to do so in future.

Wishing to see unique events, linked to the individual venue, was particularly strong in Greater London (13.85%), where this was the fourth most important factor for visitors.

7.6 Overall observations from survey one

The survey demonstrates the importance of economic factors for the heritage attraction visitor, as we head into the 2026 season. Visitor attractions will need to pay strong attention to pricing and deliver good value for money for their experience, if they are to keep the visitor on-side.

However, it also highlights the role that storytelling can play in helping to deliver both value for money and satisfaction. The desire to explore a unique story ranked extremely highly. When coupled with other factors, such as the availability of good storytelling tour guides, the desire for unique events linked to the venue, rather than generic ones, and the appeal of seeing something that is a one-off or a bucket-list type experience, there is much for the heritage visitor attraction to tap into here. Those with a rich story should be developing a compelling PR campaign and multiple, informative website assets.

Projecting a welcome to all is important, at a diversity and inclusion level. However, attractions afraid of elements that have links to a darker past may be over-thinking this, as such links did not seem to matter to the majority of interviewees.

The survey perhaps also highlights the benefit that can be derived from a good tearoom or eatery but suggests that potentially too much emphasis is placed on laying on generic events with no real link to the venue's story, and also mindfulness and wellbeing events. What is clear is that audio guides are not popular elements within a visitor experience, with in-person storytelling being the clear preference.

Chasing a film or TV shoot may also not be as beneficial as some venues believe. It was not a factor that seemed to influence whether a visitor would, or would not, visit a heritage house and garden. Offering visitors a chance to picnic seems more in line with consumer wishes.

08
DEEP DIVE INTO HERITAGE VISITORS' EMOTIONAL REACTIONS AND VIEWPOINTS

8.1 Background to this part of the survey

To build a more complete picture of what the UK heritage visitor is thinking about heritage visitor attractions of all kinds – museums, heritage houses, historic homes and gardens, historical sites and heritage-linked attractions – Catapult PR conducted a second research survey. Again, this was conducted independently by Censuswide and the charts are as in Appendix 1.

By delving deeper, Catapult PR gained a greater understanding of some of the viewpoints held by the British heritage visitor, whilst also being able to connect some sentiment to the list of priorities determined by survey one.

8.2. The non-connected segment

The survey results continued to identify a segment of the British public that is not connected to heritage and thus unable to state that they agreed or disagreed with any statements with regard to heritage visitor attractions. In the case of this second survey, this was a total of 25.2% of those surveyed, so slightly over a quarter.

8.3 Positive sentiments

19.4% of those surveyed stated that they "love visiting heritage attractions/stately homes and connecting with the past." However, this was a sentiment shared by only 10% of 16-24-year-olds.

11.7% also stated that they "feel very emotionally connected to British heritage and want to help preserve it." This was a view most held by those aged 35-44 (20%) but this dropped dramatically to 4.62% of 16-24s.

Despite this, only 8.46% of that age group feel that heritage attractions are not doing enough to attract younger visitors. But this was a viewpoint held by 14.02% of 24-34-year-olds and 15.63% of 35-44-year-olds.

8.4 Negative sentiments

One-in-ten of those surveyed believe that "heritage attractions and stately homes often feel too elitist." This opinion rises to 16.88% amongst those aged 35-44. Men (12.55%) are more likely to believe this than women (7.59%).

Similarly, 10% believe that such visitor experiences are "not for people like me". This sentiment and belief is held by 13.58% of men and 16.25% of 35-44-year-olds.

9.40% believe that heritage visitor attractions do not reflect the diversity of modern Britain. Here, 13.17% of men feel this way, contrasted with just 5.84% of women. But 15.24% of 25-34s and 14.38% of 35-44s feel the same, leaving visitor attractions with food for thought with regard to their diversity, ethnicity and inclusion strategies.

This is particularly true because 7.3% say that heritage visitor attractions are often "too white and too posh." 25-34s are most likely to believe this (10.37%).

8.7% stated that they believed heritage visitor attractions are not welcoming of everyone. From survey one, we know that feeling that "all are welcome" was important to one-in-ten people and 16.46% of 25-34-year-olds. So there is a definite issue here. Almost 11% of men express the sentiment that heritage attractions are not welcoming of everyone, but even more – 14.38% ¬– of 35-44-year-olds feel this.

And, 6% of people have positively avoided visiting a heritage visitor attraction or site because it did not align with their values. More than double this percentage – 12.80% - of 25-34-year-olds agree.

If we focus on all that those aged between 25 and 44 are saying, and their importance to the heritage visitor economy in terms of their spending power, family budgets and influence, much more needs to be done to win friends and influence people in this age spectrum. Notably, only 3.09% of over-55s have not visited a heritage visitor attraction because it did not align with their values.

8.5 Economic viewpoints

Survey one demonstrated the importance that cost of admission and value for money play in the decision-making process undertaken by prospective heritage visitors. In survey two, 10.90% said that heritage visitor attractions do not offer good value for money.

Men were almost twice as likely (14.20%) to feel this way as women (7.78%). Again, it was the 35-44-year-olds who were most likely to concur with this opinion (12.5%).

Adding value successfully could be done by offering guided tours and by providing a children's trail or activities. 11.4% would be more inclined to visit a historic house/ stately home that offered a guided tour within the admission price and 8.8% more inclined to visit a heritage attraction with something specific for children to do, which was similarly included in admission.

Most inclined to visit if a guided tour were available on this basis are the 25-34-year-olds (18.29%). This appears to be part of the quest for added value from a visit, as survey one actually found that this age group ranked good storytelling tour guides way lower than was the case with other age groups.

The 35-44-year-olds topped the table when it came to a desire to see children's activities available, with 14.38% more likely to visit an attraction offering those within the admission price. Of course, this age group ranked children's activities as their third priority in survey one, so the children's offering matters to them.

8.6 Custodians of the past

There is a section of the British public which definitely views heritage visitor attractions as both custodians of the past and of British culture. 13.10% believe that heritage visitor attractions have a bigger role than ever to play in preserving knowledge of Britain's past. This was most felt by 35-44-year-olds (15.63%) and over-55s (15.21%).

12.8% "do not want heritage attractions and stately homes to gloss over darker parts of history", believing 'we need to learn from the past, not avoid it." Over-55s are most likely to believe this (14.95%).

8.7 Staying relevant

There is a challenge to stay relevant and in touch with some of the prospective visitors in the market. 9.20% of respondents feel that heritage attractions need to modernise their approach, in order to stay relevant. Men (12.44%) are almost twice as likely to think this as women (6.42%). The age groups most likely to concur are 25-34-year-olds (16.46%) and 35-44-year-olds (12.5%).

The National Curriculum and literary preferences are also a challenge for others. Nearly one-in-ten (9.40%) say that the former homes of poets and authors are of no interest, as they are not familiar with their poems or books. Most likely to say this are men (12.14%) and 25-34-year-olds (13.41%).

13.8% believe that TV programmes and films have made stately homes relevant again in Britain. Here, 18.13% of 35-44-year-olds believe this. Yet, as survey one showed, a link to a TV programme or film ranked very low as a reason for this age group to visit. Whilst it might add relevance where such a link exists, it is perhaps not being leveraged enough to make it a reason to visit.

8.8 Storytelling

Survey one showed the importance of a good story to heritage visitor attractions and also that of people who can deliver that story and tie it in with relevant, bespoke events. So how are heritage attractions doing with the storytelling and insights into their history?

6.9% of those who felt engaged enough with heritage to respond to survey two said that heritage attractions put little effort into visitor interpretation and storytelling. 9.47% of men felt this way, compared to 4.47% of women. Again, the key age groups of 25-34s and 35-44s were most vocal on this, with 12.8% and 10% respectively feeling that storytelling and interpretation is poor.

To assess what the heritage visitor might want to see, discover whether this aligns with social media trends and determine whether the generations who have grown up with 'unboxing' videos want more innovative storytelling, Catapult PR asked a key question. When it asked whether respondents agreed that heritage visitor attractions should offer more behind-the-scenes insights, it found that, overall, 11.2% did (14.2% of men and 8.37% of women).

However, amongst the 35-44-year-old age bracket this rose to 21.25% and it was 17.68% of 25-34-year-olds. 12.66% of 45-54s also agreed. The average was brought down by 16-25s (3.08%) and over-55s (6.44%). There would appear to be much mileage in offering behind-the-scenes insights, as it is likely to attract additional visitors.

8.9 Regional variations of note

8.9.1 Regional variations on positive sentiment

The region that most loves engaging with heritage through visits to heritage attractions which facilitate a connection to the past, is Greater London, where 26.15% said this. This is closely followed by the South West (25.29%). This is in stark contrast to the North West (7.21%).

Greater London is also where most people feel emotionally connected to British heritage and want to help preserve it. Again, this is followed by the South West (18.39%). Only 8.70% of those in the South East feel the same and it is 9.91% in the North West.

The East of England stands out when it comes to believing heritage attractions should do more to attract younger generations (17.02%), followed by the North West (14.41%).

8.9.2 Regional variations on negative sentiment

The paradox is that, despite many in Greater London expressing a love of heritage attractions, 16.92% of those in the region believe heritage attractions are too elitist. Only 2.74% of those in the East Midlands felt this, perhaps suggesting that the make-up of heritage visitor attractions is different.

The region most likely to feel that heritage attractions "are not for people like me" is the North East (15%) and then Scotland (13.41%). Only 3.57% of people in Northern Ireland feel this way, as is the case with 4.26% in Wales.

12.5% of those in the North East also feel that heritage visitor attractions are "too white and too posh." 10% of those in Greater London concur.

Greater London, arguably the most diverse region, is the one that most feels heritage attractions do not represent the diversity of modern Britain (18.48%). With this being nearly one-in-five, this is significant.

Unsurprisingly, Greater London is also the region that believes heritage attractions are not always welcoming of everyone (16.92%). This is nearly double the average viewpoint.

But it is in the North East where a significant 15% of people have pointedly chosen not to visit a heritage attraction because it did not align with their values. This is way above the average of 6%.

8.9.3 Regional variations on economic viewpoints

The region in which most people feel heritage attractions do not offer good value for money is Yorkshire and Humberside (15.85%). Only 5% think this in the North East, suggesting that other factors are more important there in deterring visits.

In Greater London, one-fifth of survey interviewees would be more inclined to visit a heritage attraction that offered a guided tour within the admission price. That falls to just 3.57% of those in Northern Ireland.

Greater London is also the region in which most would be more inclined to visit a heritage attraction that included a kids' trail or children's activities within the admission price (13.85%). This would make a difference to just 2.74% of those in the East Midlands.

8.9.4 Regional variations on custodians of the past

The region that most believes heritage attractions have a big role to play in preserving knowledge of Britain's past is the East of England (18.09%). This is followed, a little surprisingly given other responses, by the North East (17.5%).

The North East is also leading the way in not wanting heritage attractions to gloss over the past, so as to learn from it. One-in-five (20%) in the region say this. This is closely followed by the South West (18.39%).

8.9.5 Regional variations on staying relevant

The need for heritage visitor attractions to modernise, in order to stay relevant, is most perceived by people in the North East, where 15% believe this. In Greater London, it is just slightly fewer (14.62%). Nobody (0%) in Northern Ireland feels the same way.

The region most likely to feel that there is a lack of knowledge of the poems or works of famous poets and authors connected to particular heritage houses is the North West (16.22%). This is, of course, a region home to various houses connected to names such as Wordsworth and Elizabeth Gaskell. Wales is the region in which fewest people felt this an issue, with only 4.26% saying this. This was closely followed by the West Midlands (4.55%).

A very large 22.50% of people in the North East feel that TV dramas and films have made stately homes relevant again, with only slightly fewer feeling the same in the East of England (22.34%). However, only 9.59% of people in the East Midlands feel the same way and only 9.76% in Yorkshire and Humberside.

8.9.6 Regional variations on storytelling

People living in Greater London are those who believe heritage attractions put too little effort into interpretation and storytelling (13.85%). Only 1.22% of those surveyed in Scotland concur, along with 2.13% of people in Wales and 3.57% in Northern Ireland. Is there more storytelling associated with Celtic tradition, perhaps?

The regions most in favour of more behind-the-scenes insights by heritage attractions are the East of England and Wales (both with 14.89% in favour). Following them, is Greater London (13.85%) and Scotland (13.41%). Areas of the country least thinking this would be a good thing are Yorkshire and Humberside (6.10%) and the South East (7.25%).

09 SUMMARY

9.1 Overview

The two Catapult PR surveys demonstrated that there is a segment of the British public that has no relationship with heritage attractions and no desire to have one. There is an even greater number who do not have opinions on heritage topics, or viewpoints about heritage visitor experiences, probably because their knowledge is too limited.

It is unlikely that many of this group can be enticed into the heritage fold. More worrying are the demographics that suggest that there are facets to heritage visits that are unattractive to today's participating visitor. Heritage attractions need to work on these, ensuring, in particular, that all are made to feel welcome.

Much of this is probably at a perception level, so heritage visitor attractions need to pay attention to their service-scape, their in-person welcome at ticket booth or gate, and handouts. However, the hard work needs to start ahead of a visit, with heritage visitor attractions putting much effort into their website information and, in particular, their blog and news articles, where much key messaging can be used to make all potential visitors feel that they will fit in.

A warm brand tone of voice should be adopted, with messaging in these larger articles then repurposed and reutilised in social media posts. Brand voice synergy and consistent messaging down all channels is imperative, even if the language is adapted to suit the generational audience and channel user's profile.

9.2 The importance of storytelling

Heritage visitor attractions' websites and blog and news sections are a key resource when it comes to storytelling too, offering the perfect opportunity to enhance the visitor experience and build excitement ahead of a visit. Those attractions not offering a physical tour, provided by enthusiastic tour guides, should view such a tour as a key investment. Providing people with a set of headphones and an audio guide has been shown to be very unpopular.

There are specific trends and viewpoints within the Catapult PR research findings that could be built upon, to create a strong PR campaign and accompanying blogs and news article messaging on websites. By providing what visitors want to see, and communicating that online, heritage visitor attractions can quickly make prospective visitors aware of what they are doing. However, they can also achieve something hugely important in an age of AI-powered online search – appearing in external, high-ranking media outlets, where, influential people talk about them. This, coupled with a strategic way of talking about themselves on their own websites, will help boost their online presence, at a time when traditional rankings are falling away, because search rules have changed in an AI age.

9.3 Adding all-important value and messaging

Having the holistic approach that AI search now demands for communication will help heritage visitor attractions add some of the value that visitors wish to see. However, they should also consider adding value through downloadable features, booklets and resources, housed on their websites, that help the visitor maximise the spend they put into a visit. Catapult PR's 2023 research survey into heritage attractions and their marketing showed that visitors largely use websites and online content for visit planning, but do not use social media for the same purpose.

Communication would appear to be a key weapon in the fight to increase visitor satisfaction in the heritage sector. Making visitors feel valued and playing their part as custodians of a heritage experience can only be beneficial. The right messaging can make a big difference.

9.4 Strategic audience targeting

When it comes to public relations activity, heritage visitor attractions need to focus on their unique selling points and bucket-list facets and ensure that their event programme ties to these, rather than the generic events that a heritage visitor could sample absolutely anywhere.

PR has a huge part to play in helping heritage visitor attractions maintain and grow their relevance within the current tourist demographic, by being the main conduit of the storytelling that visitors want to see. PR campaigns should also focus on the experience, rather than just the facts, engendering a desire to visit through the stories that it tells.

By using highly targeted PR, heritage visitor attractions should be able to dissect their visitor appeal and create different stories, for different demographics, communicated through relevant media titles that are serving these demographics. Abandoning a one-message-suits-all approach could create more reasons to visit. It could even positively influence those generations who had felt a visit was not for them.

9.5 Achieving on-point storytelling

Heritage visitor attractions should focus on what it is that they can offer, which no other venue can provide, and dive deeply into their story to determine what the compelling 'hooks' are.

They then need to tell their story well, ensuring that this not only inspires the purchase of admission but adds the value that makes that expenditure worthwhile. If they do, they can deliver on the expectations of those wanting to see or experience a unique part of history and feel that buzz that comes from making a dynamic connection to living history.

For help with the storytelling, targeted marketing that is required through PR and online content channels, heritage visitor attractions and stately homes and gardens can contact the white paper authors, Catapult PR, on 0333 2424062, or email jane@catapultpr.co.uk

Catapult PR has extensive experience in heritage PR and marketing and is a multiple award-winner of PR and content awards for campaigns conducted for heritage-sector attractions and businesses.

Further resources, in terms of a podcast and video resource, are available at Catapult PR's B2B podcast – The Catapult PR Show – and at its YouTube channel.

The first six heritage venues to make contact can also sign up for a free 1:1 workshop session, to assess how the research findings can be interpreted in their venue and what the strategies for 2026 should be.

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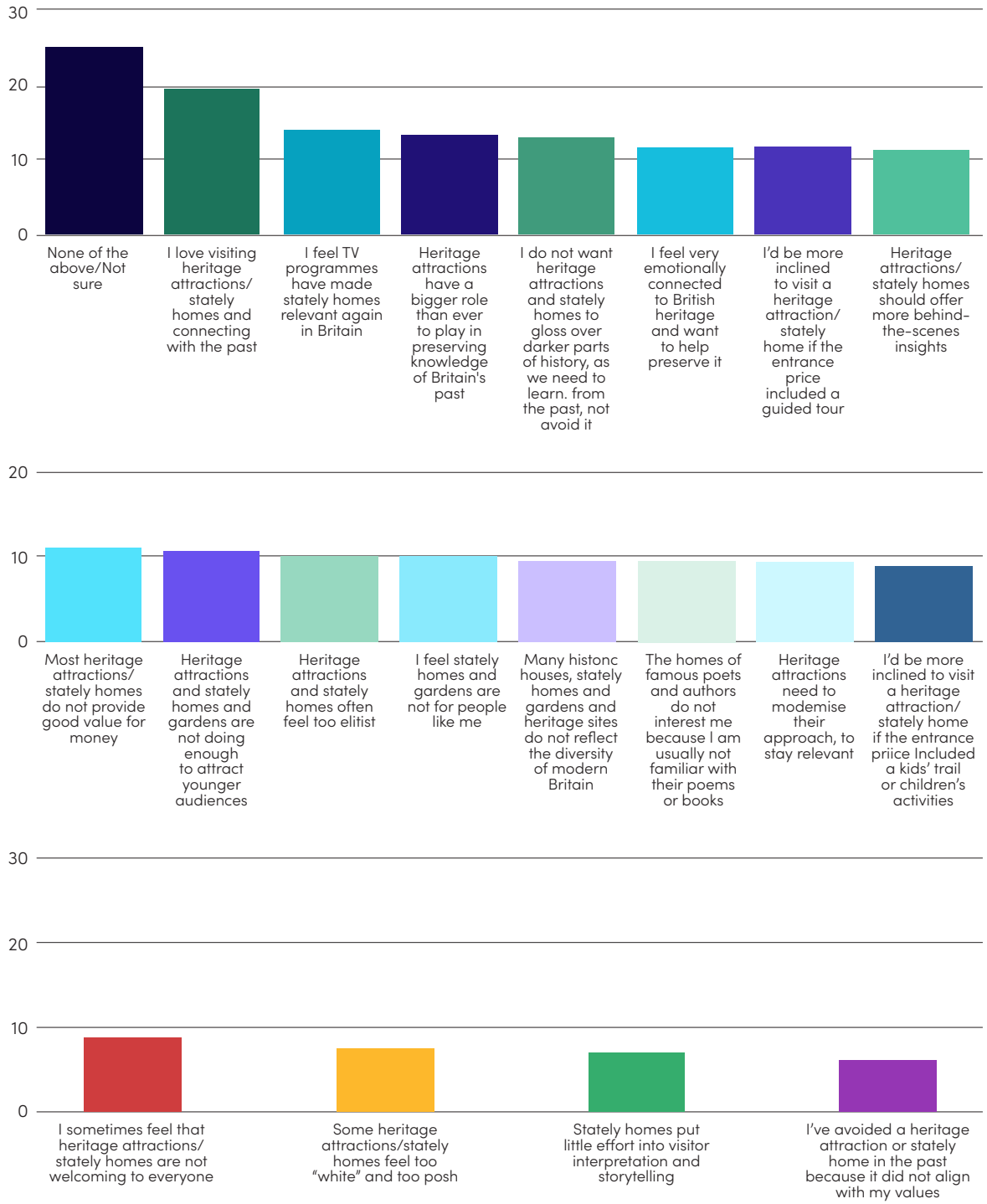
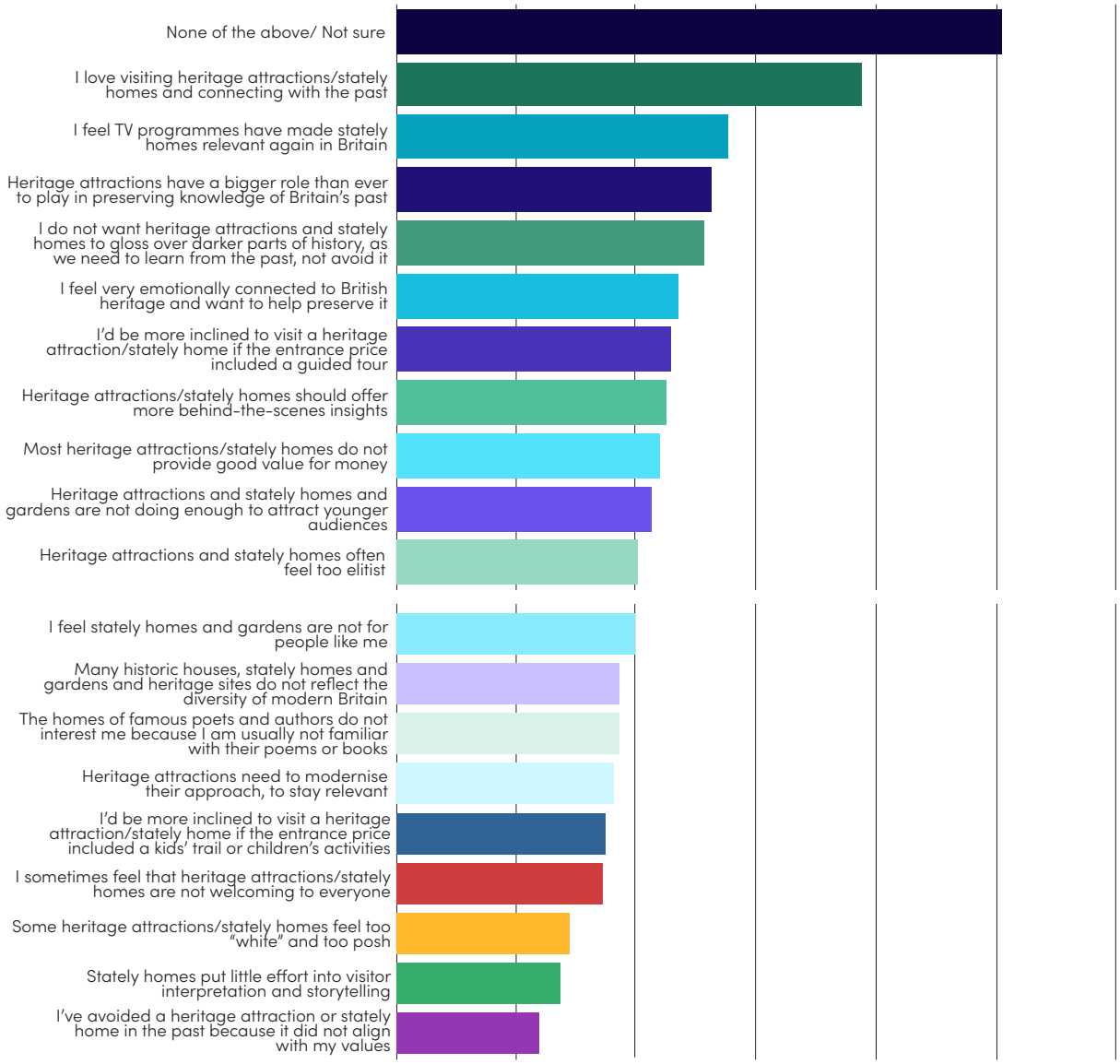
APPENDIX 1
SURVEY RESPONSES, IN CHART FORM, FOR SURVEY 2.



APPENDIX 2
SURVEY 2 RESPONSES IN HORIZONTAL BAR FORM



[1] https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/indicator-data/participation/
[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/taking-part-201920-heritage/heritage-taking-part-survey-201920
[3] https://historicengland.org.uk/research/heritage-counts/indicator-data/participation/

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