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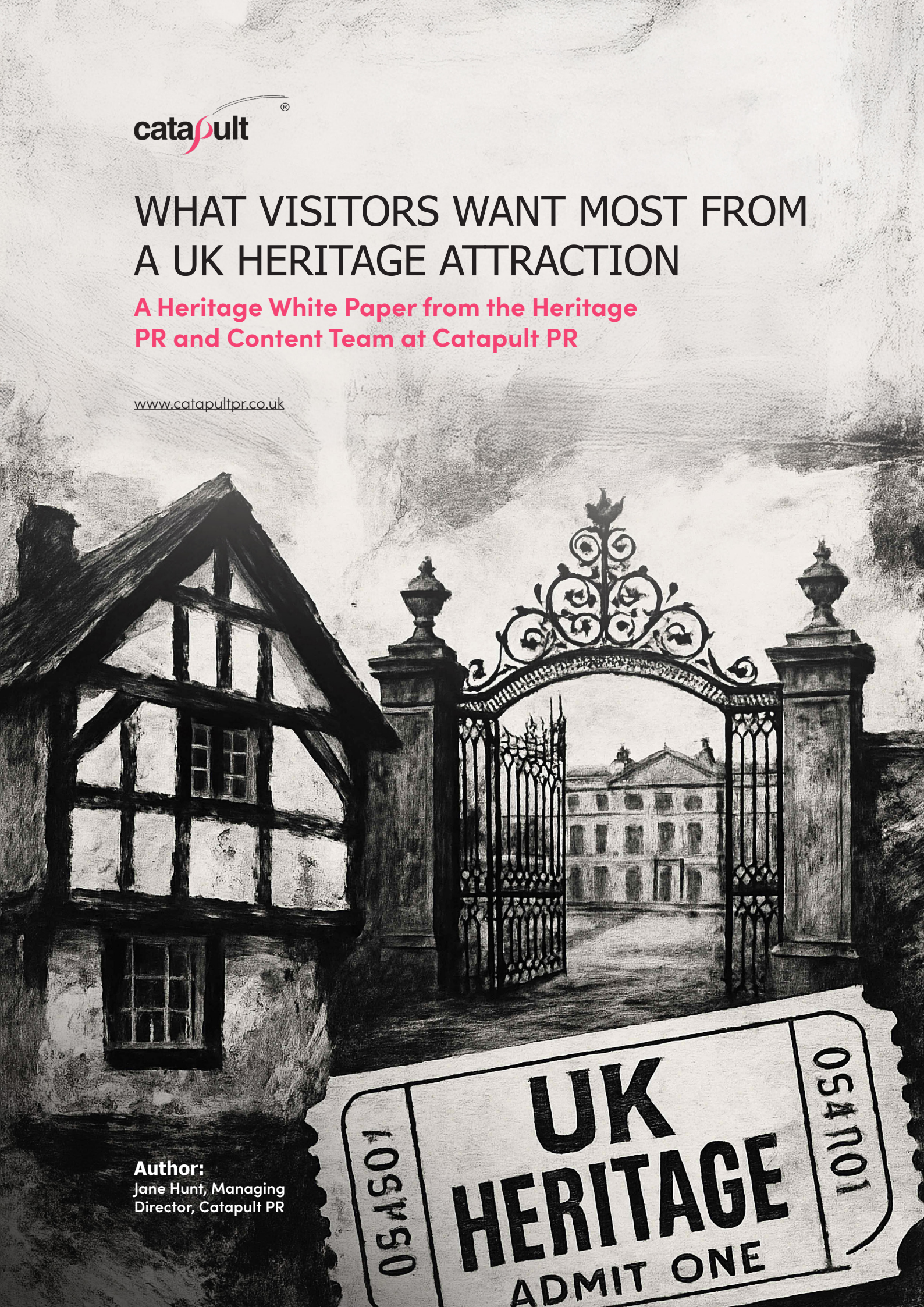
WHAT VISITORS WANT MOST FROM A UK HERITAGE ATTRACTION

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

www.catapultpr.co.uk



Author:
Jane Hunt, Managing Director, Catapult PR

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.