

MUSEUM VISITATION: RECOVERY TRENDS FROM THE PANDEMIC

A 2022 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY

The COVID-19 pandemic upended museum visitation, and the visitation patterns of museum-goers continue to shift as we all navigate into a "new normal."



By pure luck, the timing of the Annual Survey of Museum-Goers was perfect for tracking how the pandemic has affected visitation patterns among frequent museum-goers.

How?

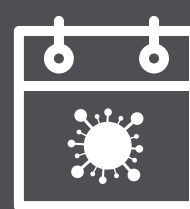
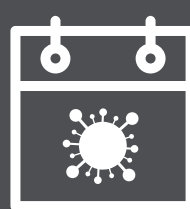
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Because the Annual Survey is in the field in January and February, we typically pull the data for analysis in the middle of March.



That meant that in 2020, we pulled data *right when museums started to close* ... and we had a clean baseline for documenting pre-pandemic norms.

Our 2021 data thus captures the first year of the pandemic (mid-March 2020 to mid-March 2021). And now our 2022 data capture recovery patterns in the second pandemic year.



The Annual Survey asks respondents two questions about museum visitation.

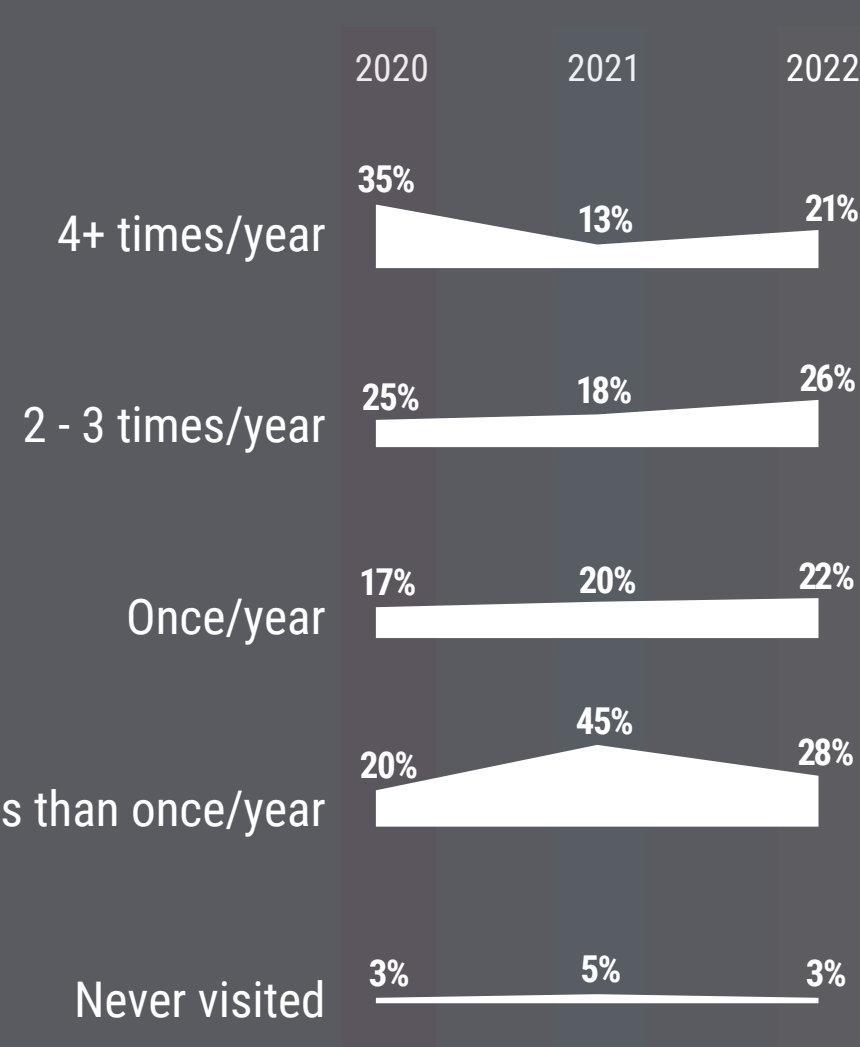
1 Self-reported repeat visitation rates at "their" museum

Participating museums in the Annual Survey send out the survey request, and the first question asks respondents how often they visited that museum *in person* in the previous year.

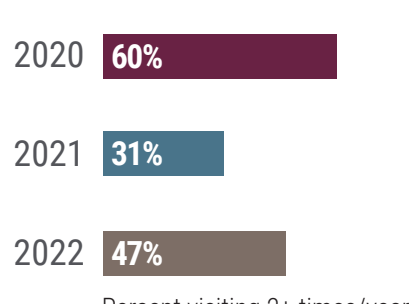
When we aggregate responses by year, we can clearly see the devastating drop in attendance from pre-pandemic highs (March 2020) to pandemic lows (March 2021).



In 2022, we are seeing some recovery, but visitation has not returned to pre-pandemic norms.



When we look at repeat visitation (2+ times/year), museums overall have only made back about half of attendance losses..

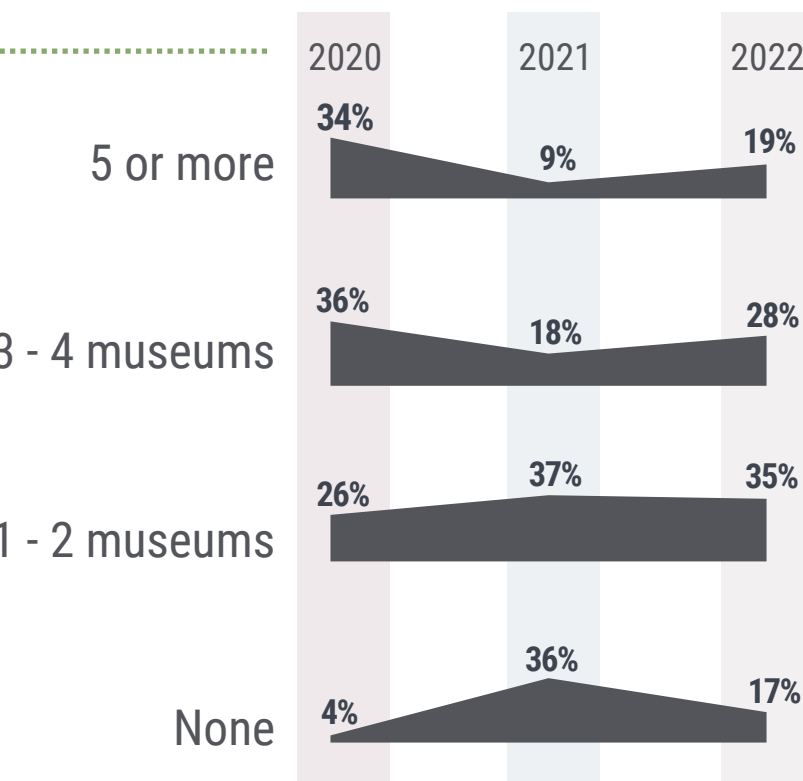


Additionally, nearly a third of respondents reported not visiting at all in the past year ... substantially higher than pre-pandemic norms.

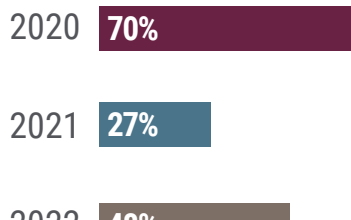


2 How many different museums they visit

We also track how many *different* museums a respondent reports visiting in the course of the previous year. Once again, we find that visitation at museums in general plummeted from 2020 to 2021, and now we are seeing some recovery.



Pre-pandemic, 70% of frequent museum-goers were visiting 3 or more different museums each year, which fell by nearly two-thirds to only 27% in 2021. In 2022, this has rebounded somewhat, nearly half (48%) of frequent museum-goers.



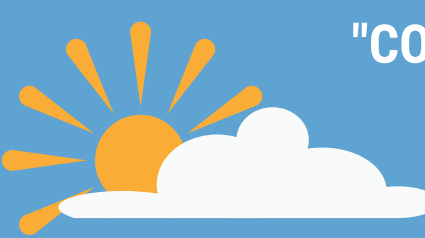
And while the 17% that reported visiting no museums at all in 2022 is far less than the 36% reporting no visits in 2021, this is still 4 times higher than the 4% who reported the same in 2020.



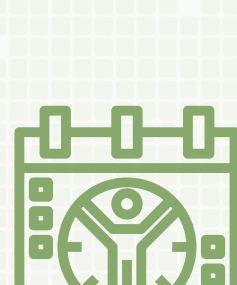
The good news overall is that yes, people are returning to museums.

But the return continues to be bumpy, with some people remaining "COVID cautious" and others returning in full force.

Individual museums also vary widely, with some still reporting low levels of visitation, and others even exceeding pre-pandemic attendance.



As we head into 2023, new external forces are arising that may also affect leisure time and museum visitation, from revenge travel (likely positive for museums) to inflationary concerns (could encourage some people to visit museums closer to home ... but keep others at home entirely) to people's habits and preferences shifting. We'll be checking in with museum audiences on what they are doing in the 2023 Annual Survey.



Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:
 • 2022 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, n = 90,747; 186 museums participating
 • 2022 Broader Population Sampling, n = 1,017
 • 2017 - 2021 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers

*Data Stories share research about both frequent museum-goers (typically visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual and non-visitors to museums).

More Data Stories can be found at wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories.

