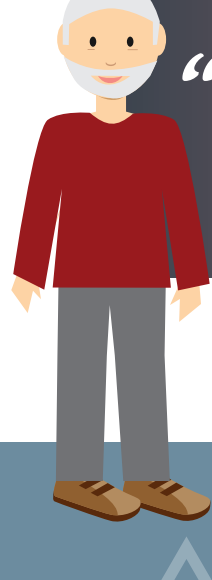


# Q: WHEN WILL AUDIENCES BE READY TO RETURN TO MUSEUMS? AND WHAT WILL HELP THEM FEEL SAFE AND COMFORTABLE?

## A: IT DEPENDS ...

MUSEUM-GOER\* RESPONSES RANGED WIDELY (THOUGH MOST FELL IN A CAUTIOUS MIDDLE).



“Never going to feel comfortable in a public place again.”

“If they were open tomorrow, I would probably go visit one. Heck, if we had a Museum of Annoying Sounds and Flashing Lights, I would probably go visit it if it was open.”



When they will be ready to visit upon reopening appears to depend on two main factors:

### 1 Individual attitudes

Risk tolerance can vary widely, depending on individual/family health concerns, age, and personality, though most people fall in the middle (assuming you are providing a safe environment ... and perhaps after a few weeks to see if the virus flares back up).

“I might not feel comfortable until a vaccine is available.”

“As long as we could be assured of the museum's cleaning/ sanitizing policies for common areas like railings, benches, and bathrooms, I think museums will be safe to visit ...”

“In all honesty? I will visit my first day I can. I want to see animals in zoos. I desperately need to get out.”



### 2 Museum type

The general consensus is that zoos, gardens, and outdoor historic spaces will likely welcome back more visitors, and sooner, than indoor museums. Additionally, “hands-off” museums will fare better than interactive ones.

Proximity also matters. For the foreseeable future, audiences are likely going to be local as most museum-goers expressed deep concerns about overnight and especially airplane travel. While a few were ready to vacation as soon as possible ... most were saying not for a year or more, often linking it to a vaccine.



“Common sense would say that places outdoors will come before those indoors, the roomy will come before the cramped, the lightly-attended before the crowded.”

## ★ FEELING SAFE AND COMFORTABLE IS PARAMOUNT. WHAT THAT ACTUALLY MEANS VARIES WIDELY, WITH MOST FALLING IN THE CAUTIOUS MIDDLE. ★

“I would like museums to carefully consider what they can do to protect their patrons, starting with the highest level of protection they can imagine short of Hazmat suits for all.”

“Hand sanitizer stations by doors I have to open, 6-ft distancing marks on the floors, everyone wearing masks ... sanitize all high-touch areas.”

“I don't really have an opinion about hygiene.”



FIRST WE NEED TO BE CLEAR. All museums should follow CDC and state/local health requirements and recommendations. This infographic reflects what museum-goers say they want to be kept safe, and may include extra precautions for you to consider.

Most museum-goers expect to see a new standard of basic precautions to feel safe and comfortable. This absolutely includes:

- Strict crowd management/enforcement of social distancing
- Hand sanitizer stations
- Contactless: payment, doors, etc.
- Regular and observable cleaning of surfaces



“I would need to see evidence of the utmost care, planning, and implementation of precautions to keep visitors and staff safe.”

Visitors also want to see what you are doing to keep them, and your staff, safe so they can have confidence in visiting and know what to expect. They are demanding transparency prior to deciding to visit (e.g., post it prominently on your website) as well as during visits.

### What about requiring masks?

It came up quite a bit ... enough that you should strongly consider it, but not enough to say you absolutely need to require them (unless already required in your community).

### Safety also played into what activities they expect to participate in at a museum.

Outdoor experiences felt most comfortable to museum-goers, followed by roomy “hands-off” gallery experiences.

For programs and activities, the answer was “it depends” ... so long as social distancing could be enforced and touch minimized.

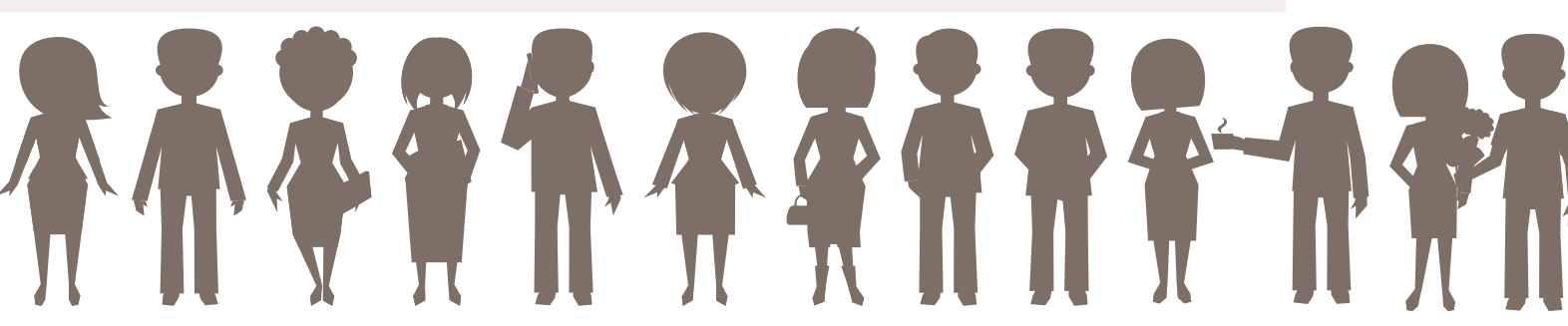
### But there were three activities that museum-goers had deep concerns about ... and would avoid:

- GUIDED TOURS • THEATRE SETTINGS • HANDS-ON/INTERACTIVE ANYTHING



And with that “flip” of opinion about interactive exhibits, many museums will find their interpretive models and goals flipped upside down ... creating immediate and deep challenges for children's museums, science centers, outdoor history museums, and other museums that emphasize hands-on learning.

“I think all interactive exhibits should be closed ...”



Even though these questions were relatively straightforward for museums-goers, answers were still laden with emotion, sadness, and even grief for museums ... and that's something we need to remember when welcoming visitors back: they need to feel safe and comfortable; they are grieving for many things; and we are all in a time of stress and worry for what is and what will be ... for all of us.

“When I think about this question, I feel really sad ... to some extent, I think museums will be working with one hand tied behind their collective back as they welcome visitors in this brave new world ... I hope I can help ensure they're still there when I feel safe to return.”



With our society struggling with so many immediate and basic needs, how will museums survive long-term? Our next **Pandemic Data Story** will share what museum-goers think.

Museums and the Pandemic Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:

- Spring 2020 Online Panel of Museum-Goers
- Spring 2020 Broader Population Sampling
- 2020 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers

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

The entire series of Museums and the Pandemic Data Stories can be found at [wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories](http://wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories).