




RANNSÓKNAMIÐSTÖÐ  
FERÐAMÁLA  
ICELANDIC TOURISM  
RESEARCH CENTRE



**SURVEY AMONG MUSEUM GUESTS IN THREE MUSEUMS  
& EXHIBITIONS IN REYKJAVÍK, WINTER 2025/26  
PILOT STUDY**

VERA VILHJÁLMSDÓTTIR & RIKE NISSEN  
2026

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## TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction.....	5
Methodology and implementation .....	7
Participants' backgrounds .....	8
Age of visitors.....	8
Gender.....	9
Educational Background .....	9
Nationality.....	10
General travel & museum behaviour .....	11
Previous visits to Reykjavík .....	11
Current visit to Reykjavík .....	11
Current visit to Reykjavík, continued .....	12
Booking preferences for Activities and experiences .....	13
Museum visits in the past 12 months .....	14
Visitors' museum experience and motivations .....	15
Finding information about the museum or exhibition .....	15
Purpose of visit.....	15
Time Spent in the Museum .....	16
Visitor Companions During the Museum Visit.....	16
Expectations for the museum visit.....	17
Activities and facilities considered important for bringing kids .....	21
Discussion / Conclusion .....	24
Visitor Profile and Travel Behaviour .....	24
Motivations and Museum Experiences.....	25
Implications, Limitations and Conclusions .....	26

References.....	27
Appendix: Museum Guest Survey (English version).....	28

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1 Background of participants .....	7
Table 2. Length of stay in Iceland & Reykjavík.....	11
Table 3. Average score for satisfaction with museum visit (on scale of 1-5) ...	22

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1 Age distribution by nationality .....	8
Figure 2 Age distribution by museum.....	8
Figure 3 Gender by nationality .....	9
Figure 4. Educational background by nationality .....	9
Figure 5 Participants' nationalities .....	10
Figure 6. Nationality by museum.....	10
Figure 7. Number of visits to Iceland.....	11
Figure 8. Planned experiences in Reykjavík during current trip .....	12
Figure 9. Planned museum/exhibition visits during current trip .....	12
Figure 10. When do participants prefer to book activities for their trips? .....	13
Figure 11. Awareness of the Reykjavík City Card among visitors .....	13
Figure 12. Museum/exhibition visits abroad in the past 12 months by nationality.....	14
Figure 13. When did you decide to visit this museum/exhibition?.....	15
Figure 14. Purpose of visit? .....	15
Figure 15. Time spent in museum/exhibition.....	16
Figure 16. Companions during the museum/exhibition visit .....	16
Figure 17. Were expectations for the museum visit met today? Findings across factors along with average scores (on scale of 1-5) .....	17
Figure 18. Expectation met for feeling inspired by the visit.....	18
Figure 19. Expectation met for being challenged by the visit .....	18
Figure 20. Expectation met regarding interactive elements .....	19

Figure 21. Important activities and facilities for bringing children to the museum/exhibition .....

Figure 22. Satisfaction with museum visit .....

**LIST OF PICTURES**

Picture 1. Visitor at the National Gallery.....	20
Picture 2. Inside the Settlement Exhibition.....	23
Picture 3. Old board game .....	25
Picture 4. Entrance to the National Museum.....	26



## INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a pilot project conducted by the Icelandic Tourism Research Centre (ITRC) in collaboration with Visit Reykjavík and the Creative Industries Research Centre. The data collection for the study was funded by Visit Reykjavík. The pilot formed part of Rike Nissen's internship project at the ITRC and was undertaken under the supervision of Vera Vilhjálmisdóttir, researcher at the Centre. The project was carried out over a six-month period, from November 2025 to April 2026, with the aim of developing a deeper understanding of tourists visiting museums and exhibitions in Reykjavík, particularly in relation to their interests, motivations, and travel behaviour.

Museum tourism is commonly regarded as a subcategory of cultural and heritage tourism (Bogan & Grigore, 2018). In recent decades, the significance of cultural production and consumption has increased substantially, with culture becoming an increasingly important motivation for travel among international tourists. Consequently, destinations are placing greater emphasis on promoting their cultural assets in order to differentiate themselves and attract visitors (Richards, 2021).

In a survey of international tourists visiting Reykjavík during the winter of 2025, conducted by Maskína (2025) on behalf of Visit Reykjavík, museums and exhibitions were identified as the second most popular activity (46%), following nature baths and lagoons (52%). Findings from a comparable survey conducted during the summer of 2024 shows that museums and exhibitions were the most popular activity, with 51% of respondents stating that they had visited, or intended to visit, museums and exhibitions during their stay. Other cultural activities were also frequently mentioned, including food and drink tasting tours (20%) and participation in events (8%).

At the national level, a border survey conducted by the Icelandic Tourist Board (2025) in 2024 demonstrated that museums were the third most popular activity among international visitors (31.8%). Additional cultural activities identified included swimming (21%) and "Meet the Locals" experiences (13.8%). Collectively, these findings demonstrate that cultural attractions, particularly museums and exhibitions, represent an important component of the visitor experience in Iceland, and especially within Reykjavík.

Visiting museums and exhibitions is not solely associated with acquiring knowledge about a particular subject; it is also closely connected to emotional engagement and experiential dimensions that link visitors to a destination (Bogan & Grigore, 2018). Contemporary tourism experiences are increasingly shaped by entertainment-oriented consumption, a trend that is also evident within museums and exhibitions (Du Cros & McKercher, 2015). In this context, the concept of edutainment has emerged to describe the integration of educational and entertainment elements that characterise many modern museum experiences (Du Cros & McKercher, 2015).

## MUSEUM GUEST'S MOTIVATIONS

In 2022, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) defined museums as follows:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing (International Council of Museums, 2022).



This definition highlights the educational role of museums, which has historically represented one of the principal motivations for visiting museums and exhibitions (Smith et al., 2020). Previous studies have demonstrated that the “pursuit of knowledge” constitutes a primary reason for museum visitation, followed by opportunities for personal development (Bogan & Grigore, 2018). More recently, additional motivational dimensions have been emphasised through the so-called 3E model, in which the three “E’s” refer to Education, Entertainment, and Emotions. Together, these concepts provide a relatively comprehensive description of the experiences sought by many museum visitors (Smith et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, the relative importance of these dimensions varies across visitor groups. Research has identified generational differences, with older tourists tending to prioritise educational experiences, whereas younger visitors often seek more engaging, entertaining, and authentic forms of interaction (Smith et al., 2020). Generation Z is increasingly emerging as a key consumer segment within the tourism sector (Marques et al., 2025). This generation demonstrates a strong preference for authenticity, digital engagement, social interaction, and personalised, distinctive experiences (Marques et al., 2025). Within this context, emotional engagement is becoming increasingly important in the design of museum experiences. Indeed, within the 3E model, emotions are regarded as a particularly significant component in the future development of museum experiences (Dragija & Jelinčić, 2025).

Experiential consumption alone may no longer be sufficient for museums in the future (Dragija & Jelinčić, 2025). Instead, personal transformation is increasingly viewed as a desired outcome of tourism-related activities. Museums are therefore placing greater emphasis not only on providing memorable experiences but also on facilitating processes of personal transformation. Such transformation is frequently achieved through emotional

engagement, which enhances memorability and encourages reflection (Dragija & Jelinčić, 2025). Reflection constitutes an important aspect of this process and is explicitly referenced within the ICOM definition of museums. Following their visit, individuals often reflect upon their experiences and share their impressions with family and friends, online audiences, or directly with museums through visitor feedback (Yang et al., 2023). Consequently, visitor reflection forms an integral component of the overall museum experience, while the desire to share these experiences with others—both offline and online—may also contribute to museum development and visibility.

Another important characteristic of transformational experiences is the active role of visitors themselves. Museum experiences should therefore be personalised, interactive, creative, and designed to engage multiple senses (Dragija & Jelinčić, 2025). Drawing upon this theoretical framework, the survey included questions examining whether visitors’ expectations were fulfilled in relation to educational value, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, entertainment, interactivity, modern presentation methods, family-friendliness, accessibility, uniqueness of the experience, and the desire to share the experience with others.

The findings presented in this report are organised into three main chapters. The first chapter examines the background characteristics of the participants, while the second chapter explores their general travel patterns and museum visitation behaviour. The third chapter presents findings relating to visitors’ experiences of the museum or exhibition they visited on the day of the survey. The report concludes with a discussion of the findings and a summary of the key conclusions.



## METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

The survey was conducted at three museums and exhibitions in Reykjavík: the National Museum of Iceland, the Settlement Exhibition, and the National Gallery of Iceland (see Appendix). The questionnaire was developed by ITRC in cooperation with Visit Reykjavík and the Creative Industries Research Centre. The survey, which was conducted in both English and Icelandic, was divided into 3 parts: 1. General travel and museum behaviour, 2. Today's museum experiences and motivations, and 3. Background information. The survey consisted of 25 questions in the English version and 24 questions in the Icelandic version. After visiting a museum or exhibition, visitors were asked whether they would like to participate in the survey. Those who agreed completed the questionnaire independently on a tablet device. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and responses were recorded anonymously. The survey took approximately 5-10 minutes to complete and consisted primarily of single-choice or multiple-choice questions. In total, 262 participants took part in the study. The data was analysed based on five background variables: gender, age, nationality, education, and the museum or exhibition visited.

Participants from Iceland were almost exclusively residents of the capital region of Reykjavík. Due to the limited number of respondents from other regions of Iceland, the data does not allow for a representative analysis of populations outside the capital region. Consequently, the findings reflect international visitors and domestic residents from the capital region of Reykjavík.

Table 1 Background of participants

	Total	International	Domestic
Number of responses	262	228	34
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	58,40%	57,02%	67,65%
Male	38,93%	39,91%	32,35%
Non-binary	1,53%	1,75%	0,00%
Prefer not to say	1,15%	1,32%	0,00%
<b>Age</b>			
17 and younger	3,44%	0,44%	23,53%
18-24	19,85%	21,49%	8,82%
25-34	25,95%	25,44%	29,41%
35-44	20,23%	20,61%	17,65%
45-54	12,60%	13,60%	5,88%
55-64	13,36%	13,60%	12,50%
65 and older	4,58%	4,82%	2,94%
<b>Nationality</b>			
Mainland Europe	23,28%	26,75%	0,00%
United Kingdom	25,19%	28,95%	0,00%
North America	32,06%	36,84%	0,00%
Rest of the world	6,49%	7,46%	0,00%
Iceland	12,98%	0,00%	100,00%
<b>Education</b>			
Elementary School	3,05%	0,44%	20,59%
Vocational and/or secondary schooling	16,41%	17,54%	8,82%
Undergraduate Degree	39,69%	40,35%	35,29%
Postgraduate Degree	39,69%	41,23%	29,41%
No formal schooling completed	1,15%	0,44%	5,88%
<b>Visited museum</b>			
National Gallery of Iceland	18,32%	12,72%	55,88%
National Museum of Iceland	48,09%	51,32%	26,47%
The Settlement Exhibition	33,59%	35,96%	17,65%



## PARTICIPANTS' BACKGROUNDS

### AGE OF VISITORS

Visitors' age profiles varied to some extent by nationality. Visitors from North America and the United Kingdom tended to be older on average, with approximately 60% aged 35 years or above. In contrast, more than 60% of visitors from other nationalities were aged 34 years or younger.

The age distributions of visitors to the National Gallery of Iceland and the National Museum of Iceland were broadly similar, with the 25–34 age group representing the largest proportion of visitors at both institutions (approximately 30%). By comparison, the age profile of visitors to the Settlement Exhibition was more evenly distributed across age groups.

Nevertheless, the Settlement Exhibition recorded a comparatively high proportion of international visitors aged 55–64, who accounted for 24.2% of all international visitors to the exhibition.

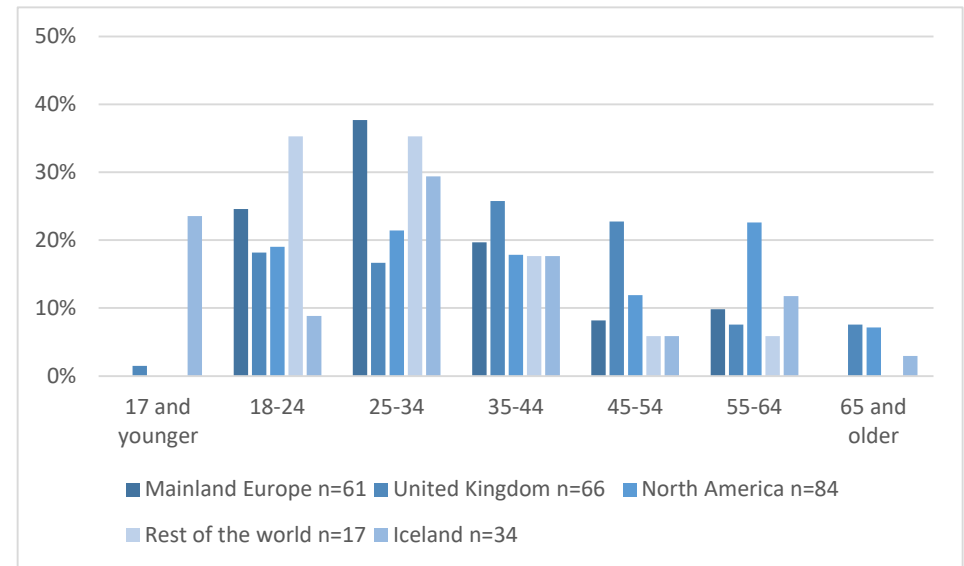


Figure 1 Age distribution by nationality

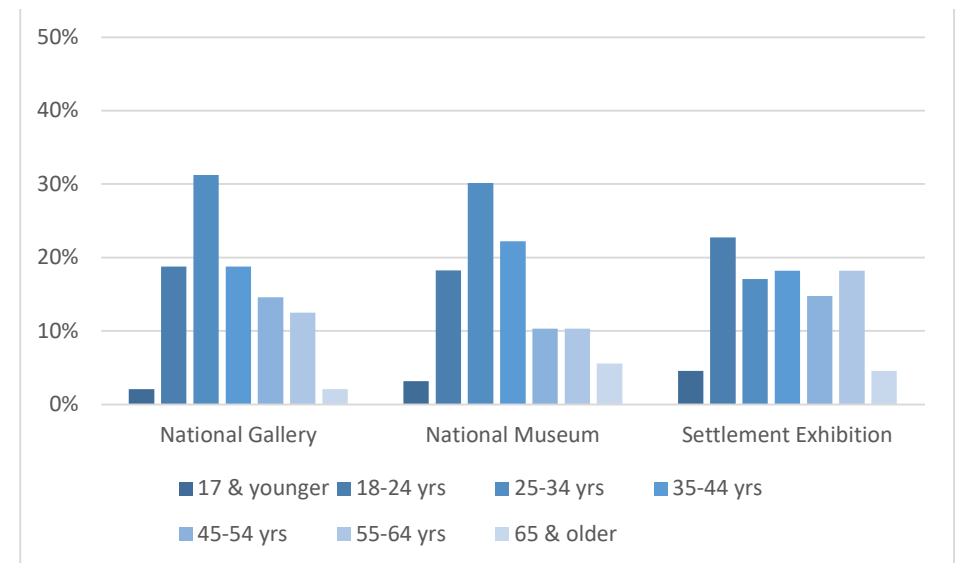


Figure 2 Age distribution by museum



## GENDER

Approximately 58% of all respondents identified as women, while around 39% identified as men.

Women constituted the majority of respondents across all three museums and exhibitions. This pattern was particularly pronounced at the National Gallery of Iceland, where women accounted for 75% of respondents.

Respondents who identified as non-binary or selected the option “prefer not to say” represented no more than 1.8% of the sample. Given the small number of responses within these categories, the data does not support a meaningful or statistically robust analysis of these groups. Consequently, the findings presented in this report primarily reflect the responses of participants who identified as women or men.

## EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

The respondents were generally highly educated, with the majority holding either an undergraduate degree (39.7%) or a postgraduate degree (39.7%). In contrast, only a small proportion reported elementary school as their highest completed level of education (3.1%), while an even smaller share indicated that they had not completed any formal education (1.1%).

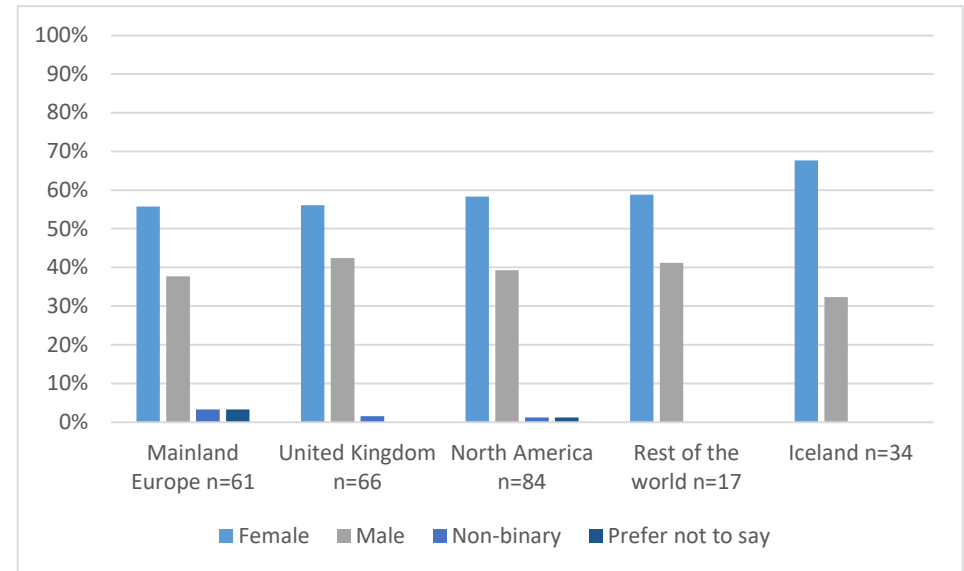


Figure 3 Gender by nationality

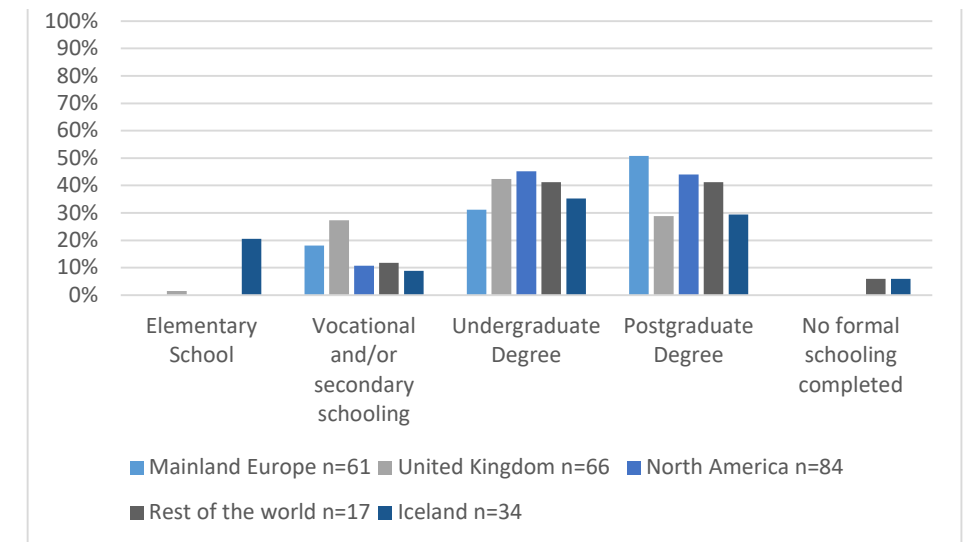


Figure 4. Educational background by nationality



## NATIONALITY

The majority of respondents were international visitors (87%), while domestic visitors accounted for 13% of the sample. Among international respondents, visitors from North America constituted the largest group (36.8%), followed by visitors from the United Kingdom (28.9%).

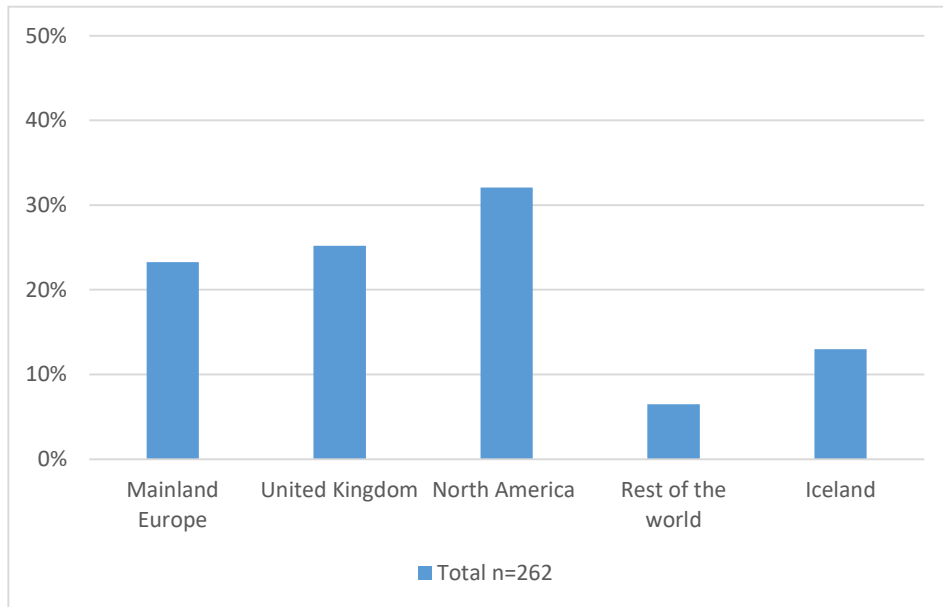


Figure 5 Participants' nationalities

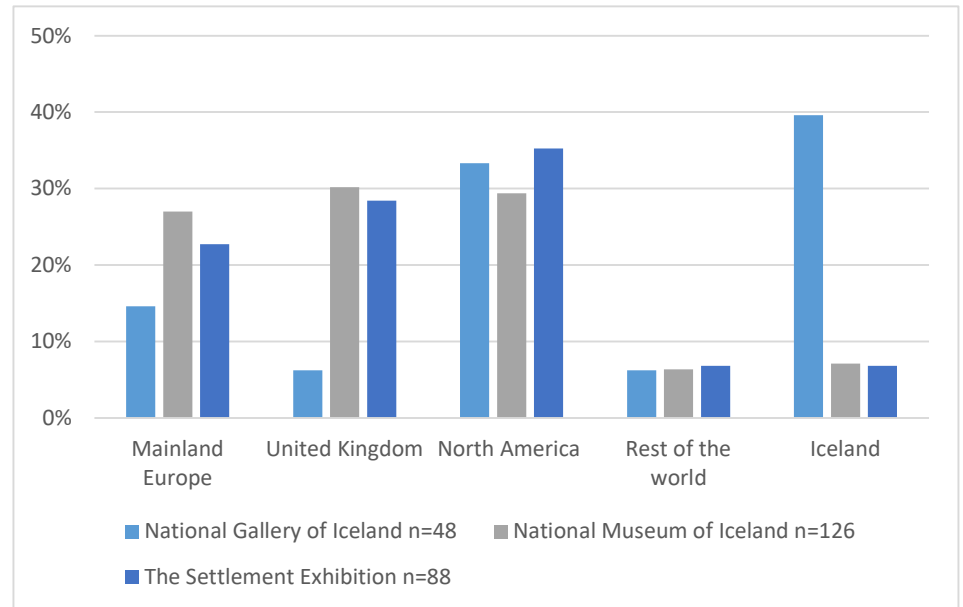


Figure 6. Nationality by museum



## GENERAL TRAVEL & MUSEUM BEHAVIOUR

This chapter gives an overview of answers given to general questions about the participants’ travel and museum behaviours.

### PREVIOUS VISITS TO REYKJAVÍK

Q1. Have you visited Reykjavík before?

Q2. Did you visit any museums/exhibitions during previous trips to Reykjavík? If yes, which ones?

The majority of international respondents were visiting Reykjavík for the first time (84%). A further 8% were on their second visit, while 7% reported having visited the city three or more times. Among respondents who had previously visited Reykjavík, more than half (54%) indicated that they had visited museums or exhibitions during earlier trips.

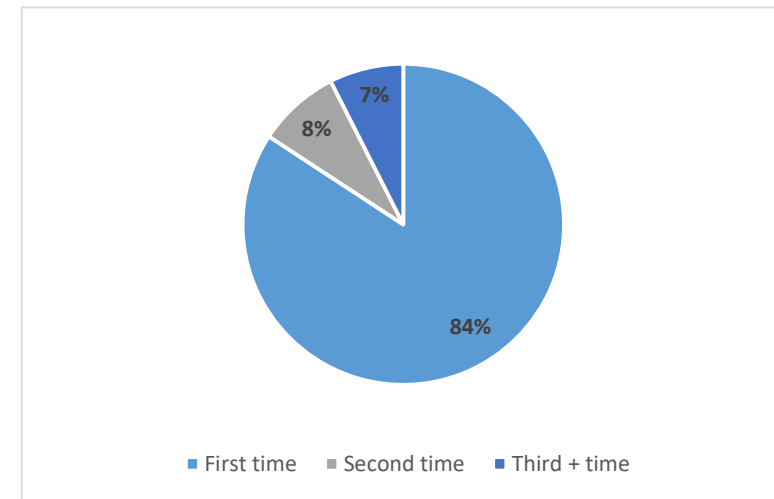


Figure 7. Number of visits to Iceland

### CURRENT VISIT TO REYKJAVÍK

Q4. How long are you staying in REYKJAVÍK during this trip?

Q5. How long are you staying in ICELAND during this trip?

Most international visitors reported staying in Iceland for between four and six days (44%), while 35.2% indicated a stay of one week or longer. When asked about the duration of their stay in Reykjavík during their current trip, 42.7% reported staying for four to six days, 30.4% for two to three days, and 20.2% for more than one week. Only a small proportion of respondents reported staying in Reykjavík for one day (3.5%) or less (2.2%). The findings indicate that international visitors generally spend several days in Iceland, although the length of their stay in Reykjavík varies considerably.

Table 2. Length of stay in Iceland & Reykjavík

Length of stay in:	Iceland	Reykjavík
Less than a day	0,0%	2,2%
1 day	0,0%	3,5%
2-3 days	20,3%	30,4%
4-6 days	44,1%	42,7%
7+ days	35,2%	20,3%
I do not know	0,4%	0,9%



### CURRENT VISIT TO REYKJAVÍK, CONTINUED

Q7. Please mark every museum/exhibition you plan to visit during this stay in Reykjavík / the capital area (choose all that apply)

Q8. Please mark everything you plan to experience during this stay in Reykjavík / the capital area (choose all that apply)

During their stay in Reykjavík, international visitors most frequently reported visiting natural and geothermal baths (66%), participating in Northern Lights tours (51%), and shopping (42%). Organised excursions outside the city (39%) and visits to art galleries (38%) were also commonly reported. Among the museums and exhibitions respondents planned to visit, the most frequently mentioned were the National Museum of Iceland (61%), Perlan Museum (28%), and Aurora Reykjavík (22.8%).

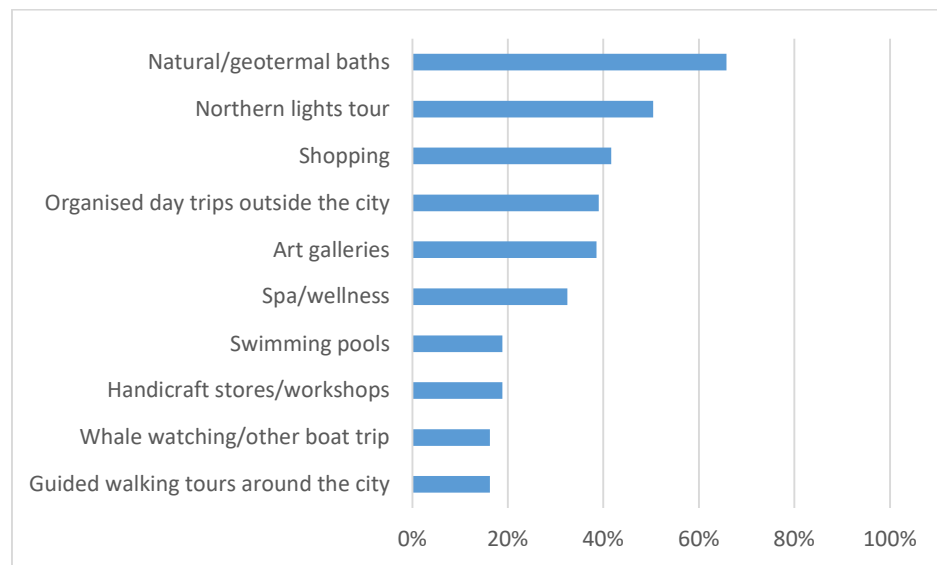


Figure 8. Planned experiences in Reykjavík during current trip

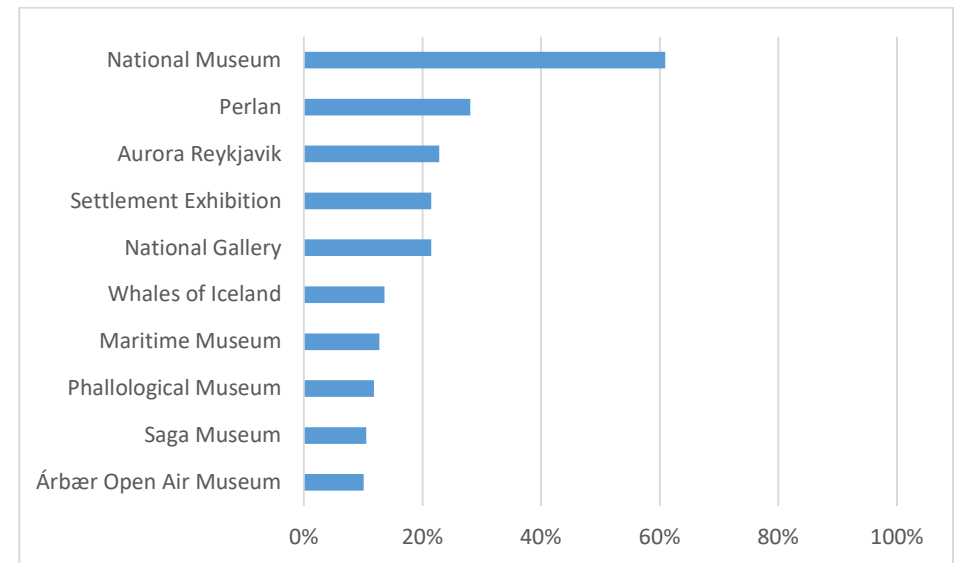


Figure 9. Planned museum/exhibition visits during current trip



## BOOKING PREFERENCES FOR ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES

*Q6. What of the following best describes your booking preferences*

Overall, international visitors demonstrated a tendency to book activities in advance of their trip, with 47.8% reporting that they arranged activities before arriving in Reykjavík. Visitors from North America (54.8%) and the United Kingdom (48.5%) showed a preference for advance booking, while respondents from mainland Europe exhibited a more balanced distribution between booking activities before departure, after arriving in Reykjavík, and directly on site.

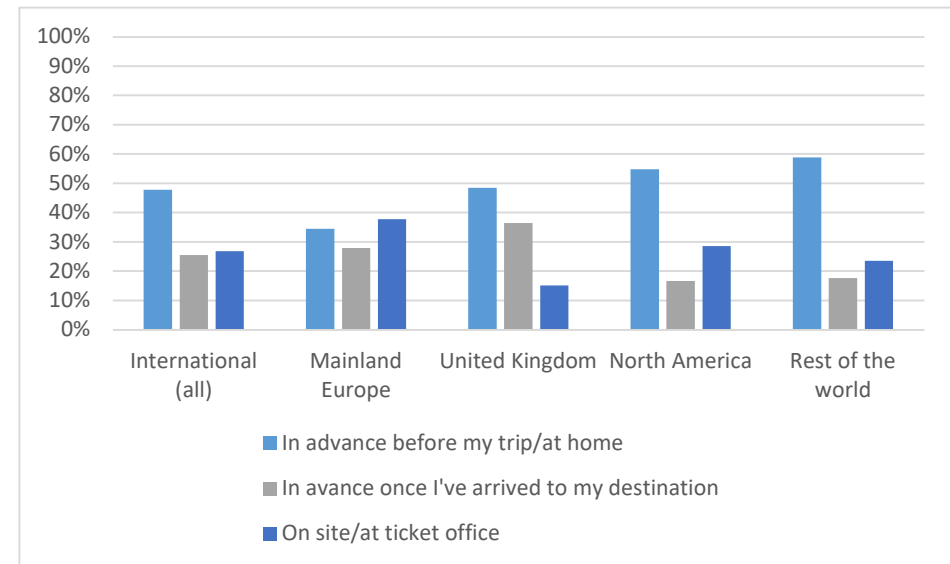


Figure 10. When do participants prefer to book activities for their trips?

*Q9. Do you know about the Reykjavík City Card?*

Respondents were asked about their awareness and use of the Reykjavík City Card. Among international visitors, the majority (59.2%) reported that they were not aware of the card, while 28.5% indicated that they were aware of it but had not used it. Only 12.3% of respondents reported both awareness and use of the Reykjavík City Card.

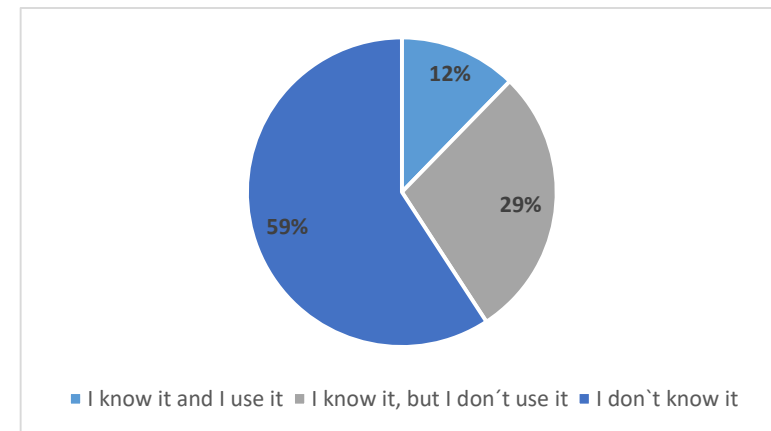


Figure 11. Awareness of the Reykjavík City Card among visitors



### MUSEUM VISITS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

*Q10. In the last 12 months, how often have you visited museums/exhibitions in your country of residence?*

*Q11. In the last 12 months, how often have you visited museums/exhibitions while travelling abroad?*

Overall, museum visitation patterns indicate moderate levels of engagement both domestically and internationally. The largest proportion of international respondents reported visiting museums and exhibitions between one and three times during the previous year, both while travelling abroad (45%) and within their country of residence (57%). This was followed by respondents reporting four to five visits (21% abroad; 18% in their country of residence).

Differences were observed across nationality groups. Respondents from mainland Europe and North America generally reported low to moderate frequencies of museum visitation while travelling abroad, with the largest share indicating between one and three visits (41% and 38.1%, respectively). A similar pattern was evident among visitors from the United Kingdom, where 62.1% reported between one and three museum visits.

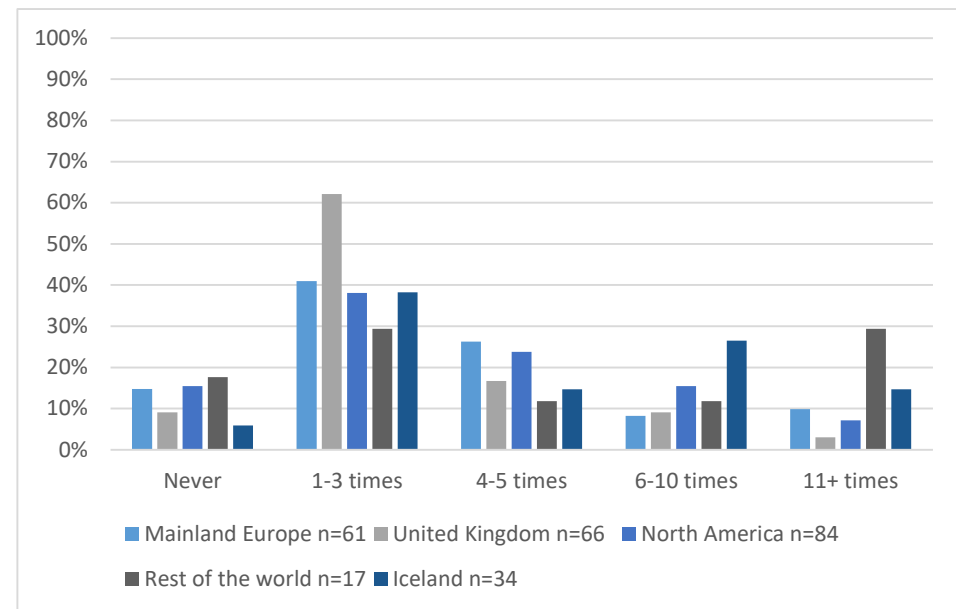


Figure 12. Museum/exhibition visits abroad in the past 12 months by nationality



## VISITORS’ MUSEUM EXPERIENCE AND MOTIVATIONS

This chapter presents the findings relating to participants’ experiences at the museums and exhibitions they were visiting at the time of the survey.

### FINDING INFORMATION ABOUT THE MUSEUM OR EXHIBITION

Q13. How did you find out about **this** museum/exhibition? (choose all that apply)

Q16. When did you decide to visit **this** museum/exhibition?

International visitors mainly reported finding out about the museum or exhibition through internet search engines (49%), followed by Google Maps (21%) and official websites such as Visit Reykjavík and Visit Iceland (15%). Social media (10%) and recommendations from friends and family (11%) appear to play a smaller role.

Most international visitors decided to visit the museum or exhibition after their arrival in Iceland (47%), while 33% had decided to visit before their trip to Iceland began. Nearly 21% stated their visit to the museums was a spontaneous decision/as they were walking by.

### PURPOSE OF VISIT

Q.15 What is the purpose of your visit to the museum/exhibition today? (choose all that apply)

Most visitors came to visit the museum in general (85.5%), while 15.6% reported being motivated by a specific exhibition. Among international visitors, 91.2% came to visit the museum in general, 11% to see a specific exhibition, and a small percentage to take part in an event. Domestic visitors were mainly visiting the museum in general (47%) or seeing a specific exhibition (47%), while 12% were attending an event.

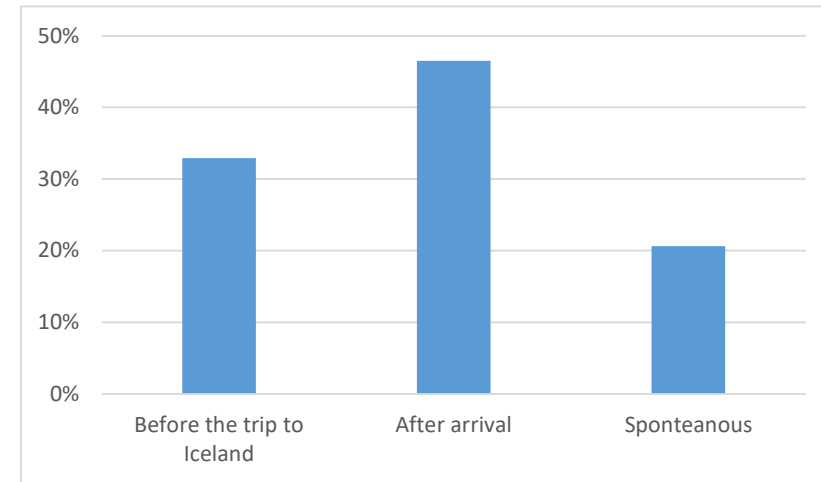


Figure 13. When did you decide to visit this museum/exhibition?

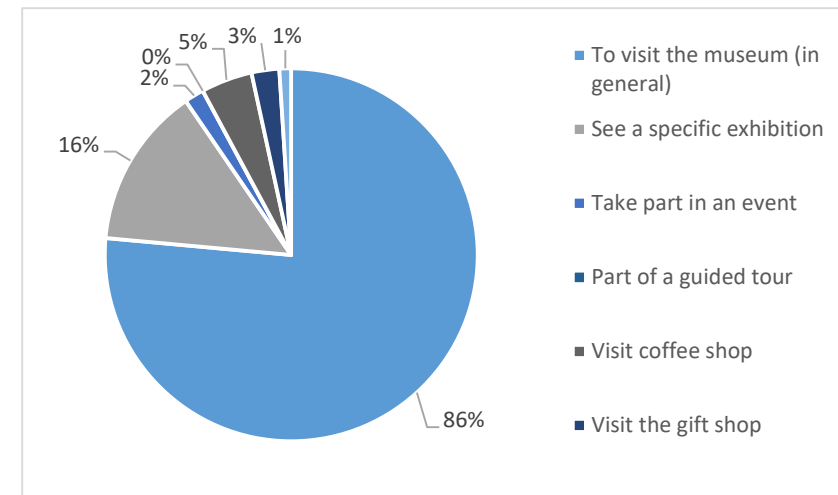


Figure 14. Purpose of visit?



## TIME SPENT IN THE MUSEUM

Q17. How much time did you spend in this museum/exhibition today?

Respondents most commonly spent between one and two hours at the museum or exhibition (47%), followed by between 30 and 60 minutes (38%). Overall, almost half of all visitors spent between one and two hours at the venue, while a smaller proportion remained for more than two hours (8%).

Differences were observed across the three museums and exhibitions. Visitors to the National Museum of Iceland were more likely to spend longer periods at the venue, with 63% staying for one to two hours and 13% remaining for more than two hours. At the Settlement Exhibition, the majority of visitors spent either 30–60 minutes (55%) or one to two hours (36%). In contrast, visitors to the National Gallery of Iceland most frequently reported spending 30–60 minutes (46%), followed by one to two hours (25%). The National Gallery of Iceland also recorded a comparatively high proportion of visitors spending less than 30 minutes at the venue (20.8%), compared with the Settlement Exhibition (5.7%) and the National Museum of Iceland (0.8%).

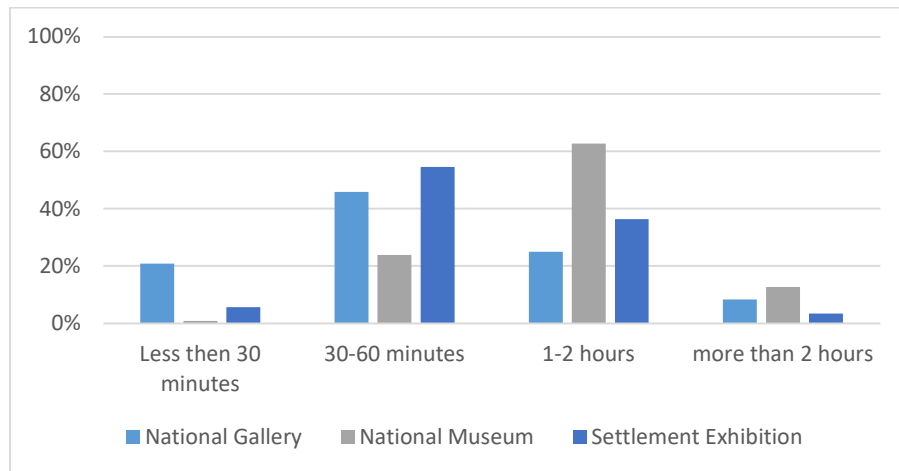


Figure 15. Time spent in museum/exhibition

## VISITOR COMPANIONS DURING THE MUSEUM VISIT

Q14. Who did you visit the museum/exhibition with today? (choose all that apply)

Most visitors were accompanied by their partners (49%) or were visiting with other family members or relatives (21%). Visiting museums or exhibitions with friends was also reported quite frequently (20%).

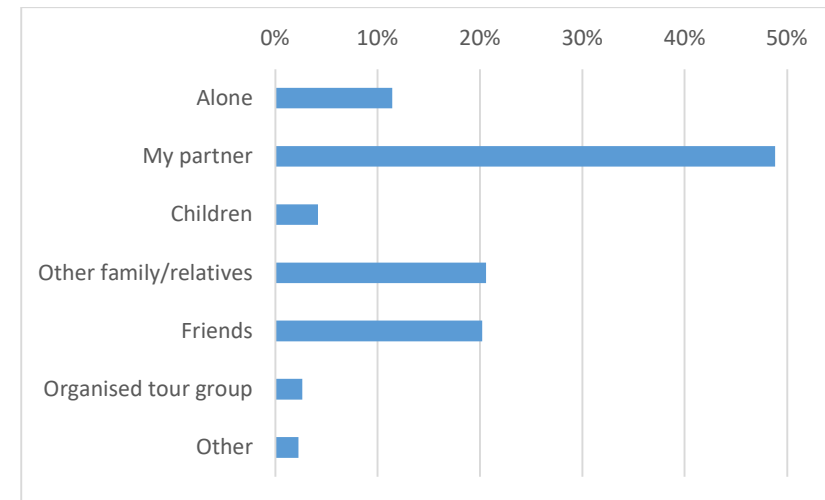


Figure 16. Companions during the museum/exhibition visit



## EXPECTATIONS FOR THE MUSEUM VISIT

Q18. Do you agree or disagree that your expectations for the following factors were met during your visit to this museum/exhibition today?

Participants were asked to assess the extent to which their visit met their expectations across a range of ten categories. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 5 indicated strong agreement.

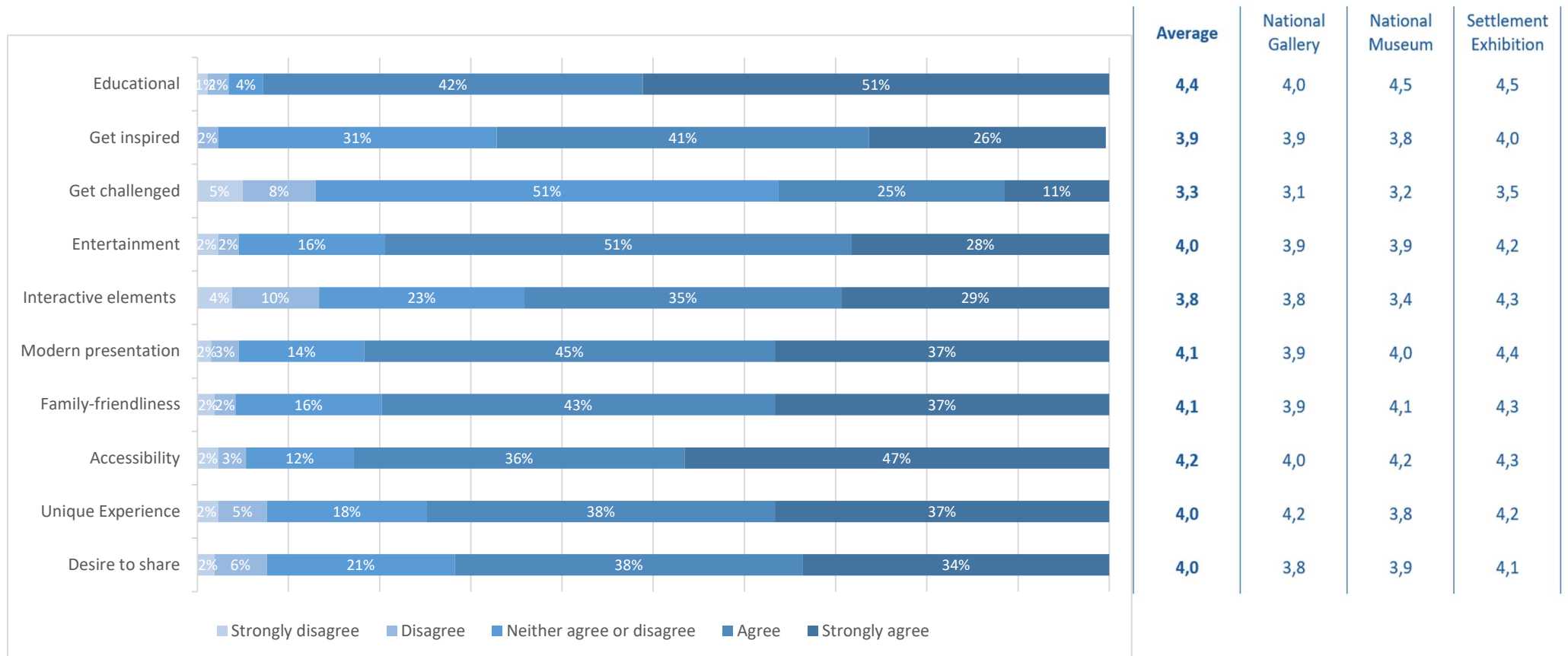


Figure 17. Were expectations for the museum visit met today? Findings across factors along with average scores (on scale of 1-5)



### EDUCATIONAL / INFORMATIVE

The first category examined whether visitors’ expectations regarding the educational value of the museum or exhibition were met. Overall, 51.1% of respondents strongly agreed that the museum or exhibition met their expectations in this regard, while a further 41.6% agreed. Response patterns were broadly similar across the different visitor groups.

### INSPIRATIONAL

Overall, respondents reported that their expectations regarding inspiration were met, with 25.6% strongly agreeing and 40.8% agreeing. A further 30.5% neither agreed nor disagreed, while only 2.3% disagreed.

Differences were observed between the museums and exhibitions. At the National Museum of Iceland, agreement was highest, with 17.5% strongly agreeing and 49.2% agreeing that their expectations had been met. The National Gallery of Iceland displayed a more varied response pattern, while responses at the Settlement Exhibition were generally positive but more moderate, with no negative responses recorded.

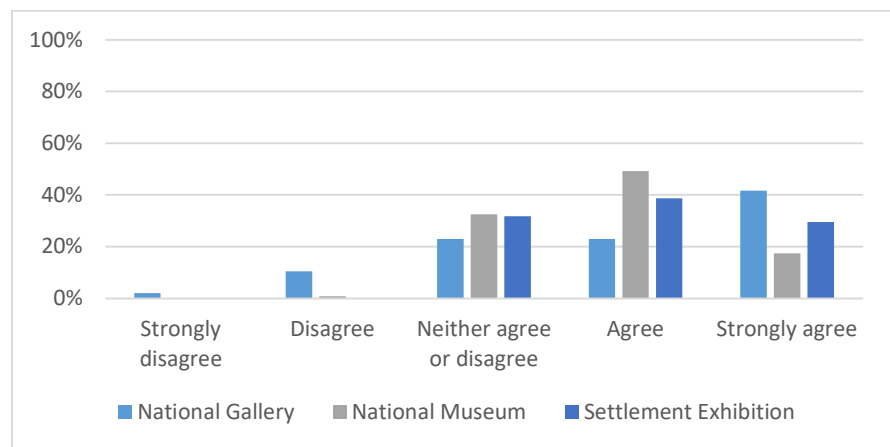


Figure 18. Expectation met for feeling inspired by the visit

### CHALLENGING

A different pattern emerged in relation to whether visitors perceived the museum or exhibition as being challenging. Overall, responses were largely neutral, with 50.8% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Smaller proportions expressed positive evaluations, with 11.5% strongly agreeing and 24.8% agreeing, while 13% disagreed.

Differences were detected between the museums and exhibitions. The National Museum of Iceland displayed the most neutral response pattern, with 54% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. The National Gallery of Iceland showed relatively higher proportions of both agreement (34%) and disagreement (21%). In contrast, responses at the Settlement Exhibition were characterised by comparatively higher levels of agreement (46%) and lower levels of disagreement (5%).

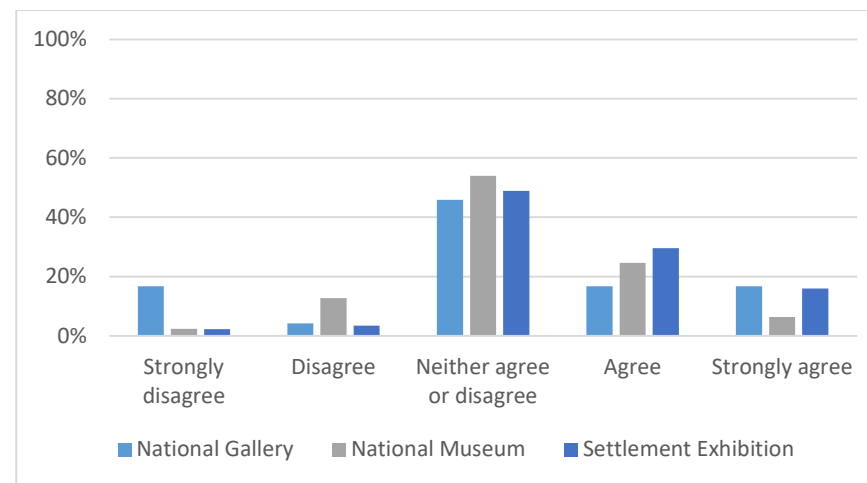


Figure 19. Expectation met for being challenged by the visit



### ENTERTAINING

The entertainment dimension of the museum or exhibition experience was generally perceived positively by visitors. Overall, 28% of respondents strongly agreed that the museum or exhibition was entertaining, while 51% agreed. A further 16% neither agreed nor disagreed, whereas 4% were in disagreement.

Among international respondents, 26.8% strongly agreed, 53% agreed, and 16.2% neither agreed nor disagreed. Only 4% expressed disagreement or strong disagreement.

### INTERACTIVE ELEMENTS

Overall, respondents indicated that their expectations regarding interactive elements had been met. Responses were predominantly positive, with 29.4% strongly agreeing and 34.7% agreeing. A further 22.5% neither agreed nor disagreed, while 13.3% expressed some level of disagreement.

Differences were observed across the three museums and exhibitions. The Settlement Exhibition recorded the highest levels of satisfaction with its interactive elements, with 48.9% of respondents strongly agreeing and 38.6% agreeing that their expectations had been met. The National Gallery of Iceland showed a more balanced distribution of responses. In contrast, the National Museum of Iceland recorded lower levels of agreement and a higher proportion of neutral and negative responses regarding its interactive elements.

### MODERN PRESENTATION

Concerning the extent to which visitors perceived the presentation of information as modern, 36.6% of respondents strongly agreed that their expectations had been met, while 45.0% agreed and 13.7% neither agreed nor disagreed. Among international respondents, 36.8% strongly agreed, 46.5% agreed, and 12.3% neither agreed nor disagreed.

### FAMILY-FRIENDLINESS

Regarding family-friendliness, 36.6% of respondents strongly agreed that the museum or exhibition met their expectations, while 43.1% agreed. A further 16.0% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Further analysis of visitors' preferences regarding facilities and activities for children will be presented in the following section.

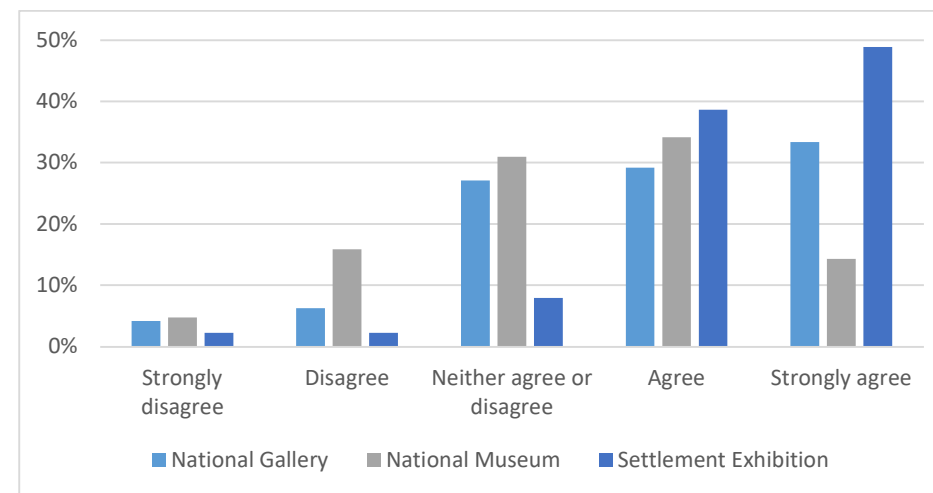


Figure 20. Expectation met regarding interactive elements



### ACCESSIBILITY

In terms of accessibility, 46.6% of respondents strongly agreed that the museum or exhibition met their expectations, while 36.3% agreed. A further 11.8% neither agreed nor disagreed. Response patterns were broadly similar across visitor groups.

### UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

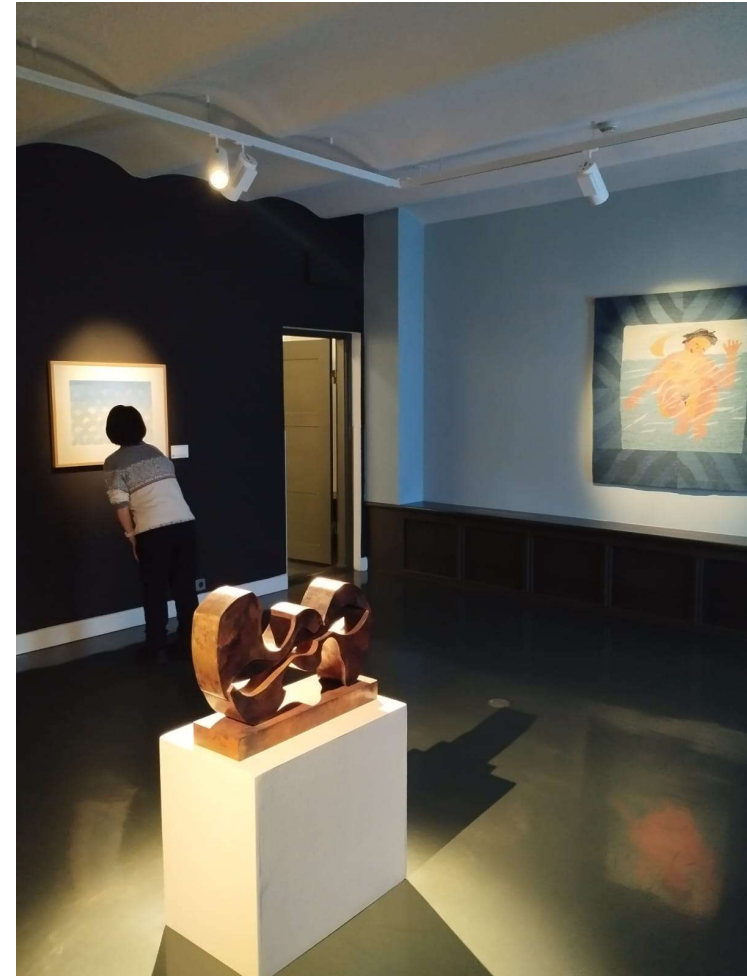
In relation to the uniqueness of the experience, 36.6% of respondents strongly agreed that the museum or exhibition met their expectations, while 38.2% agreed. A further 17.6% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 7.6% expressed some level of disagreement.

Response patterns were broadly similar among international respondents, with 35.5% strongly agreeing and 40.4% agreeing that their expectations had been met. Among domestic respondents, a larger proportion strongly agreed (44.1%), although levels of disagreement were also somewhat higher (15%) than among international visitors (7%).

### DESIRE TO SHARE EXPERIENCE WITH OTHERS

Finally, respondents were asked whether the museum or exhibition experience met their expectations in terms of their desire to share it with others. Overall, 33.6% strongly agreed that their expectations had been met, while 38.1% agreed. A further 20.6% neither agreed nor disagreed, 5.7% disagreed, and 1.9% strongly disagreed.

International respondents reported a broadly similar pattern of responses. Compared with international respondents, domestic respondents were more likely to report that their expectations regarding sharing the experience with others had not been met.



Picture 1. Visitor at the National Gallery



## ACTIVITIES AND FACILITIES CONSIDERED IMPORTANT FOR BRINGING KIDS

Q19. What activities / facilities do you consider important in order for you to bringing children (0-17yo) to this museum? Choose the 5 most important to you.

The survey also examined which activities or facilities respondents considered important when bringing children to museums or exhibitions. Most participants considered objects that can be touched or hands-on to be important (50.4%), followed by an exhibition for children (37%). Furthermore, approximately one third of the respondents consider immersive experiences and a room for experiences to be important.

Responses from international visitors indicated that objects that can be touched or hands-on were considered most important (51.8%), followed by interactive elements (44.7%), and an exhibition for children (38%). The data also suggest that around one third of international respondents consider both a room for experiences and immersive experiences to be important when bringing children to a museum or exhibition.

The responses from domestic visitors reveal a different pattern as they considered a room or space for free play (42%) and objects that can be touched or hands-on (42%) to be most important. Furthermore, 32% of domestic respondents considered a changing room to be important, followed by an exhibition for children (26%), a room for experiences (24%), interactive experiences (24%), and a quiet or breast-feeding room (21%).

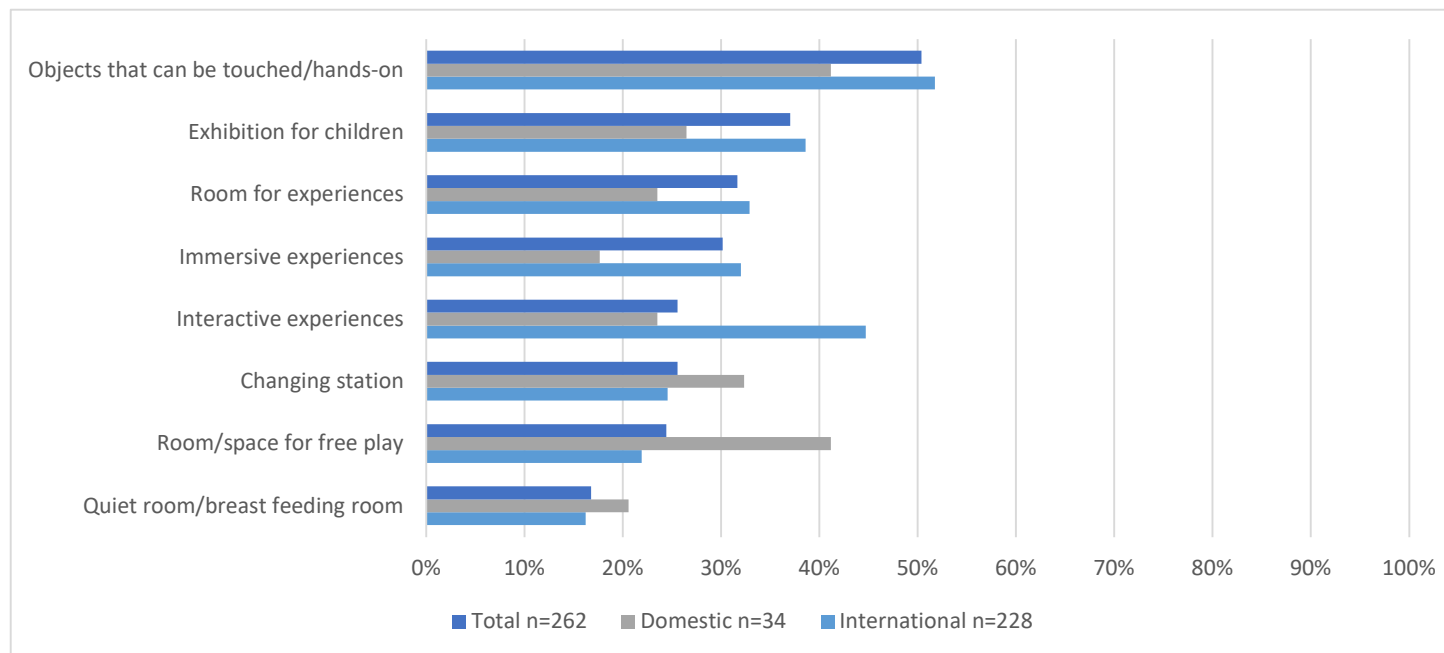


Figure 21. Important activities and facilities for bringing children to the museum/exhibition



## FEEDBACK & SATISFACTION

Q20. If you could add to or change something about this museum/exhibition, what would it be and why?

Q21. Overall, how satisfied are you with your visit to this museum/exhibition?

Overall, visitors were satisfied with their visit to the museum or exhibition, around 50% of respondents reported that their visit was very satisfying, and 40% stating they were satisfied. International visitors were overall more satisfied by their visits than domestic visitors, with domestic visitors being more likely to be neutral (12%) or dissatisfied (9%) with their visits than international visitors (7% neutral / 1,5% dissatisfied).

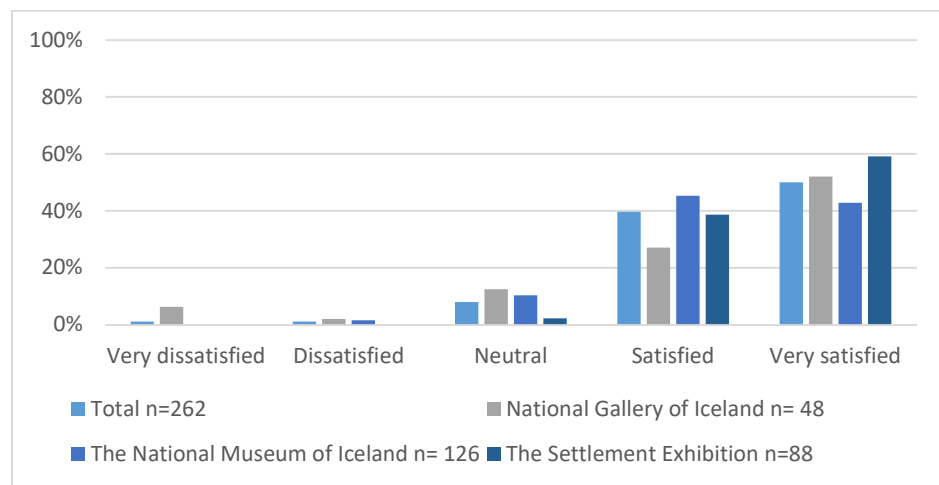


Figure 22. Satisfaction with museum visit

Table 3. Average score for satisfaction with museum visit (on scale of 1-5)

All	National Gallery of Iceland	The National Museum of Iceland	The Settlement Exhibition
4,4	4,2	4,3	4,6

To provide a more detailed comparison of satisfaction and feedback across the different museums and exhibitions included in the survey, the following section presents a breakdown by individual institution.

### FEEDBACK & SATISFACTION: THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ICELAND

At the National Gallery of Iceland, 52.0% of respondents reported being very satisfied with their visit, while a further 27.0% indicated that they were satisfied. In addition, 12.5% rated their visit as neither satisfying nor dissatisfying, 2.0% reported being dissatisfied, and 6.2% described their visit as very dissatisfying.

When asked whether they would like to change or add anything to the museum or exhibition, the majority of respondents indicated that they would not make any changes. Among those who provided suggestions, several commented that the museum was “too small”. Other recommendations included the addition of a “permanent exhibit” and to “showcase more artist or mediums”.



### FEEDBACK & SATISFACTION: THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ICELAND

At the National Museum of Iceland, 42.9% of respondents reported being very satisfied with their visit, while 45.2% indicated that they were satisfied. A further 10.3% rated their visit as neither satisfying nor dissatisfying, and 1.6% reported being dissatisfied. No respondents described their visit as very dissatisfying.

When asked whether they would like to add or change anything within the museum, several respondents expressed a desire for more in-depth information on specific topics. Others suggested organisational improvements, including clearer wayfinding and adjustments to the sequence of the exhibition. One respondent commented:

Feel a little bit disorganised. Expect a little bit more about the normal daily life and customs and habits of the Icelandic people and language.

A number of respondents also suggested the addition or enhancement of interactive and immersive elements. One visitor noted:

I would add more audible elements to the exhibits. Not that there aren't any, but more prominent auditory elements, such as songs from the time periods and ambient sounds of the time periods, would be very immersive.

While some respondents recommended the inclusion of background music and additional sound-based elements, others highlighted the museum's quiet atmosphere as a positive aspect of the visitor experience.

### FEEDBACK & SATISFACTION: THE SETTLEMENT EXHIBITION

At the Settlement Exhibition, 59.0% of respondents reported being very satisfied with their visit, while a further 38.6% described their visit as satisfying. Only 2.3% rated their experience as neither satisfying nor dissatisfying. No respondents reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their visit.

When asked whether they would like to add or change anything within the exhibition, one respondent suggested improving visitor orientation by “adding more directions on where to go”. Several respondents also recommended the addition or further development of interactive and immersive elements, while others expressed satisfaction with the exhibition's existing approach:

Enjoyed very much good use of technology balanced with artefacts.

Other included suggestions and comments included:

Add real size Viking dolls to compare with current people.

Love the accessible elevators!



Picture 2. Inside the Settlement Exhibition



## DISCUSSION / CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the travel behaviour, motivations, and interests of visitors to museums and exhibitions in Reykjavík during the winter season of 2025/26. The findings provide valuable insights into the characteristics, behaviours, and experiences of visitors to three cultural attractions in the capital region and contribute to a better understanding of museum tourism within Reykjavík's broader tourism offer.

### VISITOR PROFILE AND TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR

The findings indicate that museums and exhibitions in Reykjavík attract a predominantly international, highly educated, and young to middle-aged visitor group. This profile broadly corresponds with the characteristics commonly associated with cultural tourists in previous research. While the largest proportion of respondents were aged between 25 and 34 years, notable differences were observed between nationality groups. Visitors from North America and the United Kingdom tended to be older on average than visitors from other regions, highlighting the importance of recognising variation within the broader cultural tourism market.

The majority of respondents were visiting Reykjavík for the first time, suggesting that museum and exhibition visits form part of the initial destination experience for many international visitors. Nevertheless, the findings also indicate a continued interest in cultural attractions among repeat visitors, as more than half of those who had visited Reykjavík previously reported having visited museums or exhibitions during earlier trips.

Visitors generally reported moderate levels of museum engagement, both within their country of residence and while travelling abroad. Most respondents had visited museums and exhibitions between one and three times during the previous year, suggesting that museum visitation forms a

recurring component of their travel behaviour rather than representing a highly specialised interest.

The findings further reveal differences in travel planning behaviour. Visitors from North America and the United Kingdom were more likely to arrange activities before departure, whereas respondents from mainland Europe demonstrated a more balanced approach between advance booking and making decisions after arrival. Similarly, almost half of international respondents reported deciding to visit the museum or exhibition only after arriving in Iceland. Together, these findings suggest that museums and exhibitions should remain visible throughout the visitor journey, rather than relying solely on pre-trip marketing.

Information search behaviour reinforces this observation. Internet search engines and Google Maps were the most important sources of information about museums and exhibitions, while official destination websites played a secondary role. Although social media is recognised as an important source of travel information more broadly, it appeared to play a comparatively smaller role in visitors' decisions to visit museums and exhibitions specifically.

A notable finding concerns awareness of the Reykjavík City Card. The majority of international respondents were unaware of the card, while only a small proportion reported using it. This suggests that the card currently has limited visibility among international museum visitors.

The results also demonstrate that museum visits form part of a broader tourism experience in Reykjavík. While respondents showed a clear interest in cultural attractions, they also reported high levels of participation in nature-based activities, particularly visits to geothermal baths and Northern Lights tours. This reflects the continued importance of Iceland's nature-based tourism offer and



suggests that museum visits often complement, rather than replace, other visitor experiences.



Picture 3. Old board game

## MOTIVATIONS AND MUSEUM EXPERIENCES

The findings provide further insight into visitors' motivations and expectations. Most respondents reported visiting the museum or exhibition as a general attraction rather than being motivated by a specific exhibition or event. Domestic visitors were more likely to attend specific exhibitions or events, whereas international visitors primarily viewed museums and exhibitions as part of their wider destination experience.

Visitor expectations were generally met across most categories examined in the survey. Particularly high levels of agreement were recorded for educational value, modern presentation, accessibility, family-friendliness, and entertainment. These findings support the continued importance of museums' educational role while also highlighting the significance of enjoyable and engaging experiences.

The results correspond closely with the concept of edutainment, which emphasises the integration of education and entertainment within contemporary museum experiences (Du Cros & McKercher, 2015). Respondents valued opportunities to learn while simultaneously enjoying their visit, suggesting that both dimensions contribute to positive visitor experiences.

The findings also indicate that inspirational and emotional aspects form part of the visitor experience, although they appear to be less prominent than educational and entertainment-related factors. Similarly, visitors generally felt that their expectations regarding uniqueness and the desire to share the experience with others had been met. These findings are consistent with contemporary discussions surrounding visitor engagement and the increasing importance of creating memorable experiences that visitors wish to communicate to others.

Family-friendliness also emerged as an important aspect of the visitor experience. While respondents generally reported that their expectations in this area had been met, additional comments highlighted the importance of interactive exhibits, hands-on activities, dedicated children's exhibitions, and spaces designed specifically for younger visitors. These findings suggest that family-oriented facilities and experiences remain important considerations for museums seeking to appeal to family groups.



Across all three institutions, qualitative feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Visitors frequently expressed appreciation for their experience and often indicated that they would not change anything. Where suggestions were made, they primarily related to improving wayfinding, providing greater depth of information, and expanding the range of interactive and immersive elements available.

### IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the findings highlight the important role that museums and exhibitions play within Reykjavík's cultural tourism offer. The results demonstrate that visitors seek experiences that combine learning, entertainment, accessibility, and engagement, while also valuing opportunities for inspiration and memorable experiences.

The study further highlights the importance of maintaining a strong online presence, particularly through search engines and digital mapping platforms, as these channels play a central role in how visitors discover museums and exhibitions. The findings also suggest opportunities to increase awareness of initiatives such as the Reykjavík City Card among international visitors.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted during the winter season, and visitor profiles and behaviours may differ during the summer months. Second, the survey focused on three museums and exhibitions in Reykjavík and therefore does not necessarily reflect the experiences of visitors to other cultural attractions within Iceland. Finally, the number of domestic respondents was relatively small and largely limited to residents of the capital region, restricting the extent to which conclusions can be drawn regarding the wider Icelandic population.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable baseline information on museum and exhibition visitors in Reykjavík. As a pilot study, it offers insights

that may support museums, destination management organisations, and tourism stakeholders in developing visitor experiences, improving service provision, and strengthening Reykjavík's cultural tourism offer. Future research could build upon these findings by examining seasonal variations in visitor behaviour and exploring visitor experiences across a wider range of cultural attractions.



Picture 4. Entrance to the National Museum



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## APPENDIX: MUSEUM GUEST SURVEY (ENGLISH VERSION)

### Museum Guest Survey in Reykjavik

Dear museum guest,

The Icelandic Tourism Research Centre and Visit Reykjavik are interested in learning more about tourists visiting museums and exhibitions in Reykjavik. This survey aims to provide insights into the interests, motivations, and travel behaviour of tourists visiting Reykjavik's museums and exhibitions.

The survey is designed to be completed after your museum or exhibition visit. It takes about 5-7 minutes to fill out the survey, the answers are anonymous and we won't be able to trace them back to you.

Thank you for your participation, we appreciate it!

#### **A. General travel and museum behaviour**

We want to start by asking you some general questions about your travel & museum behaviours

##### **Have you visited Reykjavik before?**

No, this is my first time in Reykjavik  Yes, this is my second time in Reykjavik  Yes, this is my third+ time in Reykjavik.

If visited previously: Did you visit any museums/exhibitions during previous trips to Reykjavik?  Yes  No

If yes, which ones? \_\_\_\_\_

##### **How long are you staying in REYKJAVÍK during this trip**

Less than a day  One day  2-3 days  4-6 days  7+ days  Do not know

##### **How long are you staying in ICELAND during this trip**

Less than a day  One day  2-3 days  4-6 days  7+ days  Do not know

##### **What of the following best describes your booking preferences:**

- I prefer to book activities / experiences in advance before my trip / at home
- I prefer to book activities / experiences in advance once I've arrived to my destination
- I prefer to buy a ticket for activities / experiences on site / at ticket office

**Please mark every museum/exhibition you plan to visit during this stay in Reykjavik / the capital area (choose all that apply)**

- National Museum of Iceland
- Perlan Museum
- Aurora Reykjavik
- Fly Over Iceland
- Settlement Exhibition Aðalstræti – Reykjavik City Museum
- Reykjavik Maritime Museum – Reykjavik City museum
- The Icelandic Phallological Museum
- Árbær Open Air Museum – Reykjavik City Museum
- Reykjavik Museum of Photography – Reykjavik City Museum
- House of Collections
- Hafnarhús - Reykjavik Art Museum
- Ásmundarsafn - Reykjavik Art Museum
- Kjarvalsstaðir - Reykjavik Art Museum
- Gerðarsafn Art Museum
- Natural History Museum of Kópavogur
- Hafnarborg Centre of Culture and Fine Arts
- Hafnarfjörður Museum
- National Gallery of Iceland
- Whales of Iceland
- Saga Museum
- Punk Museum
- Chromo Sapiens - Shoplifter
- Viðey – Reykjavik City Museum
- Gljúfrasteinn museum
- Hofstaðir Viking Settlement
- Museum of Design and Applied Art
- Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum
- The Einar Jónsson Sculpture Museum
- World in Words – Manuscript exhibition in Edda
- The Living Art Museum
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



**Please mark everything you plan to experience during this stay in Reykjavik / the capital area (choose all that apply)**

- Guided walking tour around the city
- Northern lights tour
- Organised day trips outside the city (start in Reykjavik)
- Sightseeing tour by bus around the city
- Food guided tour
- Theatre
- Concert
- Festival (film, book, visual art, music etc.)
- Other cultural events
- Art galleries
- Handicraft stores/workshops
- Swimming pools
- Natural / geothermal baths
- Spas / wellness
- Shopping
- Whale watching or other boat trip
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you know about the Reykjavik City Card?**

- I know it and I use it
- I know it, but I don't use it
- I don't know it

**In the last 12 months, how often have you visited museums/exhibitions in your country of residence?**

- Never  1-3 times  4-5 times  6-10 times  11 + times

**In the last 12 months, how often have you visited museums/exhibitions while travelling abroad?**

- Never  1-3 times  4-5 times  6-10 times  11 + times

### **B. Today's museum experiences and motivations**

Next, we have some questions about today's museum visit

**Are you currently visiting:**

- The National Gallery (Listasafn Íslands)
- The National Museum (Þjóðminjasafnið)
- Settlement Exhibition in Aðalstræti (Landnámssýning)

**How did you find out about this museum/exhibition? Choose all that apply**

- Internet search engines
- Official websites such as Visit Reykjavik or Visit Iceland
- Social media
- Travel blogs
- Friends/Relatives recommendations
- Travel guidebook
- My accommodation (hotel, guesthouse, etc.)
- Locals recommended it
- Google maps
- Information signs / billboards
- I came here by coincidence/was walking by
- I've been here before
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Who did you visit this museum/exhibition with today? (choose all that apply)**

- Alone
- My Partner
- Children (17 and younger)
- Other family/relatives
- Friends
- Organised tour group
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



**What is the purpose of your visit to the museum/exhibition today? (choose all that apply)**

- To visit the museum (general)
- To see a specific exhibition
- To take part in an event
- Part of a guided tour
- To visit the coffee shop
- To visit the gift shop
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**When did you decide to visit this museum/exhibition?**

- Before the trip to Iceland
- After arrival in Iceland
- Spontaneous decision / just walking by
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**How much time did you spend in this museum/exhibition today?**

- Less than 30 minutes  30–60 minutes  1–2 hours  More than 2 hours

**Do you agree or disagree that your expectations for the following factors were met during your visit to this museum/exhibition today? (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)**

- Educational / Informative
- Get inspired
- Get challenged
- Entertainment
- Interactive elements
- Modern presentation
- Family-friendliness
- Accessibility
- Unique Experience
- Wanting to share my experience with others

**What activities / facilities do you consider important in order for you to bringing children (0-17yo) to this museum? Choose the 5 most important to you.**

- Changing station / table
- Quiet room / breastfeeding room
- Space to eat packed lunch
- Mascot
- Kid friendly option at the café
- Room / space for free play
- Room for experiences
- Exhibition for children
- Objects that can be touched / hands-on
- Interactive experiences within the exhibitions (using the body, mind, different senses)
- Immersive experiences within the exhibitions (screens, computer games, mobile phones)
- Orienteering games within the museum
- Puzzles
- Museum bingo
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If you could add to or change something about this museum/exhibition, what would it be and why?**

Open answers: \_\_\_\_\_

**Overall, how satisfied are you with your visit to this museum/exhibition? (1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = satisfied, 5 = very satisfied)**

(Likert scale)

**Do you have any additional comments?**

Open answers: \_\_\_\_\_



**C. Background Information**

A few background information about you for statistical purposed, answers can not be traced back to any individuals

**What is your age?**

17 or younger  18–24  25–34  35–44  45–54  55–64  65 or older

**What is your gender?**

Female  Male  non-binary  Don't wish to answer

**Country of residence?**

Iceland

Postal code in Iceland? \_\_\_\_\_

Abroad

What country do you reside in? \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

Elementary School

Vocational and/or secondary schooling

University education (BA/BSc, etc.)

Postgraduate education (MA/MSc/MBA/PhD, etc.)

No formal schooling completed





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