

# Christmas Around the World and Holidays of Light

## *Research and Evaluation Executive Summary*

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### Goal

The purpose of this study was to evaluate three aspects of the visitor experience in the *Christmas Around the World and Holidays of Light* exhibition:

- The emotions of visitors to *Christmas Around the World* (CATW).
- The extent to which CATW visitors report learning about other cultures or their own.
- The relationship between emotions and the ability to retain exhibit information.

### Why

In 1993, the Museum did a survey of the emotional motivations that visitors have for attending *Christmas Around the World*. The most popular responses fell into three categories:

- Educational: Visitors learn something, are interested in customs, think about how others live, and like little details.
- Personal: Visitors are put in the holiday spirit, thrilled by big trees, get a warm/comforting feeling, have fun, and would come back.

- Social: Visitors like sharing CATW with others  
In 2014, we replicated the survey to see if these emotional motivations had changed over time. We found the motivations were largely unchanged, with the only major difference being an increase in interest about cultural aspects of the exhibit. This 2016 study intended to dig deeper into why and how cultural interests had changed.

### What

Research and evaluation staff conducted interviews and surveys with CATW visitors.

### Who

Interviews were conducted with 38 adult visitors to CATW.

### How

Participants were recruited after being observed looking at the trees in the CATW exhibition. Interviews took approximately 5-10 minutes and were audio recorded. In addition to open-ended questions about how they felt and what they learned while attending the CATW exhibition, participants were asked to fill out the Russell Affect Grid, a tool that allows visitors to rate their emotions quantitatively on two dimensions: valence, or the intrinsic “good-ness” or “bad-ness” of a feeling, and arousal, which refers to how calming or exhibiting a feeling is. After the

interview portion was completed, participants completed a written survey composed mostly of demographic questions. Participants were rewarded with a \$10 gift card for their time.

## When

Data was collected for this study on weekdays from December 7 to 20, 2016.

## Results

Findings showed that:

- The majority of visitors experienced a high level of arousal and positive valence while in the exhibit space, with slightly more variability in arousal.
- Half (50%) of visitors could report a specific fact they learned about another country or culture while in the exhibit.
- There could potentially be a relationship between higher emotional arousal and higher levels of ability to retain exhibit information, but due to low sample size this finding is not conclusive.

Results of this evaluation were accepted for presentation at the Visitor Studies 2017 conference.

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Project Lead: J. Greenslit  
Executive Summary Prepared By: J. Greenslit  
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For more information please contact  
[msiresearch@msichicago.org](mailto:msiresearch@msichicago.org)

## Memorable quotes

“This is something that I used to do every year with my parents. It’s been a long time since I’ve been back, and so [I] definitely [have] that feeling of home, and tradition, and also a lot of excitement because I enjoy seeing the different ornaments and all the different artwork from around the world. Both my parents are children immigrants so it’s cool to see the different countries that their families are from and to see the traditions and [it] just puts me in the holiday mood.”

“It was [a tree] where it had a bunch of dove cut outs. I thought that was really interesting because it symbolized peace, and I thought it was a really good representation of what should be happening throughout the whole world. I liked that tree because it was a message I could take beyond Christmas time.”

“Though people live far away from one another, like all over the world, there’s still a connection, though people may have so many differences and different qualities and belief systems.”