

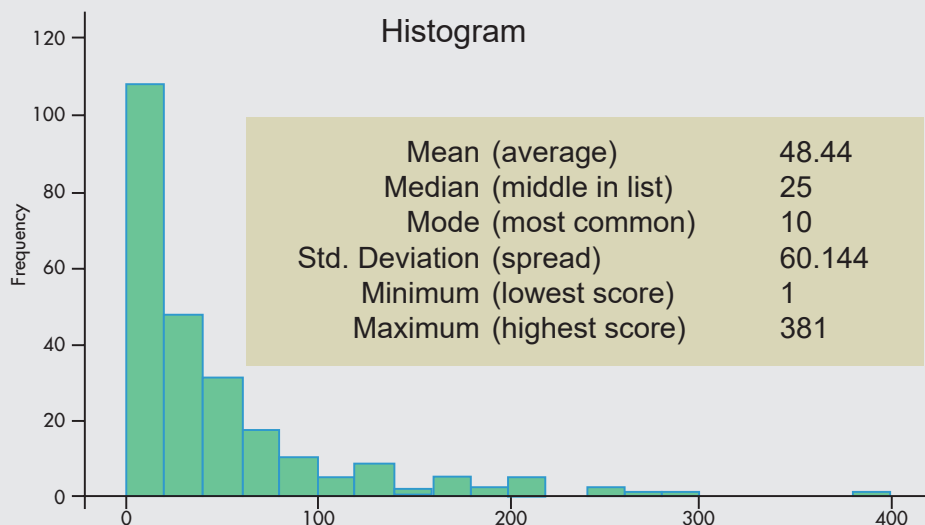
2017 ESCAPE ROOM ENTHUSIAST SURVEY

VERSION 1.1, AUGUST 2017

A survey targeting escape room enthusiasts was open for completion in June, 2017. This is a summary of selected results.

PAGE 1

"HOW MANY INDIVIDUAL ESCAPE ROOMS HAVE YOU DONE?"



250 people completed the survey

This survey was open for completion between the 24th and 30th of June 2017, the survey was promoted online through Facebook escape room groups, Reddit, as well as the 'secret' escape room enthusiast slack chat.

57% of respondents were men, 42% were women, and 1% identified as other. Participants ranged from 16-20 to 60-61 aged categories, with the largest numbers aged 26-30 and 31-35 years. More than half of participants had a bachelor's degree or higher. 43% said they were ambiverts, 36% described themselves as extraverts, and 20% said they were introverts.

Almost half of participants (48%) came from the USA, 17% came from Canada, 8% from the United Kingdom, 8% from Australia, 16% from Europe, and 4% from the Middle East, Asia and South America.

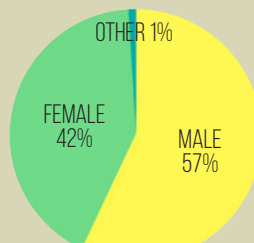
Two thirds of enthusiasts did not work in the escape room industry, the remaining third described themselves as owners (22%), designers (9%) or consultants (2%).

Enthusiasts had done between 1 and 381 rooms. The average number of rooms was 48, the median number of rooms was 25. The graph below shows the distribution of scores - most participants had done under 20 rooms, however there was a long tail of participants who had done many more rooms.

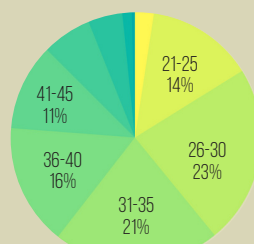
COMMENTARY

Participants in this survey are not representative of escape room players. The sample is biased towards people who identify as enthusiasts, have played more rooms, and spend time on English language online enthusiast groups.

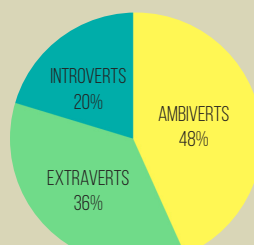
QUICK LOOK



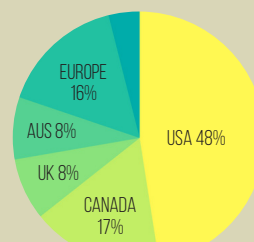
GENDER



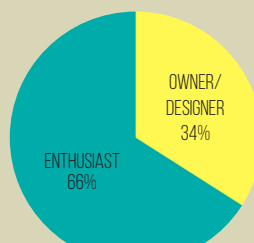
AGE



PERSONALITY



COUNTRY



IDENTIFIED ROLE

More about escape room enthusiasts

Motivation: A third (33%) of enthusiasts said they played a room to have fun. 38% described their goal was to escape.

Tracking rooms: Over 80% of enthusiasts tracked the number of rooms they had played.

Rooms played in 24 hours: The maximum number of rooms that enthusiasts had played in a day ranged between 1 and 14, with an average of 4, and a median of 3.

Replaying rooms: A quarter of enthusiasts had played a room more than once. Repeat players said that they replayed the room with another team (24%), to introduce new players to escape rooms (24%), to finish the room or see other parts of the room (22%). Other reasons for replaying were because the room had been changed, it was a replayable room, it was at a different location, it was replayed as a mistake, and to set a faster time.

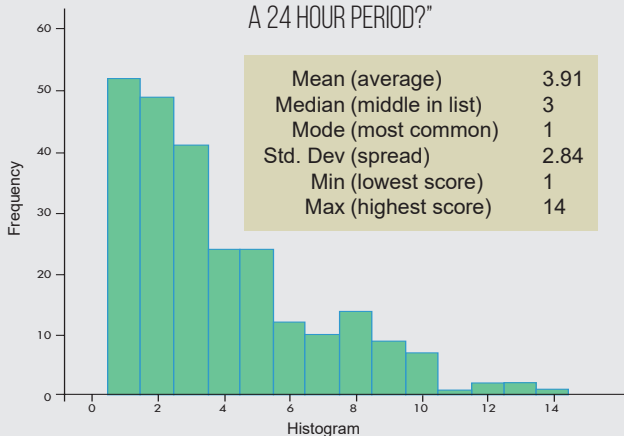
Ideal team size: When asked about their ideal team size, enthusiasts' scores ranged from 2 to 10 members, almost half of enthusiasts stated that their ideal team size was 4.

"WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN SKILLS AS AN ENTHUSIAST?"

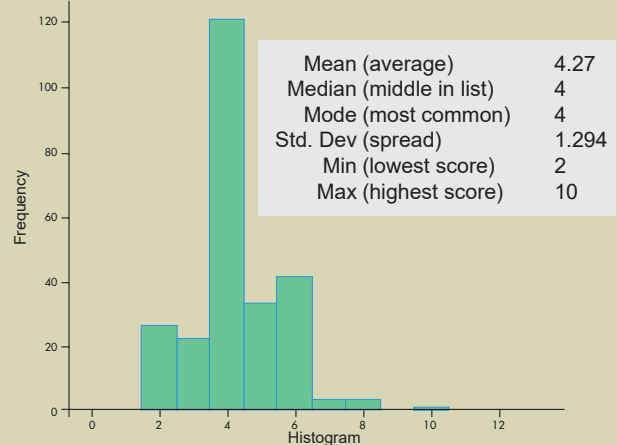
60.8%	Correlation (relate clues to solution, Aha! solver)
59.2%	Observation & Discernment (knowing what's important)
51.6%	Compartmentalization (make sense of the whole)
51.6%	Pattern recognition (i.e. sequence puzzles)
50.8%	Logic deduction
48.8%	Communication
37.2%	Visual / Spatial (visual puzzles)
32.8%	Searching
30.8%	Math
28.8%	Kinetic (physical puzzles)
24.8%	Words
14%	Memorization
11.2%	Brute Force (permutation through locks)
10.8%	Aural (audio puzzles)

Escape room skills: From a selected list, enthusiasts selected between 0 and 14 skills, with an average of 5 skills. The most commonly selected skills were CORRELATION and OBSERVATION AND DISCERNMENT (both selected by about 60% of enthusiasts). COMPARTMENTALISATION, PATTERN RECOGNITION, LOGIC DEDUCTION, and COMMUNICATION were selected by about half of enthusiasts. The more specific skills of VISUAL PUZZLES, SEARCHING, MATH, PHYSICAL PUZZLES and WORD PUZZLES were selected by between a quarter and third of enthusiasts. The least common skills were MEMORIZATION (14%), BRUTE FORCING LOCKS and AUDIO PUZZLES (both 11%).

"WHAT'S THE MOST ESCAPE ROOMS YOU'VE PLAYED IN A 24 HOUR PERIOD?"



"WHAT IS YOUR IDEAL TEAM SIZE?"



2017 ESCAPE ROOM ENTHUSIAST SURVEY

MOST POPULAR ROOM BOOKING SYSTEM

Private ticketing system (2-6 plyrs)*	4.24
Private ticketing system (7-12 plyrs)	3.54
Whole room booked (2-6 plyrs)	3.10
Whole room booked (7+ plyrs)	2.75
Public ticketing system (2-6 plyrs)	2.41
Public ticketing system (7-12 plyrs)	2.18

5 = PREFER 1 = HATE

*Room Capacity - players room can hold

Avg Score

ENTHUSIASTS' PREFERRED HINT SYSTEM

1. Most preferred was in room video
2. In room audio
3. Actor playing role in room
4. Equal fourth preferred were notes given, walkie talkie, pre-made hints
5. Second most hated hint method was GM in room
6. Most hated hint method was GM entering room

Escape Room Preferences

Public vs private ticketing: Private ticketing of small rooms (2-6 players) was the most popular ticketing system, followed by private ticketing large rooms (7-12 players), whole small room, whole large room, public ticketing small room, then public ticketing large room. The differences between the preferences for these types of ticketing were tested statistically and were significant.

Room length: 71% of enthusiasts preferred 60 minute rooms, only a few (1%) preferred shorter rooms, the remaining 27% preferred longer (75 or 90 minute) rooms.

Price: About half of enthusiasts said that for a good escape room that lasts 60 minutes, a fair price per person would be twice the price a movie ticket. A quarter thought it was worth 1.5 the price of a movie ticket, and 16% thought it was worth three times the price of a movie ticket.

Escape Room Hint Systems

Enthusiasts were asked about their opinions about hint systems. Answers were given assuming a well-designed room.

Asking for hints: Two thirds of enthusiasts said they preferred to ask for hints when they wanted them, 15% preferred unsolicited hints, and 18% did not care.

Number of hints: When asked about their preferences for number of hints, enthusiasts generally preferred more hints.

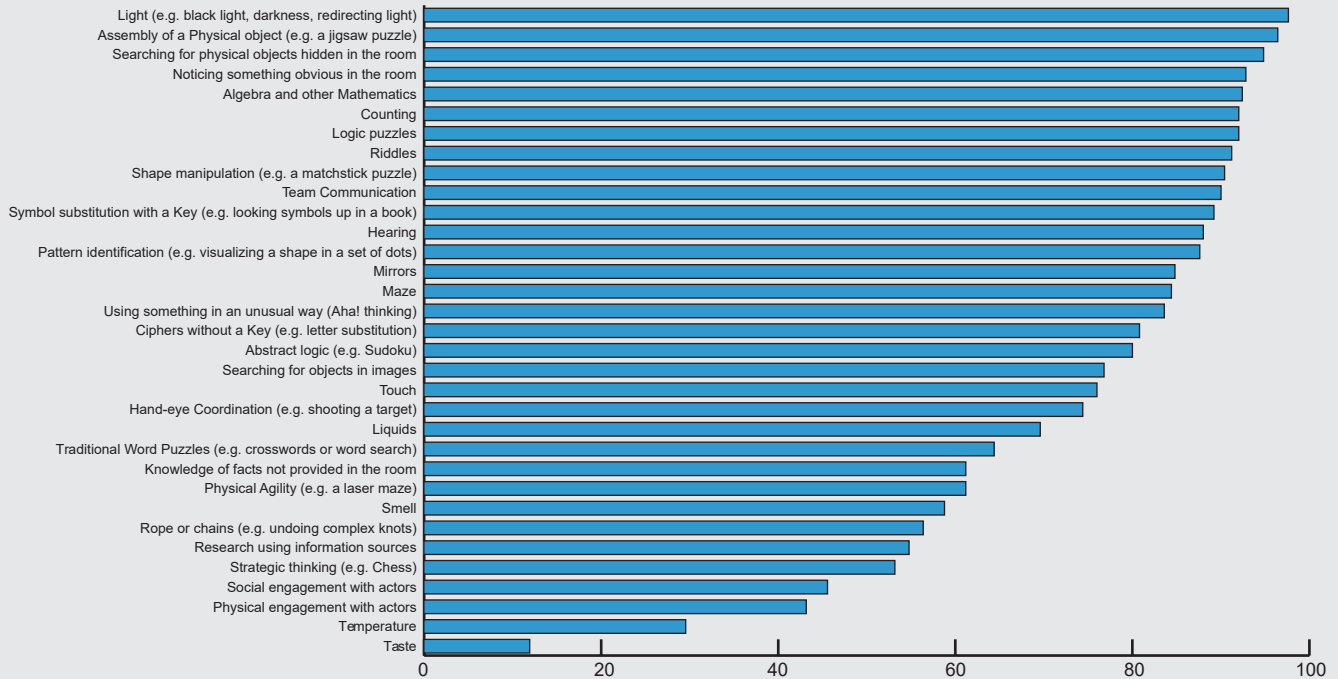
Penalties for hints: When asked about their preferences for penalties for taking hints, enthusiast generally disliked any penalties for taking hints.

REQUIREMENTS FOR AN IDEAL ESCAPE ROOM

Enthusiasts were asked about their preferences regarding requirements of room characteristics for their ideal escape room.

1. The most highly required element was well designed puzzles and game flow.
2. This was followed equally by customer service, immersion, game master quality and integration of escape room elements.
3. These elements were rated equally second lowest as required for an ideal room: scenery, excitement/intensity, story/narrative, novelty/uniqueness.
4. The equal least requirement elements were specific theme and technology.

PERCENTAGE OF ENTHUSIASTS WHO REPORTED HAVING SEEN THESE PUZZLE TYPES*



*Puzzle types as described in Scott Nicholson's 2015 paper *Peeking Behind the Locked Door: A Survey of Escape Room Facilities*

ALLOWABLE TROPES

1. Searching was the most allowable trope
2. Second most allowable was blacklight reveals
3. Riddles and blacklight searching tied at 3rd most allowable
4. Blindfolds and being bound tied at 4th most allowable
5. Trial and error puzzles were 5th most allowable
6. Red herrings were 6th most allowable
7. Outside/knowledge was the least allowed trope

UNCOMMON ROOM ELEMENTS

1. GM in room and random elements were the equally most hated elements
2. Taste was the second most hated element
3. Smell, scoring and in-room actor were the equal third most hated elements
4. Physical challenges were the second most preferred element
5. Extra bonus items/puzzles was the most preferred element

THEME PREFERENCES

- Most preferred to least
1. Tomb / Ancient Civ
 2. Space
 3. Science
 4. Spy
 5. Historical
 6. Supernatural
 7. Heist / Thieves
 8. Detective/Police/Crime
 9. Sherlock
 10. Airplane
 11. Dream
 12. Carnival
 13. Bomb Defusion
 14. Prison
 15. Medical / Asylum
 16. Western
 17. Music
 18. Serial Killer
 19. Vampire
 20. Library
 21. Military
 22. Horror
 23. Zombie
 24. Office
 25. Themeless

INAPPROPRIATE THEMES

- Holocaust
- Asylum
- Terrorist
- Lots of porn
- Recent crimes/tragedies
- Racist themes
- Horror
- Prison
- Religious/idol worship
- Politicians as criminals

BEST AND WORST ESCAPE EXPERIENCES

Enthusiasts were asked in free response questions about their best and worst escape room experiences, their responses were coded into themes.

WORST ESCAPE EXPERIENCES

Many enthusiasts described their worst experience as arising from a combination of different poor components; it was this combination that made the experience particularly bad. Elements that contributed to their worst rooms were:

Element	Mentions	Description
Game or puzzle design	155	Enthusiasts described poor game design, game flow, or puzzle design. Elements that were mentioned included too much searching, too many red herrings, logic leaps, poor cluing, maths, and puzzles that took too long. Some mentioned too many locks, and lockout safes. 14 respondents specifically described rooms that were too easy or had insufficient puzzles for the group size.
Customer service	79	Enthusiasts described poor customer service. Specifically 56 enthusiasts described poor game mastering including that they were not paying attention, unenthusiastic, had made reset mistakes, poor hinting. Several enthusiasts wrote about owners who were arrogant.
Set	53	Enthusiasts commented about the quality of the set, criticisms were that the decor was cheap, or that the set was uninteresting. 29 enthusiasts wrote about broken props or puzzles, including locks that did not open, and technology that did not work. 5 enthusiasts commented about the lack of immersion
Team	11	Enthusiasts described teams that did not work well together, including working with strangers.
Theme	6	Enthusiasts described inappropriate or uninspiring themes.
Environment	6	Enthusiasts wrote about noisy, hot or uncomfortable environments.
Dangerous	4	Enthusiasts wrote about feeling unsafe, including being locked in dangerously and one when the room was set on fire.

BEST ESCAPE EXPERIENCES

Enthusiasts described their best experience as arising from a combination of different good/great components in the one room.

Element	Mentions	Description
Game or puzzle design	147	Enthusiasts described good game design as having good flow and being logical. There were a variety of puzzles, or puzzles were clever, or there were 'aha' puzzles, and a few mentioned that the game was sufficiently challenging.
Immersion	68	Enthusiasts specifically described the immersiveness of their best experience. This seemed to relate to how integrated or cohesive the theme/story/puzzles were, as well as the set design.
Customer service	54	Enthusiasts wrote about customer service forming part of their best experience, 34 specifically mentioned game masters being enthusiastic and attentive, and 9 specifically mentioned actors playing a role in the experience.
Set	45	Enthusiasts described rooms that had good production values, props, and atmosphere and were consistent with the theme.
Novelty	33	Enthusiasts described their best rooms as having some element of novelty or uniqueness relating to the theme and/or puzzles, or there being surprises that they enjoyed. Some described specific 'Wow' moments, or climactic moments in the room. 7 enthusiasts specifically mentioned secret rooms or multiple rooms.
Team	30	The team they were playing with contributed to their best experience. The team were described as fun, or working well together. 7 enthusiasts specifically mentioned room design that required/encouraged teamwork.
Theme	22	Enthusiasts mentioned enjoying specific themes, or the uniqueness of the theme.
Story	21	Enthusiasts described the story playing a part in the immersion, or motivation the room.
Technology	10	Some enthusiasts described technology as contributing to their best experience.

THE IMPACT OF EXPERIENCE (I.E. NUMBER OR ROOMS PLAYED) ON PREFERENCES OF ENTHUSIASTS.

Reported below are significant relationships between level of experience and preferences of enthusiasts.

More experienced players tended to:

- Report a greater number of ER skills
- Have more rooms local to them
- Have done more rooms in a day
- Prefer smaller teams
- Prefer longer rooms
- Felt more strongly that each listed element was required for their ideal game
- More strongly disliked searching, blacklight searching, riddles, outside knowledge, red herrings, trial and error as tropes more strongly
- More strongly preferred blindfolds and handcuffs and tropes
- More strongly disliked GM in the room, and random elements in the room
- More strongly disliked themes: bomb defusion, detective/police/crime, heist/thieves, library, asylum, military, office, prison, science, Sherlock, spy, supernatural
- Felt more strongly that there should be no penalties for hints

COMMENTARY

It appeared that experienced players generally had stronger opinions about elements of escape rooms. Perhaps their experiences gave them a better idea of what they liked and disliked.

Comparison: Enthusiasts to Owners/Designers/Consultants

When comparing enthusiasts not working in the escape room industry to owners/consultants/designers, there were only a few statistically significant differences.

THERE WERE NO DIFFERENCES ON

- Number of rooms played
- Number of local rooms
- Ideal team size
- Number of puzzle types encountered
- Price willing to pay for 60 minute room
- Willingness to pay for bad room
- Ticketing preferences

Compared to enthusiasts, **owners/consultants/designers** felt:

IT WAS MORE IMPORTANT TO HAVE

- All ER elements well integrated into theme
- Scenery, props, and decor
- Story / Narrative

IT WAS LESS ALLOWABLE TO HAVE THE FOLLOWING TROPES OR ELEMENTS IN A ROOM:

- Outside knowledge/trivia
- Red Herrings (intentional mislead)
- Actor (playing role) in room

Compared to enthusiasts, **owners/consultants/designers** had:

LOWER PREFERENCES FOR THE FOLLOWING THEMES

- Themeless
- Office
- Heist/thieves
- Sherlock
- Library

LOWER PREFERENCES FOR THE FOLLOWING HINT SYSTEMS:

- Walkie talkie
- In screen video

And finally, when compared to enthusiasts, **owners/consultants/designers**:

- Preferred unlimited hints compared to limited hints
- Generally preferred no penalties for hints
- Placed less importance on the cleanliness of the facility

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



LEE-FAY LOW is an Associate Professor at the University of Sydney and an avid enthusiast of escape rooms. She compiled all the results and provided commentaries and insights written here.



ERROL ELUMIR is obsessed with escape room puzzle design and has designed large scale escape events. He is part of a podcast about escape rooms called Room Escape Divas.

More information about this survey, as well as raw data, can be found on the website <http://thecodex.ca>. A huge thanks to all who participated in this survey!

COMMENTARY

Compared to enthusiasts not working in the industry, owners/designers/consultants were not more experienced in terms of number of rooms played, and had had slightly stronger opinions about only a few elements of rooms and themes.